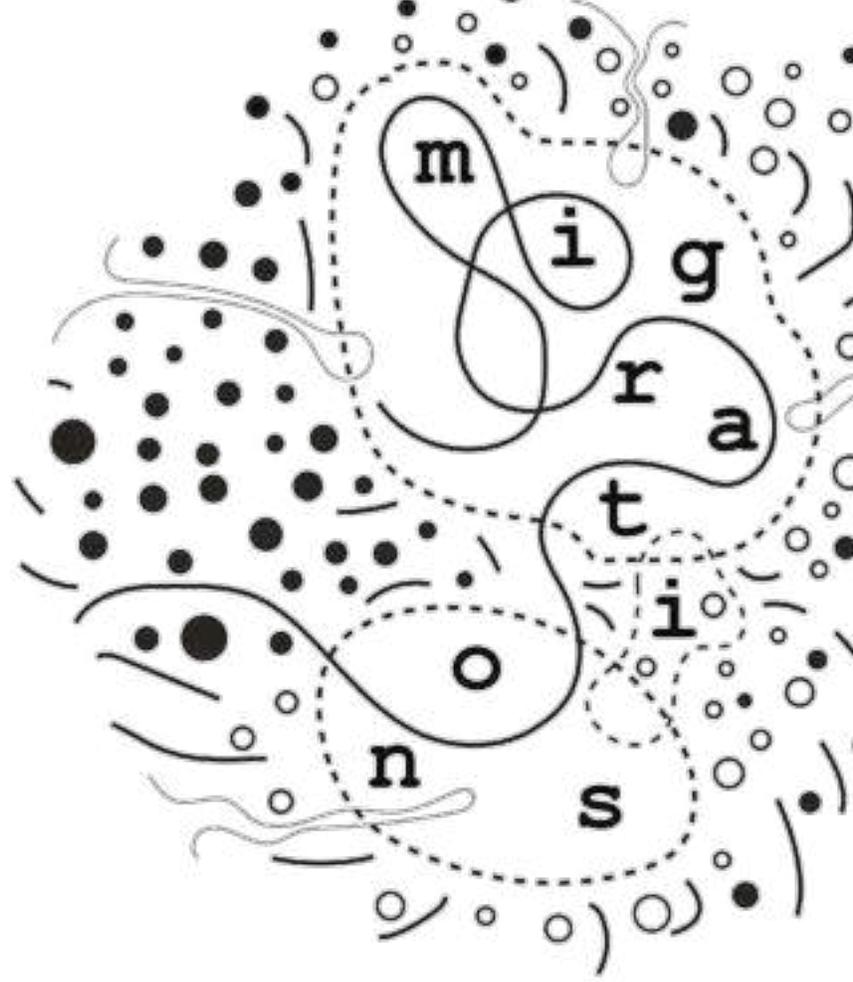


# MOTION:MIGRATIONS

35th World Congress





# MOTION:MIGRATIONS

35th World Congress

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# Introduction

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Since the first theoretical manifestations and discourses by Giorgio Vasari and Joachim Winckelmann, art historical texts have tried to capture the artistic processes of creativity as a process of migration; inventions are understood as mobile processes. The development of the figure of an artist or a style can be seen as a complex process of migrating individuals or concepts. Migration has always also been related to historical, political, and socio-economic questions. In addition to this, it has been a fundamental aspect of the human experience in the Modern Age, i.e., since the times of the circumnavigation of the world, which promoted displacements of large population groups among all the continents. Even before the creation of art history as a scholarly discipline in 19th-century universities, art, and culture have been built through the exchange of objects, concepts, and practices among a variety of territories and societies around the globe, not only between Europe and their colonies and vice versa, but also between Africa and the Arabian Peninsula or India, or Asia and the Americas. In the 19th century, European mass emigration to the Americas, which continued throughout the 20th century as a forced migration related to the two World Wars and the many other violent conflicts around the globe, reached an unprecedented level in the 21st century, when humankind faces new challenges brought about by different forms of transit of peoples, ideas, and images.

It is precisely through its establishment as a scholarly practice during the neocolonial era, and after its own self-reflection that art history has started revising its methods and theories regarding such a phenomenon while attempting to articulate new ways to describe and analyze its complexity by reaching out into a transdisciplinary practice. Art historical discourses had declared within the formation of post-colonial critique the opening of the discipline towards a global outreach: a World Art History, which is distinctive from a universal art history,

where the discipline is redefined in the plural form (world art histories), to encompass the diversity of cultural processes of the visual arts. These processes however are complex, especially when they involve images. As W.J.T. Mitchell points out in his article on Migrating images, it implies not only movement but “contradiction, difficulty, friction and opposition.”<sup>1</sup>

The 35th CIHA World Congress: “Motion: Migrations” aimed to describe, to reflect upon, and to analyze those different forms of migrations in a concrete, historiographical and theoretical way. The results of this effort are registered along the sixteen sessions that compose this book. Migration can mean a movement of peoples, objects and ideas, or concepts (see Sessions 1, 4, 6, 10 and 13). How traveling artifacts can challenge cultural patterns? (Session 1) Migrated objects could be creative, for example, in establishing different cultural codes in collections (Sessions 12, 15) – from the Wunderkammer to contemporary artist’s networks; or they could be threatening within the cultural encounters – from apotropaic figures to iconoclastic manifestations, since the Byzantine iconoclasm to the recent destructions of the Bamiyan Buddhas or other objects declared as “world heritage”. Does it make a difference whether such concepts, peoples and objects are forced to emigrate or do it by free will? (Session 4, 8) How are art historical practices to deal with migrations across time? How does the latter help us to cope with the notion of anachronism?

Migrations also shaped different cultural and art historical ‘identities’, while establishing borders (Sessions 2, 6, 7, 9, 14). In which way “Italian”, “German” art was created? But also, how were “American” (meaning here the United States), “Latin American” concepts built on ideas of migration, or ideas of “Négritude” or “Méditerranée”? How are such national, regional, or continental identities, conceived in very specific historical moments, still used today? If they continue to emerge, what are they being used for, in a world that tends to become more and more globalized? What are the consequences of migrations of images and objects between different institutions (Session 15), for example, private and public, between countries or different cultural zones? How did aesthetic concepts of Buddhism or Hinduism transform the creative processes in other Asian regions? What was the

importance of commercial routes such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), or the Silk Route for the migration of people, objects, and ideas?

Especially for the contemporaneity, but not exclusively, migrations between the so-called ‘real’ and the ‘virtual’ reached such a level of complexity that it requires transdisciplinary approaches not only within the humanities, but also across other disciplines of the ‘hard sciences’ (Sessions 5, 11): How can network theories help us understand global artistic movements? How can social media shape ‘reality’? How can digital archives help to preserve fragile documents and objects? How are these new types of archives threatened by other technological and cultural challenges? And what are the theoretical and methodological consequences of working with digital archives? Within all the radical transformations experienced by high-end technology, how should art history think about the ecological crisis that comes with it? How can art historians take theoretical and methodological stands that includes an ecocritical framework? (Session 3, 5)

As Mieke Bal has explained in her *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities*, art history belongs to culture, but does not constitute it. Such critique was also adopted. The qualifier ‘culture’ indicates precisely that migrations of objects, persons, and concepts should be analyzed in view of their existence in culture. And “They are not seen as isolated jewels, but as things always-already engaged as interlocutors, within the larger culture from which they are emerged”<sup>2</sup> – and from where or to where they are migrated.

If the last decade has seen an expansion of art history regarding the range of objects to be encompassed within the field, we still have to expand the discipline in terms of theoretical and methodological discussions. The challenge of doing art history outside the established “Western tradition” implies the effort of finding new ways to approach the field. Scholars sitting outside the ‘mainstream’ of art historical tradition, therefore, are likely to have important contributions to give. What are the differences in art historical practices across the globe? How does the discipline build its practices in different contexts? How can new methods from sociology, anthropology, history, philosophy, aesthetics, philology, among other fields, help to transform art history? How do we “animate” objects in different contexts? How do

they “react” to the different settings of art historical thinking? In this new perspective, migrations are of utmost importance to consider, for we cannot go on working with objects, concepts and peoples disconnected from their contexts. To understand the world, as it has been shaped necessarily by the experience of dislocation and movement, it is vital to deal with different layers of the making of art. The collective result of our joint venture was richer because each researcher taking part in the conference entered the discussion from their particular point of view and experience, building a very lively, complex, and challenging picture of global and local art historical practices today.

CLAUDIA MATTOS AVOLESE  
JENS BAUMGARTEN  
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FELIPE CHAIMOVICH  
ROBERTO CONDURU  
ANA GONÇALVES MAGALHÃES  
PATRICIA DELCANALE MENESES  
VALÉRIA PICCOLI

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### Endnotes

1. WJT Mitchell, *Image Science*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2015, p. 65.
2. Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities. A Rough Guide*, Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2002, p. 9.

## Preface

# **Motion: Migrations’ How Does It Inform Art History Today?**

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**Claudia Mattos Avolese**

Tufts University

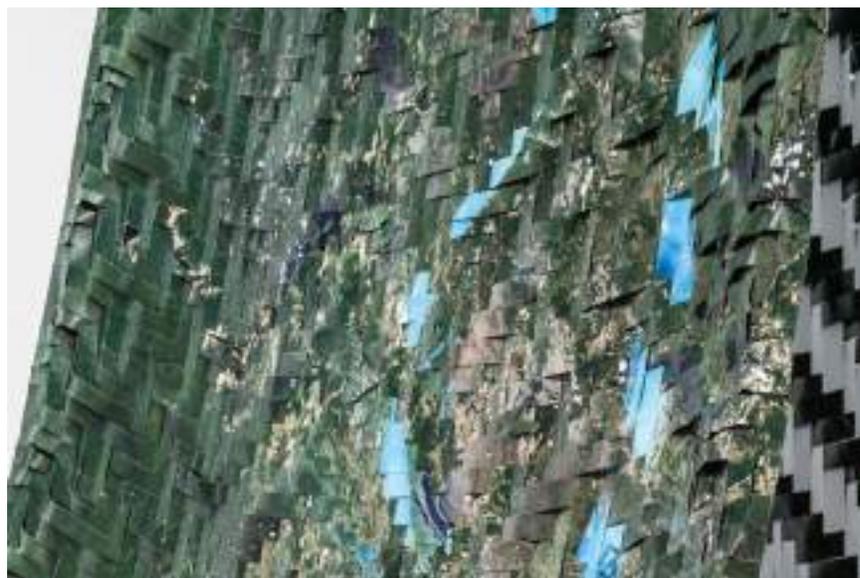
The term *Migration* made its first significant appearance in the realm of CIHA in the title of 2008 CIHA World Congress in Melbourne, Australia: “Crossing Cultures: conflict, migration, and convergence”, increasingly entering the vocabulary of academics in the field since then. It emerged together with a set of terms such as circulation, transit, displacement, that were evoked in an effort to reinvent art historical narratives, adjusting them to an increasingly “globalized world”. In spite of the presence of the term “conflict” in the Melbourne title, at the time, there was a freshness and optimism to this project, since it offered convincing alternatives to the traditional nationalistic approach to art, and a vision of a dynamic art history, where everything was on the move. More recently, however, in light of the contemporary political debates on migration, and particularly after the Covid-19 pandemic, the term has acquired a more complex meaning. As Tom Mitchell points out in his article on *Migrating images*, migration is associated not only with mobility and convergence, as suggested by CIHA’s Melbourne title, but also with “contradiction, difficulty, friction and opposition.”<sup>1</sup> The radical experience of being ‘held in place’ brought by the Covid-19 pandemic made the entanglements of migration with all kinds of barriers and violence explicit, demanding a critical reevaluation of the utopian promises suggested by the concept in the early 2000s. In this new context, art historians such as Mieke Bal, Miguel Hernández-Navarro, Inge Boer, and Jill Bennett, among others, have helped to reposition the concept of Migration within art history, by focusing not only on themes associated to migration, such as narratives

about the circulation of peoples and objects in the colonial world, for example, but reflecting upon the *condition of the migrant*.

Migration has always been one of the conditions of artists. In the contemporary world, however, it became endemic. As Ann Ring Peterson observes, today “a considerable number of artists are on the move, due to the triple processes of globalization, decolonization and migration”<sup>2</sup>. Migration became central to artistic practice, and it seems very hard today to be an artist – especially for those born outside Europe or the US – without experiencing the conditions of a migrant. To acknowledge this is to understand art as emerging “between cultures”, in a place defined by Inge Boer as “uncertain territories”, which is also by definition a political place.<sup>3</sup> Mieke Bal pins down the description of art produced under these conditions with the term “migrant aesthetics”. As Ann Peterson observes in her article, “For the last two decades, an increasing number of non-Western artists have been ‘included’ in the art market and the international exhibition circuit. Many of these artists follow the same typical career path: born and raised in a non-Western country; educated at a Western art academy or university; presently living and working in one of the metropolitan art centers of the West; and travelling and exhibiting worldwide.”<sup>4</sup> The biography of the Brazilian artist Clarissa Tossin perfectly fits the type described by Ann Peterson. Her work can help us understand the kinds of challenges that our contemporary migrant culture sets upon art history and why Migration could serve as an urgent and important platform, suited for a CIHA international congress.

Born in 1973 in Porto Alegre, Clarissa Tossin grew up in Brasilia, completed her Bachelor in visual arts in São Paulo, and left to the US to study at the California Institute of the Arts. She is based in LA since then but maintains deep ties to Brazil. Dislocations and migrations are central themes in her work. In “Encontro das Águas” (Meeting of Waters), for example, she proposes a reflection on the impact of advanced capitalist society on local populations of the Amazon. The work, first exhibited in 2018 at the Blanton Museum of Art in Austin, Texas, is composed of different objects that,

together, in their material presence, reflect on the complex environmental and human problematic in the region.<sup>5</sup>



**Fig. 1 and 2.** *Encontro das Águas (Meeting of Waters)*, 2016–18. Woven archival inkjet print on vinyl, terracotta objects, fishnet, thread, woven baskets and backpack made out of Amazon.com delivery boxes. Instituto Inhotim Collection, Minas Gerais, Brazil.

The first work produced for the group was a large tapestry, 15 meters in length and 1.3 meters wide. It is built out of two satellite pictures depicting the 900 miles stretch of the Amazon River, from the city of Manaus to its entrance in the Atlantic Ocean. The satellite pictures were cut into long ribbons and woven together, in reverse, using the traditional basketry technique of the Baniwa peoples. The stretch of the Amazon presented in the work corresponds to the route travelled daily by hundreds of cargo ships, transporting products from the so called “Zona Franca de Manaus” (Manaus Free Trade Zone) to the Atlantic Ocean, and from there into the world. The “Zona Franca”, an area of more than 6 thousand square miles in the heart of the Amazon forest, was created in 1957 as a tax-free, deregulated zone to attract international capital to the region. Today, some of the largest companies in the world have their base in the surroundings of Manaus, such as Apple, Samsung, Coca-Cola, Panasonic, Honda, and many others.

The establishment of the “Free Trade Zone” is one of the most recent, among many interventions in the ecosystem of the Amazon throughout history, resulting in the deforestation of thousands of acres of native forests, as well as violence and dislocation of native peoples in the region. The indigenous populations living along the Amazon and its affluent rivers have been interacting with European for centuries, struggling to survive. The Baniwa people that traditionally occupied the margins of the rio Içana and the high part of the rio Negro are one among many of these affected communities. The first registers of contact with the Baniwas date to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when they were captured and enslaved by the Portuguese settlers. From the 19<sup>th</sup> century on, religious missions were created in the region by the Salesians, and later also by protestants from The United States, transferring the Baniwas into villages and converting a large part of their population. In the turn of the century, they were deeply affected by the rubber exploitation economy that brought constant confrontation with the “seringueiros”, or rubber workers, and many deaths. Again, in the 1970’s, the government confiscated significant part of their land to build the North Perimetral road, and in the 1980’s they were affected by big mining companies that settled in

the region. In spite of this violent history, the Baniwas managed to maintain their culture and traditions, including the art of basketry.



**Fig. 3.** Baniwa Basketry at the Museum of Modern Art, Rio de Janeiro. Photo Juliana Chalita/ archive Selvagem Ciclo de Estudos, 2023.

In the 90's they finally organized politically and obtained the demarcation of their lands. They also developed co-ops to insert their products – basically peppers, terracotta pots, and basketry – into the market, becoming an inspiration for other native people seeking their rights. The relevance of the group within the local indigenous organizations in the Amazon was probably the reason why Clarissa Tossin chose to use the Baniwa basketry as reference in her work. Although their territories lay outside the Zona Franca, 600 miles up the Rio Negro, they are still affected by the global market created by the Free Trade Zone. Forced to navigate the Amazon waters to bring their art work to sell in Manaus as means of survival, they cannot avoid being an active part of the net of economic, politic and social relations in the region.

By using Baniwa traditional weaving techniques to reconfigure an image of the Amazon river, Clarissa Tossin points to this complex history of assimilation and resistance present in the area. The weaving of the satellite photographs materializes this entanglement of cultures, with their own sense of place and space on the Amazon. In front of the city of Manaus, the two rivers that form the Amazon – Rio Negro and Rio Solimões – meet, but do not mix their waters for another six kilometers, this is one more metaphor for the dialectics of resistance and assimilation included in the title of the work.



**Fig. 4.** Meeting of the waters of the Negro and Solimões rivers

The artist's discussion of the encounters and (des)encounters produced in the area of the "Zona Franca de Manaus" is expanded by further objects that compose the "Encontro das Águas" installation.



**Fig. 4.** Installation view, Clarissa Tossin: Encontro das Águas (Meeting of Waters), Blanton Museum of Art, University of Texas at Austin, January 13–July 1, 2018. Courtesy of the Blanton Museum of Art. Photo: Colin Doyle

Using terra cotta, a traditional media in the region since pre-Columbian times, she produces cast models of locally manufactured high-tech objects by multinational companies, such as motorcycle tiers, routers, computer keyboards, and Coca-Cola bottles, hanging them in fishing nets, or setting them in baskets woven with cardboard strips from *Amazon* company boxes. All these products put on the market for local or global consuming are also known and desired by the indigenous population of the Amazon, however remaining largely inaccessible. When translated by Clarissa Tossin into the traditional media of terra cotta, they become dysfunctional and awkward, albite maintaining an aesthetic appeal. Hanging on fishing nets, they also call to mind images of environmental degeneration and pollution that directly affect the lives of locals.

The use of *Amazon* boxes as material for the production of Baniwa-like banquets and carriers, is again another way of reflecting on the complexities of the “Zona Franca” cultural texture. Jeff Bezos, creator of *Amazon.com*, chose the name for his company because of the Amazon river. Amazon is today one of the largest transport service companies in the planet, guaranteeing the circulation of millions of items every day. For the Baniwas, however, outsiders to the consumer world of globalized capitalism, Amazon boxes have other connotations. When translated into the local technologies of transport, they result in useless “simulacra”.

We can see all the movement taking place in the Amazon “Free Trade Zone” as a movement of incorporation of the region into a globalized capitalist system. This process provoked dislocations, exclusions, and violence, which remain part of the local memory. Although Clarissa is not one of the immediate actors involved in the Amazon conflict – after all she comes from a middle-class family of European descent and never lived in the region – as a Brazilian immigrant in the US, she feels compelled to engage and act. By exhibiting the installation “Encontro das Águas” at the Blanton Museum of art in Austin she found a way, through her own imagination, to connect the space of the gallery to the Amazon reality. With this gesture, to use Mieke Bal’s words, she “enacts a small-scale resistance against the status quo”, and

thus exert political agency. To center the CIHA World Congress around the concept of Migration is, therefore, to interrogate the ways in which art history can become as space of resilience and resistance against the globalized corporate reality we live in.

Motion is implied in Migration, but today both concepts exist in tension. In its traditional meaning of dislocation of populations, Migration has always been part of the human experience. People were on the move since prehistoric times, crossing continents to seek better living conditions. However, since the beginning of the circumnavigation that led to colonial expansion, human dislocation was incorporated as an essential part of the nascent capitalist system, which depends on mobility for exchange. To be functional and serve its purpose, as capitalism advanced, mobility became highly regulated. With time, sophisticated strategies of controlling movement within the system were put into place. Boundaries were set, and immigration laws were established. At the same time, various technological apparatus for mapping and location – from navigation maps to satellites – were created to operate radars, televisions, telephones, and most recently, the internet and cellphones. As Jonathan Crary describes it in his book *24/7*<sup>6</sup>, humanity partakes today in an advanced capitalist system of permanent regulated movement, captured by the image of a society that works around the clock, in which the last unconquered, but already threatened frontier is sleep. In *Art and Visibility in Migratory Culture*, Mieke Bal and Hernández-Navarro also deliver a rich insight on the utopia of Motion permeating contemporary society. As they describe it, “the current status quo is dominated by the paradigm of travel, the key figure of modernity.” However, “the idea of travel implies a direction and also a hidden ideology of control (that) becomes apparent when we consider that even mobile phones are linked to satellite technology of location.”<sup>7</sup>

In this contemporary scenario, Migration gains new meaning and can be seen as the disruptive element, as a movement that escapes control and disturbs the system. It causes unpredictable movement and resistance, disorganizing temporal and spatial coordinates. It creates the “uncertain territories” in which established boundary lines are transformed into loosely

defined zones of encounters, where multiple spaces and temporalities are obliged to coexist.<sup>8</sup> Mieke Bal sees such spaces as offering “the conditions for resistance to technological control”. In her view, this can create the space to experience the tension and the conflictual nature of social life. In art, these experiences become visible and tangible. In other words, the concept of Migration as the disruptive element within contemporary society can become operative within art and art history.

The 33<sup>rd</sup> CIHA World Congress proposed “Migrations” as a platform for art historical discussion in these terms. The objective was not so much to examine how art represents the past and present phenomenon of migration, but rather to explore beyond that, and see Migration as a political condition of art. In other words, we wanted scholars to come together to reflect on the potential of art as one of many spaces of the political, created by the dislocation of people, objects and ideas across cultural borders. A space which is at the same time framed by “aesthetics”, by the materiality and sensual quality of things that incorporate and make ideas visual and tangible.

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### Endnotes

1. Mitchel, “Migrating Images”, in: *Image Science*, 2015, p.65.
2. Ann Ring Peterson, “The location of memory: migration and transnational cultural memory as challenges for art history”, In: *Crossings: Journal of Migration & Culture*, v.4, n.2, 2013, p. 121-137, here: p. 122.
3. Inge Boer, *Uncertain Territories: boundaries in cultural analysis*, Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006.
4. Ann Ring Peterson, op.cit., p. 122.
5. The series of works presented in this installation were produced by the artist during an artistic residency at the Harvard Radcliffe Institute in 2017. See: <https://blantonmuseum.org/rotation/clarissa-tossin-meeting-of-waters/>
6. Jonathan Crary, *24/7 terminal capitalism and the end of sleep*, London, Brooklyn, and New York: Verso, 2013.
7. Mieke Bal and Miguel Hernández-Navarro, “Introduction”, in: *Art and Visibility in Migratory Culture: conflict resistance and agency*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011, p.10.
8. “I will argue that boundaries cannot be wished away but will serve their ordering purposes better – that is, without the lack of understanding and the ensuing hostilities that usually

accompany them – if we accept their existence but take them as uncertain; not lines, but spaces, not rigid but open to negotiation. The resulting uncertain terrains are the ground we stand on, together.” Inge Boer, “Introduction”, *Uncertain Territories: Boundaries in Cultural Analysis*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006, p. 13.

This article is an updated version of a paper presented in 2018 at CAA as part of the panel “Mobilities: Brazil and Beyond”, chaired by Jeanette Favrot Peterson.

# Guest contributors

## **Encounters**

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**Mieke Bal**

**ABSTRACT**

Migration is less an issue of “others” than a potential encounter within a culturally mixed society. Instead of the usual suspicion, even hostility, towards people “we” don’t know or find different, and either exaggerating or erasing those differences, it is better, I suggest, to go towards them, understand and enjoy those differences. The concept of knowledge underlying this view holds that knowledge is a never-ending process, rather than a hasty attempt to reach a fixed state of arrival in which one knows. I will develop some nuances of this view through a video installation I have made and exhibited, which is entirely geared toward personal contact, interest, and friendship.

**KEYWORDS**

Affect; Empathy; Friendship; Migratory; Motherhood.

### **Friendship and Empathy**

In the current cultural climate, for those who do not personally, individually have such experiences, migration, as an act and a process, is first of all an issue that concerns others. We can get information about their experiences, “in the third person”. Documentary film and literature is a standard tool to convey that information. But when I started to make documentaries, in video films and installations, I realized immediately that the very notion that documentaries, in classical form, give information, is precisely what obscures the lack of access to the *affective* level of those experiences. This lack makes the presentations by definition incomplete. The experiences are mostly stored or re-made in *memories*; the memories of others. This lack of access limits what such films can do for the cultures they claim to document, analyze, and address. Therefore, it is crucial to experiment with the form, to break open the “third-person” aesthetic, replacing *showing* with *interacting*. The viewer or reader must be given access to the interactive level where the first and second person conduct a dialogue. This is necessary to overcome the easy, smoothing narrative impulse, so that the experience itself, rather than the exterior manifestations of it, can accede to visibility, solicit responses, and become relevant. The point is that the participants in the live culture we all share must thereby be assisted in *learning from* the video artwork.<sup>1</sup>

For this to happen, the experiences must find expression in an intimate encounter; an affective, social proximity. That event of encounter is performative; it is the performance where migration is no longer fixated in otherness, and the tenacious opposition of self and other loses its grounding. Otherness tends to produce phobias: fears, which lead to hostility. Such encounters, instead, which can positively affect the social fabric, are not so much facilitated by knowledge but rather, need to be mediated by empathy as their medium for knowledge production and understanding; empathy as solicited by an aesthetic. *Encounter* constitutes the ground of an experience in the here-and-now in public space. It offers a productive alternative to the phobic concept of “otherness.”<sup>2</sup>

For an analysis of migratory culture, I have experimented with a mode of analytical filmmaking that performs the analysis not *about* but *with* the people concerned; a sort of fieldwork of a different kind. This approach made narrative an uneasy mode, and description and analysis based on statistics both too meager and, given the pace of academic publication, always *belated*. It is belated in relation to the constant transformation of *becoming* that is the dynamic aspect of the present, and underlies the concept of knowledge as process. The closest I was able to come to a different mode of analysis was a combination of live contact and video, as a tool for making visible what is there for everyone to see but remains unseen because it does not have a form that stands out. I attempted alternative forms in some of the documentaries I made between 2002 and 2010. These concern large and small issues, from the struggle with language, the difficulty of traveling through constantly closed borders, the break-up of families, the changes in social space through small eating habits, growing up between different cultures, and the traumatic events that compel migration even a generation later. The mix of such trivial and profound issues is, precisely, what characterizes migratory culture. These films have in common an open, undefined form that surrenders to the need to express what can barely be brought to awareness, let alone explicitly said, and seeks forms of expression that can be alternatives to political declarations. By making an audio-visual presentation of such tiny sheer-invisible things I try to enhance them, bring them to visibility, so that everyone can understand, empathize with, and participate in them, without, however, turning them into an exotic strangeness. To sum this up: when curating an exhibition with Spanish colleague Miguel Á. Hernández Navarro, we came up with the term “migratory aesthetics”.<sup>3</sup>

The “migratory” in the concept indicates a culture where older residents and newcomers merge; and hopefully, *encounter* one another. The qualifier does not focus on special people, those “others”, but on the mixed culture as such, in which we all participate. Then there is the “aesthetic” part. “Migratory Aesthetics” refers to the *sensuous* traces of migration as an aesthetic phenomenon, in the contemporary environment. From the beginning of aesthetics as a philosophical discipline, a misconstrued Kantian

perspective has prevailed over the founding view articulated by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten. To sum up a 900-page treatise (in Latin) into a single sentence: for Baumgarten, aesthetics is based on an experience of three features: *binding* through the *senses* in *public space*. The verb *to bind* contains a promise of connectivity. With a critical view of the integration one-sidedly demanded of immigrants, which is more adequately termed enforced assimilation, I consider that connectivity to be a *mutual* integration; not of “others” coming into a fixed social world, determined by traditions, but instead of an event of getting acquainted, affectively, in the present. The role of the *senses* alludes to the pleasurable, intense, and reflection-inducing quality of the aesthetic – the feeling that one has enjoyed, learned from, been enriched by an experience. And the *public space* is where the encounters happen. This is necessary if the social world is to be able to continue to be in constant movement and change; “in becoming” as Deleuzian ontology would put it. This must be learned; hence, it is a useful subject for teaching. It is a viable alternative to the stultifying and reifying categorization and binary obsession in an oppressive yet illusory feeling of familiarity as monocultural.<sup>4</sup>

How does this view of migratory aesthetics have potential for a different practice of teaching in an environment that is fundamentally culturally mixed? In philosophy, the figure of the teacher as a “conceptual persona” is usually presented as the lover. In her book *What Can She Know? Feminist Epistemology and the Construction of Knowledge*, Canadian philosopher Lorraine Code takes this tradition up and turns it around (1991). For Code, the concept-metaphor that best embodies her ideal is the *friend*, not the lover. Moreover, the conceptual persona of the friend – the model of friendship – is not embedded in a definition of philosophy but of knowledge. This view necessarily takes knowledge as provisional. If the authority of the author/artist, as well as that of the teacher, is unfixed, then the place it vacates can be occupied by *theory*. The teacher, then, no longer holds the authority to dictate the method; her task is only to facilitate a reflection that is ongoing and interactive. Knowledge is knowing that reflection cannot be finished. Moreover, to use Shoshana Felman’s phrase mentioned above, knowledge is not to learn something *about* but to learn something *from*.

Knowledge, not as a substance or content “out there” waiting to be appropriated but as the “how-to” aspect that bears on such learning *from* the practice of interdisciplinary cultural analysis.<sup>5</sup>

Within the framework of Felman’s description of teaching as facilitating the *condition* of knowledge (31), Code’s apparently small shift from lover to friend is, at least provisionally, a way out of the philosophy/humanities misfit. Friendship is a paradigm for knowledge production, the traditional task of the humanities, but then production as an *interminable process*, not as a preface to a product. Code lists the following features of friendship, as opposed to the lover’s passion, as productive analogies for knowledge production:

- such knowledge is not achieved at once; it develops
- it is open to interpretation at different levels
- it admits degrees
- it changes constantly
- subject and object positions in the process of knowledge construction are reversible
- the ‘more-or-lessness’ of this knowledge affirms the need to reserve and revise judgment (1991: 37-38).

This list helps to distinguish between philosophy in the narrow sense, as a discipline or potential inter-discipline, and the humanities as a more general field, “rhizomatically” (Deleuze & Guattari 1976) organized according to a dynamic interdisciplinary *practice*. I propose to take it seriously, not only to make a profile of a good teacher but in migratory culture of a good neighbor, who is interested in encountering, then developing friendship with others, from which they can learn.

Philosophy creates, analyses, and offers concepts. Analysis, in pursuing its goal, puts these together with potential objects that we wish to get to know. Disciplines “use” them, “apply” and deploy them, in interaction with an object, in their pursuit of specialized knowledge. But, in the best of situations, this division of tasks does not imply a rigid division of people or groups of people along the lines of disciplines or departments. For, such a division deprives all participants of the key to a genuine practice of *cultural*

*analysis*: a sensitivity to the provisional nature of concepts. Without claiming to know it all, each participant learns to move about between these areas of activity. In our everyday traveling through public spaces, such as the street and the classroom, one is compelled to constantly negotiate these differences. One must select one path and bracket others, but eliminate none. This is the basis of interdisciplinary work.

The most crucial condition to make this possible is a feature of friendship not mentioned in Code's very useful list: empathy. Without empathy, no friendship can thrive. At the beginning of an edited volume on the subject, memory theorist Aleida Assmann defined empathy in these words: "the capability to 'think in the mind of another', to anticipate the reactions of another human being" (1). During the conference in Sao Paulo, I presented three projects based on empathy: the installation NOTHING IS MISSING and the experimental documentary films BECOMING VERA and UN TRABAJO LIMPIO. Each of these works concerns encounters with unexpected "others": the mothers of migrants, nowhere present in the published literature, and yet, profoundly affected by the departures of their children; a child with a mixed cultural background, of three years old, unaware of the cultural pressure around her, yet smartly deploying fiction to resist it; and the desire of high-school students to simply achieve the acquisition of a "clean" job: where they don't have to dig the earth as the only possible mode of subsistence. In all these works, empathy is key. I will briefly present the first of these below.

There is also an aesthetic-material aspect to this need for empathy. This concerns the core feature of the aesthetic encounter that helps people to understand, and feel, the difference between the fear of otherness, or phobia, and the friendship that can emerge from a true encounter. In 2016-17, I have been involved in a project to develop an aesthetic, theatricality-based method of exhibiting as a mode of learning empathy. This can help in a society where friendship is a desired mode of knowing others, instead of a categorization of others as others. This aspect, easiest summed up as "providing seating", has been my near-obsessive point about curating ever since. It sounds so simple, even banal, but providing seating is an aesthetic-intellectual gesture. Only when visitors can relax, take/give the time, can they really emphatically

engage with the figures on the screens they are looking at. Seating, instead of walking fast through the galleries, provides time, and concentration, and solicits “facing” – the visual equivalent of the encounter.<sup>6</sup>

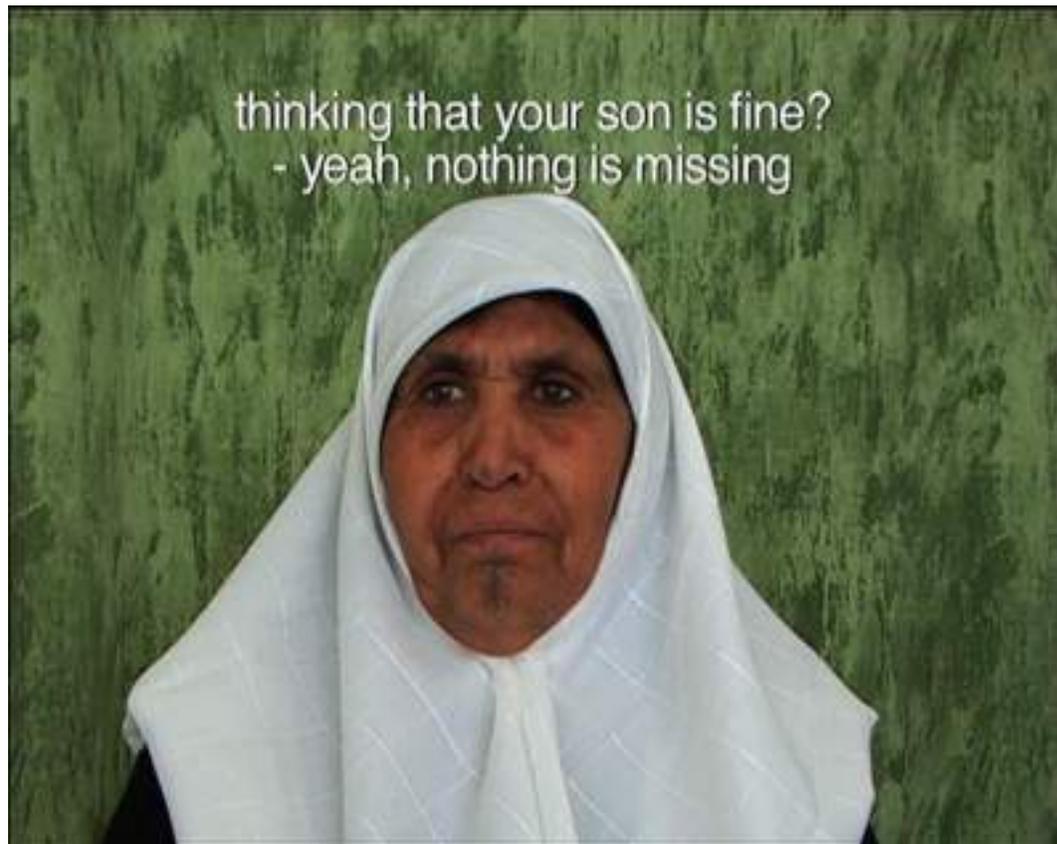
This poses a challenge to the idea of the universal. All over the world, and in your own living room: are we able to consider, experience, and value these two locations and the ensuing positions at the same time? One of the most severe challenges to the idea, or hope, of any universality is the division produced everywhere between people whose everyday life and its intimacy are safely assured and those who lead an existence of “infra-humanity”. Among other consequences, this division produced an unsettling tension when the two parts of our supposedly unified world collided in Western countries as a result of migration. Migration causes the coexistence in one social environment of people who can afford to live permanently in a place and those who cannot – those who are driven to displacement.<sup>7</sup>

### **Mothers Facing Migration**

This situation deeply impinges on conceptions, experiences and practices rarely addressed in this context: of motherhood. It interrupts that relationship and brutally destroys the relation of intimacy, since the proximity or distancing between mother and child is no longer a matter of choice. The combination of motherhood and migration, then, is a good place to reflect on the confrontation between globalization and intimacy against the backdrop of a non-oppositional, unresolved dialectic of singularity and universality. The relationship between the singular and the general – to use a more abstract pair that encompasses both universality-singularity and globalization-intimacy – also holds for my own analyses. It has consequences for the relationship between my video-making (or, taking the word videography literally, video-writing) and my scholarly writing. I must foreground that, with one of my video installations being central to my argument, this is also an exploration, through one particular case, of the dynamic complementarity between media. One goal is to make the mothers staged in this installation full participants in what can only be a multi-voiced

discussion. Documentary videos, while of course not full accounts either, preserve something of the voice of their subjects.

The tension between intimacy and the consequences of globalization is enacted most explicitly in the video installation made between 2006 and 2008, with a supplement in 2010. Through this installation, I sought to image intimacy on terms that allow for the strategic use of universalism (“motherhood”) as well as for the acceptance, respect for, and even foregrounding of differences (“migration”). The central concept became “facing”. The installation is titled *NOTHING IS MISSING* after the statement of the first of the mothers.



**Fig. 1.** Massaouda; Remada, Tunisia

Quoting her statement as the project’s title is already a first step in abandoning authorial authority. The work consists of a variable number of

audiovisual units, between 5 and 17, that play DVDs of about thirty minutes in which a mother talks about a child who has left in migration. Visually, imagine a gallery looking like a generic living room, where visiting is like a social call. The image is a portrait, a bust only, of a woman speaking to someone else.

Apart from a short introductory sequence that sets up the situation, the videos consist of unedited single shots. The decision to not edit is a step in abandoning authorial control, to do justice to the empowerment of the mothers through minimising my own authorship. Sometimes, we hear the voice of the interlocutor; in other cases, we hear no one other than the woman speaking. Every once in a while, they fall silent. In the multi-channel installation, this visually suggests that the silent one was listening to the others, although they have never met. The installation itself enacts the tension between global and intimate, since the domestic ambiance is created within a space that is public, although often not a space where such installations are expected. I have had it installed in museums and galleries, academic settings, and office spaces – most radically, in a corner office at the Department of Justice in The Hague, which had become unrecognizable as an office where the (anti-)immigration policies are being written.<sup>8</sup>

This installation probes the tension between usages of universalism as escapist exclusion and as a strategy to enhance differences. My provisional answer to the contradiction between these two elements is to replace any *thematic* universalism with a *performative* one, and an essential universalism with a strategic dynamic variant that is constantly challenged by *singularities*. Between aesthetic and academic work, activism for activation through the promotion of reflection in sense-based experience is at work. The question that the installation raises, and that I attempt to answer in the present article, is how it is possible to make intimate contact in the sense of friendship sketched above, across the many divisions that separate people in different cultures, that is, linguistic, economic, and familial situations, without ignoring or erasing differences, and why it matters to do so. The goal is not to reach a universal ground for communication but instead to establish the universal as the ground on which differences can performatively be brought into dialogue.

The women in the installation live in various countries from which people have migrated since the onset of modern-day globalization. Still living in their home countries, they all saw a child leave to Western Europe or to the USA. If we are to understand the possibility of a universal such as motherhood through insight into the intimate local relationships against the backdrop of a globalized world, we must, first of all, realize the enormity of the changes in the lives and life experiences of individuals taking this drastic step. We must wonder, that is, why people decide they must leave behind their affective ties, relatives, friends, and habits – in short, everything that constitutes their intimate everyday lives. Imagine! These motivations, which are too complex to allow any generalizations, tend to include economic necessity but are rarely limited to that overarching issue.



**Fig. 2.** Zuiderzeemuseum, Enkhuizen; photo: Astrid van Weyenberg

While my purpose is not to fully understand those complex motivations, I bring them up considering that they are among the ambivalences toward the migration of their child to which the mothers

testify. My primary goal was to explore the possibility of an aesthetic understanding that, by means of its own intimacy across the gaps of globalization, can engage the political. The proximity presupposed by the sense-based experience also establishes intimacy between the subject and the “object” of the aesthetic moment. Hence, this approach furthers my attempt to develop a method that approximates the “object” to becoming a subject, not as the anthropological subjects subjected to the researcher’s gaze, but as full co-authors of their image.



**Fig. 3.** Hamdiah; Gaza, Palestina

At the heart of this project is a triple deployment of the act of *facing*. Facing sums up the aesthetic and political principle of NOTHING IS MISSING, which is an attempt to reflect on severance and its consequences. Through this installation, I attempt to shift two common universal definitions of

humanity: the notion of individual autonomy of a vulgarised and misunderstood Cartesian *cogito*, and that of a subjecting passivity derived from the principle of George Berkeley's "to be is to be perceived." The former slogan has done a lot of damage in ruling out the participation of the body and emotions in rational thought. This does not only do an injustice to Descartes, but to the cultures that need a bit more rationality, precisely on behalf of the bodies. The latter, recognizable in Lacanian as well as in Bakhtinian traditions, has sometimes tended to over-extend a sense of passivity and coerciveness into a denial of political agency and, hence, responsibility. And that responsibility matters most for a nuanced view of effective political art that surpasses the propagandistic limitation of "activist" art.<sup>9</sup>

Reflecting on facing helps to rethink these notions. I try to shift these views in favor of an intercultural aesthetic based on performance of contact – that encounter mentioned above. In order to elaborate on such an alternative, I have focused this installation on the bond between speech and face. Here, I use speech not just in terms of "giving voice" but also and more importantly in terms of listening and answering, all in their multiple meanings. Briefly, I would like to turn the face, the classical "window of the soul", into an "inter-face."

Facing constitutes three acts at once. Literally, facing is the act of looking someone else in the face. It is also coming to terms with something that is difficult to live down by looking it in the face rather than denying or repressing it. Thirdly, it is making contact, placing the emphasis on the second person, and acknowledging the necessity of that contact to sustain life. Instead of "to be is to be perceived" and "I think, therefore I am", facing proposes, "I face (you); hence, we are". A "we", in this sense, that is not a false universal but an I/you exchange. For, *facing* is my proposal for a performance of contact across divisions, one that avoids the traps of universalist exclusion and relativist condescendence. The project NOTHING IS MISSING is structured through these three meanings of facing.

In a lucid book from 1999, Australian philosophers Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd unpack ideas in Spinoza's writing that can be deployed for

contemporary social thought. Their book does three things at once that are relevant to my goal of furthering the activity of “migratory aesthetics” for encountering friendship, and implementing the performative *face* in that context. Firstly, they develop an intercultural relational ethics. They invoke the relevance of Spinoza’s work for a reasoned position in relation to Aboriginal Australians’ claim to the land that was taken from them by European settlers. These claimants are not migrants in the strict sense, but can be considered as such from within the opposite since they stayed put while their land was taken away from underneath them, but their claims are based on a culturally specific conception of subjecthood and ownership that makes an excellent case for the collective and historical responsibility the authors put forward through Spinoza. This responsibility is key to any possible universality. It is a relation to the past that we have to face today.

That this intercultural ethics should be based on a seventeenth-century writer who never met such claimants – although he was definitely a migratory subject – makes, secondly, a case for the historiography I have termed “pre-posterous” in a study of contemporary art responding to Caravaggio (1999). Clearly, this conception of history is focused on the relevance of present issues for a re-visioning of the past, as much as the other way around. In alignment with the intercultural relationality my plea for encounters promotes, I call it *inter-temporal*. Thirdly, the authors make their case on the basis of the integration of Spinoza’s ontological, ethical, and political writings – three philosophical disciplines traditionally considered separately. This exemplifies *interdisciplinarity*.

In order to transform it from a fashionable buzzword into an intellectually responsible and specific notion, interdisciplinarity could be modeled on *inter-facing* in the sense I am developing here: as a strategic-universalist practice. The face, with all the potential this concept-image possesses, seemed an excellent place to start. But to deploy the face for this purpose requires the elimination of an oppressive sentimental humanism that has appropriated the face for universalist claims – as the window of the soul, as the key to identity translated into

individuality, and as a tool for policing. With this move, I also seek to suspend any tendency to sentimentalizing interpretations of NOTHING IS MISSING.



**Fig. 4.** Elena; Bucovina, Romania

There is another thought-mistake underlying this traditional view of the face. The abuses of the face that individualism underpins are articulated by means of a form of thought that confuses origin with articulation, and runs on a historicism as simplistically linear as it is obsessive. Common origin is a primary ideology of universalism. This involves motherhood. Creation stories from around the world tend to worry about the beginning of humanity in terms of the non-humanity that precedes it. Psychoanalysis primarily projects on the maternal face the beginning of the child's aesthetic relationality. Both discourses of psychoanalysis and aesthetics show their hand in these searches for beginnings. Both are predicated on individualism,

anchored in the mythical structure of creation as ongoing separation, splitting, and specification.<sup>10</sup>

Origin is a forward-projecting illusion. Therefore, through this installation, I explored a different sense of beginning – not in motherhood, but in migration. The primary question is why people decide to leave behind their lives as they know them and project their lives forward into the unknown. With this focus, I aimed to invert the latent evolutionism in the search for beginnings. The portraits that compose *NOTHING IS MISSING* challenge the joint assumptions of individualism and realism. I “staged” the women – “staging” meaning: I asked them to choose a place in their home, a chair to sit on. Then I asked their interlocutors to take place behind the camera; I set the shot, turned the camera on, and left the scene. This method is hyperbolically *documentary*. It was to underline this aspect that I refrained from editing the shots.

Aesthetically, the women are filmed in a consistent close-up. The relentlessly permanent image of their faces is meant to compel viewers to look these women in the face and listen to what they have to say, in a language that is foreign, using expressions that seem strange, but in a discourse to which we can relate affectively. This is a second form of the performance of contact as encounter. The face as inter-face is an occasion for an exchange that, affect-based, is fundamental in opening up the discourse of the face to the world. It equates communication with identification and expression. This equation is grounded in the double sense of identification – *as* and *with* – that underlies the universalist paradox and to which my installation proposes an alternative. In line with my strong preference for the preposition “inter-”, I call that alternative “inter-facing.”

The socio-cultural version of this political ambiguity is most clearly noticeable in the dilemma of “speaking for” and the patronizing it implies, versus “speaking with” as face-to-face interaction. The self-sufficient rationalism of the *cogito* tradition is thus in collusion not only with a philosophical denial of second-personhood but also with a subsequent denial of what the face can *do*. In order to move from an expressionism to a performativity of the face that writes a program for a new, tenable strategic

universality, I deduce three uses of the preposition “inter-” from Gatens and Lloyd’s take on Spinozism that can be mobilized in a helpful way; three inter-ships. But in order to prevent an over-hasty, over-optimistic mystification, we must acknowledge that each “inter-” works across a constitutive gap.

Inter-*cultural* relationality, in its inscribed mobility of subjectivity, posits the face as an interlocutor whose discourse is not predictably similar to that of the viewer. These women speak to “us”, across a gap, as they speak to their own relatives, again across a gap. The first gap is that of culture, if we continue to view cultures as entities instead of processes. In such a conception, intercultural contact is possible on the basis of the acknowledgment of the gap that separates and distinguishes them. The sometimes over-extended emphasis on difference in postcolonial thought is a symptom of that gap. The second gap is caused by “the cultural” conceived as moments and processes of tension, conflict, and negotiation, rather than as a reified “thing” or “state”, a dynamic view developed by Fabian (2001).

### **Second-Personhood in Practice**

To highlight this dynamic, including recognition of the gap, I have invited the mothers to choose a spot in their own home and intimates as their interlocutors. The people to whom the women tell their stories are close to them, yet distanced by the gap that was caused by the migration of the loved one. Tunisian Massaouda’s daughter-in-law, for example, who was not chosen by her for her son, as her culture would command her to do, is reaching out to the mother across an unbridgeable gap produced by history. In Romanian Elena’s case, even the son himself struggles to overcome the gap that sits between him and his mother, with whom he talks during the short Summer period when he visits her.

There are yet other gaps in play. As I have suggested, the two simultaneous situations of speech – between the mothers and their relatives and between the mothers and the viewer – doubly mark second-personhood, but across gaps. The strong sense of intimacy emanating from the direct address of the mother to her closely familiar interlocutor at first excludes the

viewer. Only once one makes the effort and gives the time to witness or even enter the interaction can the viewer earn a sense of participation. When this happens – and, due to the recognisability of the discourse, it does – the experience is elating and, I contend, unique in public events such as art exhibitions. Once, during setting up, I saw a cleaner of the exhibition space in Melbourne, an immigrant from Sudan, put down his tools and sit, watching riveted a mother from his home country talk to a close friend. He remained glued to his chair for at least half an hour, with tears in his eyes.<sup>4</sup>



**Fig. 5.** Alham; Khartoom, Sudan

The third gap opens in the making, due to the theoretical and artistic alternative to artistic authority I had constructed, a “wilful abandon of mastery”, which underlies the filming in my own absence. There is *necessarily* a gap between intention and artwork – always. The gaps as entrances into

sensations that are “borrowed”, grounded in someone else’s body, open the door to the inter-face. Gaps, in other words, are the key to a universality that rejects a romantic utopianism in favor of a difficult, hard-won but indispensable inter-facing. Gaps, not links, are also the key to intermediality as well as to interculturality.

The resulting images are far from the documentary realism considered so important in Western culture. They possess a temporal density that is inhabited by the past and the future, while affect remains an event in the present – an event of *becoming*. This is especially strong in the affect produced by the close-up. This is not an event in the punctual sense, but a slice of process during which external events slow down. Becoming harbors the presence of the past. If we take this presence to the realm of the social, we can no longer deny responsibility for the injustices of the past, even if we cannot be blamed for it. Without that responsibility, the use of the vexed pronoun “we” - “the full deceptiveness of the false cultural ‘we’” Torgovnick commented on it – itself becomes disingenuous, even unethical.<sup>12</sup>

Gatens and Lloyd’s “Spinozistic responsibility”, then, is derived from the philosopher’s concept of self as social, and consists of projecting presently felt responsibilities “back into a past which itself becomes determinate only from the perspective of what lies in the future of that past – in our present”. Taking seriously the “temporal dimensions of human consciousness” includes endorsing the “multiple forming and reforming of identities over time and within the deliverances of memory and imagination at any one time.” (81) This pre-posterous responsibility based on memory and imagination makes selfhood not only stable but also unstable (82). This instability is a form of empowerment, of agency within a collectivity-based individual consciousness.

Making contact, the third and most important act implied in facing, facilitates that becoming – becoming world citizens, building our existence on mobility without having to move. This making of contact is suggested as an effect of the insistent facing in NOTHING IS MISSING. What faces can do is stage encounters. This is the point of the mothers’ faces – their

empowerment. In the installation, the face is constantly present, in close-up but not extremely close. As a visual form, the close-up itself *is* the face:

There is no close-up of the face. The close-up is the face, but the face precisely in so far as it has destroyed its triple function [individuation, socialization, communication] ... the close-up turns the face into a phantom... the face is the vampire. (Deleuze 1986, 99)

If the close-up is the face, this equivalent is reversible; the face is also the close-up. Through a slight distance nevertheless built into the image to avoid locking the viewer up and denying the women any space at all, the images avoid facile conflation and appeals to sentimentality. I wanted to give the face a frame within which it can exercise its mobility and agency. And to make the images also look a bit like the busts of Roman emperors and other dignitaries. That slight distance, then, provides the space for a certain kind of freedom.

This would be a freedom à la Spinoza – a freedom that is “critical”. Critical freedom, wrote James Tully in 1995, is the practice of seeing the specificity of one’s own world as one among others. Inter-temporally, this freedom sees the present as fully engaged with a past that, insofar as it is part of the present, can be rewritten a little more freely. The act of inter-facing can do that. The term, or illusion, of universality may not be the most felicitous one to characterize this act, but accompanied by the verb “confronting” it makes sense beyond a relativism that implies turning one’s back on such faces. I have attempted to create an environment within which all these considerations facilitate true encounters.

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## Endnotes

1. The idea of learning from instead of about art was launched by Shoshana Felman (1982). Jeroen Lutters developed this into a concept; see his edited volume (2024). In a book of interviews with me I discuss the teacherly aspects of it. (Lutters 2018)
  2. In his early book on Proust, Deleuze came up with the notion of "the encountered sign" (1972).
  3. I have presented the issues and the resulting films in a recent book, from which some of the ideas presented here are derived (2022). Information about the documentaries can be found on my website, at <http://www.miekebal.org/artworks/films/>
  4. For a lucid presentation of Baumgarten's aesthetics, see Hlobil (2009). On Deleuze's 'becoming', Biehl and Locke (2010)
  5. Paul de Man defined theory long ago as "a controlled reflection on the formation of method" (1982, 4).
  6. On this exhibition project, see Bal (2017).
  7. The term "infra-humanity" comes from Colombian artist Doris Salcedo. Salcedo's Unilever Commission *Shibboleth* at the Tate Modern in London consisted of a long, deep, and elaborate crack in the floor of the Turbine Hall. The catalog explains the artist's attempt to put the global division between people, literally down. The term "infra-humanity" must be understood in that context. See Salcedo (2007), and for an analysis of her work, my 2010 book.
  8. For reasons of discretion, given the intimacy of the situations, I promised the mothers not to put the entire films on line. For a complete list, stills and synopses of the elements of NOTHING IS MISSING, see <http://www.miekebal.org/artworks/installations/nothing-is-missing/>
  9. For a subtler interpretation of the *cogito* than the traditional dualistic one, see Balibar (2017, 55-73). The complexity of Balibar's interpretation is anchored in a fundamentally interdisciplinary thinking practice, forging an inter-ship between philosophy, political science and anthropology. Descartes is the subject of a film and installation I made in 2016, titled REASONABLE DOUBT: SCENES FROM TWO LIVES. For information, photographs and clips, see <http://www.miekebal.org/artworks/films/reasonable-doubt/>
  10. For this view of creation in Genesis, see the final chapter of my book on Biblical Love-Stories (1987).
  11. The notion of "giving time" alludes to Derrida (1992).
  12. For this relevance of becoming in what could be seen as an anthropological context, which gains special relevance here. On the temporal effect of the close-up, see Doane (2003).
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**Mieke Bal** is author of 46 books and supervisor of 81 finished PhDs, the cultural theorist, critic, video artist and curator Mieke Bal writes in an

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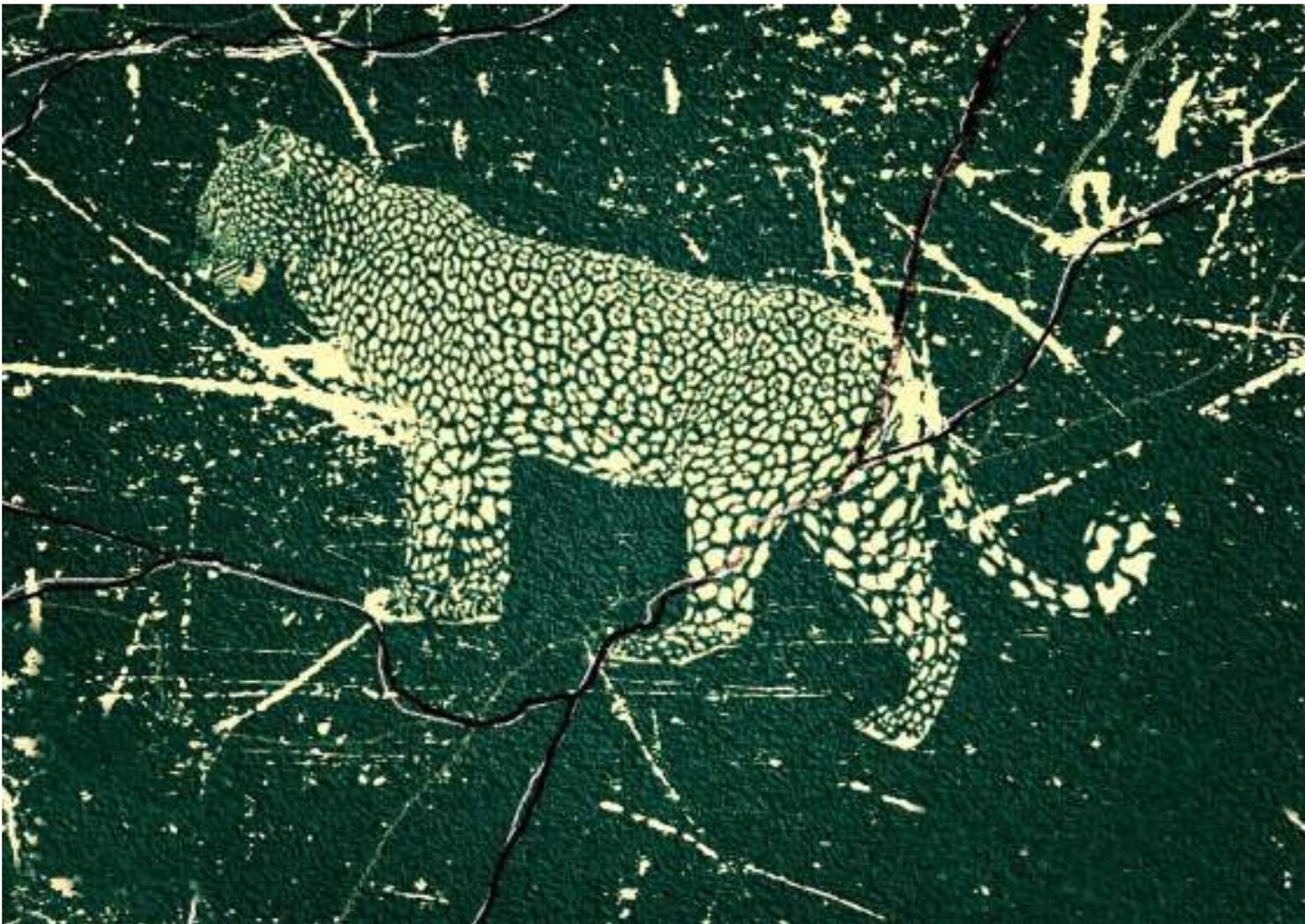
interdisciplinary perspective on cultural analysis, literature and art, focusing on gender, migratory culture, the critique of capitalism, and political art. From 2002 on she also makes films, as a different, more in-depth and more contemporary mode of cultural analysis. In her 2022 book *Image-Thinking* (Edinburgh UP) she develops her ideas about how to integrate academic and artistic thinking. As a filmmaker, she made a number of experimental documentaries, mostly about migratory situations, and “theoretical fictions”. [www.miekebal.org](http://www.miekebal.org)

Guest contributors

## **Natureza Morta (Dead Nature/Still Life)**

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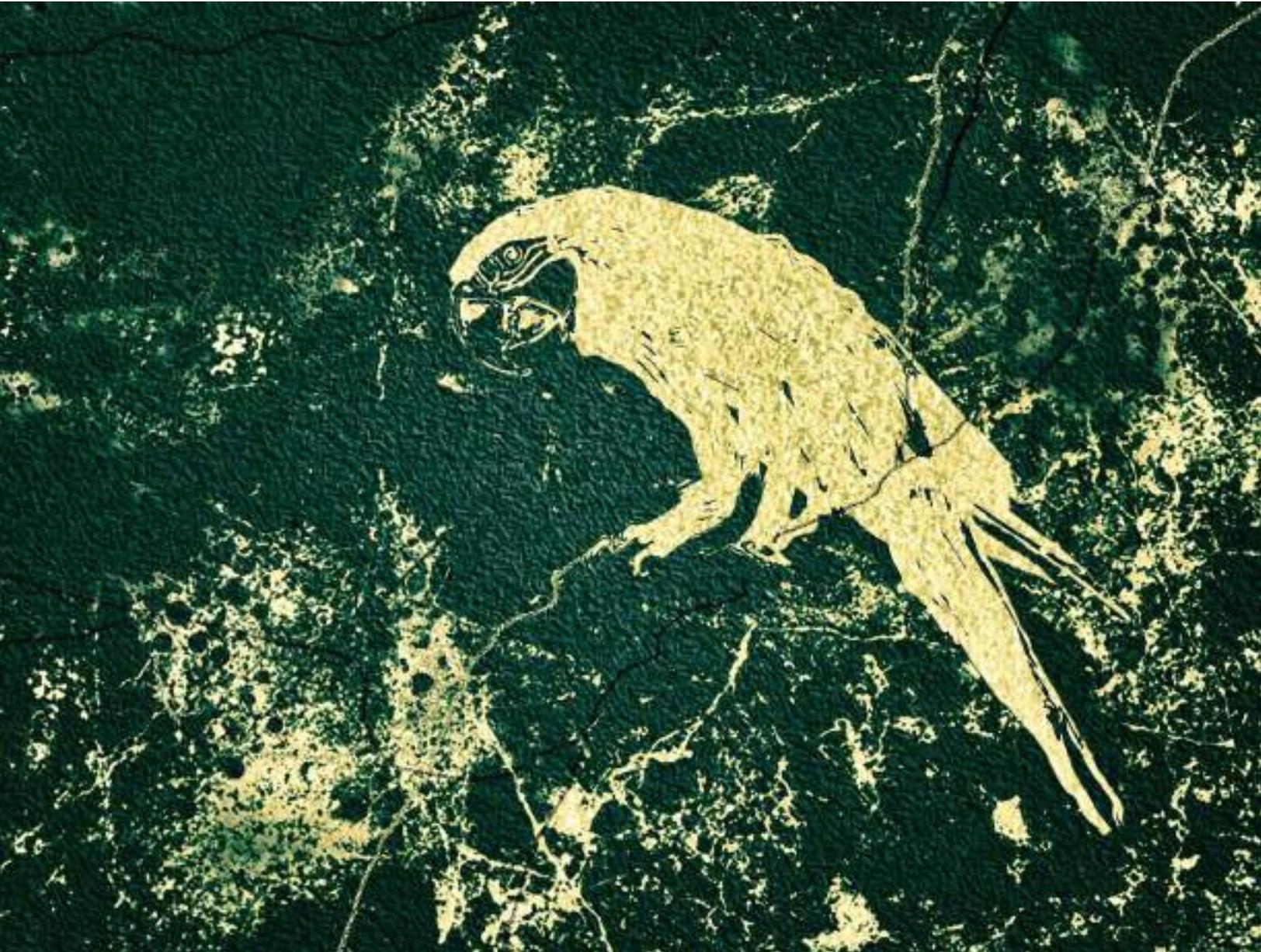
**Denilson Baniwa**  
Artist



**Fig. 1.** *Natureza Morta 1* (2016–2019). Infogravura.



**Fig. 2.** *Natureza Morta 2* (2016-2019). Infogravura.



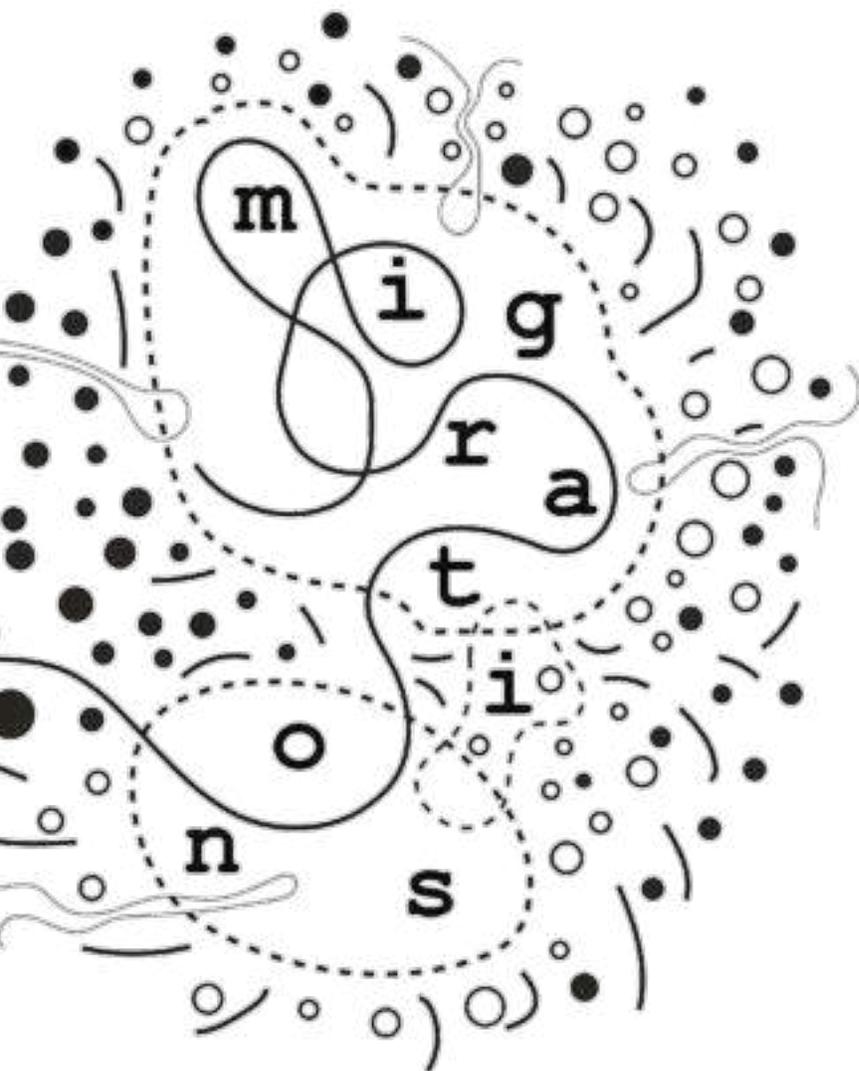
**Fig. 3.** *Natureza Morta 3* (2016–2019). Infogravura.

**Denilson Baniwa** is a visual artist and curator. He creates his work out of the intersections between visual languages of the Western tradition with those of the Indigenous people, using performance, painting, projections, and digital images. As an activist, he addresses the rights of indigenous peoples; the impact of the colonial system, proposing reflections on the current condition of the indigenous people.

# Artisanal Epistemologies as a Transcultural Category

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## Session 1



## Session 1

# Artisanal Knowledge as a Transcultural Category: Introductory Remarks

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### **Claire Farago**

University of Colorado Boulder

### **Jens Baumgarten**

Universidade Federal do Estado de São Paulo

**Claire Farago:** When the 35th Congress began in Florence in September 2019, when our own conference theme and sessions were established, and when the proposed paper abstracts were submitted, no one could have predicted that a rapidly migrating and constantly transforming virus would necessitate postponing the São Paulo conference for two years. My heartfelt thanks to the unstinting efforts of the national organizing committee whose determination and teamwork under difficult circumstances made this conference happen. My co-chair Jens Baumgarten, who is a member of the organizing committee, and I thank all our speakers for your continuing accommodation, goodwill, your emotional and intellectual support in these head-spinning times. The evolving situation has required flexibility and improvisation for eighteen months beyond the originally intended date of our meeting. The world is now a different place that, tragically, gives a new, concrete reality to the São Paulo conference theme of thinking globally about migration, creativity, and borders.<sup>1</sup>

It is important to see the silver lining in the clouds. The pandemic has forced all fifteen speakers and the two co-chairs in this session to meet virtually. Thanks to Zoom technology, we are able speak and interact simultaneously from fourteen different time zones across the planet, with participants physically located in Europe, the Americas, Asia, and Australia. The conference delays have also brought an unexpected, pleasurable, intellectually stimulating opportunity for us to get to know one another better. The initial idea for this session began in my conversations over email with three of the eventual participants, Christine Göttler, Mia Mochizuki, and

Patricia Zalamea who have been rethinking on a global stage some of the most fundamental assumptions in what were once arguably helpful methodological tools in art history. The conversation continued to blossom when Jens and I were paired as co-chairs. While we were waiting for the end of a pandemic that never came, at the suggestion of the CIHA Organizing Committee, we convened a virtual workshop that took place in October 2021. Nearly everyone was able to participate. We, co-chairs, wanted to explore with our participants how the artistic processes of creativity, the central theme of our world congress and a core aspect of our session, appeared from the standpoint of their own knowledge bases and their own professional expertise. We framed the roundtable around the question of creativity: is it truly a transcultural concern?

For our workshop, we read Tim Ingold on defining the core of creativity as improvisation - the problem-solving skills needed to fashion matter that is involved in everyday life.<sup>2</sup> Can skill and ingenuity - a time-honored pair of European categories with complex histories - defined in these terms be inclusive of all cultures? (In fact, improvisation and problem-solving are not limited to humans, but I leave that discussion for another time.) How does the European category "creativity" defined as a process of improvisation through skillful working with materials resonate in other belief systems and practices? To state the challenge of developing a transcultural approach in ontological terms, as Ingold does, can we move beyond the inherited Western dichotomy between nature and culture to think about the way the social and the biological are distributed and entangled?

Can the relation between the social and the biological be articulated without imposing thought structures of European origin such as the assertion that Art is a universal phenomenon. The category "art" has a history, a loaded one at that which has often assumed that European culture is superior to all others. Counter to this understanding, the discourse on de-coloniality, a term associated with the concept of the coloniality of power introduced by Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano, is a critique of this Eurocentric episteme.<sup>3</sup> Yet, despite the global reach of colonial practices - and they are certainly not confined to European expansionism - the colonial matrix of power is not a universal condition. It is not applicable to all places

and cultures adversely affected by such universalist claims. On the other hand, the rigid episteme that decolonial studies seek to identify and revise *is* of concern to the field as a whole, which is the focus of this conference. Works of art and other cultural artifacts are irreducibly multivalent – that is, all images, all material things for that matter, by their nature refuse absolute meaning. The meanings assigned to the material world not only differ across different audiences but collide, often violently, when different societies come into contact. "Could the concept of Migration," our CIHA Mission statement asks, "seen as a disturbing and complex element within contemporary society, become operative within the field of art history?"

This session addresses migrating processes of knowledge production in a global framework while strategically sidestepping the problematic hierarchy of the fine arts and related binomial categories of European origin such as art versus artifact, fine art versus decorative art, and other labels that downgrade or exclude many historically and aesthetically significant kinds of cultural production. The inclusive category "artisanal knowledge" recognizes that all societies pass on their cultural knowledge, their technology, their rites and practices. How is this knowledge negotiated when cultures and belief systems intersect? Our session is organized around the dynamic category "artisanal knowledge" introduced and widely discussed in recent years by historians of Early Modern science critical of standard accounts of the Scientific Revolution in an era when modern distinctions of terminology between art, technology, and science were not maintained as they are today. Pamela Smith suggests that one possible definition of science and technology around the turn of the seventeenth century is simply the interaction of humans with their natural environment and their aspirations to understand it.<sup>4</sup>

As we employ the term "artisanal knowledge," it is not intended to contrast with "artistic," or "scientific knowledge," but to function as a basis for renewing the discipline without falling into the traps of Eurocentrism. The questions now attracting attention in a transdisciplinary field of inquiry involve the nature of embodied knowing and the ways that knowledge systems operate through social networks, whereas the inherited art historical model of agency assumes that cognition is purely an individual mental operation. What are the broader implications of thinking

cross-culturally about knowledge and technology in these relational terms? To address such complex signifying practices requires recognizing a network of agents connected to one another through materials, images, objects, signs, and whatever other means subjects use to relate to other subjects. The work of this session situates the central art historical question of artistic processes of creativity - the language of which derives historically from European concepts of art - into a framework that does not privilege European ideas about art. The perennial challenge is in moving from material processes to signifying practices. The aim of this session is to develop a non-totalizing, transcultural approach to historically documented relationships that rethink how specific technologies of making are interrelated in economic, philosophical, social, and political terms. Our focus is on migrating technologies, materials, and craftsmanship.

The session as a whole aims to move beyond the cumulative case study approach by thinking through epistemological and ontological issues on a historical foundation. Conceiving artistic production in these terms goes well beyond the existing compass of the discipline. The category artisanal knowledge intentionally sidesteps the category Art of European origin and instead opens the history of culture without reference to a norm, nor is the discourse situated in a narrative of cultural development. Yet neither does the category "artisanal knowledge" exclude Art with a capital A from consideration.

Our broad terms also make it possible to de-familiarize European conceptions of artistry, to think its history anew. Our shared inquiry in this session, approached through many different case studies involving many kinds of data and contexts, focuses attention on methodological aspects. The speakers provide a sustained meditation on artisanal knowledge that includes intellectual, social, economic, and political factors without relying on universals, monolithic categories, hierarchies of genre and medium, or the use of binaries, least of all the global/local binary. As different as they are from one another, all the talks ask about various connectivities among peoples, ideas, things.

**Jens Baumgarten:** Migration is the title and theme for this CIHA congress. A lot has migrated since we (in this case the organizing committee of the

whole Congress) started to organize this conference. The migration of the COVID virus made us migrate from the middle of 2020 to early 2022. Contrary to this, we all could not migrate (travel) to São Paulo in person – as I realize we are all still in our virtual Zoom mode. This panel focuses on artisanal epistemology as a way of understanding human creativity through an analytical category that intentionally avoids the existing pattern of binaries in art historical theories and methodologies. The critique of a naïve appreciation of the term “world art history” and, as some intellectuals would put it, the global turn has become stronger. I can say we are very happy that we received so many intriguing proposals that show, through case studies the cultural, political, social, and economic reasons, contexts, aspects etc. In avoiding the simple application of a theoretical model, these different case studies (from all continents) can help us deepen the analysis and help us discuss the development of different theoretical approaches through a dialogue between the different kinds of objects, the significance attached to materiality, and the artisanal processes linked with them. In recent years, it became evident that simply expanding or increasing the number of objects within a European/North American-centered art history is not sufficient for contemporary questions and challenges. I use the word “expand” intentionally to emphasize the inherent risk of applying categories of analysis developed for the study of European and North American art to other histories of materiality, creativity, and objects. These different concepts of artisanship are often based on complex epistemological categories and sometimes even on different ontologies. As Claire has pointed out, neither artifacts nor knowledge systems operate in a solipsistic way. Therefore, it also seems necessary to understand transcultural exchanges in their complexity and, again, not through the construction of binaries. This means that it should be possible to discuss the theoretical consequences of avoiding or eliminating the traditional binaries of art history to develop a transcultural approach to the discipline (that also has theoretical consequences for European and Northern American art history faced with the complexity of different categories, epistemologies and perhaps even more – I will come back to this point in a few moments).

Just let me interrupt my reflections about this panel and introduce another aspect that is directly connected to the theme of this Congress and this panel. It is almost commonplace to introduce the question of agency – and in the case of our session today, the agency of *this* place, São Paulo in Brazil in 2022, and my own trajectory. As mentioned in the opening statement of this Congress, postcolonial approaches are not sufficient for understanding transcultural processes of exchange, appropriation, symbolic inscriptions, etc. Different power relations homogenize, prioritize hegemonic discourses, and hide other epistemologies. Therefore, the questions of hegemonic and non-hegemonic discourses remain a central topic for art history. I think it is not by coincidence that postcolonial debates that were rooted in Southeast Asia were displaced by decolonial critiques that originated in Latin America, which included indigenous intellectuals like Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, who is not teaching in the Northern Hemisphere, and Boaventura de Sousa Santos, who developed the idea of the "Epistemologies of the South."<sup>5</sup>

Especially important to consider in Brazil is the political context of the bureaucratic coup in 2016 and the extreme right-wing government since 2018 that has tried to reestablish structures almost from the time of slavery. A panel about transcultural processes and artisanal practices must be political in a wider sense to analyze also – not only – the power relations operating within aesthetic and cultural research. From my very personal point of view, I remember, when I was a student in Germany that my professors always asked me about my “epistemological interests.” I was very confused as a student - what did they want to know? Many decades later I – hopefully – understand the question better, but also its importance: being a migrant myself with a different cultural background living in a different place from where I grew up has radically changed my emotional and intellectual perspective. It makes a difference to see and experience different cultures firsthand for an extended period of time - alterity as a transcultural perception (that doesn't mean that there is a superior or an inferior perception, but the epistemic differences lead to the construction of different notions). Also, I am deeply grateful for this opportunity to think about my own transcultural experiences together with all of you!

In our workshop to prepare this session we discussed some texts by the anthropologist Tim Ingold, as Claire has mentioned. In my own research, but also regarding the proposal for our panel, I would like to consider some interesting aspects recently discussed in the field of anthropology in Brazil that could be useful for our discussion at the session. The Brazilian anthropologist, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, states that the basic method of anthropology is comparison, like the fundamental method of art history, but he does not fall into the trap of binary construction.<sup>6</sup> In his research he denies ontological dualism. Hence comparability doesn't mean translatability (translations are always interpretations). This is fundamental for understanding the juxtapositions, superimpositions, and complex constitutions of transcultural concepts of creativity. I would like to conclude with his idea of creative misunderstanding. An equivocation is not just a "failure to understand," but a failure to understand that understandings are necessarily not the same and that they are not related to imaginary ways of "seeing the world" but to the real worlds that are being seen. He continues that, while we may have killed the Creator some time ago, we are still left with the other half of the whole that had been posited precisely by the now-absent God – namely science: the transcendence of transcendence created immanence. This insight can be applied specifically to the context of the arts, literature, music, visual, and performative arts, and their concepts of creativity. Despite modern efforts to *dispose* of dualism, for Viveiros de Castro they only create monism, that is, the *denial* of dualism. Therefore, his lesson in perspectivism consists of concepts of pluralism and multiplicity. The critique of his own discipline could be easily extended to the field of art history. Perhaps a transcultural art history would not be able to overcome this implicit ontological dualism, whereas transcultural art histories in the plural would be able to do so by considering altogether different ontologies and epistemologies – and I would not want to get rid of thinking about categories of creativity completely, because epistemic systems are necessary for understanding questions of visibility, materiality, and sensorial regimes. I wish us all two very intense and fruitful days of presentations and discussion that help us unmake binarisms created as separatist categories, and also to increase diversity in art historical approaches. I hope that in the

process, we will instigate more creative and responsible reflections and actions.

**Farago and Baumgarten:** We organized the papers into four consecutive panels intended to highlight different approaches to the question, how is artisanal knowledge conceived transculturally? We grouped the presentations under these headings: (1) "New Epistemologies in Formation," featuring Bart Pashaw, Susan Lowish, and Peter Krieger; (2) "Circulating Objects and Institutions," featuring Christine Göttler, Leah R. Clark, René Lommez Gomes, Deepti Mulgund, and Patricia Zalamea; (3) "Textual Flows," featuring Jeanette Favrot Peterson, Erin Benay, and Iara Lis Schiavinatto; and (4) "Knowledge-Sharing Models," featuring Mia Mochizuki, Vera-Simon Schultz, and a joint presentation by Dario Donetti and Lorenzo Vigotti.

Three of our speakers were unable to submit their papers for the conference proceedings. We would like to document their contributions to our session through the following brief summaries of their presentations. Deepti Mulgund (Shiv Nadar University, Delhi-NCR, India), "The Artisan and the School-Goer: Drawing and the Continuities of 19th Century Colonial Education in India," examined continuities between artisanal training and general education by focusing on the teaching of drawing as a subject within the formal schooling system in colonial Bombay in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth century. She argued that drawing instruction, situated at the intersection of discourses around child-centered pedagogy; the demands of industrial capitalism and empire; and changing ideas around vision, was a key site of transcultural practices. Jeanette Favrot Peterson (University of California Santa Barbara), "Artisanal Authority and Indigenous Knowledge in the Book Culture of Sixteenth-Century Mexico," explored how a hierarchical, European value system that elevates the conceptual over the material was inverted in the sixteenth-century Mexican encounter between European prints and Amerindian artisanal technologies of writing and bookmaking. Through a close reading of images in one beautifully illuminated encyclopedia produced between 1575 and 1577, the *Florentine Codex*, compiled by Bernardino de Sahagún and his indigenous collaborators, Favrot Peterson argued that the hand-crafted manuscript privileged the materiality of pigments and paper elevated the artisanal process over the end product,

and underscored the polyvalent rhetorical capacity of the image itself. Mia Mochizuki (New York of Fine Arts and NYU Abu Dhabi, retired), "Making: a Global Methodology?," drew upon evidence in her newly published book, *Jesuit Art* (2022), to argue that the images produced by diaspora artistic communities of Early Modern religious orders suggest how an artisanal framework for studying *all* objects can provide a critical way forward for the future of the field as a whole. She examined "image-chains" of the *Salus Populi Romani Madonna* transmitted globally in prints, oil paintings, even semi-precious stones and unusual woods and two other case studies from sixteenth-century Japanese cultural exchange with the rest of the world to revisit the process of making made visible through the materials, the mimetic technologies, and the subjective place bequeathed to us by the overlooked, often anonymous artisan<sup>6</sup>.

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## Endnotes

1. The conference took place before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, begun 24 February 2022 and ongoing at this writing. As this text was being submitted for publication, the UN announced that for the first time, the number of displaced people has passed the "staggering milestone" of one hundred million (Diane Taylor, citing the UN Refugee Placement Agency (UNHCR), *The Guardian*, 22 May 2022, accessed at <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/may/23/total-displaced-people-now-a-t-staggering-milestone-of-100m-says-un>).
2. We read Tim Ingold, "Rethinking the Animate, Re-animating Thought," *Ethnos* 71/1 (2006): 9-20, DOI: 10.1080/00141840600603111; and Tim Ingold and Elizabeth Hallam, "Creativity and Cultural Improvisation: An Introduction," in *Creativity and Improvisation*, ed. Elizabeth Hallam and Tim Ingold (Oxford-New York: Berg, 2007), 1-24.
3. See Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla: Views from South* 1/3 (2000): 533-80.
4. Pamela H. Smith, "Science on the Move: Recent Trends in the History of Early Modern Science," *Renaissance Quarterly* 62 (2009): 345-75, suggesting that what we really mean is something like *technoscience*, or even *techno-medico-science* (358).
5. See Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide* (London: Paradigm Publishers, 2014); and Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *Ch'ixinakax utxiwa: On Practices and Discourses of Decolonization* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020).
6. It only came to our attention as the proceedings were about to be published, that other participants did not submit their papers to this publication. Their contributions will be published in expanded form in an anthology based on our session, co-edited by Claire Farago, Jens Baumgarten, and Susan Lowish, provisionally entitled, *Questioning Art History through Artisanal Epistemology*, forthcoming from Routledge Press, c. 2024.

# “L'Ami Des Arts” in Exile, An Image-Maker in the Tropical World

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## **ABSTRACT**

At the beginning of the 19th century, Hercule Florence's imagery research privileged the processes of visual serialization, the use of the press, and the invention of photography — as a word, a visual method and a new kind of material culture — in the tropics, which became visually tropicalized in the Atlantic world. These new visual materials met the need for national and international circulation. Moreover, this process of visual creation implies on an experience of otherness.

## **KEYWORDS**

Hercule Florence; Photography Pioneering; Press Culture; Cultural Mediation, Otherness.

### **The otherness and the new image economy**

Known as an artist-traveler, the “Patriarch of São Paulo iconography”<sup>1</sup> and artist-inventor<sup>2</sup>, the Franco-Monegasque Hercule Florence (1804-1879) was one of the men in Euro-America dedicated to the creation of photography before the daguerreotype was instituted as a public good at the French Academy of Sciences and the French National Assembly, in 1839. At the beginning of the 19th century, among the researchers and inventors of photography (notably Niépce, Daguerre, Talbot), it is possible to notice a powerful presence of the question of otherness in the visual research of Hercule Florence. To this day, it seems that he was the first to name this new visual artifact and its making process with the term Photography.

He arrived in Rio de Janeiro in 1824. His first job was at Tipografia Plancher. The owner of this typography was another exiled from revolutionary France in Rio de Janeiro who soon entered this court’s literary and political circuits. Pierre Plancher was well-informed and sensitive to the struggles and the political, ethical, and social ideas of the revolution in Santo Domingo (now Haiti)<sup>3</sup>. There, the first modern abolition of slavery in the Americas took place with the installation of a republic by freedmen. Pierre Plancher published works on this topic in Rio de Janeiro and discussed interracial marriage, sympathizing with the subject. Shortly after that, Hercule Florence worked as a designer for the Russian imperial expedition, headed by the Baron of Langsdorff, between 1825 and 1829. Langsdorff, a noble Russian diplomat, owned the Mandioca Farm in Rio de Janeiro. He hired Rugendas, Adrien Aimé Taunay, and Hercule Florence as designers for his ambitious study voyage. A group of researchers and amateurs, mostly foreigners, students of natural history, frequently met on the farm. Their research agenda discussed the travel routes to enter and get to know the Brazilian territory, contact the native peoples, collect the natural elements and objects of these visited peoples, and send them to European research centers with the related descriptions<sup>4</sup>.

He settled in “Vila de São Carlos,” in Campinas, where he lived between 1830 and 1870. During these years, he reflected on himself, on his process of creating new visual objects and on his methods in his

notebooks: “L’ami d’arts livré à lui-même or recherche et découvertes sur différents sujets nouveaux, l’Inventeur au Brésil. Correspondance et pièces scientifiques, livre d’annotations et de premiers travaux”. In these writings, he called himself “L’ami des arts,” as if he projected a specific performance of a liberal man. These writings indicate his original research with new visual objects: Photography, Typos-Syllaba (a variation of typographic forms), Polygraphy<sup>5</sup>, Inimitable Papers<sup>6</sup>, skies studies in the tropics, Zoophony, and some machinery. These were practical inventions aimed at everyday life that combined pleasant and valuable concepts. For instance, Florence photographed drugstore labels, hat advertisements, and Masonic diplomas. For him, Photography had the power to move from commercial use to political badges. This choice ensured Florence’s authorial capacity and made it clear that serialization was a method that met the requirement of circulation at different scales (local, regional, national, and Atlantic).

This new kind of visual object was destined for circulation, inscribed in the political, artistic, and production world of nineteenth-century commodities. Circulation had been associated with visibility, portability, and data mobility — together, this trio rolled a media function. In the nineteenth-century Euro-American visual culture, traditional and new visual processes — including the press, panorama, polygraphy, and photography — coexisted. They were driven by technical reproducibility and characterized a new economy of images.

### **Nouveau Robinson and the Right to Revolt**

In his writings, Daniel Defoe identifies Florence with Robinson Crusoé. He even listed some things in common with Crusoé: the passion for travel and Geography, the taste for discovery, the experience in Brazil, the invention as an instrument that solves concrete problems and reclaims nature, and the relationship between master and subordinate. In the subordinate relationship, the physical and intellectual superiority of the European white man is affirmed in the figure of Crusoé, understood as a Homo Faber aligned with the general project of the Enlightenment man. In his subjectivation process, Florence adopted the code name Nouveau Robinson.

Crusoé has also mentioned his voluntary “exile” condition, which could be similar to Florence’s condition in Campinas. Soon, Florence realized the prestige of being a foreigner at the court of Rio de Janeiro from the notoriety of the French printer Pierre Plancher, the Russian diplomat Langsdorff and the Taunay artists’ family.

He understood the violence of enslaved existence in the Atlantic city of Rio de Janeiro, with an enormous African population, and in the slave ship that took him from Rio to Santos. However, he did not see the enslaved and the Africans from a foreigner’s perspective. However, he justified the escape of the enslaved, the formation of “quilombos,” and even the captives’ rebellions. In his opinion, the right to revolt was based on the inalienable individual freedom and the right to life. Meantime, he never took an anti-slavery stand. He thought that the management secret of the enslaved was defined because of the lordly command’s quality based on Carlos Augusto Taunay’s manual of the Brazilian agriculturist<sup>2</sup>. In all his reflections, otherness was a central and thought-provoking issue.

From his experience in the Langsdorff caravan, he distinguished the cultural mediators’ role in enabling the acquisition of ethnographic artifacts from Indigenous and collecting specimens for Natural History, preserving the collected object, and carrying out a study expedition. On this expedition, Florence highlighted the expertise of veteran guide Antônio Lopes Ribeira. The role of the guide has traditionally been an Indigenous task known for its high lethality. In this function, Ribeira knew the local geography and could communicate with the different Indigenous people.

For Florence, cultural mediators are essential for approaching and maintaining friendships with other people. The use of the subject’s proper name despite any ethnic and social situation had considerable importance in his research. This method drove him away from the epistemic misconception of inventing a new social typology, which would be a veil to cover up the mediator’s knowledge. The mediators were his main interlocutors because of their agency and subjectivity. With them, Florence established a cross-cultural listening work.

At the beginning of the 19th century, the Johannine government declared war against the Botocudos and Kaigangues. The massacres and the cruelty of this war have marked the contact between Florence and the Indigenous people. At the Jacobina farm in Mato Grosso, there was a clear understanding that the disappearance of the young and adult male Indigenous happened as an irreparable loss in civilizing history. Florence dealt with the residue of a brutal American historical experience.

Contradictorily, he also attributed the violence in the country's backlands to some Indigenous groups' ferocity. In a kind of historical law, the stages of civilization would appear in the artifacts and physical aspects of the Amerindians. The physiognomy and material culture functioned within a gradient of stages of civilization. In this historical logic, the Guanás were not as European as the Guató. Nevertheless, they were not pure Amerindians in the way of the Kayapós or Xamacocos, not having the evil expression of the Guaicurús, the Botocudos, and Bororós' savagery, and could resemble the Apiacás. This ferocity origin was born from the colonial experience in the past, especially Iberian, which led to empires and native populations' disappearance. Along with Abbe Raynal's ideas, he thought this characterized a European historical mistake.

Florence lived with Amerindian ethnic groups, free Africans, enslaved people, free Afro-descendants, and mestizos, characterizing this multiethnic society as we see in the portrait with the black in the background and the/one Munducuru in the front. Quite involved with the familiar, political, and armed battles in 1842 in São Paulo, Hercule Florence closely followed the participation of native peoples and multiethnic troops with low-ranking officers (many *pardos*) in these struggles.

He distinguished two historical origins of the violence experienced in Brazil: the Iberian colonization process and slavery. The ways of apprehending and representing this population were dear to him. He recalls that his father and Langsdorff studied Statistics to measure populations, a new form of knowledge in the service of governability. Besides that, for years, Hercule Florence dealt with questions regarding the ways of representing

social subjects with their distinctions and hierarchies, which involved the very processes of social and ethnic exclusion.

He visually described this multiethnic population based on his cultivated sense of observation. He paid attention to the shapes of their bodily marks, ornaments, utensils, and houses. In particular, he favored body marks and paintings, especially in graphics: extension, position on the body, symmetry, texture, color, and line width in the individual and group. It was a detailed study of adornment as a visual practice of the early civilizational stages. In this historical situation, each civilization stage had its cultural materiality.



**Fig. 1.** Tucháua. Chefe Munduruku em traje de festa. Hercule Florence, Santarém, 1828. In Expedição Langsdorff. Catálogo de exposição. Rio de Janeiro, CCBB, 2010, p. 193.

For this reason, Hercule Florence sent a Bororo image printed in a medium invented in 1831 to Félix Émile Taunay, later director of the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts. It was an image printed using the light of the figure of a

Bororo chief, which Féliz Émile Taunay included in an album of diplomatic correspondence. In Hercule Florence's studies, the knowledge produced through representation implied its artisanal production, mainly through the invention of processes for making serial objects (generally printed). In this way, the image theme and the printing technique had a novelty sense and originality that corresponded to the demands of that time.

On the other hand, cross-cultural relationships could shape the materiality of the images. During the Langsdorff expedition, Aimé-Adrien Taunay made a board on which he and Ludwig Riedel were involved in drawing or coloring illustrations. They are closely followed by five Indigenous people in a lodge - perhaps Bororo. We can sense a conversation in the air, suggested by the relaxed position of the bodies, the easy gestures, and the mutual interest. The artist is not alone in a studio with the materials recovered. The image-making in the locality has an immersive dimension in a globally perceived world. The Indigenous seem to observe, perhaps comment on the making of the image, intervening.



**Fig. 2.** Alguns Bororo em visita a Riedel e Taunay, na casa que ocuparam perto da aldeia. Aimé-Adrien Taunay, 1827. In Expedição Langsdorff, 2010, p. 168-169.

In general, Florence's imagery production was inscribed in a contact zone – as Mary Louise Pratt<sup>8</sup> points out – marked by the constitution of social ties made along the lines of differences, hierarchy, and conflicting or non-shared assumptions. For her, invisibility would cover up the subordinate's presence in a relationship of domination. Florence visually problematized this in the tropical world. Indigenous and Cabocla materiality fed his tropical world perception. In the drawing, “Lina metamorphosed into a Brazilian,” his second wife, Carolina, is reclining in a hammock with a book in one hand and her face resting on the other. Florence enacted the pose in which his second wife, Carolina, playfully finds herself in its coming and going. The term metamorphosed is due to the presence of the hammock. Lying there would not be a “natural” habit for this cult German woman. It reinforces the social mark of being a foreigner. However, living in the tropics made it natural to be in a hammock.



**Fig. 3.** Lina metaformoseada em brasileira.  
In FLORENCE, 2009, p. 41.

### **Tropical nature, materialities, and artisanal knowledge**

It is important to emphasize that the visual production of Florence concerned the overseas tropical ecosystem. In Langsdorff's caravan, he generated his first documentary series of the visited tropical world by making scientific illustrations. The drawing was a form of immediate representation of what he saw. Marked by distance, de-contextualizing the scientific illustrations made it possible to compare them. From then on, he may have incorporated the collation of images and his techniques of making as a research procedure.

The emergence of the appreciation of the tropical as a pictorial motif intertwined with scientific observations about environmental diversity, especially in Botany. These procedures of aesthetic knowledge content turned the image into a power device invested with the ability to reference the observed because it described it well, crossing the arts and sciences. According to Nancy Stepan<sup>9</sup>, in this visual practice, which is also scientific, the tropics became visually tropicalized. In this tropical world, thus defined, an unbreakable bond is established between man and the natural world. Furthermore, a totalizing view of natural phenomena encompassed human history.

Under the tropical world's specificities, Florence developed research on the representation's forms of the other associated with the requirement that the images be serialized and put into circulation. In this sense, Florence's visual experience is part of a historical constitution global process of technical reproducibility with his research on Polygraphy and Photography. He dealt with the multiplication of the images through photographic printing processes, manipulating the camera Clara, photosensitive elements, and fixation of images. He saw a continuity between the photographic and the drawing through mechanical reproduction: *“Penétre de la beauté des dessins que presente la chambre obscure, je me suis dit: n'y aurait-il pas un moyen de fixer ces dessins? Ne pourrait-on pas obtenir les dessins de tous les objets sans travail intellectuel et sans emploi d'autant de temps qu'il in faut?”*<sup>10</sup>. The exercise of looking was based on observation, understood as a category tied

to technical reproducibility organized in this visual system, deeply nucleated in the tropical world.

His study of the bird sounds, especially during the cutting down and burning of forests in the Campinas region, shed light on aspects of the observation category. The recording of that kind of song and its registration depended on the observer's place. In Paris, the observer in front of the bird illustration would not have guessed its metallic and melancholic singing. However, *in locu*, the closer the observer is to that bird, the more its song stuns them. While from afar, his singing sounds sweet and pleasant. Not transmitting such information to the spectator would not show the drawn bird sufficiently, denying the observer nature's enjoyable aspects. Florence must know these different points of view to balance the various perceptions that lead to accurate observation.

Florence uses this same criterion of nature observation in his studies of the skies and his ways of representing them in their most varied configurations. His plates of the skies would serve as a reference for European painters who had never seen the tropical skies. Soon, they were integrated into the international artistic circuit. However, the elaboration of the appearance of this observed world could serve as a substrate for science. It would demonstrate, with precision and vivacity, the skies of a given region in the tropics.

Nature itself behaved as a space of knowledge. Florence understood it as a pleasant teacher of artistic practice that would encompass helpful knowledge. There would not be a separation between art, science, and technique. In this perspective, Florence sought to create visual artifacts representing what was observed, but such objects could also express values through signs, as in *Inimitable Papers*.

He dedicated himself to creating new visual processes and objects (as in the case of Photography), inventing and specializing in chemical procedures, typographic resources, and various techniques to create such images and systems in a continuous work of improvement. These images also aimed to meet the need for the circulation of images and their everyday uses.

Polygraphy prevailed among his research themes (from *Photographie* to *Typo-Syllaba*, and the *Inimitable Paper*). Among his investigations, it was the one that better embraced another visual process. Polygraphy involved: the preparation of the plate (matrix), the preparation of the ink, the indelible ink aspect, the simultaneous printing of colors, and their continuous improvement. Polygraphy had on its horizon the production, circulation, and consumption of serial images that could move in different geographic areas. Polygraphy consisted of a method based on a printing plate engraved using wax ink prepared by Florence. It was possible to control the mixing of colors and make the simultaneous printing of all colors. This process was an advance over chromolithography, in which each color requires a separate matrix.

As a printed result, Polygraphy increased the vividness of the images obtained, keeping them within the contour lines and even allowing the thickness of the hachures to vary. To him, vividness was a fundamental aesthetic category because it expressed the uniqueness of the tropical world. This method highlighted the meaning of each color as in this set of three *Sant Anthony* images, each color, a skin color: white, black, and mestizo, which was aimed at different audiences, and the image of the Saint could have local uses.



**Fig. 4.** Sem título (Santo Antônio mestizo). In FLORENCE, 2009, p. 124.

This reflection on objects in transit and the practices of artisanal knowledge shows us the historical modes of subjectivation and help us understand the mobilized notions of the self, the understanding of alterities, and specific behavior choices shaped in these global circuits. He developed an image capable of giving the impression of the observed authenticity. It was conceived in series to reduce the work steps, cost, and energy of its making process.

He found Photography a pleasant invention made for commercial purposes. It would print through the action of sunlight, having as parameters the need to obtain an image that had subtlety (*finesse*), sharpness, and was well fixed, working with photosensitive surfaces and the darkroom device. In addition, the photographic process met the need to draw in the tropical world despite all its climatic conditions and geographical distances.

Florence is dedicated to researching graphic forms and the mass production of images. The notion of series took place at an experimentation level, and he was looking for a method to do so. In this broad spectrum, Florence's scope would go roughly from how to make reproducible images to how to make them inimitable. He took care of the serialization of the images in several projects. The serialization was linked to the centrality of the press culture in his visual studies. For *Nouveau Robinson*, the press perfected civilization and was, in his words, closely related to the Progress of Intelligence.

His *Typo-Syllabas* project sought to reduce time and effort in printing. He interferes in the mechanical and visual printing process, calculating its final image. Working correctly, *Typo-Syllabas* would result in overall savings in the printing process. The investigation of *Typo-Syllabas* reiterates his desire to think about the image-making process intrinsically linked to its uses. In this project, the series combines the typology result – also present in his *Inimitable Papers*.

In his visual research, Florence paid attention to the presence and subtle matter of light in the image and its effects in several studies. In “*Moonlight Camp Scene*,” to emulate the landscape observed, he pierced the paper at the height of the skies to display a moonlit tropical night to

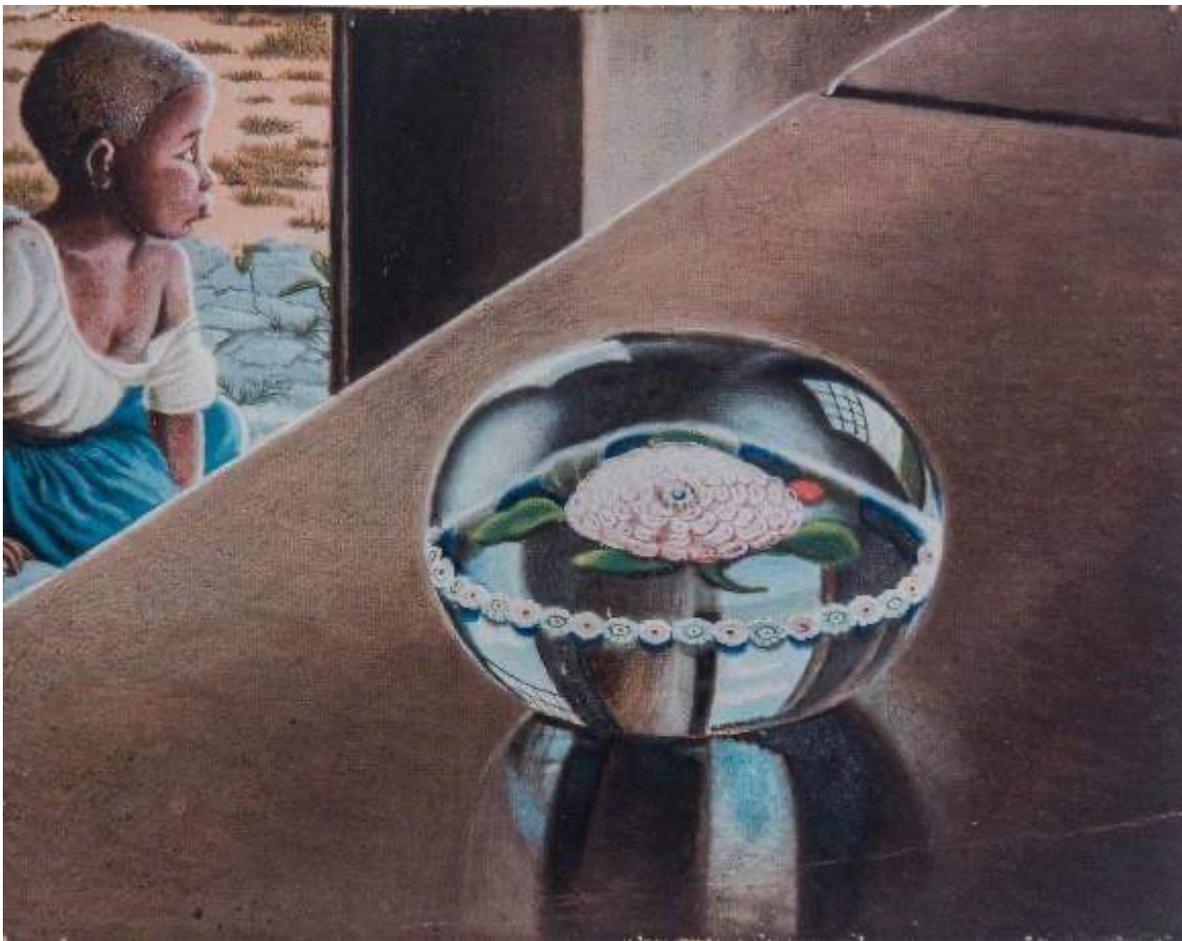
emulate the landscape observed. He pierced the paper to show the that image's sky. Behind the paper, he placed a candle that brightly and accurately illuminated the starry sky. The luminous effect was accentuated by inserting tiny crystals in the holes to emulate the flickering of moonlight and starlight. He wanted to enchant the viewer through this visual artifice manufactured in tableaux, which stages the night. He set up an optical device to display this landscape.

Florence created a visual device with the sail to accent a visual effect miming tropical nature's element — in this case, the starry night skies. He expected the viewer's eye to be fascinated by the visual artifice he fabricated in the tableaux. Hercule simulated what was seen in a landscape, replicating it for anyone who could see it in the tableaux. He settled on a display to show this landscape, creating a visual device. However, it should be noted that the elaboration of this appearance of the world seen in a particular place could serve as a substrate for science itself, linking itself to a set of procedures to produce scientific knowledge about the landscape from a geographically referenced point of view. In Florence, there was a search for an image capable of well emulating the vision, which could create a new reality.

### **Visual materiality and otherness's visibility**

Florence's visual research implied exploring the interdisciplinary transits among Geography, Cartography, Natural History, Chemistry, Statistics, Optics, and press culture is laden with political meanings. Amid technical reproducibility, the subtle matter of light and luminosity were investigated. In this image 4 of the interior of his countryside house, we see the globe, the dismantled press, the palette, and the darkroom. The place is well organized. The male pulse of father and husband sustains and rationalizes the space, combining a practical world of instruments with maternal love. In the background, a window exposes outdoor plants with a rare vivacity due to the expressive luminosity. It is a type of image created by Florence, entitled stereo painting. He inserted an optical device (a mirror) with which nature becomes visible, referring to the question of what I see and how I see it. He wished nature framed by the window exposed a visible

One specific image stands out due to its conception and treatment of the visibility of the subordinate subject. The enslaved girl Sara, belonging to Florence's squad, is in the doorway into an open area, probably his farm. The position of the blouse and her bare chest is similar to so many others seen in illustrations with African, black, and mulatto girl, free and enslaved, made at the time in Brazil. In general, such slaved girls were known as “pretinhas”, “negrinhas”, or “molecas”. The image borders on the erotic appeal one read in nineteenth-century novels.



**Fig. 5.** Retrato de Sara, In FLORENCE, 2009, p. 121

Sara looks at something that the viewer can note, which seems to be Florence himself. He doesn't see what she sees, nor does she know the author of the image. There is a game between letting see and being seen. A glass paperweight reflects and condenses a series of images on a table: flowers, windows, and beams of light. On another level of meaning, the viewer intuits the power of Optics. The anamorphosis reflects the image that the viewers mentally perceive, ordering the visible world and having fun. There is, however, a specular game here, which affects the order of the visible world and Sara's place. In the image, she is in the background of this visual enjoyment, absorbed in herself and what she sees.

This image full of ambivalence exposes the threshold of Sara's painful condition in being visible and at the same time invisible, as, she was inquiring about the horizons of her existence and her agency. Perhaps this plank alludes to the devices of power, also visual, that lie at the edges of Nouveau Robinson's tropical world.

The interest in otherness in Florence and his visual research, deeply marked by artisanal knowledge and directed towards the consumption of serial images, can lead us to propose a methodological assessment of the cultural transits and artisanal production of knowledge. From this case study of Brazil in the 1800s, it should be suggested that the modes of subjectivation, the relationship with the other, the links between art, science, and technique, or between craft and art, and nuclear research into materiality at various scales as parameters to think about the cultural transits in global art history.

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## Endnotes

1. The title of Patriarch of São Paulo Iconography was awarded by Afonso d'Escragnolle Taunay when he was Director of Museu Paulista, considered the first historical museum in Brazil. In this Museum, between 1920 and 1940, there were rooms dedicated to the work of Hercule Florence.
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# Artisanal Popular Construction and Artistic Configuration of Waste in the Work of Contemporary Artist Abraham Cruzvillegas

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## **ABSTRACT**

The oeuvre of the globally active contemporary artist Abraham Cruzvillegas (\*1968) is labeled by the term and principle of self-construction (autoconstrucción), which is an artisanal mode of art production, a principle transferred from the creation of “architecture without architects” in the megacities of the Global South. Based on personal, empirical experiences of growing up in a slum neighborhood of Mexico City, Cruzvillegas transforms the creativity, diversity, and anarchy of informal, artisanal craftsmanship into a conceptual mode of contemporary art –which became his trademark in the global art market. This article analyses under which circumstances this artisanal art production with hand and mind –mano e ingegno– became a fashionable merchandise in the globalized contemporary art market, and what critical impact Cruzvillegas’ conversion of waste material in art installations might generate, particularly in the environmental and social debates on the Anthropocene.

## **KEYWORDS**

Informal Housing; Contemporary Art; Craftmanship; Global South; Anthropocene; Mega City

### **Biographical construction**

Abraham Cruzvillegas (\*1968 Mexico City) is an outstanding, globally active contemporary artist.<sup>1</sup> His oeuvre is labeled by the term and principle of self-construction (autoconstrucción).<sup>2</sup> Since the beginning of his career, the artist has transformed his experience of growing up in a slum neighborhood of Mexico City into a principle of creativity, in artisanal house construction and artistic installation, reusing waste as a material. Such a success story in the global art market requires a careful and critical inspection of the biographical construction. In spite of the fact that I personally know and esteem Cruzvillegas as an inspiring person, my analysis tries not to repeat a frequent error in many contemporary art historiographies and exhibitions, which consists of an uncritical repetition of the artists' own biographical constructions, conceptual orientations, and personal mythologies.<sup>3</sup> Critical distance and academic independence are needed when we enquire about the materialization and migration of an idea, such as converting artisanal, improvised building practices into contemporary conceptual art.

As stated in many autobiographical and curatorial texts,<sup>4</sup> Cruzvillegas grew up in the (meanwhile) consolidated slum area of the Colonia Ajusco in southeastern Mexico City. These texts explore the social, anthropological, political, spatial, environmental, and aesthetic dimensions of this informal building site, located not so far from two architectural highlights, the University City (Ciudad Universitaria) and the Diego Rivera's Anahuacalli Museum. Cruzvillegas himself presented his former place of residence in a documentary artistic film called "Autoconstrucción".<sup>5</sup> The panorama and many detail stills of this film give an impression of how the slum's informal artisanal housing materializes a social mega sculpture, afterward conceptually catalyzed by the artist into a continuing series of installations. The Ajusco neighborhood is both a breeding ground and raw material for Cruzvillegas' conceptual artistic work. "Autoconstrucción" is an artisanal and artistic practice, a principle of creativity building houses and configuring works of art. Cruzvillegas takes advantage of his empirical knowledge as a slum dweller, applying informal construction techniques and reusing any type of material, including waste, for his installations.



**Fig. 1.** Still from the film *Autoconstrucción*, 2009, Abraham Cruzvillegas, director.  
Photograph: screenshot

Comparing a self-built slum house in the Colonia Ajusco and an installation in the Jumex Museum of Mexico City may illustrate this conceptual transfer. A still from the film “Autoconstrucción” of 2009 [fig.1] shows how a dweller of this site reuses wooden pallets for wall construction, including a crafted wooden lattice window. Openings of this unfinished façade are covered with dark plastic sheeting, and roofing felt. As the artistic director of this film, Cruzvillegas highlighted this structural motive, which, five years later, [fig. 2] in his Jumex exhibition appeared in one of his installations, which revived constructive ideas, recycled wooden material, and recodified the aesthetics of poverty as a creative driving force, revealing the complex and contradictory “strata of experience” in the visual anarchy of

slums. The comparison clearly shows that Cruzvillegas' work is not a mere representation of a slum area but a "reproduction of its constructive dynamics" and its aesthetic potential, which "implies an approach to sculpture involving improvisation and instability, and a constant process of learning: about materials, people and himself," quoting former Tate Modern director Chris Dercon.<sup>6</sup>



**Fig. 2.** Jumex Museum, Mexico City, exposition of Abraham Cruzvillegas "Autoconstrucción," 2009; photograph: Peter Krieger

“Autoconstrucción” became Cruzvillegas’ trade mark which catapulted him into the highest spheres of the contemporary art market. Thus, the informal craftsmanship from the slums –a habitat where about a billion inhabitants of the world population live– migrated to the sophisticated art galleries in the discursive centers of the Global North. This transformation implies the risk of producing visual stereotypes of slums to be commercialized in the elite spheres of globalized contemporary art. Since the nostalgic distortion of the favelas in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Rio de Janeiro as a “picturesque” habitat, visual stereotypes of slums generated a “thrill” for artists and their collectors, coming to the extreme in early 21<sup>st</sup> century the self-referentially circulating system of globalized contemporary art.

#### **Neo-colonial conditions**

The case of Cruzvillegas reveals how the artisanal knowledge of self-construction, customarily excluded from the collective consciousness of the upper and middle classes in the cities, i.e., the possible gallery visitors, became an attractive and economically successful topic of the art market and the (many) museums of contemporary art, with their globalized, and often exchangeable curatorial programs. An artistic impulse from a remote slum area in the Mexican megalopolis increases its value as a transcultural aesthetic phenomenon. Such transition works mainly in one direction, from its material origins in the Global South to its conceptual artistic interpretation and distribution in the Global North. The authentic slum expertise of Cruzvillegas attracted museums and galleries in Glasgow, London, Paris, Berlin, New York, and later in the Asian and Pacific regions.

In this case, the mechanism of making fame in the art world recalls, to a certain extent, the presentation of the “noble savage” in the European 18th-century discourses. The artist from the Global South, with authentic slum experiences, is getting invited and integrated into the establishment of the Global North, merchandizing the aesthetics of contemporary lumpenproletariat as an artistic product with artisanal roots. Thus, the artist catalyzes the infinite number of nameless slum dwellers and their constructive creativity. Such conceptual exploitation might be labeled as a

neo-colonial mechanism of the global art market. However, the conversion of a hyper-urban precarious reality into the metaphorical spheres of an art installation also contains a critical, probably post-colonial potential.

### **Productive provocations**

Exposed in the international art centers, the series “Autoconstrucción,” modified with different subtitles, stimulates a non-linear understanding of the situation of the lower classes in the megacities’ slums. It confronts the public with the often ignored social and cultural reality of marginalized communities. It stages their aesthetics of daily survival, using waste and other recycling materials to improve the informal habitat. The hand and mind –mano e ingenio– of slum dwellers appears as a cultural potential catalyzed by the epistemic force of contemporary artworks into critical knowledge production.

In his first manifestations of the “Autoconstrucción” series, Cruzvillegas used disparate materials such as cotton, feces from sheep, cardboard, stones, hair, and other stuff to create a conceptual memory of his parents’ house in the Ajusco neighborhood.<sup>2</sup> In these installations, he intended to condense the absurd combination of raw materials and cheap decorations, reassembled in a permanent metamorphic process of improvisation. The visitors of these “Autoconstrucción” exhibitions, who probably live in accommodated, professionally designed and sublime, perfected interiors, had to face the alternative reality of constructive bricolage in the slums.

In the following variations of this series, the artist collected and included local (waste) material, confronting the public with their own detritus. The Seoul version of “Autoconstrucción” (2015) even brought up the repression of poverty in the booming South Korean capital. There he accumulated material of the demolition of poor housing complexes, which were gradually replaced by high-priced apartment towers. The brutal act of gentrification, which erased the informal constructive intelligence and creativity at this site, was exposed in an art museum, not with documentation, but with a conceptual installation.

Contemporary art thematizes the transnational phenomenon of contemporary slums. Still, little research is done in our discipline, art history, on this spatial signature of urban culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: the slums. Thus, Cruzvillegas` installations not only thrill the visitors of art galleries, but also inspire new concepts of art historical research, beyond curatorial routines. Urban poverty and its spatial, architectural expressions are an object of critical research, and the “Autoconstrucción” series offer striking material for this in the given framework of a congress on “migration,” with a focus on “artisanal epistemology as a transcultural category.”

There are different modes of conceptualizing the mega urban living conditions of the lower classes in art. Mexico City, where more than 60 percent of the inhabitants live in informal settlements, was portrayed, for instance, by the British-Mexican contemporary artist Melanie Smith, who in 2002 created a multimedia project called Spiral City, which contained aerial views of the endless hyper-urban extensions, seen from a helicopter flying in hallucinating spirals.<sup>8</sup> Her video and photographic installation tried to unveil the structural dimensions of urban poverty. In contrast, Cruzvillegas goes into the visual details of this misery, and reveals artisanal knowledge construction in the marginalized zones of the mega city. As a former inhabitant of the Ajusco slum, Cruzvillegas understands the “connectivities among things, peoples, and ideas from all time periods and geographical locations” (a quotation from the CFP of this session at the CIHA Congress Sao Paulo 2022). He is familiar with such “dwelling urbanism,” which produces, even represses social habits, but also opens personal spaces for free aesthetic expressions and anarchic construction.

### **Craftmanship and creativity**

Both his “Autoconstrucción” installations and the film give intimate insights into the artisanal potential amidst the visual chaos of a slum. The constructive bricolage of stones and asbestos cement, absurd constructive and aesthetic compositions of a wall, even in some cases the application of neo-baroque balustrades<sup>9</sup> on the façades, create powerful patterns of spatial and iconic identification – an unexpected mode of creativity that converts

economic austerity (the lack of expensive building materials) into aesthetic abundance.

Via his conceptual transformation of this visual communication into an art installation, Cruzvillegas promotes self-construction as a processual, alternative aesthetics with its own logic. What's more, in his artistic conceptualizations, the artist also raises political questions: „Can art constitute a poetic form of creative resistance to marginalization?“, profiling the visual anarchy of informal housing as a political statement against the standardized, commercial, and controlled production of the segregated middle and upper-class habitat. Thus, the *mano e ingenio* in slums and galleries coincide with the principle of creative resistance based on artistic and artisanal capacities.

The cultural potential of slum dwellers, which Cruzvillegas catalyzes in his installations, is fed by migrating technologies, materials, and craftsmanship. And it has an undeniable sensorial seduction, which the artist labels “aesthetic promiscuity.” Following his definitions, the sublime beauty of slum housing bricolages has these principles: Things are getting interesting when they can be changed; thus, metamorphosis is an attraction because it indicates that we can change things; perfection is boring, but imperfection is dynamic, creative, vivid. This artistic ideology, inherent in “Autoconstrucción” clearly corresponds to what Richard Sennett has described as the qualities of a good craftsman, who reacts positively to coincidences and limitations, accepts the metamorphosis of objects, avoiding obsessions of perfections, and tolerating imperfection.<sup>10</sup>

Imperfection has attractive sensorial qualities generated by failures, defects, and resistances, a key issue raised by Cruzvillegas' writings.<sup>11</sup> Despite his professional self-description as a conceptual, abstract artist, he bases his creativity on the artisanal capacity of relating the eye (as an organ of perception), the brain (as a steering entity), and the hand (as an executing instrument).<sup>12</sup> Even Immanuel Kant's definition of the action of the hand as a window to the mind (*Geist*, in German) describes Cruzvillegas' construction of art installations: the hand is an instrument of culture, of creation, of transformation. In one of his many texts, Cruzvillegas states that he has “no

ability to do anything with my hands”<sup>13</sup>. Still, this is quite coquettish because he has the artisanal ability to construct his installations (together with his team and the specialized museums and galleries staff). Also, he took courses in traditional crafts of the Mexican region where his father was born, in Michoacán, where he did not only learn artisanal techniques but also understood that crafts only survive with the appreciation of the local communities, in daily use or otherwise, craft products become tourist, and also racist kitsch.<sup>14</sup>

Herein lies a basic understanding of craftsmanship as a vital capacity, even of contemporary conceptual art, often detached from materiality. To promote the creativity of Global South mega cities’ informal housing, even more, the political resistance against the capitalist, generic city patterns, fixated on US and European standards, the artist has to produce a visual, a spatial statement with sensorial, seductive qualities, which may unfold an aesthetic, epistemic power in the minds of the beholders.

Under these conceptual, psychological, social, and political circumstances, how could we define “creativity,” a term and concept often used but still not explained in this text? Creativity, in our case, artisanal and artistic, is not an abstract idea floating around in the mind, but an implementation, which, taking up a notion of Tim Ingold, alters the social and cultural settings<sup>15</sup>; creativity has an “improvisational dynamic”<sup>16</sup>, present in the slums and in the art galleries which show “Autoconstrucción.”

Of course, such an artistic production explained with the work of Cruzvillegas, may become a neocolonial merchandise of global art galleries, as explained beforehand. Still, it is also a tool for breaking stereotypes of life in the Global South cities’ slums, exposing and promoting alternative principles of popular artisanal creativity in the hyper-urbanized early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Epistemic potential**

Due to a lack of empirical research in visual sociology on the images and imaginaries of slums<sup>17</sup>, we may only be able to speculate on the epistemic and discursive impacts of the “Autoconstrucción” series, which reveals alternative

modes of creativity, of craftsmanship. The presented conceptual migration between a given urban reality and the exclusive space of art galleries and museums may move peoples, objects, and ideas, challenging static, even anachronic cultural and social patterns. Recalling a notion of Karl Marx that artisanal skills enable the “full development of individuals,”<sup>18</sup> of poor slum dwellers as well as established artists, we may deduce that Cruzvillegas’ artistic work generates new, different, complex insights into the improvisational dynamic of creativity and its related political consequences. In Mexico, one of these possible repercussions has a legal dimension: the Mexican Constitution guarantees the “dignity” of dwelling. While this is an unattainable utopia in a country where more than half of the population lives in poverty, we may rethink the expressions of integrity and liberty of slum dwellers. Cruzvillegas’ art has an implicit didactic impulse, arguing that informal housing is not only an expression of misery but also of artisanal creativity and alternative beauty. The individual, improvised design solutions of the Mexico slum dwellers, sublimated in the multi-faceted installations of the “Autoconstrucción” series, constitute a vivid, anarchic social sculpture against the generic, commercialized city production determined by powerful real estate companies. Cruzvillegas’ conceptual artistic work emanates this political dimension of artisanal capacities and expressions.

### **Environmental dimensions**

Furthermore, his work contains environmental lessons. Although most informal settlements generate a toxic impact on the natural soils, the self-built informal houses consequently apply the environmental principle of efficient use of materials via recycling. Both the slum dwellers and the artist collect on-site waste material for their constructions, thus reducing the amount of rubbish distributed in remote urban zones and natural landscapes. Such a revaluation of discarded objects for architectural, artisanal, and artistic purposes raises a contemporary key issue of the Anthropocene<sup>19</sup>: the efficient and ecologically correct uses of limited resources.

The process of reintegrating worthless, damaged, and even toxic material into a new structure explicitly characterizes Cruzvillegas’

“Autoconstrucción” installations. A randomized compilation of waste is the raw material for his artisanal and artistic work. However, the artist does not understand himself as a „scavenger“, but as a composer of valuable material, thus breaking a taboo of the consumerist society, and generating critical environmental consciousness.



**Fig. 3.** MUCA, Ciudad Universitaria, Mexico City, exposition “Autorreconstrucción: Detritus,” 2017; photograph: Peter Krieger

The often ignored problem of garbage, which constitutes new strata of planet Earth in the Anthropocene, was the explicit topic of the 2017 edition of the series, this time called “Autorreconstrucción: Detritus,” [fig. 3] a group exhibition, including works of other Mexican artists such as Gabriel Orozco, Eduardo Abaroa, and Luis Carrera-Maul.<sup>20</sup> The University Museum of Sciences and Arts (Museo Universitario de Ciencias y Arte, MUCA) at the central campus of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM)

was converted into a refuse dump of different materials found in the whole University City (Ciudad Universitaria). The participating artists, including art students, transformed this material into provocative metamorphic installations with unpredictable dialogues and epistemic synergies.

Part of the waste was collected at the nearby Ecological Reserve of the Stony Desert at San Ángel (Reserva Ecológica del Pedregal de San Ángel, REPSA),<sup>21</sup> where Cruzvillega in 2015/2016 had erected a garbage wall [fig. 4] – denouncing that protected wilderness,<sup>22</sup> in this case with a high level of geo and biodiversity, commonly is getting debased as a none-site for garbage.<sup>23</sup>



**Fig. 4.** Garbage Wall at the REPSA, 2015/2016, Abraham Cruzvillegas; photograph: Peter Krieger

To sum up, the productive interrelation of artisanal capacity and artistic ingenuity in the work of Abraham Cruzvillegas generates provoking revaluations of decayed slum areas as well as garbage disposal. In his work, the artist opens Pandora's box, which in Hannah Arendt's understanding, reconceptualized by Richard Sennet (in his book on the craftsman)<sup>24</sup>, reveals humankind's fear of self-destructive inventions, developments, and products. In present times, Pandora is the goddess of aggressive destruction via the no-sustainable management of planet Earth – but Cruzvillegas' adulation of Pandora is definitively not a fundamentalist environmental manifesto but a playful, ironic, anarchic expression of artisanal and artistic creativity.

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#### Audiovisual material

Cruzvillegas, Abraham, director, *Autoconstrucción*, 2009, HDV video, color with sound, 1hr 3min.

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#### Endnotes

1. His discursive importance is also confirmed by the fact that he is the only contemporary artist present in two papers of the CIHA World Congress 2022 in Sao Paulo, in Esther Garbara's paper and in mine.
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# Ochre, Bark, Brush: Material Concerns In Australian Indigenous Art

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## **ABSTRACT**

Drawing upon fifteen years' worth of conversation, collaboration, and co-teaching, it is hoped that this paper will go some way toward honoring the life and work of Mr. W Wanambi, Marakulu Elder and Yolŋu community leader from Northeast Arnhem Land, Australia<sup>1</sup>. Mr. Wanambi was to be my co-author, but he sadly and unexpectedly passed away<sup>2</sup>. His full name and image will, therefore, not be used in accordance with tradition and his family's wishes. His widow, Rita Wanambi, has full knowledge of the content of this paper; she sometimes co-taught with us, and was often present during our conversations. She approved this publication.

Mr. W Wanambi was an internationally renowned contemporary artist. His works are held in significant collections (public and private) throughout the globe. He was an inaugural director of The Mulka Project in Northeast Arnhem Land, was on the Board of Directors for Arnhem, Northern and Kimberley Artists (ANKA) and played an important guiding role in several

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<sup>1</sup> "The letter ŋ is the same as the English sound in the word 'singer'. It is made with the back of the tongue against the roof of the mouth in the velar position. Unlike in English, this sound can also occur at the beginning of words." See: Beulah Lowe, 'Yolŋu – English Dictionary', *The Aboriginal Resource and Development Services (ARDS)*, accessed 10 January 2022, <https://www.goveonline.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/yolgnu-english-dictionary.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Although Mr Wanambi was in hospital at the time of the conference and could not present, his passing was still very unexpected. See: ' "A visionary in many ways": art world mourns loss of Yolngu artist Mr Wanambi', *The Guardian Newspaper*, accessed 10 May 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2022/may/04/a-visionary-in-many-ways-art-world-mourns-loss-of-yolngu-artist-mr-wanambi> and also 'Internationally-renowned art "visionary" Mr Wanambi dies aged 59', *ABC News*, accessed 10 May 2022, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-05-06/mr-wanambi-yolngu-artist-dead-at-59/101044668>

other arts organizations. During his lifetime, he won many awards, including the 2018 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award for best 3D artwork<sup>3</sup>.

Mr. Wanambi's artistic practice utilized a range of multi-media technologies. Still, this paper will only delve into the detail of his most frequent lecture subject, the materials and techniques of bark painting, to consider the deeper personal and historical significance behind this subject matter and to reflect upon the mode of delivery of his lectures. This paper argues that the near ritualized revelation of the unique materials and specific technologies of making, built up year after year, has interrelated historical, economic, philosophical, social, and political messages. Witnessing the process of demonstrating the materials and techniques of painting on bark, in the context of his many lectures, has provided a small window onto Yolŋu art history, which inculcates a totalizing system.

#### **KEYWORDS**

Yolŋu Art and Culture; Art Teaching Techniques; Materiality; Kinship; Reciprocity.

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<sup>3</sup> These are the most prestigious awards for Indigenous art in Australia. See: '35th Telstra NATSIAA Winners', Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, accessed 15 January 2022, <https://www.magt.net.au/35th-telstra-natsiaa-winners>

### Introduction

Deliberately referencing in its title an environmental manifesto that emphasizes circular economies,<sup>4</sup> this paper tells part of the story of cross-cultural teaching and learning about art, and how these lessons might apply to rethinking art history. The larger objective of this work is for art history in Australia to become less focused on categories, like Australian, Global, or Indigenous art, and more focused on how the processes of making, and the materials themselves, are integral to identity due to the pre-existing relationships they embody. The key question being: How might we better recognize not only the uniqueness and particularity of individual works of art but also something of our essential connectivity, to this place, within the discipline, and across the humanities?

For this conference session, Claire Farago and Jens Baumgarten offered the provocation: ‘What can a focus on the kinds of knowledge and skill involved in material production demonstrate about the complex intersection and fluid boundaries of cultural encounters?’ I am mindful that by introducing to you the work of my esteemed, award-winning artist friend,<sup>5</sup> I am also immediately introducing a veil of chronology, of ideas of progress and innovation, or repetition and tradition, distinctions between art and artifact, ancient and new technologies. I also risk transgressing the distinction between public and private, colleague and friend, subject/material, and support.

However, if the work of this session is to situate the central art historical question of artistic processes of creativity into a framework that does not privilege European ideas about art, then I must risk sharing something of what I have learned about thinking in another way - through another structure of knowledge, from another foundation, within another framework.<sup>6</sup> In this endeavor, and not just from the perspective of the discipline of art history, I also risk being criticized for lack of critical distance<sup>7</sup>. Still, it is clear that only through risking this closeness that trusted relationships are established that enable knowledge and ideas to be shared and exchanged. Before any of this can be expanded upon, more information about Mr. Wanambi is needed.

### **About Mr. Wanambi**

Mr. Wanambi was Yolŋu community leader and Marakulu Elder from Northeast Arnhem Land, Australia. His homeland was Gurka'wuy / Trial Bay, but he lived and worked in Yirrkala; he spoke many languages.<sup>8</sup> Mr. Wanambi's first paintings appeared in 1998, part of the transformative Gapu-Monuk ~ Saltwater collection,<sup>9</sup> with one work, *Bamurrungu*, winning a national award.<sup>10</sup> This work depicts a sacred, partially submerged rock at the mouth of a river in his homeland about which swim milkfish. The flattened eucalyptus bark is sectioned by north-south, east-west flowing mint'yi (sacred clan design) painted in natural ochres. There are layers of meaning behind each element of the work, with only a brief surface description publicly available. A high-resolution digital scan of this artwork exists online, enabling the fine brushwork and intricate patterning to be closely viewed.<sup>11</sup>

In 2018, 20 years after his first paintings appeared, Mr. Wanambi won yet another national art award, this time for best 3D artwork with his installation entitled *Destiny*.<sup>12</sup> In this work, three of his intricately painted larrakitj (hollow log memorial poles) surround a digitally scanned and projected school of his painted fish that swirl and then disappear back into the logs as thunder sounds in the distance and rain drops appear on the surface of the water. Mr. Wanambi reveled in the potential of new media to realize his ambitious and complex ideas.<sup>13</sup> Most recently, he became the first of two Yolŋu to sell non-fungible tokens to aid the purchase of artwork for his community museum.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to being an artist, Mr. Wanambi had worked as a builder's laborer, a sport and recreation officer, a probation and parole officer, a local mine worker, a coastal patroller, a court worker (interpreting and translating), and a night patrol mentor. At the time of his passing, he was deputy chair of Miwatj Health Aboriginal Corporation, an independent Aboriginal-controlled health service representing communities across East Arnhem Land.<sup>15</sup> As a research fellow at the Centre of Visual Arts at the University of Melbourne, Mr. Wanambi had ambitions to complete a research higher degree. In 2007,

when we first met, he was one of two inaugural cultural directors of The Mulka Project in Northeast Arnhem Land.<sup>16</sup>

In 2019, Mr. Wanambi, along with The Mulka Project, exhibited work at the contemporary arts festival Tarnanthi.<sup>17</sup> His work there consisted of seven giant larrakitj with interactive projections of his tiny fish that swam around and between the logs on the gallery floor.<sup>18</sup> As you moved through the installation, the fish would part as you stepped, but if you stood still for any length of time, the fish would gather in close and swim about your feet. I recall his delight at lying on the gallery floor to let the fish flow over him. He titled the work, Djalkiri, which in Yolŋu Matha (everyday speech) can be understood in its literal sense of ‘foot’ or ‘footprint’. But it also means ‘foundation’.<sup>19</sup>

In its metaphorical sense, it [djalkiri] represents the ‘footprints’ of the waŋarr [ancestors] as they traveled across the clan’s land and waters, all the signs and traces they left in their tracks: the evidence of their presence and land-shaping activities and transformations in the land itself and in the sacred designs, paintings, songs, and ceremonial objects. It is the djalkiri, this foundation, that provides each individual with meaning and identity ... Yolŋu individuals belong as much to the djalkiri as it does to them.<sup>20</sup>

Through his work, Mr. Wanambi showed us the surface level of his ancestral inheritance, identity, and knowledge. ‘During life, people may continue to absorb waŋarr power through ritual contact with other manifestations of the waŋarr; for example, through sacred clan designs painted ceremonially on the body.’<sup>21</sup> There are several publicly available images of dhapi, or young boy’s initiation ceremonies, showing the torso being painted and the close link between Yolŋu art and identity.<sup>22</sup> At each level of initiation, the design and image seem to become larger and more intricate. The first time we met, Mr. Wanambi explained something of the code taught at initiation: generosity, honesty, and strength of spirit. It was many years later that I encountered this same code written down in a publication by the anthropologist Donald Thomson.<sup>23</sup> Thomson also noted that young boy’s

initiation ceremonies are where children learn discipline, respect, and endurance, as body paintings can take many hours and ceremonies can go all night and last several days.

In his artist's statement for the 2019 Djalkiri installation, Mr. Wanambi noted, 'it is important to show our culture to the [wider] world... We are showing, in a modern way, a very old way of doing it ... All the patterns ... come from the land and the sea - that is our power ... Art can show culture, but initiation and ceremony is very important too. The body painted with clan designs is all part of the same structure. Balanda [white people] need to understand the whole structure, or they will never find a better way of being.'<sup>24</sup>

#### **Understanding the whole structure – Finding a better way**

Nearby to Mr. Wanambi's installation of fish and poles at the 2019 exhibition, The Mulka Project exhibited their work entitled Dhuyuwiniy Milmarra / The Gurrutu Engine, a large screen projection of a three-dimensional, animated, Yolŋu kinship diagram. As The Mulka Project's current Creative Director, Ishmael Marika, states: 'Gurrutu means extended family relationships among the different clans. For us Yolŋu, gurrutu ... links us ... [it] goes back through the generations and forward into the future.'<sup>25</sup> Senior songman and artist, Buwathay Munyarryun explains further: 'Yolŋu gurrutu is all-encompassing. It is not just a relationship between one or two people – it embraces everything.'<sup>26</sup> He explains that gurrutu links people to the land, not just the land. There is gurrutu in the freshwater, saltwater, the Sun and the Moon, clouds, wind, rocks, and trees. Everything is connected.

In Dhuyuwiniy Milmarra / The Gurrutu Engine, The Mulka Project wanted to show outsiders how Yolŋu are connected, mapping these connections in culturally appropriate ways. Ishmael explains further: 'we wanted to educate the outside world and show them that everyone is connected and that everybody is family.' He also points out: 'The main problem [with previous explanations of kinship structures] was that it was going out forever and ever and ever ... but gurrutu should be in cycles ... like a doughnut or a torus shape.'<sup>27</sup> The artwork was instructive, no doubt, but it

seems to have been overlooked aesthetically the context of the many other powerful Yolŋu contributions to the important annual celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art.<sup>28</sup>

By this emphasis on kinship diagrams, you can tell that Yolŋu have had a lot to do with anthropologists over the years. Contact with art historians? Not so much.

There exists a vast corpus of documented interactions between Yolŋu and missionaries, anthropologists, and filmmakers, it remains to be ascertained, what would engagement with art historians look like? What would be the result? Thankfully, we do not have to wait long to find out. As Ishmael again tells us: ‘We have gurrutu as well that goes with the paintings and the history.’<sup>29</sup> So, Yolŋu are their own art historians and are producing art histories in their own ways that emphasize relationships and connections rather than intersections and boundaries; they carry the knowledge of their artistic lineages in their ancestry and their songlines. They are also expert educators with a passion for sharing their culture and are now also curators, arranging their artworks according to their kinship system.

As the Melbourne-based Māori arts writer Dylan Rainforth explains, ‘learning from Indigenous conceptions of object relationships would seem imperative in our national context, if curatorial practices are to move beyond imported and transplanted settler-colonial epistemologies regarding material culture.’<sup>30</sup> It is also imperative for the history of Yolŋu art to be similarly conceived. Otherwise, it cannot be a Yolŋu art history. More than that, as I am slowly learning, the materials themselves (bark, ochre, brush) all have their own djalkiri and exist within a complex set of relationships. There is a relationship of kinship with the material, and the gurrutu (which Ishmael likens to a torus) is the shape of Yolŋu epistemology. This is more than learning about who can paint what subject matter; it goes toward understanding who is related to what colors, and beyond that – it goes toward understanding who is the bark, who is the ochre, who is the brush.

In his last recorded interview, Mr. Wanambi explained:

Yo! ... gaḍayka (stringybark tree) is pieces of me. I am gaḍayka ... When they chop the gaḍayka for yidaki (didgeridoo), for bark, for shelter, for fire ... it is me. When they strip it off the bark and turn it into a bark [painting], that is me. The flesh and the bone are still connected, even though they do that for yidaki, bilma (clapsticks) and other things as well. I feel more strongly to show and to explain clear, as I said before, from one tree you get shelter, bark, larrakitj (memorial poles), yidaki, clapsticks, and more things, like firewood and all that stuff. From the one tree we get [all these things], we don't throw it away. So, the people who want to know about gaḍayka, they should talk to me.<sup>31</sup>

Mr. Wanambi had been coming to the University of Melbourne to teach classes and give lectures every year since 2008. Sometimes he also provided us with Yolŋu perspectives on colonial art, and sometimes he helped us identify works in our image collection.<sup>32</sup> Even though his prolific artistic practice increasingly utilized a range of multi-media technologies, his favorite lecture subject was always the materials and techniques of bark painting – bark, ochre, brush. I believe that there was always a much deeper historical significance behind his choice of subject matter, the way in which the topics he covered, and the consistency in the mode of delivery were both measured and deliberate. Maybe it was a bit like the levels of initiation, whereby knowledge is shared in a particular order, and increased over time.

Mr. Wanambi brought his materials into the classroom. He often held a small sheet of gaḍayka (stringybark) up to the class and touched its surface as he spoke. He also used film and PowerPoint presentations we reviewed and renewed each year,<sup>33</sup> choosing from a mix of contemporary and historical images to explain the process of removing the bark from the tree, drying it over the fire, rubbing it smooth, and weighing it down to keep it flat. Mr. Wanambi documented his own work in various stages of completion on his mobile phone and shared these images with the class. Sometimes he would choose to show images of his cat sitting on the unfinished artwork. Other times, portraits with humorous filters from his Instagram account;<sup>34</sup> and these would help to break the ice. Through images that detailed the process of bark painting, we (in the classroom) began to learn about the seasons, the

right time to cut the tree to remove the bark so that it comes off in a sheet and does not split. Unfortunately, in most cases, the tree dies as a result (Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1.** Gadayka (stringybark tree), *eucalyptus tetradonta*, commonly known as Darwin stringybark or messmate, endemic to northern Australia, with a section removed for bark painting. Photo: Susan Lowish 2007.

Mr. Wanambi also brought samples of the white pigment (often referred to as ‘ochre’) into the classroom. You can see the grate marks on the sample where he has demonstrated how it is prepared (Fig 2). In front of the students, he would usually eat some of the prepared pigment, as this white clay – or gapan, as it is called in Yolŋu Matha, can also be used as a medicine. To my dismay, my teaching sample was becoming smaller with each visit. I am sure the people at the Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies, Harvard University, do not have this problem.<sup>35</sup> I am sure visiting artists are not allowed to eat their pigment! Instead, their pigments are used in experiments to determine their elemental make up.<sup>36</sup> They have also been

able to work out that bark paintings were made close to where the ochre was collected.<sup>37</sup> My colleagues and I were able to work that out as well when Mr. and Mrs. Wanambi showed us the spot (Fig. 3).

**Fig. 2.**  
Sample of gapan (white clay) used in bark painting. Photo: Susan Lowish 2015.



**Fig. 3.** Nuwal ochre pit near Yirrkala, North east Arnhem Land. Photo: Anne Dunlop 2018.

Another Yolŋu artist, Patrina Mununggurr, is one of the leading cinematographers at The Mulka Project. She has documented many

community events, including ceremonial films of dhapi (initiation ceremonies) in the Yolŋu homelands.<sup>38</sup> Her artwork has focused more specifically on the ceremonial, artistic, and health properties of gapan, evident in her first screen-based piece called *Gurrkurr Dhalkuma* (Strengthening the Bloodlines) 2017. In 2018 Patrina produced *Dhunupa'kum Nhuna Wanda* (Straightening your Mind), described as 'an intimate portrayal of her preparations for ceremony, painting the white clay from her Djapu clan's beaches on her forehead and limbs'. The review continues to describe the piece's materiality: 'The clay – gapan – represents the dhuwa wanjupi (cloud), and is the subject of an ancient songline sung before ceremonial dances'.<sup>39</sup>

Using high-tech x-ray facilities, researchers have spent much time and energy investigating the origins of different ochres painted on Aboriginal artifacts, hoping to find out where they traveled and how they were exchanged between groups.<sup>40</sup> Many First Nations peoples, including Yolŋu, do not need x-ray machines to trace ancient Indigenous trade routes. They know them intimately through the songlines and ceremonies. For example, Biniŋ artist Graham Badari was able to locate a sacred white ochre deposit after driving three days through the bush with no road. He had never been there, but through the songlines, he knew exactly where it was.<sup>41</sup> Another important source of white pigment in Western Arnhem Land, long treasured for its sacredness, turns out also to be 99% pure calcium magnesium carbonate.<sup>42</sup> The worldwide archives of art are full of scientific knowledge about materials and techniques, but what can this tell us about Australian Indigenous art? And what does it do for our understanding?

It is well known that ochres formed part of the trade of materials throughout Australia. Anthropologist Donald Thomson published a comprehensive account of Yolŋu economic structure and ceremonial exchange cycles in 1949.<sup>43</sup> In this work, he details the regular and ritualized Yolŋu trade with Macassan peoples from Indonesia that had been occurring along the Northern coastline of Australia for hundreds of years before Europeans set foot on this island continent. In his diagrams, Thomson incorporates images of bark paintings.<sup>44</sup> In the central pages of the book, he

goes into great detail about the many different meanings and words for ‘gifts’.<sup>45</sup> Unfortunately, this paper cannot expand on them. However, it is my firm belief that the long history of Yolŋu giving gifts of bark paintings and other ‘artworks’ to the many visiting dignitaries, politicians, and heads of state follow in the footsteps (djalkiri) of this ceremonial exchange, despite the lack of acknowledgment of the larger political purpose of this gift giving.<sup>46</sup>

One last instance involving Mr. Wanambi gives the best contemporary example of the close link between artists, artwork, and the politics of the gift. On a recent visit to Yirrkala, His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales was given a message stick from the independent politician, the Member for Nhulunbuy in the NT Parliament, Yingiya Mark Guyula, by Yolŋu clan leaders Mr. Wanambi and Waka Mununggurr.<sup>47</sup> The message was a request for the Prince to pass on to the Prime Minister of Australia to recognize Indigenous sovereignty. An accompanying letter read in part: “Please accept this ... and create a diplomatic passage for this message from your highly respected position to the Prime Minister of Australia, to help our sovereign nations reach Treaty”. Prince Charles graciously accepted the letter stick.<sup>48</sup> The groundwork for this gift had been laid years earlier, when Mr. Wanambi presented The Prince of Wales with a small bark painting at the opening of Indigenous Australia: Enduring Civilisation, an exhibition at the British Museum in 2015.<sup>49</sup> Investigating the expectations and obligations generated as a result of various modes of transactions around artworks that operate outside the commercial art market is an ongoing project.

### **Conclusion**

Despite my best efforts to meet the brief of the session convenors, this paper has not taken up the challenge of developing transcultural categories by focusing on migrating technologies, materials, and craftsmanship. It has instead been a first foray into rethinking the idea of focusing on categories altogether. Through the many years of conversation and collaboration with the greatly missed Mr. Wanambi, I have learned to focus on the relationships between, rather than the things themselves, and to realize the importance of ceremonial exchange cycles – today’s circular economy. It has been a

challenging journey at times, and one that is not nearly over. By revealing something of his relationship to the materials of bark and ochre in his teaching, Mr. Wanambi has powerfully demonstrated the complexity of cultural encounters that goes well beyond the existing compass of the discipline of art history. Witnessing his teaching has caused me to realize how specific materials and technologies of making are interrelated in economic, philosophical, social, and political terms. As Buwathay Munyarryun explains: ‘It links [us] to the place itself, to the water, earth, trees, and grass, ... Designs in white clay link us altogether that is how gurrutu works...’<sup>50</sup>

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## Endnotes

1. “The letter ŋ is the same as the English sound in the word ‘singer’. It is made with the back of the tongue against the roof of the mouth in the velar position. Unlike in English, this sound can also occur at the beginning of words.” See: Beulah Lowe, ‘Yolŋu – English Dictionary’, *The Aboriginal Resource and Development Services (ARDS)*, accessed 10 January 2022, <https://www.goveonline.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/yolgnu-english-dictionary.pdf>
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3. These are the most prestigious awards for Indigenous art in Australia. See: ‘35th Telstra NATSIAA Winners’, *Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory*, accessed 15 January 2022, <https://www.magnt.net.au/35th-telstra-natsiaa-winners>
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7. Robert Zimmerman, ‘Kant: The Aesthetic Judgment’, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 21, no. 3 (1963): 333–44. <https://doi.org/10.2307/427443>
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11. Mr. W Wanambi, *Bamurrungu* (1998), natural pigments on bark, 188 x 83 cm, purchased 1998, Telstra Collection, Museum, and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory © licensed by Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre <https://g.co/arts/kxYsWLYAoRHh7Yph8>
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# Beyond Art Historical Notions of Center and Periphery: Transcultural Dynamics along the East African Coast

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## **ABSTRACT**

Confronting the art and architecture in fourteenth-century Siena and Kilwa, this article sheds new light on multiple entanglements between the mobility of artifacts, materials, and artistic practices, on intersections between ecologies and aesthetics, and on migrations of objects and ornamentation across the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean world. It investigates transcultural dynamics in coastal East Africa in the global fourteenth century and beyond from an art historical perspective. Questioning well-established canons, it seeks to show what is to gain, if we move away from traditional art historical notions of center and periphery for analyses of the arts in Kilwa and Siena, but also what is to gain from this for the discipline of art history itself.

## **KEYWORDS**

East Africa; Italy; Global Art Histories; Center; Periphery



**Fig. 1** Ambrogio Lorenzetti, Allegory of Good Government, 1338-1339, Siena, Palazzo Pubblico

When the discipline of art history started to increasingly re-direct its attention to global horizons during the past decades,<sup>1</sup> this came along with the establishment of new canons, canonical images, and objects of global art histories. The works of Ambrogio Lorenzetti count among the most well-known of these (Fig. 1),<sup>2</sup> as does the emphasis on long-distance travels of merchants, diplomats, and missionaries between the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and Asia during that period, migrations of people that came along with the mobility of objects, transcultural dynamics, and complex intersections between visual and material culture such as depictions of imported luxury fabrics from Central Asia and the Middle East in Italian paintings.<sup>3</sup> None of these topics were really new in scholarship; in fact, particularly the renewed focus on fourteenth-century Eurasian interactions during the past twenty years in disciplines such as history and art history shows how much global art history has also been drawing on and reconceptualizing discourses from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Gustave Soulier's *Oriental Influences in Italian Painting* and Ivan

Pouzyna's *China, Italy and the Origins of the Renaissance*, for example, were published almost a century ago.<sup>4</sup> In this paper, however, I would like to show that art history today can also move into other directions, directions which do not only imply an expansion of the field – although also this is the case – but, more importantly, also lead to new questions and help us to re-think problems of canons and notions of center and periphery within the discipline of art history.

Instead of moving from the Mediterranean to Asia, as is most frequently done within global art history, referring to the many important Eurasian research projects of the past two decades,<sup>5</sup> the aim of this paper is to present a brief case study of Afro-Eurasian dynamics. Taking as a starting point the East African coast, a region usually much more studied by archaeologists and anthropologists,<sup>6</sup> this brief article seeks to show how art history can contribute to studies on the built environment along the Swahili coast, while, on the other hand, making clear how analyses of the liminal spaces in coastal East Africa can make pointed contributions to current debates in transcultural art histories today.

### **I. Transcultural Connections in Coastal East Africa**

Commonly referred to as the Swahili coast, the area stretching from Southern Somalia to Northern Mozambique and including adjacent islands, most prominently the Lamu, Zanzibar and Mafia archipelagoes, but also Comoros and parts of Northern Madagascar, has been in dialogue with the most distant regions of the Indian Ocean world since ancient times, fostered by the natural phenomenon of the monsoon winds. Before the age of steam, those who sailed across the Indian Ocean depended on the seasonal winds, which reversed with the monsoon and were strong enough to cause a reversal of currents. Whereas the northeast monsoon allowed the navigation from India and the Persian Gulf to East Africa from November through March, shifting winds in April, now in the southwest direction, enabled their return. Islam had therefore been adopted in coastal East Africa early in the middle ages. It is first testified at Shanga in the Lamu archipelago in Northern Kenya in the

eighth century, and by the twelfth century, it was spread widely along the coast.<sup>7</sup>

In the premodern period, Kilwa in today's Tanzania was one of the most critical cities in coastal East Africa, not least because it was in control of the gold trade. This significance came to light in major building projects such as Husuni Kubwa (Fig. 2), literally the Great Palace dating to the fourteenth century that was once overlooking the harbor of Kilwa and that — as reconstructions have suggested — was planned to be able to rival with palaces from other parts of the Islamic world.<sup>8</sup> Such prestige buildings in Kilwa and other port cities along the Swahili coast did, in fact, not only stand out by means of their monumentality, having been built with coral stone harvested from the sea but also through details, most prominently their architectural ornamentation. At Husuni Kubwa, for instance, a fragment of the dado zone of the building has been found, which features a pattern well-known from Persian star- and cross-shaped tiles (Fig. 3-4). The coral stone carving with crosses and eight-pointed stars could have been fitted with imported tiles but could have also been created in dialogue with imported textiles featuring the very same pattern.<sup>9</sup> The significance of imported fabrics in coastal East Africa comes not least to light in the founding myth of Kilwa Kisiwani (literally “Kilwa on the island”), which, according to a legend, was founded by Ali ibn al-Hasan, a Persian prince from Shiraz, in the tenth century. Locally known as Nguo Myingi (Kiswahili for “many clothes”), Ali is said to have come into possession of Kilwa by acquiring it from the ruler of the facing mainland in exchange for a quantity of cloth. Of the most diverse colors, the textiles which Ali is said to have traded for the territory of Kilwa were presumably sufficient to “encircle the island.” <sup>10</sup>



**Fig. 2** Husuni Kubwa, 14<sup>th</sup> century, Kilwa Kisiwani



**Fig. 3** Dado zone fragment from Husuni Kubwa, 1330s, Kilwa Kisiwani



**Fig. 4** Star and cross tiles, ca. 1270-1280, Iran, probably Takht-i Sulaiman, Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Philippe Beaujard has discussed how this passage of the legend cannot only be described as a symbol of a mercantile transaction but that it also expressed a process of urbanization and was even connected to the very creation of territory.<sup>4</sup> The legend goes that Ali also dug or had dug – using his magical powers – a channel that brought the island Kilwa Kisiwani into being, separating it from the continent. As Beaujard argued, this origin story thus

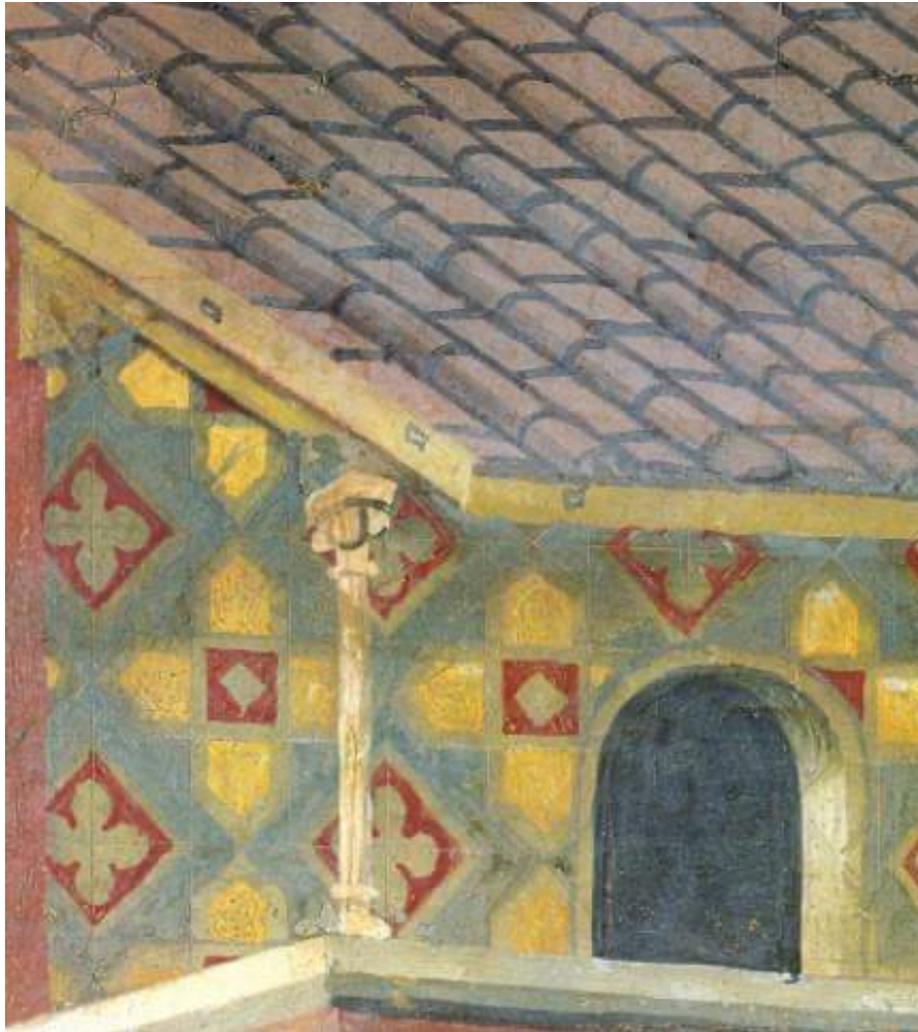
emphasized two significant features: a religious magical power connected with Islam and the crucial role of imported luxury objects that reached the coast through Muslim merchants, particularly textiles.

Fabrics, however, were not the only costly objects that arrived in coastal East Africa; another group of significant imported artifacts was ceramics and porcelain bowls from the Middle East and Asia.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, in the case of these objects, intricate intersections between architecture, artifacts, and ornamentation came to light along the Swahili coast. In the early fifteenth-century Small Mosque in Kilwa, for instance, both the wall of the mihrab, that is, the prayer niche pointing to Mecca, and the domes were decorated with immured bowls, some of them still preserved in situ.<sup>13</sup> In the plain domes, the roundness of the dome is echoed and enhanced by the placement of one centrally positioned bowl encircled by a corona of other round ceramic and porcelain vessels radiating from and forming a ring around the apex. In contrast, the fluted domes feature only one bowl at the top. Here, the interplay between architecture, physically present and evoked objects astounds the viewer, creating, in fact, the visual association of the flutes of the dome with a canopy of folded cloth fastened by and suspended from a jewel-like bowl.

## **II. Long-Distance Entanglements and the Questioning of Art Historical Canons**

The cases of Husuni Kubwa and the Small Mosque in Kilwa exemplify some of the sophisticated ways in which imported artifacts were responded to and the aesthetic choices that were taken along the Swahili coast. Moreover, if these buildings stood in another world region, they would have long received more attention from art historians. However, the East African coast is not only a liminal zone concerning the mobility of people and objects, artistic interactions, and processes of exchange but also a liminal zone concerning disciplines: long disregarded by the sub-field of Islamic art history because Islamic art historians did not focus very much on regions south of the Sahara, and long pushed to the margins within African art history because most buildings were considered to rather belong to Islamic art history, the Swahili

coast has been predominantly studied by archaeologists, historians, and anthropologists, although a stronger engagement with the art and architecture along the Swahili coast would hold the potential to re-direct the discipline in significant ways.



**Fig. 5** Detail from Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *Allegory of Good Government*, 1338-1339, Siena, Palazzo Pubblico

Imported ceramics immured into architectural structures, mobile dishes taken out of circulation and permanently displayed on architectural surfaces, have received much attention in the discipline of art history during

the past two decades, yet except for the studies by Prita Meier mostly not with regard to East African,<sup>14</sup> but with regard to Italian examples. Imported ceramic bowls not from Persia or China but from Fatimid Egypt, Mallorca, and other places across the Mediterranean were immured into prominent building facades on the Italian peninsula, such as in San Piero a Grado in Pisa and elsewhere.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the motif of the star-and-cross-tile pattern was by no means confined to the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean connections. It was also widespread from the Middle East to the Western Mediterranean across various media and materials, not least in the form of actual tiles and their painted counterparts, such as in the Allegory of Good Government painted by Ambrogio Lorenzetti in Siena in the first half of the fourteenth century (Fig. 5). Yet. At the same time, Lorenzetti's frescoes count today among the most famous works of art in the canon of art history; the opposite is the case concerning Husuni Kubwa, the palace of the sultan of Kilwa featuring star-tile-ornamentation that was built in the very same years when Lorenzetti painted the Buon Governo.

We know of no direct connections between Siena and the Swahili coast in the fourteenth century. However, both regions were involved in long-distance entanglements and processes of artistic exchange that included the mobility of people, objects, and ornamentation across various multidirectional networks. One of these networks existed between the Middle East and the Mediterranean including the Italian peninsula, as a way of transmission for objects, ornamentation, and artistic practices, and another one across the Western Indian Ocean where star-and-cross-shaped tiles could be found in the dado zones of prestige buildings in Persia such as at Pir-i Bakran near Isfahan, at the Great Mosque of Qalhat in Oman overlooking the Indian Ocean,<sup>16</sup> and in Kilwa Kisiwani in coastal East Africa, with very site-specific, localized practices: the cases in East Africa, for instance, were unique examples of this type of ornamentation being carved into the material of coral stone. Moreover, the artistic practice of immuring ceramic and porcelain bowls into architectural surfaces, such as in the Small Mosque in Kilwa and other buildings along the East African coast, was another case of complex entanglements and intersections between the local, regional, and

transregional. Again, there is no evidence for a connection between this practice in the Mediterranean and coastal East Africa (yet), but the practice was also widespread all across the Indian Ocean world.<sup>17</sup> And it is, in fact, intriguing to consider that by the early sixteenth century and with more examples in the *longue durée* over the centuries until today, Muslims traveling along the Indian Ocean littoral would have been able to pray in mosques featuring immured ceramic and porcelain bowls in their interiors or on their exteriors from coastal East Africa via the Arab peninsula with examples in Yemen and Oman as far as Java in South-East Asia.<sup>18</sup>

### **III. Overcoming Traditional Notions of Center and Periphery: Perspectives from the South**

The case studies that I briefly addressed in this paper highlight not only migrations of objects but also connectivity employing artistic practices, which were characterized by local and site-specific distinctions such as the use of local coral stone, skills, and ingenuity in carving this material, or the particular aesthetic choices taken from case to case concerning the built environment and intersections between architecture, objects, and ornamentation in coastal East Africa. It is important to note that these dimensions of site-specificity can also be regarded from transcultural perspectives. Elizabeth Lambourn, for instance, traced the mobility of precious marble carvings from Cambay, modern Khambhat in Gujarat in Western India, to regions as distant as coastal East Africa, the Arab peninsula, and Java and Sumatra in Southeast Asia during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when these sophisticatedly carved marble tombstones and building elements pointed at a shared taste for these imported luxury objects, but when they also constituted material connections between communities living in these regions all across the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Indian Ocean world.<sup>19</sup> Coastal East Africa, where a Gujarati marble tombstone has been excavated in Kilwa, was a region that did not have any marble quarries of its own nor any other types of stone locally available except for coral stone harvested from the sea. Nevertheless, while Swahili monuments are today darkened over time, hence making the difference between local coral stone

from coastal East Africa and the creamy white imported marble from Western India clearly apparent, Swahili coral stone monuments were much lighter in color when they had been newly built, since coral stone, when freshly harvested, has an almost marble-like finish. Rather than being a material of lower quality, Swahili coral stone architecture was thus, in fact, well-prepared to compete with the luxury marble carvings from afar by its materiality and visual effects and even more so when studded with jewel- or pearl-like ceramic and porcelain bowls, creating multiple dialogues across media and materials.

However, these very same buildings, objects, and issues also make clear that global art history cannot only be about itineraries of people and objects, artistic encounters, and fascinating case studies of transcultural dynamics but that stories of connectivity need to be considered as enmeshed with those of resistance, physical and epistemic violence, stratifications and layers over time, legacies of colonialism, and coloniality that continue to cast their shadows. The luxury marble tombstone excavated at Kilwa, for instance, was found when East Africa was a German colony and transported to Berlin, where it remains in the collection of the Ethnological Museum of Berlin until today.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, numerous Swahili monuments, such as a tomb in the Lamu archipelago in Northern Kenya,<sup>21</sup> once over and over studded with precious celadon and blue-and-white porcelain bowls, are today characterized by the gaping emptiness of the cavities that once held the precious imported bowls. Immured Persian ceramics and Chinese porcelain objects were already stolen by colonizers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in East Africa and by some until today as souvenirs from their journeys. For their collections of Old China, many of these objects have disappeared forever, some of them later donated to Western museums such as the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, where one can find several Chinese porcelain objects from East Africa, such as in the collection of George Révoil.<sup>22</sup> Apart from these objects, what is at stake is where the art and architecture along the Swahili coast were and are being addressed. This is an issue that I would like to discuss in order to conclude this paper.

Coastal East Africa has long been perceived, described, and conceptualized from the Global North and European viewpoints, a tendency that started at the moment when the Portuguese circumnavigated the Cape of Good Hope at the end of the fifteenth century, and when the stone towns and buildings along the Swahili coast entered into new discourses, geopoetic descriptions that had more to do with the visual vocabulary of European observers than with the contexts in which the buildings were made. Gleaming white coral stone buildings in coastal East Africa, rivaling marble artifacts imported from Western India, were suddenly described by European visitors as evoking the whitewashed stone-built houses of Évora and other towns in Portugal and Spain.<sup>23</sup> And one observer, sailing on a Portuguese ship shortly after 1500, when confronted with the Great Mosque of Kilwa and its monumentality, described it in his diary, comparing it with the Great Mosque of Córdoba.<sup>24</sup> This was a highly Eurocentric interpretation of Swahili architecture that was created in dialogue with the architecture elsewhere in the Indian Ocean world, the Great Mosque of Kilwa evoking the silhouettes of Indian mosques. The comparison between the Great Mosque of Kilwa and the Great Mosque of Córdoba can be interpreted as a description “in the mirror of the familiar”<sup>25</sup>: that at the sight of the monumental mosque along the Swahili coast those sailing on Portuguese ships drew on buildings that they knew from back home on the Iberian Peninsula to make sense of the buildings that they encountered in coastal East Africa.

When Swahili stone towns started to be studied by Western scholars in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, misconceptions continued, with severe scholarly consequences and accompanied by highly racist concepts ascribing Swahili art and architecture exclusively to foreign origins, when monumental stone buildings in coastal East Africa were conceived of as buildings erected by Persian and Arab precolonial colonizers who had arrived to bring ‘civilization’ and to build stone architecture along the Swahili coast in the middle ages – because East Africans were thought to be incapable of building in stone.<sup>26</sup> Or, when Mortimer Wheeler, when describing the Swahili city Kua in the Mafia archipelago south of Zanzibar in 1955, once more saw the ruined city through a European lens referring to the

site as potentially the “Pompeii of East Africa,”<sup>27</sup> drawing on the Pompeii trope for his description of Kua, that had not only long haunted non-Western archaeology using a European benchmark for sites in other locations of the world, but that also carried heavy colonial baggage. The latter comes to light, for instance, in the report about Mussolini’s visit of Leptis Magna in Libya, then an Italian colony, in the journal *Life Magazine* stating how “far finer and bigger than Pompeii, Leptis Magna, had been dug out of the sands of Italian Libya by modern Italian rule,”<sup>28</sup> published only twenty years before Mortimer Wheeler’s statement about Kua.

Today, thanks to the work of archaeologists in the recent two decades, it is unanimously clear that Swahili cities were African cities that developed over time and that grew rich through trans-oceanic trade.<sup>29</sup> And coastal East Africa has long become an essential region in the fields of archaeology and critical heritage studies with a focus on non-European perspectives.<sup>30</sup> A more substantial consideration of the art and architecture along the Swahili coast, however, also raises important questions for the discipline of art history, such as the question: why privilege Lorenzetti’s fresco of the Good Government in the canon of art history over the Great Palace in Kilwa, two monuments that were created in the very same years, the 1330s, both of them constituting diverse transregional entanglements and complex intersections between the local and the global in the fourteenth century. It encourages us to think about the ways how the prominence of immured ceramic and porcelain bowls in East African architecture and along the Indian Ocean rim could have had impacts on the visual and material culture in Europe after the arrival of the Portuguese, inspiring porcelain-clad ceilings such as in the Santos Palace in Lisbon. And it raises the question of why, rather than referring to Kua as potentially the Pompeii of East Africa, not think of Pompeii as potentially the Lamu, Kilwa or Kua of the South of Europe, provincializing the Mediterranean and Europe from the viewpoint of the crossroads of the Indian Ocean.<sup>31</sup> However, while these practices of “reversing the gaze” can indeed be crucial for re-directing our perceptions about art and architecture in and beyond Europe,<sup>32</sup> it is also significant to attempt to move out of concepts and discussions related to Europe altogether: focusing on

South-South relationships, highlighting, for instance, local community museums and other modes of display such as the newly founded site museum in Kilwa, working collaboratively and emphasizing the work of scholars in institutions beyond the Global North, striving towards “new relational ethics”,<sup>33</sup> and seeking to overcome traditional notions of center and periphery, both institutionally and thematically, when a city such as fourteenth-century Siena was but at the very margin of a globe characterized by multidirectional networks and complex intersections of short-distance and long-distance relationships with a stronger focus on the Majority World to turn the map of art history for more than a moment upside down.

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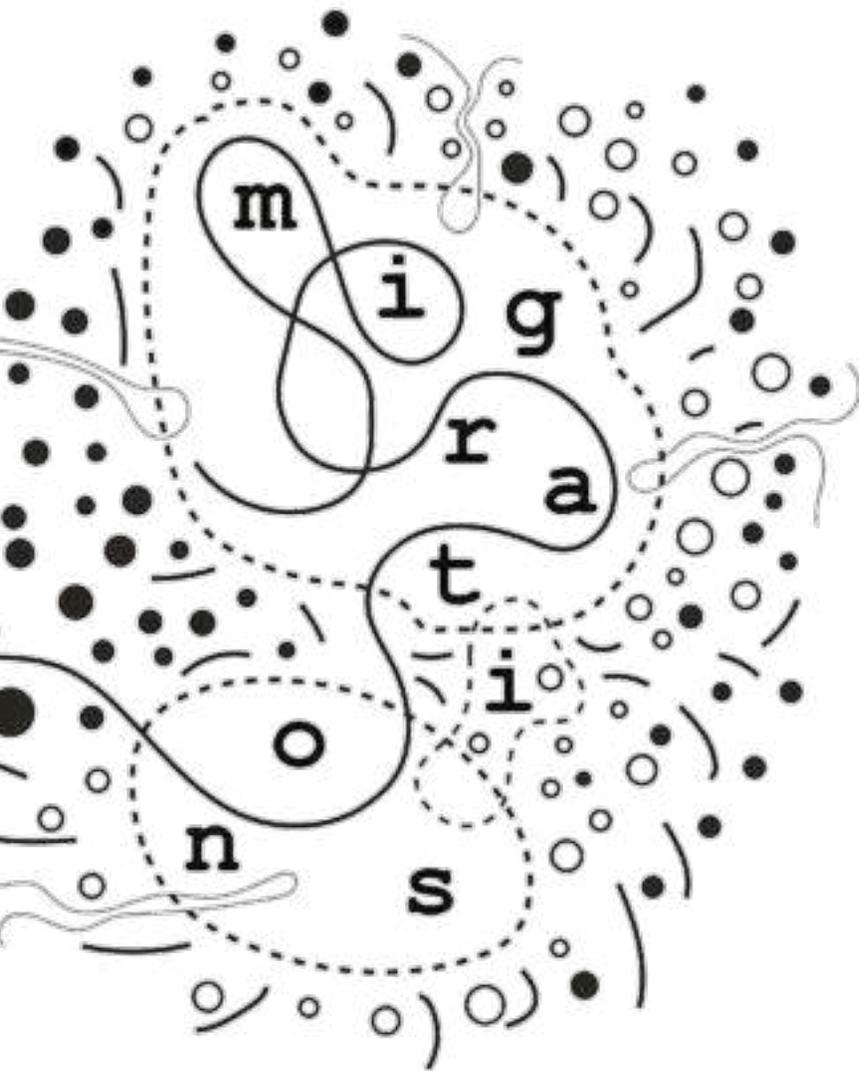
## Endnotes

1. See, e.g., Saurma-Jeltsch and Eisenbeiß, eds., *The Power of Things*; Flood, Joselit, Nagel, Russo, Wang, Wood and Yiengpruksawan, “Roundtable”; Necipoğlu and Payne, eds., *Histories of Ornament*.
2. Prazniak, “Siena on the Silk Roads”; Wolf, “Die Frau in Weiß“.
3. Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza*; Fircks and Schorta, eds., *Oriental Silks*; Dunlop, “Mongol Eurasia”.
4. Soulier, *Les influences orientales*; Pouzyna, *La Chine, l’Italie*.
5. See, e.g., Grasskamp and Juneja, eds., *EurAsian Matters*.
6. Wynne-Jones and LaViolette, eds., *The Swahili World*.
7. Horton, *Shanga*.
8. Sutton, “Kilwa”; Garlake, *The Early Islamic Architecture*.
9. Schulz, “Artistic Dynamics”.
10. Elkiss, “Kilwa Kisiwani”, 123.
11. Beaujard, “East Africa, the Comoros Islands and Madagascar”.
12. Zhao, “Global Trade”.
13. Schulz, “Artistic Dynamics”.
14. Meier 2015.
15. Mathews, “Other People’s Dishes”.
16. Rougeulle, Creissen and Bernard, “The Great Mosque of Qalhāt Rediscovered”.
17. Goffriller, Hohgjiao, Bandyopadhyay and Henderson, “Chinese Porcelains”.
18. Schulz, “Coral Stone Architecture“.
19. Lambourn, “La production de marbre sculpté”.
20. Reyels, Ivanov and Weber-Sinn, eds., *Humboldt Lab Tanzania*.
21. Schulz, “Coral Stone Architecture”.
22. Pradines, “L’Archéologie Swahili”.
23. Barbosa, *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, 17; Prestholdt, “Portuguese Conceptual Categories”.
24. Silva Rego, ed., *Documentos*, vol. I, 527.
25. Howard, *Venice & the East*, 45.
26. Lane, “The Archaeology of Colonial Encounters”.
27. Schulz, “Potentially the Pompeii of East Africa”.
28. *Life*, “Camera Overseas,” 62.
29. Chami, “East Africa and the Middle East”; Chami, “A Review of Swahili Archaeology”.
30. Ichumbaki and Schmidt 2020.
31. Schulz, “Potentially the Pompeii of East Africa”; Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*.
32. See for this also the research project *Reversing the Gaze: Towards Post-Comparative Area Studies*, Centre for African Studies Basel.
33. Sarr and Savoy, *The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage*.

# Border as Method: Art Historical Interventions

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## Session 2



## Session 2

# Border as Method: Art Historical Interventions

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The theme of the CIHA World Congress in Sao Paolo 2022 was, as we all know, “Migrations.” This session emerged from the essential fact that the border, or borders in the plural, are central to the paradigm of migration: they are both sites of cultural contact and encounter, and harsh barriers to movement and human mobility. The great paradox about migration in our era of globalization, our supposedly increasingly “borderless” world, is that it has resulted simultaneously in a proliferation of borders — in the form of physical walls, security fences, barricades, and a general redrawing of boundary lines — whose goal is to prohibit and restrict human mobility. But borders do not merely thwart migration, they are also constantly changing horizons in motion, rather than permanent fixtures in geo-political space. In other words, borders are not merely on the margins of human experience, but they have somehow come to “inscribe themselves at the very center of contemporary experience.”<sup>1</sup>

This quote, along with the title of this session, is derived from the 2013 book by political theorists, Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, titled *Border as Method, or The Multiplication of Labor*. For these authors, based in Italy and Australia, respectively, the idea of “border as method” is about advancing a methodological agenda. They argue that the border is not merely a research object to be held up and analyzed as an autonomous thing; but rather a kind of semantic field—in their terms, an “epistemic framework” – and therefore a privileged lens through which to view our world. This means recognizing the powerful proliferation of borders around the world today, but equally the struggles against them and the acts of

translation and border- crossing — embodied, for instance, in the figure of the migrant— that constantly frustrate their acts of violence and power. To sustain the “border as method,” then, is to recognize the constitutive role of the border within the field of migratory relationships, and to foreground the border as a privileged optic that can open up new and productive perspectives.

Accordingly, our contributors were invited to engage in a rethinking of the border — away from something that is pre-given, fixed or immutable, and towards a conception of the border itself as a social process, and as a horizon that is continually shaped and re-shaped in a variety of cultural practices and visual forms. We encouraged participants to embrace a vision of the border as a process through which social identities are shaped; as thresholds that both bring together and divide; as performances, practices, discourses, and symbols; as active sites of negotiation and contestation. In other words, we invited contributors to approach the border as an intricate social process, a dynamic historical or lived experience that is not reducible to the alienating forces of bureaucracy, or to the abstractions of the map or the state.

The papers that follow aggregate a heterogeneous set of works. They do not present a conclusive or closed view in global terms. Our contributors participated both virtually and in-person at the conference in Sao Paulo from all over the world: they are based at institutions in Hungary, Estonia, Poland, Hong Kong, Spain, France, South Africa, Beirut, the United States and Brazil. While the essays are primarily concerned with the field of modern and contemporary art, we have selected papers that reflect a range of approaches and encourage productive and open discussion. An important theme that emerged within the epistemic framework of the “border as method” was that the border persistently presented itself as a battlefield. The notion of the border as a territory of negotiation, of appeasement of conflicts, appeared to take a minor role. In its place, the border emerged as a place that fundamentally embodies practices of exclusion. It is a territory that exacerbates differences and consolidates relations of dominance and subordination that, over time, can resemble open, incurable wounds.

The time elapsed between the selection and the presentation of the works was marked by the unpredictable turn of the global pandemic. For two years we learned to live with the imposition of distance, isolation, to live with the fear of contamination, to build new borders. We developed strategies to avoid, on the physical plane, the contagion that we sought to grapple with on the intellectual plane. At the event, the presentations made up a hybrid program and reflected a free flow of ideas, the mobility of critical thinking and the need to update the discussion on edges.

Ultimately, certain conceptual formulations stood out that expand and destabilize the fixity of the border: “modalities of knowledge”, “untranslatability”, “porosity of borders”, “semiosphere”, “imaginary borders”, “paradox”, “scientific quality”, “the border of the border”, “symbolic aspect of the border”, “satirical simulation”, “dreamy forms of power” and “counterpoint archives”. Although they seem disjointed, these expressions converged, temporarily and provocatively, for us to project a constellation of issues. We hope that the texts gathered here can bring the reader closer to the concerns that motivated us. The displacements that these authors impose on us, the migrations of our thoughts, are part of our reading experiences. We are tempted to think that borders have been abolished in the globalized world. However, as we move, we can see that the edges take on varied forms and functions, they are also spaces for meeting and dialogue. In the search for a point of contact, we got to know each other a little more.

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### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, or The Multiplication of Labor*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013.

# Border as Method

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**Alexander Alberro**

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## **ABSTRACT**

My paper explores ways contemporary artists address the effects of the current deepening of capitalist relations on national borders. I show that while some practitioners produce artworks that reflect on borders in witty, ironic, and poetic ways, others make art that concentrates more intensively on border crossing's toll on those most in need of relocation. I conclude with a discussion of artists who focus on transport and communication's logistical coordination across vast landscapes, arguing that their productions make visible economic globalization's processual and infrastructural operations across the world's national borders.

## **KEYWORDS**

Contemporary Art; Borders; Economic Globalization; Migration; Infrastructure

Neoliberal deregulation and financialization have profoundly transformed the twenty-first-century lifeworld. The effects of these processes have included not only capital's fluid flow into new markets but also more flexible professional classes, digital communications systems, and labor markets that work against durable personal and professional arrangements. The comfortable mobility that power requires and confers is one of the most discriminating factors around which a new kind of international class segregation and privilege distribution is taking shape. As sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello observe in *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (1999), the more versatile professionals and their services become, the lighter they travel, and the fewer ties they have to older unities such as family, class, and place, the greater their chance of getting ahead. (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005: 361-370)<sup>1</sup>. Neoliberal regimes have developed faster and less expensive travel infrastructures to accommodate a vital component of these new economic conditions, which have vastly extended social relations across space. These developments have made modernity more liquid, according to some, and enabled capital flows to circulate just about anything.<sup>2</sup>

Paradoxically, the same flows of global movement have led to a proliferation of borders, security systems, checkpoints, and physical and virtual frontiers. Today, every nation-state at once seeks to maximize the opportunities the circulation of people, resources, and information creates and yet close its doors to the migration forms these elements stimulate. As a result, countries are becoming increasingly vigilant about their borders' defense. A form of neoliberal nationalism has drawn up no-go buffer zones and constructed armored boundaries to restrict cross-border migration. The Berlin Wall and what it represented may have come down, but, as philosopher Étienne Balibar explains, the era of economic globalization, in its need to discriminate "between the two extremes--between those who 'circulate capital' and those 'whom capital circulates,'" has rendered nationalism pernicious. (Balibar 2002: 83) It has prompted stricter laws against refugees and asylum seekers, the ruthless eviction of economic migrants, and the erection of more fences and walls between nation-states than ever before.

Artists have addressed the new conditions of national jurisdiction in several ways. Some have turned borders into performance spaces, ludically traversing, circumnavigating, or accentuating them. Christian Phillip Müller's *Green Border*, 1993, a witty intervention carried out in the context of the Austrian pavilion at the 45th Venice Biennale, addresses the porosity of borders and the affective dimensions of nationality and state identification at the twentieth century's end. To make the work, the artist donned local costumes and illegally hiked across Austria's national boundary at eight different locations (the Czech Republic, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Italy, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, and Germany). In the process, he questioned the practice of defining borders between segregated national entities through drawings on a map.<sup>3</sup> The artwork casts the border not as a line at which one stops but as an indefinite area in which to proceed. It renders the border a mobile and uncertain metaphor for the performative, socially constructed, and contingent aspects of identity, which creative artists are exceptionally well-poised to negotiate. National boundaries, Phillip Müller suggests, are only social constructions and are often more imagined than real.

Other practitioners have accentuated the rigidity of borders or turned them into thought experiments to draw attention to their absurdness. Santiago Sierra's *Wall Enclosing a Space*, 2003, exhibited at the Spanish Pavilion of the 50th Venice Biennale, turned the building into a firm boundary that separated what was inside from the people outside. It functioned as a barrier to movement. The artist covered the word "España" on the edifice's facade with black tape and closed off access to the pavilion's primary entrance. Directions sent visitors to the back door, where security guards requested identification and permitted entry into the pavilion's empty interior only to those with valid Spanish passports. The guards locked out foreign visitors ineligible to travel to Spain without a visa. The implication was that Spain's current political situation emphasizes reactionary notions of ethnic roots and fixed places, especially for the border and who gets to cross it.

Raqs Media Collective's video installation, *Undoing Walls*, 2017, ruminates on the rationale for national boundary lines. The animation loop

shifts from what initially reads as an architectural structure to the collapsibility of a fluttering textile. In a distant echo of philosopher Angela Davis's reflection that "walls turned sideways are bridges," the artists based their thought experiment on the premise that an imagined "dysfunctional" wall structure could productively reimagine the function of borders. (Davis 1974: 137) The group proposes creating "a 'welcoming' wall" that can operate as an alternative to human segregation in the context of the extra-judicial position of migrants. The wall will enable contact and interaction rather than divide communities. It will "become the site where counter-narratives are inscribed and resistance" to capitalism's exclusions can take place. "Can we play the system from within the system but according to its own rules?" the collective asks. "Can a wall become a conduit, as opposed to a divide, by rethinking its structure? Can we imagine a wall that is intentionally permeable? Or even a self-destructive wall that conjures against its own intentions?" (Raqs Media Collective 2017) By rethinking walls as ephemeral, porous, and fluid entities, the collective undermines their politically oppressive power and casts them as dynamic thresholds.

Sierra's and Raqs Media Collective's projects present borders as politically and culturally contested sites of belonging and not belonging. Sierra's *Wall Enclosing a Space* flaunts and reenacts these borders, and Raqs Media Collective's *Undoing Walls* tries to reconceive their operation. The two mischievously encourage spectators to contemplate the relationship between borders and contemporary art, especially the latter's increasingly transient conditions. At the same time, the artists marshal the contradictions and complexities of national boundaries and walls as metaphors to explore cultural, political, and artistic boundaries. They recognize that even border walls have boundary aspects and are as variable as the performative acts through which legal discourses construct them. Their stability relies on the process of perpetual articulation and rearticulation.

Some artists have pictured the border security apparatus and marshaled disembodied evidence of clandestine migration in aesthetic ways to evoke national borders' toll on those most in need of relocation. A case in point is Richard Misrach and Guillermo Galindo's project "Border Cantos,"

2004-16, which addresses the unseen human reality of the highly militarized U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Misrach's medium-format photographs focus on areas marked by human presence: the security-industrial complex, alternative infrastructures of mobility, and remnants of human movement. The pictures depict the dark reddish-brown border wall as a paradoxical structure: physically menacing on the ground against startlingly beautiful (considering the subject) landscapes devoid of people. In some images, such as *Wall, East of Nogales, Arizona*, 2014, the corrugated steel border fence cuts through the landscape's rolling hills like a road or river, blending with pathways along which humans have long moved. In others, such as *Wall, Los Indios, Texas*, 2015, a solitary 36-slat segment of free-standing barrier looms uselessly atop a small patch of grass in a dirt field crisscrossed in tire tracks, resembling more a preserved relic or a museum piece than a functional element of a security apparatus. The carefully framed compositions repeatedly use perspective to dramatize the relationship between the border wall and the land.

Misrach also symbolizes the migrants' struggles by photographing objects found along the border. The items index migrant movement. The possessions are ambiguous. Abandoned under unknown circumstances, they point to the unknowable crossings of the people who desperately depended on them. *Artifacts Found From California to Texas Between 2013 and 2015*, 2013-15, presents a sampling of these artifacts: garments, glass and plastic bottles, cigarette packs, empty food tins, toiletries, books, backpacks, and children's toys shot in situ covered in dirt. Set in a forensic grid, each of the work's forty-eight photographs is a mystery that indexes the particular difficulties of undocumented migration; together, this long horizontal arrangement of frames makes up an abbreviated lexicon of border zone objects, from junk to keepsakes. Misrach's visual evidence approach acknowledges the limitations of the objects' symbolic power.<sup>4</sup> The migrants' journeys are embedded in the finds, though there is no easy way to transcribe them.

Galindo's sound sculptures reanimate the found objects and materials visually captured by Misrach. He transforms the detritus into musical

instruments and sonic environments. The installations and performances render percussive rather than melodic sounds, evoking fear, drama, and pathos along the border. Many suggest the movements of people walking briskly or running, the pitter-patters, rhythmic clangs, and other beats bringing anxious but determined footsteps to mind. Galindo uses bottles and beverage cans as wind instruments and fills jugs and jars with gravel or golf balls and spent shotgun shells to make shakers and rattles. A Border Patrol guard's flashlight becomes a trumpet. Liquid drips from a pierced, former water station barrel, resonating on a metal plate below. In *Teclata*, 2015, a wooden, piano-like hammer mechanism created with Border Patrol ammunition boxes activates empty cans, bottles, and a plastic cup. *Zapatello*, 2014, includes a shoe and glove that pound a rawhide-strung drag-tire like a drumhead. The shapes of the machine's cranks mimic the Border Patrol targets pictured in some of Misrach's compositions. The found elements in *Huesocordio*, 2012, a wooden, five-string instrument, are limited to five vertebrae while also incorporating three wind-up toy roaches. Based on haunting photographs of scarecrow-like effigies constructed of found migrant clothing pilloried on agave-stalks Misrach discovered in the desert, the "arms" and "legs" of Galindo's *Efigie* are hollow and the wood resonant. Two steel cables stretch between the figure's outstretched arms, and thirteen more cross the tattered jacket's front. Galindo's instruments are documents of peoples' passing (literal and figurative) and memorials to those we may never see. As the composer says, the instruments enable the invisible victims of migration who might have survived the experience or perished in the crossing to speak through their belongings. (Misrach and Galindo 2016: 193) *Micro-Orchestra*, 2014, is perhaps the project's most chilling piece. Rendered from a plastic toy scorpion, a child's comb, and a small toothbrush, the makeshift instrument sounds off a spine-tingling cacophony of high-pitched screeches and scrapes that evokes the cries of unaccompanied minors crossing the perilous boundary zone.

The power of these sounds and their connection to the objects' physicality, history, and relation to the border is undeniable. Although Galindo's and Misrach's works could stand alone, their proximity enriches

both. Misrach's high-definition archaeological images are eloquent in their silence; Galindo's instrument-objects are poignant in making charged materials and landscape sing. Together, these artists transform the border's liminality into a multi-sensorial and multi-dimensional landscape. "Border Cantos" bears witness to the complexity and magnitude of the concerns and encourages a humanitarian perspective on the plight of migrants. It roots border politics in the context of individual human lives and reflects on an international order in which an accident of birth secures or loses the right to travel.

Other artists and art collectives have employed different narrator positions to address border crossing and mobility-related traumas. Their works are considerably less witty and ironic and more strictly political than Phillip Müller's, Sierra's, and Raqs Media Collective's, and arguably less poetic than Misrach and Galindo's "Border Cantos." For example, the Milan-based art collective Multiplicity produces project works that evoke the gulf between who can and cannot travel at will because of political and economic reasons. Its productions intertwine border politics and the migration crisis that has been at the center of worldwide attention in recent years.<sup>5</sup> The group's *The Road Map*, 2003, explores the spatialization of the West Bank's occupation and that territory's dynamic, constantly shifting, ebbing, and flowing boundaries in vivid terms.<sup>6</sup> "The territories of the West Bank," the group explains, "are almost completely covered with enclosure and fences. They are war zone barriers, bypass roads, military zones for the Israeli army, Palestinian villages and cities, refugee camps, areas with no jurisdiction, networks, and infrastructures. They are all arranged on top of each other like a giant web." (Multiplicity 2005: 172)

*The Road Map's* multimedia installation compares the time it took a person holding an Israeli passport with that of a resident of Palestine to travel the same seventy-kilometer distance through the area's charged and complex geography. In 2003, three members of Multiplicity, with their European Union identification papers, accompanied an Israeli citizen from Kiriya Arba to Kudmin (two Israeli colonies in Palestinian territory). They made a similar trip from Hebron to Nablus the following day, with someone holding a Palestinian

passport. The two routes start and end in the same latitude and even overlap at some points. But from a topographical point of view, the Israeli government has splintered the West Bank's infrastructure by a network of fast bypass roads, bridges, and tunnels that weave over and under one another to link the colonies and bypass Palestinian villages. (Multiplicity 2008: 71) The concentration of enclosures, fences, checkpoints and controlled corridors regulates the space. According to architect Eyal Weizman, "the bypass roads attempt to separate Israeli traffic networks from Palestinian ones, preferably without allowing them ever to cross. They emphasize the overlapping of two separate geographies that inhabit the same landscape. At points where the networks do cross, a makeshift separation is created. Most often, small dust roads are dug out to allow Palestinians to cross under the fast, wide highways on which Israeli vans and military vehicles rush between settlements." (Weizman 2002) As a result, the Israeli citizen's journey was a hassle-free one hour. By contrast, the Palestinian traveler, subjected to a vast array of security checkpoints, inspection stops, and other impediments, spent five-and-a-half hours commuting the same distance. Regulated by military roadblocks and security control, the tentative and arbitrary borderlines, in this case, function as daily reminders of the misery and hardship the ongoing conflict imposes on a large section of the area's population. Strict regimentation of territory and the splintering of space "into a multitude of temporary, transportable, deployable, and removable barriers" that "shrink and expand the territory at will" operate to define who matters and who does not. (Weizman 2017: 6)

*The Road Map* highlights the relational dimension of border zones. It reveals that what comprises those spaces for some, enabling fluid circulation, may impede others. The artwork also calls attention to politics' spatialization along racial, ethnic, and religious lines. For large numbers of people, this form of politics has everyday life implications. Borderlines regulate their daily existence. They generate their social and political conditions. Their discriminations of inclusivity and exclusivity underwrite an everyday violence. So does the border security industry, which has thrived under neoliberalism.<sup>7</sup> The Road Map's chart of Israel/Palestine's contested territory

through travelers' politicized movement reveals much more about daily life's conditions in this contested geopolitical space than any abstract map ever could.

Political theorists Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson argue in *Border as Method* that economic globalization's new infrastructure has made national boundaries central to the heterogeneous organization of space and time. (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013) The new infrastructure loosens borders in contexts of economic expansion when there is a need for additional sources of labor and tightens them when the economy contracts. Keyed to a system that allows migration to flow because of structural changes in the economy, the borders of physical locations become boundaries that constantly assume new morphologies. They map the contemporary world's fragmented contours, generating tensions and conflicts well beyond the geopolitical line of demarcation between states. These contours function as neither endpoints nor starting points. Instead, they operate as mechanisms that propel daily life. In such a scheme, that which is human becomes the limit zone, and borderline lives grow exponentially.

Bouchra Khalili's *The Mapping Journey Project*, 2008-II, powerfully takes up this topic.<sup>8</sup> The multiscreen installation explicitly traces migratory routes to probe the diverse ways national borders function today. The "project" addresses what we could call, with the authors of *Border as Method*, a politics of "differential inclusion." (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013:163-166) In their theorization, Mezzadra and Neilson contend that rather than providing no space for actors to decide on their own migration or acting as a mere limit on already-formed subjects, borders "are productive of subjectivity." (Ibid.: 268) They operate dynamically, as much a means of inclusion as devices of exclusion. *The Mapping Journey Project* emphasizes that we can only correctly understand borders today in terms of circulation.

Comprising eight single-channel video projections focusing on economic globalization's labyrinth of migration regulations, *The Mapping Journey Project* draws attention to internal bordering practices neoliberal states use to assert control over global mobility. It relates the stories of eight individuals forced by political and economic circumstances to travel illegally

across frontiers throughout the Mediterranean basin and beyond. Khalili encountered her subjects by chance in transit hubs across Southern Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East.[9] Following an initial meeting, she invited each to narrate their journey on camera and trace it in permanent marker on a regional map. The project investigates how individuals resist arbitrary boundaries of identities and nation-states. The stories the subjects tell are harrowing. An array of nebulous figures regularly rob, beat, and arrest the travelers--distinctions between smugglers, gangsters, border guards, and police ebb away. As a result, the characters' routes become a critical element in each's story, casting the cartographically delineated frontiers as sites of struggle.

*The Mapping Journey Project's* videos feature the subjects' voices and hands articulating and sketching their trajectories across the surfaces of maps. The videos unfold in one long shot with no cuts.<sup>10</sup> As the figures draw their trips on the maps using a thick-tipped marker, they obliterate the existing borderlines, alluding to their arbitrariness. The characters, whose faces remain unseen, perform their own identity and story as they author their narratives. Khalili avoids depicting humans as simply at the mercy of the state or of corporate power, emphasizing instead the extent to which, despite all odds, people exercise agency and transform their world under these conditions.

At the literal level, *The Mapping Journey Project* links migration to economic opportunity and perilous escape from regions mired in destitute poverty, violence, and environmental disaster. It casts the North African exodus toward Europe as a phenomenon induced by historical conditions and local privations. Khalili explores how clandestine migration produces transnational micro-geographies interwoven with international border politics. But in another register, the stories of the individuals Khalili follows highlight the shifting terrain between legality and illegality that increasingly characterizes national boundaries. Borders do not just restrict the inclusion of citizens and the exclusion of non-citizens. As Mezzandra and Neilson show, today's borders "differentially include (some) non-citizens," even if only temporarily, "as intensely subordinated labor power through legal categories

(such as ‘illegal’).” (Mezzandra and Neilson: 159-166) The rights of these individuals are severely limited. When cheap labor is no longer required, the employer can easily and legally cut them from the payroll with little fear of reprisal. As a result, the migrants are perpetually susceptible to exploitation and constantly in fear of punishment or deportation. *The Mapping Journey Project* deconstructs the false line of “interior” and “exterior” that national geopolitical boundaries organize and presents these boundaries as material relationships often regulated by law.

Circulation and supply chain logistics that streamline distribution systems propel today’s economy. The development of global commodity “networks of production and assembly” blurs the distinctions between fabrication, distribution, and consumption. Components, people, and knowledge move fluidly across frontiers and heterogeneous transnational spaces. The neoliberal order manufactures topographies of work and productivity by identifying industrial locations, zones, and hubs through calculations that balance labor costs against those of transport. Sophisticated coordination and distribution technologies are crucial to global commerce.

While commodity production drove international markets in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, circulation and supply chain logistics that streamline distribution systems propel today’s economy. The development of what historians Terrence Hopkins and Immanuel Wallerstein describe as global commodity “networks of production and assembly” blurs the distinctions between fabrication, distribution, and consumption. Components, people, and knowledge move fluidly across frontiers and heterogeneous transnational spaces. (Hopkins and Wallerstein 1986: 157-170) The neoliberal order manufactures topographies of work and productivity by identifying industrial locations, zones, and hubs through calculations that balance labor costs against those of transport. Sophisticated coordination and distribution technologies are also crucial to global commerce. (Cowen 2014; Harney and Moten 2013; Tsing 2009).<sup>14</sup>

The centrality of infrastructure logistics to economic globalization was a longstanding preoccupation of artist Allan Sekula. His *Fish Story*, 1989-2005, casts circulation, transportation, and systematic coordination across oceans

as neoliberalism's dominant mode of production.<sup>12</sup> The artwork comprises over one-hundred color photographs organized as seven chapters or sequences, interspersed with twenty-six text panels across several rooms. To these, Sekula added two slide projectors, each containing eighty transparencies shown at fifteen-second intervals. *Fish Story's* overarching subject is the world's container shipping industry's operation, especially its role as global commodity distribution's unseen bedrock. Long-distance supply chains have defined neoliberal capitalism since the 1980s. It used to be that manufacturing was a rich-country activity. Poorer countries supplied raw materials to rich-country factories and then purchased their exports. But, as economist Marc Levinson explains, in the late 1980s, "the combination of cheaper container shipping, vanishing communications costs, and improved computing flipped the script. Manufacturers and retailers adopted new strategies--arranging, for example, to buy chemicals in Country A, transform them into plastics in Country B, mold the plastics into components in Country C, and deliver them to an assembly plant in Country D. Container ships made it possible to move parts and components from one country to another at low cost, while technology, soon accelerated by the internet, allowed managers to oversee their supply chains from a headquarters far away." (Levinson 2021) Sekula emphasizes the uniform container's crucial part in that infrastructure. *Fish Story* explores the transformation of world trade that the standard cargo box facilitated. As Levinson clarifies, two factors drove this change<sup>13</sup>: "One was the lowering of labor costs. The gap between the pay of factory workers in China or Mexico and those in Western Europe, Japan, or North America yawned so wide that even if the low-wage workers accomplished far less in an hour of work, producing in Shanghai rather than in St. Louis made financial sense. The other was economies of scale. Factories serving the entire world could specialize, making a small array of products in enormous volume and lowering the cost of each unit." (Levinson 2021) The transport vessel's innovation was pivotal to the emergence of a more expansive form of capitalism that handles greater volume and extends production and trade beyond what was previously possible. "Cold War 'containment' sought to limit the expansion of communism," cultural theorist

Rachel Price observes in comments that address the post-Cold War proliferation of shipping facilitated by the uniform cargo container. “Today all states seem to seek increasing containerization, to ship the greatest number of goods at once.” (Price 2015: 99)

In direct contrast to the prevailing fantasy of a derealized, dematerialized economy newly enabled by electronic instantaneity and the collapse of borders of all kinds, *Fish Story* tracks the plodding process across space that lies at the foundations of what anthropologist Anna Tsing calls “supply chain capitalism.” (Tsing 2009: 148-176) Mobilizing an abundance of photographs and text, Sekula’s project reflects on the slow, weighty transportation of goods over oceans, and the “isolated, anonymous hidden work, of great loneliness, displacement and separation from the domestic sphere,” aboard ships often registered in countries with few regulations and run by crews that seldom share a language. (Sekula 2002: 582) According to the artist, the uniform cargo containers hitched the stock market and harbor closer together than ever before: “If the stock market is the site in which the abstract character of money rules, the harbor is the site in which material goods appear in bulk, in the very flux of exchange... But the more regularized, literally containerized, the movement of goods in harbors, that is, the more rationalized and automated, the more the harbor comes to resemble the stock market.” (Sekula 1995: 12)

*Fish Story* connects the sea, port-side labor, container shipping, and long-distance trade to economic globalization’s unequal and destructive character. It reveals the tremendous damage the recent phase of globalization, in which highly trained employees in advanced economies create physical products to be manufactured where wages are lower, has wrought. It also touches on the extent to which this global marketplace’s impending catastrophe is in its utter destruction of the world’s oceans and Earth’s ecosystem. As the narrator states at the opening of *The Forgotten Space*, 2010, the important essay film Sekula made with Noël Burch, “The sea is forgotten until disaster strikes. But perhaps the biggest seagoing disaster is the global supply chain, which — maybe in a more fundamental way than

financial speculation — leads the world economy [and Earth’s environment] to the abyss.” (Sekula and Burch 2010)

To document the global supply chain’s political ecology as *Fish Story* does is to follow laborers and resources over oceans and other natural borders, across the boundary lines of nation-states, and through the economic divides that segment the Global North and Global South. It is also to track transport and communication’s logistical coordination across vast landscapes. The operation of long-distance supply chains produces not “things” or “places,” but sets of links or relations among them--an invisible but powerful global infrastructure. Operation here includes the effects of the channel’s “noise” on that which they put into circulation. But it refers primarily to the production of what the authors of *Border as Method* describe as “the connections, chains and networks that materially envelop the planet enabling and framing the labor and action of subjects well beyond those directly involved in the execution of the operation itself.” (Mezzandra and Neilson 2019: 246) The links Mezzandra and Neilson highlight — the factors that render border a method — establish relations crucial for the capitalist world system’s function today. In probing these links and relations, artworks such as *The Mapping Journey Project* and *Fish Story* make visible economic globalization’s processual and infrastructural operations across the world’s national borders.

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## Endnotes

1. Boltanski and Chiapello call this the "mobility imperative" (2005: 370) and argue that its assimilation places a premium on constant activity: "[I]n a connexionist world, mobility--the ability to move around autonomously not only in geographical space, but also between people, or in mental space, between ideas--is an essential quality of great men, such that the little people are characterized primarily by their fixity (their inflexibility)." (361)
2. Zygmunt Bauman (2000: 2) reasons that "fluidity" and "liquidity" are "fitting metaphors when we wish to grasp the nature of the present, in many ways novel, phase in the history of modernity."
3. Müller's Green Border comprised eight reproductions of historical prints depicting border areas between Austria and its neighbors. Müller also built a round table-like object using the most common types of wood in Austria and exhibited trees native to Austria alongside information on their botanical migrations in the pavilion's open space. The timber and trees troubled the national pavilion's territorial divisions. The artist hung the photo series that documented his repeated illegal crossing of Austria's "green border" on the pavilion walls.

4. Richard Misrach (Kencrest 2016; Mallonee 2018) reasons that “every single one of these personal belongings has an incredible story of a human being.” “Each item contains a mystery, a story of hardship and fear.”
5. Citing International Organization for Migration’s 2018 report, Peggy Levitt (2019: 214) notes, “in 2018, 244 million people, or 3.3 per cent of the world’s population, were international migrants.... This means that, by some estimates, one out of every seven people in the world today is on the move.”
6. On Multiplicity’s Solid Sea 03: The Road Map, 2003, see Multiplicity 2005: 181-183, and Multiplicity 2008: 70-74.
7. As Rob Nixon (2011: 20) observes, “Security has become one of neoliberalism’s signature growth industries, exemplified by the international boom in gated communities, as walls have spread like kudzu, and the marketplace in barriers has literally soared.”
8. On Khalili’s *The Mapping Journey Project*, see Emma Chubb 2015: 268-295.
9. Khalili (Schoene 2021) explains the process of encountering the participants in her project: “I would not say that I find the subjects who participate in my projects but rather that I meet them and sometimes they find me, rather than I find them.”
10. Two are in English, two in Italian, and the others in different Arabic dialects. For all the videos that are not in English, subtitles appear at the bottom of the screen.
11. Fredric Jameson (2010: 421-422) argues that the innovations of bit-structures such as the bar code and the uniform cargo container recast global capitalism’s infrastructure. Both shifted power onto the side of retail. They “stand as the mediation between distribution and consumption.”
12. On “the question of logistics--an object of dogged and nuanced inquiry in Sekula’s maritime works,” see Toscano 2018. On the increasingly common conjunction of contemporary art and logistics, Toscano and Kinkle 2015.
13. On the origins of the shipping container, see Levinson 2006. Peter Drucker (2007: 28) explains that the uniform shipping container grew “out of a new perception of a ‘cargo vessel’ as a material handling device.” The goal was “to make the time in port as short as possible. But this humdrum innovation roughly quadrupled the productivity of the ocean-going freighter and probably saved shipping.”

# Wolf in Sheep's Clothing: Transcending the Borders in Post-Socialist Nationalist Hungary

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## **ABSTRACT**

Hungary joined the European Union in 2004. Being a member of the EU does not prevent Hungary from enacting brutal measures at its national frontiers, fortified with a fence on its border with Serbia and Croatia, and aiming at ensuring border security by preventing asylum-seekers and immigrants from entering. The reference point has been the wall-building US with its similar mission of protecting its southern borders. However, the imaginary borders the regime daydreams about are much more distant: the lines drawn along the borders of the so-called Greater Hungary a hundred years ago.

The Memorial to Alliance in Budapest, commissioned by the reigning regime, advocates borderlessness regarding ethnic Hungarian communities — including minority Hungarians in neighboring countries like Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, Croatia, and Serbia. Still, the hidden idea behind embracing all the Hungarians is to return, even if in imagination, to greater Hungary by extending and not at all eliminating borders. The disguised function of the monument is to enhance and hypnotize the masses to divert them from everyday problems. All the visual elements of this monument under construction are intended to put in service affect, a populist tool so effectively used by authoritarian powers.

The monument is supposed to be completed by June 2020, the 100th anniversary of the Trianon Peace Treaty signed after WWI that truncated” Hungary. The interwar period of the country that lost almost half of its

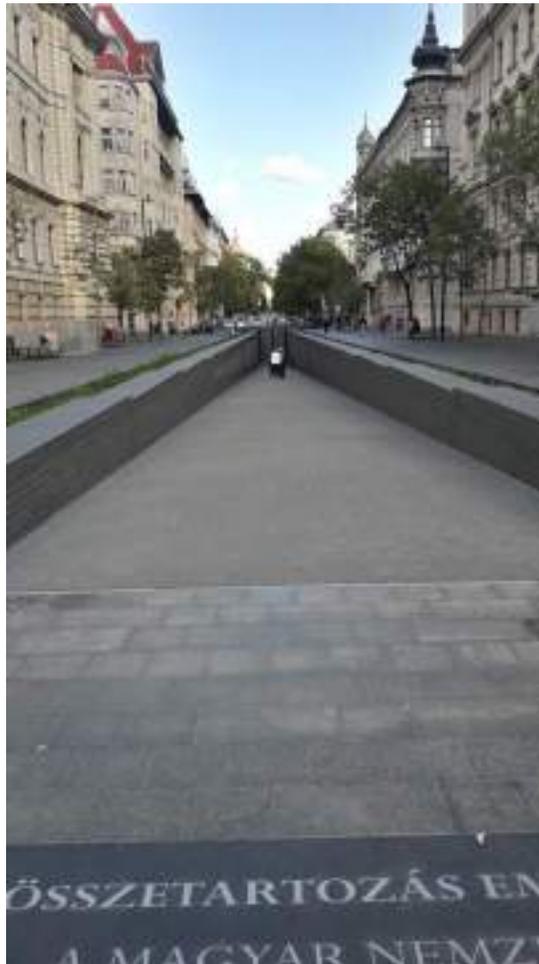
territory was about revisionism that led to an alliance with Nazi Germany in WW2. Lived state Socialism swept the issue of Trianon under the carpet and treated it as taboo, but it came back with a vengeance after the collapse of the Soviet Socialist system. Trianon and the previous boundaries of imagined greatness became a political tool in the hands of subsequent nationalist regimes: the wound has been kept open and instrumentalized for political purposes.

The paper is a case study intending to elaborate on how various visual and contextual elements of the memorial arouse the intended sentiments and fantasies of a “lost greatness” and power while communicating the opposite, the innocent and sentimental feelings of belonging that cross all the physical borders and transcend them.

**KEYWORDS**

Borders; Memorial; Monument; Nationalism; Trianon Peace Treaty

Although Hungary joined the European Union in 2004 and enjoys all the benefits of the membership, the country became the flagship of the process of re-nationalizing post-socialist countries. Being a member of the EU does not prevent Hungary from fortifying its southern border with a fence, aiming at ensuring border security by preventing asylum-seekers and immigrants from entering. The reference point has been the wall-building US with its similar mission of protecting its southern borders. However, the imaginary borders the regime daydreams about are much more distant: the lines drawn along the borders of the so-called Greater Hungary more than a hundred years ago.



The Memorial to Alliance in Budapest, commissioned by the reigning regime, advocates borderlessness regarding ethnic Hungarian communities—including minority Hungarians in neighboring countries, like Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, Croatia, and Serbia—but the hidden idea behind embracing all the Hungarians is to return, even if in imagination, to Greater Hungary by extending and not at all eliminating borders.

**Fig. 1.** Memorial to Alliance, Budapest, 2020.  
Photo: Author

The monument was completed by June 2020, the 100th anniversary of the Trianon Peace Treaty signed after WWI that “truncated” Hungary. By the terms of the punitive treaty, Hungary was shorn of two-thirds of its former territory and around 3 million people got beyond the border of the mother state, founding itself overnight in newly created neighboring nation-states as a minority.

Although the memorial does not mention Trianon, it obviously refers to it, aided by visual, verbal, and conceptual elements. The local reception of the monument referred to some of them, such as the timing and its enormous size with symbolic numbers (it is 100 meters long). However, it mostly evolved around its historical meaning and the historical sources it relied on. It focused on the verbal elements of the monument, namely the Hungarian names of cities and villages given in 1913, at the onset of WWI, in the time of aggressive and forced “hungarianification” by which traditionally Romanian, Slovakian, Serbian, and German names were forcefully changed.<sup>4</sup>

Concerning its physical realization and the entire arsenal of visibility of the spectacle, even the most critical readings greeted it as a “contemporary public artwork” instead of the army of traditional, monumental, figurative, or allegorical statues that overpopulate the public space. On the one hand, the reception problematized the historical message verbalized on the wall, which referred to the pre-Trianon world and borders; on the other, it hailed the aesthetics of the “cutting-edge realization”. As if the two aspects, the historical/verbal and artistic/visual, could be safely separated.

I intend to elaborate on how various visual and contextual elements of the memorial arouse the intended sentiments and fantasies of a “lost greatness”, while communicating the opposite, the innocent and sentimental feelings of belonging that cross all the physical borders and transcend them. My main question is, what does visibility, spatiality, and the monument's iconography communicate? More accurately: does it contradict the historical meaning or rather consolidate it?

It is obvious, at first sight, that the monument strongly resembles Maya Lin's Vietnam Veteran Memorial in Washington DC., the antithesis of the traditional monument type: it is anti-heroic, anti-monumental, one of the

first counter-monuments.<sup>2</sup> As opposed to the gigantic vertical statues on huge pedestals monumentalizing violence and glorifying war and hero, the horizontal monument provides the inverse of violence. The shared pain is evoked by the enormous open wound on the earth's surface. Not the heroes but the victims are enlisted in chronological order of their passing or vanishing, avoiding any military hierarchy. No direct or hidden moral lesson is provided, and no prearranged physical movement or prefabricated experience is incorporated into it. The symmetrical construction is dug into the ground, open from one side, making any free-floating movement available for those who approach it. The exhausting list of the deceased might evoke an association with a national cemetery located in the natural environment or of a mass cenotaph (empty, symbolic grave), as it is understood by those who place flowers or memorabilia next to the names. However, due to its low slope and openness, it still does not support the sensation of descending into a grave. The reflective surface of the black marble provides a meeting point for the living and the dead, yet, it does not arouse the gloomy sensation of shadow-falling thanks to the southern orientation of the structure and its natural green environment. It rather stimulates therapeutic contemplation and regeneration.

While the analogy with the Maya Lin memorial is profound, the differences, modifications, and distinctions are much more telling than the similarities of the recent analysis. The Memorial to Alliance is squeezed into an urban street in a densely built-up area. Although both memorials invite participation, while Maya Lin's construction is inclusive and luring, the Hungarian version is somewhat claustrophobic and bundles into a narrow channel.

The visitor is forced to join the "funeral procession" that comes around the eternal flame at the end and leaves the same way as entered. There is no way to randomly, ad hoc approach it. The downward slope leading beneath the ground level and the two massive closing the path resembles some huge gravestones. Altogether, the whole structure closely resembles monumental tombs, mainly to the circular Mycenaean tholos tombs to which a narrow road, an entrance passage, a dromos leads. The tholos tomb (also

known as beehive tomb), a burial structure characterized by its false dome created by corbelling, was a late Bronze Age development in Greece. It was not just a burial place but also a symbol for public display of power; the tomb's proportion and size corresponded to the deceased's social and economic status. It gives an illusion as if being carved into a hill, but as opposed to the chamber tombs that were, in fact, rock-cut, tholoi were largely built, towering above the grave. The entrance passage was stilted on both sides, which fostered the illusion of entering the hill.

The contemporary alteration of the tholos tomb situated in the modern world in an urban environment is the exact inverse of the ancient type; the grieving does not process into the illusionary hill but to the illusionary grave placed underground.

By bringing the architectural construction into play it bears strong resemblances of a cenotaph where the procession of the mourners turns into the chamber, as seen on the funerary monument in Augustinian Church in Vienna, Austria created for archduchess Maria Christina of Austria by Canova in 1805. The life-size figures in the sepulcher escort the Archduchess off to her resting place and providing her support on her final journey.



**Fig. 2.**  
Antonio Canova  
Cenotaph of  
Archduchess  
Maria Christina  
Augustinerkirche,  
Wien,  
1798–1805. Photo:  
Paolo Villa, ©  
Creative  
Commons

Who is, or are those deceased that are memorialized by the grandiose construction, given that not names of deceased persons are carved into the granite walls bordering the path that leads beneath the ground level? Instead, one of the sacred national symbols - such as, the flag, crown, national soil -, that is, the national geography in form of the list of places of the Kingdom's geography in 1913 are engraved.<sup>3</sup> What could be the purpose to set out names of places on the walls of a dromos that descends beneath the ground into a grave?



**Fig. 3.** Memorial to Alliance, Budapest, 2020, detail. Photo: Author

According to Émile Durkheim, the nation acts as a secular substitute for religion in the modern age. Sacrifice, so fundamental to religion, also exists in the nation. The memory of which to be kept alive is the duty of the nation. Followers of Durkheim has suggested that not culture, language, ethnicity and territory, as it has been generally conceived, serve as the real cement of the nation but the shared memory of blood sacrifice which is periodically renewed.<sup>4</sup> The function of sacrifice and symbols of defeats is that they create a connection with the past, and provide a sense of historical injustice or grievance around which the community can be mobilized. They are able to reinforce the sense of the nation as durable or even indestructible entity.

Western nationalism adapted many features of Christianity. According to Marvin and Ingle, scholars of nationalism as secular religion: “The flag is the skin of the totem ancestor held high. It represents the sacrificed bodies of its devotees just as the cross, the sacred object of Christianity, represents the body sacrificed to a Christian god. The soldier carries his flag into battle as a sign of his willingness to die, just as Jesus carried his cross to show his willingness to die...”<sup>5</sup> In both Christianity and nationalism, the violently sacrificed body becomes the god renewed—in Durkheimian terms—the transformed totem. In Christianity the revived totem is the risen Christ. In nationalism the transformed totem is the soldier resurrected in the raised flag. On the basis of his sacrifice the nation is rejuvenated.

Blood-sacrifice is coupled with birth and death, and as such its memory is capable of creating much stronger feeling of belonging, in each constructs, totem, god and nation, than the textual, verbal cohesion. War is one the ritual sacrifices. Group cohesion lies in this collective victimage, in a way, that the group sacrifices its members in order of its own survival.

Thus, “the underlying cost of all society is violent death of some portion of its members. To protect itself from acknowledging the cost of group unity, that render totem violence and its symbols sacred.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, what keeps the group together is not the sacrifice of the enemy but the sacrifice of its own. According to Rene Girard the reason for the ritual sacrifice of its own blood offered to the totem-god-nation is offered by the all-time enemy,

which is a kind of “supplementary-sacrifice” mourned and lamented by the nation. In another wording: The ritual victim gives an acceptable reason to kill our own. According to Caroline Marvin’s point, that is important for us, “what constitutes the nation in any moment is the memory of the last successful blood sacrifice that counts for living group members.”<sup>2</sup>

However, not all blood sacrifice rituals consolidate the group bond; the successful ones must satisfy some conditions: it must touch every member of the group; the victimage must be unanimous; it has to be an event that pose serious risk to group survival; win or lose, the outcome must be clear and definite. And most importantly; “Time and space must be redefined. History begins from this moment; territorial borders are re-created or reaffirmed.”<sup>8</sup> As for the trajectory of the rituals, “only another ritual can repair a failed ritual” and seemingly the number of victims is not decisive in this regard.

The question arises, why could certain events perceived to be a national trauma, while other, similarly tragic and traumatic events do not gain the same status in the collective memory. Perhaps because national mythologies are not natural or given, but are reinterpreted time to time, and adjusted to the nation’s actual needs. The “choice” of which traumatic event is to be elevated to the rank of national trauma depends on which one can satisfy the necessities of a national awakening.

It leads us to the following questions, how be rigged the mechanism of re-nationalization blast-off, how to add fuel to the fire of the smoldering national belonging after a long period of dormancy, for example in post-socialist nations after a long period of socialist internationalism? And most of all, whose interest is it to elevate certain events to the level of collective grievance while belittling or downright denying others? The principal point about rituals in nationalism could give us some clue in general. “The purpose of ritual is to sustain the group by repeating (at various levels of intensity) the act of group creation. A successful ritual stops time at the perfect creation moment. It repeats and freezes the retrospectively golden moment when the group was created out sacrifice.”<sup>9</sup>

In our case the interwar period offered the “perfect moment” which could have repeated and frozen the retrospectively golden moment. The core ideology and cohesive forces in “truncated Hungary” revolved around irredentism and revisionism. Politics and culture equally orbited around the mourning of the lost greatness of the nation, the cohesive force of which was nourished by pain and grievance felt over the disruption of the nation, symbolized by Trianon, which led to an alliance with Nazi Germany in the WW2. In lived State-Socialism the issue of Trianon was swept under the carpet supported and was treated as taboo. After the collapse of the Soviet Socialist system, it came back with a vengeance. Trianon and the previous boundaries of imagined greatness became a political tool in the hands of subsequent nationalist regimes: the wound has been kept open and instrumentalized for political purposes. Even if not in real politics, as Hungary became part of the European Union, but in symbolic politics this attitude has been resurrected and the narrative of Trianon-trauma reinvigorated.

The Hungarian rightist regime led by Victor Orbán that has reigned for three course in the last twelve years actively dreams itself back to the interwar period. Symbolic politics are in line with populist rhetoric that Hungarian sovereignty was lost during the two consecutive occupations of the country, first by the Nazis and then by the Soviets which period was rendered illegitimate. Consequently, the 1944 spectacle of Kossuth Square in front of the Parliament has been meticulously reconstructed.

In the crash course of re-nationalization of Hungary Trianon was that chosen trauma, and provided the national attitude that proved to be the most effective for the reigning regime to rebuilt the nation, and also offered the maximum of political benefits in form of votes coming from outside of the mother state from minority Hungarians who gained double citizenship.

In line with the idea that authenticity or an illusory nature of a symbols is irrelevant in regard of its impact on the imagined community, it hasn't posed any problem, that Greater Hungary in means of modern sovereign nation-state did not really exist, and that in the time of peace-negotiations Hungary was part of a multiethnic, multilingual empire, the

dualist Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Although, blood sacrifice, in the strict meaning of the word, was not connected to Trianon, still it could be designated a traumatic event, that pulled apart, “truncated” and crucified the embodied nation as was symbolised in the interwar period.

Conditions of the successful ritual, listed by Marvin, that consolidate the group bond mostly apply to Trianon. The condition as “it must touch every member of the group; the victimage must be unanimous” did not really apply, but it was solved by cutting through the Gordian knot. As the rhetoric goes: “those, for whom Trianon does not hurt, are not even Hungarians.” In populist regimes, those who do not share the national narrative sanctioned by the ruling elite, who avoid or oppose the constant hate-mongering and scapegoating indoctrination, could easily find themselves outside of the conceptual border of the nation. Retrospectively, those who negotiated the peace treaty got labelled as enemy, and have been made scapegoats for betraying and giving away the nation.

The other condition of a successful ritual, the possible erosion of the group cohesion was fulfilled by the disperse of the population and became actual threat, amplifying the fear over group survival. At the moment when the territorial borders were re-drawn, time and space has been truly redefined, and a new history began indeed.

The Holocaust could not be elevated to the level of national tragedy and trauma, as the compliance of the country has never got acknowledged, and has never been part of the official historical narrative. As a result, victims of the Shoah have not entered to the collective memory which was clearly communicated by Memorial for Victims of the German Occupation erected in 2014. At the same time, the symbolic horizon of the nation was extended to the lost mythical territory, Transylvania through the Sekler flag put to hang on the Parliament next to the Hungarian one instead of the European Union one by the nationalistic regime.



**Fig. 4.** Péter Párkányi Raab, Memorial for Victims of the German Occupation, Budapest, 2014. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Furthermore, through the Memorial to Alliance. the horizon of the symbolic nation's body got extended to the living bodies of the nation that have got beyond the borders living in another host-countries, However, as Szabolcs László historian with Transylvanian origin, rightly points out the memorial is not centered around the once real trauma of families being torn apart, family members being rived from each other's, but instead, it mourns the lost territory, the shrunken borders.<sup>10</sup> It projects the virtual map of Great Hungary into the ether, and into the imagination of the visitor.

As for the location and orientation of the memorial, it perfectly fits to the official rhetoric, into the web of a sort of elaborated baroque program with its allegories and layered meanings. It pulled together the seemingly separate elements of symbolic politics in public spaces. The new Monument bridges the building of the Parliament with its reconstructed interwar surroundings and Freedom square, which gave place to the irredentist statues

in the post-Trianon time. Nowadays, the square is the visual demonstration of the official interpretation of history: the innocence of double victimhood.

By erecting the Memorial for Victims of the German Occupation on the opposite side of the same square, where the last remaining socialist monument, the Monument for Soviet Heroes, dedicated to the Great Patriotic War still stands, the regime killed two birds with one stone. Through a kind of “conceptual iconoclasm,” it converted the meaning of the Soviet monument from liberation into a visual sign of occupation. The visitor of the newest monument marches toward this square.

Moreover, the choreography of the prescribed motion and the visitors' route shows remarkable consonance with the funeral processions and rituals (*pompa funebris*) in antic Rome (republican and imperial alike), in the Forum Romanum. In the very same way, as “for the members of the elite, the route and activities of the Roman funeral offered a valuable opportunity to display and increase their symbolic importance,”<sup>11</sup> the Memorial to Alliance’s sensorial impact and effects are carefully calculated in order to push through the official agenda and also to demonstrate power. The use and manipulation of symbol-laden public spaces, and surrounding architecture clearly resonate with the Roman practice of funerary procession.

The architecture, in both cases, is not just a neutral backstage design, but organic part of the ritual in which the visual rendering echoes the hierarchy of power. “Ancient texts and pictorial representations affirm that the Romans believed building of importance should be viewed frontally, ideally from an inferior position”<sup>12</sup> This is precisely the choreography that is followed by the funeral procession to the grave of the nation in Budapest! The funerary procession on its way back sees frontally and from an inferior position (from below) the three main entrance gates of the Parliament. The extended axis of the memorial points to the most important building, “house of the country”, the physical and symbolic embodiment of power.

The Memorial to Alliance, is a megalomaniac crowning of populist stage design for the political performance of the Orbán regime. The memorial is a visual crystallization of the regime’s mission to create ethnic cohesion on the base of collective grieving, and to hypnotize the population for its own

sake and interests. Seeking for homogenous ethnic community and cultural homogeneity the regime does not stop at the borders, advocated by the monument.



**Fig. 5.** Memorial to Alliance, Budapest, 2020. Photo: Author

The symbolic reenactment of a historical loss offered up to the masses effectively channels all anger, frustration, and anxiety felt over the growing inequality, insecurity and precarity of the society in the present into the past. No competing narratives are available in public space as the political, social and cultural discourses are tightly controlled. The “Hungarian people” (not at all citizens!) earned free tickets to the ghost machine running between past and present for taking an imaginary time-travel and are invited to participate in a psychedelic mass delusion to linger between present and past: forgetting about present worries and difficulties and perceiving the past as the source of anger and loss.

By the new millennium, the ex-East Bloc became a hostile region in which the anti-global and anti-EU stand is rather a smokescreen, an empty rhetoric hiding corruption and making it possible for the regimes to stay in power. The shared past and shared history are not considered in this

multiethnic, multicultural zone, but rather interpreted against each other. The fragile post-socialist democracies are on their way to being transformed into “illiberal” democracies, in an ongoing process in which Hungary takes the lead. Symbolic politics and memorial culture is a powerful tool in this transformation.

The newly erected memorial in the heart of Budapest is like a wolf in sheep’s clothing, advocating national belonging without borders, while putting back old ideas about Greater Hungary into the core of national mythology.

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### **Endnotes**

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2. Young, "The counter-monument."
3. Egri, "Vitatható-e?"
4. Marvin and Ingle, "Blood sacrifice."
5. Ibid. 770.
6. Ibid. 771.
7. Ibid. 775.
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9. Ibid. 777.
10. Szabolcs, "Memory politics."
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12. Ibid. 14.

# Archival Borders in Contemporary Art Practices: Imagistic and Cultural Crossings and Exchanges Between Global/Colonial Junctions and Local Differences

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## **ABSTRACT**

Taking into account that borders are not only fixed divisions between territories and people but that they also expand into a less defined zone of contacts and exchanges, this paper examines how some archival art practices deal with colonial and cultural transmissions and negotiations of images through borders. Here, two contemporary artworks are analyzed: *Colonial Modernity: the first mass in Brazil and Algeria* (2014), by French-Algerian artist Kader Attia, and *40 nego bom é um real* (2013), by Brazilian artist Jonathas de Andrade.

## **KEYWORDS**

Archive; Borders; Contemporary Art; Images; Coloniality

Taking into account that borders are not only fixed divisions between territories and people but that they also expand into a less defined zone of contacts and exchanges, this paper examines how some archival art practices deal with colonial and cultural transmissions and negotiations of images through borders – physically or symbolically, as represented in archives. The archives borders, I argue, reflect a concise representation of more extensive borders of the territories and discursive areas they help to regulate. As significant representation and organizational devices, or, conceptually, as regulators of society – as pointed out by Michel Foucault ([1969] 2002) –, the archives can be “contact zones” (Pratt 1992)<sup>1</sup> and “borderlands” (Anzaldúa 1987)<sup>2</sup> in their own right. From within the archive, some art practices challenge the determination or disjunction of borders – the ones internal or external to the archive.

One relevant aspect of the diffused areas around borders as “contact zones” or “borderlands,” and which the commanding and correspondent territory of the archive can represent, is that they are not only a zone crossed and inhabited by people but by the cultural references and imagery that travel and exist across them. The traveling images, signs, cultural references, and the discursive power they carry, are the material appropriated and intervened by the archival artworks focused on in this paper.

As Homi Bhabha, in reference to Martin Heidegger, observes, “a boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing” (1994, 1). However, as Bhabha argues, our contemporaneity is marked by a sense of living on borderlines of a “present” that either unfolds from or breaks with previous mentalities and experiences – for instance, modernity or coloniality – and that co-exist with different cultures and temporalities it would be crucial to take into consideration moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences beyond borders – taking into account an “in-between” space of what does not settle within one side or another of a border. In these “in-between” spaces, the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated (Bhabha 1994, 4). Similarly, I argue, it is in the “in-between” spaces

created by what is approximated by archival practices that one can grasp connections and disjunctions of cultural crossings.

As Bhabha underlines, we should consider that the epistemological 'limits' of ethnocentric ideas are also the enunciative boundaries of a range of other dissonant, even dissident histories and voices (1994, 4-5). In this sense, "the boundary becomes the place from which something begins its presencing in a movement not dissimilar to the ambulant, ambivalent articulation of the beyond," which Bhabha has drawn out (1994, 4-5). In a similar way that a bridge can escort people from a bank to another and is a gathering place that crosses (Bhabha 1994, 5), an archive can be a gathering place and a bridge for the crossing of images from a bank to another between cultures. Archives can also be diffused zones of shared colonial references that cross between different cultural formations.

As Thomas Richards has observed, the archive was one of the tools used, for instance, for the long-distance control of the expanded borders of the British Empire — both factually and fictionally (1993)<sup>3</sup>. One of the consequences of the administration of borders afar by archives is that it makes them more "invisible" or "abstract." As Homi Bhabha observes from the stammering words of the character Mr. Whisky' Sisodia, in Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*: 'The trouble with the Engeghish is that their hiss hiss history happened overseas, so they dodo don't know that it means.' (1994, 6).

In the same way that the archive can administer afar borders, it can, as the analysis of the artworks will demonstrate, make less tangible borders (such as the cultural ones) present or visible – even if as moving or dislocating frontiers. Intercepted, appropriated, and intervened by contemporary art practices, archives, the idea of the archive, and archival materials, can be used to critically examine the crossing borders and exchanges between modernities and coloniality that were/are disseminated globally, and modified and intervened locally. The archive as a gathering place can be used to critically examine what Bhabha referred to as the colonial text that articulates some interruptions, fragmentary symptoms, non-linear

relationships, disjunctive temporalities (1994, 173), and, one could add, uncanny repetitions.

The border relations of uncanny repetitions, disjunctive connections and crossing references of traveling images can be distinguished in two contemporary artworks — *Colonial Modernity: the first mess in Brazil and Algeria* (2014), from French-Algerian artist Kader Attia, and *40 nego bom é um real* (2013), from Brazilian artist Jonathas de Andrade – works which share some imagistic references and forms of operating within points of exchanges and disjunctions of colonial archives. In analyzing them, it can be argued, these art practices bring forward forms of tensioning and putting into motion contacts through borders, dislocating images that are relevant to national narratives and cultural identities from certain fixed positions.

**Colonial encounters and post-colonial disjunctions through archival images**

**Fig. 1.** Kader Attia: *Colonial Modernity: the first mass in Brazil and Algeria*, 2014. Oil on canvas and metal staples 68.875 x 95.75 x 2 inches



In *Colonial Modernity: the first mass in Brazil and Algeria*, a piece from 2014, Kader Attia stitches together two inaugural scenes: *The First Mass*

*in Brazil* (Fig.1: the smaller picture on the right), painted by the Brazilian painter Victor Meirelles in 1860, and, on the left, *The first mass in Kabylia*, created by the French painter Horace Vernet six years before, in 1854. With an undeniable similarity in their treatment of a shared theme, with almost identical composition and style, the influence of Vernet on Meirelles' painting has also been pointed out by art historian Jorge Coli (1998).

Brazilian academic painter Victor Meirelles made his version of the mass while staying in Paris. The theme of the painting, Brazil's first mass, came from what is considered Brazil's first document, the letter of discovery from Pero Vaz Caminha. Meirelles looked for inspiration for his painting in Caminha's letter per suggestion of his mentor, Araújo Porto-Alegre. For Porto-Alegre, Caminha's letter, which narrated the European arrival and "encounter" with the new land and its native populations, was a perfect document as a base for an academic historical painting – which was Meirelles' specialty. Coli (1998) observed that one could imagine that the letter, with its meticulous descriptions of the landscape, the people, and the scene of the mass, would be enough for the work's genesis.

However, Meirelles found inspiration for the composition in Horace Vernet's *The first mass in Kabylia* (Fig. 1: picture on the left), which was shown in the Paris Salon in 1855.

The episode portrayed by Vernet, the first mass of the French colonial force in Kabylia, Algeria, had happened two years before, in 1853, as part of a French colonial mission in North Africa. The mass scene celebrates the eventual defeat of the Kabylia tribe, the last stronghold against French colonization in the region. Commissioned to portray the colonial conquest, Vernet visited Algeria many times since the 1830s. It is said that Vernet actually staged a provisory altar for the mass in Kabylia (Coli, 1998). He then had double authorship as the stage director of the religious conquering scene – both in locus and its pictorial representation –shaping, as Coli calls, a "historical truth" about it (Coli 1998).

Nonetheless, similar operations of producing "historical truths" can be distinguished in other historical paintings, even when the scenes were not physically staged or personally witnessed. This is the case of Meirelles' First

Mass, which became a critical iconographical reference for a “founding act” that is considered the birth of Brazil but conceived as a historical landmark and an inaugural scene 300 years ago later than the original event itself<sup>4</sup>. This historical landmark was cherished in the construction and, to use a Benedict Anderson term, imagination of the nation after its independence in 1822 when there was a need to outline a tale of the country's origin. With much of the visual imagery of this narrative being created in the Second Reign to which Meirelles was a key figure as a commissioned painter, Vernet ended up inadvertently offering his vision to Brazil's historical imagination, I would argue, rather than historical truth – which does not stop such imagination having a historical ballast. After all, as Anderson defines, a nation is an “imagined political community” (2008, 32), shaped by imagination and the narration that forge an “original” past.

In Brazil's case, the historical ballast of a particular trans-colonial imagination meant the creation of a definitive historical image that has shaped the imaginary of Brazil's “origin” ever since. Ironically, since its creation, it has been praised for its “historiographical accuracy” (Estrada 1888). In 1888 Luis Gonzaga Duque Estrada analyzed that Meirelles' *First Mass* “could not be, but what is there” – being based on Caminha's letter, the painting was considered a perfect visual tale of “what history tells us and nothing more” (Estrada in Oliveira 2020, 202).

However, the “history” that Estrada refers to was based on the unilateral narrative of Caminha's letter, which showed a one-sided voice and point of view: that of a romanticized Portuguese perspective about the “arrival” in the “new” land. Caminha's letter was a poetic report addressed to the Portuguese king and bore the influence of the biblical account of arrival in paradise as a promised land. The native population was fitted into this account as a docile uncivilized population, marveled by the European arrival and ready to be guided by them. In this way, the native populations were portrayed in the definitive visual representation of Meirelles' painting.

Despite the formal similarities in Vernet and Meirelles' compositions and their theme, as well as in the colonial conquering presence, some local differences can be seen in the two paintings, not only in their geography and

landscape but also in the treatment of the local populations and their attitudes. While in Vernet's painting, the local army appeared in a very aligned and formal position of deference to the religious celebration, in Meirelles' scene, the local population is less rigidly distributed, suggesting a spontaneous interest and deference to the newcomers. This was a view in tune with Brazil's romantic attempt to include the local population in a national project – albeit an inclusion by submission rather than by agency. In that sense, Meirelles used Vernet's “template” colonial image and adapted it to Brazil's national project.

Since its creation, Meirelles' image became one of the most well-known paintings in Brazil and a sort of official visual account of Brazil's “birth”, reproduced extensively in history schoolbooks, on paper money and stamps (Mello Júnior 1962). Becoming an 'icon' of Brazil's national history and its “discovery” narrative, Meirelles' painting created an afterlife for Vernet's colonial view across the other side of the Atlantic, expanding a colonial visual archive through trans-Atlantic borders (furthermore, Vernet's *First Mass* has disappeared, being at the same time outlived and surviving in its influence over Meirelles' *Fist Mass*).

Pointing to the connection between different national imaginations and their historical ballasts, Attia's work suggests a common colonial matrix that shapes these imaginations across very distant borders and different historical times. In this sense, Attia's disjunctive stitching together of both images is very telling of the non-linear relationships, disjunctive temporalities and uncanny repetitions of a “colonial text” (as Bhabha could have said), which Attia articulates within a colonial archive of mirroring historical paintings. Moreover, it points to an afterlife and continuation of the original image (Vernet's) that surpasses its historical, geographical, and cultural borders.

The relationship between the two paintings, as disjoined articulated by Attia, opens up a series of issues about cultural encounters and exchanges propelled by modernity and coloniality: among them, the existence of multiple modernities; the different historical times that co-exist within one chronological time; the different experiences of colonialism and coloniality in

different locations; and the transnational shared invention of modern nations and their nationalisms. The meeting of these images and their relationship of transference and influence, as exposed by Attia, also works as a negative blueprint of the lively encounters, exchanges, appropriations, translations, and adaptations between cultures, which has been discussed within the field of cultural studies concerning modernity, its migrations and diasporas (Hall 1996; Canclini 2005; Bhabha 1994). What we see in Attia's work is not the fruitful intercultural formations of the Black Atlantic, as analyzed by Paul Gilroy, or how the African people were at the center of triangulation and movement between margins that would change the world history and many of its cultures, as suggested by Achille Mbembe (2017), but the borders of a homogenizing colonial project spreading across both sides of the Atlantic. The projected unilateral views and the shared colonial imagination can be appropriated, fissured, and opened up by critical and aesthetic archival interventions such as Attia's.

Attia's work is in tune with how the notions of borders, especially national ones, have been reassessed by analyses of forms of cultural exchanges, approximations, and tensions such as the ones brought forward by post-colonial studies (Bhabha 1994; Hall 1990). The reshifting in notions of nationality, identity, and their interconnection with histories and memories opens up multiple possibilities of navigation between cultures and shared references, which helps to challenge fixed categories, symbolic stocks, and legacies related to these categories – also opening up trans-national shared tropes and decolonial conversations, which can be continued in the fissures of these re-opened borders. Stitching together copies of the two contemporary nineteenth-century paintings, Attia leaves exposed the mending of the mismatched encounters of cultures, stressing the survival of some of these stitches in the present.

In archival art practices, while sometimes stitches of cultures or shared projections are made visible in image encounters and frictions, like in Attia's work, other times stocks of images are mixed in ways that hide their mending together. Unpacking the relationship between these archival images – being by tension or by incorporation of each other – art practices can

illuminate further understandings about the encounters and negotiations through borders at stake in archival formations. They can also, as the analysis of Jonathas de Andrade's *40 nego bom é um real* will demonstrate, use the archival force, or the impulse of archives in making connections, against the archive's authority or limits, "anarchiving" some of the orders and borders established by colonial archives.

### **Global transmissions and local interpretations of colonial archives**



**Fig. 2.** Jonathas de Andrade: *40 nego bom é um real* [40 black candies for R\$ 1.00], 2013 (installation view). 16 silk prints on wood, 7 acrylic engraved boards, 40 riso prints on paper, 40 laser prints on paper, variable dimensions

A parodic use of different visual and cultural references to unarchive a local identity and critically analyze colonial heritages fixed into a social structure is at stake in Jonathas de Andrade's work *40 nego bom é um real* (Fig.2), from 2013.

Living and working in Recife, a large city in the Northeastern region of Brazil, Jonathas de Andrade draws on local archives (both literal and conceptual ones) as well as on images and references from different origins and scopes of circulation to create an installation that critically relates to certain aspects of his local "culture" – albeit, inserted in a globalized world.

The installation in question, *40 nego bom é um real*, resembles a cartoon structure and it narrates the production of a popular local banana sweet, the nego-bom candy. In the strips of serigraphy-printed images and blocks of texts that accompany them (Fig.3) one can see an illustrated step-by-step guide for the candy production – indicating what type and how many bananas to use to make the sweet, how green they should be, how much sugar to put in, and which color the mixture should be when cooking.



**Fig. 3.** Jonathas de Andrade: *40 nego bom é um real* [40 black candies for R\$ 1.00], 2013 (detail)

The second part of the installation (right side of Fig.2) shows individual profiles of the candy production workers, in image and text, as well as a map of a fictional banana farm and candy factory. When further examined, the information contained in the images and narrative produced by de Andrade opens up an underlying archive of references that expand the significations of the work in relation to social and racial structures that are part of Brazil's

Northeastern society and, in larger scale, of the colonial legacy that shapes the region.

The region of the Northeast, which appears as an essential context to de Andrade's work, has a local culture considered traditional in Brazil, with distinctive regional traces. Despite some of its spontaneous manifestations, the region, which is very extensive, formed by diverse geography and different cultures, started to be characterized as one culture, having some of its diverse expressions inscribed as part of the same geographical borders.

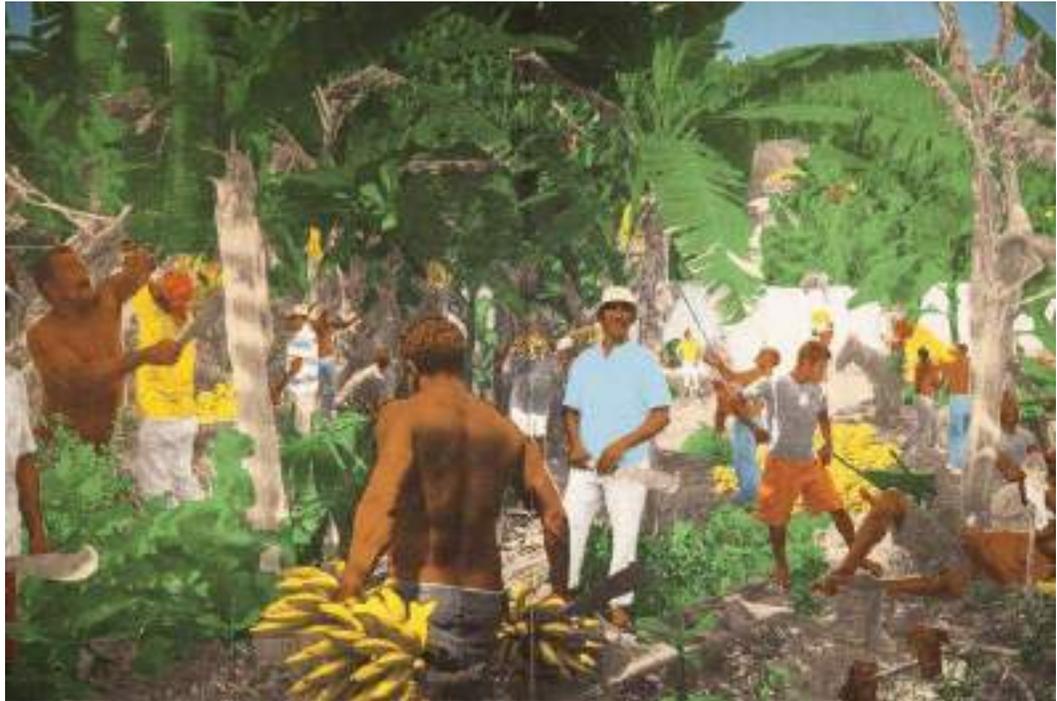
Notwithstanding its image as traditional, the Northeast region is the creation of a 20th-century regionalist project that aimed to fortify the area politically. Basing the characterization of the region on aspects inherited from its plantation system past (reinscribed in characteristics reinforced in the present such as the rural heritage, the hard-worker, and mestizo population, the afro-descendent traditions), the regional response ended up generating a version of an "essentialist" identity that reflects colonial traces fixed in the present (dos Anjos 2005).

In this sense, the traditions and culture of the Northeast seem to be performed and carried on in the manner of what Manuela Carneiro da Cunha (2009) called "culture between inverted commas," that is, a self-referring fixed culture that populations create in order to represent themselves for others. Once defined and propagated, this culture starts to be performed by the population. In this case, it seems that the Northeastern culture got fixed on a performance of coloniality that is interpreted as part of the local traditions. Naturalized by everyday practices, this coloniality is exposed by de Andrade's work in the use of some double meanings that can be distinguished in local repertoires.

The first reference to the double meanings in the work is in its title, *40 nego bom é um real*, a phrase chanted by street vendors of the popular candy that can be heard in the streets of Recife. The literal translation of the chant into English would be something like "Forty Good (or Tasty) Blacks for one real." Although sounding like a very explicit form of racism to an outsider, the repetition of the chant becomes "naturalized" by the playful tone and its ubiquity in the streets. As de Andrade admits, it was only after hearing the

chant many times that he realized it represented an “audacious formula about racism, cheap labor, and a naturalization of servitude and of a racist and classist issue” (2014).

One of the strategies of de Andrade’s work is then to use imagistic and textual representations to create a dialectic of naturalization and denaturalization of racism – using a similarly playful and double-meaning tone to the chant itself. Only when examined closer does references to the survival of Brazil’s colonial past in the present and representations of a contented ‘servitude’ of racialized people start to emerge in the apparently cheerful and celebratory images of the installation.



**Fig. 4.** Jonathas de Andrade: *40 negro bom é um real* [40 black candies for R\$ 1.00], 2013 (detail)

A famous reference that reverberates in one of the images from *40 negro bom* [...] (Fig.4) is Victor Meirelles’ historical painting *A Primeira Missa no Brasil* [*Brazil First Mass, 1861*] – as also seen in Attia’s image montage (Fig.1) –, which shows Indigenous peoples laying on the ground and hanging

from trees while deferentially watching the religious service of their new colonial “masters.” It has been previously indicated how the success of Meirelles’ painting disseminated a colonial iconography in Brazil that supported the construction of a national “history” and imagination in which native populations are a placid part of a colonial “civilizing’ project”. A similar construction in relation to black and mixed-race people permeates the visual representation of ‘typical’ Northeastern workers in *40 nego bom* – who appear in a similar pacified and languid position of servitude in the continuation of a colonial structure.

The list of references that emerge from examining *40 nego bom*[...] can be extended: some of its images remind of visual representations of racial stereotypes, such as those present in colonial-style advertising images as from the French chocolate drink Banania (Fig.5). De Andrade’s bold color serigraphs might also remind one of the Warholian pop art visuality and its operation of image appropriation and reproducibility.

Without a doubt, de Andrade’s work considers the imagistic matrices that are part of contemporary cultures and the fact that stock images are available for appropriation and interventions. As Hal Foster has identified in relation to contemporary art of the early 2000s, image appropriations were also part of the strategies of art practices that presented an “archival impulse”, a notion of artistic practice "as an idiosyncratic probing into particular figures, objects and events" (Foster 2004, 3). These practices, Foster argued, “seek to make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present” (2004, 4). To do that, they elaborate on, among other things, found images. The sources could be familiar archives of mass culture or more obscure ones. These works, stresses Foster, would be archival since they not only draw on informational archives but they produce them as well – creating new matrixes of citation and juxtapositions (2004, 5).

**Fig. 5.** Banania “y’a bon...”:  
 Frech chocolate drink  
 advertisement, 1920s-30s



As Foster pointed out, the archival impulse followed a will to connect in the archive what is not necessarily side-by-side in the world (2004, 21). The will would be not so much to totalize as it is to relate, “to probe a misplaced past, to collate its different signs (sometimes pragmatically, sometimes parodically), to ascertain what might remain for the present” (Foster 2004, 21).

It is essential to underline that the images and references assimilated by Attia’s and de Andrade’s works are not treated by them as part of one global or historically unbounded imagistic archive (where everything could be connected to anything). However, they are treated as chained in processes of transmission and adaptation between “global” or transnational references and local or national aspects – guided by a common thread of colonial links.

In tune with this approach observed in the works of Attia and de Andrade, Andreas Huyssen has similarly argued that the “transnationality” of image technology and other “modern” media are reinterpreted and shifted by art practices from different parts of the world concerning specific historical contexts and notions of “memory” (2014, 59). That is, the borders of visual archives available to contemporary artists are enlarged by globalization and the digital era, but the selection and reinscriptions of the images often operate in relation to specific local histories, social issues, and memories.

What interests here is to reflect on how this will probe the signs of the past into the present or of other cultures in one’s own is at play in the focused artworks in the sense of proposing not general or global counter-narratives but counter-narratives that create connections between specific colonial histories. That is, the archival art practices analyzed here seem to understand the powerful symbolic space of reinscriptions of borders and margins at stake in archives and use this potency to bring forward some illuminating connections between colonial pasts and presents, global and local cultures, and transnational modernities and coloniality, working with the “contact zones” or “borderlands” created by the transit of images in between these different areas and temporalities. One of the strategies is to make present and visible within new archival inscriptions that otherwise seemed diffused and invisible in the larger borders of everyday cultures and national narratives.

Another way of looking at these archival art strategies is how they use and dislocate globalized colonial archives to intervene in them with decolonial perspectives on local social and historical formations. That is, they can depart from archives of what Mbembe called “the Western consciousness of the blackness” (2017) to re-focus on how this general “Western consciousness” shapes specific histories or operates locally. Through archival imagistic operations, they point to globalized colonial borders reproduced locally. It is also from archives that they deconstruct certain borders and engage with decolonial practices.

In this sense, I argue that, by incorporating some of the references transmitted within multiple flows of global and colonial imagistic and cultural exchanges and by weaving further “transversal threads” between

them, works such as Attia's and de Andrade's challenge images' boundaries and negotiate the meeting and crossings of their symbolic lives. The network of possible references intertwined with the images underlines the archival potential of multiple connections between the past and the present, between different cultures, and between global transmissions and local issues.

Poignantly dealing with images that dialogue with certain shared tropes of colonial modernity, the artworks critically unfold common colonial matrixes that plurally reflect different cultures. Doing so, they also point to the archive (both in the sense of incorporating archival references and an archival logic of their works) as a place of maintenance of symbolic borders as well as a place from where they can be dislocated and tensioned.

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### Endnotes

1. As Pratts defines, "contact zones" as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination – like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today" (1992, 4).
2. In the case of the borderlands explored by Gloria Anzaldúa they can be physical, psychological, sexual, spiritual or linguistic, as a result of two or more cultures that edge each other (1987). As Anzaldúa analyses, "a border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is a constant state of transition" (1987, 3). She argues that around the U.S.-Mexican border, lifeblood of two worlds merge to form a third country – a "border culture". As Anzaldúa defines, having grown up between two cultures (the Mexican and the Anglo), and being a lesbian in a Catholic upbringing, she is a "border woman" (1987).
3. As Richards points out, "the narratives of the late nineteenth century are full of fantasies about an empire united not by force but by information" (1993, 1). According to him, most people involved in the British Empire in the nineteenth century were aware that the empire was a collective improvisation; that is, it was less of a unity than they would have liked it. Their tactics, then, was to try to fill the gaps in their knowledge with as much information as they could: they collected information, they surveyed, they mapped, they classified species, and they produced statistics. All this paper shuffling required some kind of archive for its unification. They pared the Empire down to file-cabinet size, argued Richards (1993, 4). As Richards concludes, "the truth, of course, is that it was much easier to unify an archive composed of texts than to unify an empire made of territory" (1993, 4). What Richard analyses is not only the 'information explosion' of the British Empire, but the theme of control of knowledge that crossed to the literature of the time. In this sense, the archives in fiction would also be an important archival source of the time.
4. The narrative of Brazil's "discovery" was an invention of 19th century romanticism in Brazil that answered to the necessity of construction of a national tradition. It was within this context that Pero Vaz de Caminha's "Discovery Letter" was first published in 1817 and turned into a celebrated document (Coli 1998).

# **“I want to show something beyond this: I want to show life.” Khaled Jarrar’s art beyond borders from the global turn perspective<sup>1</sup>**

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## **ABSTRACT**

As Wendy Brown stands in the *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (2010), the first decade of this century has seen a great increase in walled states, a tendency that hasn’t changed in the last decade. The art of Khaled Jarrar (Jenin, 1976) is the result of this global tendency and represents a valuable angle on this topic due to his experience of two of the most emblematic walls of our age, which stand between Mexico and the United States of America and between Palestine and Israel.

My purpose is to present a selection of the most significant works of this Palestinian artist to highlight the uniqueness of his contribution to the contemporary description and understanding of the border and its paradoxes from a global perspective. Indeed, this uniqueness is given by Khaled’s ability to join different countries and histories in a “local-global continuum”, quoting Darian-Smith and McCarty (2017), which goes beyond the geo-political landscape given by the concept of the nation-state. For his connection with key topics of contemporary art theory — such as global turn, postmodern hermeneutics, cultural studies, post/neo-colonial turn, and multiculturalism — Jarrar’s reflection on the meanings of the border could be considered as one of the most emblematic voices of contemporary visual arts.

## **KEYWORDS**

Border; Palestinian Art; Global Turn; Transculturality; Activism

In July 2016, a small group consisting of Palestinian artist Khaled Jarrar, the Italian film-maker Matteo Lonardi and other Middle Eastern, European, and American members of the project CultuRunners traveled along the U.S./Mexican border from San Diego/Tijuana to El Paso/Ciudad Juarez. The trip was part of a multi-year artists' road trip filmed between the United States and the Middle East against the backdrop of the 2016 Presidential elections. This major project, called "Crossing the Line. Middle Eastern Artists in Trump's America", was conceived as a way of proposing a new type of journalism, which – as stated on the project's web page – "champions the soft power of artists to explore complicated subjects with empathy and insight".

As Wendy Brown stands (2010), the first decade of this century has seen a great increase in walled states; a tendency that hasn't been changed in the last decade. Along with his peculiar biography, the art of Khaled Jarrar (born in Jenin - Palestine, 1976) is the result of this global tendency and represents a valuable witness of his experience of two of the most emblematic walls of our age – one between Mexico and the United States of America, and the other between Palestine and Israel – and embodies a critical representation of these walls, and especially of their impact on the societies involved in the political and economical conflicts of these borders.

As I will try to demonstrate, Jarrar's participation in this project eventually extended far beyond the concept of "soft power" and the alternative journalism realm related to the project that gave rise to the installation of *No Man's Land*<sup>2</sup>.

The artist's journey took him from San Diego to Ciudad Juárez in a 34-foot RV converted into a mobile artist studio, crisscrossing and following the U.S.-Mexico border included in this area, being part of a series of ten public space interventions meant to explore the ideological boundaries between the United States and the Middle East, in a context of increasing islamophobia as part of the generalized xenophobia instigated during the Trump era, traveling from the geopolitical border with Mexico and then within the south-eastern states, making the border not only a matter of

international policies but also as a national issue, looking back on American narrations about society and culture.

From this perspective, the project itself fits remarkably with the definition of Mezzadra and Nielson (2013) of the border as an “epistemic angle” from which we can try to analyze and forge our contemporary world<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, Jarrar’s work goes one step further by proposing a public artwork that converts this space into an opportunity for dialogue and exchange, and not only on a bi-national scale: the making-off *No Man’s Land* enabled Jarrar to interact with local people, showing through a selection of his video artworks the affinities between Palestinian and Mexican – and indigenous – people living along a militarized border.

Jarrar negotiated his narration with these communities, suggesting a global perspective that introduces a disruptive view in border art and curation that we can summarize as follows: intervening on the border not only to denounce the local and global problems implied in its existence and militarization – and, so, other borders: social, cultural and economical borders from which the geo-political one arose and which it perpetuates – but also to show it as a space for encounter and dialogue from a glocal perspective, a place from which we, as human beings, citizens and non-citizens, can build up new forms of inclusion and, thus, of social disruption. In this sense – and considering the recent global spread of cultural production that is suggesting this kind of use of the space of the border, actually recovering its sense of common space – geopolitical borders can be seen as key labs for future societies and cultures.

Jarrar also literally broke the border by using a part of the fence from Tijuana to make his ladder – as it is locally known, *Khaled’s Ladder* or *La escalera de Khaled* – and, of course, by doing that he was likely to cross the line of another border: that of national and international law. This barely legal act – illegal and nude as many lives which cross the border, as Agamben would say – was the beginning of an artwork that is ironically literal, as many of Jarrar’s, by turning a fence into a ladder.

This wasn’t the first time Khaled broke up the wall and turned it into a piece of art: he had already intervened in the apartheid wall between

Palestine and Israel in the Ramallah area in 2012, using the concrete extracted from the wall to create playful and polemical sculptures such as the *Buddy Bear* (2013) or the *Volleyball or Football piece* (2013)<sup>4</sup>.

Materiality itself tends indeed to be highly significant in Khaled's work. If both iron and concrete evoke the hardness of the wall and the isolation of the communities living alongside, and, in this sense, these works evoke a still-life on the border, their appropriation and alteration also suggest that even this hard material and its social effects can be subverted, as a form of resistance to the hegemonic narratives and practices which argue the need of a militarized border.

As quoted in the title of this intervention, there's still life on and beyond the border, resilient life. That's what Khaled's playful performances on the Palestinian wall whisper to the observe. And that's exactly what Jarrar wanted to show to the Mexican community he interacted with: the counter-narration of life on the border as a way to mutual understanding and as a strategy for the construction of a transnational society and culture, in contrast to the dramatic media coverage that practically portrays the area of the border wall as a war zone.

By "community" I am referring to those who are living and working along and across the border, including members of the local police who approached the artist while he was taking a closer look at the fence and beyond. The way Jarrar handled his encounter with the police was particularly interesting and was the same with the civilians living in the area that became the site of Khaled's ladder: he showed them some extracts from the series of short-films *Infiltrators* – Khaled's debut documentary – filmed in 2012 on – or it would be better to say "across" – the Palestinian border, again, to show life – ordinary and human life – of civilians living on the border to an audience that, despite the cultural differences and its poor knowledge of the historical background of the State of Palestine, was widely familiar with the informal crisscrossing practices of a border area's society and the concept of ghettoization<sup>5</sup>. These same practices have been continuously shaping their own identity, and also recalling another controversial topic about all militarized border areas that, regionally, was aggravated in the Trump era,

that is, systematic family separation: an issue that recurs significantly in Jarrar's interviews with civilians living in the border area both in Palestine and Mexico, and a practice that became strategically relevant in U.S. illegal migration policy, whose extreme consequence was the creation of specific centers of detention along the border which are tragically infamous.

Khaled's intervention goes far beyond the installation of the ladder as such, which can be interpreted, more precisely, as part of a wider performance of the artist on and about the border. The artist didn't limit himself to exploring the topic, as other contemporary artists would have done: he needed to go literally beyond borders by using his social interaction and work to create a connection on site. The outcome is not a self-referential documentary filled with conjectures the artists didn't share with locals, nor have the locals been exposed to narrative exploitation as passive subjects: rather it's the result of a blend of both planned and spontaneous collaborations and interactions on a transnational and transcultural level that shaped the performance and its permanent outcome, the artwork, from the beginning to its results.

Indeed, the making of the ladder itself was carried out in collaboration with students of the New Mexico State University in Las Cruces: another stop-over in Crossing the Line's road trip that allowed Jarrar to use the ladder to suture the boundary and strengthen the connections between the U.S. and Mexican border states communities in a very coherent way. The ladder's installation in Ciudad Juárez was a collaborative work with locals as well, and the placing didn't represent the end of this collaboration, rather, it was the beginning of a long-term process of communitarian re-appropriation of the border's public space where children played a first significant role. As Khaled's ladder was placed in front of the border wall in the surroundings of Ciudad Juarez, it very soon drew the attention of the civilian communities living onsite, particularly children, with the artwork not only becoming a sort of playground but also being intervened with textile works by children of the local indigenous community.

This unexpected appropriation not only fulfilled Jarrar's goal to give the local community a monument that, as a bridge, would bring people

together –transforming the object of the wall into its antithesis – but also enriches the artwork’s narration of the border with a wider view, as the piece can also be understood as a vehicle for connecting a layered and global history of exclusion and resilience that follows the contemporary art and curation tendency to use the artwork – and the artist himself in this case – as a disruptive social medium, a counter-narrator, which is not new, of course: what is more recent is the global scale of the social and cultural connections enabled by the initiative, along with the significant recurrence of this phenomenon in the last two decades, especially in conflictive spaces like geopolitical borders. Jarrar’s commitment to making people see beyond these spaces, and especially walls, is a recent, emblematic case related to this tendency.

A former captain of the Palestinian Presidential Guard, Jarrar is familiar with international policies, militarized geopolitical control, and bureaucracy.

Indeed, it is not a matter of chance if isolation, separation, and control represent emblematic topics in Jarrar’s work. With this background, he devoted his career as an artist to a systematic subversion of these realms, and the multiple mechanisms of exclusion they represent, with a focus on the topic of the border in its diverse meanings: the “line in the sand”, the wall, as well as invisible social and cultural borders that shape our contemporary worldview.

He often took advantage of this peculiar familiarity to propose a disruptive, and sometimes satirical, simulation of the practices of international policy, such as the bureaucratic ones, as in the case of the fake Palestinian Passport stamping action of 2011<sup>6</sup>.

Or, and this is another interesting case that brings the artists back to the southern area of the US, quite close to the border, *Good at shooting, bad at painting*, where we can recognize another inclusive, transnational, ironic, and strongly political performance referred to the political use the CIA made of modern art, and especially abstract expressionism, during the Cold War as part of a global strategy of propaganda and control, subverting, again the

original, function of the medium, the weapon, to create a highly allusive piece of art in collaboration with local institutions and public<sup>7</sup>.

And, more recently, Jarrar's online selling of handfuls of Palestinian soil to turn them into NFTs: a project ironically titled "If I don't steal your home, someone else will steal it", where the general virtual public is invited to the virtual acquisition of Palestine's disputed soil as a way to express transnational civil solidarity in response to the constant annexation of these lands to Israel and the consequently forced expulsion of Palestinian families<sup>8</sup>.

Like *No Man's Land*, the artistic action is intended as a way to express transnational solidarity and understanding: a purpose that Jarrar has been chasing across all of his initiatives, often employing utopian and playful practices that convert the border into a place where a more humanistic and global narration is possible.

To touch things – showing that they aren't untouchable and unbreakable – and try to change their function and use them to make bridges between humans is exactly how the artist defines his work.

Jarrar embodies the ultimate role of the contemporary artist as a radicant infiltrator who turns a disputed public space into a method and an opportunity for social and transcultural dialogue, de-centralizing and de-colonializing the narration of the border by shifting it to the very center of a global debate about the concept of humanity.

From the global turn perspective described by Darian-Smith&McCarty (2017), Jarrar brilliantly uses the border as a method to show the interconnection and mutual constitution of global processes that manifest at multiple levels – transnational, regional, national, and local – turning the border into a privileged space for social inclusiveness and political expression.

The artist can be considered as a distinguished inheritor of the first transnational art initiatives and struggles that rose just on this geopolitical border from the seventies, who picks up this heritage and brings it to a wider perspective thanks to the opportunities offered by the mobility and the technological progress of the global era.

The interdisciplinary and multicultural nature of the project that led to *Kahled's Ladder*, along with the local and global implications and interconnections that emerged from both the project and the artwork, coincides with a global turn perspective strategy which is likely to be the most appropriate angle from which analyze contemporary cultural production, where artistic and curatorial border initiatives can be seen as fundamental nodes for the development of a global web of mutual negotiations, with both practical and theoretical consequences. These kinds of initiatives are forging an extremely fluid concept of society and culture that is shaping new trans-identities against and beyond the concepts of regional, national, and citizenship, establishing new and unexpected alliances with a supportive and disruptive vocation.

It's certainly too soon to understand the complete cultural effects of this kind of initiative and their global spread and recurrence – for example, we can mention other projects related to a global turn perspective from the curatorial field, like The Real DMZ Project for the Korean militarized border or *Juntos Apartes* for the border area between Colombia and Venezuela.

What can be argued, for the moment, is that they are powerful indicators of growing tendencies in contemporary cultural production whose potential can't be ignored as they are forging a future where the trans-suffix will definitively substitute that of post- or inter- to better describe the on-going cultural process of the construction of a growing alternative, horizontal and interconnected narration of the local and the global, denouncing the obsolescence of every social and cultural definition proceeding from the concepts of nation and race and systematically subverting them, on both a theoretical and a practical level.

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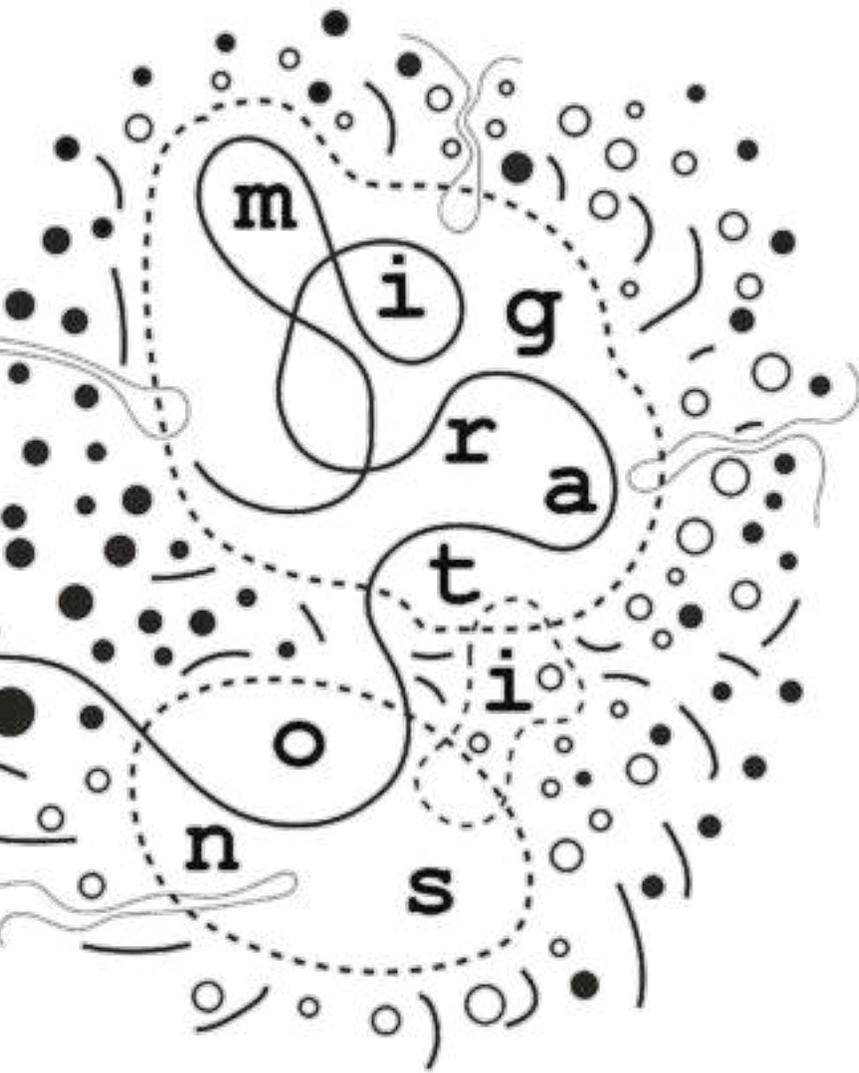
## Endnotes

1. This statement is taken from Khaled Jarrar's interview with George Alistair for the International Solidarity Movement Reports in November 21, 2011. See: Khaled Jarrar, "An interview with Khaled Jarrar: Stamping Palestine into Passports", interview by George Alistair, International Solidarity Movement Reports, November 21, 2011, <https://palsolidarity.org/2011/11/an-interview-with-khaled-jarrar-stamping-palestine-into-passports/>.
2. João Inada and Matteo Lonardi, "Khaled's Ladder," filmed July 2016, video, 8:17, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/video/2016/jul/04/can-i-jump-palestinian-artist-at-mexicous-border-video>.
3. Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border As Method, or, the multiplication of labor* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), Preface, viii.
4. Khaled Jarrar, *Whole in the Wall: Khaled Jarrar* (London: Ayyam Gallery, 2013), 10-13.
5. Khaled Jarrar, "Infiltrators," filmed 2012, video, 70:00, <http://idiomfilm.com/movies/infiltrators/>.
6. In this sense, the announcement of the performance at the Berlin Biennale in 2012 is very significant as it stated: "Get your passport stamped by Khaled Jarrar at Checkpoint Charlie". Once more, Jarrar's work enables a connection between the Palestinian wall and other historical border wall like the Berlin Wall. See: "Stamping action with Khaled Jarrar," last modified April 5, 2012, <https://www.berlinbiennale.de/en/veranstaltungen/2105/stamping-action-with-khaled-jarrar>.
7. Khaled Jarrar, "Good at Shooting, Bad at Painting," filmed May 12, 2018, video, 4:52, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mLDpW-RZCHM>.
8. Indeed, and in particular, the initiative arose as a critical response to the expulsion from the Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah that occurred in the previous months. See: Kabir Jhala, "Artist Khaled Jarrar is selling handfuls of soil from Palestinian farmland—and has turned them into NFTs," *The Art Newspaper*, May 20, 2021, <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2021/05/20/artist-khaled-jarrar-is-selling-handfuls-of-soil-from-palestinian-farmland-and-has-turned-them-into-nfts>.

# Ecologies of Migration: Engaged Perspectives

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## Session 3



## Session 3

# Ecologies of Migration: Engaged Perspectives

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Taken together, ecology and migration form the dominant discourse of the contemporary, indisputably reshaping the self-conception of the humanities. It is evident that climate change and environmental catastrophe constitute, both historically and now, a major cause for migratory movement. Our panel focused on the interdependency of movements of migration, on the one hand, and ecological conditions, on the other. By bringing these discourses together, we explored the complexity and cultural potential of these timely perspectives.

We claim that art production *per se*, and artists explicitly, reflect on migration as a process that can be discussed in relation to a broad, relational model of ecology, but also in terms of specific responses to the environment. Our panel was focused on contemporary experiments in art and curation that engage with migration, yet also included a strong historical perspective.

We discussed human mobility as a paradigm that cannot be thought of without considering geographical spaces / settings / localizations. Indeed, humans are not unique in this regard; plants and seeds migrate as well. Inanimate objects like stones or non-human life forms are equally affected by migration as are abstract phenomena such as knowledge. We looked at processes that are deeply rooted in and interacting with environmental transformations, linking migration to geology, flora and fauna, and the

non-human world in general. Systems of acclimatization and transfers of materials might be looked at in a way that surpasses any nature/culture divide.

Our panel featured a wide range of contributions that examined a variety of perspectives and time frames in their exploration of the interplay between migration and ecology. To address the issue required including new models for understanding the interdependencies between migration and ecology (Burcu Dogramaci, *Migration und künstlerische Produktion*, 2013; Shinichi Nakazawa, *Art Anthropology*, 2006 and the concept of “symmetrical anthropology”; Ecofeminism; Queer Ecology), artistic and curatorial strategies that reflect on migration in terms of an interpretation of the world in flux (Pierre Restany, Sepp Baendereck and Frans Kracjberg, *Manifeste du Rio Negro ou du Naturalisme intégral*, 1978; Allan Sekula; documenta’s “platforms”, etc.), and migration and material culture (Arjun Appadurai, ed, *The Social Life of Things*, 1986). In addition to the iconography of “precarious life” (Judith Butler, *Precarious Life*, 2004), the reality and the imagination of migratory transit spaces (stops, camps, assembly places, borders), was incorporated. The panel also drew on attempts to describe how artworks integrate, on both the material and the semantic level, the ecology of global migration (Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaïa*, 2017), ecologies of knowledge transfers, adaptations in the modes of artistic nomadism and the cultural techniques of memory, imagination and appropriation, deconstructions of established concepts of homogenous site, and authentic and pure settings. By asking such questions, contributors suggested new categories and paradigms. What happens, for instance, to the old notion of “cultural heritage”? What are the implications of injecting an environmental dimension into this concept? Could we propose a “multi-sensual heritage,” including smells and sounds, as new approaches in Social Anthropology suggest? (Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*, 2021; Christopher Tilley and Kate Cameron-Daum, *An Anthropology of Landscape*, 2017; Emily Eliza Scott and Kirsten Swenson, ed., *Critical Landscapes: Art, Space, Politics*, 2015).

Panelists looked at how this “eco-heritage” relates to and is transformed by the multiplicity of sites (departure, transfer, arrival) and of “artificial” localization (memory, imagination, re-creation) in terms of a

cultural reference system (Mary Louise Pratt, *Arts of the Contact Zone*, 1991; Lucy R. Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Sense of Place in a Multicentered Society*, 1997; Homi Bhabha, “Third Space” in *The Location of Culture*, 1994). Contributions brought interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches into play. There was a large span of case studies on artistic works that engage with these questions, as well as methodological reflections, analyses of the canonical narrative of migrations (Bible, Frontier, Long Walk, etc.) as well as of the micro-narratives around the territories “intermédiaires” (Marc Augé, *Non-Lieux. Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité*, 1992; Gilles Clément, *Manifeste du Tiers Paysage*, 2004). How do artists contribute to the reflection on the formation of new sites and how do they explore the ecologies of passage and arrival? Which typologies of the ephemeral, the transitive, and the provisional might be detected?

We strongly think that the integration of the artistic dimension that deals with the ecology of migration might contribute to the development of *modes of hospitality*, overcoming one-dimensional stereotypes of identity and flawed dichotomies such as “authentic place” versus “contamination.” At the same time, we want to liberate ecological discourse from its ideologically charged idea of preservation and the misconception of nature as a stable, ideal equilibrium.

In proposing the theme “Ecologies of Migration: Engaged Perspectives,” we did not want to minimize the ideological, political, and economic domination that explain the forced migration of so many, even entire peoples, by focusing on the relationship between climate change and the global phenomenon of migration. Quite the contrary. However, we hypothesize that the general phenomenon of migration profoundly affects not only the relations between human groups but also the relations between them and what they consider their natural environment, that is, the condition of human life. In the film *Don't Look Up* (2021) by Adam McKay, humanity meets its doom by refusing to look at the sword of Damocles above its head.

### **Awareness**

The art historians in our session shared the conviction that artists are working on the tools that allow us to observe, describe, and understand

phenomena that we perceive as symptoms of a crisis. They contribute to the development of true awareness and react first as “detectors.” Artists are observers who question the mutations, whose eyes and works reveal the flow of beings and things, the past that mingles with the present, the swarming of the seeds of the future.

Artists have delivered to the public images of refugees at sea and of the reality of fortified borders, transit camps, and gathering places constituting what Judith Butler has called an iconography of precarious life (*Precarious Life*, 2004). Some artists have taken up the idea of “Time-Landscape,” after the American artist Alan Sonfist who, in his 1978 manifesto “Natural Phenomena as Public Monuments” proposed the creation of art that keeps the environment of the previous generation “in front of our eyes” in order to combat what the American psychologist Peter H. Kahn called “environmental amnesia” in 1999. Each generation tends to consider the state of degradation it inherits from the previous generation as normal. In this sense, artists like Sammy Baloji (1978) demonstrate the potential of visual language. In his collages, he combines, without nostalgia, images of the Congo’s landscape in the colonial era and the realities of its current total degradation due to over-exploitation. The idea of the artist as restorer and preserver of what might be called, in the model of “cultural heritage,” the “ecological heritage” is developing. It comprises ways of life, landscapes, smells, sounds.

Brazilian artist Clarissa Tossin reflects on the connection between ecology and migration. Her series called *Disorientation Towards Collapse* (2019-2020), woven entirely from cut-up Amazon.com delivery boxes, highlights the conspicuous circulation and consumption of goods in the contemporary world. She flattens the cardboard boxes, cuts them, and weaves them using Amazonian indigenous patterns. With that simple procedure, she asks important questions about the migration of words, cultures, media, and people. At the fourteenth Istanbul Biennial in 2015, during the centenary of the Armenian Genocide, Turkish artist Asli Çavuşoğlu presented *Red/Red* (2015), a drawing on paper painted with cochineal ink from Armenia and red from Turkey. The first two-thirds of the work depict intricate ornaments, ornaments that fade away as the eye moves down the sheet. This fading is halted by the appearance of pure, raw lines whose

patterns in red are, this time, geometric. The most traditional ornaments are made with Armenian cochineal ink. They are abruptly cut off by brighter red geometric ornaments made with Turkish red. They fade away because there is no cochineal to create the pigment, because the cochineal in Armenia has been heavily exploited for many years. On the other side of the border, in Turkey, cochineals are plentiful, but the know-how to produce the pigment has been lost since the genocide of 1915 and the forced emigration of the Armenians. This is why, in the design, the beautiful ornaments fade away and are replaced by a more banal design. Asli Çavuşoğlu calls for the reconciliation of Armenia and Turkey not only to reconcile peoples and memories but also for the protection of the ecosystem and artistic skills.

### **Acting**

Refusing to remain mere witnesses, artists have become actors in a form of eco-responsibility that they have integrated into practice. We could say that they want us to shift *our* position from observing to engaging. There is an expectation that art can contribute to the search for a better future.

Artists test and challenge our sensorial tools, and develop scenarios that work by drawing on a new “situational ethics” (Pascal Gielen 2014). Can art take a place amongst other political and social approaches working on solutions? Can art history collaborate with other disciplines, such as the earth sciences or the social sciences?

Perhaps our era will be marked by a shift: the consideration of the impact of any action on the planet as unexceptional. Artists who transmit an ecological message through their work will no doubt take more care. Two artists from the French collective *Art Orienté Objet* set out on an expedition in April 2010, on the Norwegian island of Spitzbergen, to fulfil an absurd goal: to bring a polar bear footprint back to France and exhibit it in its original snow at the Magasin de Grenoble. This Arctic expedition is documented by a video, *Polar trash, CO2 Time code*, made to accompany the work. In this ten-minute video, the time code scrolling down the left side of the screen uses the CO2 emitted during the artists' journey (from transport to heating the hotel) as a unit of time. In total, the carbon footprint of the project was just over eight tons of CO2.

To compensate for the carbon, the artists required the Magasin de Grenoble and the city to plant two hundred and ninety trees, which corresponds - if their calculations are correct - to the emissions of their endeavor. Paradoxically, it was easier to bring back a footprint in its original milieu: the artist Marion Laval-Jeantet said that planting trees was “the most difficult thing for the art center and the city. [...] Presenting a freezer is not a problem, but obliging an art center to have 290 trees planted for a work of art is not an easy thing.”

### **Complexity and methodological implication**

Most interesting are artistic projects and conceptual approaches that promote forms of hospitality and coexistence in host countries, breaking with a stereotypical notion of identity and the authenticity of place. Drawing on situationist theories of drifting and nomadic housing, artists such as the Mexican Abraham Cruzvillegas and the Citámbulos group or the Italian STALKER and French PEROU collectives create modes of integration in the interstices of host societies. In our session, a case of ecological urbanism integrating the migrations of people, plants, and cultural habits has been studied: The “Jardins d'Éole” in Paris.

The proposals and case studies all demonstrated an interest in the complexity of the relationship between migration and ecology, seen through a relational model. Migration has always been considered from a dialectical point of view, showing what it changes but also what it brings, defeating the dominant discourses of “purity,” “authenticity,” “preservation,” against “invasion,” “contamination,” “great replacement.”

We want to stress that the topics of our panel have implications for CIHA's self-conception as an international association, questioning its historical link to highly problematic institutional structures, national art histories, exclusions and normativities. (Think of the Congress in Melbourne, “Crossing Cultures: Conflicts, Migrations and Convergences”). That's why this section not only aimed at methodological reflection, but explicitly questioned ideologically charged paradigms linked to the discussion of relationships between environmental space, conceptions of stable localities, and conditions of purity, on the one hand, and movement, shifting identities,

and productive contaminations, on the other. How can we achieve the equal consideration of all acting agencies?

We deliberately included the phrase “engaged perspectives” in the session’s title. We wanted to stress that by “engaged perspectives” we do not only address artistic activism but, above all, an art historical shift from detached and distanced analysis to an attitude of engagement and the intention to take a stand, to get involved. The approaches were presented in the discussion of migration and ecology as key terms of crisis or as much more general figures of thought, as key terms for a new conceptualization of artistic strategies, as perspectives on relational models. Which formats do artists use to advance the issues of migration and ecology, or, more relevant, how do ecology and migration shape the mediality of the works? Which senses - beyond the gaze - are crucial? How does the institution's exhibition system collide with these new dimensions? How does the evaluation criteria of the contemporary art system fall short? How can we analyze the performative, the temporal, and the spatial concepts at stake? And which formats do we, art historians or social anthropologists, think are appropriate to access the potentiality of culture in this context? The individual artistic biography? The anthropological perspective? How can we develop sensitivity towards the way artworks to incorporate the ecology of global migrations?

Our panel resisted any systematic approach or hierarchical order, but offered a fascinating sequence of case studies that all sharpened our understanding of the ecological space as a space of migration.

# Nature Shipping. Remarks on the Contemporary Ideas of Heritage

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## **ABSTRACT**

The ongoing ecological crisis does call for planetary awareness and the incorporation of non-human actors in academic debates about the Anthropocene. However, despite the call for a cultural coexistence of human and non-human actors, nature and culture, the impact of heritage-making is still underestimated. The paper engages with artistic and architectural landscape examples to explore practices of gardening as memorizing migration and motion of both human and non-human actors. It questions the need to transform heritage practices to create an encompassing ecology of practices.

## **KEYWORDS**

Maria Tereza Alves; Valango Wharf; Human-Non-Human Relations; Heritage; Migration; Plants.

In 2018 the Nomadic Biennale Manifesta 12 was executed in Palermo. The event borrowed the idea of the Planetary Garden by the French philosopher Gilles Clément, who sees ecology and science-based research as the fundamental principles of today's landscape architecture.<sup>1</sup> In his understanding, every single garden encompasses a planetary scale. The world has to be understood as a garden curated by human and non-human agents within planetary boundaries determined by economic growth. The curators of the biennale, Bregtje van der Haak, Andrés Jaque, Ippolito Pestellini Laparelli, Mirjam Varadini, referred in their statement to the curatorial concept to Palermo's Orto Botanico, which inspired them "to look at the idea of the 'garden', to explore its capacity to aggregate difference and to compose life out of movement and migration."<sup>2</sup>

In that context, they also drew attention to the additional title of the event: "Cultivating Coexistence". Relating to the depicted lemon tree, olive tree, and eucalyptus in Francisco Lojacono's painting *Veduta di Palermo* from 1875, the curators demonstrate that even plants today are assumed as part of heritage are non-native plants by their origin, coming from distant parts of the world.

The concept of Manifesta, thus, is related to the very heart of ongoing debates about living in the Anthropocene and alternative terms emphasizing the entanglement of human and non-human actors such as the Plantationocene (Anna L Tsing 2015), the Chthulucene (Donna J. Haraway 2015), or the Capitalocene (Donna J. Haraway 2016, Timothy J. Demos 2017). They are all characterized by their focus on a new set of relationships between humans, history, heritage, and ecology. Within this transformation to alternative histories, the practices of gardening understood as an artistic and landscape-changing process, became relevant, I want to argue. Furthermore, assembling plants, cultures, soil, water, gardening and thus questioning the cultivating of coexistence of entangled cultures refers also to curating heritage in the sense of taking care, but also as an active practice of selecting, collecting, and attributing value – one aspect of researching comparative approaches of natural and cultural heritage practices.<sup>3</sup>

Based on examples from artistic practices and landscape architecture, I want to point out various degrees of cultivated coexistence, which I see as a relationship of humans with nature with human and non-human agents, focusing on the meaning of displaced or dislocated plants. I am referring, thus, to a growing interest in implementing plants and botany in framing an ecological art history to explore the intertwined dynamics of colonization, capitalism, forced migration, and environmental change. In doing so, I want to address several points concerning ongoing discussions on the Anthropocene and the implication of heritage in transformation. I assume that the impact of plant migration and movement, coincidental or forced, inevitably creates an expanded field of entanglements between cultures and ecologies, between nature and human history.

Nature shipping or the shipping of nature means, in this context, literally a transfer of plants from one continent to another or within one continent due to migration, diaspora, and economic exploitation. The planted barge in the harbor of Bristol is part of the ongoing project *Seeds of Change* (1999 to the present) by the Brazilian artist Maria Tereza Alves. An impulse for the project was given by the research done by Finish Botanist Heli Jutila, who, for the very first time, recovered seeds systematically from an area in Finland in which ship ballast had been dumped.<sup>4</sup>

So-called ballast flora is seeds transported in soil that was used as ballast to stabilize merchant sailing ships, a usual practice until the end of the 19th century. This way, seeds were collaterally distributed from ports in Africa, the Mediterranean, the Caribbean, or Asia to European and American landscapes. Triggered by the idea of botanical archaeology combined with a social history of plants, Alves started to localize similar places in European and North American ports to investigate and conceptualizes the global impact of the movements of seeds and plants' species (Marseille 1999–2000, Reposari 2001, Liverpool 2004, Exeter and Topsham 2004, Dunkirk 2005, New York 2018).

Her approach is characterized by research on places where ballast was dumped and practices of gardening by taking soil samples and pottering them to see whether some seeds would germinate and grow. In the next step,

she identified the plants with botanists and proposed a place for a garden where the ballast flora could grow—sometimes accompanied by an exhibition to present the documentation of the investigation on shipping routes, local history and botany, and eventually plants. Thus, plants are assumed as signs of displacement to tell other migration stories.

Also, in Bristol, a port that was one of the infamously important points in the Atlantic triangle slave trade route, Alves adopted this multilateral investigative mode before a floating garden was realized. Starting in 2006, she excavated the seeds from the river bed where the ballast was dumped over centuries. The history of ship routes and local history related to the plants were shown firstly as a result of this action in a group exhibition titled *Port City: On Exchange and Mobility* at the Arnolfini Gallery in Bristol in 2007. This time, the Bristol City Council was willing to execute the final step of this artistic undertaking and create a natural garden out of Alves' seeds. For this purpose, landscape architect Gitta Gschwendtner designed a garden on a disused barge.

As the barge cannot be entered from the land and is accessible only from the water – by ship – the idea of arrival and how the seeds arrived became an integral part of the garden. The (floating) place of the plants thus reveals a hidden chapter of place-making, dislocation/displacement within the fluid realm of global capitalism, colonization, and migration transmitted by the seas. Also, vegetation/flora shapes and alters landscapes with random dissemination. The marginal can thus become the most evident and widespread: plants that were mostly unnoticed part of a local flora can turn into agents of the history of a city as they reveal the tight historical connection between the city and the oversea plantages, colonial dominions, and global marketplaces. Thus, plants become living examples of sustainable witnesses of economic exchange and exploitation – as such, they can alter a place's identity and create a borderless history, as Alves called her approach.

Frequently such plants are called with value-laden botanical terms such as invasive, weed, useful or harmful, which sound very similar to the description of human migration to some extent. Furthermore, this hidden movement determines ecologies and landscapes worldwide - mainly to a

greater extent. Researching traveling plants also sheds light on the local disposition of the opposite side of the travel route.

That displaced plants, once non-native, build a native, indigenous flora and culture nowadays is also one of the starting points of a project by American landscape architect Sara Zewde. She proposed a design for a Transatlantik memory on the Valango Wharf in Rio de Janeiro.

The project by Zewde aims to raise awareness of slavery and the black experience in America. Moreover, it intends to stress its impact on the urban landscape and diverse cultural practices of enslaved people. Although the harbor area, Porto Maravilha, was revitalized while preparing for the Olympic Games and Football World Cup in Brazil 2016 erecting, among other two museums, there was no concrete plan for the Valango Wharf.

In 2011 the intact Wharf was discovered by archaeologists who excavated the original stones of the site and found thousands of historical artefacts. In the 18th century, more than 20% of all enslaved people arrived America. Zewde was also part of a group claiming the nomination of the Valango Wharf to become a Unesco World Heritage site. In this context, Zewde was thinking about how to describe the requested "Outstanding universal value," which every site has to prove evidence.<sup>5</sup> In 2017, the Wharf was eventually accepted as a Unesco World heritage site. Calling it "the most powerful memorial of the African diaspora outside Africa."<sup>6</sup>

However, the report focuses mainly on the Wharf as a site and 'physical trace'. Zewde argued that the memorial could not be reduced to the exhibition of the site of the Wharf and the classical notion of a memorial fixing the event in the past. She shifted the focus to the related question of the importance of practices, traditions, and rituals related to enslaved people in today's culture and society.

Based on the investigation of the circuit of slavery in the area (hospital, cemetery, warehouses), she proposed a constellation of places interacting with the everyday life of the residents, like the history of slavery itself. For this purpose, she designed eight places. Each site would incorporate recognizable Afro-Brazilian cultural practices, plants, and forms. Zewde was thinking about the ficus, as a tree native to both continents, the African and South

American. She proposed, for instance, to create a place by a curved platform. Its form reminds of the Afro-Brazilian practice of wrapping a white cloth around the base of a Ficus tree to mark where the ancestors gather. In doing so, she wants to blur the line between the archaeological site and the city and between the distinction between Past, Present, and Future by taking up stories and rituals still relevant today. In this way, she demonstrated the relation between plants brought by slaves to Brazil or arrived by natural dispersion and then became part of the local flora and domestic culture. As Alves, she is interested in practices towards making public common space to care for and gather for each other. Plants are, in this context, agents of creating such a place and a subject of caretaking.

Another place was a pathway from the port to the city planted with Afro-Brazilian vegetation to mark the infrastructure of the slavery in the city and how the cultural practices of enslaved people found their way into the landscape and culture of America. One of the plants is, for example, the *Dracaena angolensis* (*Sansevieria cylindrica*), which is still used for rituals by members of AfroBrazilian religious groups like the Candomblé or the Umbanda. The plant is also known as Saint Bárbara sword in Brazil and is known today in Europe, at least thanks to the furnisher house Ikea since it builds an essential element of urban interior gardening.

Zewde wanted not at least to demonstrate with her site interventions that the city, the landscape itself, is the memory. She rejects a narrative of remembrance as enclosed in her project's past. Instead, her approach proposes considering the aftermath/impact of ongoing cultural practices and continuing transformations that shape a heritage sustainably. In doing so, heritage became diverse not only due to the effect of diverse cultures but furthermore embracing cultural practices, plants, and landscapes. However, by addressing the metaphor of 'being rooted', Zewde also shows how critically following the roots of plants may lead to recognizing plants and related practices as metaphorical carriers of past and ongoing history. Thus, the notion of cultivating nature, which has long determined natural and cultural history and often went hand in hand with human dominance over nature, is

converted into caretaking, understood as the cultivation of cultural practices for living together with diverse local flora.

In a certain way, Zewde's approach is comparable to the Diaspora Garden at the W. Michal Blumenthal Academy of the Jewish Museum in Berlin, situated in a rebuilt hall of the former flower market on the opposite side the Museum. The project of the Academy was delivered by Daniel Libeskind, who designed the interior with wooden cubes containing the entrance area, a library, and an auditorium. The cubes are supposed to recall wooden boxes containing a legacy that the Museum should preserve. In this context, Libeskind also was in favor of a Jewish-biblical garden. The landscape architects by Le Balto won the competition for the realization of the garden in 2013. They shifted – differently from the former idea expressed in the formal announcement of the competition the focus on the issue of diaspora and designed – four plateaus, each planted according to different topics: landscape, culture, nature, and academia. In this way, the Diaspora garden creates a particular space 'floating' over a wooden ground meant as a bridge between the elevated plantings and, thus, metaphorically between the place of origin and the place of arrival. The garden becomes a model of an all-encompassing reflection on the multiple connections of human and non-human journeys and their implications for contemporary landscapes and societies. These intertwined histories are made visible by the plants. Le Balto chose plants with unique connections to Jewish life, symbolizing the diaspora of Jewish culture and plants which grow in dispersion, thus addressing the question of a diaspora's related cultural and botanical history. By referring to plants familiar to Western cultures, like the cyclamen, also known as the Salomon Crown, Le Balto pointed to the common origins and roots of diverse environments. Concerning natural dispersion, it is also about the diaspora of the Jewish faith across the world and its impact on other cultures. Created inside the academy hall, it does not represent an ordinary garden. Instead, it addresses issues about the integration of plants into the museum context and the practice of curating, which raises further questions about overcoming the object character of plants. Together with the changeable exhibition display, plants are not to be understood as artifacts, but stand for the

processual, constantly changing. Above all, they promote a new approach to transmitting a living heritage that can only be achieved through constant questioning of the heritage's value for contemporary societies. Taking care of plants means also working on heritage.

Like Zewde's, Le Balto's design does not refer directly to the history of violence but, instead, to the botanical and cultural legacy which is part of nowadays culture in different parts of the world. Thus, plants appear as a common feature that can express identity and articulate the idea of culture as an assemblage. Moreover, like in the proposal by Sara Zewde, the French landscape architects included a possibility of participation in the garden by leaving one plateau to the Academy and offering a possibility for everyone to start planting and gardening to become familiar with the very complexities of cultural and natural heritage be doing.

Gardens and displaced plants turn insofar as figures of blurred, dynamic, and mobile environment; they oscillate between accommodation of the near and the far, the past and the present, and, as such, they embody the heterogeneity of culture. Furthermore, as symbols of inequality, they re-introduce a forgotten chapter of colonial and ecological heritage and bring it into social awareness. The quoted examples show a need for a re-definition of our understanding of art, historic gardens, and landscapes as heritage, not only as a notion of conservation. Incorporating non-human agents and understanding gardening as a practice allows us to critically evaluate the processes of the production of meanings upon conservation and preservation of natural and cultural objects, as it is often stuck in a tendency to recall the past. In sum, not the garden as a closed entity but rather the planetary gardening as a process could be an important focus for the future-oriented thinking of culture and ecology, aiming at creating an ecology of practices.

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# Plant Hunters and Their Valuable Booty

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## **ABSTRACT**

This text focuses on plant hunters and the relationship to their valuable booty: ornamental plants. Following Arjun Appadurai, in this context, ornamental plants can be considered *commodities*. Based on this, the first part of this text analyzes the trajectory of ornamental plants, especially tropical orchids in Latin America, including their social life and importance in the 19th century. The second part focuses on plant hunters and their activities, based on various documents, travel reports, correspondence, illustrations, biographies, and secondary sources. Finally, it explores the relationship between hunters and a valuable booty — ornamental plants. It investigates the narratives behind images and texts that justified an approach to the environment and ornamental plants, almost leading to the destruction and extinction of some varieties.

## **KEYWORDS**

19th Century; Ornamental Plants; Plant Hunters / Booty; Gathering / Collecting.

### **Introduction**

In the 19th century, there was a growing interest in tropical ornamental plants in Europe, especially in tropical orchids, which motivated sending commercial plant collectors or hunters to the places they came from<sup>1</sup>. They belonged to a commercial circuit of ornamental plants made up of different actors and institutions.

In this context, ornamental plants can be considered *commodities*, following Arjun Appadurai, who, in his book *The social life of things*, defines them primarily as objects of economic value<sup>2</sup>. Appadurai is interested in exploring the conditions under which economic objects circulate in different value regimes in space and time. He emphasizes that even if one thinks that things have no other meanings than those conferred by human transactions, attributions, and motivations, this view does not clarify things' specific and historical circulation. Therefore, things must be followed since their meanings are inscribed in their forms, uses, and trajectories. Only by analyzing these trajectories can one interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things. Thus, although from a theoretical point of view, human actors encode things with significance, from a methodological perspective, it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their social and human context<sup>3</sup>.

Following Appadurai, the first part of this text will analyze the trajectory of ornamental plants, especially tropical orchids in Latin America, their social life, and their value in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The second part will focus on one of the actors that codify the significance of things (ornamental plants): plant hunters and their activity, based on diverse texts and images, travel reports, correspondence, illustrations, biographies, and secondary sources. Finally, the hunters' relationship with their valuable booty, the ornamental plants, will be investigated.

### **The social life of ornamental plants and their value**

The trajectory of ornamental plants is linked to their value, or rather to the change in their value. As Appadurai emphasizes, for the sociologist Georg Simmel (*The Philosophy of Money*, 1907), value is never an inherent property

of objects. Still, it is a judgment made by subjects about them<sup>4</sup>, which, moreover, as Appadurai accentuates, arises from exchanges. The exchange is for Appadurai, a source of value<sup>5</sup>.

For botanists, gardeners, traders, adventurers, collectors, and gatherers, as well as for institutions such as botanical gardens and commercial nurseries, ornamental plants had a high value associated with their use.

Europe imported ornamental plants mainly for use in living collections: for decoration of stately gardens with a representative intent; to be cultivated and exhibited in botanical gardens and/or in a preserved form in herbaria in a scientific context; or to be collected and displayed for no apparent reason, for the pure pleasure of collecting related to botanical interest or that which confers prestige<sup>6</sup>.

Certain plants or specific species, such as orchids, were preferred and collected for their shapes, colors, exoticism, symbolic associations, and scarcity. It was collecting, which meant more than accumulating. As philosopher and biologist Nicole Karafyllis states, collecting always involves including and excluding objects in the collection. Gathering, specific collecting, always becomes a theme in the form of an ongoing reflection on what has been collected and what remains to be collected, similar to works of art. Collecting thus has at least an epistemic, technical, social, and economic dimension and, especially in the case of collecting living things, as is the case with most of the imported ornamental plants, also an ethical and moral dimension<sup>7</sup>.

The trajectory of ornamental plants, particularly orchids, begins in the trees where they grow and are found. Being there, the plants initially had little or other value to the natives, as the German collector Wilhelm Hennis (1856-?) describes in Ibagué, Colombia, in 1899:

As soon as it became known that I was collecting *Cattleya Trianae*, here called "Tulip," the natives brought me whole mountains of plants on mules and oxen, but what were they like! My heart ached when I saw the most beautiful and largest cattleyas completely broken, and when I then

told the people that the plants must be intact, they could not understand why and thought I could still make "ink" out of them. These people firmly imagined that I would prepare some kind of medicine with the orchids<sup>8</sup>.

Hennis added that when he explained their [commercial] value, they had begun to plant the plants on orange and guava trees and roofs<sup>9</sup>.

Continuing their trajectory, the ornamental plants were collected by the plant hunter and his helpers. The plants were uprooted from trees, or the entire tree was felled for easier reach for the orchids growing there. Similar or identical plants of the same species could have different trajectories, depending on their value: some were chosen to be transported and exported to Europe, and others were discarded<sup>10</sup>.

Those selected for export were packed in wooden boxes with tiny air holes to survive a long journey of several weeks, first from the collection site to the port to Europe and then to Europe. This was a live and delicate cargo that had to arrive alive. There was always a risk in transport within the country of collection and on the long transatlantic journey<sup>11</sup>. However, sometimes everything was lost when entire shipments were flooded, affected by frost or fire, or during shipwrecks, as in the case of a ship off the coast of Africa in which a part of the live plants collected by Alexander von Humboldt, more than 4500 plants unknown in Europe were lost<sup>12</sup>.

Once they arrived, the plants still valuable for the exchange were sent to different destinations after being received by a representative of the importer<sup>13</sup>. Those plants discarded at the collection sites or during transport had lost their value since they were no longer useful for exchange. This could occur either because they did not belong to the best specimens or the desired species or were considered "damaged." In this regard, the collector Hennis stated in 1899 that the success of orchid importation depended on the selection of the plants that were sent and added, "If you are there, you throw away all the less good and damaged plants and pack only those that are really worth transporting." In that sense, he also added that he had sent ca. 200 boxes of *Cattleya Trianae* from Tolima, Colombia, to Europe in 1883, having thrown away three times more, which had been damaged when felling the

trees to reach them or in transport. In addition, he said that he had once had to pay to help throw mountains of plants into the river because they were unacceptable for export<sup>14</sup>. Here it is evident how the high value assigned to the plants in the exchange could be quickly lost when they were considered damaged and how the disposal of those plants considered "not valuable" were massive.

### **Plant hunters and their activity**

Plant hunters played a decisive role in the social life of ornamental plants. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they were mainly hired by commercial nurseries and gardeners, botanical gardens, and private European collectors, who commissioned specific species. There they met other more experienced hunters and learned the profession, which included acquiring knowledge of botany, collecting and packing the plants properly between the collection sites and Europe, and learning some of the languages they were going to work. In addition, some of them were trained as gardeners and even worked at the collection sites where they were sent. All this means that the plant hunters were mostly highly qualified and trained professionals<sup>15</sup>.

The plant hunters were sent to different tropical regions of the world, where they settled temporarily or permanently, traveled through many territories in search of plants, and, in some cases, recorded their itineraries. In the countries of arrival, the plant hunters often expressed their fascination for the tropical vegetation that overwhelmed and enchanted them, as the German collector and gardener Herrmann Wendland (1825-1903) said in 1857 when he observed the tropical nature of Costa Rica for the first time: "What a spectacle, what magnificence, what soft and fragrant forms, what green, what life in the vegetation, what magnificent nature!"<sup>16</sup>. However, they also experienced the environment as difficult, even hostile, somewhat maybe related to the tropical conditions they were not normally used to.

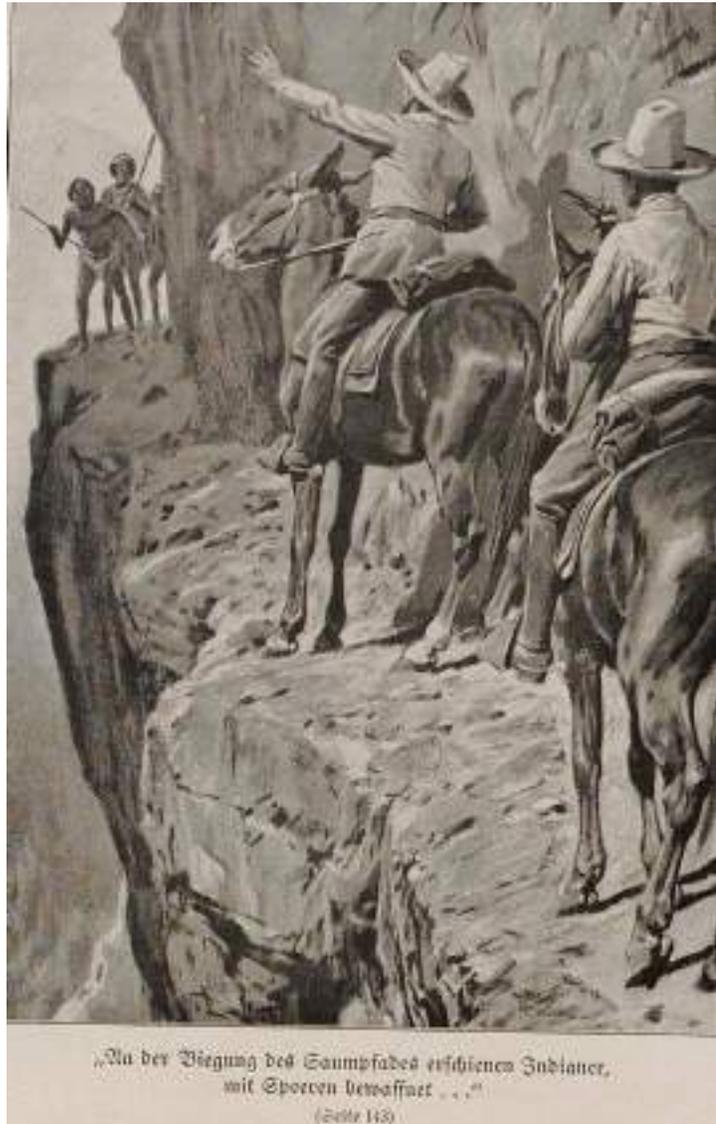
When the plant hunters reached their goal, they chose the site for their camp and recruited helpers and assistants, natives and foreigners, who would show them the way or help them with the location and acquisition of the plants<sup>17</sup>. Wendland recounted having hired in 1857 in San José, Costa Rica,

a companion, interpreter, and assistant, a German named Jäger, who was always ready to do whatever it took to get a plant<sup>18</sup>.

The importer gave the hunters drawings or indications of the plant to look for, and they communicated by correspondence<sup>19</sup>. In general, and depending on what was agreed, the hunters gave their assistants a fee for each specimen collected. Several times they returned to the camp to leave the plants until they had explored the whole area. To reach the plants in the treetops, the helpers almost always climbed up the trees, or else they would cut down the whole tree to uproot them. In addition, they freed entire paths in the jungle to access and transport them. As the German collector and gardener Wilhelm Kalbreyer (1847-1912) told from Colombia in 1899, they sometimes cut trees because they thought they found a valuable orchid. Then they realized it was only a "less valuable" one. In addition, he continued, it also happened that the felled trees were trapped with their tops on other trees, so these also had to be cut down to get the desired orchids.<sup>20</sup> This story of a plant hunter shows how plants considered valuable were acquired at any cost, regardless of destroying the rest of nature, which for them had no value.

Despite mostly having a specific mission, hunters sometimes also sent unknown plants, which were given to botanists to describe and name. When a species was recognized as new, the importer brought it to the market as a novelty, which increased its value. The descriptions of the new species, followed by recommendations for their care, were published in popular gardening magazines for the general public or in luxurious specialized volumes<sup>21</sup>. This information was accompanied by rich illustrations or detailed color plates of the plants, made by artists, illustrators, or botanists, and based on field sketches, short textual descriptions, live plants, or dried herbarium specimens. These illustrations contributed to increasing the value of the plants<sup>22</sup>.

**Fig 1.** This picture shows the encounter of the plant hunters with the “wild” Indians in Colombia. The caption says: “At the bend of the mule track appeared Indians armed with spears,” Ottmann, Victor. *Der Orchideenjäger – Erlebnisse und Abenteuer im tropischen Amerika.* Dresden: Verlag Deutsche Buchwerkstätten, 1922, 113.



Purely botanical, plant-focused descriptions were often supplemented by the plant hunters' accounts of their adventures, with the planter hunters themselves at the center of the story. The hunters described in their texts and images their positive and negative impressions of the people and the

environment of the territories they traveled. They often expressed a feeling of nostalgia for their place of origin, as in the case of Wendland, who stated in 1857, during his stay in Costa Rica, and after just a few months there, that he found the jungle and nature, its grandeur and splendor, monotonous and ordinary and would prefer the simplicity and freshness of a beech or oak forest<sup>23</sup>. In the plant hunters' reports, there is also information on other personal and general matters, such as the political situation in the countries where they were and how it hindered their search and collection work<sup>24</sup>. These written and visual documents are finally an interesting source on the political, social and cultural situation of the visited regions; that not only contain observations but also reflect fears and prejudices, for example, about supposed cannibals and "wild" indians<sup>25</sup>.

Plant hunters were generally characterized and depicted as brave and daring in texts and photographs with an often anecdotal and highly dramatic tone. It was a risky life: just as for high profit, there could be high risk. Plant hunting was not only difficult, but at times, it was also dangerous, as shown by the examples of several plant hunters who died in the field, such as William Arnold (1801-1851), who died of typhus, and Friedrich Carl Lehmann (1850-1903), who drowned in Colombia in 1903. In general, the health condition of many hunters often deteriorated in the tropics. Many became ill with malaria and yellow fever<sup>26</sup>, and several died from it, such as Gustav Wallis (1830-1878)<sup>27</sup>. In addition, some hunters were also robbed and abandoned in the jungle.

It is possible to characterize and establish an iconography of the plant hunters based on images and texts. Plant hunters had to be talented, energetic, determined, clever, adventurous, and reliable. They also had to be good stewards and attentive to plant lovers' interests, especially orchid lovers. The clothing worn by the hunters was mostly similar: they wore boots and hats; they also possessed a hunting knife and a revolver, as shown in photographs and illustrations: proudly outdoors, on foot or horseback; sometimes also depicted similarly to scientists with their attributes: devices alluding to their profession, sometimes with plants and their assistants or helpers near them or at their feet.



**Fig 2.** German orchid hunters in Bogotá at the start of an expedition, Ottmann, *Der Orchideenjäger*, 49.

Also, the so-called "last of adventurers"<sup>28</sup>, the German Clarence K. Horich (1930-1994), active until the 1990s for the Berggarten in Hannover, reinforced this prototype of the plant hunter when he said in 1990 about his profession:

"I have experienced and survived things which seem to come from the cheapest adventure book! Three poisonous snake bites of the most dangerous kind. Broken arms in Honduras when I crashed to collect *Brassalova Digbyana*. Gunfights with bandits and Indians in South America, etc. Yes... this is probably all WITHIN the somewhat dangerous profession of a plant hunter in the tropics."<sup>29</sup>

An article published in the same year on Horich reaffirms this prototype:

“Do you know him? Wide-brimmed hat, scuffed leather jacket, drum revolver in the waistband and cigarette casually in the corner of his mouth? It is Indiana Jones? You almost got it right. But only almost. Our man in the jungle is called Clarence Klaus Hörich, and instead of cash, he's chasing the real treasures of the jungle - the magnificent orchids”<sup>30</sup>.

### **The plant hunter and his booty**

The scientist Catherine Vadon expresses herself in her book *Mythos Orchideen* about plant hunters as brave and intelligent adventurers, close to the heroes of antiquity. Although she characterizes them specifically, she refers to them as characters, which could also have carried out another adventure-related activity. She says, "they could be looking for gold in California, for rubber in the Brazilian jungles, however, their destiny is to be looking for another jewel", alluding to plants. Vadon refers to the fact that plant hunters were looking for adventure and a quick profit, despite the risk, to then enjoy their hero status, with fame and appreciation<sup>31</sup>. Following this idea, we can allude to Karafyllis, who refers to a type of collector she calls the *adventurous explorer*, whose prototype would be Alexander von Humboldt. She states that in personal collecting and the research of collections, what inspires is not so much the objects collected as the collecting as an adventure in which the adventurous explorer takes great risks and finds himself between life and death<sup>32</sup>.

Despite the fact that the accounts and narratives of plant hunters give the impression that they were primarily concerned with adventure, in reality, it was a specific collection, to a certain extent ordered and, above all, selective, not casual. However, some also collected other living and dead objects apart from plants, such as animals and objects considered “exotic”<sup>33</sup>. The narratives and stylization of plant hunters as treasure hunters aim to increase the value of objects. The greater the effort, the higher the price.

Not only the plant hunters themselves were highly stylized. The descriptions and depictions of plants are also far from a purely factual and real representation. In texts and images, plants are referred to as valuable objects: as unattainable objects whose acquisition was associated with great effort, as miraculous and sacred objects, represented almost with a divine halo or linking them with constructions of nobility and purity to roses and blushing whites, as treasures, jewels, "green gold," exotic objects or relics, which were kept and exhibited in a kind of reliquary. Plants are also referred to and depicted as unique collectibles or part of many, as well as fragile but "dangerous" objects, in the sense of the risk of their attainment. Plants are also represented and referred to as yields, trophies, prey, and booty<sup>34</sup>, as objects to be hunted and collected, like animals, such as jaguars, whose hunting is also reported in various plant hunters' texts and images<sup>35</sup>.

**Fig. 3.** Cover of a book that shows the illustration of an orchid emerging from the mountains of Colombia with a sort of divine halo, Ottmann, *Der Orchideenjäger*, cover.





**Fig. 4.** Illustration of *Cattleya Mendeli*, that shows the flower as a fragil, delicate and nobel object, *Travels and Adventures*, 1.



**Fig. 5.** This image shows the dangerous life of the plant hunter and the risk of the attainment of the plants. The caption reads: "In the midst of a hesitant decision, the orchid hunter threw the white magic flowers into the stream" in this case to prevent his threatening opponent from getting it, Ottmann, *Der Orchideenjäger*, 2.

### Conclusions

According to sociologist Justin Stagl, hunting can be seen as a unique form of gathering, requiring more attention, energy, and risk<sup>36</sup>. Appadurai argues that "we call valuable those objects that resist against our desire to possess them." One's desire for an object is satiated by the sacrifice of some other object, which is the center of another individual's desire<sup>37</sup>. If one follows this thesis, it can be concluded that the conditions of the literal sacrifice in obtaining the plants increased their value. Was the sacrifice consciously or unconsciously exaggerated to increase the value? The same is true of the risk and danger of their procurement. Are these mere narratives of self-stylization? Or is there more to it? If we go back to the initial thesis: to understand the value and meaning of a thing, we must look at things in their form, use, and trajectory. Here we see the following:

Evidently, images and language allude to ornamental plants as booty. Despite being used primarily for decorative reasons, to be illustrated, and to be exhibited as an expensive commodity, the ornamental plants were also handled as a booty. In texts and images, a narrative is staged that justifies and legitimizes the extraction of ornamental plants, in many cases violent, sometimes arrogant, and derogatory tones.

Booty or Beute (in German) is a word also used by the actors involved. *Beute* is, as art historian Bénédicte Savoy states, a strong term that shows the different variations and nuances in the attainment of works of art and objects and refers to colonial and colonialist conditions<sup>38</sup>. Orchids, ornamental plants, and works of art are undoubtedly different. But their use, value, position in society, presentation, and acquisition conditions make them comparable. Similar to works of art a more precise and critical look is also needed to reveal the interests and discourses related and behind to the procurement and representation of plants.

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## Endnotes

1. Catherine Vadon, *Mythos Orchideen- von leidenschaftlichen Sammlern, fernen Ländern und besonderen Sorten* (Munich: Callwey Verlag, 2015), 53.
2. Arjun Appadurai, *The social life of things – Commodities in cultural perspective* (Cambridge: University Press, 2003), 3.
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8. Wilhelm Hennis, "Vom Orchideen-Sammeln in Kolumbien," *Möller's Deutsche Gärtner-Zeitung*, no. 7 (February 11, 1899): 74. All quotations have been translated by Claudia Cendales Paredes.
9. Hennis, "Vom Orchideen-Sammeln," 74.
10. See report about it: Hennis, "Vom Orchideen-Sammeln," 74.
11. Vadon, *Mythos*, 63.
12. Vadon, *Mythos*, 28; Schlumpberger, "Reisen," 419.
13. Vadon, *Mythos*, 73.
14. Hennis, "Vom Orchideen-Sammeln," 74.
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- y *Le Journal des Orchidées*. There are also many biographies and reports, between real and fictitious, which narrate their work and adventures, like Victor Ottmann, *Der Orchideenjäger – Erlebnisse und Abenteuer im tropischen Amerika* (Dresden: Verlag Deutsche Buchwerkstätten, 1922), Albert Millican, *Travels and Adventures of an Orchid Hunter* (London: Cassell & Company, 1891), Norman Mac Donald, *The Orchid Hunters – A Jungle Adventure* (New York / Toronto: Farrar & Rinehart, 1939) and Thomas Harper Goodspeed, *Plant Hunters in the Andes* (New York / Toronto: Farrar & Rinehart, 1941).
16. “Reisende,” *Botanische Zeitung*, (April 17, 1857): 278- 279.
  17. Vadon, *Mythos*, 55-56.
  18. “Reisenotizen des Hofgärtners H. Wendland in Central-Amerika,” *Hamburger Garten- und Blumenzeitung*, (1857): 362. Jäger means coincidentally a hunter in German.
  19. Vadon, *Mythos*, 55.
  20. Wilhelm Kalbreyer, “Kolumbianische Orchideen I,” *Möller’s Deutsche Gärtner-Zeitung*, no. 28 (July 8, 1899): 316.
  21. Vadon, *Mythos*, 161-162. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, several specialized gardening and horticultural magazines emerged, providing information on new technical horticultural and gardening discoveries, introductions, plant culture and care, biographies, expedition reports, and descriptions of collections. The journals were published by botanists, horticultural institutions, as well as nurseries and commercial gardeners, and some of them were published for almost a hundred years, such as the Gardeners' Chronicle published from 1841 by Joseph Paxton and John Lindley.
  22. Two of the most known and luxurious specialized volumes of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were *Reichenbachia: Orchids Illustrated and Described* and *Flore des Serres et des Jardins de l’Europe*. The first one was created by the German orchidologist Frederick Sander (1847-1920) and contains rich and life-size illustrations and descriptions of nearly two hundred orchids. *Flore des Serres* was founded by Louis van Houtte (1810-1876) and spanned 23 volumes and more than 2000 colored plates. Both contain German, English and French texts.
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  33. For example, Joseph Banks transported numerous living objects, mainly plants, to England, but most of the objects were already dead (or killed) when he collected them or did not survive the journey. The diversity of what he collected was divided between dead collections and living collections, e.g., herbarium and insect collections ended up in the British Museum, living plants in the RBG at Kew and in the Edinburgh Botanic Garden, Karafyllis, “Die Samenbank,” 90.
  34. There are many texts in which the plants are referred like that. For example, the German Botanist and orchid specialist Rudolf Schlechter (1872-1925) expressed about the collection trip

- from plant hunter Nicholas Funck in Venezuela: "Loaded with rich treasures Funck went from here across the Rio Zulia to Maracaibo and then started the journey home to Europe (...) The great and valuable yield, which he gathered during the next fifteen months, was unfortunately lost with the steamer from which it was to be shipped to Europe", Rudolf Schlechter, *Die Orchideenfloren der südamerikanischen Kordillerenstaaten – II. Colombia* (Berlin: Verlag des Repertoriums, 1920), 9.
35. See the reference and the illustrations of animal hunting, in particular jaguars, by Ottmann, *Der Orchideenjäger*, 81 and by Millican, *Travels and Adventures*, 186-187.
36. Justin Stagl, "Homo Collector: zur Anthropologie und Soziologie des Sammelns," in *Sammler – Bibliophile – Exzentriker*, ed. Aleida Assmann, Monika Gomille and Gabriele Rippl (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1998), 38.
37. Appadurai, *The social live of things*, 3-4.
38. Bénédicte Savoy and Robert Skwirbliés, „Beute“– Anthologie und Bildatlas,“ interview by Katie Salié, *ZDF: Aspekte*, ZDF, May 13, 2021, video, 2:29, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RjoOTdxXmic>.

# Livia Flores, Landscapes and Cities Transformations

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## **ABSTRACT**

The article investigates the work of Livia Flores (Rio de Janeiro - Brazil, 1959) and its relation with cities' landscapes in their processes of transformation. Flores is an artist with an experimental poetics that is interested in the city and the relationship with margins. Operating through distinct territories and vocabularies, Livia Flores explores the relationship between margins and centers, proposing reverse landscapes by using mirrors or filming and photographing reflections of the city in the water, as we can see in works like "Inserção de retrovisão," 2002, "Livro Labirinto," 2007 and "Passa batido mas não despercebido/ Rastreamento do Rio Morto," 2004-2010. Displacements between different memory inscription regimes, such as dreams, texts, reused parquet flooring, books, and fabrics, point to changes in perspective and her engagement in showing the transitions in cities flows. She is interested in how landscapes move because of time and pollution processes, real estate speculation and economic exploitation, physical and social changes in and from urban settings, putting these images upside down or proposing different scales and angles.

## **KEYWORDS**

Livia Flores; Landscapes; Cities transformations; Contemporary Art; Brazilian Art.

Livia Flores (Rio de Janeiro, 1959) is a contemporary Brazilian artist who works as a professor and researcher. With consistent production since the 1980s, the artist has been participating in exhibitions in Brazil and abroad. She began her artistic training at the "Escolinha de Artes do Brasil" ("Brazil's Little Art School") and later attended the Escola Superior de Desenho Industrial ("Industrial Design Graduate School"), in Rio de Janeiro, the end of the 1970s, leaving for Germany in 1984, to which she traveled with a grant from the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, to enter the Düsseldorf Art Academy.

Her poetics is highly experimental and diverse, as the artist explores different media to address issues related to the contemporary city - regarding the relationship between the center and the margin - and their instabilities and precariousness. With works in drawing, installation, film, video, and photography, Flores activates different orders of vulnerabilities and focuses on the formation of the image, affirming her interest in the reverse and the negative. To confound the notion of a postcard, the artist uses mirrors, glass, and other strategies to deal with points of view that are not all obvious.

In her apprehension of the landscape as a composition, a framed construction, the French philosopher Anne Cauquelin thus defined this traditional pictorial genre as follows:

For the westerners that we are, the landscape is, in fact, precisely "of nature." The image, built on the illusion of perspective, is confused with what it would be the image of. Legitimate, the perspective is also called "artificial." Then, the transportation of the image to the original is legitimized, one matching the other. Even more: it would be the only possible image-reality. It would adhere perfectly to the concept of nature, with no distancing. The landscape is not a metaphor for nature, a way of evoking it; it is indeed nature itself. Here one could say: "How? If the landscape is not nature, what is it, then?" Therefore, speaking of a rhetorical construction (of an artifice, this time a linguistic one) about the landscape is a *lèse-majesté* crime. Nature-landscape: a single term, a single concept – to touch the landscape, shaping it or destroying it, is to touch nature itself. (Cauquelin, 2007, p.38-39).

For Cauquelin, the reduction to the limits of the frame allows the apprehension of nature as a painting project. Such a project is formed by a cultural arsenal that differentiates slightly between individuals and groups, while the elements (shapes of colored objects) and their syntax (symmetries and associations of elements) vary according to time and place (Cauquelin, Op. Cit. 2007, p. 26).

To researcher Maria Lúcia Bastos Kern, the urban landscape practiced in painting and photography:

it does not, in general, present the notion of amplitude or of total vision because the city spaces are multiple and fragmented and do not allow for the horizon line to be defined. In fact, they represent angles of view, in which there is an attempt to capture the speed and the processes of change that are established in it, without leaving aside formal questions. (Kern, 2011, p. 9).

It is in this sense that, distinguishing between the pictorial and photographic apprehension of the landscape, the author points out changes in the framing and gradation between the planes. The horizon line marks the natural and traditional landscape in its relationship with perspective and, consequently, with the succession of planes and the vanishing point. Photography, although it dialogues with painting through themes, compositions, and atmospheres of nature, differentiates itself through "the flattening of the planes and the definition of lines as structuring elements proper to its language" (Kern, Op. Cit. 2011, p. 2).

In works such as "Projeto Observador" ("Observer Project"), carried out in the city of Porto in 2001, and "Inserção em Retrovisão" ("Insertion of retro-vision"), carried out in Rio de Janeiro in 2002, Livia Flores stresses the idea of the landscape by offering other points of view, such as cutouts of the upside down city, originating from cracks, reflections, etc. In her works, mirrors reflect and project images but do not fixate or store them. In this way, they shuffle the relationship between the inside and the outside, in and out, near and far, center and periphery, presenting interesting distortions.

Following this direction, the artist explores overlapping images and unusual points of view.

The work "Inserção em retrovisão" from 2002 was selected for the 4th edition of the Prêmio Interferências Urbanas ("Urban Interventions Prize")<sup>1</sup>. The proposal consisted of fifty rear mirrors stationed at different points in the Santa Teresa neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro to reflect landscape clippings "variable according to the point of view of the observer-passerby" (chronology in FLORES, 2012, p. 184). Slopes and staircases leading to the neighborhood have become privileged spaces for placing mirrors on the walls to make architecture and nature converge in their reflections. The pole that interrupts the view of the Pão de Açúcar ("Sugar Loaf") Mountain, the public lamp that occupies the centerpiece of the image, as well as the emphasis on the walls of the houses and the steps of the staircases, all of those underline the anti-monumental character of the city and the landscape listed by the artist.

Also of note is the exercise she proposes: instead of opting for satellite, technical, or high-resolution images, her interest is focused on a given precariousness that is a constituent part of the image - either because of the technology used or because of its non-fixation.

In cars, rearview mirrors help the driver's peripheral vision. By reducing blind spots, the driver can see areas behind and to the side of the vehicle, invisible to the naked eye. By bringing to passersby an instrument used by drivers in their cars, Flores welcomes different speeds and ways of traveling and perceiving the city. Despite choosing strategic points for the placement of the mirrors by the artist, the work "Inserção em retrovisão" ("Insertion of retro-vision") begins with the action of the spectator, who walks, wandering, going against the mirrors, which provides true "open-air cuts,"<sup>2</sup> and point out the vulnerability implied in the formation of this artwork.

In his book "Técnica, Espaço, Tempo" ("Technique, Space, Time"), the Brazilian geographer Milton Santos explains the differences in temporalities and rhythms that inhabit the city:

Can one speak of a single time for the city or a single regional time, as one would speak of a single universal time? Groups, institutions, and individuals live together but do not inhabit the same times. The territory is, in actuality, a superposition of engineering systems that have been dated differently, and are used, today according to different times. The different roads, streets, and public places are not traveled equally by all. The rhythms of each one – companies or people – are not the same. Perhaps it would be more correct to use the expression temporality here instead of the word *time*. (Santos, 1997, p. 45-46).

In the 2001 work, "Projeto Observador" ("Observer Project"), carried out during her artist residency at Ateliês da Lada<sup>3</sup>, in the city of Porto (Portugal), for three months, the artist transformed the studio space into a darkroom through the complete darkening of the environment. The residency was part of the "Squatters/Ocupações" project at the Serralves Museum, which took place in the same year. In the black vinyl glued to the windows, Flores made small openings, which allowed for inverted projections of the external landscape on the walls of the space. The number of holes, their diameter, and position determined the construction of the image, making it possible to perceive in real-time movements that took place outside: depending on the incidence of light on the landscape, the images projected on the walls of the studios varied in color and intensity, being visible only during the day.

On the occasion of the residency, the artist also made two films: "Douro" and "Ribeira." The first presents images of water flow from the Douro River, while the second captures images of the Ribeira neighborhood through cracks in windows, shop windows, and doors. The phrases "liquidation of all existence," "pass by," and "for sale," captured by Flores, point to the radical economic changes underway at that time in Portugal.

In the book cited above, Milton Santos addressed space, pointing to changes in the apprehension of this geographic category. According to the professor:

Space appears as a substrate that welcomes the new but resists change, keeping the vigor of the material and cultural heritage,

the strength of that which is created from within and resists, a quiet force that waits, vigilant, for the opportunity and possibility to rise. (Santos, Op. Cit., 1997, p. 37).

When approaching everyday life as the fifth dimension of space, the author stated that it is not enough to consider it as simple materiality or under the domain of necessity but as "an obligatory theater of action, that is, the domain of freedom" (Santos, Op. Cit., 1997, p. 39):

Space has gained a new dimension: the thickness, the depth of what happens, thanks to the enormous number and diversity of objects - that which is fixed -, of which that is formed today and also thanks to the exponential number of actions - that which flows across it. This is a new dimension of space, a true fifth dimension. (Santos, Op. Cit., 1997, p. 38).

Santos affirms space as something dynamic where materiality and human action come together: "a theater of flows with different levels, intensities, and orientations" (Santos Op. Cit., 1997, p. 53). From this perspective, space would be "the inseparable set of systems of natural or manufactured objects and systems of actions, deliberate or not" (Santos, Op.Cit., 1997, p. 49). At each epoch, new actions and objects modify space, both formally and substantially.

In this sense, Livia Flores' approach to the crucial moment Portugal was going through at the beginning of the 21st century is of interest. By recording the phrases that enunciate the availability of spaces for sale and lease in the Ribeira neighborhood in Porto, the artist addresses the economic, social, and spatial transformations of this region of the city.

Pointing in the same direction, Milton Santos points out how the landscape, as one of the components of space, is a palimpsest<sup>4</sup>. It is the "result of an accumulation, in which some constructions remain intact or modified, while others disappear to give way to new buildings. Through this process, that which is before us is always a landscape and a space, in the same way that the transformations of a language take place through a process of

suppression or exclusion, in which the substitutions correspond to the innovations" (Santos, Op. Cit., 1997, pp. 66-67).

In addition to her interest in image formation processes (in this case, the camera obscura), Livia Flores focuses on the specific conditions of the neighborhood in which the Ateliês da Lada, the place of her artistic residency, is located. Milton Santos defined the *place* as "the union of men through cooperation in difference" (Santos, Op. Cit., 1997, p. 36) and as an "area of the solidarity happening" (Santos in Leite (org.), 2007, p. 163) in the sense of them being interdependent actions:

Define the place as the extension of the homogeneous happening or the solidary happening and that which is characterized by two types of constitution: one is the territorial configuration itself, the other is the norm, the organization, the regulatory regimes. The place, the region, is no longer the result of an organic solidarity, but of a regulated or organizational solidarity (Santos, Op. Cit., 1997, p. 36-37).

The place is the meeting between latent *possibilities* and preexisting or created *opportunities*. These limit the realization of occasions. (Santos, Op. Cit., 1997, p. 44).

In an interview with Revista Concinnitas (Concinnitas Journal), Livia Flores stressed her interest in horizontal displacements around the city, noting that:

in fact, the movements that I usually make, that I like to make, are horizontal displacements, and maybe they happen in search of a point of view that is kind of outside the city. Peripheral displacements. The Pão de Açúcar, a postcard, but only if it is inverted, only upside down. (Flores, 2019, p. 10).

From this perspective, another work that we are interested in discussing is entitled "Passa batido mas não despercebido" ("Passes Beaten But Not Unnoticed"), from 2004-2010. The artist carried out a kind of sweeping of the Rio Morto/ Dead River Road, in Vargem Grande, a neighborhood in the west zone of Rio de Janeiro, in a straightforward process

of transformation. Traveling along the route with two video cameras attached to the sides of the car, Flores tracked the road, providing two viewpoints: one facing the Rio Morto Canal and the other facing the buildings. Assembling the work in different windows, the artist exhibited it at the Tempo-Matéria ("Time-Matter") group show. Held at MAC/ Niterói in 2010, the video installation showed the round-trip routes along the length of the road over time. The title of the work comes from graffiti written on the path itself, which the artist also partially traversed on foot so that it would be possible to apprehend certain details.



**Fig. 1.** Passa batido mas não despercebido ("Passes Beaten But Not Unnoticed"), 2004-2010, Video Installation, 2010. Photo by Pat Kilgore. MAC/ Niterói.

In the exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, the photographs were mounted on a long (5.90 meters) length in order to suggest a tracking shot, which the spectator will travel with his body. In addition, several small photos

were mounted to suggest a continuity/fluidity of the approached space. However, as the images were produced at different times and from different points of view, making them fit became arduous. The artist tries to level them with the horizon line as if putting together a puzzle from a fragment of her hometown.



**Fig. 2.** Passa batido mas não despercebido (“Passes Beaten But Not Unnoticed”), 2010. Photographic print, 22 x 590 cm, 2010. Photography by Pat Kilgore. MAC/ Niterói.

Nevertheless, while in traditional puzzles, we have tourist attractions or spectacular landscapes, Livia Flores confronts the landscape without giving it a magnanimous character. The two versions of "Puzzlepolis," which she created in partnership with the artist Clóvis Aparecido dos Santos<sup>5</sup> in 2002 and 2004, present a puzzle of the city based on different possibilities, configurations, and fittings. In both cases, the city appears as a mirage, a place of projection and reflection of images. The photographs of "Passa batido mas não despercebido" suggest continuity and a panoramic view over the long stretch of the Rio Morto Road. It is not, however, a panoramic, 180-degree photograph.

In her text "Notas sobre a (Fotografia das sombras ready-mades)" ("Notes on a (Photography of ready-made shadows)", the artist defined photography as such: "unlike the manual trace, inscription-trail that separates the human from the mechanical" (FLORES, 2009, p. 20). This is how the proposed tracking ends up far from obvious. What the artist presents us with are versions of everyday paths, almost intimate relationships, and

inscriptions-traces of this road traveled at different times and from different points of view.

Maria Lúcia Bastos Kern introduced, in her text "História e Arte: as invenções da paisagem" ("History and Art: the inventions of the landscape"), the panorama containing illusionist representations of landscapes that tried to "introduce the countryside to the city" (Kern, Op. Cit. 2011, p. 6). In her words, the panoramas:

whose 360-degree circular screens provide the viewer with ample and infinite views of still images, until then impossible to enjoy. The viewer wanders like a flaneur, moving from one space to another in the landscape, contemplating it and discovering new phenomena or angles to be observed, but within a closed space that separates their gaze from the city. Unlike easel painting, in which the viewer penetrates the landscape at a glance, the panorama requires the displacement of the body in space. The large and elevated axes of circulation allow the wandering of the gaze from above (BEUVELET, 2008) over the landscape or over the representations of urban panoramas, without setting limits in any direction. (Kern, Op. Cit., 2011, p. 6).

The professor also points out that the car rescues the perception of the landscape from the front and in a panoramic way but does not allow a more detailed look. Here, we take up Livia Flores' option of combining different speeds: those of the route on foot and those by car. The artist scans the road by car and, through videos, she captures everything that enters the frame, as the cameras are fixed to the sides of the vehicle. From the windows that make up the work, however, there comes a type of monotony in the rhythm at which the vehicle traverses the landscape. In the videos, occasionally cyclists, cars, and buses cross the frame, but reliefs, green areas, some houses, and a few under-construction buildings prevail.

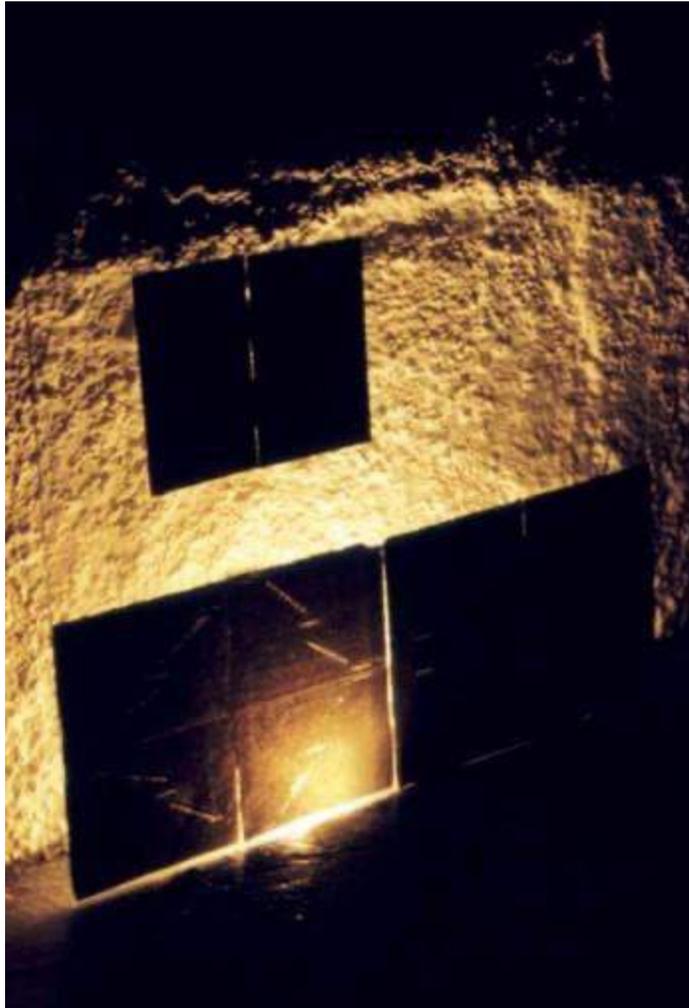
In the photographs, however, Flores captures that which catches her attention. According to her, there would be a kind of "observation training, so you walk and notice things" (FLORES, Op. Cit., 2019, p. 15). In her own words: "(...) time is important to allow time for repetitions to happen, for differences

to be perceived, I think this work is very emblematic of that. The same path and the differences, which is what interests me, the events, the micro-events on this same path" (Flores, Op. Cit., 2019, p. 15). In these photographs, we can see a dress hanging on the fence next to a tree, the location of a watchman, and other intensity marks.

In his previously mentioned book, Milton Santos addresses the differences in rhythms and mobility in the city:

Those who, in the city, have mobility – and can walk around and scrutinize it – end up seeing little of the city and the world. Their communion with images, often prefabricated, is their downfall. (...) The "slow" men, in turn, for whom these images are mirages, cannot be in sync for too long with this perverse imaginary and end up discovering the fables. (Santos, Op. Cit., 1997, p. 84).

In the carbon paper drawings from 2000, entitled "RODOVIÁRIA - RUA DO HOTEL SEM PASSADO – CENTRO" ("BUS STATION - STREET OF THE HOTEL WITHOUT A PAST-DOWNTOWN"), the artist presented a kind of dream-like cartography of the city. More than indications of precise neighborhoods, the three locations suggest desolate scenarios, melancholic images, and urban mirages. As fragments, the drawings provide clues for the reconstitution of a path. This fictional map, the theme for the artist's solo exhibition at the Espaço Agora-Capacete, in Rio de Janeiro in 2000, was mounted directly at floor level, between two sheets of glass. Illuminated by low-power lamps (7w), the carbon paper drawings were perforated by the impact of the typewriter and handwriting gestures, confirming their appearance in a fragile and precarious way, on the edge of (in)visibility. In the text for the aforementioned exhibition, entitled "Super," Ricardo Basbaum stated that it was "an investigation of the surroundings, the places Flores goes through, the landscape around her" (Basbaum in Flores, Op. Cit., 2012, p. 96).



**Fig. 3.** Rodoviária - Rua do Hotel sem passado - Centro ("Bus Station - Street of the Hotel without a Past - Downtown"), 2000. Drawings on carbon paper, glass and 7-watt bulb. Photography by Wilton Montenegro.

It is interesting to resume the approximation that Cauquelin and Kern make between the beginnings of landscaping and cartographic representations as modern phenomena. For the landscape made it possible for a man to "unveil space and suggest to him the feeling of greater control over his world, at a time when cartography and other advances in the field of science collaborate for the success of maritime expeditions and the discoveries of new territories" (KERN, Op. Cit., 2011, p. 1). Also Milton Santos, when thinking about the different cartographic representations, attests in an interview that

"the world map is lots [sic], but the world is one" (Santos in Leite(org.), 2007, p. 81).

Basbaum, when referring to the film works from the 2000 exhibition, used the terms "moving landscape" and "landscape-passage / passing," evoking the moving images produced by the artist, fruit of her displacements. And it is in this way that we can point out the friction undertaken by Livia Flores regarding the idea of a postcard since the presented clippings of the landscape are improbable and not at all obvious.



**Fig. 4.** 12.04.2008 ("04.12.2008"). Installation with light bulbs and cables. Approximately 25 x 1,5 M. Morro da Conceição, Rio de Janeiro. Photo by Wilton Montenegro.

The installation *12.04.2008* uses wires and light bulbs to say the phrase "Feliz Ano Novo" ("Happy New Year"). The work, exhibited at the event "Intervenções Artísticas no Morro da Conceição" ("Artistic Interventions on the Morro da Conceição") in 2008, remained lit throughout the weekend, announcing a party, or an extemporaneous renovation. Wilton Montenegro's

photo in plongé, with the city in the background (or maybe below?), highlights the idea of a belvedere with a privileged view of the city center, mixing temporalities and geographies. Despite the installation's length of 25 meters, what catches the eye is the lighting improvised workaround, achieved through the use of yellow light bulbs appropriated for domestic usage. The work suggests some sort of breakdown in the order of time or discourse, such as what is proposed by Hans Georg-Gadamer in his essay "The relevance of the beautiful. Art as play, symbol, and festival". In the aforementioned text, the German philosopher attested that the temporality of the party is of a different order since celebrating stops time. The non-pragmatic character of the party proposed by Livia Flores' extemporaneous celebration, thus, explores an out-of-order time.

In "Livro Labirinto" ("Labyrinth Book"), from 2007, the artist proposed a radical inversion of the point of view. Formed by a wooden structure with hinges, mirrors, and serigraphic printing, the book allows the viewer-reader to see himself in the reflection while their surroundings are simultaneously reflected. The mirrors contain impressions that suggest the floorplan of an apartment but end up acting as delimitations of the reflective surface: the space within the space, within the space.

In the photographs by Wilton Montenegro printed in the book "Livia Flores" (Flores, Op. Cit., 2012, p. 158), the mirrored surface of the book (both a reflection and a "bouncing"), is taken to stroll through the city, the same as in the records of the "Livro da Criação" ("Creation Book"), which Lygia Pape produced in 1959-1960. In both cases, the books leave the shelves or the collection of the libraries' environment to reach the world. Another relationship between these two artists can be established through their interests in urban spaces: Livia Flores welcomes the complexity of the world in her tracking and scanning, while Lygia Pape sees herself as a spider, weaving webs in the city with her car.

"Rio Morto" ("Dead River"), from 2000, starts from a mirror image: the film runs parallel to a watercourse on whose surface the image of the urban occupation that rises to its banks is mirrored, inverted. The Rio Morto Canal, located in Vargem Grande, Rio de Janeiro, acts as a surface that reflects,

upside down, the landscape of its surroundings. The tracking shot points out the artist's displacement as she travels the car's length and the variations of this landscape that is being transformed.



**Fig. 5.** Labyrinth Book, 2007. Silkscreen on mirror, wood and hinges, 20 x 30,5 x 1 cm. Photography by Wilton Montenegro.

As a professor, the artist develops "Desilha," - a research project on art and the city at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. In the text she published with Michelle Sommer, a collaborator on the project, Flores defined it this way:

At the origin of the DESILHA project is the teaching practice along the line of research in Visual Languages of the Master and Doctorate Program in Visual Arts (UFRJ), aimed at the theoretical-practical training of contemporary artists. Considering that the insular paradigm deeply anchors the notion of work in art under the sign of the subject-author, the frame, and the white cube/black box, we propose to convoke artistic creation to the collective debate, placing it in the

spotlight in order to provoke a state of friction with its surroundings. During the courses taught since 2014 by Livia Flores and Ronald Duarte (...) and (...) from 2017, with the participation of (...) Michelle Sommer, we have gotten acquainted with the warehouse where we work, a mix of studio, classroom and exhibition hall, but also with the university, the island, and the city, through displacements between different positions and through the proposal of actions, transforming the word "desilha" into a verb and an invitation to move beyond the demarcated perimeters of art and its formal education (Flores & Sommer, 2019, p. 226).

Since 2014, the platform has been carrying out a series of actions, such as postgraduate courses, the organization of seminars and other academic meetings, exhibitions, and other interventions, in addition to the publication of "Cadernos Desilha" ("Desilha Notebooks"). It has also been carrying out what the authors call "crossings," whose investigative and artistic proposals have been moved to the territories of Maré, Vila Autódromo, Aldeia Maracanã, and the city center. Conceived starting from the university city, the "Fundão" Island, and its surroundings, the project has been spilling over to other neighborhoods in Rio de Janeiro, intervening poetically in varied spaces.

The actions proposed by the DESILHA platform discuss citizenship and activism, they encompass perceptions about multiculturalism and interculturality in the city and take the urban space as an impetus for the construction of narratives and actions, adding the place of the university to the immediate social context of the city. For, perhaps, new and other navigations, in a possible future, to come. (Flores & Sommer, Op. Cit., 2019, p. 232)

### **Final Considerations**

If we recover the definition proposed by the artist of photography as inscription-trail, we can relate it to her interest in engraving, present since the beginning of her artistic training at the Escolinha de Artes do Brasil. From this, we also emphasize her focus on other printing forms, including her

experiences with cinema (and originating from there also the inversions and mirrorings, as well as the relationships between positive and negative, light and darkness), present in the works discussed in this text. We were also interested in considering Livia Flores' focus on mobility, present in the referred works when she approached the different forms and rhythms with which the city is traversed and perceived.

This is how the variations in the images proposed by Flores point to subversions of given displacements, giving new meaning to the artist's pathways in her hometown and other places she passes through. Works like "Passa batido, mas não despercebido," "Rio Morto," and "Rodoviária – Hotel sem passado – Centro" invert obvious paths, establishing other maps. And it is in this way that, more than pathways, what Livia Flores' works suggest are detours, poetic crossings of spaces, times, subjects, and images.

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### Endnotes

1. [https://www.ufrgs.br/escultura/fsm/jornal/santa\\_teresa.htm](https://www.ufrgs.br/escultura/fsm/jornal/santa_teresa.htm)
2. Expression used by Tania Rivera in her text “O Belo e o ínfimo” (“The beautiful and the tiniest”), published in the book *Livia Flores* (RIVERA in FLORES, 2012, p. 51).
3. <https://inresidenceporto.pt/pt/espaco/polo-i-ateliers-da-lada-ateliers-da-lada/>
4. In the definition of the Aulete Digital dictionary, the palimpsest is understood as “Parchment or papyrus whose manuscript has been scraped to be replaced by a new text [Underneath this, it has sometimes been possible to make the previous characters reappear by means of special techniques]”. Available at: <https://www.aulete.com.br/palimpsesto>. Accessed on 11/01/22 at 13:20h
5. For a more in-depth analysis of Puzzleópolis, see the author’s text entitled “A precariedade das imagens: Clovis Aparecido dos Santos, Judith Butler e Livia Flores” (“The precariousness of images: Clovis Aparecido dos Santos, Judith Butler and Livia Flores”, available at: <http://www.cbha.art.br/coloquios/2020/anais/pdf/Fernanda%20Pequeno.pdf>

# The Ground Beneath our Feet: Soils, Souls, Seeds

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## **ABSTRACT**

The following text draws from several contributions to the TETI Press publication *Mobile Soils*, paying particular attention to the iterations of artistic research and how ‘research as practice’ can channel engaged formulations to negotiate the increasingly slippery grounds beneath our feet, reflecting on their capacity to mediate environmental issues, to channel *polyphonic* voices emanating from past and present grounds, as well as to participate and *to engage* in their future *sowings*. Furthermore, this specific case study offers an opportunity to reflect on an art historical development – artistic research – while considering its capacity to inspire art historical practices in their form and engagement with the world, past, and future.

## **KEYWORDS**

Mobile Soils; Artistic Research; Globalisation; Polyphony; Artist Publication.



**Fig. 1.** Mobile Soils, TETI Press, 2021

Flat, uneven, rocky, rolling, sandy, mushy, asphalt and tar covered, the ground on which humanity treads upon, confides, anchors itself, departs from and abandons, shares and disputes with other living entities, is the object in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century of a renewed and anxious globalized attention: no mere plot of property, jealously guarded memories, the ground appears to be always mobile, traveling and touring with many passengers on board, and yet could depart for mutations unanticipated by its self-appointed pilots. In 2018, the TETI Group (for Textures and Experiences of Trans-Industriality) organized a series of workshops in Zurich, Switzerland, on the topic of soil, as part of an interdisciplinary artistic research agenda focusing on the changing representations of nature in an increasingly urbanized world. We were particularly interested in considering passages between the worlds of botany and the matrix of urban transformation that are construction sites, seen as receptacles of migrating plants, ephemeral bodies, and potential ideas. Our

discussions have come to fruition in the form of a publication entitled *Mobile Soils*, featuring texts by artists, gardeners, historians, art historians, architects, environmental scientists, and engineers.<sup>1</sup> In the following text, I want to draw from several contributions in *Mobile Soils*, paying particular attention to the iterations of artistic research and how ‘research as practice’ can channel engaged formulations to negotiate the increasingly slippery grounds beneath our feet, reflecting on their capacity to mediate environmental issues, to channel *polyphonic* voices emanating from past and present grounds, as well as to participate and *to engage* in their future *sowings*. Furthermore, this specific case study offers an opportunity to reflect on an art historical development – artistic research – while considering its capacity to inspire art historical practices in their form and engagement with the world, past, and future.

### 1. Mobile Soils

On the shores of lake Zurich at the school for applied science in Wädenswil (ZHAW),<sup>2</sup> an installation entitled *Erdreich, the treasure beneath our feet*, half pedagogical display, half earthwork, was recently added to the school’s public gardens (2018). The result of a collaboration between the artist Monica Ursina Jäger and scientists from the Zurcher Hochschule für Angewandete Wissenschaften, *Erdreich* brings visitors in direct visual contact with the ‘treasures beneath our feet’. As one descends into the tunnel-shaped structure, window panels open into the soil, where insects, water and worms, mushrooms, and roots mingle in the dark, usually unseen by human eyes. The display aims to showcase the preciousness of the earth’s soil as a natural resource, constituted over thousands of years and not easily replaceable.

In her discussion of *Erdreich* that opens the TETI Press *Mobile Soils* publication, Monica Ursina Jäger underlines four qualities she sees as being triggered by her piece: to make soil *visible*, the *politics* of soils, *caring* for soil, leading to *being* soil.<sup>3</sup>

The work can be seen in the art historical tradition of land and environmental art, with its corridor leading into the ground, immersing the visitor into the textures of living organisms that is the soil. It is a landscape to

tread on, displaying a temporality so often removed from the sight of our industrialized society – ‘the world we live from’ to refer to Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel’s evocation of the modern condition and conundrum in *Critical Zones. The science and politics of landing on earth*, as opposed to ‘the world we live in’, characterized by the illusionary entrapping into opaque surfaces of tar and concrete.<sup>4</sup> Caring for soil based on understanding it as a living ecosystem leads to a possible embrace of deep time, seen as a vector for a changed relationship with the earth.

Thus the work offers ‘visible evidence’, to refer to the eponymous conference on documentary practice and studies,<sup>5</sup> to open the eyes of the visitors to the rich and circulating diversity below the ground; it has a pedagogical dimension cast in an open-air museum. The museological aspect catches some of its interplay as an artwork, made in close relation with scientific actors and research: it can be seen as a prolific characteristic incorporation of scientific knowledge into an aesthetic experience, a route significantly at the heart of contemporary discussions regarding the modalities of establishing meaningful artistic research.<sup>6</sup> But it can also be seen the other way around, using artistic modes of iteration to make visible scientific discourses and knowledge obliterated by antagonist politics.

This sense of *revelation* and the role of aesthetics in the public sphere is a potent drive behind *Field to palette. Dialogues on soil and art in the Anthropocene* edited by Alexandra Toland, Jay Stratton Noller, and Gerd Wessolek.<sup>7</sup> The volume combines texts by scientists and artists exploring ‘boundary objects’, referring to a term coined by the Science Technology Society to describe “conceptual entities that bridge different understandings of information by different user groups.”<sup>8</sup> On that bridge, artistic practices are entrusted with the task of *translating* the scientifically sound *functions* of soils into vernacular parlance: biomass production means sustenance, habitat means home, storage function means receptacle, buffering and filtering means transformation, platform means stabilizer, bio infrastructure means communities.<sup>9</sup>

In the equally voluminous collective endeavor that is *Critical zones. The science and politics of landing on earth*, edited and masterminded by

Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, the function of art in our time of increased environmental pressure is drawn from polymath Alexander van Humboldt,<sup>10</sup> who, in true nineteenth-century fashion, liked to sketch the occasional drawing. Our problems are entangled, the local fused with the global, and artistic practices have a role to play: “changes in cosmology cannot be registered without changes in *representation*.”<sup>11</sup> In a downbeat version of Marshall McLuhan’s prophetic assignments,<sup>12</sup> the artist’s mission in this bleak new world is to attune our senses: “today, much as in other earth-shaking periods, we need *aesthetics*, defined as what renders one sensitive to the existence of other ways of life. Just as politicians are supposed to hear voices previously unheard and scientists to become attuned to phenomena so far invisible, artists are challenged to render us sensitive to the shape of things to come.”<sup>13</sup>

Yet, besides this role as a mediator, the artist can also size the tools at his hands to exert *transformation*. This was one of the injunctions actively pursued by Joseph Beuys, working at the time of rising ecological activism and concerns regarding the impact of industrial societies on our earthly habitat, vocally phrased by the Club of Rome 1972 manifesto *Limits to growth*.<sup>14</sup> With regards to the art and science dialogue, his *Barraque D Dull Odde*, now permanently installed at the Krefeld Museum, Germany, subtitled *working place of a scientist/artist*, consists of shelves and a working desk as can be found in a back garden shed, where its occupant not solely plots, but hammers, casts, plants the world in flux.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the digital revolution that was in the making in the 1970s is booming into so many second lives, complexifying the set of tools necessary for the artist to take part in the cosmological conversation. Establishing a bridge between soil and screen can become critical; such connections as they pertain to the earth are explored by Laurie Dall’Ava, who combines in her series *Les terres élémentales* (2019) photographs of micro-organisms and volcano-sites, images from anthropological archives, with objects such as ‘ritual arches’.<sup>15</sup>



Similarly, in *De soufre et d'azote*, lists of volcanoes throughout the globe are juxtaposed with photographs of shamanic practices, both evocative as Victor Mazières comments, of an ancestral connection to immemorial times, human, and non-human, completed by rural objects such as a bull's nerve, a wooden tub, oxidized tools.<sup>16</sup> The artist conducted several archival research in South America, particularly in Brazil, Bolivia, and Peru, including at the Centro de la Imagen in Lima, from which many of the incantatory images come. They form a body of 'resistance' to modern erasure, outlining a possible resurgence and stabilization. Furthermore, if distant times are juxtaposed, remote spaces are also brought into connection. This is evident in the volcanic references, from Bayuda to Sao Tome, from la morne aux Diable to Ixtepeque, but also through the ready-made objects which come from the artist's own collection and her rural roots in southwestern France.

Additionally, besides photographs and objects, sound also plays an important role in many of Dall'Ava's display through, for example, the inclusion of archival recordings of shamanic incantations. The incanted polyphonic melodies stemming from the ground constitute a significant sensory route that artistic research can attune, channel, and embark upon.

## **2. Polyphonic Chora**

In the National Archaeology Museum of Ireland in Dublin, amongst the many findings excavated from the Hibernian peninsula, carved stones and golden hoards testifying to a network of exchange spread across the European continent and seas, a gallery speaks more forcefully to the resurgence, in these lands, of the trodden upon the earth: the so-called 'bog bodies'. These are human remains millennia-old – the Cashel Man is dated from 2000 BC – which have been preserved in the characteristic Irish peatlands, so praised nowadays for their capacity to entrap carbon. The bodies are incomplete – a head and torso, torso and arms – fragments of their former selves, dried steady, and of a plum and leather dark hue miraculously adorned by a hair or two. The Derry poet Seamus Heaney gave voice to these sacrificial bodies that refuse to let go and continue to speak beyond the grave. In the 1975 collection

*North*<sup>17</sup> – also compiled in the collection *Opened ground poems 1966-1996*,<sup>18</sup> Heaney conjures the vision of *the Grauballe Man*: “As if he had been poured/ in tar he lies/on a pillow of turf/ and seems to weep/ the black river of himself.”<sup>19</sup> Tellingly and fittingly perhaps, it is to a translation of the book six of the Aeneid, in which the Trojan prince descends under the earth to see his father Anchises, that Heaney was working at the time of his death, posthumously published in 2016. At the outset of the sixth book, Aeneas visits the Sybil of Cumae to be granted descent into the earth; she admonishes:

Talibus orabat dictis arasque tenebat,  
Cum sic orsa loqui vates : ‘ sate sanguine divum,  
Tros Anchisiade, facilis descensus Averno :  
Noctes atque dies patet atri ianua Ditis ;  
Sed revocare gradum superasque evadere ad auras,  
Hoc opus, hic labor est...<sup>20</sup>

To visit the souls of the departed, to salute them once more, but also to bring back auspices, which in Virgil’s time as Augustus rose to power, including a celebration of Rome’s achievements to his days, depicted at the end of the sixth book as Anchises describes to his son “the future glory of the Trojan race, Descendants due to be born in Italia, Souls who in time will make our name illustrious – I speak of them to reveal your destiny to you.”<sup>20.1</sup>

In this vein, *Tunnels* and *Hades* were the main protagonists of the day study organized by TETI Group in September 2019 at Zürich Hochschule der Künste, which used another iconic Greco-Roman tale to reflect on the chorus of voices emanating from the ground: that of Orpheus and Eurydice, as narrated in Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*, and in which the musician descends to the underworld in a doomed attempt to retrieve his beloved wife. The convening took the Ovidian tale as a departing point, mixed with its revisitation by the Indian writer Salman Rushdie in his 1999 novel *The ground beneath her feet*. In Rushdie’s piece, the narrative is set in the second half of the Twentieth century, in the matrix of the popular music industry globally connecting Bombay to New York, London, and Mexico. The sound of the soil is plural and decentered on a spinning planet. Nevertheless, the urge to anchor our lives

and dead remains a strong incentive to make sense of such spiraling dizziness.

Hence, funeral rites that connect Ovid, Heaney, and Rushdie, are explored in *Mobile Soils* by Rafael Newman and Caroline Wiedmer in a critical and poetic text focusing on the *Spitz*, a small piece of land in Wiedmer's home village in the Emmental region in Switzerland, still owned by the family.<sup>21</sup> There, ashes of the deceased, human and non-human (the family pets), are buried – if in passing, for the economics of death in Switzerland only grant a temporary resting place before the necessary repurposing of the busy underground. The *Spitz* is a multilayered slice of soil, a material resting place rich of symbolic personal, and collective attachments tied to a fabric of identity evolving within the particular web of socio-political regulations inherited from Swiss history.

Artist Jan Van Oordt on the other hand, goes to meet in person the non-human inhabitants of the soil, in a twist on Lewis Carrol's tale entitled "the Hawhum panel".<sup>22</sup> At the outset, the narrator wakes up in a barn, which he has been refurbishing. To give some context to this opening, one should know that with some friends, van Oordt has bought a former auberge in the Swiss Jura, and recently set up an artist residency in a smaller summer house located up the hill. The tools of reconstruction are at the narrator's side, but the sound that woke him up, as the reader follows his stream of consciousness, is that of a mouse who calls out to him: isn't it time he realized the havoc he is creating out there? His new proposed library has demolished the mouse's favorite reading spot. There ensues a conversation, and a proper invitation to visit the tunnels brimming with life under the cottage: in fact a party is in preparation.

Such a conversation with the non-human inhabitants of the underground, parallels the artist's multimedia work, where the voicing of the unheard mirrors its enhanced visibility. It must also be understood within the collective project that is *La Dépendance*, which since 2018 welcomes artists who engage with rurality and socio-natures through the lenses of the Jura and the town of St-Imier. As such, the circular saw, the flat crowbar and the carpenter's hammer are material instruments in the same vein as the

residence. Samuel Bianchini in an essay entitled ‘towards organogenesis’ reflecting on the instrumental approach developed in artistic research as part of his Ensad lab in Paris, underlines the plural uses of the term, which encompasses both musical instruments – the Lyra of Orpheus – and the scientist laboratory tools.<sup>23</sup>



**Fig. 3.** Jan Van Oordt, diaprojection, *Wasser im Wasser*, in situ film screening at the SAE Greenhouse Lab, March 2022, as part of the first Mobile Soils Dinner – underground, surrounding installation by Manon Briod & Mathieu Pochon

As to the design of the instrument, in post-Duchampian ages the occasion will command the conception, a point casually underlined by David Antin in one of his talk piece featured in *What it means to be avant-garde*:

“and if you have to invent something new to do the work at hand you will but not if you have a ready-made that will work and is close at hand and you want to get on with the rest of the business”<sup>24</sup>

### 3. Hybrid sowing

Hence tools can help us channel and hear the voices in the ground that bind us consciously or unconsciously to the past, that might remind humanity of its animality, just as it morphes more resolutely than ever into a set of hybrid futures. In that respect, the ground can be considered in terms of its *potentiality*. Naturally, critical economic and political theories have long scrutinized the entrepreneurial perspective on the soil in terms of potential value-making, cast under the spell of the *plantationocene*,<sup>25</sup> or violently locked into a cycle of *implosion-explosion*.<sup>26</sup> To consider the shape of things, prospective architects, may use models. Models are not mere reductions, lesser entities of the structures to come, but also a matrix containing the future. In the garden, the gardener works with seeds, planning and anticipating the shape of things to come. The work involves a material basis, the generative presence of seeds, as well as the tools needed to accompany the growth of plants, at which point we see the storytelling, the narrative, order the trajectory of things to be. *Fiction* becomes an agent in world-making.

The state of in-between, the investment in the stage of potentiality, is captured in Jacques Abeille’s novel *Les jardins statuaries* (1982), which describes the visit of a traveler to the country of statuary gardens.<sup>27</sup> There, the land secretes anthropomorphic statues, which are looked after by gardeners, from embryonic nascent shoots to full bloom. The process is carefully supervised by the gardeners, who do not know of the particular nature of the growing statues, but monitor, select, trim, and guide their development. At the edge of this country, however, a domain left in semi-abandon has turned

into a monstrous site. There, the statues gone wild turn into dangerous untamed protuberances.

The speculative confrontation between organic lives, sculptural concretion, and the transitionality of building sites is at the heart of the series of sculptures, *Grands travaux urbains*, by Anne-Laure Franchette.



**Fig. 4**  
Anne-Laure Franchette, *Grands travaux urbains*, in situ installation in the garden of La Becque, Résidence d'artistes, La tour de Peilz, Switzerland, 2021, as part of *An Hommage to Derek Jarman III*, photo @ Manon Briod, La Becque)

The series of sculptures combine material attention to botanic circulation, with a symbolic representation of our modes of categorizing, ideas as much as people, and knowledge as much as living beings. The pieces

are made of dried plants cast in resin, which are positioned in metallic structures used typically as signalization structures on building sites.<sup>28</sup> The plants are collected on-site, where the pieces are to be shown, and the artist searches specifically for the *mauvaise herbes*, wild plants growing at the edge of the garden, in the cracks of concrete in the city, embracing an *éloge des vagabondes* to refer to the work of Gilles Clément.<sup>29</sup> The piece also juxtaposes the garden with the building site; on the one hand, building sites are particular spaces, posited for a time in an in-between, between things that were and things to come; in this suspended realm, Unkraüt and invasive species, botanical and animal, find a momentary harbor, a biodiversity which shies away from a polished monolithic future. On the other hand, the work suggests the garden as a building site, the art of the garden becomes the '*art du chantier*', to point to the 2018 exhibition at the *cit  de l'architecture* in Paris, which drew significant parallels between building sites and the artists' studios as spaces where things take shape.<sup>30</sup>

The works were on display in 2021 in the gardens of La Becque, *r sidence d'artistes*, in La Tour sur Peilz on lake Lemman in Switzerland, as part of Modern Nature III, curated by Elise Lammer, revisiting the garden and legacies of the late Derek Jarman.<sup>31</sup> In the 1980s, the filmmaker, retreated to a cottage on the southeastern coast of England, as he fought illness. His garden caught between raw nature and the shadows of the nearby nuclear station, espoused *modern nature*, also the title of his journal later published.<sup>32</sup> The third part of the program, designed at la Becque, looked in particular at the impact of the HIV crisis, additionally reflecting in the time of a global pandemic on questions of community and isolation in relation to health concerns and control.

The circulation of plants and seeds envisioned as a receptacle of temporal and spatial circulations, is also explored by artist Uriel Orlow in a number of research-based works that capture the power relations inherited from the extension of global routes and European colonial expansion, while suggesting alternate modes of apprehending and constructing our societies and environments. His residency at the Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers in France in 2017-2018 led to an enquiry into the daily lives of the '*mar chers*', the fruit

and vegetable sellers in the city, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, binding local consumption and labour, with the not so distant French colonial dominions.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, his series *Theatrum botanicum* (2016-) puts plants at the center, agents of history in an exploration of colonial ties in South Africa, which has taken the form – amongst others – of an indigenous botanical dictionary, typically presented through a sound installation, to replace the overarching imposition of Latin nominations and European based botanical categorization.

Such an investigation of botanical transformation as informed by and shaping global encounters is also strikingly at play in Maria Thereza Alves's *Seeds of change* (1999-2007), a work that looks at ship ballasts, in their function as repositories of dormant seeds, capable of germinating years after their voyage. The piece offers a springboard to consider the present legacies and challenges of globally interconnected histories. The work was shown in a number of European ports, including Liverpool and Bristol, which were heavily connected to the triangular trade, as well as Antwerp and Marseille, France's so-called 'gateway to the orient'.

For the Mobile Soils Publication, Mexican Swiss-based artist Paloma Ayala wrote a text that combines these different layers of *potentialities*, symbolically and materially carried by *seeds*.<sup>34</sup> Its title, *Conversations between epizoochory* alludes to the “inadvertent carrying by animals of dispersal units” associated with seed dispersals. The texts take the form of a playwright or script. The scene takes place near Matamoros, by the US-Mexico border traced by the Rio Bravo, Rio Grande river, from which the artist originates. Three figures, Araceli, Cande, and Wina, are eating Guamuchil pods. Cande explains the purpose of the visit of three departing figures:

“they spoke about creating a publication... something like an infrastructure to make the changes that will happen in cities of the future, visible.”<sup>35</sup>

Progress is on its way, and the land has been assessed as valuable for modernization. In the discussion, though, the fictional account engages with

the material changes occurring to the soil beneath and around the speakers, and its mediation through a published format, ‘a zine as a place of infrastructure’. In reflection on the politics of urban metabolism, Nik Heynen, Maria Kaika, and Erik Swyngedouw outline the revolving pattern of urban transformation, whereby the material transformation of nature shapes the conditions of the world, within which discursive operations take place, which in turn model the modes of material extraction-transformation.<sup>36</sup> The epizoochory takes place when the three friends throw out the consummated pods behind their back, as well as, in this instance, in the iteration of the script in the *Mobile Soils* publication. Such a strategy embraces a form of transversality, which de Assis and d’Errico, in their introduction to “Artist research: charting a field in expansion (2019)”, see as indicating “an intellectual mobility across discipline boundaries and the concrete establishment of a continuum through theory, practice and action in the world.”<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, Ayala, as Van Oordt discussed earlier, employ fiction as a path to connect seemingly extraneous elements. Van Oordt’s narrator’s visit below the cottage and encounter with its many non-human inhabitants reminds one of the territories that fiction can open, as discussed within an art historical context by Anne Lafont, Mark Ledbury, Krista Thompson, Pierre Wat, and Olivier Weller in “*L’histoire de l’art à l’aune de la fiction. Pour une extension du domaine de la recherche*”, in which fiction can be apprehended as a mode of uncovering that which has been or is silenced.<sup>38</sup>

In an exploration of the prolific edges of fictional landscapes, Jacques Rancière, in *Les bords de la fiction* (2017), dedicates a chapter entitled *Paysages de papier*,<sup>39</sup> to an analysis of W.G. Sebald’s *Rings of Saturn*.<sup>40</sup> In the novel, the narrator goes for a walk along the Eastern coast of England, which spirals through ‘elective affinities’ into a journey to the Netherlands, China, and the New Jerusalem, amongst others, as space is dilated. Rancière underlines the manner through which the labour of fiction toils to counter destruction, establish patterns of coexistence, and trace new uses and modes of knowledge, community, and common sense. The migration of ideas and objects, spirits and seeds of things to be, is ‘*exposed as*’ research in the spectrum of artistic investigations of soils discussed above, operating fluid

dialogues, borrowings, juxtaposition, displacements between disciplinary frameworks, tools and methods. The reference to Michael Schwab's theorization of 'expositionality' in artistic research stresses the active role of the artist equipped with the instruments of his trade as befit the occasion.<sup>41</sup> They are, in a sense, in *exposure* in the publication *Mobile Soils*, which denotes a passive state, yet as a whole, also *exposed as active*, in the conception of the publication as a mode itself of conducting research. *In other words, the publication Mobile Soils as practice as artistic research.* At this junction, the art historical joins the artistic research in its engagement towards making visible and activating the grounds beneath our feet as a mobile, circulating, and living space.

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# Climate Change: Unpacking the Sociocultural Dynamics of Ex-Herdsmen in Southwestern Nigeria

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## **ABSTRACT**

The global call on climate change highlights the daunting consequences on flora and fauna and the need for a sustainable environment. One such effect is the depletion of forest resources. In Nigeria, where the Fulani are predominantly herdsman, the quest for pasturage is not unconnected with increased desert encroachment and the disappearance of grazing land. This quest informs why the migration of these people is dovetailing to the Southern part of Nigeria, where lush vegetation is still available. Despite the abundance of vegetation in the southern part of the country, some herdsman have reconsidered their enterprise and found settlements in their state of domicile. Against this backdrop, this study examines the sociocultural changes emanating from this diasporic status. In-depth interviews were conducted with 20 ex-herdsman living in Lagos and Oyo State using a purposive sampling technique. Findings show that from marriage rites to food and dress, there is a growing cultural diffusion of the Hausa/Fulani-Yoruba cultural practices on many fronts. The paper concludes that the emerging sociocultural hybridity evident among the Hausa/Fulani in Lagos and Oyo States is informed by climate change that altered the temporality of their absence from home, from migrants to the diaspora.

## **KEYWORDS**

Climate Change; Ex-Herdsman; Nomadism; Southwest Nigeria; Sociocultural Change

### **Introduction**

Now more than ever, global attention and discourses are focused on issues of the environment. This stems from the obvious climate change and consequent disasters that have continued to erupt across different spaces. From the depletion of flora visible in increasing desert encroachment to the loss of fauna evident in endangered and extinct species, the consequences bearing far-reaching effects have attracted diverse degrees of opprobrium, anger, sympathy, concerns, and bile, around the globe (Weiskopf *et al.* 2020). Manifested in tsunamis, hurricanes, heatwaves, tornadoes, windstorms, and cyclones, among others, weather conditions are increasingly becoming hostile to the earth and all that is within it. Be it migration, displacement, relocation, or evacuation, affected people have always moved away from the harsh climatic condition to ensure their survival (Askland *et al.* 2022; McLean, 2014). Alarmingly, climate change is among the highest generators of refugees and internally displaced persons. Regardless of the urgent actions to mitigate its effect, it is not enough to prevent the ongoing changes (Storlazzi *et al.* 2018).

Climate Change and its consequences around the globe are nuanced and of varying degrees. Experts say the consequences are unevenly distributed, with underdeveloped and developing countries being the worst hit by its impact (Askland *et al.*, 2022). As a matter of precision, communities that depend on natural resources are most vulnerable to the raging destruction of climate change (Kaján 2014). This disproportion is not unconnected to the lack of or insufficient resources to curb climate change disasters' effect. Invariably, developed or, better put, richer countries exercise their edge by deploying their resources to sufficiently quell the devastating effect of climate change in their country. While climate change consequences are reflected in diverse forms, victims are challenged mainly by rising food shortage/insecurity, disease outbreaks, severe medical conditions, crime, conflict, social and economic loss, and cultural diffusion (Nnaji *et al.*, 2022). Communities/societies/countries are not exonerated, especially those that depend largely on their natural resources for producing goods and rendering services for growth and development (Kaján 2014).

Kaján's position resonates with the situation of the Hausa/Fulani people in Northern Nigeria. By being predominantly nomads, their reliance on lush vegetation cannot be overemphasized. However, this enterprise has been greeted with many challenges informed by climate change. Loss of flora and fauna, increasing desert encroachment, drought, and depletion of forest reserves number among the plight of herders (Hoffmann et al. 2018). The long cycle of drought has led to the constant search for lush vegetation for cattle. This human and animal migration has set the tone for shades of events and interests ranging from the destruction of farmlands to kidnapping, rape, murder, and banditry Ikezue and Ezeah (2017), thereby causing insecurity and straining relations between herders and farmers and members of attacked communities (Chukwuma 2020). The Nigerian government proposed the Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) initiative as a reactive solution to these problems. RUGA settlements are proposed delineated, permanent grazing areas to be established in all the federation states to check and stave off cattle encroachment into farmlands (Ekpo and Tobi 2019). However, Nigeria's deeply entrenched socio-political mistrusts among the different ethnicities in the country came to the fore as the government was accused of showing inexplicable support to the socioeconomic interests of a particular section of the country over others (ibid).

The historical trajectory of the Fulani as nomads and the crimes of kidnapping, banditry, and killings alleged to have been perpetrated by them in recent times, especially in the rich vegetation southern part of the country, provided good stock for the rejection of the proposed initiative of the Federal Government. Speaking comparatively, the International Crisis Group (2019) gave a sense of how deadly these herdsmen have become in a report, stating that more people have died and many more displaced six times more as a result of herders' attacks than the dreaded Boko Haram terrorist group. The government's gesture was widely interpreted as biased on the basis that the cattle-rearing business is not government-owned, and the government is not expected to compel states to cede lands to cattle owners who are engaged in their economic enterprises. While the initiative by the Nigerian government is informed by the continued shifting fault lines of climate change causing a

drastic alteration in the country's vegetation, the proposed RUGA initiative raised concerns and new forms of interest by different sections of the populace, particularly herders.

Therefore, this article aims to discuss how climate change impact has altered the enterprise choice of Nigerian herdsman who are highly dependent on the lushness of vegetation for their cattle feed. Following that, one can infer that the migration that characterizes nomadism is seasonal; that is, herdsman move to the South during the dry season only to return to base during the wet season when vegetation in their region would also benefit from the rains (Ayodeji 2020). The study thus focuses on how some herdsman, now ex-herdsman following their quitting of nomadism, have transited from being migrants to the diaspora. It then proceeds to examine the sociocultural dynamics practiced by ex-herdsman consequent upon their integration into the sociocultural norms of the host communities. In doing these, what factors influence migration patterns of herdsman in Nigeria, how have herdsman negotiated their sustenance in host communities, and what sociocultural dynamics are emanating from this migration were critical questions that maintained the study's focus.

### **Climate Change, Migration, and Sociocultural Dynamics**

Studies on migration help further understand how climate change interacts with society and the peoples' realities, lived experiences, and adaptation measures (Wafula *et al.* 2022, Askland *et al.* 2022, Guiteras 2009). Different circumstances inform people's migration, and climate change-induced migration produces a staggering number of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (Salami and Tilakasiri, 2020). Askland *et al.* (2022) believe it creates a situation of two categories of people- who either do not want to leave a place they call home or are unable to leave. They argue that climate change-induced migration is place-based dispossession. However, McLean (2014) gives a milder representation of this dispossession as relocation from a harsh environment. With narratives of trauma and loss trailing the experiences of people and communities, the situation with pastoralists is multifaceted, especially because pastoralism is both a cultural and an

economic endeavor (Nyariki and Amwata 2019). The last three decades have been enormously challenging for Nigerian herdsmen, just like other herdsmen in the Sahel region, due to prolonged drought, depleting water and pasture resources, and desert encroachment located in the Sahel North of the country (Ayodeji 2020; Hoffmann et al. 2018). These have triggered the relentless search for pasturage and influenced many herders' decision to temporarily or permanently engage in other livelihoods, as shown in Nairobi City (Wafula *et al.* 2022). An earlier study on Burkina Faso and Chad revealed a similar trend that urban areas are increasingly becoming attractive for this human and animal migration because pastoralists are exposed to more and better opportunities that guarantee maximum profit for the sale of their cattle (Ancey *et al.* 2020). Migration is a survival strategy that has provided humanity with the much-needed safety from socioeconomic, natural, and artificial disasters (McLean (2014).

In 2011, McLeman and Brown acknowledged that depending on the magnitude of the disaster caused by climate change, individuals, households, or communities could be sacked, and the people move to settle elsewhere either temporarily or permanently. By so doing, the structure and living patterns are altered, leaving tremendous risks and hazards that tamper with the dynamics of a place Askland *et al.* (2022). This unexpected reality is believed to challenge people's sense of being and belonging (Farbotko 2019). The process of being and belonging transcends the individual's values to being receptive and accepted into the values and practices of the larger society. Whatever the circumstances underlying the migration, 'new settlement' appears to be the first step to cultural hybridization. Hybridity creates a sense of dualism where two cultures intersect and interact. Manifestation of the diffusion varies from mild, average to acute depending on internal and external factors (Eshalomi 2020; Poltera 2010; Shome and Hedge 2002). As the degree of hybridization vary, cultural practices of the home country/state become indisputably recessive.

In their study, Hassi and Storti (2012) identified channels through which cultural contacts happen, including wars, trade, migration, economic, political, social, and technological advancement. They invariably

posit that culture is mobile. As people move, many other physical and abstract phenomena move with them; and are greeted by different sociocultural practices in their host location (Idang 2015). E.B Tylor's profound definition of culture appears holistic in the very sense that he positions cultural practices as a product of the society (1871, reprinted 1958). By being a product of society, culture is procedural, and the process allows man to address the social, economic, aesthetics, political and religious challenges of living in the society (Bello 1991). In an attempt to define culture, Abbas (1997) advances the discourse by bringing to the fore the chameleonic and deceptive nature of culture. According to him, the elements, values, and practices of a culture that looks the same may already be different, and what is different may still look the same. Culture is a critical part of identity, and the inability of different definitions to holistically capture its complexities explains the term's malleability (Eshalomi 2020; Bello 1991).

### **Methodology**

An ethnography that conforms to qualitative research design was employed to answer the questions that guide this study. In-Depth Interviews were conducted with 20 participants living in Lagos and Oyo States. The interviews were conducted within the first half of 2019. These interviews were semi-structured to allow flexibility and clarity of ambiguous statements. Participants were purposively selected to ensure that they were ex-herdsmen. They fall within the age range of 25-60. This range was not intentional but appeared the most ideal for social and economic independence from their masters. Their ages significantly reflect the years they have spent as ex-herdsmen. Incidentally, the younger interviewees reconsidered their profession earlier than the older interviewees. In other words, younger participants spent lesser years herding than their older counterparts interviewed for this study. While questions on their demographics were asked, more central questions that addressed the focus of this study were primary. Critical among them include questions on why and when they quit herding and how they have navigated through the sociocultural differences in their states of domiciliation were asked. Lagos's choice was informed by its

vast and enduring socioeconomic advantage over other states in the country (Osho and Adishi 2019). Besides being the historical home of the Yoruba, Oyo is essentially an Islamic State, the religion of these herdsmen. All participants were indifferent about their identity, so the study adopted pseudonyms for neutrality. Secondary data within the discipline of climate change, cultural studies, and nomadic studies were consulted in journal articles, books, newspapers, and conference papers, among others, to foreground the study. The data was transcribed and grouped under themes for onward analysis using explanatory and deductive styles.

### **Sociocultural Dynamics of Ex-herdsmen in Lagos and Oyo State**

In this section, responses from interviewees are engaged in unpacking the sociocultural dynamics of ex-herdsmen who are now diaspora albeit local exhibit. Their decisions have been largely blamed on climate change, making their search for pasturage increasingly cumbersome.

#### *Nature and the aggressive search for survival*

As a representative response for 12 other interviewees, Ahmed, a 43 years old ex-herdsman, triangulates climate change, empathy for hungry cattle, and conflict, especially those between herders and farmers. He captures it most explicitly as indented below:

"... herding before anything else is first and foremost our source of livelihood. We practically depend on it economically, and that is where our attachment to the flock stems from. The worry a parent exhibits when their child/ren is/are hungry is what we experience when we cannot find fresh vegetation for our cattle. That is one thing that climate change has caused for herders in the North. We feel the hunger on behalf of our cattle and are pushed to bring down any barrier just to get what we want. That is why you not only see us move from place to place in search of fresh grasses, but accounts for the violent conflict with farmers in areas with lush vegetation" (Interview, Oyo State, 2020).

This response is multifaceted, following its economic, psychological, conflict, and climate change strands woven together. Before the new millennium, the relationship between herders and sedentary farmers was amicable and cordial. Experts even revealed that after harvest, farmers looked forward to herders grazing on their farmlands because waste from the cattle fertilized their land (Gürsoy 2019). In some situations where cattle destroyed farmlands, community heads mediated between both parties, and herders were asked to compensate farmers for their loss. However, severe climate change has continued to deplete natural resources and raised tensions, making this strategy unsustainable. What used to be cordial has soon degenerated into violent conflicts across the country. By empathizing and putting themselves in the position of the cows, we are reminded of the unbearable pain of hunger capable of instigating injurious actions and the need to reduce cattle mortality. The sensation evident in the tone of this interviewee is remarkably frightening, especially as the International Crisis Group reported that more lives had been lost to the herders-farmers crisis than Boko Haram in the country (2019). Invariably, the global call for environmental sustainability is reiterated by how this respondent presents the trickle-down effect of climate change as unavoidably affecting other aspects of society.

*Drifting from Temporary to Permanent Resident*

Underpinning nomadism is the temporality that characterizes their mobility. Albeit, the situation captured by Abdul, a 38 years old ex-herdsman, underscores the dynamism that alters phenomena at different times and under different circumstances. Below, the interviewee displays his knowledge of the political and economic realities of the country and how his mobility status transited from temporal to permanent:

"I have always been a temporary visitor in Lagos who always returned to the North after the sales of my cattle. However, the suspension of the RUGA policy following the outcry of the southerners has made me reconsider my choice of business because, in this Nigeria, one has

to be proactive. Now, I buy from herders who bring cattle from the North". (Interview, Lagos State, 2021).

In his response, one can deduce that open grazing is not sustainable following different factors ranging from climate change, poor policies, and ethnic or regional sentiments, among others. The Federal Government's proposal of the Rural Grazing Area Policy (RUGA) was a reactive solution to the increasing problems of farmlands destruction by cattle, kidnapping, rape, murder, and banditry accompanying pastoralism in the country. The RUGA initiatives settlements are proposed delineated, permanent grazing areas to be established in all the federation states to check and stave off cattle encroachment into farmlands. However, Nigeria's deeply entrenched socio-political mistrusts among the different ethnic tribes in the country came to the fore as the government was accused of showing inexplicable support to the socioeconomic interests of a particular section of the country over others (Ademola 2020). The historical trajectory of the Fulani, and the crimes of kidnapping, banditry, and killings alleged to have been perpetrated by them in recent times, especially in the rich vegetation southern part of the country, provided good stock for the rejection of the proposed initiative of the Federal Government. The government's gesture is widely interpreted as biased on the basis that the cattle-rearing business is not government-owned, and the government is not expected to compel states to cede lands to cattle owners who are engaged in their economic enterprises. The situation creates a complex bifurcation where justice for one automatically precipitates injustice for the other. The rejection is further justified because an earlier suggestion for ranching, which would have provided justice for both sides, had been ignored by the government,

Additionally, Abdul's swift business change is critical to how his migratory status transitioned from a temporary migrant to a permanent resident in Lagos State. For more precision, Abdul does not fall short of being regarded as a diaspora having moved from being a 'flow' to a 'stock.' His sense of being proactive indicates the instability that characterizes the different sectors and structures of Nigerian society (Gürsoy 2019). Climate change

poses a threat to cattle rearing. It is responsible for the flexibility of migrant status, especially in a country divided along political, cultural, ethnic, and religious lines like Nigeria. Quitting herding indicates lurking health danger if the government does not take seriously the effect of climate change and the need for a sustainable alternative benefitting all stakeholders.

#### *Cultural Assimilation*

In the response below, Yassah, a 28 years old interviewee, recognizes the growing changes in his sociocultural life and subconsciously highlights the stages of cultural change. Moreover, he captures the evolution of culture in a most enthralling way:

I am unconsciously imbibing the Yoruba culture, and it is surprising how it played out the last time I visited my village. I practically craved *amala* so much so that I had to look for a restaurant in a faraway place to eat it. ...I appeared differently all through my stay because my dressing was a blend of both Yoruba and Hausa attire. Interestingly, my relatives back at home reached me when I returned to Ibadan, that they had made some of the clothes styles/patterns I took with me for themselves. I smiled! (Interview, Oyo State, 2020).

Across different disciplines, culture has been established to be pliable and subject to change. The changes go through 3 major stages- contact, interaction, and diffusion (Eshalomi 2020). One way cultures contact is through trade, a channel that resonates with Yassah's experience. As cultures diffuse or assimilate, the effect is not unilateral, as elements of both cultures are transposed consciously and unconsciously into interacting cultures. Food/Cuisine, dance, music, and attires are critical elements of cultural identity, and more than other core cultural practices and values, they are easily transferable. There is a sense in which Yassah's response allows us to understand the critical role of the diaspora in the evolution of culture. Diaspora commands respect and influence and has established their position as agents of sociocultural change (Akeson and Baaz 2015). As much as climate

change impacts the migration pattern among Northern herders in Nigeria, it is also tinkering with their patterned way of life in a way that results in cultural loss and/or gains.

*Home away from home*

To help take care of the fluidity of the concept of home, scholars categorize the concept into two, namely: physical and mental (Ullah and Kumpoh 2018). Lagos and Ibadan, the Oyo State capital, have become home to them as many have assimilated and adopted the cultural practices of their host community and vice versa. Mohammed, a 61 years old ex-herdsman whose response resonates with other interviewees, shares his achievement and how receptive he has become to the Yoruba culture:

I have now adopted Lagos as my home. I am almost done with my building project. I relocated my family to Lagos because of the recurring attacks in the North. Just last month, my daughter married a Yoruba man from Ogun State, and I must admit that the marriage rituals that were done that day were a blend of both Hausa and Yoruba. My wife dresses very often in Yoruba attire. I plan to take a Yoruba wife who will always cook *Amala* and *Ewedu* for me because that food is now one of my best food. (Interview, Lagos State, 2021)

My understanding of Mohammed's view of a home aligns with the concept of cosmopolitanism, where anywhere is home. However, this resolve is determined by the migrant, who, more often than not, has relaxed the sociocultural context he/she was originally exposed to for the adoption of the sociocultural practices of the host state/country. For this interviewee, sociocultural flexibility is at the foundation of a hitch-free stay in a host community. In a culturally heterogeneous country like Nigeria, sentiments, restrictions, and differences are debilitating challenges against inter-tribal marriages. Aside from being amenable to the sociocultural practices of his host location, this ex-herdsman has allowed the same for members of his family to the point of supporting the daughter's marriage to a Yoruba man.

His plan to marry a Yoruba woman will further consolidate his growing assimilation into the Yoruba sociocultural practices. At this point, one would understand climate change's far-reaching effect as an agent of cultural evolution and change. Rather than being condemned to instigating a miserable fate, climate change becomes a springboard for exploring other life's possibilities.

*Cultural Assimilation Accelerated by Religion*

Over the years, alliances have been formed among people who share similar ideologies that span political, cultural, economic, security, technology, and religion, among others. As Hamid, a 59 years old ex-herdsman, reiterates that no culture is sacrosanct, he ties the change to the indispensable place of religion:

The assimilation is mutual. Many Yoruba people have also imbibed some Hausa cultural practices because of their interaction with us. They are more in Hausa-dominated areas, though, but many of them are Muslims. (Interview, Lagos State, 2020)

Earlier in this study, the stages of cultural change have been identified. Hamid's opening sentence helps us understand that the status (dominant or minor) of the culture has little or no effect on its evolution. Put differently, interacting cultures draw upon their distinct elements for change. In the response above, Hamid shows the undeniable role of religion in cultural assimilation. While the Hausa/Fulani are largely Muslims, Yoruba are adherents of both Abrahamic Faiths. Their cultural diffusion is accelerated by their religious commonality, especially because the practice of Islam is barely different from adherents' cultural practices. Additionally, the interviewee highlights the role of proximity in the process of cultural diffusion. By crediting the cultural assimilation to the cohabitation of people from both cultures, Hamid corroborates existing literature that when cultures are close, there are transpositions of different practices from both cultures (Seabela 1990).

### Conclusion

Overall, this study examines the increasing consequences of climate change on pasturage in the Northern part of Nigeria. The article situates climate change at the very heart of cultural change and assimilation. By focusing on ex-herdsmen from Northern Nigeria, a region that has been severely affected by the unrelenting climate change, the study highlights sociocultural changes that are taking place following their quitting of pastoralism and subsequent adoption of their host communities (Lagos and the Oyo States) as home. From food to dress, music, and marriages, among others, Hausa/Fulani ex-herdsmen have continued to assimilate the Yoruba culture and vice versa. The ex-herdsmen confirmed that climate change and the government's inability to find a sustainable solution to the violent herders-farmers conflict across the country informed their decision to venture into other forms of enterprises in their new homes. The men have learned to draw upon their resilience and determination in creating and making meaning of their lives under these new yet unexpected conditions.

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# Extracting the Visual: Mobility, Migration, and Ecology seen through Nineteenth-Century Visual Representations of Colombian Mining

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## **ABSTRACT**

Different examples of watercolors, prints, and photographs made in Nineteenth-century Colombia and its relationship to mining and land can be found when searching archives and collections. In most images studied, actual extraction rarely occurs, an observation that allows for these gaps to become part of what is not being recorded. If we understand mining as the act of taking valuable or useful materials from the ground, we can look at these images and extract from them essential visual elements to confront them, alone or against each other, and understand how foreign and local actors produced specific visual approaches towards the relationship between man and land. By carefully looking at these images and the people and contexts that produced them, we can chart historical issues that currently threaten mining communities with ecological and social disasters, but that also allow these visual constructions to be understood as complex territories that destabilize notions of identity, nation, land, resource or territory. Comparative examples of these nineteenth-century productions with Contemporary Colombian Art and its concerns can also be spun through reflections of actors and places, both old and new, and how the mining narratives are being revisited and reappropriated.

## **KEYWORDS**

Mining; Miners; Landscape; Colombia; 19th-Century

### **Introduction**

Colombia's history of mining is initially associated with gold extraction through exquisitely crafted objects made by pre-Hispanic cultures, and also through the history of conquest and colonialism until today when mining conflicts and dialogues with development, progress, crime, human labor, human rights, and social and ecological disasters. Placer mining, or the sifting of valuable metals from sediments in river channels using simple pans, was established through colonial attitudes. In a few places during the 18th and 19th centuries, both open-surface and underground mines were exploited to extract minerals and precious stones such as gold, emeralds, coal, and ore. When the territory was part of the Spanish Empire, some of the mines were the property of Spain, while others were private and thus paid the Viceroyalty 20% of their earnings. Any history of mining must include the horrible story of harsh human labor. When indigenous populations diminished due to disease and mortality rates, Spain authorized sending enslaved Africans to work at specific mining regions for further exploitation. For 300 years, the current Colombian territory extracted mainly gold and sent approximately three to four metric tons a year to Spain, abusing enslaved people through terrible work conditions and damaging landscape through gunpowder. At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Charles III sent to New Granada German engineers to further develop gold and silver mining and improve mining techniques and technology. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Colombia's mining industry has included the extraction of minerals such as gold, silver, platinum, coal, copper, iron ore, bauxite, and nickel; nonmetallic minerals such as salt, gypsum, talcum, and emeralds, and energy resources such as oil and natural gas.

This paper presents a first approximation to some of these images and ideas, engaging and problematizing some of these examples while at the same time trying to understand the role that representation or lack of representation is playing in the image. Through this first lens, some ideas about taking away, abstracting, and synthesizing may allow for further and deeper study of the urgent issues related to the mining industry. There are many artists and travelers of this nineteenth-century period studied here.

Still, due to the time limitation, this presentation will only include Englishman Joseph Brown, local and foreign artists of the Corographic Commission Carmelo Fernández, Henry Price and Manuel María Paz, diplomat Edward Wallhouse Mark, and Spanish adventurer José María Gutiérrez de Alba. We will first approach this topic and its primary, evident visual issues through a selection of images. A few examples of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>-century artworks by Pedro Nel Gómez, Daniel Rodríguez, and Clemencia Echeverri will be briefly mentioned to create a dialogue and a continuity of how these problems are relevant in our modern and contemporary world. By looking at these images carefully, for example, one can easily see a tendency towards the representation of the human role in mining, as an example of genre drawing or *Costumbrismo* in the first half of the century. In contrast, the second half tends to give at least a little more importance to the landscape. Not just through the act of drawing but through photography examples, we can see the lens shift in intention and context.

### **19<sup>th</sup>-Century Examples**

Some of the first images related to mining that we can find in the early Nineteenth Century are those of Englishman Joseph Brown, who traveled widely and was in Colombia between 1825 and 1840 as an employee of the Colombian Mining Association, “the same enterprise that at different times went under the name of ‘Herring, Graham and Powles’, ‘Powles, Illingworth, and Co.’, ‘Powles, Illingworth, Wills, and Co.’”<sup>1</sup>. The company “... owned mines at Marmato, Santa Ana, and Bucaramanga and invested substantial sums. Though it consistently disappointed its stockholders by failing to pay dividends, it was successful enough to keep going...”<sup>2</sup> There are three drawings by Brown associated with the business that can be seen in the archives at the Royal Geographical Society in London, which are, according to historian Malcolm Deas, some of the first representations of this type. In the image, “*A native laborer from the Santa Ana mines arriving with a dispatch,*” the messenger bears a letter addressed to Powles, Illingworth, Wills, and Co... The emphasis in this image is the messenger’s typical attire of the tempered area of Tolima, where the mines of Santa Ana were located.

The messenger wears a dark *ruana*, knee-high pants, and a conical straw hat while standing barefoot with the letter in his hand with a generic landscape in the background. This image seems like an excuse to construct a stylized native type. It seems unimportant that the subject represented is working as an emissary to or from the mining company, or what the note even says, he is serving as a model of the type of humble peasant that casually traverses the landscape to hand in a message. The very thin and elongated figure show an unnamed, mixed-race man who passively completes his task and obviously poses for Brown to create watercolor such as this one, that is part of “... the collection of an Englishman who wanted souvenirs for family and friends, and who also hoped to publish an album of types, scenes and customs...”<sup>3</sup> The landscape is completely undetailed and unspecified, the man stands on a barren mound of sand in the foreground, the dark medium ground could be a river. Although the Santa Ana mines were located near the small Murillo creek, the messenger could bring information from the mines to the larger town of Honda on the main branch of the Magdalena River. In the background, a faint mountain range suggests that little or nothing reflects on the bountiful exploitation of the gold mines at Santa Ana or of the rich and complex geography surrounding this area of the country. Attention here is placed on typified clothing, especially on the *ruana*.

The other two images made by Joseph Brown are one of the outside of the Santa Ana mine and another of the inside of one of the shafts. *Santa Ana Mine* differentiates working roles by pairs. In a clear colonial attitude of what was by the 1830s a Republican enterprise, two light-skinned men with golden locks are standing outside of the hut conversing, properly dressed in clean, light clothes. They are relaxed and comfortable as they seem to talk business. Next to them, under the narrow hut, two men sit on the floor in postures that would signify terrible back pain at the end of the day, working, hammering, and analyzing every bit of stone that is coming from the inside of the mine. The man on the left is barefoot, has darker skin, and sits directly on top of the gruelingly uncomfortable pieces of broken material. There is more work on the surroundings in this image, although it wouldn't necessarily be considered a landscape, as it shows built-in stairs, large, broken stones set

aside that manifest the intervention on the land, and a few examples of local vegetation, not necessarily specified but more as an idea of the sort of verdure to be found. We can definitely assert that because Brown was directly involved in the mining company, because he was a commercial traveler and because he was not necessarily an artist, his interest in these types of images was illustrative for the publication of possible future memoirs. When drawings like these are seen next to literary descriptions, the gap between looking at the landscape and focusing on the actual functioning of the mines is evident. Three decades earlier, at the end of 1801, Alexander von Humboldt described the landscape of the mines of Santa Ana in his *Diary*,

The small town, famous for its antique mining exploitation is located South of Mariquita. The road initially goes through part of a huge valley that extends itself between the cordilleras of Guaduas and the páramos (Herveo, Quindío) towards Neiva. That valley is divided into smaller valleys on the old river bed of the Magdalena, near Honda and Mariquita, and contains new sandstone formations that alternate with layers of both coarse (breccie) and fined-grained sandstone. The sandstone is exactly the same as the Cuban Stone, especially that of the Llano de Calabozo and to that of the valleys near the mission of Atures, Maipures and Turbaco... The road slowly crosses through a nearby forest towards the west, coming close to the cordillera. You must wade the rivers Lumbi, and close to Santa Ana, the Guamo. Between both you can already see the metamorphic rock gneiss. From Guamo a, 800 feet long sinkhole was built towards La Manta. From there you must climb, over bare gneiss, up to the small town where you enjoy a wonderful spectacle of the immense valley of the Magdalena and the snowcapped Ruiz volcano, towards the east in the mornings, and towards the west in the afternoons.<sup>4</sup>

As is usual when framing the 19th-century visual versus the written in travel narratives, text details and informs more realistically, whereas images select and abstract the essential for communicative purposes. We have much more information about the landscape from Humboldt's paragraph than from Brown's watercolor.



**Fig. 1.** Joseph Brown . *Illingworth's Shaft- Santa Ana Mine, Raising Ore.* ca. 1825-1840. Watercolor and ink. 25,7 x 25,8 cm. Royal Geographical Society, London.

The third and last image of Brown's authorship is *Illingworth's Shaft- Santa Ana Mine, Raising Ore*, which is, without a doubt, the most interesting of the three examples precisely because it ventures to represent what goes on inside the mine. An evident issue with this image is how Brown chose to illuminate a naturally dark scene. As spectators, we see a cross-section of the shaft as if we were lighting it up directly to see the inside workings. In any case, the illuminated elements are the miners who, in awkward attire, no pants, collared shirts, and no shoes, un-stressfully seem to do their job

without any difficulties. The lighting and the shadowing appear to be realistically off because the light source is unclear, and the shadows are also random. Using a pulley, the two racially undetermined, fit, and muscular-looking men raise ore from the bottom of the shaft in a wooden bucket. The similarity between both models is curious. They evidence that this was not an image done underground *in situ* by Brown. Actual mining work doesn't seem strenuous, as the workers look directly towards the viewer while not exerting too much force with either arms or legs in what appears to be a *pseudo-contrapposto*. The surroundings are again generic, with tones of browns, blacks, and greys used to create an underground context while perfectly framing the human act of excavating and raising the much-needed material for commercial and economic progress from the underground.

The Colombian Corographic Commission, an official survey project led by the Liberal governments of the 1850s, aspired to understand the rural regions by mapping and describing, both visually and textually, human geography, landscape, natural resources, possible trade options, handicrafts, indigenous findings and more. It also registered a small variety of images with mid-century mining. Because of its heterogeneous manner, the three main artists involved in representing the different voyages produced a diverse group of watercolors that were supposed to accompany the published texts, an objective that was never finalized.

The six examples that involve inquiries involving landscape, ecology, and human mobility all visualize the relationship to the mining enterprise through a human, commercial, and business transaction perspective. In this slide, we can see both the Venezuelan artist Carmelo Fernández and Henry Price, the British artist who accompanied the Commission in 1852, capturing some elements of the natural world involving extraction while maintaining a visual emphasis and composition on human interaction. If social interaction around mining must be represented in one image, the challenge is to include as much information on the actors involved in this business while making the image seem natural and organic. It is also indisputable that issues of race and social class representation are dialoguing in these images. Fernández titles his drawing *White Miners* and specifies the geographical region where they

operate. The man in the brown coat is the organizing element of how we should read this image, he is the boss and is dubiously listening to one of the workers who is not mining but could be one of the head workers as he dresses in the same manner as those in the background. Landscape acts as scenario and includes a minimum of elements to give space an identity associated with that specific province, the three men in the back who are working are lightly drawn, much as the trees, rocks, and barren mountains, the miners blend into the mid-ground and background whereas the human types are centered and sharp. Mining here is an excuse to understand how class, race, and land interact in a hierarchy. On the other hand, Henry Price brings to his drawing the next step in the mining industry when gold and silver have been quarried or panned. They are negotiated and traded in the urban scenario. Four human types appear to qualify the image as a synthesized mineral and gem trading idea. The title, *Miner and dealer*, gives us a clear hint of the main characters of this story. The miner is a big dark-skinned man who hands the fair-skinned dealer the merchandise he has brought to sell.

Meanwhile, the store owner and the woman in the foreground are completely passive. Still, they serve as elements of variety in the composition while allowing the viewer to see other examples of people and clothing through the optimization permitted by the image.

A second group of images of this Commission includes another image by Price and one drawn by Colombian artist Manuel María Paz. Price's scene of gold panning in the Guadalupe River in the great mining area of Antioquia shows five female figures, two of them have their torso and face covered by the pan they are using to sift sand in the river and find small nuggets of gold. Similar to what price did in *Miner and dealer*, he makes sure that there is an apparent, organic variety of human examples that can make the image credible while assuring clearness in the information conveyed. The three women dress the same, blue skirts and white shirts, difference lies in the frontal, side, and back positions they take concerning the viewer. Price, trained as a watercolorist in England, subtly details the rocks and river bank in the foreground. He deals with the different planes of the drawing through

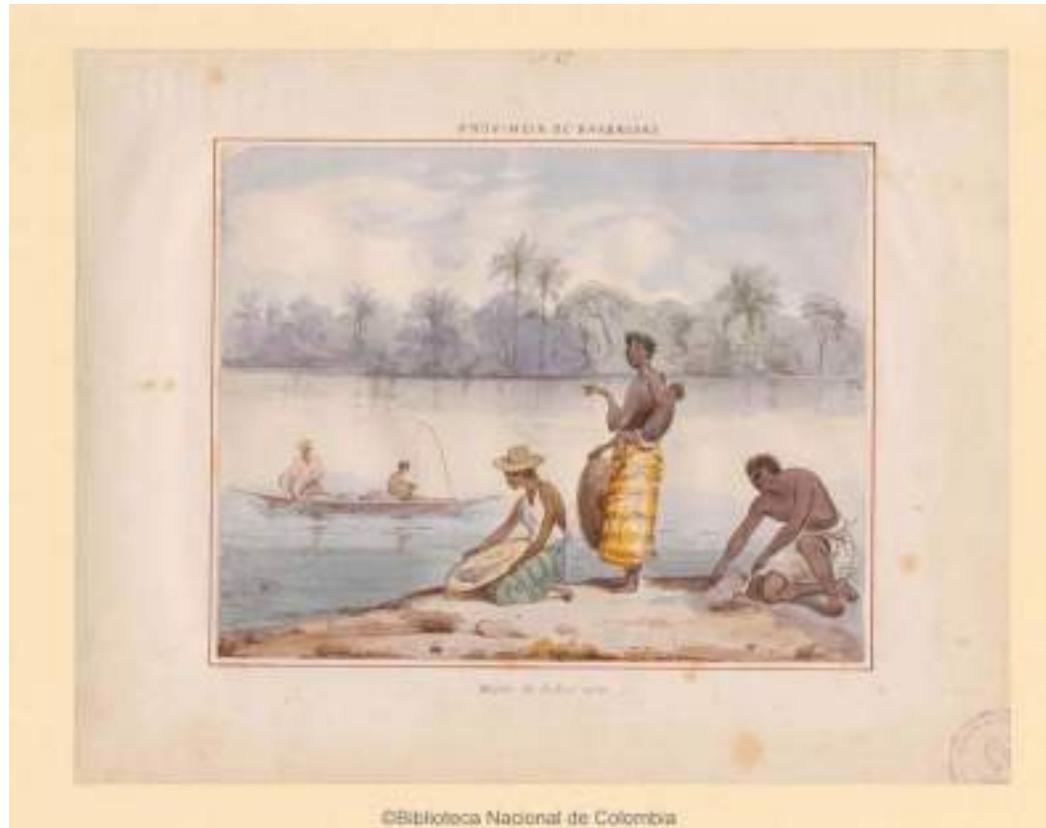
atmospheric perspective and, like Fernández in *White Miners*, dissolves the workers of the mine into the mid-ground. The two bright pink and white handkerchiefs on the women's hair visually convey attention to these central parts of the composition. The women's dark brown skin appears to camouflage with the river as if being there is part of this natural habitat. These images are meant to illustrate examples of regional life and economy. This is why they are posed and constructed as archetypes of the ideal union between the human and the natural.

Manuel María Paz, on the other hand, separated the human from the landscape more evidently. The three figures in the foreground show variety in terms of gender, role, skin color, and relationship to the viewer. The central figure is the woman that stands up and carries her baby on her back. She turns around, pauses, and looks at the viewer while pointing toward the men that glide through the river while fishing in their canoe. Two economic activities coexist on this river of the Cauca region in the South West gold panning and fishing. As is explained by historian Maria Elena Bedoya Hidalgo,

...gold, and everything that can be associated to it, becomes the pattern with which to measure richness, in the past and in the present, as well as the facilitator of different strategies: extractive, scientific, economic, and culturally-historic. This is why the imagined figure of the "Indians dressed in gold," of the mines filled with gold, and the richness of the golden territories are central points towards the understanding of the representation strategies of a nation's past, that shows wealth and constantly negotiates a present, based on the economic requirements and the political-diplomatic disputes about the territories.<sup>5</sup>

Landscape appears on the other river bank, across from the water, where palm trees and mountains softly stand. Both women, elongated and stylized, contrast with the man's muscular figure. They all seem part of this passive paradise where rivers and nature are bountiful with the gifts of fish and gold. The central figure wears a skirt-like-garment that emphasizes her relationship to gold as a precious material that is inevitably bound to her and

her social and economic role in extraction. Part of this Commission's purpose was to report the hidden potential of the country's different regions for economic progress and as part of the political campaign against a competing Conservative, Centralist government.



**Fig. 2.** Manuel María Paz. *Gold washing- Province of Barbacoas*. 1853. Watercolor on paper. 24 x 31 cm. Biblioteca Nacional de Colombia.

Although there is great interest in the representation of the human in images related to mining in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Colombia, one can also find examples that appear to obliterate the human and focus on the landscape. This is the particular case of images of the emerald mines in Muzo, in Boyacá, approximately 113 miles North of Bogotá. The indigenous peoples of Muzo extracted emeralds from these mountains before the Spanish conquest. Colombia is known for its high-quality green emeralds extracted from this

region. A tropical forest surrounds the area of the town of Muzo at an altitude of 3000 feet above sea level, including very rich and varied vegetation. For decades, the constant extraction in these mountains, not just of emeralds but of minerals and rocks, like calcite, pyrite, dolomite, and quartz, eroded the cliffs and hillsides of the region, causing significant ecological damage.



**Fig. 3.** Edward Wallhouse Mark. *Emerald Mine, Muzo*. October 1846. 17,5 x 25 cm. Acuarela sobre papel. Museo de Arte Miguel Urrutia, Bogotá

This is what, consciously or not, is portrayed in the watercolors of the Muzo area by both the British diplomat Edward Wallhouse Mark and Henry Price. Both small drawings, probably made directly on site, lessen obvious human activity and captivate the viewer's eye through the barren rock. Mark's watercolor does leave a small hint of the mining camp, with two tiny groups of men climbing the cliff towards what looks like small constructions of the mining camp. Nevertheless, the natural elements dominate the image and, contrary to what mining does to the land, both Mark and Price extract the

landscape, isolate it and allow it to stand on its own, like a piece of emerald found in the midst of the black stone.

Spaniard José María Gutiérrez de Alba spent, around the 1870s, fourteen years in Colombia as an agent for the Spanish government. He was a journalist and playwright interested in expanding his horizons. With his basic childhood drawing and coloring abilities, he produced thirteen volumes of handwritten and illustrated diaries, including original and copied watercolors of his authorship, drawings made by others, and an interesting collection of photographs. In Volume XII of *Impresiones de un viaje a América*, which he titles *Appendix: Wonders and Curiosities of Colombia*, he makes copies of many watercolors of the Corographic Commission that, at the time of his voyage, were already archived at the National Library. Amongst those copies are Price's *Gold Washers* and Paz's *Gold Washing* images. They are interesting to compare, as Gutiérrez de Alba, not trained as an artist, includes more light and dark contrast, and in the *Gold Washing* copy adventures to explore a more expressive sky.

Of his creations, Gutiérrez de Alba illustrates his handwritten memoirs that are interesting to see in the light of this mining imagining relationship with four drawings. They are dated with the exact dates he visited the Province of Mariquita. The same area includes the Santa Ana and Marmato gold and silver mines, and he visits specifically the Mines of Mal Paso and Bocaneme. Images made by Gutiérrez that are not copies seem to be simpler in terms of mimetic or naturalistic representation. He doesn't detail light and shade, contrast, or emphasis. They all relate to the main title of his diaries, *Impressions*, or quick jot-downs of what he sees in the different excursions he does through the main cordilleras. While in the Mariquita area, the Spaniard writes,

The first thing we visited was a recently opened sinkhole, where work was being carried out in a hole, following a seam, called del Caimán, I don't know for what reason. While we were there, I took in my album a note of the entrance to the sinkhole, and made a light portrait of an Englishman, notable for his rough forms and vigorous musculature, who was chief

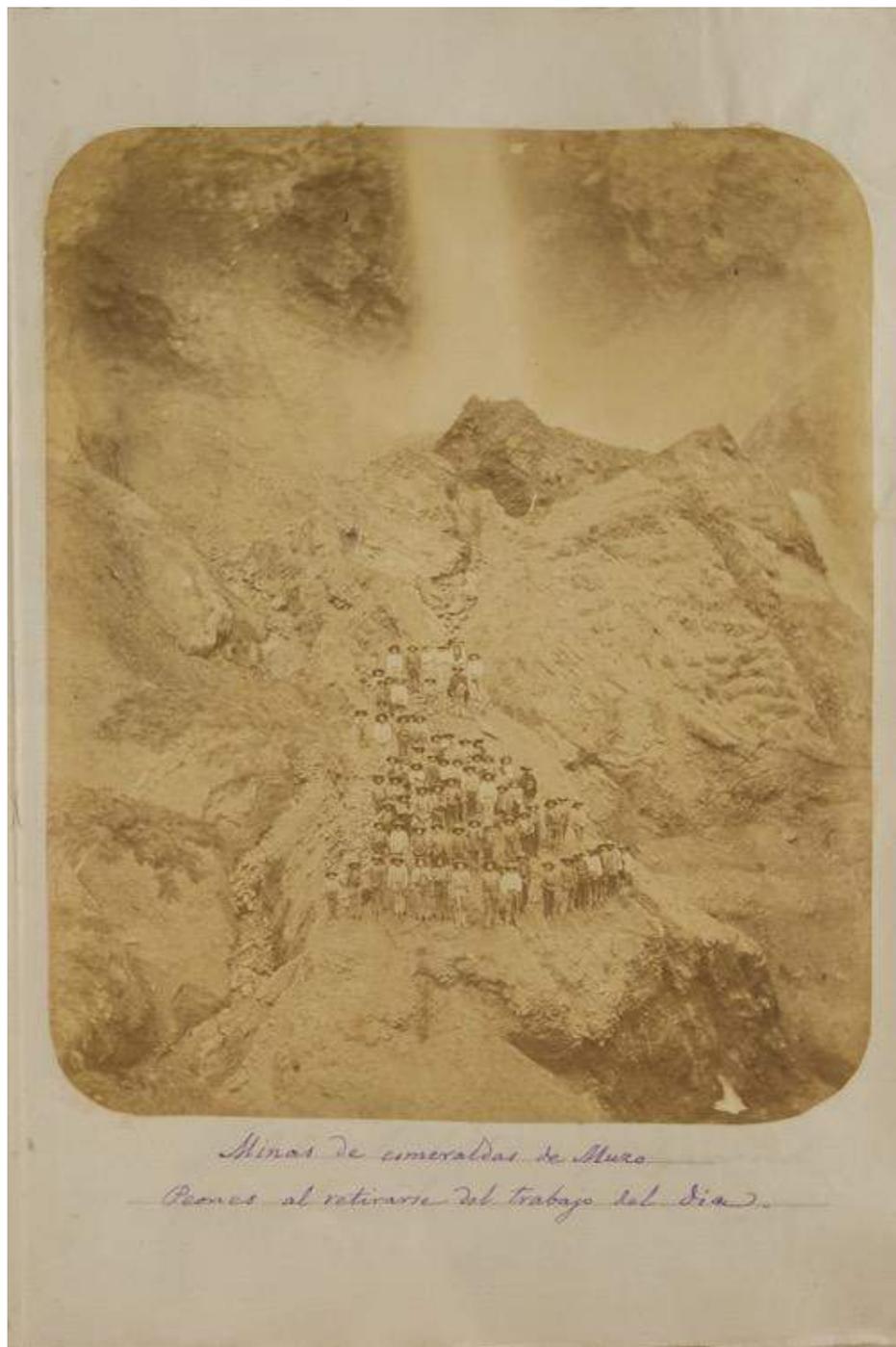
of the workers. At the door of the pit there were large piles of the extracted mineral, and under a nearby shed several workers, men, and women, were busy breaking the stones with hammer blows until they reduced the pieces to the size of a fist, soon leading the, to the back of oxen, to the place where the crushing devices are found, in large leather bags arranged like saddlebags.<sup>6</sup>

What is intriguing about these images' actual reference to the workings of the mines, the shafts, the veins, the machinery, and even the accidents are intriguing. Landscape and vegetation here are again subdued to the actual intrinsic day-to-day workings of the land, including the portrait of Englishman William Scaddon, boss to the miners in Bocaneme. The drawings even have visual mistakes or evidence of Gutiérrez's lack of training, perspective, and proportion, as seen in the small wheelbarrow of the *Williamson Shaft* drawing or the anatomical inconsistencies visible in Scaddon's portrait. Trees all look the same shade of green, details in the vegetation are scarce, and coloring seems very primary as if only trying to capture the gist of the mining enterprise.



**Fig. 4.** José María Gutiérrez de Alba. *Williamson Shaft, Alligator Vein*. In: Jose María Gutierrez de Alba. *Impressions of a trip to America*. Volume X. June 2, 1874. Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, Bogotá.

The most intriguing images of mining found in Gutiérrez de Alba's volumes are the five anonymous photographs he includes in Volume VII, *Northern Expedition*, of the mines in Muzo. These images change the relationship that we had seen up to now in the drawings, except those of Muzo, by Price and Mark. A landscaping element in the barren cliffs surrounding these mines brings the photographer's, the artist's, and the viewer's attention toward the eroded walls and precipices. In the first two photographs, *Emerald Mines of Muzo*, *Forest that Surrounds the Enterprise* and *Emerald mines of Muzo, Jet for washing the landslides*, the human and the commercial have been blocked out by focusing only on the terrain that accompanies the mining industry, but that has been erased by only capturing the vegetation, just as Henry Price did in his watercolor of 1855. The traveler explicitly registers the supposedly non-mining elements and the human intervention and focuses on the vertical forest and also on the jet explicitly used to wash down the landslides, an element that adds to accentuate the erosion. In the other three photographs, *Pawns retiring from a day's work*, *Workers on the washed grounds at the bottom of the sinkhole*, and *Pawns working with the bar in the great sinkhole*, both images go back to emphasizing anonymous human labor, at the end of the day, including with explicit instructions of posing for the camera. Workers, similar to what was done by the Commission watercolors, blend in as part of the environment. They become elements of that landscape and help build it and construct it, both literally and metaphorically. So many more things can be said of these images.



**Fig. 5.** Anonymous. *Emerald mines of Muzo. Pawns retiring from a day's work.* 23,9 x 19 cm. In: Jose María Gutierrez de Alba. *Impressions of a trip to America.* Volume VII. February 9, 1872. Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, Bogotá.

### **A Few Modern and Contemporary Examples**

It is important to link the history of these images and to understand the issues underlying the social transformations, migrations, mobilities, ecologies, and other complexities of the modern mining industry with modern and contemporary aesthetic views. The problems that surround mining as an unsustainable industry in an ever-growing modern world seen through the eyes of the Anthropocene are much the same in late modernity but become more entangled and urgent during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, or artists, independent from institutions, governments, and companies disentangle visual problems differently, engaging the audience with a critical view of the image constructed.

I briefly want to mention painter and muralist Pedro Nel Gómez, who, being born and raised in Anorí, a town located in the rich mining geographical Department of Antioquia, during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was deeply touched by miners and their activities. Interviewed for a monographic book on his work, Gómez narrated that,

In Anorí, during my childhood, I knew mining directly. Without livestock, without agriculture and without coffee, the mines were really the only collective heritage of the common people. What I have painted in my paintings and my frescoes I did not invent; I drank in reality. Barequeo and tunnel mining were people's piggy banks, where the poor man searched for his daily grain. The barequeros and barequeras went in brigades; you could count the regiments not by hundreds but by thousands. With their pans they looked for the gold of the currents, especially when the summer diminished the flows of rivers and streams. I saw work as a popular feat, the participation of women in civil life, tragedy and mystery in those early years.<sup>2</sup>

His views of mining are interwoven with the humanity of the labor he saw for decades. The social element is firmly present, as is an absence of time searching for small nuggets of gold. Art historian Carlos Arturo Fernández describes the *Barequeo*<sup>8</sup> fresco of 1836 and says,

The climate that creates the fresco is very strange, like it has stopped in time. On the one hand, it shows us the landscape in which the mining work is done, in the banks of a river where vegetation has been completely wiped out. The tree stumps make it clear that this same future awaits the vegetation seen at a distance, on the opposite river bank. In his work, Pedro Nel Gómez pays more attention to the human figure than to the details of the landscape, but, beyond the artist's intentions, the atmosphere of devastation that is insinuated, represents the conflict between exploitation economy and nature that leads to the present ecological crisis. Nevertheless, the climate created by the human figures is strange, with a total of thirteen, that give the feeling of being completely silent and frozen in time and space. Only one miner removes material from the bottom of the river, while two more work with their trays. The rest seem to be quietly reviewing what little they have found or, perhaps exhausted and sick, take refuge on the shore. They are generic figures, doubled over on themselves, distressed, static, without vitality. The only ones who seem attentive are the two characters with hats, patrons or foremen, who control the events from the right margin of the fresco. In short, this is not the frenetic atmosphere of the great crowds in the grip of the gold rush that the artist himself claimed to have known. Gold mining will be a haunting subject for Pedro Nel Gómez, who makes it the quintessential symbol of the nation's hopes for life and prosperity, but also of its problems and contradictions. But here, in 1936, mining is not a happy celebration of work. Rather, it is an elegy, a song that in its eloquent silence denounces the destruction of the human being, crushed by pain and suffering.<sup>9</sup>

Modern photographer and graphic reporter Daniel Rodríguez, student and assistant of well-known 20th-century photographer Luis Benito Ramos, worked for some of the main magazines and newspapers in the country. During the 30s and 40s, he made rich visual reports on different topics of the country's daily life. In *Niño minero* (Miner Boy)<sup>10</sup> he photographs the human. Still, more the social than just the human is deeply portrayed through the child miner whose forehead lamp is being accommodated by larger, adult hands. The child looks towards the floor as pressure is exerted on his head; he inevitably needs help with his gear before descending underground again. On

the one side, a young man observes him as if accustomed to child labor. On the other, he observes these very large hands that probably should not be part of the passiveness.

The thick mud on the older miner's hands, caked onto his skin, is all the viewer needs to seize the viewer's comprehension of the physical and emotional trauma that happens under the earth's surface.

Lastly, we need to understand that the problems that both the planet and human kind bear with mining are inexhaustible, and that both the land and the people involved under the layers and issues are passive victims of our modern society. Contemporary Colombian artist, Clemencia Echeverri creates the 11-minute video installation *Sin cielo*<sup>11</sup>. This moving piece is poetically described by well-known author Piedad Bonnett as follows,

In *Sin cielo* the artist records what happens in Marmato, Caldas, a town located on a mountain full of veins of gold, where mining has been going on for 400 years, first in local hands and more recently also through multinational companies. What the video records, again, is the river, but this time making us see what the mine's dumps bring: cyanide, mercury, everything that is a lethal poison for the people in return for the search for gold. While we see, between astonishment, indignation and pain, the level of atrocious contamination of the waters, we hear the incessant clatter of the miners against the stone, which reminds us of the presence of those humble men, sunk in the sinkholes, humbly earning their livelihood, perhaps ignorant of the tremendous environmental damage these mines cause. Clemencia Echeverri's camera also records the bleak panorama of a town that does not show any wealth: rather chaos and ugliness, nothing that seems to be the realization of a dream world to live with dignity. The title Without Heaven perhaps refers to the double condition of working underground and, more metaphorically, to the hopelessness of the whole situation.<sup>12</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Mining is a key topic through which many issues can be studied: landscape, ecology, natural resources and their exploitation, modernity and productivity, human exploitation, etc. Through further study and careful analysis of these

images and others, we can approximate the human-nature relationship and try to disentangle modern and contemporary attitudes to past Republican practices. Through a difficult global problem like mining, images can be studied in a deeper context to understand the role they have played in forming collective attitudes and activities that today reveal deeper problems. So many contemporary issues are deeply rooted in the past, especially in 19<sup>th</sup>-century approaches to land, nature, and capitalism. This brief study seeks to connect some of these initial late-modern drawings and photographs to more recent pieces that allow us to understand the urgency of the subject and the role that images play in our understanding of the complexity of the affectation on our visual and physical environment.

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## Endnotes

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3. Deas, 25.
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# Rethinking Tupinambá Objects Beyond Restitution

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper draws a comparison between two objects that have been designated as being *tupinambá* in different contexts: the *ibirapema*, a wooden club dating from the 16th century used by the Tupinambá in ritual killings, and the *bolsa menina*, a purse manufactured in the northern coast of contemporary Bahia employing a weaving technique known as ‘tupinambá’. By comparing these pieces’ material elements and their role in the production of Tupinambá ethnicity, I question the notion of authenticity as a criterion for categorizing non-European artworks. Just like the *ibirapema* in the 16th century, the *bolsa menina* can be read as a key piece in the process of ethnogenesis that occurs in a constant struggle with the Other (in this case, the sprawling tourist economy in the coastal regions of northern Bahia). The self-designation of this contemporary group of artisans as ‘Tupinambá’ actualizes the ontological temporality operated by the *ibirapema* in the 16th century not despite, but because of the incorporation of new elements into its reinvention. From this, I conclude that there may still be a future for western ethnographic museums and for a history of indigenous art that goes beyond the debate around restitution.

## **KEYWORDS**

Tupinambá Objects; Ethnographic Museums; Curatorial Practices; Museum Polices; Public and Participative Collections.

This paper presents a part of my research concerning the period between July 2017 and August 2018, when I, during my masters, had the opportunity to frequent the archives of the *Musée du Quai Branly* in Paris. My goal is to answer the following question, which is frequently posed by colleagues and artists when they come in contact with the collection of objects that I chose to study: “Are these contemporary works really *tupinambá*?”

To answer this question, I will share some thoughts from the comparative study that I made of two pieces: 1) the *ibirapema* – a *tupinambá* indigenous artifact which, in the 16th century, was brought to the cabinet of curiosities of the king of France and; 2) an object manufactured in contemporary Brazil employing a technique called ‘*tupinambá*,’ the *bolsa menina*.



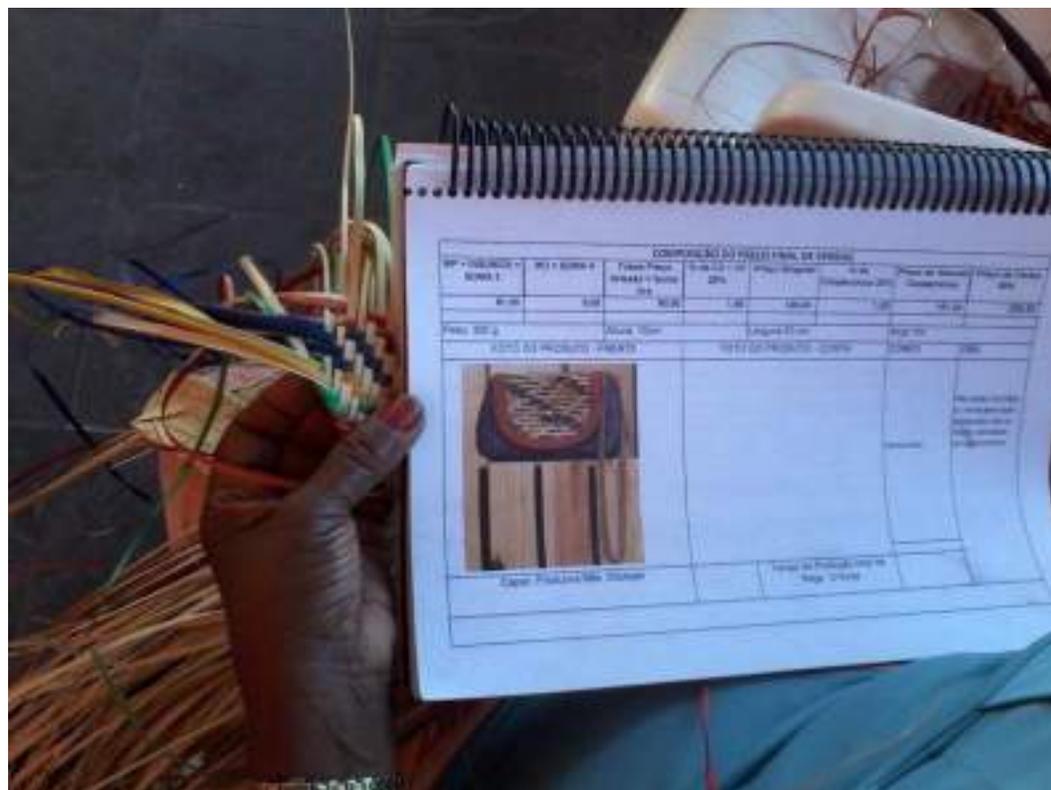
**Fig. 1.** Top view of the *ibirapema*. Textile structures manufactured in vegetable fibers are devoid of the feather art finishes. Technical reserve of the *Musée du Quai Branly*, 2018.

The *ibirapema* is a solid wooden club measuring about six feet and made of *pau brasil* (*Caesalpinia echinata*). The piece has the shape of a two-foot wide disc on one extremity, whereas the other extremity is a kind of flattened bat. This lower extremity is adorned with plant fibers and shows traces of feather tissues. (These plant fibers are of three distinct qualities, two of them being very similar to those used in the contemporary ‘tupinambá’ weaving technique: the ‘piaçava’ (*Attalea funifera*) and the ‘ouricuri’ (*Syagros coronada*)).



**Fig. 2.** Lower view of the ibirapema. Flattened surface manufactured in *Pau Brasil* wood with which the enemy's skull was smashed during the ritualized anthropophagic revenge in the terreiro (courtyard). Technical reserve of the *Musée du Quai Branly*, 2018.

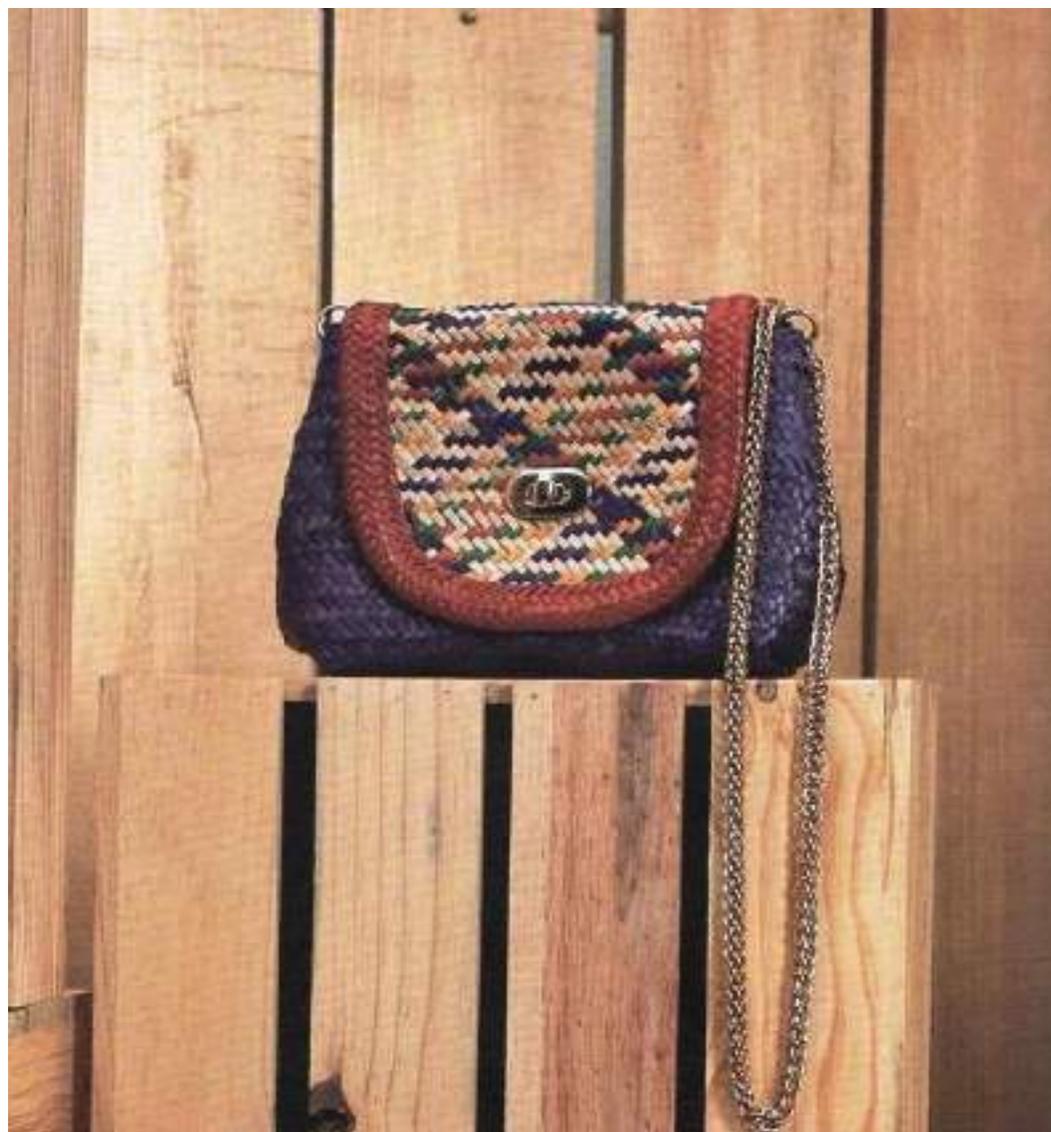
The *bolsa menina*, on the other hand, is made of the *piçava* fiber (*Attalea funifera*) and sewn with the ouricuri thread (*Syagros coronada*) utilizing a 3-D modeling technique belonging to the traditional indigenous tupinambá knowledge handed down in the northern coast of Bahia region over generations.



**Fig. 3.** Artisan crafting a *bolsa menina* during my fieldwork in Porto de Sauipe, the northern coast of Bahia, 2016.

Thus, this *corpus* of objects is composed of *tupinambá* indigenous artwork from the 16th century belonging to the collections of the most visited European ethnographic museums, such as the *Musée du Quai Branly* in Paris, and of another group of objects also called *tupinambá* in contemporary Brazil, of which the aforementioned *bolsa menina* is but one example. But, unfortunately, this latter set of objects is frequently neglected by art historians, maybe because, although their main raw materials are plants and

the technique evidently of indigenous tradition, they often incorporate artificial pigments and plastic and metal elements, or maybe because they were manufactured by rural populations in contemporary Brazil, some of which have not claimed their indigenous identity before the State.



**Fig. 4.** *Bolsa menina* in the catalogue *Talentos do Brasil*, 2009.

I will now attempt to show the point where the histories of these two objects intertwine. The *bolsa menina*, which is manufactured with the

contemporary *tupinambá* weaving technique, has material elements (such as the use of the ouricuri fiber) that go back to the *ibirapema* of the 16th century. Furthermore, according to Chakrabarty, as cited in Buono (2018), when approaching colonial objects such as the *ibirapema*: “..the historian should remember that many of these objects remain symbolically active in living Brazilian cultures. Thus, they belong to what Chakrabarty calls the ontological now, which emphasizes the continuous relation between past and present practices, between modernity and all that preceded it.” In other words, to understand the relationship between these two objects in the contemporary world, it is necessary to try to grasp the material ties between them and the ontological sense of the *ibirapema* in colonial Brazil.

To this end, I will refer to the text “Vingança Tupinambá” by Manuela Carneiro da Cunha and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2009). Here, the authors connect the *ibirapema* to their theory of the “*tupinambá* temporality,” which, in turn, refers to a peculiar and intriguing social device, the *tupinambá* vengeance. Their text demonstrates how “the breaking of the skulls with the *ibirapema* was pursued more persistently [by the Tupinambás] than anthropophagy.” Cannibalism had an important but secondary role. Nonetheless, it was cannibalism that attracted the most fascination from the westerners, such as Brazilian modernist artists, who appropriated and popularized the term.

The fact of the matter is that both ritual practices operated the ontological definition of the Tupinambá. However, it was mainly the crushing of the enemy’s skull with the flattened end of the *ibirapema* that was determinant to distinguish the one who was, from the one who was not tupinambá in 16th century Brazil. Consequently, the *ibirapema* mediated the production of *the tupinambá* ethnicity, whereas cannibalism produced the limits of the Tupinambá ethnic group. The young and prestigious warrior that crushed the enemy’s skull with the *ibirapema*, and those who ate from the enemy’s flesh were Tupinambá. Consequently, the *ibirapema* may be considered an important socio-cultural artifact in Tupinambá cosmology since it produced this people's historical continuity by mediating the production of the Tupinambá name.

Thus, in Brazil, before arriving at the European cabinets of curiosities in the early modern age, the *ibirapema* was the ritual and political object responsible for the historical process of producing Tupinambá ethnicity - just like the practice of anthropophagy was responsible for defining the limits of the ethnic group. In this sense, it is important to notice that Carneiro da Cunha and Viveiros de Castro do not use the analytical category 'identity.' The reason for this is that these anthropologists, as well as José Maurício Arruti, despite the differences concerning their theoretical approach, are proposing theories of 'ethnicity' as a historical process of production of ethnicity and recognition of internal limits that make out ethnicity as a group. Arruti (n.d.) construes 'identity' as a concept of recognition realized by people or institutions – such as the State – that are outside the group's internal limits. Thus, for them, 'ethnogenesis' is a process of self-recognition that precedes the process of recognizing the 'indigenous identity' granted by the State.

Therefore, it is clear that the category of 'authenticity' of a supposed indigenous identity is a category that is of interest only to the European canon of art history. It doesn't help us to understand the complexity of the material and immaterial culture produced by contemporary 'ethnic groups' or 'traditional peoples' who find themselves in constant cultural re-elaboration and legitimate objectification of their culture for political and economic reasons.

In agreement, by describing the ritualized *tupinambá* killings, Carneiro da Cunha and Viveiros de Castro (2009) intend to present the anthropophagic vengeance from the indigenous perspective of the Tupinambá. Through this narrative, these authors are defending the view that the notion of 'cold societies' used by Lévi-Strauss in the 1970s to understand African societies as 'non-historicisable' societies don't work for the study of South-American indigenous peoples such as the Tupinambá. According to them, the *tupinambá* temporality follows from the drive to avenge. And this vengeance, when emptied of the meanings imposed on it by an exoticizing western morality – from the Jesuits to the modernists –remains, in itself, simply as the *tupinambá* will to produce continuity for itself and the group.

Similarly, in the case of the *bolsa menina*, we must also try to apprehend the material ties between objects and their ontological sense in contemporary Brazil. By intertwining these theoretical notions of ‘*tupinambá* temporality’ and ‘ethnogenesis,’ it is possible to hypothesize that the self-recognition of the artisans in the northern coast of Bahia as an ethnic group arose on the limit where the indigenous weaving technique of *piçava* fibers met the visual and material culture of fashion when the latter – which is not *tupinambá* – advanced on their territory.

Just like with the *ibirapema*, in the case of the *bolsa menina*, the internal limits of the group are defined in the conflict with the other and can, thus, be considered an actualization of the temporal spiral of the ‘*tupinambá* temporality.’ It is only with the invasion of these territories by tourism that the name ‘Tupinambá’ resurfaces in this community, which organizes itself in a productive group formally known as *Cooperativa do Artefato Tupinambá* (Cooperative of the Tupinambá Artifact). Therefore, the self-designation as ‘Tupinambá,’ which is associated with this process of cultural reinvention of the dyeing and manufacturing techniques for the production of *piçava* fiber objects, suggests that the *bolsa menina*, by producing the Tupinambá name and historical continuity, are playing a role analogous to that of the *ibirapema* in the Tupinambá groups of the 16th century. The same goes for all other objects manufactured in Bahia's northern coast.

Unlike the population of the southern coast of Bahia, the group of extractivists and family farmers that produced the *bolsa menina* on the State's northern coast isn't a Tupinambá people recognized as indigenous by the Brazilian State. Nonetheless, the historical process of reinventing such objects associated with the production of indigenous ethnicity indicates that the self-designation of this group of artisans as ‘Tupinambá’ in the northern coast of Bahia in 2007 actualizes the *tupinambá* ontological temporality operated by the *ibirapema* in the 16th century. Furthermore, this shows that the agency of the *bolsa menina* equates the Tupinambá memory about the ways of extracting, preparing, and weaving the plant fibers of *piçava* and ouricuri not despite but because of the incorporation of new elements into its reinvention.

Therefore, the concern with ‘indigenous authenticity’ expressed in the recurring question mentioned at the beginning produces a noise that affects the meaning and the value of traditional indigenous works produced in contemporary Brazil when the European ethnographic museums receive these. The *bolsa menina* incorporated elements of cosmopolitan fashion’s material and immaterial culture. Due to their ‘globalized’ appearance, it is not uncommon that, even today, a critical and learned audience still asks if products such as the *bolsa menina* are ‘really’ indigenous objects. Conservators and curators of ethnographic museums, and especially the art historians that now turn to arts of non-European traditions, should make an effort to abandon this false problem. Instead, they should focus on the concern with ‘indigenous alterity,’ a notion that may lead to going beyond the debates on restitution of objects and collections and which suggests that there may be a future for western ethnographic museums and a history of indigenous art if we are willing to enter a dialogue with these ethnic groups that resist and reinvent themselves in contemporary rural Brazil. Such groups, I would say, that face the conflict with invasive forms of globalized culture and modes of production are now more indigenous than ever. The future of these institutions can only lie to give agency to ‘indigenous alterity’ through new curatorial practices and museum policies, especially through the investment in public and participative ways of constituting collections and exhibitions.

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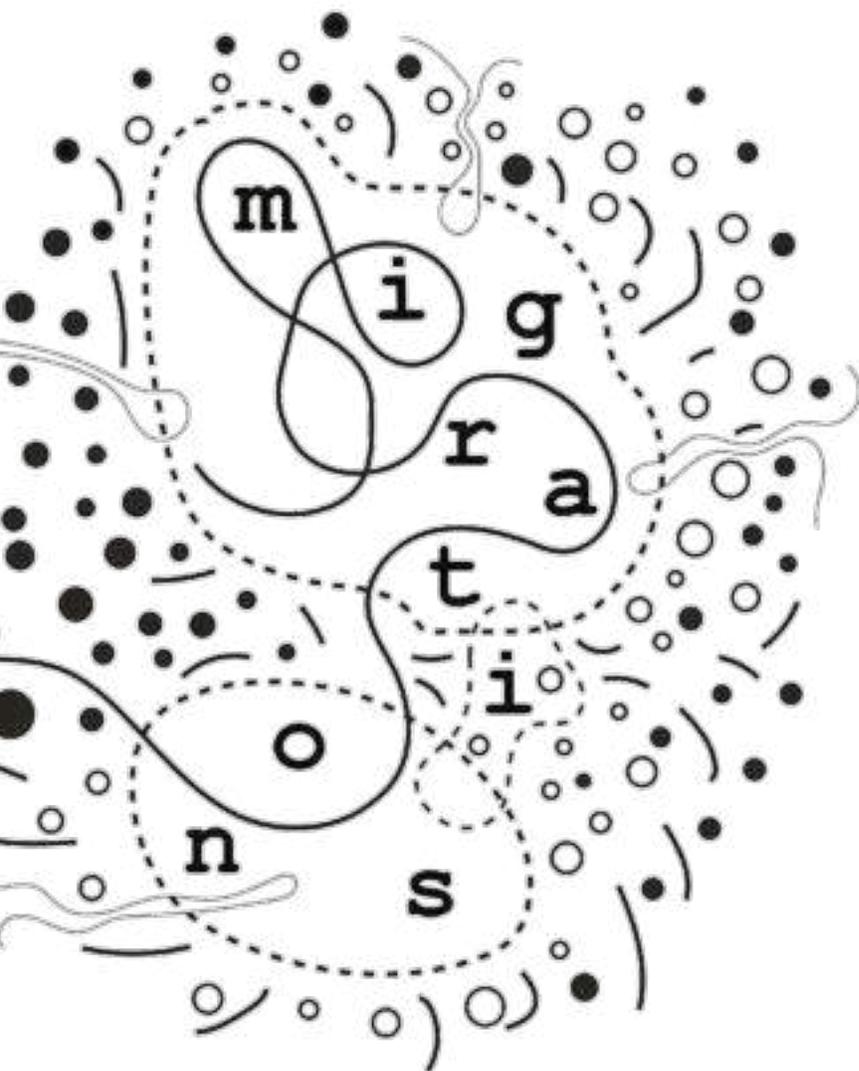
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# Forced Migrations and Their Impact on Art and Visual Culture

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## Session 4



## Session 4

# Why Forced Migrations Matter for Art History and Visual Studies?

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“Forced Migrations and their Impact on Art and Visual Culture” was the title of the fourth session of the 35<sup>th</sup> CIHA conference, held in the city of São Paulo, Brazil, in January 2022. The conception of the session, however, dates back much earlier, but its realization was delayed by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. In its call for papers, published in 2019, the session proposed, as its general objective, to imbricate forced migration processes and their effects on art and visual culture, without indicating temporary or historical limitations. The venture was relatively successful, bringing together a total of thirteen speakers of diverse nationalities, who — in person or remotely — presented their current research. Most of the communications made in the occasion are now gathered in the present proceedings.

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), forced migration is a general concept that refers to “a migratory movement which, although the drivers can be diverse, involves force, compulsion, or coercion”.<sup>1</sup> It is not an international legal concept, since it is recognized that forced migration implies a continuum of agency, rather than a “voluntary” versus “forced” dichotomy. In practice, however, the concept is commonly used to designate the movements of refugees and internally displaced persons (those displaced by problems within their country of origin), in which the mobility of ideas, beliefs, and faiths is also embedded.

Forced migrations may be induced by a variety of causes, and the most common of which are: (1) conflicts, such as in the case of wars (including civil wars), situations of generalized violence, and persecution on the grounds of nationality, race, religion, political opinion or membership of a

particular social group;<sup>2</sup> (2) disasters such as hurricanes, droughts, earthquakes, infectious disease outbreaks, etc., in which natural causes and human action are sometimes intertwined, as stressed by those who study current environmental collapse;<sup>3</sup> (3) issues related to “development” policies and projects,<sup>4</sup> which may include, e.g., large-scale infrastructure projects (dams, roads, ports, etc.), urban clearance initiatives, mining and deforestation.

Besides these causes, we would also recall the dire phenomenon of trafficked or smuggled people, those who are moved by deception or coercion for the purposes of exploitation. A well-documented example is the forced displacement of people from Africa to be enslaved in the Americas. In the period in which this slavery system operated, between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, more than 12 million Africans were captured and transported across the Atlantic Ocean to be sold as human merchandise.<sup>5</sup> The Atlantic slave trade had profound and longstanding consequences for the societies that were involved in it and, as we will see, was particularly relevant for the discussions that took place in the session.

Having occurred throughout human history and across a wide geographic spectrum, forced migrations constitute a heterogeneous phenomenon. Fundamental differences already become clear when we consider the diverse causes cited above. In the cases involving conflict, disaster or “development”, the pursuit to safeguard one's own life, or the life of the family or group of belonging, is still ultimately connected to the agency of those who migrate — in this sense, as pointed out by Edward Said, it would be necessary to differentiate between refugees, exiles and émigrés.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, in the cases of trafficked or smuggled people, after the previous act of their physical capture they are literally compelled to move, dehumanized, and converted into objects of exchange. During the session, we tried to be sensitive to how the heterogeneity implicit in the very concept of forced migrations impacts the aesthetic productions that were discussed by the speakers.

Forced migrations raise discussions of culture that have global implications, as they resonate with a variety of other concepts such as: diaspora, exile, globalization, hybridity, mobility, multiculturalism, transnationalism, or nomadism. Thus, from the conception of the session,

we believed that visual productions connected to forced migrations constitute a very rich source for art history. This is evident not only regarding representations linked to the phenomenon but also in the artistic production of the displaced people themselves.

Moreover, we believed that research on the topic could contribute to a reassessment of the canon and usual writing methods of art history. In fact, the complex migratory processes and their aesthetic counterparts discussed in the session raised major challenges for the discipline and forced us to critically reflect on its usual concepts and approaches.

A critique of art history's usual canon seemed to be one of the potential outcomes of this discussion. From the beginning, the session's topic encouraged us to establish a relationship at odds with the orthodoxies and to avoid and oppose the "thumping language of national pride, collective sentiments, group passions", as advocated by Said.<sup>7</sup> In addition, we were convinced that investigations on the art and visual culture connected to forced migrations are a privileged locus for — quoting an expression proposed by Kobena Mercer — "erasing and rewinding" the Western art historical narratives of the past centuries.<sup>8</sup>

Regarding art history's writing methods, research on the aesthetic dimensions of forced migrations can contribute to aligning the discipline with propositions made by several authors. We could recall here, for example, the idea of "mobility turn", considered by Saloni Mathur as an emergent paradigm within the 21st-century social sciences.<sup>9</sup> Or the more recent proposal by Burcu Dogramaci and Birgit Mersmann of a "migration turn", which positions discussions of migration as a pivotal theme in contemporary art history.<sup>10</sup> We could also recall the ideas of mobile or migratory aesthetics, and of a kinetic theory of the migrant image, advanced by authors such as W. J. T. Mitchell.<sup>11</sup>

If, as art historians, we wish to incorporate proposals such as these, we will certainly have to face difficult questions. Dogramaci and Mersmann already posed some of them: "Which theoretical concepts correspond to the procedural, performative, transnational, and transcultural migration movements and their artistic reflections? How can art history be written by focusing on instability, exchange, and cultural changeability, and not by drawing on national parameters?"<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the linearity of time is often

disrupted when dealing with migratory processes, and art history seems ill-prepared to deal with the conceptual turbulences that results from this.

All these questions may seem threatening to traditional art history. In effect, migrations in general — and forced migrations in particular — often involve conflictive and dangerous border crossings, displacements of people, ideas and objects, as well as resettlements of these in their places of reception, entailing a seeming disorder far removed from the comfort of canonical art history. But — and this was a fundamental point for us — these questions also point to powerful historiographical alternatives. As stressed by Dogramaci and Mersmann, the study of art departing from the primacy of motion implied in phenomena such as forced migrations requires “an anti-linear, multi-perspectival, and horizontal reconceptualization and recanonization of art history from a transnational or transcultural perspective (which also would have to include a historiography of migration in art)”.<sup>13</sup>

The papers presented in the session "Forced Migrations and their Impact on Art and Visual Culture" brought several indications of how we can work in this direction and possible answers to the questions raised above. Thematically, they could be grouped in different nuclei that we would like to outline. But simultaneously, the papers also presented several points of connection, some of which we highlighted in what follows.

The first point of convergence is related to the transatlantic slave trade, which has left an indelible mark on the Americas. This is attested by representations, objects, and the use of specific materials contemporary to the trade, as well as in more recent artistic productions. Many contemporary black artists, for example, use different artistic languages to reflect and make people reflect on the memories of enslavement, the forms of structural racism and inequality, and the symbolic and concrete violence that remains in action in the present.

We could say that these artists put into play specific politics and poetics of memories detached from the official and canonical ones. These could be dubbed as “underground or subterranean memories”, a concept coined by Michael Pollak who describes memory as the field of dispute between official (or national) memories, and those that persist in the marginalized sectors of society.<sup>14</sup> In this sense, for instance, the South

African artist Kitso Lynn Lelliot states: “The idea of memory is used as a vehicle through which to connect the personal experiential with broader historical narratives while at the same time disrupting the historicized cannon of histories that were shaped over centuries on the Atlantic and have come to sit so firmly on my skin”.<sup>15</sup>

The papers by Emi Koide and Mauricio Barros de Castro explore this topic. Koide investigates the multiple possible meanings that can be articulated from the term “white” as color, and its material and symbolic power that translates into erased or denied aspects of colonial history in Brazil. The author focuses on the video *Whitewash* (2013) by the aforementioned Lelliot, and on a series of videos from the exhibition *Casa de Purgar* (Purging House, 2018) by the Afro-Brazilian artist Tiago Sant’Ana. Both artists explore the past to think about asymmetrical and racialized contemporary relationships as “specters”, showing the traumatic relationships between the past and the present. To do this, they make provocative uses of historical spaces linked to slavery. In most cases, such spaces have been reconfigured for other uses, which implied an erasure of their original meanings. Lelliot, for example, places her work in relation to the fort in the city of Salvador, in the State of Bahia, and the ocean, alluding to the slave trade. On the other hand, Sant’Ana uses sugar mills of the Bahia’s Recôncavo region as settings for his videos. These mills are now abandoned, in ruins, and his exhibition *Casa de Purgar* takes place in the Museu de Arte de Bahia, which in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the residence of the slave trader Jose Cerqueira Lima.<sup>16</sup>

Barros de Castro analyzes works by Eustáquio Neves, another Afro-Brazilian artist who refers to places significant to the memory of slavery, such as the Valongo wharf in Rio de Janeiro — port of entry for thousands of enslaved Africans. In his project *Valongo: Cartas ao Mar* (*Valongo: Letters to the Sea*, 2015-2016), Neves aims to recover part of the memory of enslavement for future generations and to reflect on Afro-Brazilian resistance. In some aspects, Neves’s works are close to those by Sant’Ana, analyzed by Koide: both artists emphasize the structural racism and persistent inequalities suffered by populations of African descent in Brazil. Moreover, like Sant’ana, Neves does not use images depicting violence to denounce these issues: rather, he produces works that imply a fine,

delicate, and thoughtful creative process. Departing from images mainly from his personal archive, the artist manipulates them using different techniques, and including stamps and texts linked to the idea of a letter — hence the title of his series.

The central point of Faya Causey's paper is amber, a fossil resin valued not only for its beauty but also for its medicinal and electrostatic properties, among others. These features have made amber a fascinating material: it is possible to trace its use from antiquity to the present day, and it demands research involving different disciplines such as history, archaeology, anthropology, art history, and sociology.<sup>17</sup> Based on archaeological finds in the cemeteries of the African Burial Ground, in New York, and in the aforementioned Valongo Wharf, Causey connects objects made of amber found at these sites to the process of enslavement and the African diaspora. Traditionally, the precious material served as a currency of exchange and was thus used in the transatlantic slave trade. But Causey also draws attention to the finding of objects such as beads and protective amulets at the sites, which allows us to infer links to Africa and African heritage, as well as the uses that diasporic communities gave to amber in the Americas.

Moving away from the slave trade, the papers by Nenad Makuljević and Tessa Murdoch nevertheless deal with forced migrations that also date back to the early modern era. Makuljević discusses the visual culture of the Sephardic Jews who, because they refused to convert to Catholicism, were expelled from Spain and Portugal in 1492 and 1496, respectively. Forced to migrate, many Sephardic Jews settled in the Ottoman Empire, especially in the cities of Istanbul, Thessaloniki and Sarajevo, where they gathered in minority communities. Since Islamic culture and customs were highly codified, Sephardic Jews had to adapt its rules. Referring to the concept of “mimicry”, Makuljević seeks to make visible the marks of this complex cross-cultural contact focusing on dress codes and religious architecture. In these modes of expression, it is possible to perceive the convergence of cultural models of the Ottoman Empire and persistent Sephardic memories, conceived still in the Iberian Peninsula.

Tessa Murdoch's paper refers to the forced migration of the Huguenots following the so-called Wars of Religion in the Kingdom of France

in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Initially, the Huguenots migrated to Protestant regions in Europe, but eventually also moved to European colonies in America, Asia and Africa. In this context, Murdoch focuses on the Rovere family (a name later anglicized as Revere), whose first generation of migrants included many artists, designers, and craftsmen.<sup>18</sup> Considering intra-colonial and international exchanges, the paper explores the impact of the arts of silver and gold developed by the Rovere family, pointing to the influence of their production on the decorative arts of the United States. Furthermore, by calling attention to the diaspora of the Huguenots in Brazil, Murdoch opens the discussion to new questions concerning the possible impact that this visual culture might have had in the country.

Two other papers collected in these proceedings — those by Rafael Cardoso and Irena Kossowska — center on modern artists who were themselves migrants. In these papers, some of the issues raised above reappear, such as the revision of the canon of art history. In fact, we believe that, when considered in relation to forced migration processes, the usual modernist canon is one that most demands such a revision. In this sense, we could recall authors such as Raymond Williams and Charles Reed, who drew attention to how the phenomenon of migration is constitutive of modernism. Pointing to the example of Guillaume Apollinaire, Williams showed how the “sociology of metropolitan encounters and associations between immigrants” was crucial for the formation of the *avant-garde* and its absorption into the dominant culture.<sup>19</sup> More recently, writing on “alienation”, Reed connected the Marxist critique of capitalism to the experience of exile and to *avant-garde* conventions, stressing how being alien, estranged or foreign is embedded in the very definition of modernism.<sup>20</sup>

But the cases of artists who are themselves migrants raise other significant questions. Can the mark of the places of origin or arrival be glimpsed in the works of these artists? How do they deal with both contexts in their artistic productions? As we have pointed out, forced migrations imply a traumatic experience, which can involve degrees of violence either by leaving the place of origin, by uprooting, or by the potential insecurity in the new places of residence. In this sense, how do artists deal with these traumatic experiences of displacement? In what ways do their productions

stage these traumas?

Rafael Cardoso discusses the work of European artists that, during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, migrated to Brazil. His paper focuses on painters such as the Russian Dimitri Ismailovitch and the Portuguese Maria Margarida Soutello, who turned their attention to representations of black subjects and racialized themes. Cardoso argues that these white European migrants developed a peculiar and ambivalent gaze upon Afro-Brazilian cultures, inflected by primitivism and ethnology, but also prone to empathy and self-identification. Characteristic of migrants, the condition of displacement and the double consciousness of artists such as Ismailovitch and Soutello channeled their gaze upon the legacy of African heritage in Brazil towards the reinvention of their own identities.

Irena Kossowska focuses her analysis on the Polish painter Józef Czapski, who witnessed the tragedy and violence of war both as a soldier and prisoner. After the end of the Second World War, Czapski settled in Paris where he developed his artistic career, wrote extensively in various publications and was an active member of the Polish émigré community. Kossowska equates the alienated figures depicted in Czapski's works with the artist himself. Moreover, he refused to adopt the vogue for abstract art, producing idiosyncratic work that did not participate in the major exhibitions of the time. The reception of Czapski's artworks "contain a possible key to understanding what it really means that social actions become cultural events through the process of symbolic construction, not simply through their own force".<sup>21</sup> In fact, based on Czapski's place of enunciation marked by traumatizing processes, Kossowska proposes that he and his works constitute a symbol of the experiences and fate of his equally displaced compatriots. This could be related to the idea, expressed by Jeffrey C. Alexander and Elizabeth Butler, that "the construction of collective trauma is often fueled by individual experiences of pain and suffering, but it is the threat to collective rather than individual identity that defines the kind of suffering at stake".<sup>22</sup>

Finally — but going back to the production of contemporary artists we started with — we have the paper by Nora M. Alter, who discusses soundtracks as witnesses of the trauma of forced migrations. Arguing that these soundtracks go beyond hypervisibilized daily images that often lack mediating and transforming efficacy, Nora analyzes the production of three artists: John Akomfrah, a British artist, theorist and curator of Ghanaian descent, who focuses his works on the forced migrations of Africans; Guillermo Galindo, a “Post-Mexican composer/artist”,<sup>23</sup> who executes musical performances playing instruments constructed with objects found on the border between Mexico and the United States; and Lawrence Abu Hamdan, a Jordanian-born artist, who explores and decodes the almost inaudible sounds of people confined in Syrian prisons, generating new, comprehensible, and — above all — disturbing records.

Like the works by Kitso Lynn Lelliot, Tiago Sant’Ana and Eustáquio Neves mentioned in the beginning, the soundtracks by Akomfrah, Galindo and Abu Hamdan are relevant to explore pressing questions such as the relationship between politics and aesthetics, mediums and mobility, socioeconomic disparity and emancipatory action. Such works seem to meet a demand stressed by T. J. Demos: “Today, what is needed more than ever are powerful and creative artistic expressions and interventions that join other movements for positive change, social justice and equality, working together toward the progressive re-creation of our common world”.<sup>24</sup>

Other topics discussed in the session “Forced Migrations and their Impact on Art and Visual Culture” — depictions of enslaved people, experimental curatorial practices, or the art of prisoners of war — also posed challenges to conventional narratives of art history, as well as to those of borders and belonging. The collection of papers presented in these proceedings certainly does not exhaust the theme of our CIHA’s session. However, we believe that it will contribute to the necessary and urgent expansion of research on the multiple relations between forced migrations and artistic production.

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# Poetics Of Specters: Dealing with Colonial Ruination and Whitewash

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper aims to analyze and compare contemporary artworks about colonial history in Brazil, in which white as a color, material, and symbolic power is mobilized to reflect on the ruins of the imperial past in the present. The set of artworks chosen - the video *Whitewash History* (2013) by South African artist Kitso Lynn Lelliot and a series of videos from the exhibition *Casa de Purgar* (Purging House) (2018) by Afro-Brazilian artist Tiago Sant'Ana - have the location in Bahia, dealing both with colonial history and the Atlantic slave trade.

## **KEYWORDS**

Specters; Colonial Memory; Afrodiasporic History; Whitewash; Video Art

### Introduction

*Whitewash History* (2013) by South African artist Kitso Lynn Lelliot was shot in one of the oldest Portuguese Fort in Baía de Todos os Santos in Salvador city, revisiting Atlantic slave trade history in this colonial space turned into a museum haunted by the image of a woman. The word white and the color unfolds in multiple meanings; presence and aesthetic strategy allude to presence, as erasure, as the whitening and racial segregation policies in Brazil. From the solo exhibition *Casa de Purgar* (Purging House) (2018) by Afro-Brazilian artist Tiago Sant'Ana, we selected the series of videos *Refino#2 e #4* (Refining), *Passar em branco* (Ironing in white) and *Açúcar sobre capela* (Sugar over chapel), all of them were shot in the ruined old sugar mill from XVIII century in close to Paraguaçu river in Recôncavo da Bahia region. Recôncavo was one of the main pole of sugar cane production in colonial times. Both artists deal with colonial ghosts that continue to haunt the present - working in the location of Baía de Todos os Santos – bringing back erased or denied aspects of colonial history. In doing so, they seem to invite us to be with specters, as defended by Derrida, reworking politics of memories and also a possibility of what still is not or does not have form.

### Whitewash

We see a white screen where the video's title - *Whitewash History* - gradually becomes visible and readable to disappear and merge again in the white background. As the words fade, the white color that blinds us fills the screen while we hear a treble sound. A dazzling sensation invades us; an image that is out of focus and shaky takes form successively. The scene brings us to an experience of disorientation as someone who is lost or who wakes up in an unknown place. Slowly the blurred image of a frame in superposition to other points of view, where a square with a slot reframes the whiteness of the light, takes form. A fluctuating, drifting image seems to translate into a swinging boat sensation, the sea's oscillation. Or the seasickness and dizziness felt when arriving on land after a long boat journey. The video installation by Kitso Lynn Lelliot invites us to land in a place, just after a trip crossing the ocean, alluding to the Middle Passage, the Atlantic slave trade, and the

Afro-Atlantic history - in which 4,8 million enslaved Africans arrived in Brazil between XVI and XIX centuries<sup>1</sup>. The violent capture, the forced exile, the separation from their families, and the displacement marked the experience of enslaved Africans from different regions in the coerced journey to Brazil. The disorientation that marks the video's aesthetics suggests the sensation of loss felt by African men and women who survived the frightful and deadly crossing on the slave ship, disembarking in a strange land, reminding of this description by Smallwood:

Now that land not only lay far distant but had, more ominously, vanished from the horizon altogether, the ship's relentless motion pulled the captives ever deeper into temporal and spatial entrapment. The sheer scale of the unknown element disabled many of the cognitive tools supplied by African epistemologies, which attributed dangerous supernatural powers to the watery realm. [...] Here, their commodification built toward a crescendo that threatened never to arrive but to leave the African captives suspended in an agony whose language no one knew. [...] For African captives, it was their wholeness as fully embodied subjects that was at stake in the Atlantic setting. Entering the open sea signaled the end of one contest - whether captives would go into circulation as commodities in the Atlantic market - and the beginning of another - how captives would sustain their humanity in the uniquely inhumane spatial and temporal setting of the slave ship at sea<sup>2</sup>.

The sensation of disorientation, of being lost and dizzy through the succession of images, works as a leitmotif. The blinding white color is omnipresent. It plays with the scale and vastness, with the absence of reference. The camera movement alludes to constant seasickness after being in a long time in a boat, even on land. It might have been the experience of those African women and men forcibly removed from their homes. The texture of a stone wall becomes visible, revealing fragments of an old colonial architectural structure; a small window or slot frame the sea as the high-pitched noise ceases as the sound of the sea and waves invade the space.

When the camera stops floating from inside space to the outside, the bastion structure from a military fortification comes into view. The window reveals to be the spot of the gaze for defense against invasions of colonial territory in the past. Colonial borders, violent histories, and memories of slavery, the relation with the stranger, the politics of domination are evoked in the empty old fortification. It is the Forte de Santo Antônio da Barra at the Bay of All Saints in Salvador, Bahia State, which is the earliest military building in Brazil, the first construction dates between 1583 - 1587<sup>3</sup>. This strategic fort turned into a lighthouse in the XVII century. Nowadays, it belongs to the Brazilian Navy, and they remodeled it into a nautical museum where navigation routes, underwater archeological findings, and several ships and Portuguese caravel model reproductions are exhibited.



**Fig. 1.** Kitso Lynn Lelliot - *Whitewash History* (2013)

As a typical Portuguese colonial whitewashed building, the camera runs the fort's thick white wall so close that it becomes a white texture surface, a landscape where to walk. The unique perspective presented on the wall resembles a ground, white sand, giving a desert dimension. The fragment of the colonial fortress, the white as a color, the luminous clarity that almost

blinds us, and the connection to different meanings of the word whitewashing in the English language are raised. As the mixture of lime and water for whitening walls, concealing faults or mistakes, when someone from an ethnic minority is assimilated into the white and Western dominant culture. All this scope of meanings is part of Brazilian history. The Afro-Brazilians - even being the majority of the population - were reduced to enslaved forced labor, and the consequences of this violence are present and define contemporary social dynamics.

The slave trade was more extensive in Brazil than in any other place globally, and it was also the last country to abolish slavery. Brazilian colonial history is always whitewashed, concealed, or an official white narrative that erases or denies black and indigenous subjects' accounts. Denial of enduring colonial structure and system, denial of racism is constant in Brazilian history. For a long time, official history and discourses about Brazil embraced the idea of an absence of racism in a mixed nation<sup>4</sup>, celebrating the myth of racial democracy as a heritage of luso-tropicalism<sup>5</sup>. After the formal abolition of slavery, there was no integration of former slaves in a society characterized by structural racism. The racist and eugenic dominant international conceptions of the XIX century that naturalized differences and hierarchies of races became a belief in Brazil too. The local elites - aware of race's degeneration theory, considering the country's prevalence of mixed-race populations as an obstacle for modernization - implemented a national whitening (*embraquecimento*)<sup>6</sup> project in the XIX century. After the former abolition of slavery, this national whitening policy encouraged importing white Europeans as a new workforce in agriculture and industry to have a "civilized" modern country.

Whitening and whitewashing the history of racism and coloniality is a persistent mark in Brazil. This logic of whitening also imposed the code and white dominating patriarchal culture, often criminalizing black culture. In the 1930s, the miscegenation of race became celebrated as a national character, nevertheless at the same time denying all the persistent racism, exploitation, and sexual violence that formed the "racial democracy." Interestingly, the word "whitewash" in the Portuguese language in dictionaries would only

translate the meaning of whitening walls, “caiar.” But we could say that Brazilian history is a history of whitewashing in many layers from the past to the present. It is also essential to observe that the city of Salvador, where the fortress is located, has one of the largest Afro-Brazilian populations. As observed by Ana Lúcia Araújo, in Salvador, there are no clear spatial markers where enslaved Africans arrived so we can see this absence as a sign of oblivion or histories effaced from collective memory<sup>7</sup>. Lelliot’s work presents us with this erasure and spectral persistence in visual poetic form.

In Lelliot’s video, as the camera continues to wander through the surface of the whitewashed wall, the commentary mentions the word in Portuguese “saudade,” an untranslatable word, which would have a meaning close to nostalgia, “which also leaves between the past and the future, a remembrance and a looking forward too.”<sup>8</sup> Between the untranslatable other connotations of “whitewash” in Portuguese, and the untranslatable word “saudade” in English and other languages, memory, forgotten narratives, colonial ghosts seem to haunt the images, space, and time. There is a constant shift in multiple meanings, gaps left, lost memories, and issues that come back to haunt Brazilian colonial history and contemporary spaces.

The commentary in which we listen to the artist’s voice continues: “one does not know if it is dead or alive, if they are living in a distant place unknown in the world, across the waters [...] it may never return, there is still a slight chance, a small, a present possibility that it may.”<sup>9</sup> All the enslaved Africans who lived the forced displacement, lost in entirely unfamiliar territory, experiencing longing from the homeland, the sadness, the impossibility of return, the lack of freedom – long-time silenced stories in Brazil official narrative. While the commentary wonders about the specters, about those enslaved Africans who are maybe dead or alive, various old objects - pieces of shackles used in the slave ships, vases, and other fragments - found underwater in a display case in the museum are presented. Among these objects, it insists in details of shackles pieces used in slave ships. The item also appears in a red illustration poster in which an image of a black woman with a child emerges along with the shackles while we listen to the sound of chains moving. The woman seems to stare at us. The boat’s

balance sensation returns through the camera's movement and alternating blurred images and focused ones, reproducing the dizziness. Just after a boat chimney shows up across the sky, the following sequence presents the museum space with illustrations and models of slave ships, details of a carved model with enslaved people with hands and feet chained in a confined cargo. It focuses on the details of the carved person figure enchained in a claustrophobic and tiny space, suffering, underlining the terrible conditions of the slave ship but also as an emblematic image of slavery:

Within every cargo, some were more physically and emotionally exhausted, some more nutritionally deprived, and some more vulnerable to illness than others. Conditions thus made the slave ship a deadly place, so much so that in Africa the language of death became part of the nomenclature for it. Slave ships were call “tumbeiros” in the eighteenth-century Angolan trade, for example, a term historians have translated as “floating tombs” or “undertakers.”<sup>10</sup>

“Tumbeiro” is another word for slave ship in Portuguese, coming from “tomb,” being used in Brazilian context as well, in which Angolan slave trade routes was one of the most important. Death as an endless horizon haunting captives in the Middle Passage. The image presentation mode repeats a disorientating regime of alternating fuzzy and focused images, the swing movement of a boat floating along with the sea's sound and the ship creaking.

We watch a museum visitor looking at a red panel in which there is one of the well-known illustrations of the slave ship from an overhead view where enslaved Africans are shown as black silhouettes crammed inside the boat. It is one of the popular images used in the abolitionist campaign in the XIX century, depicting the inhuman conditions of the slave trade. It has now been used in museums related to Afro-diasporic history, as in this part of the nautical museum in Salvador. But this panel's title also reveals the enduring whitewashing aspects of official or touristic spaces, as we read “Multiethnic City” related to the myth of “racial democracy” and denial of racism<sup>11</sup>. The black women's illustration with the child who stares at us is also part of this

panel. The carved model of the slave ship inside a glass case is in front of it. Suddenly, a ghostly woman walks through the space of the room. The museum's space reveals itself as an image, a projection of this space's image in a screen in which a woman, dressing in a white dress and clothes, also becomes a screen of projection, part of the image. The woman appears as a ghost image, a specter haunting this place, bringing memories, embodying forgotten stories and presences. The white dress reminds the "baianas" and the clothes used by Candomblé practitioners - an Afro-Brazilian religion which is also a cultural resistance. We will come back to this topic of white clothes later. She could be a formerly enslaved woman wandering and haunting the museum and fortress. Also, she evokes the black woman in the panel; maybe she wanders around the fort at night. But unlikely the former one, the ghostly woman in motion never looks back at us.



**Fig. 2.** Kitso Lynn Lelliot - *Whitewash History* (2013)

Later, a faint projection of contemporary urban traffic at night is perceived on a glass case with slave ships and caravel models. The sound of the sea and waves come back. It swings back to the outside of the fort. The fortress's landscape appears through an irregular aperture framing a bastion

and the sea, where the ghost of the woman reveals herself again, watching the ocean or waiting for something or someone to come. There is a contrast between the darkness that frames the luminous scene with the woman. Presenting superposed ghostly images, sometimes it seems to be an image of the woman who haunts as a specter over the fort's location, sometimes the opposite seems to happen, and the landscape appears to be a spectral presence as well. We hear wave sounds alternating or also juxtaposed with ship creaking sounds. The soundscape also reinforces the instability and the phantasmatic atmosphere.

It is symptomatic to consider that the fortress is now a nautical museum, supposed to be a public space of memory. Instead, it became a tourist spot, in which the Afro-Atlantic history is just a glimpse into the room of the caravels and slave ships. Interestingly, Farol da Barra, this popular spot known as a significant tourist attraction in Salvador, gradually reveals itself in Lelliot's video, and only through fragments, making the familiar uncanny. It transforms this location that is usually seen as a postcard landmark in the space of memory; it is re-inscribed through the audiovisual narrative created by Lelliot to its colonial history, past, and present. The artist uses the video and multiple projections as a ghost device or the perfect technology to deal with and present specters and ghosts. In the film *Ghostdance* (1983), about memory, spirits, and image, Jacques Derrida plays himself as a character, and for him, the film is a sort of science of ghosts:

To be haunted by a ghost is to remember what one has never lived in the present, to remember what, in essence, has never had the form of presence. Film is a "phantomachia." Let the ghosts come back. Film plus psychoanalysis equals a science of ghosts. Modern technology, contrary to appearances, although it is scientific, increases tenfold the power of ghosts. The future belongs to ghosts.<sup>12</sup>

*Whitewash* is a phantomachia in this sense. It presents ghosts and absent images, the denial and erasure of colonial past, lives, and stories of unknown enslaved subjects who come back to haunt the fort and the

spectator. The image seems to be the perfect sphere for the ghosts. According to Barthes, there is always a *Spectrum* in photography, presenting what is terrible in it, a sort of “return of the dead.” Concerning cinema and new audiovisual technologies as the video, it is Derrida who continues to affirm:

[...] contrary to what we might believe, the experience of ghosts is not tied to a bygone historical period, [...] but on the contrary, is accentuated, accelerated by modern technologies like film, television [...]. These technologies inhabit, as it were, a phantom structure. [...] When the very first perception of an image is linked to a structure of reproduction, then we are dealing with the realm of phantoms”.<sup>13</sup>

Using video projecting layers of images, images of images in *Whitewash* seem to work perfectly to address the specters and ghosts. Working with the appearances and the present absences in this colonial building is a way of opening the way to memories and other narratives. The projections and images puzzle us; sometimes, the woman is a ghostly presence on the screen that projects previously recorded images of the museum; at others, her apparition seems spectral. It is interesting to observe that this ghostly woman frequently appears in Lelliot’s other works. On other occasions, the fort and the sea also appear to be present, but in the end, they become projections revealing themselves as ghostly images. Or a haunting cinematic technology. As suggested by Derrida, the structure of reproduction is per se the confirmation of the phantasmatic experience of seeing projected images - absences that seems to be present, making possible the return of the dead.

### **Casa de Purgar**

Tiago Sant’ana’s solo exhibition *Casa de Purgar* (Purging House) (2018), curated by Ayrson Heráclito is composed of many works dealing with sugar, the history of plantation, and colonialism. The series of videos *Refino#2*, *Refino #4* (Refining), *Passar em branco* (Ironing in white) and *Açúcar sobre capela* (Sugar over chapel), all of them were shot in the ruined old sugar mill

Engenho Paramim from XVIII century in São Francisco do Conde close to Paraguaçu river in Recôncavo da Bahia region. Recôncavo was one of the central poles of sugar cane production in colonial times. As affirmed by Heraclito in the catalog<sup>14</sup>, purging house refers to the process of producing refined white sugar, turning cane syrup into different types of sugar, the brown sugar being considered inferior and the white sugar high quality. The hierarchy and classification of one of the main colonial export and extractive products replicate the Brazilian racial segregation since colonial times. The artist reworks the refined sugar and its white color in several meanings: the source of wealth, refining brown sugar into white, the Black enslaved workforce and the politics of whitening.

In *Refino#4*, the sugar covers completely illustrations of Black enslaved workers made by Jean-Baptiste Debret in a book. According to Sant'ana, he proposes an archeology of sugar. A pile of white sugar is gradually disassembled, a spoon removes little by little, revealing the image underneath. Both images on the book show African or afro descendants enslaved performing work; at the left, two of them are piling, and the image on the right is from a sugar mill driven by two workers. The exhausting work of sugar cycle production by enslaved Black workers created colonial wealth. The series of illustrations produced by Debret in Brazil is still often used as an accurate record of colonial times and enslaved workers, being present in many educational books, although it is often idealized or reproduces exotic bias. Interestingly, the image of the sugar mill shows an impossible action: the place in which the remains of the sugar cane should be exited is the one in which the entire cane is being put. As an inversion of the direction, in unconscious ways, the inaccurate record could also propose an inversion of time, of purging in other ways this violent history of exploitation.

In *Refine #2*, the sugar appears as a waterfall moving downward over, covering the artist's body in the ruins of the old engenho. In this performance, the white powder is falling continuously, sculpting time. In *Açúcar sobre capela*, the artist walks around in the ruins of a chapel of this colonial building with a sieve, covering the space with white sugar, which seems like snow. The work with the sieve performs an ancestral gesture, the

work of enslaved Black men and women in Brazil. *Passar em branco* (Ironing in white) shows the artists ironing white clothes repeatedly, echoing the domestic labor of colonial and present times. In Portuguese, the expression “passar em branco” means to overlook, to neglect an action or something. Slavery, institutional racism and colonialism are constantly being neglected in Brazilian reality. All these works bring a dimension of ruination, as proposed by Stoler, in which “imperial [and colonial] formations persist in their material debris, in ruined landscapes and through the social ruination of people’s life.”<sup>15</sup> Past colonial times still resonate and act on the present. The sugar ( and its white color) appear, invading spaces, ruins, images.



**Fig. 3.** Tiago Sant’Ana - *Refino 2* (2018)

The white color is usually considered a sign of purity and pristine, but Sant’ana works translate race hierarchies and systemic racism and the presence of sugar, a sweet product made by violent forced labor. On the other hand, as observed by Conduru<sup>16</sup>, there is not only one dimension of color and meaning in the artist’s work. It also brings purging and energies of movement from candomblé and Afro-Brazilian religions. In Afro-Brazilian traditions and as in many African traditions, white is the colour of purging, connected to

spiritual dimensions. Practitioners of African-Brazilian religions wear white cloth, but as stated by Picton and Mack “white cloth [...] is the ubiquitous product of West Africa looms”<sup>17</sup>. In Yoruba traditions, white is the color of Obatala (or Oxalá In Brazil). According to Renne<sup>18</sup>, white cloth is connected to the realm connections with spirits and ancestors and could be used for healing and protection. In this sense, white clothes used by Sant’ana and Lelliot could be also the sign and presence of ancestors and spirituality.



**Fig. 4.** Tiago Sant’Ana - *Passar em branco* (2018)

In Lelliot’s work, white plays a sensational disorientating role, blinding us, bringing us the sensation of being lost. In Sant’ana, besides criticism of systemic racism, white and sugar could also be transformed into parts of a ritual of purging violent colonial history. It also connects us to the ghosts of African enslaved workers from the haunted ruins of the sugar mill.

For Derrida, the experience with the ghosts is necessary for us to learn to live, and a matter of memory and justice:

If it – learning to live – remains to be done, it can happen only between life and death. Neither in life nor in death alone. What happened between all the “two’s”

one likes, such as between life and death, can only maintain itself with some ghost, can only talk with or about some ghost [s'entretenir de quelque fantôme]. So it would be necessary to learn spirits. Even and especially if the spectral is not. [...] The time of the learning to live [...] to learn to live with ghosts, in the upkeep, the conversation, the company of the companionship, in the commerce without commerce of ghosts.[...] And this being-with specters would also be, not only but also, a politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations.<sup>19</sup>

The philosopher proposes a “being with specters,” which resists ontology and metaphysics because phantoms can surround life and death; they cannot be located nor be controlled. They can appear and return at any moment. Accepting being with ghosts means also fighting for a politics of memory from the past and future, which is not and is yet to be. In this coming and going with specters, between living and dead, past and future, there is always a disjunction of the subject, a difference that resists totalization and an acceptance of the alterity. Those questions inhabit Lelliot’s and Sant’ana’s works, which present us with the possibility – even if it is a slight chance – of those who are dead or alive to return. It haunts us with a denied and silenced colonial and present history of enslaved women and men, and we do not know their names or stories. The woman in white, performed by the Lelliot, embodies one unknown life, her nostalgia, and her longing to come back through space and time. Sant’ana brings us to the ruination of the present, in which by one side colonial past is still acting in debris, but by the other, the performance opens a possibility of purging history. Also, it is about the present, about the justice to be made for those who were gone, of all those ghosts of the history of slavery in Brazil embodied in the continuous, ruinous, structural racism and endless debt to Afro-Brazilians of the past, present, and future.

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# Amber, Africa, and the African Diaspora

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Independent Scholar

## **ABSTRACT**

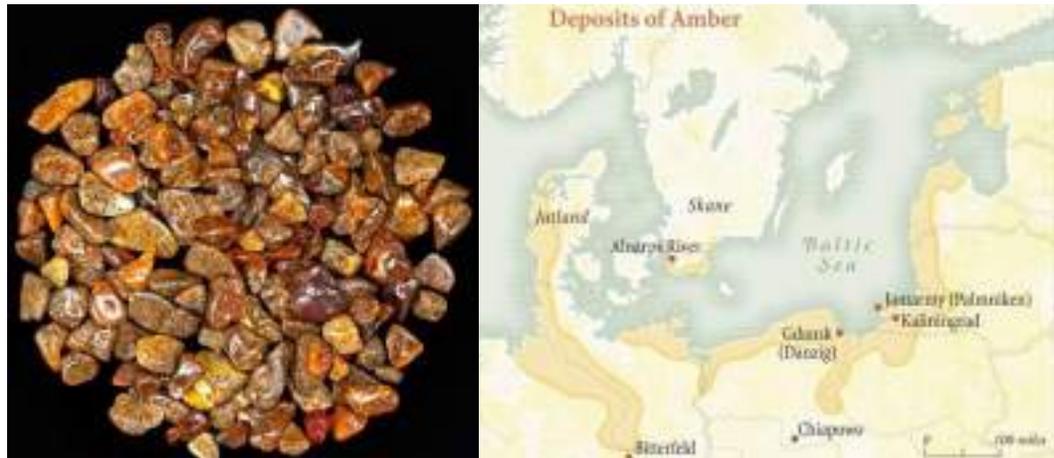
A small number of Baltic amber body ornaments excavated at two locations, both later registered national sites — the Rio de Janeiro Valongo Wharf Archaeological Site and the New York City African Burial Ground — provide critical evidence for the ownership and use (including burial) of the European-sourced fossil resin among enslaved people from Africa. Despite their tiny size and limited number, these beads and pendants are significant witnesses to the evolving picture of the four millennia-long trade, use, and value of amber in Africa and in the slavery-sourced African diaspora in the Americas.

## **KEYWORDS**

Valongo Wharf; African Burial Ground; Africa; Amber; Slavery

At the core of this paper is a small number of amber body ornaments: a single bead excavated in 1991 from a woman's grave in the African Burial Ground National Monument, New York City (in use from 1630s-1795 for both free and enslaved Africans) and a small number of beads and pendants excavated a decade later at the Valongo Wharf Archaeological Site, Rio de Janeiro, listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site which was originally built for the disembarkation of African slaves in 1811, closed in 1831. The ambers are tiny but eloquent witnesses to the millennia-long use of European-sourced fossil resin in Africa and to the tragic story of the trade in enslaved people from Africa to the Americas. The function of amber in adornment, protection, and medicine throughout Africa and in African diasporic cultures is first documented in New Kingdom of Egypt.

Today, amber is still a much sought-after material for adornment, medicine, incense, religion, and uses we might call magical as well as for its remarkable inclusions of flora and fauna. It still functions in trade as a medium of exchange. What is at the basis of human usage of amber is the fossil resin's very nature, its appearance, touch, smell when rubbed or burnt and the significance of its visible inclusions of plant and animal matter. From earliest times, it was believed to have medicinal, magical, and certain religious properties. Amber could be traded in both raw form or turned into beads and pendants. Throughout history, amber's rarity and attributed beliefs about the substance have significantly contributed to its high value in trade, gifts, deposits, or dedications. Pharmaceutical cures and divine associations are documented throughout cultures from earliest times. Amber's inclusions of perfectly preserved floral and faunal have lent even more mystery and magic to this mysterious jewel. In ancient Greece, ancient Italy, in the Middle Ages through to the modern era, its exchange value has been compared to that of gold, silver, crystal, the finest silks, to frankincense and myrrh, and to various currencies.

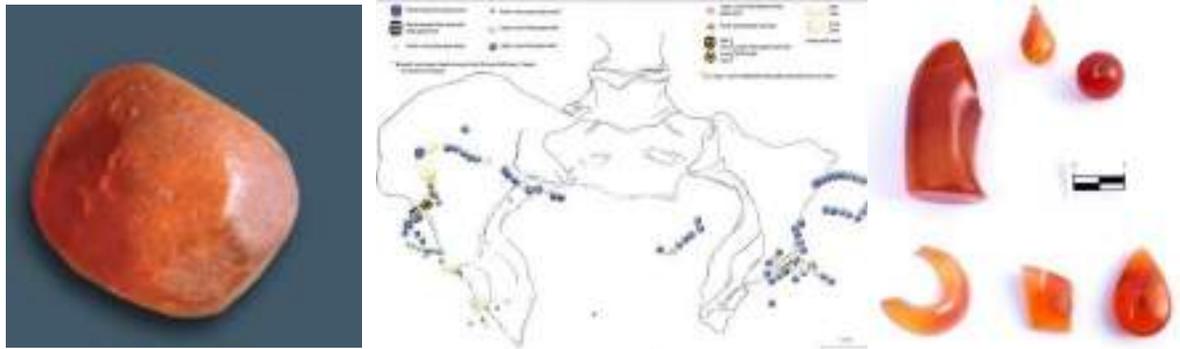


**Fig. 1.** Polished Baltic Amber Nodules (Private Collection. Photo: Author) and Map of Deposits of Baltic Amber (Causey 2011, map by David Fuller).

The first illustration includes polished pieces of Baltic amber, the variety of fossil resin imported into Africa by various indirect routes for the last four millennia, and also a simplified map that depicts the northern European amber source areas. This amber is geologically located in what is known as the Blue Earth layer of the upper Eocene, and thus 34—38 million years old. From antiquity into the nineteenth century, most of the fossil resin was found near the coast of the Baltic, often washed up upon the shore. The largest piece includes remarkably preserved fauna and flora. This over three millennia-long use of amber sheds light on the beads and pendants excavated in New York and Rio de Janeiro.

At left in Figure 2 is a tiny rounded and faceted bead from Grave 340, a well-preserved burial of a mature female, the only documented example of amber found amongst the 419 excavated graves of the African Burial Ground site. At right in Figure 2 is a group of worked ambers, beads and pendants disinterred from the Valongo Wharf area. Both the New York and Brazilian sites were professionally excavated under very tight deadlines because of intended building projects, both of them connected to national endeavors. In New York, a large United States Federal government center was to be built and in Rio, the project was connected to the 2016 Olympics.<sup>1</sup> In 2017, the

Valongo Wharf Archaeological Site was designated by UNESCO as a part of World Heritage. <sup>2</sup>



**Fig. 2** Left: Amber Bead from Grave 340, African Burial Ground, NY. (Photo: David Seckler). Center: Diagram of Deceased Woman's Pelvis (Grave 340) with Amber Indicated in Orange. Courtesy of General Services Administration. Right: Amber Ornaments from the Valongo Wharf Site. (Photo: T.A. Lima et alia)

The New York bead was first brought to my attention by American historians and anthropologists in the United States knowledgeable about the Burial Ground finds following the 2012 publication of my book, *Amber and the Ancient World*. This led me to research on amber and Africa beyond my specialty in ancient art. With my antennae out for other ambers from sites connected to the enslavement of Africans, I discovered the first mention of the Volongo Wharf site finds in their first publications. These ambers are among the approximately 2,000 beads from the wharf site area.

Within a very short time after the two excavations had begun, both sites and their finds became the subject of considerable debate — about the disinterment itself; the methods, analysis, research, storage, intended publications and proposed displays. Since the time of the original excavations and the consequent scholarly publications, considerable critical press and contemporary debate in the origin countries have addressed the projects. Conversations in communities and timely responses have appeared in scholarly and popular presses. The deeply uncomfortable legacy of the sites continues to be articulated. Among the many issues still on the table is the need for a more encompassing discussion by descendant communities of any

future activity. Continued debate also concerns long-term display of the history and archaeology.<sup>3</sup>

The African Burial Ground is located in today's Lower Manhattan at what was formerly known as the Negro Burial Ground. Up to 15,000 Africans were buried there between the end of 17<sup>th</sup> century and 1795, when it was closed. Both enslaved and freed slaves were interred there since 'negroes' could not be buried in churchyards. Excavation was completed on a partial section of the burial ground site by July 1993. Despite the limited number of graves excavated, this section sample demonstrated that many of the human remains, of children, women, and men, were well preserved. Among these, Grave 340 stand out: the woman was at least 40 but perhaps as old as 60, the deceased's teeth were modified, and she was buried with 112 beads and cowrie shells in the form of a waist belt including the single bead of amber.

While some have suggested that the amber bead may have been acquired in North America, it is more likely that the bead had an African provenance.<sup>4</sup> In this author's opinion, the shape of the bead is comparable to many 18th-century faceted ambers made in Germany or London. It is significant that the deceased was interred with the belt positioned on the body as it was in her life, thus playing similar many of the same roles in ceremonies of death and post-burial: of wealth, status, and protection.

The excavation and primary publication of the Valongo Wharf were led by Tania Andrade Lima.<sup>5</sup> The Wharf, built in 1811, was adjacent to the biggest slave market in Brazil in what is today's port zone of Rio di Janeiro. This market operated from 1779 until 1831—the year in which the transatlantic slave trade was banned. By 1843 the site was covered over, and an embankment built. The work in 2011-2012 uncovered the old area and the ambers are amongst a range of small objects excavated from the two major dumping areas found at the site—finds which likely came from one or more kinds of deposits. The thousands of the small objects are today classified with terms such as jewelry, beads, ornaments, adornments, talismans, amulets, charms, or apotropaics. The finds are of a range of materials: blue and white glass beads, shells, corals, crystals (including chandelier elements and perfume lids), but also rock prisms, flakes, and cores, plant fiber and

copper rings, *figas* of bone or wood, animal horn, teeth and claws, crucifixes, coins, medals, rattles, and keys. The majority appear to have been originally worn on the human body, next to the skin, in the hair, or attached to garments.<sup>6</sup>

My thinking about objects of adornment have been much influenced by a range of archaeologists, historians, ethnologists, anthropologists. Jewelry and amulets are value-laden, and their forms and material qualities (the use of rare and exotic materials reflects labor, skill, and knowledge-intensive production) are powerful indicators of social identity. Permanent ornaments can endure beyond one human life and can connect their wearers to ancestors, thus playing a crucial role in social continuity—especially when we consider that such objects are imbued with an optical authority that words and actions often lack or carry messages too dangerous or controversial to put into words. In life, in funeral rituals, in the grave and in ritual deposits amber and other amuletic ornaments would have had a social function, solidifying a group's belief systems, and reiterating ideas about the afterworld. As I have proposed before, perhaps more than any other aspect of the archaeological record, body ornamentation is a point of access into the social world of the past. Ethnographers see body ornamentation as affirming the social construct and structure and, when worn by the political elite, as guaranteeing group beliefs. Interpretations of the meanings of body ornamentation imagery must consider how 'artistic' languages work to create expressive effects that are dependent upon the setting.

In my close look at the finds from Manhattan and Valongo, many scholars have aided in my understanding of the complexity of the material. Their work has greatly aided my study of amber in burials and in particular, of these Afro-Atlantic finds. To my Brazilian and American colleagues who have worked on the material from the two sites, I owe a great deal. I would also like to signal the work of James Walvin, who has contributed much to the fields of slavery and modern British social history. His 2017 book *Slavery in Small Things: Slavery and Modern Cultural Habits* was an especially important model, especially because of his focus on the cowrie shell. Two decades ago, my approach to amber in the ancient Mediterranean world was

enlightened by Roger Moorey, an Ancient Near Eastern specialist, who was among the first to ask critical functions of formerly interred material culture, objects frequently found in museum collections, and his insights relevant here: “Even if it may be possible to identify who or what is represented in a human-made object, that does not in itself resolve the question of what *activity* the object was involved in.”<sup>7</sup> And, by extension, we can inquire: what activity or activities occurred before burial?

At about the same time, I met Randall White, a prehistorian, who had opened up an especially wide view of objects of adornment from their earliest appearance in the archaeological record: “Much jewelry, especially if figured, belongs to a phenomenology of images, and it functions in ritual ways. It is part of a social flow of information and can establish, modify, and comment on major social categories, such as age, sex, and status, since it has value, carries meaning, and suggests communication within groups, regions, and often larger geographical areas.”<sup>8</sup>

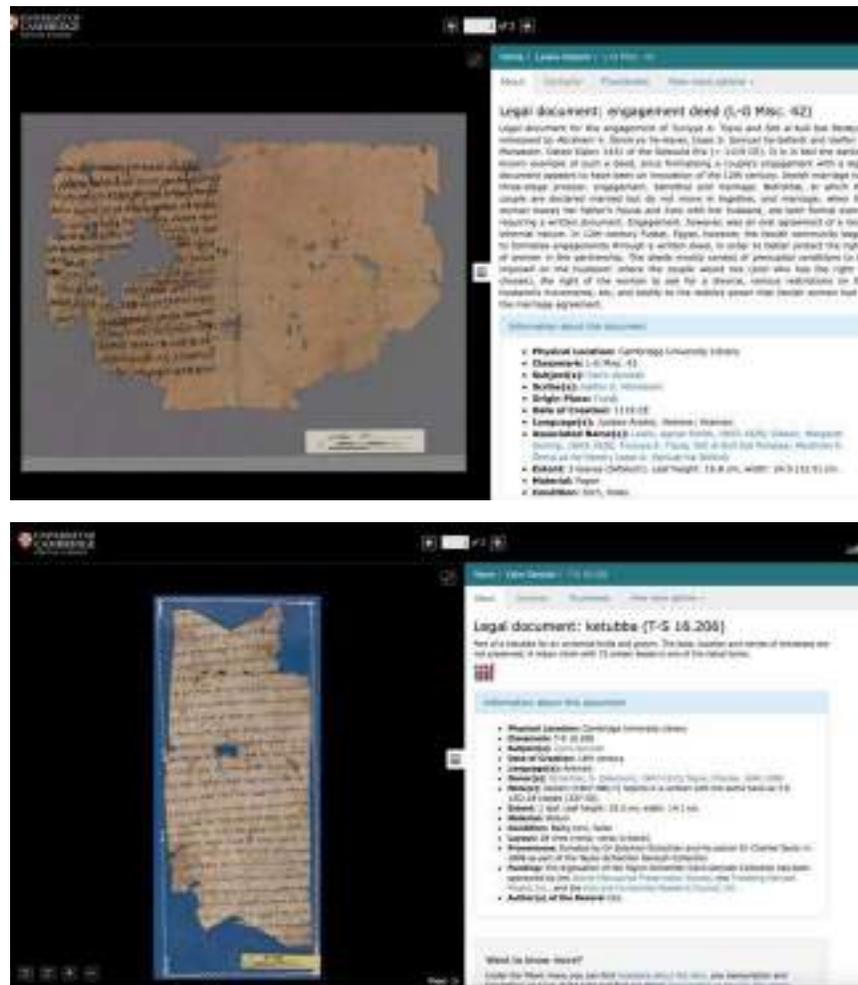
These two specialists, among others, led to my positioning that jewelry and amulets are value-laden, and their forms and material qualities (the use of rare and exotic materials reflects labor, skill, and knowledge-intensive production) are powerful indicators of social identity. Permanent ornaments can endure beyond one human life and can connect their wearers to ancestors, thus playing a crucial role in social continuity—especially when we consider that such objects are imbued with an optical authority that words and actions often lack or carry messages too dangerous or controversial to put into words. In life, in funeral rituals, in the grave, and in ritual deposits amber and other amuletic ornaments would have had a social function, solidifying a group’s belief systems, and reiterating ideas about the afterworld. Perhaps more than any other aspect of the archaeological record, body ornamentation is a point of access into the social world of the past. Ethnographers see body ornamentation as affirming the social construct and structure and, when worn by the political elite, as guaranteeing group beliefs. Interpretations of the meanings of body ornamentation imagery must consider how ‘artistic’ languages work to create expressive effects that are dependent upon the setting.

When did Baltic amber first appear in Africa? The jury is out about the evidence from ancient Egypt. There is some agreement about the painted tribute scenes in the New Kingdom Tomb of Rekhmire (that is, mid-second millennium BC) where strings of beads appear to be amber. But a text from the reign of the New Kingdom Pharaoh Thutmose III — is registered a delivery from Greece of ‘a great heap of amber which is measured by the *heket*, making 36.692 *deben* (about 3424kgs).’ Even today, at a time when amber is industrially mined, that is a great deal of amber! Another strong case for Baltic amber in Egypt was made by Professor Sinclair Hood: he identified a string of resin beads in Tutankhamun’s tomb as very as those of the Bronze Age Tumulus Culture of Central Europe. They have never been tested, but the size and forms are identical.<sup>9</sup>

With the establishment of Islam in northern Africa and the development of long-distance trade across the continent by merchantmen, amber, especially in the form of amber beads, but also as a raw material (to be used in medicine and incense), is reported as a trade good in the trans-Saharan trade by at least the 7<sup>th</sup> century of the Christian calendar. Amber from the European north was joined in trading and wearing with the beads from the glass-making centers of the Islamic world — which had inherited their traditions from ancient Near Eastern and Classical centers. Historians have noted the important accounts and documents that reveal a significant role for worked amber (mainly beads from Cairo) in North Africa as well as to the sub-Saharan from the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD onwards. This is assumed to be because of the preference for amber as the material for prayer beads. And amber in medicine and healing has an ancient and documentable history from this early date on the continent of Africa.

Until now, a large body of documentation for the use of amber in northern Africa has been untapped in regard to the study of the ancient resin: the mass of documents from the Cairo Genizah. From the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Jewish community of Fustat (Old Cairo) deposited at least 280,000 old and obsolete writings in a purpose-built storeroom in the Ben Ezra synagogue.<sup>10</sup> Such storerooms can be found in all synagogues and are intended to preserve any scrap of paper on which may be written the word

‘God.’ Sacred, such pieces of paper or parchment were — and are — considered too holy to discard. Eventually, such holy writings were intended for burial in the cemetery. Occasionally, though, this fate eluded these assemblages as was the case with the treasures in the Cairo Genizah.



**Fig. 3.** Two documents from the Cairo Genizah in the Cambridge University Digital Library site. Top: Engagement deed; scribe and couple named. L-G Misc. 42. Paper. In Judeo-Arabic, Hebrew, Aramaic. Dated 1119 CE. Bottom: Part of a ketubba (legal document) T-S 16-206. Vellum. In Aramaic, dated 1337 CE. Cambridge University Library. Part of a ketubba of an unnamed bride and groom. A chain with 72 amber beads is recorded.

These fragmentary manuscripts outline a 1,000-year continuum (870 CE to 19th century CE) of inhabitants of North Africa—Jewish, Christian,

Muslim—and comprise the largest and most diverse collection of medieval manuscripts in the world. They are written in various languages, especially Hebrew, Aramaic, Judeo-Arabic, and Arabic.

Among those that mention amber is a medical text, a leaf from a larger pharmacopoeia, that describes the preparation of a drug, including camphor, saffron, frankincense, wax, and amber.

At Figure 3, dating to 1119 CE, is one of the earliest examples of an engagement deed found in the Genizah; it mentions one amber ring and a portion of small pieces of amber. It is the earliest known example in the world of such a deed and is written in Judaeo-Aramaic, Hebrew, and Aramaic. At the bottom, in Aramaic, is a *ketubah*, a formal Jewish marriage contract of 1337 CE guaranteeing a bride certain future rights, including property. A string of 72 amber beads is mentioned.<sup>11</sup>

Dating much later are travelers' reports of the use of amber, both in North and sub-Saharan Africa. As Stanley Alpern outlines, beads were among the all-time most popular imports to Africa from medieval times on, and in strongly evidence in the 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Once the slave trade unfolded, a new, tragic, and sobering story begins, one that is known through business records and other transactions: African, European, and New World. "Many billions [of beads] landed in barrels, case, and casks... Some came loose, but the usual rule was to prestring them and sell the strings in clusters or bundles." <sup>12</sup> It is to be remembered that over one-half of the exports to Africa in the slave trade were foreign goods transshipped through London and amber from the Baltic, Germany and later Sweden were among the cargo.

In this illustration (Figure 4) by Jean-Baptiste Debret of sixteen different enslaved women representing the diversity of African heritage in Brazil, made 1816-1831 and published in 1854, was part of a commission by the Portuguese court. In dress, jewelry, and hairstyle is of significant variety. Some of the jewelry elements are conceivably of amber.<sup>1</sup>



**Fig. 4.** J.-B. Debret, Negro Slaves from Different Nations. The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Print Collection, The New York Public Library. New York Public Library Digital Collections.

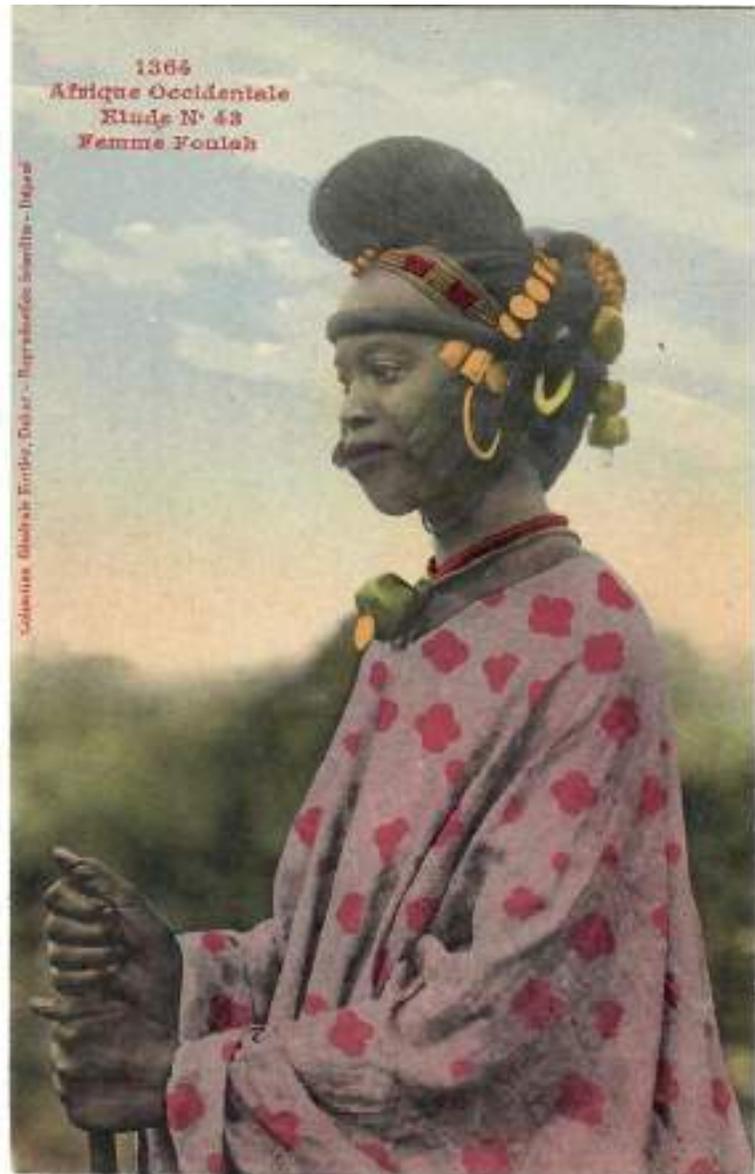
Senegambia is a case in point, and just one excavated burial site, Diakhité, (active from the 18<sup>th</sup> century until abandonment in the mid 19<sup>th</sup>) is illuminating. Marie-Joseph Opper and Howard Opper wrote in 1989, “Amber beads and faceted crystal beads were among the most expensive items in precolonial Senegambia.”<sup>14</sup> As the Oppers outlined, the bead evidence from the burial supports period reports such as the famous 1763-64 travel account by the Abbé Jean-Baptiste Demanet: “Yellow amber is a must...Coral and amber serve to make necklaces and belts for kings, their wives, and for all who can afford them. They interpret these necklaces and belts wide in the form of rosaries with beads of coral, amber, fine crystal and fancy glass

beads...”<sup>15</sup> And critical to our understanding of amber beads in Africa and the African diaspora is the Oppers’ reminder of cultural continuity from their above-noted essay: “As elsewhere in West Africa, the heirlooming of beads seems to have been a common practice at Diakhité...and such heirlooming of personal material continues to be an important cultural aspect among Senegalese women.”

Contemporary documents of the slave trade from Africa include significant information in bills of lading and memoirs. These are painful to read. One merchant reported receiving a male Negro in return for thirteen beads of coral, half a string of amber beads, 28 silver bells and three pairs of bracelets. Captain Canot, the notorious slave trader active in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, in his memoir, recounts a list of gifts presented at Timbo for slaves: Several packages of blue and white calicoes, ten yards of scarlet cloth, six kegs of powder, 300 pounds of tobacco, six muskets, two strings of amber, a gilded sword, and several packages of Spanish fly. Canot is also the first to describe another use for amber (one still popular today amongst the Fula), the decoration of a Fula woman’s hair, which was plaited all over her skull and then adorned “with amber beads and copiously anointed with vegetable butter, so the points gleamed with fire.”<sup>16</sup>

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Africa, especially in areas with significant numbers of travelers, photographic postcards of local inhabitants in “traditional dress” document traditional amber use, especially in French-speaking North African countries, Algeria, and Morocco, and in West Africa.

The early 20th-century postcard of a Fula woman illustrated here (Figure 5) exemplifies the role of amber in adornment.<sup>17</sup> This is just one more record of amber objects with possible connections to ancestors, objects potentially imbued with an authority, with a social function, a point of access into the social world of the past.



**Fig. 5.** Femme Foulah. Antique postcard. Private collection. Photo: Author

A necklace in the Smithsonian National Museum of African art is an exemplum of the many lives of amber beads.<sup>18</sup> This necklace, last worn by an Ait Atta woman in Morocco. As the museum notes in its online text, necklaces such as this “...were worn especially for weddings, but for other public gatherings, as well, a woman's beaded jewelry ensemble would have made a dazzling and impressive visual statement. It would have reflected, as well, a woman's status and the prominence of her family... since the beads were

usually old and reused for many generations. Indeed, women's jewelry from this region functions as portable wealth, as individual beads of coral, amber, and stone can be sold when a family needs money, something that is preferable to parting with an entire piece of jewelry.”

The contemporary marketplace (including online advertisements), popular photography and anthropological study substantiate traditional roles for amber. For example, among the Yoruba, amber is essential for the Orisha Oshun, whose worshippers and priests still today wear her distinctive amber beads. In contemporary Cuba, some of the necklaces used in the Afro-Cuban Rule of Santería need of amber beads. The necklace for Ochosi, Oxun, for example, ritually requires a single amber bead in the string. (Might this usage shed light on the single amber bead of grave 340 of the African Burial Ground?)

What stories do the small beads from the African Burial Ground and the Valongo Wharf tell us? Which uses did they embody? In which ‘activities’ were they involved at various points in their ownership, then in their burial, and since their exhumation? Might we consider them as miniature sites of memory? Do their uncovering and display allow them to continue to work, now, today, in new ways of sorrow and mourning, of remembrance and protection? Whatever the answers are to these questions, we cannot deny their continuing role as poignant witnesses to a complex past, to cultural and migrational trauma.

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## ENDNOTES

1. The discussion of the African Burial Ground is extensive. For an excellent encompassing assessment, see *The New York African Burial Ground Reports*.
2. For the Valongo Wharf site, the literature is also extensive. Sources consulted are in bibliography.
3. This debate continues in contemporary publications from newspapers to scholarly papers.
4. See, for example Bianco et alia.
5. Lima, 2013.
6. Lima et alia, 2014.
7. Moorey 2004, p.9
8. White 1992, p. 560.
9. Hood, Sinclair. "Amber in Egypt," in Beck, C.W. & Bouzek, J. (ed.) *Amber in archaeology: proceedings of the Second International Conference on Amber in Archaeology*, Liblice 1990: 230—35. Prague: Institute of Archaeology, Czech Academy of Sciences.
10. Ahern, p. 24.
11. Cambridge University Digital Library, Cairo Genizah section.
12. Opper and Opper, p. 16
13. Jean Baptiste Debret, *Voyage Pittoresque et Historique au Bresil* (Paris, 1834-39), vol. 2, plate 22, p. 75.
14. Opper and Opper, p. 19
15. Demanet, p. 126.
16. Conneau and Meyer, p. 179.
17. Postcard with inscription: "1364. Afrique Occidentale, Etude No. 43, Femme Foulah, Collection Générale Fortier, Dakar" (Private collection).
18. Smithsonian Institution African Museum of Art  
[https://collections.si.edu/search/detail/edanmdm:nmafa\\_2003-10-2?q=amber+atta&fq=data\\_source%3A%22National+Museum+of+African+Art%22&fq=online\\_media\\_type%3A%22Images%22&fq=online\\_visual\\_material%3Atrue&record=2&hlterm=amber%2Batta&inline=true](https://collections.si.edu/search/detail/edanmdm:nmafa_2003-10-2?q=amber+atta&fq=data_source%3A%22National+Museum+of+African+Art%22&fq=online_media_type%3A%22Images%22&fq=online_visual_material%3Atrue&record=2&hlterm=amber%2Batta&inline=true)

# **Alienated émigré in Paris: The Residue of the Trauma of World War II in the Art of Józef Czapski**

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## **ABSTRACT**

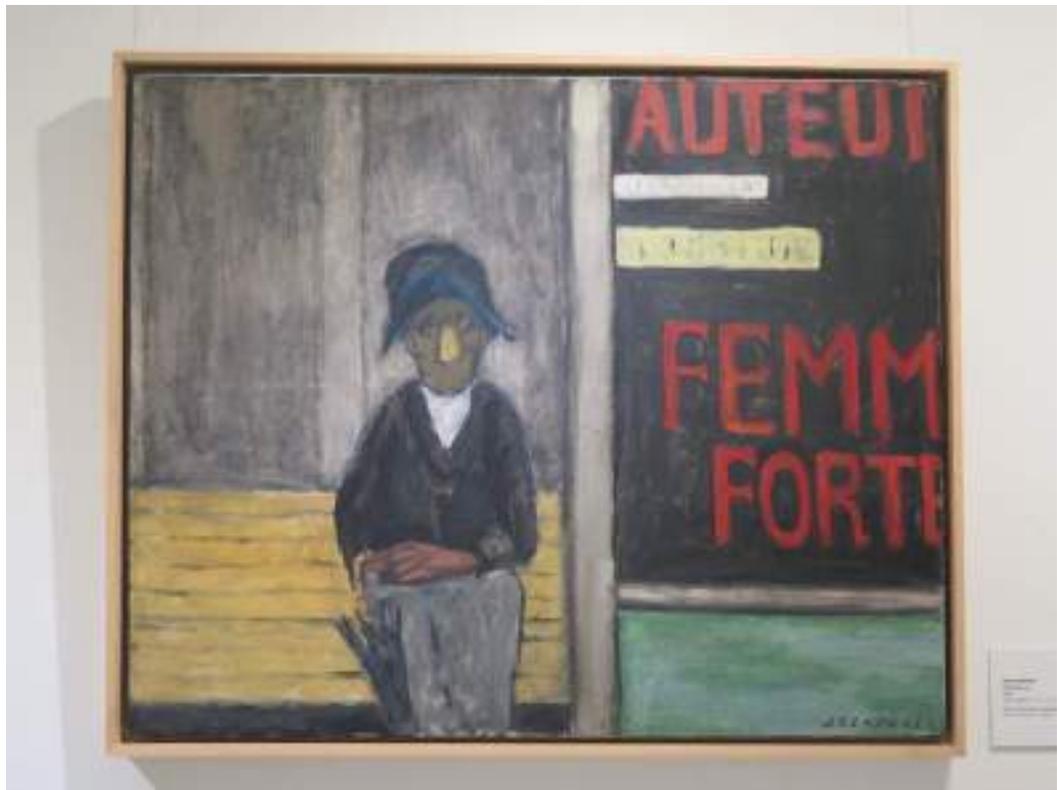
A series of images of an anonymous resident of Paris, lost in the whirl of life, in the labyrinth of streets and the underground, always lonely, preoccupied with his own thoughts, insensitive to fads and novelties. This is how I would describe the protagonist of the works painted in the 1950s-80s by Józef Czapski, a Polish émigré who settled in Paris after World War II. The alienated figure is the *alter ego* of the artist and the symbol of the fate of hundreds of thousands of Poles expelled from their country as a result of Nazi and Soviet occupation during WWII. The biography of Czapski himself (1896-1993) is the best exemplification of the forced migration caused by the dramatic political history of the twentieth century. An eyewitness to the war trauma suffered by displaced civilians, prisoners of war and soldiers, he described these experiences in his diary and in two books – *Memories of Starobielsk* and *Inhuman Land*. He complemented the verbal narrative with drawings, both of which conveyed a horrifying depiction of the war hecatomb. The burden of the wartime memories made his paintings idiosyncratic, yet perceived as a *passé* idiom in the context of the contemporary Parisian art scene. This case study emphasizes the peculiarity of Czapski's position, resulting from his mental inability to involve in artistic progressivism.

## **KEYWORDS**

Forced Migration; World War II; Art Criticism; Expressionism; Post-Impressionism.

### Solitude

A long series of images of an anonymous (male or female) inhabitant of Paris, a *flaneur*, a passerby lost in the hustle and bustle of metropolitan life, in a labyrinth of streets and metro stations or one confined in the interiors of railway wagons, cafés and bars, museum galleries and theatre boxes; always alone, deep in thought, immersed in themselves. There were also studies of an impoverished, disabled, elderly person, marginalised in society and helpless in the face of his/her misfortune.



**Fig. 1.** Józef Czapski, *Old Woman*, 1965, oil on canvas, 71 x 92,6 cm, National Museum in Kraków

The above depictions might be treated as descriptions of the main protagonist featured in the paintings executed from the 1950s to the 1980s by Józef Czapski, a Polish writer, columnist, art critic, and painter who – after the end of World War II, in which he actively participated – settled in Paris to

represent the interests of the Polish government-in-exile and to lobby for non-communist Poland. I will argue that this alienated figure, who was the point of focus in the narrowly-framed scenes of Czapski's paintings, is the artistic equivalent of the mental condition of the artist himself, as well as a symbol of the fate of hundreds of thousands of Poles exiled from their country during the Nazi and Soviet invasion in 1939, sent to labor camps in Germany and the USSR during the six-year-long occupation of Poland or following combat trails with the Allied forces. It is a token of the lives of those Polish emigrants who were deprived of the opportunity of returning to their homeland by the communist regime which Moscow imposed on the People's Republic of Poland in 1945.



**Fig. 2** Józef Czapski, *Lonely Woman*, 1979, oil on canvas, 92 x 50 cm, private collection

Nevertheless, it was not only the course of World War II that influenced Czapski's biography. The outbreak of World War I, the revolution of 1917 in Imperial Russia, and the Polish-Soviet war of 1919-1920 also left a mark on his life. Consequently, he became an eye-witness of the turbulent history of the 20th century, an emphatic observer of the suffering of dozens of thousands of civilian refugees and soldiers fighting on fronts. I hereby formulate the thesis that Czapski never freed himself of the war trauma, which was reflected in both his writings and historical journalism as well as in the sphere that can be found at the other extreme of objective historical narration – in the aesthetic experience, in the manner of comprehending the essence of painting, and in the expression of the art form created.

#### **A short biography of Czapski**

Czapski could share his rich, multifaceted biography with several people, at the very least.<sup>4</sup> Born in the Czech capital city of Prague into an aristocratic family (his mother, Josephine, derived from the Austrian family of Thun-Hohenstein, whereas his father, Jerzy, was a descendant of the Prussian counts of von Hutten), Józef Maria Emeryk Franciszek Ignacy Czapski (1896-1993) spent his happy and prosperous childhood in Priluki near Minsk (at the time the territory was a part of Imperial Russia, today it belongs to Belarus). He attended secondary school in Petrograd, where, in 1915, he undertook the study of law. As a subject of tsar Nicholas II, he was mobilized in 1916. In 1917 he enlisted in the First Krechowce Uhlan Regiment, a part of the Polish First Corps, singled out from the Russian army. However, under the influence of Tolstoy's pacifism, in 1918, he left the army ranks to start a religious phalanstère in Petrograd. Yet, the commune was ephemeral. The very same year saw Czapski resume his military service; however, by command's consent, he was not sent into combat. Instead, he was entrusted with the mission of finding these officers from his regiment who had gone missing in Russia. Therefore, holding a diplomatic passport, he covered considerable distances across the USSR territory, at the same time eye-witnessing the dramatic conditions in which the Russian population

lived. His mission was a fiasco, as it turned out that the officers he was looking for had already been executed.

Russian philosopher, writer, and poet, Dmitry Merezhkovsky – whom Czapski met in Petrograd – convinced him that one should fight for liberty by force of arms. Consequently, Czapski re-conscripted to the army during the Polish-Soviet War in 1919. He was awarded the War Order of Virtuti Militari – the highest Polish military honor – and promoted to the rank of second lieutenant in recognition of showing heroism in the Kiev Offensive in 1920.

With his taste shaped in the salons of affluent aristocracy, who relished art and music, Czapski began to pursue his dream of developing his skills as a painter in the 1920s. As of 1921, he continued the studies of painting – which he commenced at the School of Fine Arts in Warsaw in 1918 – at the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow under the supervision of, among others, Józef Pankiewicz, the promoter of Post-Impressionism, who had just returned from France. In 1924, accompanied by a group of his students, who adopted the name Komitet Paryski [Paris Committee], Pankiewicz moved to the branch of the Krakow-based academy to Paris. He taught the students to venerate Cézanne and Bonnard and to show respect to the old masters, whose works they admired together in the galleries of the Louvre. These fascinations of the young years left a lasting mark on Czapski's artistic attitude.

Czapski returned to Poland in 1932; however, the outbreak of World War II interrupted the artistic career he had just embarked on. Re-mobilized, he was held captive by Soviets during the defensive campaign in 1939. Initially detained in the prisoner-of-war camp in Starobilsk, he was later transferred to the detention camp in Pavlishchev Bor near Smolensk and, eventually, to Gryazovets near Vologda.

In July 1941, the Polish government-in-exile in London and the Soviet authorities signed the Sikorski-Mayski Agreement, which provided for amnesty for the Poles who were held captive in the USSR. At the time, Czapski joined the Polish Armed Forces forming in Totskoye under the command of General Władysław Anders. However, a vast majority of the prisoners of war from Starobilsk did not conscript to the newly-formed army,

which aroused concern among the command. For the second time in his life, Czapski was entrusted with the mission of tracing the fate of those Polish officers who had gone missing. As general Anders's *chargé d'affaires*, Czapski traversed the Soviet territory from Moscow to Kuybyshev in the frosty winter of late 1941 and early 1942. He reached Soviet decision-makers in the NKVD [the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs] headquarters in Lubyanka and in the Gulag [a system of labor camps] central office in Chkalovo, Kazakhstan. To no avail. Why did this happen?

In March 1940, the Soviet secret police conducted mass executions, shooting 22,000 Polish officers, members of prison authorities, border guards, representatives of the judiciary, medical doctors, clergy, members of the intelligentsia, and landowners, who were held captive in prisons and detention camps in Starobilsk, Kozelsk, and Ostashkov. What saved Czapski from execution by firing squad was the intervention of the German embassy (Nazi Germany was USSR's ally until 1941), undertaken at the request of Czapski's mother's family, who was well-connected with several German families.

The fact that Poles were executed at Stalin's order was consistently concealed by the Soviet authorities as well as by Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Winston Churchill. Germans, who discovered mass graves in Katyn in April 1943 while marching east, were accused of this war crime. It was as late as 1990 – the time of Mikhail Gorbachev's presidency – that the Russian authorities admitted that the annihilation of the Polish elite was one of the gravest war crimes of Stalinism. Never did Czapski have any doubts as to who was liable for the crime and exposed attempts at distorting this historical truth throughout his life.

While traversing the territory of the USSR, Czapski saw the enormous existential poverty and anguish of ordinary Russians. To compensate for the difficult experience, he wrote down his reflections on the history of European painting on the train from Moscow to Tashkent. Earlier, while imprisoned in Gryazovets, he resorted to art as an alternative world, a world completely different from the tragic living conditions in the camp. The camp authorities consented for the prisoners to undertake educational activities after a whole

day of grueling physical work. Within the framework of self-education, Czapski delivered, in French, a series of talks on Marcel Proust's prose, in which he was engrossed during his several-month sojourn in London in 1926.<sup>2</sup> To the extent to which it was possible, he used scraps of paper to sketch portraits of his fellow prisoners and scenes from camp life. Drawing restored in him the determination to survive and offered a mental escape. When treated for tuberculosis in camp hospital, he began to write the history of European painting from David to Picasso. Unfortunately, his notebook was lost.

### **Intimate diary**

In March 1942, while staying with the staff of Anders's army in Yangiyo'l near Tashkent in Uzbekistan, Czapski bought a black linen-bound notebook to resume the habit of writing an 'intimate diary' he started keeping in his youth. The pre-war volumes of the diary have not been preserved. By the end of his life, Czapski filled the pages of 278 such notebooks with casually rendered drawings of fragments of the reality he observed and regularly wrote accounts of everyday events. Today, they constitute an invaluable testimony to 20th-century events, both those constituting the 'grand narrative' of objective political history and the very personal ones, constituting the artist's 'minor narrative.'

Due to the pressure exerted on Stalin by British and American authorities, the undernourished, emaciated, decimated by diseases, and poorly equipped with weapons, Anders's army of over 75,000 soldiers as well as 37,000 members of the prisoners' families, who had been displaced to the heartland of Russia, were evacuated to Iran. As the head of the Department of Propaganda and Education at General Anders's staff, Czapski traversed the entire combat trail from Russia through Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, the Caspian Sea, Iran, Iraq, Palestine, and Egypt to Italy. He conveyed the picture of the war hecatomb in both his diary and the books published after the war: *Wspomnienia Starobielskie (Memories of Starobielsk)* (1944)<sup>3</sup> and *Na nieludzkiej ziemi (Inhuman Land)* (1949).<sup>4</sup>

Densely filled with hardly legible handwriting, verses on the pages of the diary adjoin or overlap with views of the streets of Tashkent, scenes of the army being transported by ship, or interiors of camp barracks – all rendered by means of a few lines – and, further, with images of Arabs and camel silhouettes, sketches of mosques, minarets, pyramids and desert landscapes, streets of Baghdad, Brindisi, and Taranto, and views of the Gulf of Naples.

In Loreto near Ancona, Czapski sketched Luca Signorelli's fresco, adorning the walls of Santa Casa di Loreto. Made amidst the turmoil of war, this escapist gesture was a manifestation of an attempt at 'suspending' time and imbuing the present with the past. Putting down roots in the past – whether those calming the troubled psyche or those arousing dark memories – will become an inherent part of Czapski's creative personality.

#### **Political connections and transcultural interests**

A resident of Paris since 1946, Czapski worked intensively on behalf of the Polish government-in-exile based in London (he was demobilized in 1948 with the rank of major). He had many contacts among both the French non-communist left, the political center, and conservative leaders. He would meet André Malraux, the Minister for Information – later appointed the Minister of Cultural Affairs – in the government of General Charles de Gaulle and de Gaulle himself, trying to convince them to support the Polish cause. Owing to family connections, it was as early as in the 1920s that he developed relations with the Parisian intellectual elite and met, among others, Jacques Maritain, François Mauriac, Paul Morand, and Daniel Halévy, who later helped him to move on the intricate political scene. He regularly cooperated with the *Kultura* [*Culture*] monthly, published by Instytut Literacki [Literary Institute], founded by Polish émigrés in Rome in 1946 and transferred to Paris in 1947. The magazine addressed politics and culture-related issues and was smuggled to the People's Republic of Poland. Highly esteemed as a writer, literary critic, war memoirist, and anti-Soviet dissident, Czapski became a moral authority for Poles in exile. However, due to law-abiding censorship, he remained unknown to a majority of the public in Poland until the early 1990s, a time of political breakthrough and transformation in East-Central Europe,

following the collapse of the Berlin Wall. In communist Poland, Czapski's texts were circulated as *samizdat*, for they expressed contempt for the Soviet regime and sympathy for the anguishing Russian nation, not to mention the relentless search for the truth about the Katyn massacre.

Czapski was both a patriot – far from nationalism and chauvinism – and a cosmopolite. Fluency in foreign languages – Russian, French, German, and English which he achieved at home and cultivated owing to considerable reading, as well as the paths of life, which led him to diverse geocultural zones, made him open to cultural variety and specificity. One of the many examples of this attitude was when, while searching for publications on Shia and Sunni Muslims in Teheran, he discovered the book by Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, *Les religions et philosophies dans l'Asie Centrale*, which became his indispensable talisman. He subscribed to the concept of *atonie* (meaning a type of inertia). According to Gobineau, the condition of apathy, indifference, and helplessness was typical of the inhabitants of Central Asia governed by subsequent dynasties, who fought one another. Czapski will diagnose émigrés in post-war Paris with such an attitude.<sup>5</sup>

The paths of Czapski's peregrination led him to almost all continents: Europe, Asia, Africa, as well as North and South America. In 1950 he visited the United States and Canada, where he raised funds among Poles to subsidize the publications of Instytut Literacki. In 1955, he spent four months traversing the trail leading from Brazil, through Uruguay and Argentina to Venezuela, collecting money for the same purpose. During these journeys, he created chronicles of everyday events and situations in both drawing and writing. While in New York and Chicago, he would sketch workers, the urban poor, the homeless, factories, ports, skyscrapers, and museum galleries. „Only a gaze that refuses to falsify a difficult truth could extract beauty from these streets,” he remarked.<sup>6</sup> While in South America, he was fascinated with the diversity of ethnoses, exotic plants, colorful birds, and Brazilian Gothic. In the title of one of his books, Czapski described this abundance of visual stimuli as *tumult*. The full title of the book is *Tumult i widma [Tumult and Phantoms]*<sup>7</sup> and is a reference to Blaise Pascal's antinomy between *le tumulte* and *le repos* – confusion and calm, in which the latter part was replaced with

the notion of phantoms, understood by Czapski as fragments of the past looming from memory. However, he did not record the war upheavals and traumatic experiences – which seemingly faded away, superseded by current events – in the narrative layer and in the depicted motifs of his paintings. Instead, he subjected himself to visions, which were aroused by an accidental visual impulse and evoked emotions, and reminded him of the past. He explained his creative intuitiveness in the following manner:

“This primeval vision is grace. Everything you do will seem to be evil, for it is burdened with thought and will. [...] Never will we become equal to the vision that comes to us. When faced with it, we have to admit our misery.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Czapski’s *musée imaginaire***

Czapski resumed painting in the early 1950s, after a ten-year-long break, uncertain of his skills and searching for inspiration in the art of the old and contemporary masters. The diversified assembly of artists he considered to be his progenitors included: Goya, Rembrandt, Roualt, and Soutine, as well as Bonnard, Matisse, and de Stäel on the opposite end of the expressive range. However, self-irony saved him from derivativeness or emulation of the original models.

You must discover everything with your entire self under the brush, which may be 40 years after you had heard this discovery after you had understood and comprehended it intellectually, or even emotionally, but not in your work, not at the tip of your brush.<sup>9</sup>

Czapski transferred his imaginary museum to the pages of the diary, at the same time analyzing the opinions of the artists he considered to be his spiritual allies, owing to which he could conceptualize his artistic endeavors illustrated with miniature sketches of the works which had already been completed or which were intended to be rendered. An ardent opponent of abstraction in the visual arts, he appreciated the abstract painting of Nicolas de Stäel. Nevertheless, he was satisfied with the figurative turn the artist’s late

art took. This is how he explained his objections to abstract art in 1985: “[abstraction is] the amalgam of what we call pure intuition with pure latitude.”<sup>10</sup> Having become acquainted with Cézanne’s concepts in his youth, Czapski strove to capture the essence of the phenomena observed.

From the 1960s to the 1980s, Czapski increasingly subjected his life to the imperative of painting, gradually resigning from political activity and journalism on behalf of free Poland and a free world. It is worth mentioning that, in 1950, he was a co-founder of the Congress for Cultural Freedom in Berlin. In order to focus to a maximum extent on art, he decided on radical self-restraint and withdrew into the intimacy of his studio room at Maisons-Laffitte (the seat of the editorial board of *Kultura* in the vicinity of Paris) as if he had retreated into monastic space. This was where he transposed onto canvas the succinct notes he hastily recorded in sketch books, heading towards synthesis through emotional condensation and formal asceticism. In his opinion, maximum concentration during the painting process enabled the evocation of ‘involuntary memory’ (he borrowed the notion of *memoire involontaire* from Proust) and brought one closer to the state of contemplative prayer.<sup>11</sup> “Look not beyond memory, the memory which shocked you – the rest is but an obstacle,” he recorded in his diary in 1961.<sup>12</sup>

### **A flash of sight**

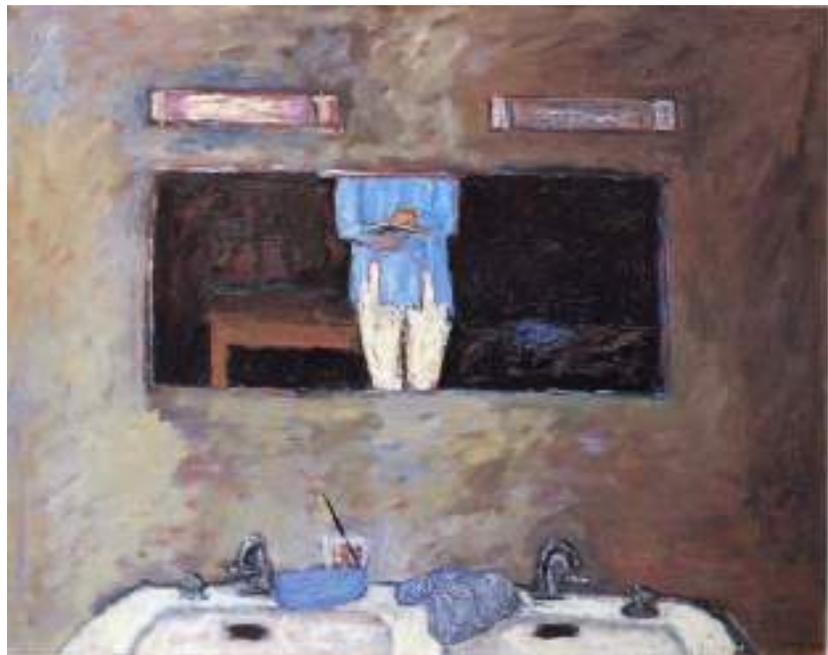
Czapski referred to glancing at the vibrant fabric of current life, which liberated emotions, as a ‘flash of sight’, an ‘illumination’, or a ‘flight.’ To his understanding, the perspicacity of vision was inextricably connected with empathy. His review of Mark Tobey’s exhibition from 1961 confirms the imperative to be sensitive to socio-political and universal affairs.

All Tobey [...] is *grâce*, but the *grâce* of a person who has never been to war and who just passed by these fifty years. Yesterday’s *France Observateur* – sixty dead Arabs in the Seine River, Arab ghetto, persecution. This *grâce* of Tobey’s, this contemplation fuelled by religious syncretism (behaviorists, Zen), is comprised of a kind of

detachment from an essential part of our life, our globe.<sup>13</sup>

A plethora of Czapski's artistic output may be referred to as studies of solitude; overwhelming, incapacitating solitude, which – despite many contacts with friends and acquaintances in Paris, London, Geneva, New York, or Buenos Aires, he experienced acutely; the solitude in which phantoms of tragic past revived. Filling the pages of the diary with a volley of words, which overlapped with drawings, constituted an antidote to solitude.

The expression of solitude in my work is often commented on. Maybe it's true, but I never pose this kind of question. [...] I subjugate myself to daily life, to the discoveries I make seeing a table, a basket, a face in a window or a café. That's where I find the point of departure I call disinterested discovery, the joy of it! Maybe that's the solitude people find, this world apart.<sup>14</sup>

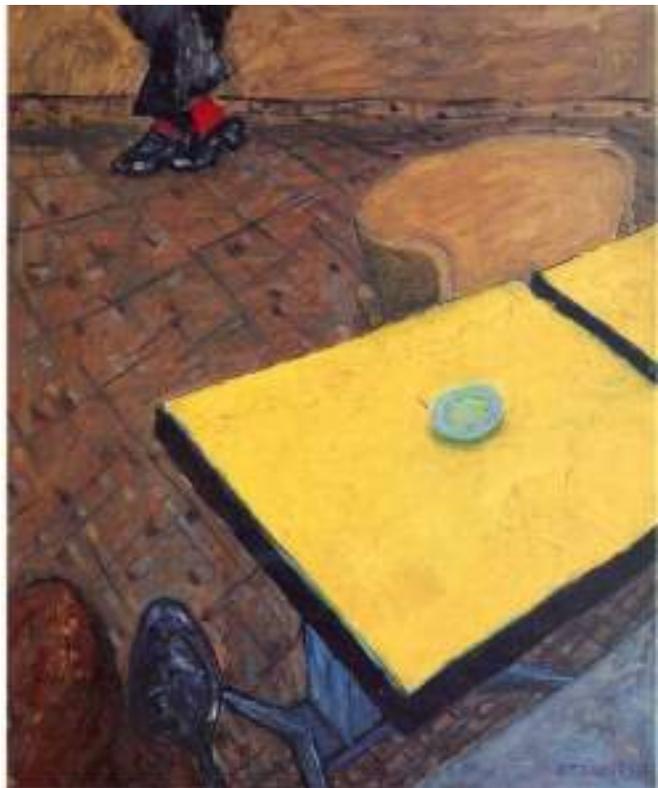


**Fig. 3.** Józef Czapski, *Lamp and a Sink (Self-portrait)*, 1959, oil on canvas, 80 x 100 cm, private collection

The verbal record of emotional amplitude, the dissection of one's own psyche, the polemic with oneself – particularly with regard to the reception

of philosophical thought and the exegesis of the creative process – found their equivalent in anonymous images of people who were solitary, mentally isolated, even while having other people around, equally alienated or living shattered lives. Frequently rendered as if observed indirectly, in a mirror, human figures almost lost their physical existence and were sublimated from corporeality. Deprived of identifiable physiognomic features through radical compositional cropping, they seem to be confined by objects. Fragmented figures ‘imprisoned’ between armchair backrests, silhouettes inserted into a spiral staircase, feet, and thighs moved to the edge of the frame, treated as a metonymic sign of a human figure – an art historian will easily identify these compositional schemes as borrowed from Japanese woodcuts and a continuation of the tradition of Degas and Bonnard.

**Fig. 4.** Józef Czapski, *Yellow Tables and an Ashtray*, 1957, oil on canvas, 65 x 54 cm, private collection



However, despite referring to Bonnard and Matisse, Czapski gradually departed from the *peinture-peinture* dogma, which implied purely chromatic

speculation. What is striking in his mature painting is condensed expression; therefore, his respect for Goya, Rouault, and Soutine shall not be surprising. He believed that inside him, there was a suppressed expressionist who persistently strove to capture the essence of pain.



**Fig. 5.** Józef Czapski, *Lonely Woman – Red Armchairs*, 1968, oil on canvas, 52 x 115 cm, private collection

### **Expression of the inexpressible**

“Painting is better, calmer after I have looked into the abyss,” he noted in 1988.<sup>15</sup> Afterward, he concluded bitterly: “The French stifled me.”<sup>16</sup> Wrongly so. The sediment of traumatic experiences became the essence of his art. In the context of the artist’s statements, the compositional effects and motifs he employed can be interpreted as the creation of artistic equivalents of human existence which cannot reach its full capacity in relation to the surrounding world. His studies of solitude can be interpreted as an image of a torn world, which – similar to his psyche – does not submit itself to integration. In his paintings, depicting forlorn railway platforms and empty café interiors, human existence is but implied, recalled from memory. The artist often quoted the words of Ludwig Wittgenstein: “If one makes no attempt to express the inexpressible, then nothing is lost, but the inexpressible is – inexpressibly – contained in what is expressed.”<sup>17</sup> This is how Czapski paraphrased Wittgenstein’s thought: “[...] it is about vision, it is about the

unconceived expression of unconceived feelings, it is an expression of a dark experience.”<sup>18</sup>

The patrons of Czapski's considerations were eminent writers, philosophers, and poets: Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Rozanov, Remizov, Proust, Simone Weil, Maine de Biran, Du Bos, Rilke, Hofmannsthal, Paul Valery, Malraux, Camus, Beckett, Huxley, and Cioran. On the pages of his diary, he created a type of a 'living library' and engaged in incessant 'dialogue' with the authors of the works described therein, commenting on their thoughts and deploying counter-arguments to their statements. He argued about the sense of suffering and infinite sacrifice for others with Simone Weil, for whose works he reached most often. This theme resonated best with his troubled psyche. In commentaries to Weil's notes, he asked: "Is this exclusivity of suffering, sole suffering, Truth?"<sup>19</sup> The last words he recorded in the diary shortly before his death, when he was almost blind (his sight deteriorated since the 1980s), were: 'Starobielsk' (just to remind: the POW camp in which he was interned) and 'Katyn' (the site of mass graves of Polish officers). Czapski found salvation from despair in the writings of mystics. "This background, this undertone, one must not forget about it and should carry it deep in the lining of one's consciousness in order to be able to live," he argued.<sup>20</sup>

This article is only intended to introduce Czapski. It is too concise to reflect the polyphonic nature of his personality. Its purpose is to emphasize the idiosyncratic nature of his creative output and, simultaneously, the marginal position he held on the Parisian artistic scene. He distanced himself from current artistic trends, which resulted from his mental inability to involve in artistic progressivism, and from constantly searching for the artistic idiom that would best convey his personality. "After finding myself in solitude, my will to live, to work, manifests itself in breathing again with my own breath, seeing again, breathing with the eyes," he wrote.<sup>21</sup>

Although his works were shown in Parisian galleries – Galerie Lambert, Bénézit, Jacques Desbrière, and Jean Briance – and his artistic output was regularly exhibited in Grabowski Gallery in London and Galerie Plexus in Chexbres near Lausanne, for many years he found himself outside

the mainstream exhibitions and beyond the art market. His paintings were purchased by relatives from the extended Austrian-German-Russian-Polish family or by affluent friends. It was only at the exhibitions in Switzerland – regularly held since 1973 by the art dealer Richard Aeschlimann, who befriended the artist – that buyers from the United States of America and Canada as well as members of the British royal family, began to show interest in Czapski's work. In Poland, most exhibitions of his art have been held after 1990. The only monograph dedicated to the artist's output and published in Switzerland during his lifetime was *Czapski – la main et l'espace* by Murielle Werner-Gagnebin.<sup>22</sup>

Distanced from the artistic mainstream, Czapski perceived himself as a painter who represented the obsolete post-Cézannesque era. Although he treated it as a manifestation of the instinct of self-preservation with regard to the commercialization and commodification of art, he considered his artistic attitude to be completely *passé*.<sup>23</sup> Wrongly so. His biography of an emigré exemplified a complex relationship between the historical and political context of art and the artistic vision, a relation that was far from being illustrative. Despite his incessant curiosity about the world and openness to the Other, despite his immense literary and artistic erudition, the essence of Czapski's art were the ghosts of the past whose impact escalated due to the impossibility of returning 'home', understood as the mental and emotional core of personality. "I think that painting is always a challenge and that my canvases contain a lot of darkness, like an inner gash, hundreds of times more than my relations with people do, even with those to whom I'm close," Czapski confessed in a letter to his friend, Ludwik Hering, who lived behind the Iron Curtain and with whom Czapski was engaged in a love relationship before the war.<sup>24</sup>

### **Modern amnesia**

In 1949, marking the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Nazi and Soviet invasion of Poland, Czapski published in *Kultura* an essay titled *Szeptem* [In a *Whisper*], in which he reflected on modern amnesia:

“I sometimes think that man has no right to exist, that we are all alive only thanks to our thoughtlessness, our disloyalty, our unremembering. If we could remember for real and remember constantly, no one would be able to breathe, to stay alive,” he observed.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, his own writings – encrusted with literary and philosophical quotations – reveal an abiding memory of annihilation and demise. He ended *In a Whisper* with a bitter conclusion:

As we speak and write the most sacred words, even our memories of those who died take on the sleekness, the shine of inert, polished wooden objects, of tools of propaganda. All over this planet, we repeat words, words, words – and this gives us permission to think that we’re being faithful? On this anniversary perhaps it’ll be better to be silent and think. To see everything that we have lived through, to get to the bottom of things and not stop halfway, to not erect any rosy screens of fiction between ourselves and reality, to not tape up the wounds with optimistic band-aids, which only hasten the rot. To remain silent.<sup>26</sup>

For Czapski, painting became the silence concealing the profound interiorization of the trauma of war. He died in Maisons-Lafitte near Paris on 12<sup>th</sup> January, 1993, aged 96.

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# Images And Memories of Slavery in the Art of Eustáquio Neves

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## **ABSTRACT**

Eustáquio Neves is one of the most important Black Brazilian photographers, and a prizewinning artist recognized internationally. In 2015, he was invited to participate in the Foto Rio 2015, a traditional photography festival in Rio de Janeiro, in the southeast of Brazil. As a guest artist, Eustáquio produced an artwork based on the memory of slavery in Brazil, the country with the largest population of Afro-descendants worldwide. Eustáquio Neves's series of images on the memory of slavery in Brazil, entitled Valongo: Letters to the Sea, is the main focus of this article. The Valongo Wharf inspired the artist's work in Rio de Janeiro, considered the world's largest port of entry for enslaved Africans and recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. The text also analyzes the artist's process of producing images through the manipulation of film photography.

## **KEYWORDS**

Memory of slavery; Contemporary Art; Valongo Wharf, Eustáquio Neves; Photography.

Over the last three decades, the memory of slavery has ceased to be confined to academic research. It has become an essential theme for artists in the Americas, Europe, and Africa, continents indelibly marked by the transatlantic slave trade (Araújo, 2018: 10). In the case of Brazil, as well as Eustáquio Neves, artists like Aline Motta, Ayrson Heráclito, Arjan Martins, Jaime Lauriano, Rosana Paulino, Tiago Santana, among others, have produced works that reflect forcefully on this traumatic memory. Given that the country was the last to abolish slavery and also received the world's highest number of enslaved Africans, the importance for these artists of recuperating this memory in critical form is clear. As the historian Ynaê Lopes dos Santos asserts: "Brazilian history is intimately linked to the transatlantic slave trade [...] According to the data from Slave Voyages, approximately 4.8 million men and women disembarked in Brazilian ports..." (LOPES, 2021: 14).

Eustáquio Neves – a self-taught photographer and artist, recognized in Brazil and abroad since the 1990s – has produced various works on the memory of slavery. The first of these, *Outros Navios Negreiros* (Other Slave Ships), was produced between 1999 and 2000. The second series, *Mascara de Punição* (*Mask of Punishment*), was created between 2002 and 2003. Finally, in 2015, Eustáquio produced a third series on the memory of slavery, *Valongo: Cartas ao Mar* (Valongo: Letters to the Sea).

Located in Rio de Janeiro's port zone, the Valongo Wharf is considered the largest port of entry for enslaved Africans worldwide. The historic site covers an area of two thousand square meters and was discovered in 2011 during urban regeneration works in the port zone. These works had taken over the region as part of the Porto Maravilha project, intended to revitalize the area, developed by the city council and begun in 2009.

The discovery, made by a team of archaeologists from the Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) coordinated by Tânia de Andrade Lima, relates to the history of the slave trade in the city. Thus: "Between 1758 and 1831, principally after 1811 when construction on the wharf was completed, around one million Africans disembarked in the Valongo Wharf area" (ARAÚJO, 2018: 10). During this period, Rio de Janeiro became the largest port of enslaved Africans on the planet. Due to its global importance as a place of

memory of slavery and the African diaspora, the Valongo Wharf was recognized as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 2017.

The Valongo Wharf's discovery and its subsequent recognition as a World Heritage Site in 2017 confirm the importance of Rio de Janeiro as an international site for the memory of slavery. Since 2015, many artists, mainly black Brazilians, have developed research and artworks about the Valongo Wharf and its legacy. This article is about one such black artist, Eustáquio Neves, and the images he has produced based on the memory of slavery, primarily the series *Valongo: Letters to the Sea*. According to the FotoRio 2015 catalog:

Letters are messages, notes left for the future. Like the bottles that desperate sailors threw into the sea containing their final stories. Eustáquio's 'letters,' made from the traces of living memories, give voice to the first protagonists of this tragic legacy that created our people and country and is, therefore, part of us all. (Guran, 2015: 34).

This article<sup>1</sup> focuses on the series by Eustáquio Neves entitled *Valongo: Letters to the Sea*, produced for FotoRio (the Rio de Janeiro International Photography Meeting) in 2015, and for the Museu Afro Brasil, located in São Paulo, where Neves also presented an exhibition of this series in January 2016. I analyze the process of producing images for *Valongo: Letters to the Sea*, therefore, enabling a dialogue between interviews with the artist and an image taken from this series, cited by himself in one of the interviews.

Eustáquio's images focused in his series on the memory of slavery denounced the inequality of Brazil, the structure of the racism in the country, and the "Contemporary Slavery" of the Black Brazilian population.

### **Valongo Wharf: discovering the memory of slavery**

When Eustáquio Neves disembarked in Rio de Janeiro, the Valongo Wharf had not yet been recognized as a World Heritage Site, but the process was already underway. The artist thus had the opportunity to read the bid dossier. "First, I

read the application file for the Valongo World Heritage bid, which was several pages long, to learn more about the history of the place” (Orlandi, 2018). The double position occupied by Milton Guran, director of FotoRio (who invited him) was, without doubt, the starting point for the invitation received by Eustáquio and the work he was commissioned to produce. As the artist pointed out:

That photo essay was commissioned in 2015 by anthropologist and photographer Milton Guran, director of FotoRio [International Photography Meeting of Rio de Janeiro], who at the time was on the technical committee for the Valongo Wharf Archaeological Site World Heritage bid. (Orlandi, 2018)

In Brazil, the archaeological discovery of the Valongo Wharf in 2011 definitively inserted the country in the Slave Route Project of UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), which seeks to map and recognize the places of the memory of slavery throughout the world, based on the formation of diverse national committees spread across various countries.

Valongo Wharf’s application to become a World Heritage Site was launched on November 20, 2013, when Black Awareness was commemorated in Brazil. On the same date, the Valongo Wharf became the first place in the world to receive a UNESCO plaque as part of the Slave Route Project, which recognizes it as a heritage site for the memory of the African diaspora.

The enormous contingent of enslaved people and Africans who increasingly came ashore in Rio de Janeiro upset the then Viceroy, the Marquis of Lavradio. What disturbed him, though, was not the ‘trade in souls,’ but where they arrived in the city, in the busy Rua Direita, today Primeiro de Março Road. In a letter, he criticized “the terrible custom of the blacks, as soon as they disembark at the port, arriving from the African coast, entering the city along the main public ways, not only bearing innumerable diseases but naked...” (cited in Pereira 2013: 221). The Marquis did not seek an end to the slave trade. He merely wanted it removed from the population’s sight. For this reason, he decreed in 1774:

My decision is that when the slaves are unloaded at the customs house, they should be sent by boat to the place called Valongo, situated in a suburb of the city, separated from all contact and that the many stores and warehouses existing there should be used to house them. (Cited in Pereira 2013: 221-222)

This region, called Valongo, covered the present-day districts of Saúde and Gamboa. The Marquis of Lavradio's decree was put into effect some years later, in 1811, when the Police Superintendency of the City Court of Rio de Janeiro built the Valongo Wharf. The number of enslaved Africans brought to the city by the Transatlantic slave trade further increased the size of the Valongo construction. Most Africans who disembarked at Rio's port came from Central Africa, principally Luanda and Benguela on the Angolan coast.

The Valongo Wharf was deactivated in 1843 to make way for the Empress Wharf, built in honor of the Princess of the Two Sicilies, Teresa Cristina of Bourbon, who had landed in Brazil to consolidate her engagement to Dom Pedro II. In 1911, the Empress Wharf was landfilled to make way for the Praça do Comércio (Commerce Square). A century later, in 2011, Valongo resurfaced during a new urban intervention program, the construction works for the Porto Maravilha Project in the port zone. When he visited Rio de Janeiro to produce his work, the artist was able to see the renovations of the Rio de Janeiro waterfront, initiated by the city in 2011, in preparation for the 2016 Olympic Games. This experience provided Eustáquio with a critical view of the regeneration process.

I think there is a great contradiction. If, on the one hand, this revitalization is attracting visitors to an area that was once abandoned by public authorities, on the other, it winds up repeating past oppression. That is because most of the region's residents are ordinary, low-income people, and the local cost of living, such as rent, has risen sharply since then. So, this revitalization has turned into an exclusionary process (Orlandi, 2018).

Consequently, the artist produced images that did not seek to celebrate the Valongo Wharf as a tourist monument forming part of the regeneration project for the port zone. On the contrary, he developed a series containing a powerful critique of the current situation of Afro-descendants in Brazil. A hallmark of his work ever since he began to produce artistic imagery.

Eustáquio Neves was born in 1955, in the small town of Jatobá, in the state of Minas Gerais, located in the southeast of Brazil. The area is marked by a strong African heritage, the result of the exploration of gold and diamond mining that brought thousands of enslaved Africans to the region during the eighteenth century. Deeply influenced by this legacy, Eustáquio lives and bases his studio in Diamantina, a historic mining town.

His training in chemistry and the decision to still use an analogical camera even today became two fundamental dimensions of his work. In the dark of the photo lab, the artist manipulates diverse chemical elements and uses a range of different materials to produce his images. As Kimberly Cleveland observed, Eustáquio “incorporates his knowledge of chemistry in his photographic processes. Over time, this use of chemical manipulation and other physical interferences becomes a hallmark of his work” (Cleveland 2013: 89).

The use of the analogical camera contributed decisively to Eustáquio articulating his artistic process with a reflection on memory. As the artist explained, this approach allows him to mobilize another temporality:

...the time of memory, the time to manipulate the negatives to create the image [...] In the case of *Valongo: Letters to the Sea*, this is reflected even in the cotton paper used as a backing for the images. Since the 9/11 attacks have made it difficult to bring chemical materials into several countries, including Brazil, I emulsified a fair amount of paper during a trip to the Netherlands in 2008. This paper obviously suffered the effects of time over the years. It got smudged and stained, which in the end, reinforced the documentary idea of the photo essay. In addition, I'm not in a hurry in life, I think there's a time for everything, something I learned in the films of [Russian filmmaker Andrei]

Tarkovsky. I can't say I'll never work with a digital camera, but I run counter to the immediacy and exaggeration (Orlandi, 2018).

*Emulsification* is a chemical process involving the use of two immiscible liquids to maintain the cohesion of particular materials. By emulsifying the cotton paper used as the support for his images, given the difficulty in transporting chemical materials between airports of various countries after the 9/11 attacks in New York in 2001, Eustáquio connected the time of memory to the wearing of the material that he brought from the Netherlands in 2008 but only used in 2015 for his work on the Valongo Wharf.

In this way, the artist argues that using a film camera enables a relationship with time that avoids the immediatism of the image produced with digital equipment. Manipulation in the laboratory and his alchemic approach consolidate this process marked by another relation to temporality.

In this sense, given the difficulty of representing the memory of slavery through images produced in the contemporary world, Eustáquio's photographs are not concerned with representing the historical and tragic past. For this reason, although it did not happen in a premeditated form, the images from the series *Valongo: Letters to the Sea* were not produced at the Valongo Wharf. As he told me in an interview conducted for this article:

I went to spend a week in Rio, interviewing people and walking around to get a feeling of what the region known as Valongo was really like. I didn't take any photos there, I just talked to people, despite having taken a film camera, a video camera, I didn't photograph anything. I came back to develop this work here, in my studio, based on some archives that I had. I work a lot through the use of archives. I just needed to understand what Valongo actually was, what happened there, for me to be able to develop this idea. That's what happened, when I returned home in the plane, I already knew what I wanted to do. I arrived here and already thought of some archives. Because I understood that in speaking of Valongo, in speaking of this memory, it was a work in which I would be speaking too of death [...] because

many of the enslaved people who disembarked there arrived dead, the port zone became a mass grave, an open-air cemetery. It was from this idea that I worked on the *Letters to the Sea*. Thinking of this place with its burden of suffering, but thinking this idea and distributing this thought came from the earlier practice of placing messages in bottles and releasing them in the sea for others to find. So my message is called letters to the sea for this reason. It's a message to the present, so that people do not forget this history, because this history is still perpetuated in memory (Castro, 2019).

When I asked why he preferred not to produce images in the Valongo Wharf and the port region, the artist replied:

It's not a question of preference. I took all my equipment, but when I arrived there, I didn't feel the need. As I talked to people, I began to have ideas. I realized that the ideas I had didn't involve taking photos of people. I don't believe much in the cliché of the traditional photographer who walks around with a camera, afraid to lose an image that he or she is observing. I don't lose images, I recreate them. It doesn't enter my head something like: "I lost that scene, if only I had my camera..." I don't think like that, I think that the scene in question was so striking... I'll make something thinking about that scene (Castro, 2019).

The artist's detachment, his disinterest in apprehending the visible, and his aim of producing photographs through his imagination, recreating images that do not represent what was before his eyes, is the key to understanding Eustáquio Neves's series on the memory of slavery.

The intervention in images through chemical processes is another fundamental dimension in his production since it becomes clear that he has no intention to reproduce a document or seek a representation that can account for this past. After all, memory, as we know, is not history. It is not based on historical documents: on the contrary, it is a manifestation of the

present, which actualizes narratives about the past through a selection of remembrances.

Indeed, the idea of a memory of slavery that is actualized in the present through a selection of images and a contemporary critique of structural racism, the inequality imposed on the Afro-descendant population, and the capitalist exploitation of the black body was already present in his works on the theme made prior to the series on the Valongo Wharf.

In his first series on the memory of slavery, entitled *Other Slave Ships*, produced between 1999 and 2000, Eustáquio associates the black body transported and exploited in the slavery era with the contemporary mechanisms linked to a reality similar to the one lived by enslaved Africans in the past<sup>2</sup>. Setting out from his critical and aesthetic view of this reality, he establishes the concept of contemporary slavery. As Cleveland explains:

Many contemporary Afro-Brazilians are either often forced to travel daily on overcrowded buses and trains for work, or are incarcerated in overfilled jails. Neves linked these incompatible and sometimes unsanitary places – such as public prisons, hospitals, and urban trains – to contemporary ‘slave ships.’ (Cleveland, 2013: 94)

For this reason, the Portuguese word *carregado*, or ‘loaded,’ is repeated in several photographs in the photographic essay *Valongo: Letters to Sea*. According to the artist

... to show that those people, kidnapped in Africa and brought to Brazil against their will to work as slaves, were treated like cargo, like objects. But I also wanted to talk about contemporary slave ships, like suburban trains crowded with poor people, mostly black, who work in the city center, live on the outskirts of big cities, and spend three or four hours a day or more inside public transport (Orlandi, 2018).

The word 'loaded' emerged from a photo taken by Eustáquio of a train carriage, again to recall how black enslaved bodies were treated as cargo by the slave trade. In one of the most emblematic images from the series, it appears on a portrait of Neves, age 17, taken from an ID card:

When I returned to Diamantina, where I live, after digesting all that information, I decided to work with portraits of friends that I had taken in the past and even a self-portrait, actually an appropriation of a photo of me, taken at the age of seventeen, from an ID card. That's because, in my view, the history of Valongo is part of the history of all people of African descent in Brazil (Orlandi, 2018).

In the image containing his photo at the age of 17, the word *carregado* (loaded) covers the eyes of the artist like a black stripe. In this way, Eustáquio recuperates the practice of Brazil's sensationalist newspapers, which use this resource to partially cover the faces of young offenders, either imprisoned or dead, the vast majority of them black youths, which they regularly emblazon on their front pages and crime reports. As in all the other images from the series, the artist's portrait is framed by photos of tombstones from the baroque churches of Diamantina, which are also all numbered, explaining why the number 33 appears above his face. Below it, we can read 'Lote 770088,' a reference that refers to the black body as merchandise, another 'lote' to be 'loaded.' Another number that renders invisible the identity of subalternized subjects submitted in the past to Transatlantic enslavement and in the present to 'contemporary slavery'. Next to the word 'loaded' and at the top of the image, the artist has printed two stamps that evoke the rubber stamps that, in his words, aesthetically evoke "a time, a practice, letters, documents" that legitimized and authorized the slave trade through the bureaucratic apparatus of slavery. Images once more recreated by the artist. As Eustáquio revealed: "these stamps are the lid of a salt pot because there is also a kitchen in my studio. Because my work is very organic, whatever is around me becomes an instrument for creation." (Castro, 2019).



**Fig. 1.** Eustáquio Neves, *Valongo: cartas ao mar*, 2015. Photography on cotton paper, 110x160 cm. Source: Eustáquio Neves

### **Throwing letters to the sea**

Even so, it is in the darkroom, used to process and develop analog photographs, mixed with his knowledge of chemistry, that Eustáquio unveils his images. The artist perceives his works to be dedicated to a black population in Brazil that continues to resist, including residents of the port zone of Rio. In this region, where the Valongo Wharf is situated:

People are occupying these places still because they are resistant, despite this violent legacy of slavery; we survived that [experience], some with much joy, others with some melancholy, like in a bar where I met a guy who drinks everything. People there go about their work with dignity, raising a family; the suffering does not leave such a strong mark on the person. These are people getting on with their lives. (Castro, 2019)

Though never allowing the violent memory of slavery to be forgotten, Eustáquio does not try to recover this memory through images of pain, therefore: he prefers to recreate images that refer to the resilience and fight of the black people in a form resolutely critical of the structural racism and social inequality imposed on the Afro-descendent population in Brazil of yesterday and today. It is through the unavoidable legacy of the African heritage in the country and the 'examples of resistance' of the Afro-descendant population in Brazil that the artist constructs images launched in the field of art, principally, but also in the public sphere more widely, like letters to the sea.

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### Endnotes

1. This is a modified, revised and shortened version of my article Eustáquio Neves: images and memory of slavery in *Valongo: Letters to the Sea*. See Bibliographic references.
2. The second series on the memory of the slavery produced by Eustáquio is called *Mask of Punishment*. On this series, see Cleveland (2013). The third series is *Valongo: Letters to the sea*.

# Japanese POW Art in New Zealand

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper introduces artworks made by 850 Japanese prisoners of war (POWs) held in the Featherston POW Camp, Aotearoa New Zealand during the Pacific War (1941-1945). The men were captured during fighting in the Solomon Islands in 1942 and transported to New Zealand by American navy forces. The historical significance of the camp has been identified with a shooting in February 1943, in which 48 Japanese prisoners were killed, and the narrative of violence, misunderstanding and racism which accompanies it, but the artworks complicate this bias. About 400 works have been uncovered by the author to date, which represent the particular socio-geographical environment of the camp: an all-male territory, where comfort is often expressed in depictions of Japanese female entertainers, and familiar Japanese images, created in established 'traditional' pictorial grammars, which also suggest a nationalist aesthetic. Distinctive of the Featherston camp was a very active culture of commissioning and exchanging art for commodities and currency with the local population. Those artworks were gifted to those who showed kindness to the prisoners. Subtle resistances to hegemony expressed in some works reflect the highly asymmetrical power relations in the camp. In addition, items made to be used by the prisoners expressed familiarity, including mahjong sets, colorful *hanafuda* playing cards, and *geta* sandals, as well as depictions of Japanese landscapes that decorated the men's huts.

## **KEYWORDS**

Japanese Prisoner of War Art; Featherston.

Aotearoa-New Zealand is a surprisingly rich source of material to add to the increasing interest in art related to Japanese enterprises during the Pacific War. The small rural town of Featherston in the southern North Island hosted New Zealand's first ever Prisoner of War (POW) camp and, in fact, was the first in the British Empire to hold a large number of Japanese prisoners.<sup>1</sup>

The camp was established rapidly. Intense fighting between American and Japanese forces had taken place in the South Pacific's Solomon Islands in August 1942. The American military informed New Zealand authorities that captured Japanese were on their way to Wellington. On 4 September, the New Zealand War Cabinet hastily met, and selected a prison site at an old First World War training ground just north of Featherston. On 9 September, 115 New Zealand troops arrived at the camp, and the first Japanese prisoners disembarked at the Featherston train station on the morning of 12 September, by which time some tents had been erected. The urgency with which the camp was established, coupled with the New Zealand military command's inexperience in running a prisoner of war camp, resulted in amateur camp oversight in the first months at least. As Mike Nicolaidi noted:

the guards and administrative personnel [were] hastily recruited for a new and unfamiliar purpose. Many of the guards were men either not eligible on medical or other grounds for overseas service, or 18-year-olds too young to be officially sent away. They had received no special training for managing prisoners of war, nor had they been forewarned they were about to come face to face with the enemy on home ground.<sup>2</sup>

This unpreparedness resulted in a tragic massacre that occurred on 25 February 1943. A group of the POWs, since their arrival, had refused to join work parties arranged by their New Zealand captors. The matter came to a head when guards surrounded the prisoners in a courtyard, and following a 'warning shot' – which likely killed a man, provoking some stones being thrown by the prisoners – the New Zealand guards opened fire, killing 48 of their charges. One New Zealander was killed by a stray bullet. After this tragedy, a compromise regarding work parties was reached, and the Japanese

men remained at the camp until the end of December 1945, when the 800-odd surviving prisoners were returned to Japan.

The initial batch of detainees came from the Japanese labor force charged with building air bases in the Pacific. The next groups arrived in November and December 1942 and came from the military forces fighting at Guadalcanal. According to Army records compiled on the prisoners' arrival, the men came from extremely varied occupations at home, including peasants and farmers, auto drivers and carpenters, draughtsmen, and electricians. The list does not reveal an artist or sculptor, but there were a number of architects, as well as craftsmen such as stonemasons, shoe-makers, and a bamboo-basket maker. One prisoner claimed to be a brothel keeper. However, the veracity of these occupations is questionable: a translator at the camp, Keith Robertson, noted that 'when enrolling these prisoners of war, we were aware that for the most part, they gave us fictitious names'<sup>3</sup> so the men may also have provided false vocations. There was no correspondence between any prisoners and their families in Japan for the duration of their confinement in New Zealand. Although the site of the camp had been used for New Zealand army-training purposes during the First World War, no buildings remained in 1942, and the Japanese were housed in tents for the first months.

Construction on accommodation for the prisoners got underway immediately, and remnants from building work – offcuts of weatherboards and the like – were plentiful; the Japanese began crafting objects from these soon after their arrival. A furniture factory was later established, and remains from this were also used. The tent canvas and bamboo poles were also crafted into footwear and flutes by the prisoners.<sup>4</sup> Today, these items are to be found in public and private collections across New Zealand.

Immediate parallels can be found with the art made in contemporary Japanese-American internment camps, well documented in recent years by Delphine Hirasuna, including the use of scrap and found materials and hand-made tools.<sup>5</sup> However, a distinctive aspect of the Featherston camp was that, in addition to making objects for use and to beautify their living quarters, prisoners fashioned many objects for the purpose of trading with

guards, and occasionally as gifts. In contrast, scholarship has established that Japanese-American prisoners made art with the aim primarily of beautifying their surroundings, recording their experience, and improving their artistic skills. Initially at Featherston, items were bartered with the guards for cigarettes, and later for currency which could be used by the prisoners in the camp cafeteria.<sup>6</sup>

An undated letter (likely written in 1943) from a guard to his family confirms the use of tobacco as payment for Japanese-made items, and expresses his admiration for their work: ‘The Japs [sic] do all sorts of arts and crafts for ‘rolly-rolly’ – cigarette tobacco – so if you have any spare packet tobacco send it down and I’ll convert it into Jap [sic] paintings and carvings. Some of the things are really beautiful.’<sup>7</sup>

As this letter also illustrates, some works were made for order by camp personnel. Most obvious are sculptured reproductions of New Zealand military badges, which, judging by the large number surviving, were popular items with the guards. There is also an example of the camp padre, Hessel Troughton (1907-1985), supplying a photograph of his wife and small child, which was copied in colored pencil on paper by one of the prisoners.

Troughton arrived in mid-1943 and played a central role in formal arrangements for trading prisoner-crafted items, which until that time appears to have occurred on an ad-hoc basis. In July 1944, the Camp Commander, likely seeking to impress his superiors in Wellington with his organizational oversight at the camp, described the process as follows:

The P.W. are encouraged to employ their spare time in making carvings and mementoes from pieces of wood which are refuse from the furniture factory.

A channel for disposing of these articles is laid down and briefly it is as follows:

(a) The articles are valued in N.Z. Currency by the Works Officer, Lt Martin.

(b) The articles are then handed over to the Padre who displays and arranges for the sale of same at the valuation price.

(c) The proceeds are handed into the Pay Office and the pay ledger card of the P.W. concerned is credited with the amount received from the sale thereof.<sup>8</sup>

Art was also used to decorate the men's living quarters, as Jack Greig, a guard who spent most of his war at the camp, explained in an unpublished memoir, written in 1986, also noting the place of informal bartering in the art culture:

Apart from mah jong, the p.o.w.s spent [their] free time making articles for [loose] change, and also painting and drawing, at which they were adept. The most popular of these paintings, characters from Japanese drama and Mt Fuji, appeared on the walls of their huts.<sup>9</sup>

It is not surprising that many of the items crafted at the camp were based on Japanese art forms. For example, Greig noted:

Most of the prisoners were highly skilled in ikebana and also used knots of wood and natural roots to decorate their huts. They would polish and carve notices on these little works of art and place them on shelves above their beds. I also saw many of these carvings around the compounds.<sup>10</sup>

Broom and gorse, invasive exotic weeds in New Zealand, which prisoners initially were put to work to clear from the campsite, were used for ikebana: 'What they could create with a few sprigs of common gorse and broom was remarkable', Greig noted. Polished roots are also a traditional Japanese aesthetic form, with origins in early China. According to Grieg: 'They also showed great interest in New Zealand native trees and plants and were somewhat surprised at the lack of botanical knowledge displayed by some of the guards and camp staff.'<sup>11</sup> Although the vast majority of works made at Featherston are of Japanese subjects, a small number do depict New Zealand vegetation.

Carved walking sticks and other objects were decorated with pieces of paua (abalone) shell. The use of shells, including abalone, to decorate surfaces

(known as *raden*), is also a traditional art form that came to Japan from China in the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

The primary material for almost all the Featherston artworks which have survived is wood, many painted with color. It makes sense that wooden items would survive over cotton, paper or plaster ones. These bulky objects also would have been difficult for the POWs to take home in large numbers. Although a newspaper reported in December 1945 that prisoners carried items made at the camp when they boarded a US ship at Wellington that conveyed them back to Japan, it would have been difficult to take many of these sculptures. They measure on average 20-30cm square, and 2-3 cm thick. By the end of the war, many items had already been traded with camp personnel, and had found their way into New Zealand homes.

Sources for the colors used to make the artworks were various organizations that made regular donations of comforts to the prisoners. For example, the Red Cross, No More War Movement, and Society of Friends regularly sent books, games, and art and craft supplies, including paints, to the camp. The carving tools were fabricated from scrap metal, such as wire, nails, and cutlery, detritus lying around the camp. An ex-guard I interviewed told me:

Off-cuts and that sort of thing ... it was all material that was either part of this joinery operation, or they were building new huts and things all the time anyway, so there was a fair bit of that. And things like bolts and nails and other bits of stuff they used to get and flatten and make all the tools they used for doing that artwork – would have been made out of stuff they found lying about.<sup>12</sup>

Some materials reworked by the prisoners were supplied by the army. Prisoners received 35 cigarettes a week, and the packaging was put to various uses, including hand-crafted books, such as an English-Japanese dictionary and book of songs, and playing cards. Early in the camp life, in December 1943, interpreter Capt. Ashton noted that, after playing cards donated by the Red Cross had worn out, 'P.O.W were doing the best they could with

homemade cards made from backs of cigarette packets.<sup>13</sup> Two complete sets of *hanafuda* cards are held in private collections; a very similar set made at Cowra POW camp in New South Wales, Australia, is held at the Australian War Memorial.<sup>14</sup>



**Fig. 1.** *Hanafuda* playing cards. Colour on cardboard, 5.3 x 3.4cm each. McKenzie family collection.

Materials for crafting objects were also gifted to the prisoners. For example, a local farmer supplied horse-tail hair for bows to be used with violins made by prisoners from the plywood of tea chests.<sup>15</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the subject matter of most of the items is drawn from Japan and Japanese culture. For example, a significant portion of the landscapes features Mount Fuji. The selection of the mountain as a subject is explicable: if the work was made for a foreigner, it is perhaps the most recognizable representation of Japan; for an internee, it was also a poignant sacred landmark and nationalist symbol.

The sculptures depict very few non-Japanese. Nearly all the Japanese figures – apart from the nudes – wear kimonos. As such, they are easily identifiable as ‘Japanese’ by a New Zealander, as well as nostalgic of Japan for the prisoners. Of all the sculptures representing Japanese people, only one is male, a *kabuki* actor with a paulownia flower pattern on his kimono (a pattern repeated in other objects), cherry blossom on his cape, *eboshi* courtly hat, and holding a *Hinomaru*-decorated fan.

The overwhelming predominance of representations of women at the Featherston camp reflects its all-male environment. Don McKenzie, a guard at the camp, in a letter home described the prisoners' reactions on encountering women:

Most of them hadn't seen a woman for three or four years, so when the WAAC [Women's Army Auxiliary Corp] drivers delivered us at the gate last week there was nearly a riot just to look at them and enough oohs and aahs to start a gale.

Female figures not dressed in kimonos are unrobed, such as women stepping out of the bath, a popular subject in Edo-period *ukiyo-e*. There are several portraits of female dancers. Figure 2 is likely intended as of a geisha or itinerant entertainer, carrying a samisen, with her girl assistant holding a drum. Of course, geisha would represent for the captive men the pleasures of home unavailable to them at Featherston. Like Mt Fuji, they are a very recognizable symbol of exotic Japan for New Zealanders.



**Fig. 2.** Entertainers in landscape.  
Colour on wood, 36.5 x 28.0cm.  
Courtesy of Featherston Heritage  
Museum

Most of the portraits that survived in New Zealand are not accompanied by any writing (if made for New Zealanders, there would be little point), but there are exceptions. On the reverse of a letter-opener, likely carved from a toothbrush, with a depiction of a standing woman on the front are the characters *Nihon musume* (Japanese girl). A colophon on a relief sculpture of a girl reads *suite sukareta nushi ja* (I liked her and she liked me).

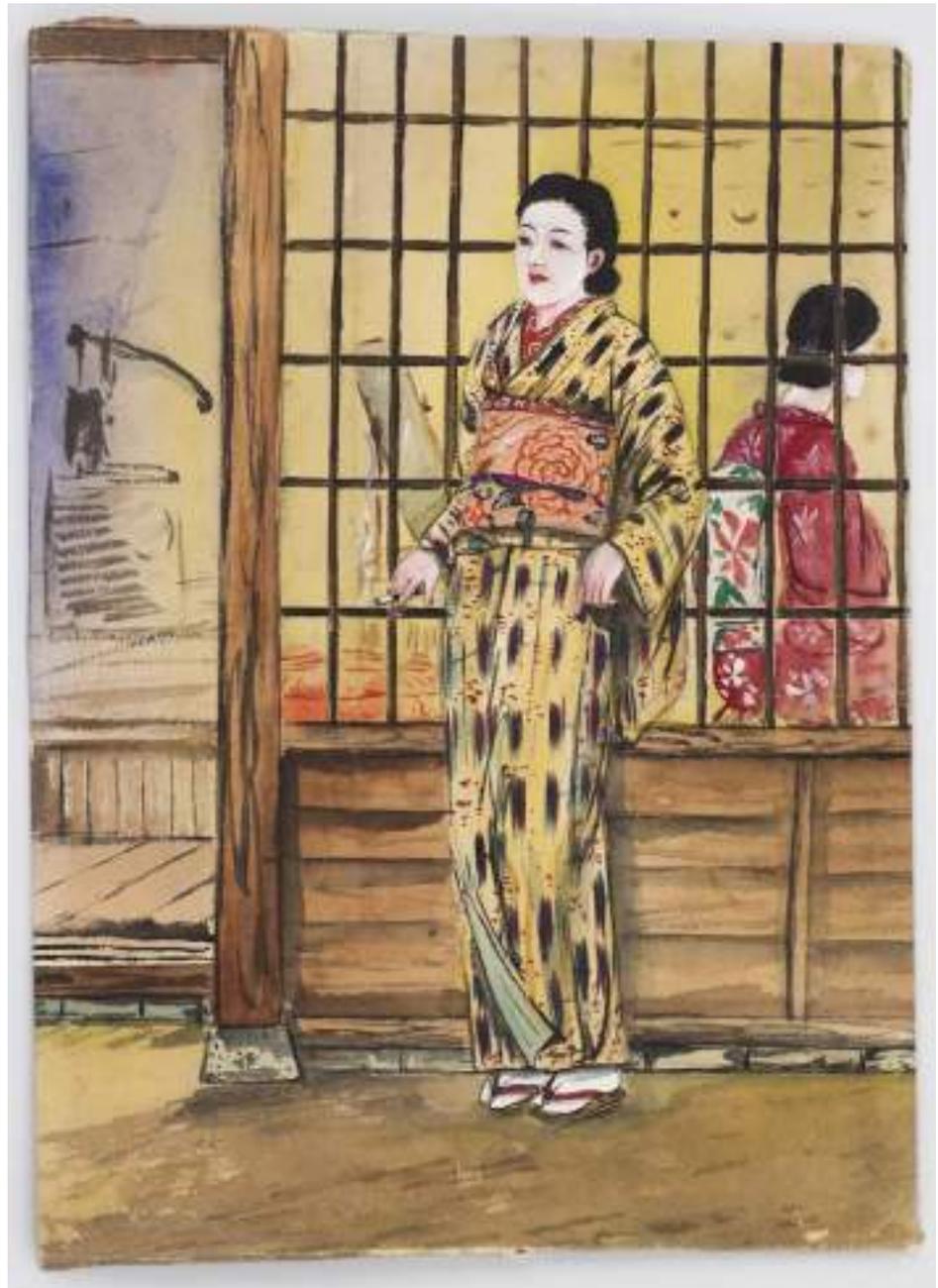


**Fig. 3.** Seated figure. Colour on wood, 33.0 x 22.0cm. Courtesy of Featherston Heritage Museum

One of the more striking sculptures, Figure 3, represents a seated woman. Although technically less sophisticated than some images made at the camp, one can recognize attempts to apply conventions of pictures created in the *Yamato-e* tradition. For example, the room is represented from a high viewing point, meaning that we look down into the space, and the floor appears steeply sloping towards the viewer, creating the sense that the woman may slip off the bottom of the picture. There are also clear attempts to apply the traditional East Asian linear perspective, whereby the depth of space is indicated by lines diverging away from the picture plane. This can be seen in the flooring of the alcove, especially on the left side.

The woman's plain kimono parts to show her knee and inner thigh. The room in which she sits is quintessentially Japanese, with *tatami* floor, *chigaidana* shelving, and a *tokonoma* alcove with *ikebana* display. She holds a tobacco pipe to the side of her face, and the artist includes a tobacco tray (*tabako-bon*) on the floor before her. The scene suggests nostalgia for the Japanese homeland, and a yearning for the comforts of women. This could, in fact, be intended as a portrait of a prostitute – the luxury of the interior is unlikely to resemble a person's home, but may suggest the inside of a brothel. Her hair is composed in something like the traditional *Shimada mage* hairstyle, as used by geisha and prostitutes, and includes an elaborate hairpin. Women in the male entertainment industry used the padded wooden pillow on the floor beside her to protect their hair. In addition, prostitutes were known to wear red. It is difficult to read the image, but the artist may have attempted to represent a folded futon behind the woman.

Other similar images have survived from the Featherston camp, including Figure 4, a work on paper. The woman depicted in yellow smokes a cigarette whilst leaning causally against the lattice shop front, enticing potential customers. Smoking marks her out as from a low social class: smoking was not an acceptable social practice for young women in pre-war Japan.<sup>16</sup> A woman in red kimono sits behind the lattice shop front, which was used to display prostitutes in Japanese brothel quarters.



**Fig. 4.** Night scene. Colour on paper, 26.9 x 19.3cm. Courtesy of Aratoi Wairarapa Museum of Art and History.

Many objects were crafted for applied purposes. Where possible, comforts and etiquette of home was transferred to New Zealand. For example, geta were made to be worn outside and, according to Greig, ‘inside the Japanese wore slippers made out of tent ropes and black and white towels which they had pilfered from their very first days when they were housed in tents.’<sup>17</sup> And the prisoners manufactured games for their own use. Greig wrote:

Life at the compounds at this early stage was dominated by mah jong. Every hut seemed to have a set – made in the compound by hand and foot. It was strange to see prisoner-carpenters sawing a 12 millimeter strip off a board guiding a homemade reverse tooth saw between two toes extended outwards, with the fast-moving saw almost touching the skin... The finished sets were very attractive.<sup>18</sup>

Some of the mahjong sets have small English letters written on the wind tiles to indicate the direction of the tile (e.g., ‘E’ for East, etc.), and some of the character tiles use Arabic numerals, or have the equivalent Arabic numeral written in the tile’s corner. These sets with ‘translations’ were likely made by order for guards, for their use at home, or perhaps as gifts.

The Japanese prisoners gifted objects to favored people. For example, a relief sculpture of a castle was cut in two parts, so that the Japanese men could smuggle it out of the camp to give to a local farmer on whose land they worked and who had shown them particular kindness.

Items were also gifted within the prisoner community. Army archives holds a list headed: ‘Carvings sent to Adachi, Wellington Hospital’, and one of the items describes Figure 5. Junior Lieutenant Toshio Adachi was a central figure in the 1943 shooting, and was the first prisoner to be hit by a New Zealand bullet that went through his shoulder and killed the man behind him, which sparked the mass shooting. He was amongst the worst injured and spent several months in Wellington Hospital recovering. This sculpture was then on-gifted to a nurse at the hospital who displayed particular empathy for the injured men. Sister Dorothy Aldrich had grown up in a family with ties

to Japan – her grandfather was Englishman Arthur Aldrich (d. 1908), who became Secretary and General Manager to the Japanese Government Railways, 1875-1890s. He retired to New Zealand. Amongst the works uncovered to date, this is unusual, in having a dedication, written in pencil, on the back:

*Kigen nisen roppyaku san nen go gatsu, Dai Nihon gunjin Uerinton byooin nyuuinsha ichidoo, Zoo Oodoreeji sama*

May 1943, All the soldiers of the Great Japan Armed Forces hospitalised in Wellington Hospital, To Sister Aldrich

The date, given using the Imperial *kigen* (or *kōgi*) system, in usage from 1873 until the end of the Pacific War, suggests a subtle resistance to captor culture. The slenderness of the female figure is accentuated by the lantern and bridge posts she stands between, samisen hanging at her side, and willow branches falling behind her. The reference is likely Yanagibashi – willow-bridge – an area of Tokyo known for its working geisha.

Art-making forms a role in war and prisoner life throughout history. Tedium is relieved, desires represented, and resistance to hegemony expressed. At Featherston, the tedium and dreariness of camp life extended to the personnel working there: the camp was known to guards as ‘Siberia’. Guard Ray Toomath told me: ‘Really, we hated the place. Nobody felt happy about being there.’<sup>19</sup>

And one of the camp interpreters noted after the camp closed: ‘Not in a technical sense, perhaps, but to all intents and purposes we, too, were prisoners of war...’<sup>20</sup> My conjecture is that the trading of prisoner-made art tempered the awfulness and tedium of camp life for not just the prisoners, but also the camp personnel, and for the vast majority of New Zealanders at the camp with no facility in Japanese language, and indeed the local population, it provided a means to engage with the enemy men on a human level, through appreciation for beautifully-crafted objects.



**Fig. 5.** Figure carrying shamisen. Color on wood, 33.0 x 21.0cm. Davies family collection.

New Zealanders' openness to Japanese-made objects followed decades of intense interest in Japan and its material culture, beginning in the 1880s with travel to Japan by wealthy citizens, and the wild popularity of

Japanese-made goods stimulated by international exhibitions, such as held at Melbourne, Australia, 1880-81. Japonisme in theatre reached New Zealand also, such as in performances of *Mikado*, first staged in Wellington in 1888. Perhaps most striking was the widespread vogue for Japanese plants, which filled nurseries and gardens across the country.<sup>21</sup> Such was the admiration in which Japan was held that, during the first decades of the twentieth century, an influential New Zealand intellectual argued that the Japanese population included Aryan blood, and New Zealand should encourage Japanese migration to increase the strength of the local populations.<sup>22</sup> Although New Zealand joined the war with Japan following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, appreciation for Japanese culture and its artefacts was firmly embedded in the New Zealand people. A story told by a Featherston camp interpreter, Keith Robertson, is poignant.

During the war, the small local Featherston School staged a fancy dress ball, and Robertson's daughter fell on the idea of dressing as Japanese. The prisoners assisted by sewing *tabi* socks, and making a wig from horse's tail, again donated by a local farmer. It was extraordinary enough that the girl dressed as a national of the enemy country, assisted by enemy prisoners, but even more perhaps that she was elected first prize for her costume.<sup>23</sup> An explanation for this, I believe, lies in the admiration New Zealanders held for the cultural artefacts of Japan after over fifty years of being exposed to the fashion for Japanese arts, plants, and Japonisme: a girl dressed in Japanese costume would likely be identified more with Madama Butterfly or Yum-Yum than the enemy in the Pacific.

The massacre of February 1943 has dominated what little discourse exists about New Zealand's Japanese POW camp. The art made by the Japanese men opens up productive new ways of thinking about the camp. It complicates public perception, as evidence of lively exchange between the prisoner and the local population adds human and humane motivations and actions to the camp's story, albeit in a wartime and prison environment. The prisoners crafted depictions of Japanese landscapes and people, and objects of play from their culture, as well as items of local significance made for order by men working at the camp, impressing their captors with their subtle

artistic skills and the beauty of their culture. The works are also cries of nostalgia – memories of home and its comforts and beauties, nationalist expressions of resistance to capture, and significant additions to the study of art produced by Japanese during a period of warfare and occupation.

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## **Endnotes**

1. Mike Nicolaidi, *The Featherston Chronicles: a legacy of war*, Auckland: HarperCollins, 1999, 18. Although focused on the 1943 shooting, to date this is the only sustained published scholarship on the Featherston camp. For a study of the broader context of the art cultures

- which developed in Australasian civilian and POW camps, see Richard Bullen & Tets Kimura, 'Japanese Art in Australasia During the Second World War', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* 20:1 (2020), 107-124.
2. Nicolaidi, 19. A guard at the camp commented to me: '...no other part of the British Empire had ever had prisoners from Japan, and of course no one knew how to run a camp or what to do with people like that, it was a complete shambles.' Author interview with Ray Toomath, 4 August, 2016.
  3. Keith Robertson, 'Tsuyaku San', unpublished manuscript, 42 pages. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, aMS-1708, 19.
  4. Auckland War Memorial Museum has on display a canvas sandal. Michiharu Shinya mentions flutes being crafted from bamboo tent poles in *The Path from Guadalcanal* (Auckland: Outrigger Publishers, 1979), 79. The only flute made at the camp I have discovered to date is crafted from two pieces of wood. Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Acc. 1948.96.
  5. See Delphine Hirasuna, *The Art of Gaman: arts and crafts from the Japanese American internment camps 1942-1946*, Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2005, and Hirasuna, *All that Remains: the legacy of the World War II Japanese American internment camps*, Richmond B.C.: Blanchette Press, 2016.
  6. J. A. Greig, 'Meeting Morikawa: a memoir of National Service', unpublished manuscript, 44 pages. New Zealand National Army Museum archives, Waiouru, Box 40/Manuscripts, Accession number: 2001.1425, 6.
  7. Don McKenzie, letter to family, undated, collection of McKenzie family.
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  9. Greig, 13.
  10. Ibid, 4.
  11. Ibid, 17.
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  13. Hand-written note, Ashton, 12 January, 1943. Archives New Zealand, Wellington, R20591425.
  14. See Australian War Memorial, <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1042572>.
  15. Robertson, 25.
  16. 'Before WWII, Japanese society did not accept smoking by young women.' Marugame et al 'Trends in smoking by birth cohorts born between 1900 and 1977 in Japan.' *Preventive Medicine* 42 (2006):120-127, 126.
  17. Greig, 5. On the clothing worn by the Japanese POWs at Featherston, see Kristyn Harman, "A definite feeling of antagonism": Rising Tensions over Clothing at the Featherston Prisoner of War Camp in World War Two', *Journal of New Zealand Studies* 20 (2015): 87-102.
  18. Greig, 12.
  19. Interview with Ray Toomath, 2016
  20. Capt. A. Ashton, 'Introduction', *Halt! Who Goes There? On Guard at No.1 Prisoner of War Camp, Featherston* (Wellington: Garratt & Co., 1946), n.p.
  21. See James Beattie & Richard Bullen, 'Japonisme in New Zealand, 1870s-1940s: A "present tendency...to possess 'something Japanese'" in Jennifer Harris & Tets Kimura (eds), *Exporting Japanese Aesthetics: Evolution from Tradition to Cool Japan* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2020), 61-79. I am grateful to a question from a delegate at the CIHA conference which stimulated my thinking about this aspect of New Zealanders' acceptance of the prisoners' art.
  22. John Macmillan Brown, *New Zealand and the Pacific Ocean* (New York: Macmillan, 1917), 498.
  23. Robertson, 31.

# Huguenot Diaspora and its Impact in the Americas: the British and Channel Isles as Springboard to the New World

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper focuses on the intra-colonial and international exchanges that typified the Huguenot diaspora. It will trace individuals from their places of origin to their new lives in the Americas and focus on Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Charleston from 1680-1850. When Louis XIV, King of France, revoked the Edict of Nantes in 1685, Huguenots (French Protestants) were no longer permitted to remain. Huguenot goldsmiths and jewelers who took refuge in the British Isles and the Channel Islands and their descendants born in Northern Europe came to America in small numbers in search of personal advancement. In Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, they did not form their own communities and were assimilated into the local population. Charleston, a planter society built on slavery, was different and Huguenot influence endured there for several generations.

## **KEYWORDS**

Huguenot; Silver; Gold; Pewter; Engraving.

### **New York and Philadelphia**

Although New York City, with one of the largest populations in the North American Colonies, had its own French church, its craft community was overcrowded. Immigrant craftsmen moved on to Philadelphia, which became the largest city in the colonies. Cesar Ghiselin (c. 1663–1733) is the first recorded Huguenot goldsmith working in the mid-Atlantic Region. Born in Rouen, Normandy to Nicholas Ghiselin and Anne Gontier, Ghiselin probably went to London as a teenager,<sup>1</sup> where, like his Huguenot contemporary in New York City, Bartholomew LeRoux, he was trained.

### **Philadelphia**

Ghiselin arrived in Chester, Pennsylvania, in October 1681, and the next year moved to Philadelphia. Ghiselin's silver was made in the austere English mid-17th century style, reflecting his London apprenticeship and the taste of his Anglo-Quaker clients; Philadelphia was a predominantly Quaker City. Surviving silver includes a porringer<sup>2</sup> engraved with the initials of Anthony and Mary (Jones) Morris made between 1684 and Mary Morris's death in 1688 and a tankard made for Barnabas and Sarah Wilcox prior to Barnabas's death in 1690. From Philadelphia, Ghiselin took out naturalization in England in 1698. By 1718, he had moved to Annapolis, Maryland, where he was paid in 1721 for twelve silver spoons as local prizes for horse races (none have survived). His Huguenot wife Catherine Reverdy (her family came from Poitou) died there in 1726. Ghiselin returned to Philadelphia and in 1732, made a communion beaker and an alms dish for Christ Church inscribed "The gift of Margaret Tresse spinston/ to Christ Church in Philadelphia." She was the daughter of vestryman Thomas Tresse.<sup>3</sup>

Ghiselin's 1730s probate inventory includes an early reference to a 'flattening mill' which with his 'draw bench' was valued at £2.15.<sup>4</sup> Robert Campbell wrote in 1747 that the goldsmiths' business 'required much more Time and Labour formerly than at present' when 'they were obliged to beat their Metal from the Ingot into what Thinness they wanted'; the newly invented 'Flattening-Mills... reduced their Metal to what Thinness they require at very small Expence'.<sup>5</sup> Flattening mills were expensive and scarce in England. Without one,

you made silver flat by taking the ingot, hammering it, reheating it, and hammering it again. You could spend a whole day hammering an ingot to get flat metal to work with. Ghiselin's inventory records a well-stocked and equipped workshop. 912 ounces of silver, and 85 dwt.(penny weights) of gold, together with silver chains, gold rings and buttons, coral and necklaces, paper currency, and a quantity of silversmith's tools. Ghiselin's personal possessions included a French folio bible and 'sundry small French books' valued at one pound.

Cesar Ghiselin's grandson William also qualified as a goldsmith. He advertised in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* November 14, 1751:

'William Ghiselin, Goldsmith, is removed from his late dwelling house in Second-street, to the house where the Widow Bright lately lived, a little below the Church, in Second St. where he continues his business as usual.'

The 1811 view of Christ Church shows the location of the Ghiselin family shop on Second Street.<sup>6</sup>

### **New York City**

Bartholomew Le Roux (c.1665-1713) was made a Freeman of New York City on arrival in 1687 a privilege only available to master craftsmen. As 'a young man from London' in 1688, he married Gertrude Von Rollegom, from the Dutch community.<sup>7</sup> Pierre LeRoux, married at Saint Martin in the Fields, London, in 1678, and registered with the London Goldsmiths' Company was probably a relative. Other London family connections may include John Le Roux (son of James Daniel Le Roux deceased) apprenticed to John Cossebadie, Huguenot silversmith of St Giles in the Fields, in 1717 and Alexander LeRoux, a watch-case maker in Dowgate Hill, in the City of London, in 1722.<sup>8</sup>

Bartholomew Le Roux introduced a French style to the Dutch tradition of silversmithing. His elegant sugar caster with its gadrooned borders, cast swags and delicate piercing, is close to examples made in Northern France.<sup>9</sup> But Bartholomew LeRoux also supplied silver in the local Dutch tradition. A brandy wine bowl with his maker's mark made for the wedding of Joseph and Sarah Wardel of Shrewsbury, New Jersey, is dated 1696. Bartholomew served as an assistant alderman on New York City's Common Council.

Like Ghiselin, the LeRoux workshop was continued by successive family generations. Two of Bartholomew's sons, Charles and John, became goldsmiths. Charles set up shop in New York and married Catherine Beekman in 1715. He served for twenty-three years as official silversmith to New York Common Council producing nine gold freedom boxes (boxes which contained the certificate awarding the Freedom of the City) including one given to Alexander Hamilton in 1735.<sup>10</sup> He worked in a cosmopolitan style. He supplied Patrick Gordon, Proprietary Governor of Pennsylvania, with a pair of double lipped sauceboats between 1725 and 1735 (Fig.1) which are similar to those being produced by London based Huguenot goldsmiths in the 1720s.<sup>11</sup> Charles also served as a Captain in the New York City Militia. He became free of New York City in 1739. Charles took over the family business in the mid-1740s; in 1745 he inherited the old family homestead at 27 Broadway. It is thought that he trained the first Jewish goldsmith Myer Myers in addition to his own son Bartholomew Le Roux II (1717-1763) and apprentices Peter Quintard (1690-1762, Huguenot) and Jacob Ten Eyck (Dutch); Peter Quintard was probably born in Bristol, England to Isaac and Jeanne Fume Quintard. He registered as a goldsmith in New York City in 1731, although he later worked as a ship owner and innkeeper. His apprentices included the Huguenot Peter David (1707-1755), later established as a goldsmith in Philadelphia. In 1737 Peter Quintard moved to Norwalk, Connecticut where he farmed yet continued his business as a goldsmith.<sup>12</sup>

Simeon Soumaine (1685-c.1750) was born in London the child of Huguenot refugee parents, Simeon and Jeanne Piaud Soumaine and baptized at the London French church in Threadneedle Street (founded in 1550) on 10 June 1685. Within four years the family emigrated to New York. Simeon may have trained there with Bartholomew Le Roux in the 1690s. Simeon in turn trained two fellow Huguenots, Elias Boudinot (1706-1770) and Elias Pelletreau (1726-1810). Soumaine marked a covered sugar bowl, made circa 1738-1745, for Elizabeth (Harris) Cruger, who arrived from Jamaica in 1738. Soumaine also produced silver in the Dutch tradition. Le Roux and Soumaine were both vestrymen of the Anglican Trinity Church in New York City, Le Roux in 1703 and Soumaine in 1711. Like other Huguenot merchants and landowners in the

colonies, they owned slaves. A slave owned by Soumaine confessed to his involvement in the Slave Rebellion, 1741, which attempted to destroy New York City. The culprits were hung or deported to the West Indies, although the fate of Soumaine's slave is unrecorded.<sup>13</sup>



**Fig. 1.** Sauceboats, a pair silver, Charles LeRoux, New York City, 1725–35, © Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of Daniel Blain, Jr.

Peter David (1707-1755) founded another dynasty of goldsmiths. Born in New York City, he settled in Philadelphia by 1736 with his wife Jane Dupuy; their son John was baptized that year. Peter David made a coffee pot and stand between 1740 and 1750 for the Logan family.<sup>14</sup> John David (1736-1793) eventually succeeded to his father's business and according to the *Pennsylvania Gazette* sold a variety of articles in gold and silver as well as importing paste jewellery, buckles and buttons. Peter David's grandson also named John David Jr (1772-1809) continued the business and formed a partnership with his uncle Daniel Dupuy senior, who moved from New York to Philadelphia with his brother-in-law Peter David.<sup>15</sup>



**Fig. 2.** The Gage Freedom Box, Gold, Otto Philip Daniel Parisien, New York, 1773.  
©Sotheby's New York City 2014

By the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century Huguenot churches in New York City were assimilated and the Huguenot collective identity was absorbed into the largely Anglican dominated community. But craftsmen of Huguenot descent were still coming to North America from Northern Europe. When he arrived in New York City in 1756, Otto de Parisien described himself as from Berlin. He worked as a goldsmith in New York City until 1797. Parisien made a gold freedom box (Fig.2) for presentation to British Lieutenant General Thomas Gage in 1773. Both the Le Roux and the Parisien boxes are engraved with the Seal of the City of New York (windmill vanes flanked by barrels with a beaver above and below, a royal crown above, with supporters – a native American with bowl, loincloth and feather crown and mariner in European dress with

sounding line). The box is inscribed SIGILIS CIVITAT NOV EBORAC (freedom of the City of New York). It was commissioned by the Court of Common Council of the Corporation of the City of New York on May 20, 1773.

The Mayor:

Communicated to this Board that General Gage Intends Shortly to Leave this province for Europe, & that as his Conduct has been Generally Approved of by the Inhabitants of this City, therefore proposed that this Board Should Address him & at the same time prefer him with the freedom of this Corporation, the Seal whereof to be Enclosed in a Gold Box.

On June 7, 1773, the Mayor and Board waited on his Excellency the Honourable Thomas Gage to make the presentation. The recipient responded with an equally elegant note of thanks ending:

I esteem myself highly honored by your enrolling my Name in the List of your Citizens and I accept your present with gratitude, as a Memorial of your Affections, and as such I shall ever carefully preserve it. It is my Ardent Wish, that your City may increase & prosper & that its Inhabitants may continue a flourishing & happy people, to the End of Time.

Gage left New York to return to Britain on leave, he had been on duty in the Americas for 17 years and enjoyed enormous popularity given his very successful administration of the 13 American Colonies. As there was a certain measure of doubt about whether he would return (George III had requested that he attend court for an audience, so everyone wondered whether it was the King's intention to confer a new appointment) the grateful citizenry wanted to convey their gratitude, and the freedom box had to be produced in a hurry before he boarded his ship. So much of a hurry, that the goldsmith was unable to come up with enough gold, so he and his wife melted down their wedding bands, to produce the last few ounces needed. <sup>16</sup>

Huguenot craftsmen also worked in pewter. Joseph Leddel Sr. (1690-1754) born in Plow Alley, Stepney, London to Thomas and Mary Leddel)

1690 came from Hampshire, England and married Marie Vincent in the French Church, New York in 1711. In 1744 Leddel moved from the sign of The Platter in Dock Street to the lower end of Wall Street with the same shop sign. Pewter marked by Leddel is preserved in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Their son, also named, Joseph was, like his father, a specialist engraver.

In 1750 three silver objects were engraved with images recording the Stuart attempt to retake the British throne; the 1745 Rebellion. These include a beaker made in France (Fig.3) by Hughes Lossieux (1670-1743, working 1697-1722) in St Malo, which is engraved on the sides with a scene of the Devil leading the Pope and the Roman Catholic Young Pretender to the English throne (Charles Edward Stuart; 1720-1788), through the gate of death into the fiery mouth of Hell. Inscribed round the rim: 'Three mortal enemies remember / The Devil Pope and the Pretender / Most wicked damnable and evil / The Pope Pretender and the Devil / I wish they were all hang'd in a rope / The Pretender Devil and the Pope'.<sup>12</sup>



**Fig. 3.** Beaker silver, Hugues Lossieux, St Malo, France, 1707-8, engraved by Joseph Liddel, New York, 1750. © Museum of the City of New York

A cann is engraved with scenes from the life of the Jewish patriarch Joseph, whose trials in Egypt could reflect the religious persecution that Joseph Leddel's parents had faced. A tankard dating circa 1725 is marked by Huguenot goldsmith William Vilant, born in New York City, who worked in Philadelphia. It is engraved with contemporary political figures, including Philip Stanhope, 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Chesterfield, who in 1745, as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, mustered troops in support of George II and pledged a £50,000 prize for the capture of the Young Pretender, Bonnie Prince Charlie. The tankard was with the London silver dealer Lionel Crichton when it was published in 1929.<sup>18</sup>

### **Boston**

By 1685, there was an established Huguenot church in Boston. After 1715, when the young Apollos Rivoire emigrated from Guernsey, the church had Andrew Le Mercier (1692-1763) as pastor and its members included the prosperous Huguenot merchant families the Faneuils, the Mascarenes and the Bowdouins. By 1748 the Huguenot church had transferred its assets to the Congregational Church as the community had dwindled as a result of intermarriage.

Neil Kamil has drawn attention to the importance of manual skills in providing Huguenot immigrants with 'artisanal security'.<sup>19</sup> Boston goldsmiths and jewelers included James Boyer (c.1700-1741) son of the London-based Huguenot distiller Peter Boyer. The father was naturalized in May 1715 (he was resident in the parish of St Giles in the Fields).<sup>20</sup> The young James was apprenticed to the Huguenot Jeweller James Papavoine in Westminster in 1712. By 1722 James Boyer was established in Boston where he advertised in *The New-England Courant*

'This is to inform the public that Mr. James Boyer, Jeweller from London, living at Mr. Eustone's a dancing master in King Street, Boston, sett's all manner of Stones in Rings & performs everything belonging to that trade'

Francis Légaré (c.1636-1711) was naturalized in England in 1682 with his wife and three sons (the eldest later settled in Charleston). Francis is listed in

the Boston tax documents for 1687. His 1711 probate inventory lists stock of gold and silver and farming tools, but no silver marked by him survives.

René Grignon (1652-1715) left London in the mid-1680s for Boston then moved on to Norwich, Connecticut as a ship's master and merchant. His French-style maker's mark is only found on two silver porringers one of which also has the mark of native-born goldsmith Jeremiah Dummer suggesting that Grignon was a retailer.<sup>21</sup>

Huguenot merchants established in North America commissioned silver from native-born goldsmiths. The teapot circa 1710 marked by John Coney,<sup>22</sup> who took Apollos Rivoire as an apprentice in 1720, is engraved with the coat of arms of Jean-Paul Mascarene (1684-1760), a soldier and politician, who was born in 1685 in the French province of Languedoc. He was smuggled out of France to Geneva and naturalized in England in 1706 and came to Boston in 1711. Other Huguenot Boston merchants included Peter Faneuil (1700-1743), whose family came from La Rochelle. Faneuil's 'handsome chariot' was imported from London as were his supplies of Madeira (a wine which traveled well) and his cookery books. Peter Faneuil gave the City of Boston the central marketplace Faneuil Hall, which opened in 1742. At home, Peter Faneuil used a London-made silver coffee pot.<sup>23</sup>

Apollos Rivoire (1702-1754) was born in Riaucaud, near Bordeaux, and on November 21, 1715, left France to join his uncle Simon Rivoire in Guernsey.<sup>24</sup> The record in the family bible written by his father reads: "Apollos Rivoire, or son, was born the thirtieth of November, 1702, about ten o'clock at Night and was baptized at Riaucaud, France, Apollos Rivoire, my brother was his Godfather and Anne Maulmon my sister-in-law his Godmother. He set out for Guernsey on the 21st of November, 1715." <sup>25</sup> His uncle sent the boy to Boston to learn the goldsmith's trade; in Boston Apollos was apprenticed in about 1720 to the goldsmith John Coney. By the time Coney died in 1722, Apollos had anglicized his name to Paul Rivoire. After Coney's death, Rivoire bought his freedom for about £40; Coney's estate's inventory records "Paul Rivoire's Time abt Three Year & half as pr indenture £30/0/0," with an additional record reading "Cash received for Paul Rivoire's Time, more than it was prized at, £10."<sup>26</sup> Apollos married Deborah Hitchbourn in 1729; they had 12

children, of whom the celebrated Paul Revere was the third. Apollos (known as Paul), advertised in *The Boston Weekly News-Letter*, May 21, 1730:

"Paul Revere, Goldsmith is removed from Capt. Pitts at the Town Dock to North End over against Col. Hutchinson."

When his father died in 1754, Paul Revere junior was too young to take over the business, so he enlisted in the army. He returned to run the family business in 1757, and married for the first time Sarah Orne – they had eight children.

Paul Revere became a Freemason in 1760 and joined St Andrew's Lodge with its Scottish affiliations. After 1764, they met at the Green Dragon Tavern, which became the headquarters for the Revolution.<sup>27</sup> Plans for the 1773 'Boston Tea Party' were made there and in the Old South Meeting House, the largest public meeting space in Boston City, attended by 5000 colonists, many from surrounding towns.

In November 1773 the merchant ship *Dartmouth* arrived in Boston harbor carrying the first shipment of tea made under the terms of the controversial Townshend Tea Act which bypassed colonial merchants. There were renewed protests against the tea shipments, on which duties were still levied. Revere, as a member of a coalition of tradesmen, organized a watch over the *Dartmouth* to prevent the unloading of the tea. He was one of the ringleaders on 16 December 1773, when 100 colonists with the cry 'Boston harbor a teapot tonight' dumped 342 tea chests from three ships the *Dartmouth*, the *Beaver* and the *Eleanor*, into the harbor.

The 1760s proved to be a demanding time for Paul Revere's business. When John Singleton Copley painted his portrait in 1768, Revere was near bankruptcy and was forced to take up dentistry to supplement his income.<sup>28</sup> That year Revere produced *The Sons of Liberty Bowl* made for the subscribers whose names are engraved round the rim. It commemorated the 92 Massachusetts legislators who on 30 June 1768 defied King George III's command to rescind a circular letter that summoned all the colonies to resist the Townshend Acts. The bowl is engraved with the *Magna Carta* and the Bill of Rights, Liberty poles and caps and John Wilkes' polemic *No.45 North Briton*. In volume 45 of this periodical, Wilkes, a radical British Whig,

denounced policies established by George III's ministers; Wilkes upheld the liberty of the press, defended his conviction for treason, and won his case after proving that his premises had been illegally searched.

The bowl was fashioned from 45 ounces of silver and was intended to hold 45 gills of rum punch. The Sons of Liberty traveled to the Governor's Mansion on 23 June 1768 and invoked John Wilkes with 45 toasts.<sup>29</sup>

From 1765 onwards Revere supported the opposition by producing political engravings including a print showing the arrival of British troops with loaded weapons and Royal Navy ships with their guns trained on Boston in 1768 (Fig.4), published in 1770. The print of the March 1770 Boston Massacre in front of the Old State House, in which five were killed and eight wounded, was published two weeks later. The victims included Crispus Attucks, who escaped slavery in Framingham in 1750 and called himself Michael Johnson to evade capture.<sup>30</sup> This is the best known of Revere's engravings and was widely copied in Europe and America.

Revere engraved banknotes which the congress used to pay the troops around Boston, bill heads and trade cards, but is best remembered today for his midnight ride 18 April 1775 from Boston to Concord to alert the American colonial militia of the approach of British forces before the battles of Lexington and Concord. Revere rode to meet John Hancock and Samuel Adams in Lexington, ten miles away, and alert others *en route*. He then rode on to Concord with Samuel Prescott and William Dawes. The three riders were captured by British troops in Lincoln. Prescott and Dawes escaped but Revere was returned to Lexington and freed after questioning. By giving the Colonists advance warning of the British Army plans, the ride played a crucial role in their subsequent victories.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 1861 poem, *Paul Revere's Ride*, has shaped popular memory of the event. Twenty-four years later the sculptor Cyrus Dallin was commissioned to produce an equestrian statue of Revere riding to spread news and organize resistance. Cast in bronze in 1940, this is in the Mall behind the Old North Church, Boston, the city's oldest surviving church.



**Fig. 4.** *A View of the Town of Boston in New England and British Ships of War landing their Troops, 1768*, engraving published by Paul Revere after the 1770 Boston Massacre. ©American Antiquarian Society, Philadelphia

Paul Revere's technical experience as a silversmith was the springboard for his industrial output. Yet he continued to retail luxury goods such as the 1791 tea urn for Mrs. Hannah Rowe.<sup>31</sup> By 1788, Revere was interested in other metalwork. He constructed a large furnace to work with larger quantities of metals at higher temperatures. He opened an iron foundry that produced stove backs, fireplace tools, and sash-window weights. Revere became an entrepreneur and a manager, investing substantial quantities of capital and time in his foundry.

In 1794, Revere provided the copper sheathing to fortify the hull of the U.S.S. *Constitution* commissioned from George Washington; the largest and widest 44-gun warship ever built in America. The crew averaged 450 men. The ship was launched on Columbus Day 1797 and moored in the newly developed shipyard in Charlestown, as Boston became New England's premier maritime city. In 1802 Revere's Canton foundry produced copper

sheeting for the dome of the new Boston State House, designed by Charles Bulfinch. Revere served as Grand Master of the Masonic Ceremonies when Governor Samuel Adams laid the cornerstone of that civic building on 4 July 1795.

Revere identified the market for church bells in the religious revival that followed the war. From 1792 he became one of America's best-known bell casters, working with his sons Paul Jr. and Joseph Warren Revere. They cast the first bell made in Boston and ultimately produced hundreds of bells; many remain in operation.

In 1813, Joseph Warren Revere paid the American artist Gilbert Stuart \$200 for portraits of his parents in old age.<sup>32</sup> Paul Revere adapted his father's bookplate with the Riviere coat of arms by introducing a British Lion, a Gallic Cock and a militant American motto *Pugna pro Patria* (fight for your country). In 21<sup>st</sup> century Boston, Paul Revere's house, dating from 1670s, is the oldest structure to survive. Paul Revere's grave is in the Granary Burying Ground alongside fellow patriots General Joseph Warren, James Otis, Samuel Adams and John Hancock.

### **Charleston**

In contrast to the merchant dominated society of Boston, Charleston, South Carolina was planter country. It boasted the first French Church in the colonies and the son of its first Huguenot minister, Samuel Prioleau (Fig. 5) became a jeweller and goldsmith although by 1732 he was Colonel of the Troop of Horse Guards.<sup>33</sup> The account book of Nicolas De Longuemare, goldsmith and jeweller, records his business from 1703-1710 in the French Quarter of the City, although De Longuemare lived on a farm for several months every year in the Santee settlement where he had purchased 100 acres in 1685. His son Nicholas continued his father's goldsmith's trade.<sup>34</sup> Other Charleston goldsmiths included, from 1697, Solomon Légaré from Boston.<sup>35</sup> *The Gentleman's Magazine* described Charleston as having between 500 and 600 houses. most of which are very costly. Besides 5 handsome Churches'... people 'are all rich either in Slaves, Furniture, Cloaths, Plate, Jewels or other Merchandize.' By 1770 the population was 11,000, half of which

was black; the city was the most important in the South and the fourth largest in British America.



**Fig. 5.** *Samuel Prioleau*, goldsmith of Charleston, South Carolina, pastel, by Henrietta Johnston, 1720. ©The Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, Winston, Salem

The French South Carolina Society was founded by Huguenot Lewis Timotheé who arrived in Philadelphia in 1731 and died in Charleston 1738. He anglicised his name to rid himself of the stigma then attached to those of

Huguenot ancestry. The society was a social and charitable organization consisting mainly of individuals of French descent.<sup>36</sup>

The Sarrazin family goldsmiths' shop at the sign of the 'Tea Kettle and Lamp, the corner of Broad and Church Streets' Charleston, advertised in 1764 imported fashionable domestic plate. The business was established by Moreau Sarrazin (1710-1761) and continued by his son Jonathan (d.1811). A large serving spoon, known as a rice spoon, marked by Moreau Sarrazin, is engraved with the emblem and motto of the South Carolina Society.<sup>37</sup> Advertisements for engraving on silver appeared in the *South Carolina Gazette* in 1741, for Francis Garden (brother of the London goldsmith Phillips Garden) who 'engraves in the best Manner any kind of Metal, Coats of Arms etc'.<sup>38</sup> Moreau Sarrazin advertised his similar skill in 1746 'Coats of Arms engrav'd on plate and sunk in Seals' and again in 1755 when Moreau & Jonathan Sarrazin affirmed 'We continue engraving coats of arms, and sinking seals according to heraldry'

Huguenot identity in Charleston was centered on the French church, established by 1688 and rebuilt in 1744, when the wealthy Huguenot merchant Gabriel Manigault (1704-81) whose father emigrated from La Rochelle, presented a new silver communion service, which unfortunately disappeared during the Civil War.<sup>39</sup>

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3. <https://christchurchphila.pastperfectonline.com/webobject/F268A9C8-7560-4E79-B796-705127532195>; <https://christchurchphila.pastperfectonline.com/webobject/3BoB549F-37FB-44A5-8853-938126907290> accessed 20/12/21. The alms-plate is 9 inches in diameter and

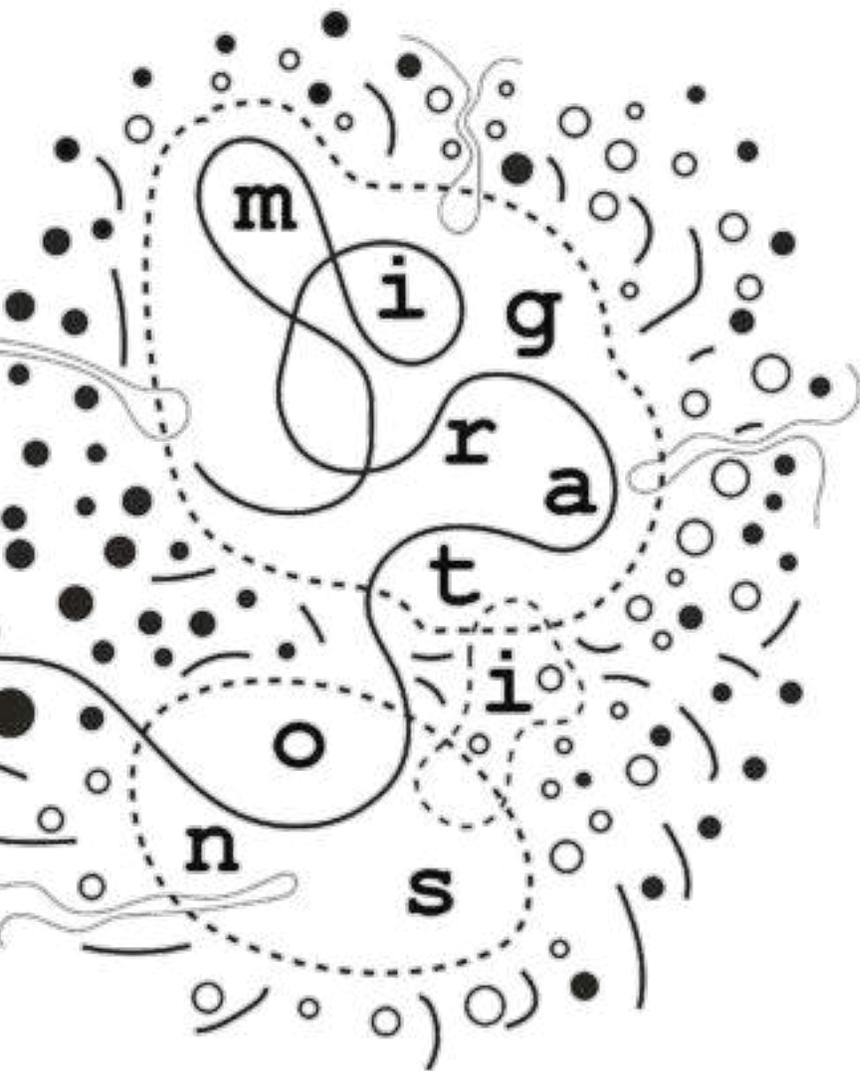
- the beaker is 4 inches high; both are stamped on the bottom C G in a rectangle surmounted by two crude pointed stars. They are illustrated in Lindsey, *Worldly Goods* 1999, 184, 182d.
4. Gillingham and Ghiselin, *Cesar Ghiselin*, 244-259
  5. Campbell, *The London Tradesman*, 141-2
  6. Philadelphia History Museum at the Atwater Kent  
<http://www.philadelphiahistory.org/collections/special-collections/>
  7. David Barquist, 'Huguenot silversmiths in colonial New York and Philadelphia', 62-3
  8. Paul de Lamerie's mother was born Le Roux, her family was from Rouen. Payment of duty for apprenticeship of John Le Roux is recorded on 10 July 1717 in the *RDPAL*, 1710-1811; Alexander Le Roux is listed by Heal, *The London Goldsmiths 1200-1800*, 194
  9. Barquist, 2008, plate 33, p.62
  10. Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Atwater Kent Museum, Philadelphia
  11. Compare the sauceboats marked for Ann Tanqueray acquired by the Huguenot Museum and the V&A in 2018.
  12. Barquist, 65-66
  13. Butler, *The Huguenots in America*, 1983, 176
  14. Lindsey, *Worldly Goods*, 1999, 176, 189 no.210
  15. Barquist, 65-66
  16. Sotheby's New York  
<https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2006/americana-no8158/lot.184.html>  
accessed 10 April 2022
  17. Barquist, 2008, 66-67 citing Skerry and Sloane, 1992, 490-99
  18. Jones, 'An Old American Silver Tankard', 1929, 264, 268-269
  19. Kamil, *Fortress of the Soul*, 2005, 1-2
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  21. Wees, 'Huguenot Goldsmiths in colonial Boston and Charleston', 772-3
  22. Teapot, silver, John Coney, Boston, *circa* 1710, engraved with the coat of arms of a prominent Huguenot immigrant, Jean-Paul Mascarene, 19.2 x 21 cm., weight 18 oz. Bequest of Alphonso T. Clearwater, 1933 (33.120.526). © Metropolitan Museum of Art 2007.
  23. Wees, 77-8
  24. Apollos Rivoire's uncle Simon was a surgeon, Nash ed., 'Directory of Huguenot Refugees on the Channel Islands 1548-1825', 295. Simon Rivoire was described as 'Mons Le Docteur' when he married Anne Le Marsiau (Marsault) at St Peter Port, Guernsey, 23 September 1701. They had four sons Pierre (1703) Simon Pierre (1705) William (1706) and Jean (1708-1711).
  25. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apollos\\_Rivoire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apollos_Rivoire)
  26. Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride*, 374
  27. E.J. Stebleckie, *Paul Revere and Freemasonry*, Boston, 1985
  28. There were French precedents to combining goldsmithing and dentistry; two generations of the Pilleau family, Huguenot goldsmiths from Le Mans, had offered this speciality alongside supplying domestic silver in London from the 1690s to the 1750s.
  29. Fairbanks, 'Paul Revere and 1768: His Portrait and the Liberty Bowl', 2001, 135-151.
  30. The depiction of the fusillade is inaccurate. Captain Thomas Preston's men were not in formation. Although this was engraved by Revere and included the inscription, "Engraved, Printed, & Sold by Paul Revere Boston", it was modeled on a drawing by Henry Pelham, John Copley's half-brother, colored by by Christian Remick and printed by Benjamin Edes.
  31. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City. Recorded in Revere's ledgers, on April 20, 1791, as a debit charged to Mrs. Hannah Rowe for a silver urn weighing 111 ounces; the earliest and largest of three known tea or coffee urns by Revere
  32. His mother Rachel Walker became Paul Revere's second wife in 1773, five months after the death of Sara Orne; Rachel also bore eight children of whom only five survived infancy.
  33. Butler, 1984, p.108
  34. Wees, 2008, 79-80

35. Second generation Huguenot goldsmiths included Andrew Dupuy, Benjamin Motteux, Isaac Peronneau and Daniel Tezevant. They were joined mid-century by Lewis Janvier and James Courteonne both trained in London.
36. Cohen, *The South Carolina Gazette*, 1953
37. Wees, 2008, p.80
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# Migration, Climate, Surveillance: What Does Media Art Complexity Want?

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## Session 5



## Session 5

# Migration, Climate, Surveillance: What does Media Arts Complexity want?

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**Oliver Grau**

Society for the Histories of MediaArt, Science and Technology

The title of our session is connecting several variables that are being negotiated for the first time at a CIHA conference. Among the big questions of our time, caused by the digital revolution, the population explosion and the further growth of the carbon societies, questions, above all thematized by media art, are undoubtedly migration, climate, and surveillance: Exhibitions, even entire festivals are dedicated to these topics.

In terms of science policy, media art, and its histories have been negotiated since 2004 through the established MediaArHistories world conference series, which began in Banff, Canada, and since then took place every 2 years on a different continent. On our web archive [mediaarthistories.org](http://mediaarthistories.org), you find documentation of hundreds of lectures, abstracts and articles from this growing field. It is a great pleasure and an important date that this field, which has evolved parallel with CIHA over the last 2 decades, is making, we hope, productive intellectual contact, a beneficial merger in terms of science policy.

MediaArHistories is an interdisciplinary field of research that explores the current developments as well as the history and genealogy of new media art, digital art, and electronic art (Grau 2007, Domingues 2009).<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, media art histories address the contemporary interplay of art, technology, and science (Wilson 2010, Henderson 1983).<sup>2</sup> On the other, it aims to reveal the historical relationships and aspects of the 'afterlife' (Aby Warburg) in new media art by means of a historical-comparative approach. This strand of research encompasses questions of the history of media and perception of so-called archetypes, as well as those of iconography and the

history of ideas. Moreover, one of the main agendas of media art histories is to point out the role of digital technologies for contemporary, post-industrial societies and to counteract the marginalization of according art practices and art objects as pointed out in 2011, in the Liverpool Declaration: “Digital technology has fundamentally changed the way art is made. Over the last fifty years, media art has become a significant part of our networked information society. Although there are well-attended international festivals, collaborative research projects, exhibitions, and database documentation resources, media art research is still marginal in universities, museums, and archives. It remains largely under-resourced in our core cultural institutions.”<sup>3</sup> Hence, scholars stress that the technological advances in current media cultures are best understood on the backdrop of extensive media and art history. Contributions to this field are widespread and include researchers who have disciplinary focuses such as the history of science (Lorraine DASTON), art history and image science (Oliver Grau, Barbara Stafford), media studies and media archaeology (Friedrich Kittler, Erkki Huhtamo, Siegfried Zielinski), sound studies (Douglas Kahn), film studies (Sean Cubitt, Jorge La Ferla), media art aesthetics (Christiane Paul, Giselle Beiguelman, Lev Manovich), archives (Grau, Beiguelman).<sup>4</sup>

The term new media art itself is of great importance to the field.<sup>5</sup> The focus of new media art lies in the cultural, political, and social implications as well as the aesthetic possibilities – more or less its ‘media-specificity’ – of digital media. Furthermore, the field of new media art is increasingly influenced by new technologies that surmount a traditional understanding of (art) media. The list of genres that are commonly subsumed under the label of new media art illustrates its broad scope and includes, among others, virtual art<sup>6</sup>, Software Art<sup>7</sup>, Internet Art<sup>8</sup>, Glitch Art<sup>9</sup>, Telematic Art, Bio Art / Genetic Art<sup>10</sup>, Interactive Art<sup>11</sup>, computer animation and graphics<sup>12</sup>, Urban Media Art<sup>13</sup>, Mobile Art.<sup>14</sup> These latter two ‘genres’ in particular have a strong focus on the interplay of art and (political) activism.<sup>15</sup> Recently, with the development of Artificial Intelligence, there is also an emerging trend exploring its aesthetics and, at the moment, the art market. A transforming Art Market - which ignored meanwhile 6 decades of digital art often representing our time like in a concave mirror - is currently blinded by the financial promise of NFTs.

The diversity of fields makes clear that digital art is a complex system, which is not only complicated but has rapidly-accelerating complexity. With the Algorithmic, Computational and even Post-digital turn over recent decades, the digital image is becoming contextual, ephemeral, immersive, interactive and processual, made as it is out of many technologies.

This session addresses the role Media Art plays in today's sociopolitical issues such as migration, climate, virtual finance, and surveillance society. It goes beyond state-of-the-art analytic methods in the humanities, combining, for example, qualitative close-gaze (of critical visual analysis) and quantitative distant-reading (from computer-assisted data analysis/empirical research). A main session outcome is added value for the humanities with "a socio-political iconography of the present", and discussion of a new "way of seeing," of "thinking with pictures," and asking "what do complex images want?" in the Digital Age.

Therefore this session welcomed as well proposals for adequate research infrastructures following the Liverpool Declaration, which was signed by scholars and artists based at institutions all over the globe to develop systematic strategies to fulfill the task that digital culture and its research demands in the 21st Century.

In the last few years, there was a significant increase of festivals and conferences dedicated to new media art, though the dominant festivals in the field continue to be the Ars Electronica, the Transmediale, the ISEA (Inter-Society for the Electronic Arts), and SIGGRAPH (Special Interest Group on Graphics and Interactive Techniques). To this day, museums and research facilities specializing in New Media Art are the exceptions. Nevertheless, ZKM (Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie) or specific focuses in collections (including the Whitney Museum, the New York Museum of Modern Art, or the Walker Art Center) serve as important spaces for exchange. Beyond museums that reach a wider audience, there are smaller and smaller museums and galleries that focus on new media art (such as the Berlin-based DAM – Digital Art Museum). Additionally, archives in which are exhibited artifacts situated at the intersection of the histories of media, art, and technology, are important resources, including collections such as that

of Werner Nekes or those cabinets of wonder and curiosity incorporated in art history museums.

Even given this increase in festivals, however, a variety of significant research initiatives have been discontinued. These include the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Media.Art.Research, the Daniel Langlois Foundation for Art, Science and Technology, and Media Art Net. This difficulty in establishing sustainable funding structures, as well as support for access to shared data for the scientific research of new media art was made public and addressed by the Liverpool Declaration. Scholars and artists based at institutions all over the globe signed the declaration in a call to develop systematic strategies to fulfill the task that digital culture and its research demands in the 21st Century. Already in the late 1990s, it became clear, that media art research is spread over many disciplines and the need became urgent to give it common ground: Therefore, from 2002 onwards at Oliver Grau and Wendy Coones at Humboldt University Berlin, in Cooperation with Roger Malina, Leonardo and Sara Diamond, Banff Center developed the International Conference Series on the Histories of MediaArt, Science and Technology, which was started in 2005 through a collective process, involving more than 10 disciplines related to media art. The world conference series attempts to foster the exchange between these different disciplines and their various actors. To date, the conference has taken place six times with Re-fresh (Banff 2005), Re-place (Berlin 2007), Re-live (Melbourne 2009), Re-wire (Liverpool 2011), Re-new (Riga 2013), Re-create (Montreal 2015), Vienna/Krems (2017), Aalborg (2019). Documentation of the meanwhile more than 2000 papers and applications can be found on [MediaArtHistory.org](http://MediaArtHistory.org).<sup>16</sup>

This CIHA session focuses on an evaluation of the status of the meta-discipline MediaArtHistories today. Immersed in both contemporary and historiographical aspects of the digital world, we explore the most immediate socio-cultural questions of our time: from migration and media (r)evolutions, to climate, virtualization of finance and surveillance. And we do so through a fractal lens of inter- and trans-disciplinarity, bridging art history, media studies, neuroscience, psychology, sociology, and beyond.

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# Phototaxydermy: Deduction of Species by Digital Neural Networks

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## **ABSTRACT**

As the ongoing Sixth Extinction threatens all life on Earth, the role of image archives, including those from art history, becomes increasingly important for our understanding of species once inhabiting it. With 150 species disappearing every day, many of which still are unknown to us, photographs play an important role in expanding our understanding of life on Earth. Although taxonomists warn that photographs are insufficient for properly naming newly found species because they can be reworked, they are often all we have.

This article investigates how precisely reworking photographs by a photomontage technique, promoted by Charles Darwin and implemented by his cousin Sir Francis Galton, is now today developed and used to aid information retrieval and possible biological restoration of species. Media artists programming neural networks can now cast knowledge of species and interspecies by combining findings from computational photography and biological computing (A-life). In addition, complex images (Grau 2020) store biological information together with a visual cast. A new model works on the deduction from scientific premises computed by artificial intelligence rather than on the induction-based model of step-by-step naming.

## **KEYWORDS**

Complex Images; Genetics; Generative Photography; Photogenetics; Species

### Introduction

Humans have been interested in biological life apart of its own specie since ever; images of animals made in the beginning of visual culture prove it. However, only in the 16th century, following the development of taxidermy (Poliquin 2012), the first systematization of biodiversity was made possible (Davidson, 2017). Such systematization, used until today, is due to Carl Linnaeus' *Systema Naturae* (1735). The invention of the photographic process advanced it, by documenting step-by-step inductive methods.

Photographs today play a vital role in our understanding of species. We would never know how some animals looked alike if it was not for photography. Dodos, Honshu wolves, ivory-billed woodpeckers, huia, passenger pigeons, thylacines, and grey whales are examples of this. Unfortunately, we do not have images of all the species humans have seen. Some became extinct before the invention of photography, while others are yet to be registered, and many more continue to disappear without being named or photographed.

William Henry Fox Talbot – one of photography's inventors – created the first contact prints of a variety of specimens. He applied a method extensively explored by his close friend Anna Atkins, who used light-sensitive salts on paper to create cyanotypes, direct cameraless image prints for cataloging British algae and foreign fauna (Saska 2010). In the following years, photography was implemented in biology as a standard tool. Biological photography has been storing the indexical version of phenotypes since the 19th century. Charles Darwin, whose *Origin of Species* (1859) contributed significantly to animal documentation, was also the author of one of the first photographic illustrated books ever published (Prodger 2009). In his book *Expressions of Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), he commissioned images by dozens of photographers, including Oscar Gustave Rejlander (known for his use of photomontage) and Duchenne de Boulogne (later known for his experiments with facial muscles).

Wildlife images further developed with the popularization of the wildlife genre recorded by professional photographers and published in

specialized magazines (*National Geographic*, since 1888, and *Nature*, publishing photographs since 1890). Soon after, animal photography was practiced as a form of hunting, resulting in a new type of trophy; a *photo-trophy*. Yet, as our growing awareness of the harm caused to other species, this practice is gradually disappearing.

Today, camera traps set in the wild document animals in nature without disturbing them. In addition to animal photography, authors such as J. J. Woodward, Steve Miller, Katherine Wolkoff, and Todd R Forsgren, Susan Derges, or Sanna Kanisto and Isa Leshko, have been documenting the last members of species, known as 'endlings'; as seen in Tim Flach's series *Endangered Species* or in Joel Sartore's book, *Photo Ark*.

Endlings, or the 'rarest of the rare' (Ackerman 1997) die into the images.<sup>1</sup> Some design projects also present a 'requiem for a species' (Hamilton 2015). Award-winning campaigns – such as *Population by Pixel*, created in 2008 by Hakuhodo C & C&D for the World Wide Fund for Nature Japan – compared the number of species to the number of pixels, taking a more abstract approach. JJSmooth44 did another exciting project that visualizes animals in pixels and directly addresses the remaining members.<sup>2</sup> They all refer to the image archive as a specie in and of itself.

Since the Enlightenment, we have documented over 1.8 million out of an estimated 9 million species in various archives and databases. *Biodiversity Heritage Library* is the world's largest digitalized database, with images dating back to the 15th century. *Arkive.org*, *The Barcode of life*, *Catalogue of Life*, *Encyclopaedia of Life*, *Global biodiversity facility*, and the *Consortium for Conservation of Nature* are well known. However, as the Sixth Extinction (Kolbert 2015) continues at a rate of approximately 150 animal species per day, new types of archives are monitoring this tragic process. The *Red List of Extinct Species* is an example of this.

In addition to these visual databases are biological databases, DNA banks known as genomics databases, disease genome databases, or DNA elements. Some of them are dedicated to sorting species. *IOBL.org* (International Barcode of Life) projects generate unique DNA barcodes for 500 000 species. Finally, there are small-scale projects that include both types

of material; visual or photographic and biological. *Virtual Arboretum* by UCF, for example, combines complex information.<sup>3</sup> Such databases, Thacker claims, “redefine the notion of biological ‘life itself’” (Thacker 2005).

In addition to these well-structured and organized databases, new ones appear online. Hese distinguishes two of them when writing that;

Global biodiversity databases [...] emerge from the conjunction of two tendencies, an encyclopaedic, centripetal impulse that reaches back to the Enlightenment and seeks to inventory the entire known world, and the hyperlinked, centrifugal architecture of the Internet, which seeks to approximate a representation of this world through constant movement between data sites (Heise 2016, 65).

As the extinction progresses at a larger speed than the inventorisation of the information, we are relying on data that appears elsewhere, including social networks that introduce photographs of species previously unknown to scientists (Suprayitno et al 2017). They challenge the idea that a dead holotype should be abandoned, and a more speculative model of taxidermy could be employed (Aloi 2018).<sup>4</sup>

### **Photographs and taxonomy of species**

Since 2013, there have been attempts to introduce recognition of new species through photographs (Pelser and Barcelona 2013) for one of the most apparent reasons – promoting taxonomy without dead bodies in the times of the Sixth Extinction (Marshall and Evenhuis 2015). Authors like Thorpe claimed that photographs may be ‘better than a poor specimen’ (Thorpe 2017, 449). This was the case for many historical examples that preceded the debate overviewed by Krell and Marshall (2017). In cases where only parts of specimens were preserved, or in cases where specimens have been lost, photographs, but also sometimes drawings were the only information of species. This has led authors such as Garraffoni and Freitas to propose a modification to the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (1999)*, aiming to recognize new species that had not allowed photographs as the primary material, but the only material deposited. The Code, being an

academic standard in taxonomy, says that the author ‘should designate as holotype a specimen actually studied by him or her, not a specimen known to the author only from descriptions or illustrations in the literature’ (ICZN 1999, Recommend 73B). In addition, the Code anticipates that new species can be introduced through the full animal or parts of the animal, fossilized remains, colonies, or microscopic slides with new organisms.

Despite the growing role of photography in the recognition of species and the introduction of new ones, hundreds of taxonomy scholars and curators objected to photography-based taxonomy (Marshall and Evenhuis 2015; Ceriaco et al. 2016; Faundez 2017; Thorpe 2017; Rogers et al 2017, Zhang 2017).

In addition to the argument that photographs do not provide sufficient information for distinguishing between species, some authors warned that images could be reworked, or altered in many ways; for example, by photomontage. They asked for some additional conditions, especially for digital photographs, such as delivering images in RAW format (Aguiar et al 2017). Indeed, the reworking of photographs showing biological material is frequent, but it was also made under the framework of the very discipline of biology and, more precisely, genetics. In this chapter, I will overview some of the most recent practices, showing how image computation advanced in the biological model-creation and possible replication.

### **Deduction from images**

One of the arguments of taxonomists for not acknowledging photography as a primary source for naming species was that images could have been reworked. Indeed, photographic images today can be reworked, and they could have been done since the beginning of photographic history. Fascinating enough, this has been mostly practiced under the framework of biological photography.

It was Darwin's cousin, Sir Francis Galton, established the field of genetic photography, or complex calculations in visual images that led to scientific knowledge of photomontage. Galton manipulated many

photographic images to create generic photographic hybrids demonstrating how individual phenotypes belong to a specific group, such as race, gender, or social layer, deducing new knowledge from visual data. On the one hand, Galton's research was responsible for the birth of eugenics, while on the other, it paved the way for the development of generative photography.<sup>5</sup> Galton's use of permutations of portraits to approach the field of genetics, later explored by artists Lewis Hine, Nancy Burson, Lilian Schwartz, and David Trood. They have demonstrated that the photographic permutation of types can lead to more diverse scientific knowledge.

In his 1986 book *The Blind Watchmaker*, Richard Dawkins was the first to describe a program that could create new generations of artificial life in support of the Darwinian theory. It referred to one of Darwin's predecessors, William Paley, who introduced an argument from design for the inclusion of God in evolutionary theory in his book, *Natural Design* (1802). Paley proposed an agent, known as an 'intelligent watchmaker', who monitored natural selection, which Darwin partially supported. Dawkins went on to save Darwin's evolutionary premises from devolving into theology by demonstrating how complex systems can operate through randomness without a supervisor. He introduced the *Biomorph Land* program based on the Darwinian model of natural selection. Several evolutionary art (EvoArt) or artificial life (A-life) authors, such as Tatsuo Unemi and Peter Kleiweig, used and expanded the program (Whitelaw 2004; Romero and Machado 2007). Initially, they processed programming lines as textual inputs matching the genome textualization, and which worked as an illustration of the process.

Today, processors are fast enough to use a large number of photographs — millions of them — to deduce the most complex information on species, based on scientific knowledge. While using photographic archives of species as datasets, the algorithm 'breeds' many new variants out of the imputed set. For example, Anna Ridler's *Myriad* (2018) computed thousands of tulips, while Jake Elwes computed new birds (2019).<sup>6</sup> Not only variants of animals and plants are computed. Human faces are also used in computations, as in Mike Tyka's *Portraits of Imaginary People* (2017), *Flick Kai* (2018) by Daniel Heiss, who entered 50 000 visitors into a photobooth to

generate new faces, and Philip Wang's *This Person Does Not Exist* (2019) or *GANimals* by MIT.<sup>7</sup>

### **Complex deduction**

In addition to being used for artificial breeding, digital photographs — made of bits — have recently been enhanced with information that has become more significant than the image itself. This was noted by Sean Cubitt's chapter of reader *Scale* (2020).<sup>8</sup> In addition to technical information, images can also carry multiple and complex biological data.

Projects that would include complex data behind what is visible have also been developed for some time. One of the most known is *The Visible Human Project*, initiated in 1986 by the National Library of Medicine. The project shows all possible data on male and female bodies. Here, two cadavers — a middle age prisoner and a lady in her late 50s — are completely scanned by CT, MRI, Cryosection images, anatomic images, in order to provide the fullest and most compressed information on the human body. Today such projects can also be used for complex computation. For example, *Interspecifics* by Codex Virtualis — presented at last Ars Electronica (2021) — calculates hybrid bacteria produced between morphotype and genotype. Computations also involve human faces. Authors like Heather Dewey Hagborg, working on famous whistleblower Chelsea E. Manning, speak on possible faces from DNA algorithms.

In addition to visualization, genetic programming also evolved. It has been a while since Margaret Boden wrote that; 'AI is helping biologists to develop evolutionary theory in general' (Boden 2016, 121). More precisely, artificial intelligence helps us to understand the self-organization principle in biology, phylogenetic evolution, embryogenesis and metamorphosis, brain development and cell formation (ibid. 121).

Today genetic algorithm (GA) is often inbuilt into a digital neural network trained in one of the most complex data mining tasks: DNA mining and editing. For example, CRISPR/Cas9 (Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats) is one of these networks used to edit DNA by sequencing it in two parts. The Cas9 enzyme acts as DNA scissors and guides

RNA. By this, we are coming closer to autonomous genetic programming, which lies in the basis of the eugenics advocated by Galton, and it is influenced by the global capital (Thacker 2005).

### **Conclusion**

To access databases of life and images of life, as well as to compute them, raises the question of whether biological types can be analyzed from computation (and thus the deduction of the model). It also raises the question of whether the initial inductive method of capturing and creating images is becoming increasingly restricted. We have reached a point where we can calculate species that existed on the planet without endangering or harming life on the planet.

In order to learn about the life that once existed on Earth, we will need to consult existing archives and databases of photographs and other visual material, as opposed to capturing and documenting species. By using digital neural networks, it would be possible to reconstruct missing pieces of the biological landscape that may have already disappeared. In this sense, the role of a new art historian would be to identify and point out species representations that can be analyzed by experts in the field, as well as to collaborate more closely with artists and programmers who may use information from both art and science to reconstruct digital biological diversity.

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## Endnotes

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8. The information concealed behind these digitized images is intricate. They contain EXIF data about the camera model and settings, as well as information about ownership and

copyright. Additionally, GIS data on the location of the recording is included. Reworked images may retain information about all manipulations performed on them, particularly if they are saved with layers. Additionally, they store their names and locations in databases. Finally, they are uploaded online and are tagged with their respective tags. All of this information is available to non-technical users.

# Accelerated Displacements Between Systems: Positive and Negative Entropy as Climate and Aesthetic Issues In Post-Digital Media Art

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## **ABSTRACT**

The accelerated dissemination of technological infrastructure is an intrinsic subject of discussion concerning media arts. Since modernism, critics and curators have chosen different perspectives regarding art's involvement with transient media generations. Post-digital aesthetics opens a new path in which media archaeology may be adopted for tactical purposes of resistance against planned obsolescence and climate crisis impacts. In this approach, objects and concepts become makeshift tools for sustaining migrations between natural, psychic and social systems. However, how can we deal with the afterlife of images, substances, and ideas that reverberate due to and in spite of the mnemonic devices' instabilities and their material collapses? How can we conceive a balance between negative and positive entropy?

This paper will address these questions by resorting to critical examinations of artworks and theories. Pieces by artists like Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Christa Sommerer & Laurent Mignonneau, and Paul DeMarinis will be commented on to highlight some views towards notions of high and low tech. In turn, we will elaborate on contributions from authors such as Vilém Flusser, Bernard Stiegler, and Jussi Parikka. Mainly, we will focus on how these artworks and theories may refer to critical aspects concerning relationships involving nature, politics, climate, finance, biology, and technology.

## **KEYWORDS**

Post-digital; Aesthetics; Entropy; Art System; Neganthropocene.

### **Media arts and medianatures**

The accelerated expansion and dissemination of technological infrastructure is an intrinsic subject regarding media art aesthetics embodied in their critical and curatorial frameworks. Due to its increasing pervasiveness, modern technologies have given rise to various means through which different artistic achievements have thrived. Sound machines, chemical and electronic photography, telematic texts and graphics, light projections, automated devices, and the more recent cybernetic systems for magnetic recording, processing and transmission of multimodal signals – these are only a few cumulative yet dynamic, and more and more fast-evolving strains of a *media ecology*, with which art has a long and productive relationship.

Paraphrasing Kantian aesthetics, this media ecology becomes the very condition of possibility of anything to be made and considered both as media and as art – or media artworks for short. We can even go further: “What we refer to as our world is no longer thinkable without the medial”, as Siegfried Zielinski<sup>1</sup> claims. With its multiplicity and vast scope, media ecology allows us to set up unusual and differing relations with space and time, providing both the ambiance (or climate) and the peculiar aesthetic issues critically addressed in media art projects. In this sense, contexts and contents turn out to be mutually constitutive. That seems to be one unavoidable aspect concerning problems about how we can place media arts in the whole art system. This placement might displace preconceived ideas, previously collected artifacts, and connected subjectivities – resulting from individual authorship, collaborations, cultural appraisal, and public attachment.

There are displacements between what Ludwig von Bertalanffy<sup>2</sup> calls artificial and epistemological systems. They involve practices and theories of arts, music, literature and design, as well as technology, economics, politics, and philosophy. However, technological pervasiveness has a much broader and more profound impact on the living environment, affecting habitats, dwelling conditions, and the consumption of energy and material resources. Consequently, we experience an accelerating displacement between artificial, epistemological and natural systems, resulting in problematic consequences.

The current technological dissemination speed rate has affected geological, biological and psychic systems. As a result, collateral damages and adverse effects abound, enhancing what Rudolf Arheim<sup>3</sup> called the catabolic destruction tendencies, already present in nature but accelerated by human action. This effect happens parallel to the hyper-exploitation of the anabolic shape-building principle, accounting for atomic and molecular arrangements behind matter crystallization, but excelled in life and consciousness emergence and their technological (media) exteriorizations<sup>4</sup>.

In the critical framework related to the Anthropocene, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and Deborah Danowski<sup>5</sup> warn us that we are facing “[...] an experience of the decomposition of time (the end) and space (the world), and the surprising downgrade of these two a priori conditions of sensibility to the status of forms conditioned by human action”. However, according to Viveiros de Castro and Danowski, a setback must be noted:

The transformation of humans into a geological force, that is, into an "objective" phenomenon or "natural" object, is paid back with the intrusion of Gaia in the human world, giving the Earth System the menacing form of a historical subject, a political agent, a moral person. In an ironic and deadly (because recursively contradictory) inversion of the relation between figure and ground, the ambiented becomes the ambient (or "ambienting"), and the converse is equally the case.

The deep temporalities involved in these exchanges and problems also point us to what Jussi Parikka<sup>6</sup> calls medianatures. As Parikka writes, this concept “[...] crystallizes the ‘double bind’ of media and nature as co-constituting spheres, where the ties are intensively connected in material nonhuman realities as much as in relations of power, economy, and work”. Thereby, medianatures represent a geological and media-oriented variation of the concept of naturecultures found in Donna Haraway. Still following Parikka<sup>7</sup>, we read that:

[...] technological culture and its specific instance in machines are not just in time but also fabricate time. The revolution speeds of hard drives, clock times of computers, network pings, and so forth are examples of the temporalities in which machines themselves are embedded and which they impose on the human social world.

### **Neganthropocene and postdigital art system**

Based on Niklas Luhmann's systems theory, Francis Halsall<sup>8</sup> claims that arts compose a complex, open and dynamic system, with its own isomorphisms and intercommunicating operations with other systems. Therefore, arts can be understood as part of our current medianature system, especially when emphasizing and resulting from relations between ecology and technology. Orders and structures emerge from the connections between the broad physical and cultural environment. In this process, culture is supposed to present comparatively less entropy than nature because it can make things through negative entropy<sup>9</sup>. For this comparison, we must emphasize how entropy was initially defined in thermodynamics: the tendency for all matter and energy in the universe to evolve towards a state of inert uniformity – where differences lose their power to make more difference and reproduce themselves anew.

Following this perspective, there is a prevailing negative entropic vector regarding art and cultural information, which means the reduction of data disorder for the benefit of structure. Such a process needs matter and energy for its conservation. On the other hand, there is a prevailing positive entropic vector concerning the matter in the long term – the degradation of its order and structure towards equilibrium states, implying the suppression of information and even life-cycle reproduction<sup>10</sup>. As Vilém Flusser<sup>11</sup> has written, “[...] information is the mirror image of entropy, the reverse of the tendency of all objects (the objective world as a whole) to decay into more and more probable situations and finally into a formless, extremely probable situation”.

Therefore, we can formulate a question around entropy: how far can we disturb natural materials' structures and exhaust world energy resources, whereas we are driven (by concurrent biological, psychic or economic impulses) to build up an increasingly complex and derivative nature? Following Bernard Stiegler<sup>12</sup>,

Technics is an accentuation of negentropy, since it brings increased differentiation. But it is equally true that technics is an acceleration of entropy, not just because it is a process of combustion and of the dissipation of energy, but because industrial standardization seems to be leading the contemporary Anthropocene to the possibility of the destruction of life qua the burgeoning and proliferation of difference – a destruction of biodiversity, cultural diversity and the singularity of both psychic individuations and collective individuations.

For Stiegler, anthropocentric processes of negative entropy must be appropriately considered so that we avoid the end of the habitable world under the impulse of the destructive effects of the Anthropocene, also understood as a capitalist Anthropocene. Therefore, Stiegler proposes a careful epoch of the Neganthropocene, in which a new economic system would require “[...] a shift from anthropology to neganthropology”<sup>13</sup>, in order for us to pursue value accumulation “[...] with a view to neganthropic investments”.

We may now think about the displacing effects the Neganthropocene could bring to the post-digital art system, regarding its connection with political, economic, and even natural systems. What would be the consequences of this shifting environmental and perceptual problem? Assuming we are increasingly dealing with circumstantial but disseminated repairs that generate an afterlife of images and ideas that reverberate despite devices' collapses and instabilities, could we conceive a balance between negative and positive entropy through artistic approaches capable of critically connecting the complex territories of information, biosphere and the all-encompassing ecosphere?

Entropy has always affected traditional art media, although the decaying effects would usually be perceived after a long term, of decades or centuries. In its turn, technological art media has an inherent changeability over a much shorter time, of years or even months. In this sense, Hanna Hölling states that the former might be defined as “slow art.” In contrast, the latter might be described as “fast art,” whose dynamics imply variants and versions responsive to the rapid obsolescence and transitions of technical artifacts<sup>14</sup>.

Different approaches have been chosen regarding arts involvement with transient technological media generations and their respective critical interpretation. Stephen Wilson<sup>15</sup> suggests three interweaving historical trends. Firstly, modernist assimilations and analogies are peculiarly more indifferent to comparisons between traditional and advanced devices, based on hitherto still prevalent convictions about the complete autonomy of the arts. We may also observe culturally contextualized analysis, built around the appropriation and deconstruction of technology operations, biases and their enframing discourses. Finally, there are constructive and speculative explorations when art projects engage with near or far-future technological unfoldings.

Post-digital art traces new paths in which archeological and speculative explorations around media and its aesthetics may be adopted for tactical purposes of resistance against accelerated and destructive entropy. Therefore, objects and concepts become makeshift tools for sustaining heterotopias and anachronistic migrations between the natural, psychic, and social systems. Following, we comment on a few representative examples.

Mexican-Canadian artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer<sup>16</sup> pursues possible integrative relationships among various systems in his artworks, mainly involving the environment, architecture, sculpture, and human communication. One of his latest projects is *Speaking Willow* (2020), a sound installation consisting of one aluminum sculpture in the shape of a weeping willow tree. Data cables run through trunks and branches and emerge from their ends, hanging like willow leaves swaying in the wind. Covered with live vine and other climbing species, the sculpture has motion-activated speakers,

through which it murmurs sound files with poems, song snippets and sayings in hundreds of different languages. In this way, Lozano-Hemmer explores the willow tree's symbolic associations involving suffering, mourning and the hope for healing and belonging.



**Fig. 1.** Speaking Willow, 2020, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer. Presented at Planet Word, Washington D.C. Commissioned by Ann and Tom Friedman in partnership with Public Art Fund, NY. Photo: Les Talusan, courtesy of Planet Word.

The *Speaking Willow* also refers to material and immaterial affordances and constraints of public and global information and communication, supported by animate and inanimate actant networks, with their various entropic and negentropic levels and particular speeds. Other

works by Lozano-Hemmer have similar features. In *Call on Water* (2016) and *Cloud Display* (2019), semiotic contextuality and instability may be compared to weather conditions or climate change, with words forming and dissipating into water vapor. In *Weather Vanes* (2019), the blowing resulting from the audience's speech and breathing makes anemometers spin like gusts of winds. In its turn, *Linear Atmosphonia* (2019) is a complex and immersive soundscape installation, a tunnel featuring three thousand channels playing audio recordings of wind, water, fire, hundreds of insects and birds, bells, bombs, and other acoustic events. In *Babbage Nanopamphlets* (2015), the public inhales excerpts of a scientific treatise by English polymath Charles Babbage, printed on nanoscopic leaflets of gold released into the exhibition room's ventilation system.

Information and materiality are directly interwoven in the works of German artist and researcher Irene Posch, many of them developed along with Turkish artist and designer Ebru Kurbak<sup>7</sup>. Together they explore the fields of traditional craft and technological art media. In the *Embroidered Computer* (2018), the duo proposes building an 8-bit machine based on metal threads, magnetic, glass and metal beads. These elements function as relays, or signal switches, like those used before the obfuscation of computing black boxes after the invention of tiny semiconductor circuits and microchips. Users can interact with the piece, programming the textile to run computing tasks. In *Knitted Radio* (2014), the artists produce an FM transmitter by inserting conductive threads among the weft points of a wool blouse. The device is intended to facilitate communication in surveillance and political oppression contexts. His source of inspiration was the wave of protests in Turkey in 2013, a mobilization against the demolition of Taksim Gezi Park in Istanbul, which gained a crowd of supporters in the face of fierce police repression.

Social activism can also be articulated with environmental activism. In *HARVEST* (2017), New Zealander artist Julian Oliver<sup>8</sup> assembles a system in which windmills generate electricity to power a computer intended for mining cryptocurrencies. With the processing service provided for the maintenance and public verification of the ledger of encrypted transactions

(the blockchain), Oliver obtains financial rewards for funding non-governmental organizations engaged in climate change research and policies for its mitigation. This project reminds us of the medianature concept proposed by Jussi Parikka<sup>19</sup>, relating data processing and ecology.

Relations between technology and biology are a common subject for media arts practices and aesthetics, as we may observe in the work of the Austrian and French artists Christa Sommerer & Laurent Mignonneau<sup>20</sup>. Years before we began discussions on the postdigital turn, Sommerer & Mignonneau created the installation *Interactive Plant Growing* (1992). The piece is a medianature interface involving live plants and virtual doubles visualized as image projections. Electronic transducers capture different voltages resulting from the audience touching the actual plants. The signals are then processed by mathematical rules based on biological evolution and development principles, affecting the virtual plants' growth in real time.

The artists' projects also explored relations among insects, their algorithmic doubles, humans, and the environment. For example, artificial ants produce interactive drawings in *ANTopolis* (2020-21) and *Homo Insectus* (2020). Artificial flies swarm, involving the public in an augmented reality installation in *Flies in the Sky*, 2017, or invading building façades in *Fly High Time Flies*, 2016, or *People on the Fly*, 2016. In addition, there are interactive animations, writing, and scribbling with non-specific virtual creatures in *Between the Lines* (2014) and *Life Writer* (2006).

Finally, we must mention the self-referential aspects of media archeology regarding technological devices in their material, operational and temporal qualities. One of the most known media archeologists is the Californian artist and researcher Paul DeMarinis<sup>21</sup>. In *The Messenger* (1998-2005), he invokes an alternative reading of the official history of electrical telegraphy and telematics, recovering forgotten origins, like the Catalan scientist Francesc Salvà's early proposals. The installation comprises three unusual systems for reading email words. First, a row of twenty-six metal wash basins turned into loudspeakers cast phonemes through reverberating voices. Next, twenty-six dancing skeletons shake themselves, dressed in ponchos stamped from A to Z. In another set, we find letter

shaped electrodes dipped into twenty-six jars with an electrolyte solution. The metal letters glow and fade, generating bubbles in the liquid as they receive the electric signals corresponding to the transmitted texts.

In its turn, the installation *The Edison Effect* (1989-1996) is a kind of imaginary media. In this project, DeMarinis juxtaposes mechanical and electronic acoustic systems. Vinyl or shellac discs, wax and clay cylinders, holographic discs, reels and dinner plates printed with soundtracks have their grooves and spectrograms scanned by laser beams, typically used in compact discs optical reading. The work combines assorted sounds such as military marches, classical and pop music, car crashes, and xylophone scales.

In Brazil, Sao Paulo-based artist Lucas Bambozzi<sup>22</sup> deals with communication ephemerality and planned obsolescence in many of his projects, such as *Short Circuit: Last Whisper* (2014), *Read Thing* (2014), or *From the Invisible Roof* (2013). *Das Coisas Quebradas* (Of Broken Things, 2012) is an autonomous and interactive contraption installation. The gears of a shredder machine for discarded cell phones accelerate as the flow of electromagnetic transmissions in the surrounding space increases. As the work suggests, the more intense the use of mobile media devices becomes, the faster the cycles of obsolescence will be. The artist presents the audience with a vicious cycle. The dissemination of wireless devices supports a growing telaesthesia. At the same time, this expansion demands the accelerated expansion of teletransmission infrastructures, which generates the increasing replacement and disposal of electronic products. This side effect raises questions: is a cell phone model more prone to entropic disintegration than the text messaging it sustains? Is the interaction between objects in science fiction now taking place as the internet of broken things, as Bambozzi proposes?

### **Final considerations**

Technological art media points to a cultural and environmental mutuality. Along with their informative aesthetics, they bring about the occasion to reflect on the material and informational risks of hyper-industrialization. Some art projects commented on above warn us that its transience owes to

physical nature contingencies and technical circumstances. Entropy has always affected traditional art media, although their decaying effects would usually be perceived after a long term, in decades or centuries. On the other hand, technological art media has an inherent changeability over a much shorter time, of years or even weeks.

Despite this changeability, network and algorithmic machines were developed to conserve information. At the same time, they are part of a fossil-fuel economy that affects distant time and space, without touching them, due to the widespread and long-running climate change consequences. In this scenario, artworks turn out as playable objects and archives. Exploring them, artists usually speculate on new realities each time their works are shown and experienced by the public. Nevertheless, any artwork presents itself in or through a physical phenomenon. It persists only in a perishable condition, even when its materiality corresponds to its unique existence, especially when considering its artisanal making. Much more of this happens when its materiality is assumed as a transitional means of documentation and communication that can be updated or replaced, from conceptual art to contemporary media arts.

With our medianatures, curating and museological activities also have to counteract the entropy that threatens to disfigure what is selected as art. This approach requires special attention to the chaining of successive generations of mediation and remediation devices. This process started with the use of artwork photographs following the theoretical and critical proposals of Aby Warburg or André Malraux. Now, it is unfolding in the imagery obtained from scanning procedures and artificial intelligence. Regarding this kind of digital memory and production, the strategies of registration, documentation, circulation, and situated review become extremely important, as proposed by Hanna Hölling<sup>23</sup>.

Common and uncommon sense unite for a kind of informational aesthetic paradox, affecting negentropy as a communicational foundation, according to Flusser<sup>24</sup>. The wide distribution, made possible by digital technologies, tends to undo the boundaries of the art system, to the point of almost nullifying the differentiation that sustains its systemic ordering.

Mediated by ubiquitous informational devices, life experience itself currently provides objects for aesthetic appreciation in an untimely and atopic setting. Although inclusive, telematic common sense does not result in entirely consensual meanings. Instead, the unusual becomes the binding element of attention. Through the cracks of informational disruption of the system, manifestations of dissent escape, threatening to scramble the sharing of codes of recognition of art. However, these manifestations simultaneously singularize certain spatialities and temporalities of drift that circumscribe the events to which creative values are attributed. Although the art system depends on institutional frameworks already given, other genealogies always emerge from their transient aspects.

Informational technoculture pushes us further and further into the vastness of data and the whirlwind of instantaneous transmission and processing rhythms. In this coded maze, several layers of algorithmic operations embrace sensory, cognitive, and behavioral aspects. Artists like the ones we commented on above have chosen a path of critical exploration, combining deconstructive and constructive biases, encompassing languages and materialities. Their works are transdisciplinary, archaeological, and speculative. They trigger an uncomfortable alert: against the inconsequential exteriorization of humanity, the Neganthropocene may be the only feasible and coherent way to postpone the end of the world.

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### Endnotes

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# Data Migration through the Bodies, Rocks, and Optical Fibers in Ayoung Kim's Speculative Fiction

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper discusses Korean artist Ayoung Kim's speculative fiction that intersects with data migration and refugee migration, complicating the relation between natural, human, and virtual borders in the age of planetary computation. Through the journey of the protagonist Petra Genetrix takes their through fictional and imaginary spaces and physical and virtual borders in her single channel video *Porosity Valley, Portable Holes* (2017), Ayoung's work engages us with as yet unexplored sociopolitical, ethical, and environmental dimension of data migration through the bodies, rocks, and optical fibers. Her work brings the phenomenon of data migration into our perception, by giving a data a tangible form and linking it with the sensory and affective textures of media infrastructure. Going further, Ayoung's *Porosity Valley 2: Tricksters' Plot* (2019)—revolving around the micro/macro histories and local and global socio-political issues—interrogates the ways in which Yemeni refugees in South Korea are treated and represented as a threat of virus or malware, thereby shedding light on the biopolitical control over both refugee migration and data migration.

## **KEYWORDS**

Speculative Fiction; Abstract Body; Data Migration; Bit Rot; Borders

Our perception of the entity of data and its constant flow often remains unknown and imaginary, while our bodies and environments are entangled with their surrounding infrastructures, networks, and data flows. Data is often inaudible and invisible since it is a corollary of the velocity and quantity of data processing beyond the capacity of human perception and cognition. Also, the seemingly transparent media infrastructure is often subject to control by government agencies and major media firms. Then, how could we even make it possible our deep engagement with such unfathomable entity of data and its migration? As data migration has become part of the social, cultural, and technological conditions of our time, how do artists explore a speculative-sensible experience of our world and invoke cultural imagination, otherwise unacknowledged by or absent from our critical understanding? In this respect, Korean artist Ayoung Kim's speculative fiction, apparent in her video installations, sound installations, films, and performances and texts bring the phenomenon of data migration into our perception, by giving a data a tangible form and linking it with the sensory and affective textures of media infrastructure. Furthermore, through the journey of the protagonist Petra Genetrix, Kim's work intersects with the migration of data and of refugees, complicating the relation between natural, human, and virtual borders in the age of planetary computation.



**Fig. 1.** Ayoung Kim, *Porosity Valley, Portable Holes* (2017). Single Channel Video, Approx. 21 min. Video still. Courtesy the Artist.

In Ayoung Kim’s single-channel video *Porosity Valley, Portable Holes* (2017) Petra Genetrix’s journey takes them through fictional and imaginary spaces and physical and virtual borders. Petra Genetrix is a virtual entity that can be variously defined as “unidentifiable blocks of mineral, shards of data, or a life form or intelligence from a world unknown to us.”<sup>1</sup> Then, Petra Genetrix became a pseudo-mythical being, as people are awed by their abstract body composed of mineral living in a gigantic and bizarre-looking rock crystal in Porosity Valley and believe that Petra Genetrix has a power to purify their thoughts. However, such mythical power couldn’t make any exception when they confronted practical problems in the migration process into another rocky platform. Like any new immigrant, Petra Genetrix is subject to an interview and 40 days of quarantine to prove that they are not carrying any viruses that may cause a danger in the new platform. Hence, Petra is subject to regal protocols and surveillance mechanisms of border control and the details of Petra’s journey are saved in the “Immigration Data Center (IDC).”<sup>2</sup>



**Fig. 2.** Ayoung Kim, *Porosity Valley, Portable Holes* (2017). Single Channel Video, Approx. 21 min. Video still. Courtesy the Artist.

Taking speculative fiction as the methodology and art practice, Ayoung explores migration as multi-dimensional conception through the lens of Petra Genetrix's journey. As she states, the formation of her speculative fiction became possible under the influence from Reza Negarestani's work, especially, *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials*, and from Octavia Butler's Afrofuturism. Ayoung remarked that Negarestani's *Cyclonopedia*, a complex of "speculative fiction, theory fiction and horror fiction," was "like an invitation to a secret, chilly, forbidden territory, [which] was at the same time a criticism of the petropolitics of today." She added that Butler's works "filled with stories about exile, diaspora, transport and transfer, and migrants and travelers who reached unexpected places," inspired her work on "multifaceted aspects of migration," that straddle physical migration and digital migration.<sup>3</sup>

The migration traversing such drastically different material strata as rock and data is inextricably contingent to Petra's virtual being as "half mineral composition and half data bits" and their abstract body. The evolution of Petra Genetrix is associated with Mithraism, an Indo-Iranian mystery cult dedicated to the worship of Mithras. The cult spread from ancient Persia into the Roman Empire between the first and fourth centuries before the ascendancy of Christianity. Intrigued by Mithra's status as a cultural and religious icon that successfully migrated from one powerful empire to another—from Persia to Rome, Ayoung's adoption of Mithra as the god of migration, settlement, and hybridization, therefore, has substantial meaning, while Petra is developed into Ayoung's own hyperbolic mythology. Also, Mithra as "mother rock" or "God-bearing rocks," as visualized in the iconic image of Mithra emerging from a rock became an important reference for Ayoung's conception of Petra Genetrix. Then, Petra's abstracted body, like Mithra's, "embodies ambiguous gender, an ambiguity which amplifies their transcendental profundity."<sup>4</sup> That is, Like the bodies of most the Middle Eastern deities, they "transcends the established boundaries of gender as a divine being."<sup>5</sup>



**Fig. 3.** Ayoung Kim, *In Search of Petra Genetrix* (2020). A Live Voice-Transforming Lecture Performance, 30 min. Courtesy of the artist.

The migration of Petra Genetrix as “genderless, formless, and fluid nonsexual being,” is supported by Legacy Russell’s discussion of “digital diaspora” in *Glitch Feminism*. Relying on Edouard Glissant’s definition of diaspora as “the passage from unity to multiplicity... when one consents not to be a single being and attempts to be many beings at the same time,” Russell underscores that “Glitch feminism reapplies Glissant’s ‘consent not to be a single being,’ making an appeal toward the cosmic range wherein a personal and collective dispersion toward vastness becomes a consensual abstraction.”<sup>6</sup> That is, by elaborating our being as “continuous range of multitudinous selves” in post-digital age, Russell asserts that:

This digital diaspora, therefore, is an important component of glitch, as it means that bodies in this era of visual culture have no single destination but rather take on a distributed nature, fluidly occupying many beings, many places, all at once.”<sup>7</sup>

In this context, the notion of abstract body in Russell's glitch feminism is certainly indebted to Donna Haraway. Haraway takes the idea of the cyborg to explore a series of issues around the way gender, race, and class are framed in traditional "Western" science and politics and takes Cyborg as a rhetorical strategy and a political method. In this respect, her seminal piece, "*A Cyborg Manifesto*" (1985) calls for a new feminism that takes into account the changes that technology brings to our bodies, that rejects and transcends gender binaries, envisioning pluralism and indefiniteness with regards to bodies and gender.<sup>8</sup> Given that, Russell states, "[n]oun and verb alike, we use the body to give form to abstraction, to identify an amalgamated whole." Then, although "[w]e all begin in abstraction," the gendered body is constructed by social, political, and cultural discourses. In this respect, in glitch feminism, glitch as "a vehicle of refusal, a strategy of nonperformance," derived from technical glitch as failure or error of digital technology, "aims to make abstract again that which has been forced into an uncomfortable and ill-defined material: the body."<sup>9</sup> Following this line of thought, the abstract body in Ayoung's work intersects with cyborg, "a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction' that prefigures a world transcending the oppressive binaries of modernity (male-female, culture-nature, subject-object, technology-biology, etc)."<sup>10</sup> It is in that Petra Genetrix's body—that some may take as illusional or ambiguous—facilitates actualization of speculative being traversing different material substrates across time and space and operates as a device to intersect the realities and the imagination in Ayoung's speculative fiction.

In this respect, Reza Negarestani points out that the "portable hole" in Ayoung's work operates as "a gate mechanism toward the possible many worlds" or "gates towards the world of infinite possibility."<sup>11</sup> In his essay "Fragments on Cosmological Politics of Many Worlds," Negarestani elaborates that porosities or holes in Ayoung's work are "exactly what might be called epistemological technologies or tools for moving freely from one world to another."<sup>12</sup> Here, it is noteworthy that Ayoung's conception of porosity evolved from her previous voice performance and installation titled *Zepheth, Whale*

*Oil from the Hanging Gardens to You, Shell* (2014-2015). The project was based on her research into the relationship between petroleum, the expansion of the world economy and geopolitical conflicts. Her project calls attention to less known histories of the migration of Korean workers in the Middle East's petroleum industry, discussing the intersections between the microhistory of the Middle East and the modern history of Korea. From her research on the geological formations of petroleum, Ayoung was intrigued by the fact that when petroleum is extracted, its volume is artificially replaced with water. From there, Ayoung began to imagine and visualize “voids, pores and holes occurring deep underground,” made through oil drilling for human usage.<sup>13</sup> To that end, such holes under Earth's surface led her to interrogate the relationship between “the Earth and the human race” mediated by the “miraculous substance” of petroleum.<sup>14</sup>



**Fig. 4.** Ayoung Kim (Music Composition: Heera Kim), *Zepheth, Whale Oil from the Hanging Gardens to You, Shell 3* (2015), 6-Channel Sound Installation, 39 min 29 sec. Wall Diagram, Digital Print, 5x4m, Voice Performance, 20min. Courtesy the Artist.

By taking these enigmatic holes as the “dispositional entities” that gain their identities through the “interactions with other objects and worlds,” Ayoung’s speculative fiction, passing through “a constant transit through holes and interstices,” connect “incommensurable worlds,” while dealing with “this word, here and now.”<sup>15</sup> That is, according Negarestani, we lack the “proper cognitive tools for moving from one world to another,” although we are already within the reach of the universe of infinite connection and crossing of many possible worlds. In this respect, Ayoung’s work showcases a “renewed mythos for a new logic of worlds that is necessary for the collective enterprise of migrating from this seemingly inevitable world to another.”<sup>16</sup> To realize it, the multifaceted meaning of “portable holes” is instrumental in unfolding and interweaving narratives of migration “traversing and crossing the ocean” and “territory of data migration.”<sup>17</sup> In this respect, Ayoung puts that:

The occasional emergence of the “portable holes”—both the speculative and physical—let the stories, migrant/mineral and data particles penetrate through to encounter the unexpected things beyond.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, Petra Genetrix’s journey entices the viewers to migration from one rocky platform to another, intersecting with digital migration through media storage and data centers. To realize it, Ayoung crosses the graphic rendering of the Porosity Valley based her research on Australia’s distinctive geology and few of action scenes shot at the INA Data Center in France, in which the densely lined-up data storages forms a valley of towers.

Here, I underscore that data is constantly instantiated, materialized, and actualized through its migration from one data storage to another, traveling through infrastructure, which are often buried underneath the buildings in the urban media environment and underseas and thus invisible to us, reinforcing our conception of data as immaterial and ephemeral entity. In this respect, Ayoung points out that data migration come under our perception when data is only signaled by flickering light of the hardware equipment as bit-sized information-data traveling through fiber-optic cables.

Moreover, by redressing the ontology of data and its materiality, her work sheds light on the phenomenon of data decay and corruption that inevitably accompanies data migration. Ayoung's interrogation of "Bit Rot," a natural decaying process of data, demonstrates that data—which need to be reformatted, backup, and restored—only exists through the endless "migration" into a new storage media. Here, the seemingly transparent media infrastructure by which data is produced, disseminated, and rearticulated, involving data migration, however, is often subject to control by the multiple protocols and regulations of major media firms. Hence, *Bit Rot* makes us think of the life cycle of the tech-device, media storage, and infrastructure controlled by tech giants—that cause the inaccessibility to media file and data due to the planned obsolescence of software and hardware periodically updated by such companies, causing substantial environmental cost. Furthermore, the energy consumption for its operation and maintenance—for example, "its cooling system counterbalances the heat being constantly emitted from the hardware," has environmental impact not negligible. Given that such not-knowing or ignorance of the environmental cost of data migration attenuates "our ethical ability to dwell on interconnections between the present and future, between media and the Earth," Ayoung's work invites the viewer to speculate on the entanglement of natural, human, or virtual borders and data migration's material connection to ecological decline.<sup>49</sup>

Then, Ayoung's speculative fiction revolves around the micro/macro histories and local and global socio-political issues. Her multi-phase projects are underpinned by her long-term research that engages the "real-world issue" of border and migration. *Porosity Valley 2: Tricksters' Plot* (2019) comments on the recent Yemeni refugee crisis in South Korea.

There was an arrival of Yemeni refugees in South Korea in 2018 through the city's visa-waiver program that originally aimed to attract more foreign tourists. Without informing themselves about the asylum seekers, many Koreans jumped to conclusions and protested the admission of refugees, and cited a number of recent high-profile crimes committed by Muslim refugees in Europe to justify their opposition to accepting Yemeni

asylum seekers. Islamophobia had already taken root in Korean society, spawning fear of Muslims refugees and Islamic terrorists alike. Under these circumstances, Ayoung's *Porosity Valley 2* interrogates the ways in which Yemeni refugees in South Korea are treated and represented as a threat of bad virus or malware detrimental to Korean society, where a distorted "pure blood mythology" is pervasive.



**Fig. 5.** Ayoung Kim, *Plot Diagram* (2019). Vinyl Cut Sheet, Size Variable. Graphic Design: Soojin Lee and Ayoung Kim; Portrait Photography: Donghee Shin; 3D Objects Modeling: Atelier Pierre Pierre.

Shedding light on the biopolitical control over both refugee migration and data migration, the documents and graphic images redesigned from the actual government's legal document presenting complex immigration processes into South Korea displayed along with three nearly life-sized figures wearing masks, each of whom resembles stratum, tide, and stone. Such images illuminate the foreignness of Middle Eastern residents in South Korea, who "have been forced to exist in a liminal space," due to widespread Islamophobia and xenophobia. The abstracted faces, reminiscent of multiple

figures—aliens, non-humans, ghosts, or gods—visualizes, as Ayoung remarks, “the complex positionality of the migrants or humanitarian status holders who were recently displaced by the ongoing Yemen War.”<sup>20</sup> In addition, the oral interview scene in the two-channel video stages the formality of the interview attempting to re-create for Petra Genetrix the pressure faced by the actual immigrants or aliens. That is, the interview interrogates the arbitrary conditions of Petra’s validity as uncontaminated mineral/data, escalating the stress of immigrants involved in legal processes corroborated by the technological protocols. Petra, having failed the migration review, is incarcerated in alien detention center called “Smart Grid,” or an alien detention center. Tracing this process, Ayoung undermines the notion of allegiance to the structure of authority and power implicit in the legal process that regulates belonging and security. In this way, *Porosity Valley 2* grounded in the factual information on the migration and its socio-political ramifications makes the viewer rethink life-threatening border crossing and refugee crisis—often relegated to the subliminal realm despite of its urgency.

Ayoung’s method that posits and interrogates such problems crossing the factual and the imaginary within much-expended time and space scale might be at risk of abstracting the critical reality issues, however, such abstraction envisions the “possible world” grounded in her “reflecting and distorting the conditions of the current world,” as Ayoung notes. As Ruha Benjamin asserts, fictions are “not falsehoods but refashionings through which analysts experiment with different scenarios, trajectories, and reversal” in that novel fictions “reimagine and rework all that is taken for granted about the current structure of the social world—alternatives to capitalism, racism, and patriarchy—are urgently needed.”<sup>21</sup> Hence, Ayoung’s work as a “refractive lens of perceiving reality,” conjures, as Negarestani states, “a hypothetical or speculative world in which the possibilities are already actualized, yet for some reason we cannot bridge from our world to the countless possibilities.”<sup>22</sup>

In conclusion, Ayoung’s work—outside the dominant Anglophone contexts and thus under-exposure of scholarly attention—evinces a new confluence of interdisciplinary practices evolved at the intersection of art, speculative fiction, mythology, media infrastructure studies, and critical

gender studies. By paying special attention to today's human as a "data vehicle" in everlasting flux, movement, and migration, Ayoung's speculative fiction gives a form to a new mode of susceptibility that we urgently need to confront the physical environmental effects of data migration and the socio-political impact of refugee migration.

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## Endnotes

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# A Forest. Artificial Intelligence at Stake

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## **ABSTRACT**

This essay questions the role of Artificial Intelligence in art images through the case of *A Forest* (2018), a two-part video and print exhibition project by Catalan artist Max de Esteban. Following Esteban's late and soaring career in art, the text describes *A Forest* as a critical and self-reflexive high-tech piece with a paradoxical romantic and biologic aesthetic. Using a double performative logic, Esteban integrates artificial intelligence in *A Forest* both as a subject and construction process. Through the aesthetic and conceptual effect of both video and prints on the viewer, he seeks to uncover AI technology's hidden economic, political, and social implications. Rather than the technology of AI, venture capital drives the process.

## **KEYWORDS**

Artificial Intelligence; Max de Esteban; Self-reflexivity; Neural Networks; Technology

What is an image in the Age of Artificial Intelligence? This paper will address a too-general and abstract question by reframing and “migrating” it to the disciplinary framework of Art History. Thus, the question will end up in terms that will inevitably echo Walter Benjamin’s:

*What is an image as a Work of Art in the Age of Artificial Intelligence?*

From the start, the formulation of the question recognizes the pervasive use in the contemporary culture of Artificial Intelligence, referred to as “the new electricity” by Andrew Ng, co-founder of Coursera and founder of DeepLearning.<sup>1</sup> If AI yields behind hundreds of our ordinary daily gestures, why would the production, circulation, and reception of images not be affected by this high-end technological process? From the simple enhancement of photographs to the effective use of algorithms by Generative Adversarial Nets in 2014,<sup>2</sup> AI revolutionized our ways of generating and using image data on an expanded high-tech scale. So the concern here is not to assess the creative possibilities of AI as a valid art-making agent (which it can be)<sup>3</sup> or to judge the aesthetic worth of its products (which can happen).<sup>4</sup>

Instead, this text will center on the broader cultural implications of Artificial Intelligence as a meaningful art tool. As a thought-provoking example, This text will discuss *A Forest* (2018-2019), a work by Catalan artist Max de Esteban in its two parts.<sup>5</sup> The first is a 23-minute video installation, and the second is a set of 21 digital images. This piece is relevant to our question because it has circulated in the context of mainstream art, that is, institutional art related to high-end museums, galleries, and publications.<sup>6</sup>

While his first photographic project developed between 2010 and 2012 imposed a contemporary turn to studio portraiture by confronting the images with philosophical writings,<sup>7</sup> since then, all his work has focused on the overarching presence of technology in contemporary culture. Before *Infrastructures*, the project to which *A Forest* belongs, Esteban developed *Propositions*,<sup>8</sup> a five-series project that evoked different ways in which photography has been transformed by its migration to the digital:

All the *Propositions* series have in common the effort to critically assess contemporaneity by exploring technology and photography’s ability to renew its symbolic potency.

Fighting for the renewal of photography's iconic force is to fight against the temporality of a capitalist economy that hyper-accelerated the info-sphere and, by doing so, eliminates our ability for critique.<sup>9</sup>

The first project of *Propositions, Only the Ephemeral*, dealt with the obsolescence of technical “bodies.” The second one, *The Collection*, with textual semantics as power. The third one, *Touch Me Not*, with the complex landscape of occult nano-circuits that support the informational “real”. The fourth one, *Heads Will Roll*, with the banality and overflow of image-bodies that eradicate the difference between subjects and objects, and the fifth one, *Binary Code*, with the relation between materiality and objects in an age of abstraction.



**Fig. 1.** Max de Esteban, *Propositions. Binary Code*. 6, 7 & 8 of a series of 24 images. 2015. Archival Pigment Prints on Cotton Rag Paper, 49” x 39”.

Following *Propositions*, Max de Esteban started a long-term research and art project centered on what he calls the “infrastructures” of contemporaneity.”<sup>10</sup> He defines *infrastructures* as “the key technologies, systems, and physical conditions that enable the circulation of meaning and power.”<sup>11</sup> In the first project of Infrastructures called *Twenty Red Lights* (2018),<sup>12</sup> whose title is inspired by the lyrics of *Far Away Eyes*, a song by the Rolling Stones.<sup>13</sup> Esteban analyzed financial capitalism as the dominant abstract logic of allocating

real-world economic resources. In the second project, *A Forest* (2018),<sup>14</sup> he reflects on the ideological and practical implications of the progressive use of Artificial Intelligence in different aspects of our daily social life.

In both projects, the works of art result from an extensive dialogue and collaboration of Esteban with technical experts, financial executives, and theoretical thinkers: Blai Thomas, Jade de Robles, Arnaud Bayle, Franco “Bifo” Berardi, and Michel Feher in *Twenty Red Lights*, and Arnaud Bayle, Isabelle Hupont, Blai Thomas, W. J. T. Mitchell, two AI Chief Technology executives, as well as an anonymous classmate of Esteban at Stanford in *A Forest*.

Both projects of Infrastructures have a similar purpose of unveiling, in a Heideggerian sense, that which lies hidden beneath technology and that is related to its economic and ideologic instrumental use. In *Twenty Red Lights*, he highlights the concrete strategies of the neoliberal economy that produce surplus abstract value (and social inequality as a negative counterpart): a “faceless power” that operates as “the prelude to power without accountability.”<sup>15</sup>



**Fig. 2.** Max de Esteban, Index of *Twenty Red Lights*, Madrid, La Fabrica, 2018.

Moreover, in *A Forest*, he calls the viewer's attention to the rhetoric of technical perfection and practical implications of artificial intelligence that repress the ideology of power, profit, and social control. In both projects, the use of text is fundamental. He writes the scripts for the video works from lengthy dialogues with his collaborators, in these cases, Feher, Berardi, and Mitchell, and several "investors" of large AI firms who preferred to be kept anonymous.<sup>16</sup>

Esteban's collaborative and transdisciplinary methodology is instructive in explaining his professional background, which is not that of a standard artist. After enrolling in simultaneous programs in Art and Engineering at a bachelor's level, he receives a master's degree from Stanford University and, afterward, a Ph.D. in Economics and Business from the University Ramon Llull in Barcelona. This academic background and the closeness of Esteban to the finance world, where he worked for almost three decades until 2010, constitute the core of his art projects. His professional art career, put on hold when he left for Stanford and retaken then, has since had a soaring success.

Described as "meta photography"<sup>17</sup>the work of Esteban is based on digital image reutilisation and manipulation rather than on their production from scratch. His process is rational and concrete, like that of an engineer. And knowledgeable and cunning, like that of an economist. Based on a flawless usage of digital image-making—digital photography, video, and artificial intelligence—, all his projects center on the interrogation of technology and economy in a broad sense:

Technology is the key to understanding photography and, more importantly, understanding the world of the 21st century. If Art is to address the symbolic universe of its time today, technology has to be at its center. Photography's stress is equivalent to the anxieties resulting from an abstract economy driven by digitalization. Intangible economy is today the most decisive, one that ultimately influences the conditions of our existence.<sup>18</sup>

Esteban produces luscious and elegant images with a distinct aesthetic

quality through a directed and resourceful use of digital imaging software. Nevertheless, his images are much more than a formal exercise of style or technical knowledge. Produced after verbal statements, they acquire a political and ideological edge through reflexive linguistic operations. Even though they still refer to worldly things, their primary semantic strategy is critical. They seek to uncover the same critical process that informed their construction as technological interfaces: imaginary surfaces created by the mechanical and nonsensical capacity of random digital montage.

Recursion is fundamental to his method. Esteban repeats the same formal procedures in each group of images within a set. His mechanical process reminds us of the syntactic and semantical implications of technical reproduction in the images (Walter Benjamin),<sup>19</sup> as the psychological connotations of repetition (Sigmund Freud).<sup>20</sup> While single images may appeal to us, viewing them as a whole allows us to perceive the critical sense of the project as a whole. Its content resides in the texture produced by dispersed and heterogeneous elements that technical media weave together and request to be read through surface scanning. We might then speak of fields of meaning by which the textual propositions are imagined—that is, transformed into images—through the overlay of shapes and colors. Like Robert Rauschenberg’s work made from image fragments, the images of Max de Esteban operate as a fabric of sensations. The conventional mimetic quality of photography collapses when used as transparent veils floating in Esteban’s dream-like virtual spaces.<sup>21</sup>

Language is also fundamental to the art project of Max de Esteban. Propositional use of language is the substratum of several of his pieces. Its essence is the productive potential of codes, whether textual or imaginary, embodied in the image by the technical media at use. The semantic collision of image and language is fundamental to the ideological edge of his pieces, which is subtly hidden under their appealing formal syntax. Sometimes attached to the photographs on the side (in his publications) or underneath them (in the exhibition prints), the phrases, aphorisms, or quotations selected by Esteban serve as conceptual markers that help us establish their meaning.

Whether affirming, negating or disrupting the apparent sense of the

images, the textual arguments constantly collide in some way with them. This indetermination of meaning is fundamental to the critical operation of the works because it forces the viewer to confront her perplexity. She might question several issues when looking at the prints of *Twenty Red Lights*: *What am I looking at? Why the red dots? Or the texts? What does a quote by Milton Friedman published in The New York Times Magazine have to do with a photograph of an American city, probably New York?*



**Fig. 3.** Max de Esteban, “Structural Subordination”, Bullet 11 of *Twenty Red Lights*, Madrid, La Fabrica, 2018.

By pairing the photo with Friedman’s text on shareholders’ value<sup>22</sup> and inserting a red dot in the image, Esteban signals to the viewer something hidden within it, the underlying economic mechanism described underneath in the quotation of Friedman’s text:

In a free-enterprise, private-property system, a corporate executive is an employee of the business owners. He has direct responsibility to his employers. That responsibility is

to conduct business by their desires, which generally will be to make as much money as possible while conforming to the basic rules of society.<sup>23</sup>

Esteban achieves a blunt portrait of Friedman’s neoliberal purported “free society” through a cold pairing of image and text. The irony of his project is best understood when linking it to the lyrics of *Far Away Eyes* song by the Rolling Stones that inspired the title of his series:

Listening to gospel music on the colored radio station,  
and the preacher said, “You know you always have the Lord  
by your side”,  
and I was so pleased to be informed of this that I ran  
twenty red lights in his honor.  
Thank you, Jesus, thank you, Lord.<sup>24</sup>

The above lyrics suggest a shared clue to the meaning of *Twenty Red Lights* and *A Forest*: the male figure of authority, the preacher in *Twenty Red Lights*, and the male voice of the video in *A Forest*, Esteban’s following work on artificial intelligence. It is a 23-minute sequence shot of a walk through a dense and dark forest. The camera wanders through the trees, its way seemingly lost while the fog grows denser. The point-of-view shot enforces the subjective effect of identifying the camera’s movement with the viewers, whose senses become abstracted — like the girl in *Far Away Eyes*— in the drifting walk in the woods. The viewer is not Benjamin’s *flâneur*,<sup>25</sup> haunted by the illuminated products of the store windows. Here, the viewer is absorbed in dense discourse, symbolized by the dark forest. The voice-over speech orients both her thoughts and her wandering walk. Like the preacher’s voice on the radio that makes the listener run twenty red lights, here, in *A Forest*, the omniscient narrator’s male voice absorbs our attention.

Like the preacher’s voice, this one is male and exerts authority over us. However, it is not a human voice, but one produced through AI. While most of the script was written by Esteban extracting and editing the transcript of his conversation with a renowned AI firm manager, he would not accept that Esteban recorded his voice. Instead, he suggested using the Beta version of an

artificial voice-generating program his company was testing. Esteban had to answer a questionnaire to set up the parameters for the voice’s pitch and tone: that of a white Anglo-Saxon male in his fifties, fluid, secure, and sometimes emotional. Thus, what we hear —what guides our perception— is a coded message of authority, that of a preacher, a priest, a judge, or a teacher, like in Alessandro Baricco’s description of the “old elites” of technology in his bestseller *The Game*.<sup>26</sup> Baricco starts his story by affirming that he will let us know “what has really happened”. That is precisely the arrogant and self-serving tone of the voice in *A Forest*: one of the headmasters of the tech companies that monopolize the industry of communication like Facebook, Apple, or Amazon, the most profitable business nowadays (a male white and well-educated man, with a soft and assuring voice).



**Fig. 4.** Max de Esteban, Video stills from *A Forest*, 23 minutes, 2019.

The computer-generated voice instructs us our way to happiness with its subtle mechanical pitch, like the preacher of *Far Away Eyes*: “AI is there to solve whatever needs to be solved.” However, times have changed. The fifty years that have elapsed from Friedman’s article have indeed taught us something: that the “social interest” that he opposed has to be put back in the

picture. Out of a mere rule of economic efficiency,<sup>27</sup> business rhetoric needs to represent the “public interest” and pay attention to areas of public concern like safety and pollution: an analogous message to that of the manifest destiny, but where the Nation’s well-being is exchanged for that of High Tech Human Life. As in the manifest destiny doctrine, well-being is painted in the image to repress the need for expansion.

The AI chief executive’s discourse purports to represent the “people’s interest” in the fashion of the “progressive neoliberalism” that Nancy Fraser has described:<sup>28</sup> that is, the unlikely alliance of the “most dynamic, high-end, “symbolic,” and financial interests of the US economy (Wall Street, Silicon Valley, and Hollywood with arguments of social interest inherited from the New Deal. This democratic “repackaging” of the discourse of profit is needed for the neoliberal project’s success. Only disguised as socially progressive can deeply regressive financial interests become a new hegemonic bloc.<sup>29</sup> Thus, masked as “social interest,” the rhetoric of AI technology is also political, as the voice says:

Vladimir Putin, he recently said that whoever became the leader in AI would become the ruler of the world. I think he is right. The recent achievements are mind-blowing, think about facial recognition. Up to very recently it was only available to top intelligence services, and now its fully integrated in our lives. Facial recognition technology is far more precise than human ability. We are just becoming to understand its immense power.<sup>30</sup>

That governments require intelligence services is something we are aware of. Nevertheless, as the voice informs us, the private counterpart of elite communication companies is already taking power over our off-line lives:

What we do online and off-line is blurring. Last year, Google announced that it had garnered with “off-line parties” that give them access to 70% of all credit and debit card purchases. This allows them to link the adds online with consumer behavior off-line. FB does something similar. Through contracts with data brokers FB know

about you off-line life, how much money you make, which restaurants you go to, how many credit cards you hold, and so on. And private homes will become a major source of information. Amazon Alexa, Microsoft Cortana, Google Assistant, Apple Siri. They all use speech recognition and upload all the recordings to the cloud. The more you use them, the better they work. Even if one tries to avoid the technology, its very difficult not to contribute to data accumulation.<sup>31</sup>

The issue is clear: the more data a neural network is fed, the better it works. Rather than the technology of AI, venture capital drives the process. Algorithms supersede human speed or calculus capacities when approving loans, selecting job candidates, predicting text, translating, making location-based suggestions, or making Art. While the process seems autonomous and rational, someone needs to feed the machine with specific data (weigh initialization) to set the parameters of decisions and objectives of neural network models.

We invest in IA technologies that have the potential to change the world in which we live in. Revolutionize whole business sectors. Technologies that create a different future. Electricity, antibiotics, nuclear energy, well, Ai is greater, much greater than anything before. It will change the nature of our world, of humanity. It's a New World we are inventing. And its happening fast, incredibly fast.<sup>32</sup>

As expressed by the voice, AI's development is a central value of the post-industrial high-tech economy. Rather than through the exchange of objects proper of capitalism, value is created through exchanging information in a post-capitalist neoliberal economy. But are we sure how AI produces information? Are deep neural networks not black boxes? Can thinking machines, like neural networks, supersede humans at all? As in *Twenty Red Lights*, the answers are there for the viewer to answer.

In the second part of *A Forest*, a series of 20 computer-generated images, De Esteban puts the machine's creative capacities through a peculiar test. He asks a GAN multi-layer neural network to imagine (that is, to produce

a new image out of learned information) a self-representation of itself. In short, he asks for a selfie of herself.



**Fig. 5.** Max de Esteban, *A Forest*, Print no. 18, 2019.

The results are surprising. Rather than a deformed human being (the information that the GAN had) or a diagram of circuits, the selfies of the machine resemble real physiological neural networks. The deep neural network chooses to portray itself as a biological organism. Esteban makes the exhibition prints attaching to each one a fragment of text from the highly cited paper of 1986 signed by Geoffrey Hinton, one of the “fathers” of Deep Learning.<sup>33</sup> Hinton’s article proposes the back-propagation algorithm that allows artificial neural networks to “learn”. That is achieved by creating useful new features through hidden processes (the adjustments of weight and bias of the inner layers of the neural network). Backpropagation as “learning” marks the start of autonomous intelligence brain-like machines that accomplish tasks like speed recognition and machine vision, such as other tasks praised by the voice in the video.

Like the video, the prints suggest a symbolic relation between biology and information. However, while the footage produces this semantic link kinesthetically, through the uncertain wandering of the camera, the print series does it graphically by stressing the differences between codes: the visual physiological code of the images against the abstract mathematical logic of the text.

Both the nervous system’s diversifying branches and the forest’s diverging paths stand as models of Western thought. For instance, the “tree structure” informs Aristotle’s categories, scientific classification, taxonomy, and bibliographic classifications. It worked well as a model with explanatory or predictive capacities until Deleuze and Guattari introduced their alternative “rhizome” theory.<sup>34</sup> Due to its representation of a non-hierarchical structure, rhizomatic structures serve as better metaphors for information flow in networked environments like the hyperlinked internet of deep neural networks.

Therein lies the paradox —and the critical operation— of *A Forest*. While it centers on high-tech artificial intelligence, its aesthetic reference in the work of Esteban is romantic aesthetics. So while it points to the future, it is regressive in its aesthetic appearance. Esteban’s forest is not a literal or scientific representation of a deep neural network but an aesthetic and

rhetorical one. It was created for the world of Art and is addressing it. It belongs to the realm of Aesthetics.

*This is not a pipe. This is not a forest.*

The artwork hides a pun. The filmed forest in Esteban's video is not natural, although it looks real. Formed by real trees, this artificial forest was transplanted from its natural ecosystem to its present location in California. It was commissioned by an elite business executive who wanted an artificial forest in his backyard and who let Esteban film it.

*I want a forest. I make a forest.  
You want my selfie. I make an image of your brain.  
(Or of my brain, because my intelligent processes emulate yours).*

Artificial intelligence started a long time ago, and artwork construction is part of it. It has used mechanical, electronic, and biological means. As the voice informs us, it has attained significant achievements. Epistemological obscurity —the dense forest fog—has yielded in the machines' technical operation. Indeed, has had an exponential increase with deep neural networks whose processes remain hidden from us. And that is because they work too fast and achieve too much.

Esteban is not making technological art; he is making art out of technology. Machines can undoubtedly create images that can function as artworks. Still, humans make art out of their subjective volition, according to a social environment and within the constraints of the artificial art world. Even though *A Forest* uses AI in its construction, its value as art derives from its reflexive and performative operation as aesthetic language. On the one hand, at the basic syntactical level of technique, *A Forest* demonstrates that AI can make images and that those images can serve as art. And on the other hand, at the semantical level of discourse, it uses art to place an important question: *What is at stake with Artificial Intelligence?*

When placed in the aesthetic realm of art, the above interrogation is rhetorical. In the imaginary and open space of art, the viewer will find herself in the free play of her senses, using her imagination and her capacity to think allegorically. She will grasp whatever she finds in the artwork that reflects herself and her world. *A Forest* uncovers her in her world of meaning: she may end up caught by the simulacra created by artificial intelligence or may be amazed by its technical achievements. Or maybe she will unconsciously use AI's help in her daily life, as most people do. Finally, AI will tag her in the world of data as a pinpoint in a data map. As an image of herself.

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# Ways of Seeing: Visitors Inside the Galleries from the Post-Photographic to the Musealized Museum

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper investigates the transformations brought to institutions with the popularization of cell phones in museums, making a comparative study about the visitors viewing habits before and after the photography was disseminated inside the galleries. Through the analyses of the visual content of museum spaces shared on Instagram, along with archival images before the digital era where people are depicted, it discusses some important changes in the construction of spectatorship. The large number of people sharing and tagging pictures taken inside museums is determining a new role of the audience not only in documenting but also in taxonomizing collections. This musealization of the museum through a cell phone is also discussed examining theories about attention concerning visual technologies. This new kind of individualization of vision is correlated with the formation of the modern viewer through a disciplinary process. Although the ubiquitous use of cell phones inside the galleries points to a new way of seeing, visitors also follow a cultural tradition on how to behave in the museum when depicting themselves. As such, repeating gestures found on social media are compared with pictures from other times, drawing attention to a socially constructed imaginary of spectatorship in museums that still prevails.

## **KEYWORDS**

Museum Spaces; Visitors; Photography; Collaborative Archives; Instagram

### Introduction

There are many ways of seeing and being in the museum. In *Old Masters* (1985), a novel by Thomas Bernhard (1931-1989), the main character goes every other day to Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum to look at a single painting. For more than thirty years, he has sat in front of Tintoretto's *Portrait of a White Bearded Man* (c.1570) on the same bench in the Bordone room that the watchman in charge makes sure is reserved for him. One can go to the museum to wait for hours to pass, like one of the characters in the movie *Museum Hours* (2012). The woman who travels to Vienna to see her sick cousin intersperses her trips to the hospital with visits also to the Kunsthistorisches Museum, where she ends up getting closer to one of the watchmen - for whom the hours spent there is nothing more than her working hours. Stories of people who arrange romantic meetings in museums are also common in fiction or even of unexpected love encounters.

Among the many possible reasons for visiting a museum, often far from the intention of seeing works of art, there is one in common: it is almost always an experience involving some social interaction. And this is perhaps one of the most striking changes brought about in recent years with the naturalization of photography in these spaces and the sharing of these images on networks, configuring another kind of sociability. Charlotte Klonk points out the social aspect as something particular to museums and what differs from other cultural experiences: "One rarely visits museums alone, and there has never been a rule in museums that says that one should only be silent in front of works of art."<sup>1</sup>

Although this idea of socialization was present in the origin of public institutions, where many times it wasn't even possible to visit except in groups and with a guide, images of people in these environments were later neglected as part of a material to be documented. While writing about the modernist art gallery space, Brian O'Doherty defined this phenomenon well when he said that "while eyes and minds are welcome, space-occupying bodies are not—or are tolerated only as kinesthetic mannequins for further study"<sup>2</sup>

There may not be a set rule about remaining silent in front of an artwork, but, just like this one, there is a series of rituals that we know very well how to reproduce: a certain position of the crossed arms close to the body, a movement of the head tilted to the side showing interest; the hand pointing to some painting denoting knowledge or authority. These are not rules that we read anywhere, but they seem to have been incorporated into the corporeal memory of visitors that cross generations.

In this paper, I discuss some recent transformations in the visitor's experience in the museum through its photographic representation. Analyzing the visual content shared on Instagram and archival images before the digital era in which visitors are depicted, it discusses the construction of spectatorship from the early times of museums to contemporary spaces. If the invention of photography in the 19th century caused a considerable transformation in art history in the era of the "post-photographic museums," influencing both the formation of new collections and the specialization of conservation departments, the spread of this new media has been encouraging an equally significant change.<sup>3</sup>

Most of these changes started to happen in recent years and are correlated with the launch of Instagram, in 2010. Since then, many museums began to review their restrictive policies on taking photos inside the galleries, encouraging visitors to photograph themselves and the artworks. The large number of people sharing photos in museums and marking them with hashtags is determining a new role of the audience in archiving collections. As Beryl Graham points out, "audiences are not only documenting but curating and taxonomizing."<sup>4</sup> These participatory archives are available on social networks without hierarchical distinction, and are often more diverse than museum archives.

### **Methodology**

The searches were made both in the institutions' archives and on Instagram, also including some photos taken by me during visits to museums. The frame in this social network focused on thematic hashtags, among them: #artwatchers\_united; #girlinmuseums; #museumvisitors; and other

personal profiles, such as Stefan Draschan, who created the hashtag #peoplematchingartworks.

This ongoing research in museums took part initially in collections with vast material available online, especially the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the MoMA. Several institutions were contacted to make on-site visits, but many preferred to send a pre-edited selection, as was the case of the Whitney Museum of American Art, which justified not having an organization in the archives for these topics that would allow in-person research; or the documenta Institut. Such situation points to another point: how the archival methodologies that arise in the networks end up being more efficient than the institutions' categorization systems –which rarely present a method to store images from the public.<sup>5</sup>

Using a qualitative analysis and a curatorial approach in search of narratives, I developed three thematic axes: "Ways of seeing and controlling: from self-surveillance to self-representation"; "Ways of seeing and copying: mimesis and repetition"; "Ways of not-seeing: the performative gaze." Each is discussed both from a certain repetition of gestures and patterns in different periods and possible breaks with a socially constructed imaginary about the museum.

### **Ways of seeing and controlling:**

#### **From self-surveillance to self-representation**

Two children look at Pablo Picasso's painting *Paul dressed as a Harlequin* (1924), while being stared at by a man who seems to be there to instruct them on how to behave. The two of them, in turn, involuntarily reproduce the position of the hands of the boy portrayed on the canvas. Nobody seems very comfortable in that situation, as if visiting the commemorative exhibition of Picasso's 75th birthday at MoMA was almost a sacrifice or social duty to be fulfilled.

The described photo could be a good illustration of the book *The Birth of the Museum* (1995), in which Tony Bennet classifies museums as "civilizing agents" of the emerging working classes, as well as women and children, by promoting self-surveillance as a first way to integrate into the modes of a new

civilized urban life. It is a rather didactic representation of what the author classifies as the "exhibitionist complex," an expression used in dialogue with Michel Foucault's concept of the "prison archipelago," defined as "a movement which simultaneously helped to form a new public and inscribe it in new relations of sight and vision."<sup>6</sup>



**Fig 1.** Unidentified visitors at the exhibition "Picasso: 75th Anniversary", 1957. The Museum of Modern Art, New York/online collection.

While in the emerging prison system one was monitored at all levels by a superior eye, in museums the intention was that disciplinarization be internalized until it was reproduced naturally. In these two "institutions of confinement" created at almost the same time, reprehension works in a complementary way: if the self-surveillance of the former is not sufficient, the offenders of civility are directed to the spectacle of punishment of the

latter. Or, in his words: “Where instruction and rhetoric failed punishment began.”<sup>7</sup>

To discipline the gaze and restrain the other senses, one had to be attentive – which did not happen spontaneously. In *Museum Bodies - The Politics and Practices of Visiting and Viewing* (2012), Helen Rees Leahy presents several accounts by visitors of what was called “museum fatigue,” the result of measures to attract and hold the attention of a new audience that was being formed. Symptoms such as dizziness or even nausea appeared in these descriptions until the first half of the last century. One of these early studies, done by Benjamin Ives Gilman at the Boston Museum in 1918, even used a model in a photographic series staging the movements made by the body when following a normative practice of “good seeing”, as it was understood at the time.<sup>8</sup> Gilman also developed a portable apparatus called a skiascope, in which the visitor could isolate a particular work and diminish the interference of other external visual stimuli.

Behind ideas like these was the rise of a new culture of visibility since the early 19th century, which sought to isolate vision from the other senses, leaving the body as a secondary element – as Jonathan Crary discussed in *Suspensions of Perception* (2001). The title already announces an analysis that carries a contradiction in itself: the idea of “suspension” can be used both to define a state of full and immersive attention and an abrupt interruption of a focus that does not linger for long on anything. As will be demonstrated throughout the book, this is far from being unique to contemporary life: “Attention always contained within itself the conditions for its own disintegration; it was haunted by the possibility of its own excess – which we all know so well whenever we try to look at any one thing for too long.”<sup>9</sup>

The idea that neither state exists without the other, and that perception happens in the constant transition between attention and distraction, is adapted by Leahy when talking about the museum’s way of seeing as a combination of the *gaze* and the *glance*. The author argues that the dynamic shift between one state and the other – one of full attention and the other a distracted sideways looking – is what establishes the “choreography of bodies” in these spaces.<sup>10</sup>

It is precisely this alternation between the two states that is lacking in the photograph of Picasso's exhibition at MoMA, where the only way of seeing depicted is direct and artificial attention demanded by the indoctrinating gaze of the man. If the children's body posture follows a protocol of how to behave, their gaze contemplates the painting in a tense way, simulating attention that perhaps does not exist.

It is a very different scene from this other photo taken in 2020, where we also see a child and possibly her father looking at Vincent van Gogh's *The Starry Night* (1889), also at MoMA. Instead of a disciplining body position, the man bends down to view the work at the girl's eye level. Both seem to look intently at the painting but in an affectionate, embracing way.



**Fig. 2.** Visitors with "Starry Night" by Vincent van Gogh in the gallery "Innovators of the 19th Century"; Robert Gerhardt (Photographer), September 2020; The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

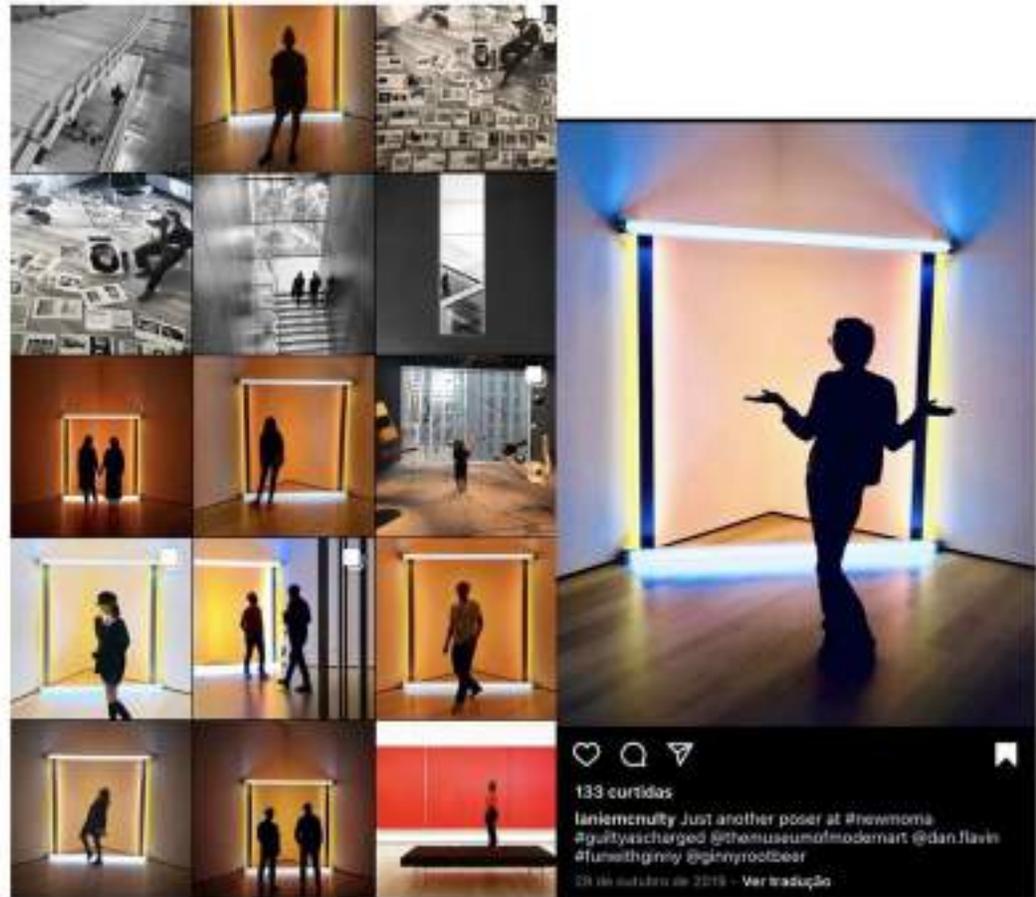
The contrast between these two photos indicates some important points about what has changed in the ways of seeing in the museum in the span of almost a century. And the fact that the analyzed space is the Museum

of Modern Art in New York brings other elements that are worth pointing out. As we know, MoMA became known for having institutionalized in the 1930s the modern art gallery format that O'Doherty would name the "white cube." He describes the modern museum as an oppressive and almost sacred place. In addition being intimidating, its architecture played an inextricable role in the art displayed there. Isolated from the outside world, the works seemed timeless and unquestionable. It was up to the spectator to contemplate them with reverence and detachment, almost as if their presence was bothersome. Or, as he ironically summarizes: " The Eye is the only inhabitant of the sanitized installation shot. The Spectator is not present."<sup>11</sup>

This absence is noticeable in much of the photographs in the collections of institutions, long documented without people. I found these two photographs in the MoMA Archives Image Database using the keyword 'visitors', which shows a small number of 238 results. Still, it is higher than other similar keywords, such as 'audience', with 20; 'spectator', with only three. Of course, this search does not correspond to the actual number of photos of visitors portrayed in the galleries, which can be found in other ways. But the fact that there is no clearer organization in the search system indicates how the spectator is not really present when trying to reconstruct the history of this institution by looking for him in this imaginary.

It is interesting to compare O'Doherty's quote with the images found on the hashtag #NewMoMA a few months after the opening of the museum's new building and the thematic reconfiguration of its permanent exhibitions in October 2019<sup>12</sup>. The project was celebrated for having "rethought what a museum of modern and contemporary art should be, righting the wrongs of its own history as well as much of 20th and early 21st-century museology," as Claire Bishop and Nikki Columbus summarize in "Free your Mind - A Speculative Review of the #NewMoMA"(2020). The review refers more specifically to the new format of the collection presentation, eliminating the chronological approach and reconsidering the Eurocentric view of global art that has prevailed for a long time. But if we look at this set of photos, one can speculate if this would not also be one of the reasons for greater integration of people in the space. Unlike in other times, the spectator is more present

than ever, placing himself in the image of the new museum in every possible way and pose.



**Fig. 3.** Images found in the hashtag #NewMoMA in search made in 2020, on Instagram.

Of course, in today's context, one cannot ignore other obvious consequences of this fruition that sees everything laterally and in the time of a Reels video. It is very easy to fall into the most banal experience of art as immediate consumption, turned into a background of selfies in search of cultural capital to feed a narcissistic culture. If the body is freer from disciplinary control and present in the space, it is the gaze of compassionate attention that today seems to be on hold and with its days numbered.

But this is not the focus of the argument here. One of the points I try to demonstrate in this comparison of images of people in the museum at different times is how the idea of full attention is not so different from the distracted *posers*; and that staging, too, was often part of a composed vision that imagined itself to be free from outside interference. After all, no one is capable of self-watching without some degree of self-representation – and today's 'posers' are not so different from the adepts of staged contemplation of other eras. Often, what seems like a distraction may be just another form of attention, less subordinated to the control of bodies and vision that marks both the history of museums and optical devices.

### **Ways of seeing and copying: mimesis and repetition**

The idea that posing for a photo is itself an image is widely debated in the history of photography. In *Camera Lucida* (1980), Roland Barthes sums up well the set of forces in the imagery behind a portrait, combining at the same time " the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art."<sup>13</sup> The result of these four "repertoires of images" is a process in which " I do not stop imitating myself, and because of this, each time I am (or let myself be) photographed, I invariably suffer from a sensation of inauthenticity."<sup>14</sup>

What happens when the game of imitating oneself for a portrait gains other layers of representation? Such is the case in which visitors who are photographed in a similar situation to a particular work, or people reconstructing the scene of a painting at home, as happened in the first months of the quarantine. Inspired by the Instagram account Tussen Kunst & Quarantaine (@tussenkunstenquarantaine), many museums adopted this challenge that soon went viral on Instagram.<sup>15</sup> Versions inspired by the context of the pandemic were the most popular. A retelling of Magritte's *The Lovers* (1928) shows a couple kissing with their faces covered with dishcloths; Rembrandt's *Anatomy Lesson* (1632) is recreated by a group of doctors in a hospital, while Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* was the champion of new versions, many with the meeting of the apostles adapted for the virtual platforms.<sup>16</sup>

But this "way of seeing and imitating" had started before with another popular hashtag, #PeopleMatchingArtworks. The project was created by Stefan Draschan (@stefandraschan), who produces much of the images, but also reposts many he receives from other visitors. If in #BetweenArtandQuarentine people staged the situations, here the idea is that visitors are caught accidentally matching a certain artwork – although it is not possible to know if the catch is also part of staging.

Again, this trend of 'seeing and copying' in museums didn't start as a hashtag on Instagram either. Throughout my research in collections, I observed how this game of resemblance between work and viewer was present in photos from other times. This 1988 image by Elliot Er Witt is one example. We do not know if he directed the scene and asked the girl to pose next to the four Egyptian sculptures at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, perhaps to give a sense of scale. But the fact that he created this situation is telling of how much there seems to be a natural propensity to imitate what we see in these spaces – a performative way of seeing that uses the body to produce another similar image.



**Fig. 4.** Elliot Er Witt, Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC, 1988. Found in the hashtag #museumvisitors, on Instagram.

Erwitt is another notorious museum photographer. Part of this material is gathered in the book *Museum Watching* (1999), with photos taken between the 1950s and 1990s – exactly the period before photography became popular in galleries. In his text, Erwitt comments on his interest in making “a direct connection with what's on show.”<sup>17</sup> Statues are highly conducive. Several photos capture these moments of reciprocity, of people repeating a gesture represented in the sculpture or posing as if they were one.

However, even if this way of seeing and copying was already present in images before the digital era, it is in the informational spaces of the networks, governed by the similarity game that feeds the artificial intelligence mechanisms, that they find a greater identification and start to circulate with more force.<sup>18</sup> It is not by chance that many of these photos, like the Erwitt one, I found in the same hashtag along with other recent ones of people matching works in museums.

But imitation in art also has a much older history and was widely debated in classical antiquity. The original definition of mimesis came first from Plato, for whom mimesis was understood as a banal imitation of what human beings grasp through the senses. The sculpture of a man, for example, would be an attempt to copy a man as he appears to the sculptor's eyes. Therefore, mimesis was seen almost as a copy of the copy, a false and imperfect version produced by the world of appearances mediated by the senses. In Aristotle's view, mimesis was a version that would better allow a knowledge/recognition of reality. For him, instead of a distorted copy, mimesis was a representation - and art, in this sense, would be an improved version of reality, providing new elements to better understand it.

There is much to be drawn on mimesis when analyzing the fusion between visitors and work in museums today. If we are guided by the Aristotelian reading, one can look with some optimism at the phenomenon, thinking that this is a way to better access and understand the work in question. But it is also possible to follow the Platonic view and interpret the gesture of imitation as yet another attempt to reproduce an original vocation

of art as something that repeats itself indefinitely, in the failed attempt to capture a world that has always been inaccessible.

If the act of seeing and copying seems inescapable, whether in museums or in the logic of networks, perhaps the way to break this cycle lies in other initiatives that escape the traditional model of the primacy of vision. This is what we analyze in the following section about other ways of (non)seeing that refuse the primacy of vision.

### **Ways of not-seeing: demusealizing the museum**

Maybe one of the most unusual ways of seeing in museum are the actions in which one is deliberately choosing to not *look at all*. This could be a performative strategy, as the experience conducted by the artist Bruno Moreschi at the Hermitage in St. Petersburg. In this experiment, as a way to confront the Russian museum's "strategies of gaze persuasion," he chooses to conduct blind tours over the course of four months.<sup>19</sup> Refusing to see the museum in person, Moreschi makes a photographic series with his eyes closed.

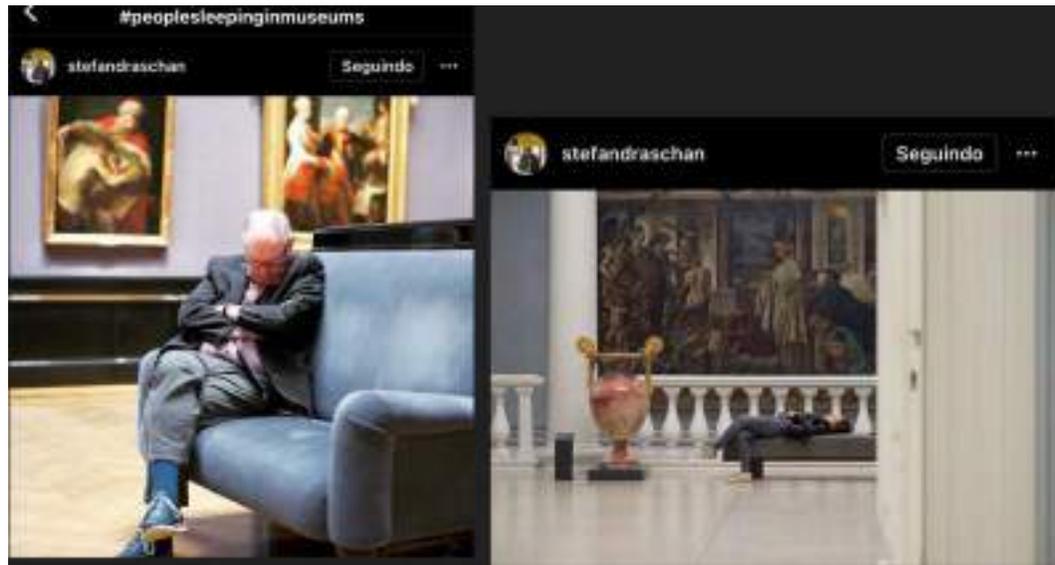
The visual essay is revealing in several senses. First, by the surprising composition of the images - unusual angles that capture details at first irrelevant, and yet essential. With the focus shifted away from the artworks, the ostentatiousness of the architectural elements, chosen with the intention of attracting the eye and increasing the visitor's power of attraction, is revealed more clearly. By outsourcing his vision to the camera lens, defining it as a visual orientation, he takes to the extreme an experience so common nowadays of having one's gaze remediated by the cell phone, to the point that this way of seeing is the first (and sometimes the only) contact with a given object. It is interesting to think about how a gesture that has become banal, and to which is attributed the fragmentation of attention, can open possibilities of a way of seeing that happens first with other bodily senses, leaving vision as the last step of the process.

How people are portrayed by him is also revealing. Since they don't notice they are being photographed, and the photographer doesn't see them either, it is a rare spontaneous register. After all, the representation of visitors

in museums is rarely documented outside of a representational ritual – from the well-behaved pose of the past to the self-representation of today's Instagram posers. In Moreschi's images, people are seen in absolutely banal situations. Quite different from the ones we find in the hashtag #HermitageMuseum, for instance. There are many portraits taken from the bottom up, with the visitor putting themselves in the scene with all the grandeur they see in the surrounding architecture. There is also an interesting fact: in many of these registers, most of them made on the main staircase of the Winter Palace, people simulate a pose of authority, placing themselves as the protagonists of that story.

And this is probably a key idea behind all these self-presentation trends in museums and the circulation of these images on social media. Although it is certainly difficult to classify these actions as artistic fruition experiences, the fact is that they somehow reveal an audience's digital agency to dismantle museum discourses, by *demusealizing* the museum itself. If these institutions are in the spotlight again in what is called the "third memory boom,"<sup>20</sup> characterized by more participative digital modes of circulation and connectivity very different from previous modes of memory representation, these movements should not be ignored at a moment when they are being questioned about their role in today's society and in the future.<sup>21</sup>

In parallel, museum visitors are also engaged in another “way of not seeing”, even when it happens involuntarily, as one can see in the images also organized by Stefan Draschan in the hashtag #Peoplesleepinginmuseum. Again, we cannot attest to how spontaneous these pictures are, since sleeping in museums doesn't seem an ordinary situation. But what the very existence of this collection indicates, as well as the body position of some of the people portrayed, is that the *museum fatigue* is still an inescapable effect on the way of experiencing these spaces.



**Fig. 5.** Images found in the hashtag #peoplesleepinginmuseums, created by @stefandraschan, on Instagram

### **Conclusion**

In recent years, visitors' ways of seeing in museums are certainly freer from the disciplinary ties that have marked the history of these spaces. The permission to photograph also coincides with the period when many institutions started to emphasize the importance of social interaction. Renovation projects at the MoMa and Tate Modern, in London, both announced intending to expand meeting areas, took place at the same time as the use of cameras by visitors inside galleries becomes more accepted by most institutions.<sup>22</sup>

It's hard to say what started first – whether the socialization of networks influenced the socialization of museums; or being social spaces by nature, the adhesion to the network format was, therefore, more fluid and immediate. The fact is that the changes in recent years, including the 'social' nature of these platforms, present new challenges in how institutions use these formats often uncritically or lacking attention to some arising phenomena.

The case of the hashtags of people in the museum, in contrast to the difficulty of researching this material in the official collections, are a good example of how initiatives created by the public in networks can offer methodological paths for research. The way the public produces and organizes this material through a huge variety of keywords that spontaneously emerge and become collaborative projects could perfectly be adopted as a model to be used in museum archives.

Lastly, it is hard not to think about the changes in the way of seeing in museums two years after the beginning of an intermittent pandemic state that has been changing our perception of real and mediated environments. It's early to know about the impact of the re-introduction of body control mechanisms, such as sanitary restrictions. We can certainly speculate, however, that the refusal to look in the museum gains other meanings in a moment in which people return to occupy these spaces still with a fragmented and compromised perception of how the world is outside the screens.

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10. Leahy, 2012, 47.
11. O'Doherty, 1986, 42..
12. It is worth mentioning that I did this search in March 2020, when I saved these group of images. Months later, when I resumed the search, I saw that the same hashgag #NewMoMA was occupied by photos of mothers with children and newborns, making it difficult to find images of the museum.
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16. The mentioned pictures could be found here: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/CA8OjzmVCZ/>>; <<https://www.instagram.com/p/CCWqwSGA-ph/>>; <[https://www.instagram.com/p/B\\_xNF8Wgs\\_e/](https://www.instagram.com/p/B_xNF8Wgs_e/)>
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22. Besides MoMA, mentioned above, the new project of the Tate Modern, which opened in 2016, is also quite significant in this sense. As I wrote in an article at the time, the speech by then director Chris Dercon announced the intention that the turbine room uniting the two buildings would be used as "an environment conducive to encounter, a place for activities." Lavigne, Nathalia. Tate Modern, 15, plans expansion. Folha de São Paulo, Ilustríssima. 5/4/2015. Available at: <  
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# From No Place to No Image: Iconic Migration

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## **ABSTRACT**

Among many objects that have migrated through the history of visual perception, iconic image plays a unique role, namely of the universal model of vision. Listing canonical features of the icon as a concept — nonessential process character, making a path to an overflowing presence, not being made by human hands, "poor" visual characteristics — the author underlines the universal model of addressing which icon performs in any space, and before every "audience." Moving on to concrete histories of the iconic that include "wars of images" as part of real conflicts, the author notes a relative regression of completeness of iconic universality, detailing the icon painting technique with its simple initiate gestures of engraving, corresponding to the "yes-no" principle of information theory, maybe considered as a basement for new universalism. Its initiate gestures are as simple as lines of engraving that, in turn, correspond to the "yes-no" principle of information theory, though leading to different results. Finally, transiting to contemporary image variations based on algorithmic elaboration, the author provides two examples and concludes that algorithms allow the production of unlimited series of "objects" that are too universal for human perception. It poses the question of the possibility of universality to a level that affects the construction of "human" as such.

## **KEYWORDS**

Icon; Algorithm; Human; (In)Visible; Universal Addressing

Today, more than ever, circumstances of very different types – above all, political –, are pushing us away from using the concept of "universalism". More and more voices claim that the world is multi-polar, that there are no universal models, no universal values that would be shared by everyone, no universal rights that would protect everyone on this planet. However, as far as the visual experience is concerned, it is the idea of universality that was the basis of both the visual paradigm (the experience of seeing, as well as the fact of exhibiting the work of art, which also organized narratives of art history) and migration processes. Differences from culture to culture are obvious only against the background of something common, even if a commonality is only hypothetically implied, as a kind of ideal type.

For centuries, all components of the visual field were considered appealing to everyone without exception, and the process of vision itself, unrelated to the level of language proficiency, was seen as universal in its communicativeness. The work of art was seen to involve both its creator and its viewer into communication, each time forcing the latter to involuntary exclamation "ah!", by which, as the art theorist Thierry de Duve wrote, an authentic work of art is recognized.

Only in recent decades, voices of non-Western art are being raised. The global history of art, earlier written mostly by representatives of Western culture, crumbled into many different histories that now have to look for common ground among themselves, suspending not only the universal but also the general. At first glance, these processes leave nothing of the possibility of universalism, declaring all cultures and all types of arts incomparable with each other.

After all, Claude Levi-Strauss<sup>4</sup> summed up his ideas for UNESCO in the following way: all cultures are different, and no two are the same. With regard to art, one can go further and assert that each creator is unique, that even formal contemporaries in the same country with the approximately same set of sociopolitical and economic conditions are not comparable to each other, and only authors of various art histories risk to put them in one narrative on rather vague reasons. Such absolutization is possible, it is also possible that it is logically consistent and corresponds to the ideal of an artist.

However, it is important not to lose another obvious tendency and discover forms (components) that work in different contexts, by different artists, even in different eras. Of course, such components turn out to be quite specific in the sense that they often partly lose their object characteristics for the sake of functional ones: it is not so much something visible physically, directly to the eye, as something transgressing, passing through different artistic "hands", different types of media, different societies, different territories, epochs, layers of time. Examples of such components can be found in Roland Barthes' "*punctum*" theory applied to photography, specifically for artistic photography, or Aby Warburg's "*pathosformel*", which functioned in different types of media (drawings, bas-reliefs, oil paintings of course, and even literature, as by Warburg-inspired Erwin Panofsky). Warburg developed his own way of constructing the history of art, based on elusive *something* that arises again and again on/in the image, taking different forms, through periods of time, building an image from itself. For example, on Panel 47 of his famous Mnemosyne Atlas project, Warburg, juxtaposed images from Giotto and Donatello to Botticelli and Ghirlandaio, further widening and complicating the role of the nymph as a symbol. A bearer of pathos formulas or "dynamograms," it oscillates between creation and destruction. The analysis of numerous attempts to determine what *pathosformel* means in few written works of Warburg himself and members of his institute demonstrates the connection of this concept with hard-to-fix affectivity, perhaps with something extra-personal, but yet felt at the level of sensory perception. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that from this slippery and elusive pathosformel, a whole highly personalized history of art, the "personal" Atlas of Warburg, unfolds.

Something very similar happens with Roland Barthes's conceptual structure of *studium-punctum*. It is not difficult to explain what a *studium* of photography is, because all the content of the established ways to construct art history, the entire visual field of photography is actually collected here: by whom, when, and where photography was taken, who was photographed, in what circumstances, what it represents, what visual components that viewers see may mean or what they meant at the moment when photography was

made. It is much more difficult to describe why few photos *touch*, though in terms of *studium* they are no more remarkable than many others. In fact, hundreds of pages of Barthes's book *Camera lucida* are an explanation of what *punctum* is. And what is again characteristic, Barthes prefaces this explanation formulating a new science of photography on the basis of *his personal private impression*: as in the case of Warburg, we see here the unfolding of a personalized narrative from the extremely difficult and unfixable functionality of something that is only subtly felt. And what may be even more important, both *pathosformel* and *punctum* seem to be indifferent to the specific time periods in which they left their traces: a photograph made fifty years ago can enter our contemporaneity today, notwithstanding all differences between epochs.

Therefore, both examples can be considered as a manifestation of something common, related to the category of universalism at another level, overcoming only the substantive level physically present on canvas before our eyes. However, *pathosformel* and *punctum* are units, even if we do not see them directly, only their manifestations. One can go further and link the work of the universal with the work of interconnected and, to some extent, interchangeable units (not in the sense of structuralist systems of connected pairs of opposites). This would not be just a logical exercise. It is a necessary consequence of the influence of information technology which not only scattered usual connections but also dissociated many objects into components so that now they can be collected in any combinations, not necessarily human-friendly (artist Hito Steyerl conclusions<sup>2</sup> may seem exaggerations, but they enable to see problem of "right connection", and isn't it the beginning of universalism?).

While expressing the hypothesis that the remnants of universalism can still be found in technique by which the work of art is produced – in contrast to its substantive characteristics presented in the visual field – this article aims to consider an important – at least for the Christian tradition – model of vision that is the iconic, in order to indicate what type of subjectivity it implies and what modifications it undergoes while being

affected by another type of technique, namely the algorithmic, which tries to "universalize" us today.

**The iconic as a (universal) model of vision, the icon as a concept**

It is important to consider the icon as a concept for at least two reasons. Firstly, many visual researchers agree that the icon is not just the oldest model of vision within the framework of Christian culture, which legitimized the field of the visible in general and enabled humans to trust their eyes. A strange model that has built connections between what is visible and what cannot be seen. Secondly, it is a model built on universality. The completeness of its universalism reaches such an extent that even individual specialists, both theorists like Marie-Jose Mondzain, and theorizing historians like Hans Belting, both icon experts initially, went far into centuries in dating the emergence of the universal model of vision: Mondzain actually spoke about the technique used to create drawings in the Chauvet cave (30,000 years ago) as already an anthropo-producing technique<sup>3</sup> although pre-Christian, Belting<sup>4</sup> found the origins of media theory in a processed and aestheticized skull (7000 years ago). This looking back indicates, in my opinion, not so much fascination with archaic, as the need to find units that would be universal and effective in a long time duration.

At the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, the interest in objects that were not historically encompassed or, in principle, could not (or should not) be encompassed by the history of art, turned to the origins of figurative tradition. One of the reasons are the so-called disembodied images that came to the scene. Further, I am going to refer to several works devoted to the problem of the image.

It is essential to start with Mondzain's main work<sup>5</sup> because of its theoretical potential. Although it formally describes the oldest, the most fundamental historical moment — the disputes that ended at the Second Council of Nicaea (787) with the legitimization of a special type of image. It is believed that the possibilities for the existence of art in the European West were laid then. Mondzain herself believes that iconophilia and iconoclasm are two ways of relating to the visual. They can be traced back to the last decades,

to the transition between the 20th and 21st centuries. Like some others of approximately the same time period, this book presents icon not so much as a specific type of image preceding the secular pictorial one, but the icon as a model of vision, that is, the icon as a concept. Of course, many earlier works treat the icon similarly, and I will also say a few words about one of them further.

The following aspects are fundamental in what role the icon plays in the organization of the visible field and how it orients it:

a) the icon can show the invisible because its own content is being emptied. In order to solve the paradoxical task — to avoid accusations of idolatry, but to give legitimacy to the visually perceived image of the invisible — the Church Fathers formulated the doctrine of *kenosis*, according to which the visual components of the icon, its pictorial series, through the use of several special techniques, are "impoverished," go away to serve only as anagogic means, only conditions for meeting of the believer with the One to Whom prayer is addressed;

b) another aspect is inextricably linked with the previous one: the icon is not an object, since the movement (or "jump", or "event") is fundamental for it. In comparison with subsequent pictorial image built according to the laws of direct perspective, the icon seems strangely static. We can literally trace how images at the beginning of the Renaissance were not using perspective, how gradually they were departing from the iconographic principles of placing "third-party" plots from "terminals" (framing the central image by small square images with scenes from the earthly history of a particular saint in a special type of icons) moving figures into the main space of the image and in the same plan of the picture. That is, we directly see how an image was being restructured, reconstructed technically, as it went from iconographic to pictorial, and this process took decades. Before the invention of direct perspective for the construction of pictorial images by artists of the Italian Renaissance, iconography used what Pavel Florensky, a priest, mathematician, scientist of the first third of

the 20th century proposed to call "reverse perspective" (although historically it appeared earlier than "direct" one), to denote the movement set by the icon in contrast to the painting: icon does not take the viewer deep into space, but goes to him from the depths. The icon is inherent in this multidirectional movement, both inward and outward, because it is intended to organize a meeting place. Therefore, the process nature of the icon, its mobility and its "withdrawal" from the material visually perceived components also lead it away from being a "thing" and incurring terrible accusations described in the Old Testament;

c) the universality of addressing, connected precisely with the field of the visible: unlike the sacred text and the tradition of interpretation adjacent to it, the study and knowledge of which required literacy and appropriate education, the icon appealed to everyone, literate and illiterate, representatives of all traditions and strata;

d) the universality of the distribution of such a scale that allowed the image of this type to overcome any boundaries, from intro-spatial to geographical. Unlike other "objects" of the temple space, the icon performs its functions anywhere: it can be taken out of the temple space not only for exceptional cases of big church holidays or heavy military battles, but to be present in homes of believers (in Russia, rich parishioners built chapels and "brownies churches" with iconostases, and the less well-off placed icons in the "red corner" of the hut), and in a "pocket" format to be carried everywhere;

e) not made by human hand: if the icon were the creation of the artist, though inspired by some force, but with all the ensuing consequences that have been formed over time (manner and techniques, the "hand" of artist, his name, by which he signed his works, those who would like to be imprinted by these very hands of this particular artist, etc.), icon could not have rejected many serious accusations.

We see that a canonically defined icon is a complex processual model — therefore, more precisely, a concept. At the same time, this concept is formulated as universally valid, at least to a double degree: the icon appeals to everyone and appeals everywhere, and this formulation applies to the visual field.

### **Iconic *in situ***

A few examples of studies that are rather historical in nature or combine theoretical and historical components are enough to show the instability of universal characteristics (specially, d and c). Many of them are connected to the so-called "wars of images". Even if some researchers emphasize that these wars are waged by specific powers on specific territories, while the images themselves are certainly "quiet" in the ancient Byzantine sense of the word, the very facts of these wars hint that universalism tied to the field of the visible may have uncertain completeness of universality.

The last chapter of Hans Belting's fundamental work<sup>6</sup> containing a huge factual material from territories with traditional domination of Eastern Byzantine image type, but also enhanced with examples of icons from Western Catholic territories, tells about transition to another version of worship in Christianity, namely the Reformation. Not finding in Luther texts explicitly formulated prohibitions of icons (icons were considered optional, since they did not fallow directly one of the most important Luther's principles of *sola scriptura*), Belting tells not only about partial damage of icons by new Protestants, but also larger-scale destruction and removals of images from religious institutions during the spread of Protestantism.

Another difficult group of examples is related to colonialism, that is, civilization clashes in various territories. Serge Gruzinsky, a specialist in Mexican culture, describes how the conquistadors' troops led by Edmond Cortez, advancing through territories where the visual field was marked with signs of local culture, destroyed these signs completely and erected in their place Catholic ones that they brought with them<sup>7</sup>. The decision of the Turkish government to change the status of Hagia Sophia and declare it a functioning mosque in July 2020 entailed not only a change in the visual components of

the space of this building (its icons were covered by curtains), but also numerous protests of representatives of other confessions, for whom this building is also highly symbolic (it is significant that many authors of Russian emigration wrote about the fantastic experience that St. Sophia allowed them to receive; Serge Bulgakov even founded "Brotherhood of St. Sophia" in 1923).

And here we come to another group of examples that are no longer religious or colonial, but reveal the role of the iconic for governments that declare themselves secular, and these are examples related to revolutions as monstrously destructive in their consequences as the French Revolution of 1789 and the Revolution of 1917 in Russia. Both were accompanied by destruction of temple buildings and irreparable damage of sacred images for the sake of new visual order and its new visual patterns.

The enumeration of these examples does not aim to open up again the discussion about religious fundamentalism which often takes the position of denying the signs of this world, including its visual order, or problems of conquering the visual field by secular powers which seek to arrange as many mechanisms of controlling eyes as possible (the surveillance problem, which owes much to Michel Foucault, is an important issue which we have no possibility to expound here). These examples imply that universality of the complex, multi-level iconic model, when it comes into socioeconomic and political space, decreases, that is, it does not act in the visual field equally for everyone. This, in turn, means that the field of the visual is not universally transparent for everyone in any place of the globe. Further, different activities tend to structure their appropriate visual orders. More than, such spheres as ethics were taken out of the visual field by the most radical researchers decades ago (for example, Emmanuel Levinas actually wrote that we do not see an ethical action, therefore, face is not a visual phenomenon: it appeals to us on another level; these ideas make Levinas a representative of modern iconoclasm).

Then, suppose we are ready to agree that universalism does not characterize either the visual field nor the main model for orientation in it. In that case one may assume that universality is more operative at another level, for example, the level of technology. Strictly speaking, the destruction of one

icon does not destroy the principles that organize it and does not eliminate the possibility of tracing the path to which the icon indicates. And if we agree that the icon is not a completely universal model, then the description of the technique that we are going to offer further may also be non-universal. But this step seems necessary if there is a desire to understand better the current situation related to the spread of information technology and data analysis.

### **Icon painting technique**

It is important to consider what exactly the process of painting the icon is about and which techniques are involved in it, through the example of the Pavel Florensky works. Although he was a priest, on the one hand, not everything in his views corresponds to the accepted canon. On the other hand, the versatility of his activities makes him more interesting, especially for secular readers, making his works more universally accessible.

First of all, in this context, his understanding of icon painting techniques in the work "Iconostasis" is important<sup>8</sup>. Florensky places a collection of icons on the border of the visible and invisible.

Among the many important aspects that concern the icon, it is important to pay attention to engraving which Florensky considered as "antipode" of the icon. This is also important for the final part of this article related to algorithms. Florensky differently described pigments and surface marks in cases of an engraving and of an icon:

(in the engraving) "the printing ink serves only as a sign of distinguishing places on the surface, but has no color, whereas the strip (in oil painting) has.. if oil painting is a manifestation of sensuality, then engraving relies on reasonableness, constructing an image of an object from.. combinations of rational "yes" and "no"<sup>9</sup>.

That is, an engraving is a scheme of an image, and its "yes-no" principle is similar to the distinction 1-0, which is fundamental for information theory. Further, this scheme is of a technical type, like a kind of automatic drawing of lines.

In the icon, everything is different:

in the pigment condition, in the method of its application on the corresponding surface, in the mechanical and physical structure of surfaces themselves, in the chemical and physical nature of the substance binding pigments, in the composition and consistency of their solvents, as well as pigments themselves, in varnishes and other fixers of the painted work and in its other "material causes" is already expressed the metaphysics, the deep worldview, which the creative will of the icon painter seeks to express with this work, as a whole<sup>10</sup>

That is, material components of the icon (wood, pigments and various substances), unlike the abstract auxiliary lines of an engraving, are the *material* for subsequent *transformation*.

Florensky writes up this metaphysics in detail, unfolding it quite canonically (since a similar image interpretation was suggested, for example, by John of Damascus). It follows the Aristotelian tradition, which calls metaphysics literally what is *behind* or *after* physics, but stays connected with physical data. Thus cosmic views of Aristotle himself are embedded here:

the icon is painted on the light.. light, if it corresponds to the icon tradition, is golden, that is, it is light, not color..the normativity for the icon of the color of gold is clear: any other pigment would bring the icon closer to the ground and weaken the vision in it<sup>11</sup>.

But in a strange (though rather only at first glance) way, Florensky also notes that the first stage of painting an icon resembles an engraving, with all the differences in the resulting work:

this scratching of contours in wood is an engraving.. iconography begins with exactly the same engraving; first, the iconographer draws with charcoal or pencil the translation of the image, that is, the church-drawn contours, and then the painted is graphed with a graph, that is, it is engraved with a needle inserted into the end

of a small stick, but the word γράφω itself means "I cut", and γραφή is an engraving needle<sup>12</sup>.

when the contour is applied, that is, the drawing is marked, successive layers of paint are applied, but this is still pure abstraction, almost invisible.. *technically speaking*, it's about filling the internal contour spaces with paint, so that instead of abstract white, a concrete, colorful silhouette that is beginning to be concrete, turns out. However, this is not yet a color in the proper sense of the word, it's just not darkness, almost darkness, the first glimmer of light in darkness<sup>13</sup>.

That is, this description is balancing: it corresponds to the canon, and sometimes goes beyond it. But it is fundamentally important, in my opinion, to see how technique operates in this description: here is the "cut" and the drawing of lines, the "forming" of materiality of pigments and surfaces, their transformation into *something else*, their transition to another level. However, it is significant that for Florensky these levels interact, he sees them all at once, all the way, from pigments and wooden surfaces to ascent to the golden light: they are all an icon.

However, such splitting and cuts are not harmless operations. It could be argued that they function to identify "distinctiveness", to get it out of materials that allow for different variants and forms, i.e. materials that are in this sense indiscernible (Florensky wrote "darkness," using an old preChristian term used in ancient mythologies). Then the breaking of icons along other lines, the violation of their integrity can be considered another technical operation that erases the marks, misleads the contours, turning the components again to a state of indiscernibility (which acts as their sinking into invisibility). This breaking is also a technique and, in some sense, more universal than engraving and painting, resulting in a formless, unassembled, infinitely variable, unstoppingly transitional from one component to another, something almost "natural", if it was still possible to use this word.

### **Algorithmic temptation**

Let us explain here why it is almost impossible to use the word "natural". It is not because Timothy Morton taught us to recognize that modern humans have no nature, that Anthropocene surrounds us by something other than nature. It is rather because the various IT technologies and 3D printing immersed humans in an environment where there are no unities, not even stochastic "entanglements" (to refer to Karen Barad's speculations on physics) arising and crumbling, only "stopping", illegitimate for this infinite shaping process.

As it often happens, this is best illustrated by examples from modern technological art. The famous quasi-ancient statues of Egor Kraft from the *Content Aware Studies* project are material units located between what once took place and what cannot take place in principle, at least within the framework of human perception. They are neither restorations of damaged antique samples with "glued" lost parts nor "augmented" forms of some other reality, they are rather random stops of the algorithmic process. They are both aestheticized and formless, though not "uncanny" in the Freudian sense, there is nothing familiar about them for us. It's so tempting to write that there's nothing human about them, so they're not uncanny— they're just imperceptible, because we don't have any frames or contours that we could stretch to them. There's hardly anything that could build one network out of us and them (perhaps this "we" must be "augmented" so that everyone's "biological material" is to be processed algorithmically). The series they embody is too much for us, they are too full and seem to be a completely solved, successful universality – not one that is only assumed by us or moving towards us, but one that took place without our participation and is implemented before our eyes.

There are many other examples. The resource *generative.hut* delivers many figures developed on screen before the eyes of the viewer, and their transformations are endless. It is fascinating that the possibilities of figures appear further and further, even though our human capacities could hardly imagine a fragment of these figures. If universalism is connected with

completeness, then these "objects" are more than universal. The technique, more precisely, the algorithm's work, plays a primary role in it.

In other words, a certain image scheme seems to replace the previous one before our eyes. In a certain sense, they are both inhuman, non-mimétique, and do not contain similarities with what human looks like. The first, the iconic, is what triggers the transformation of the "too human" and may lead to the upper level. But, what does the second, algorithmic, trigger? Are we just a "biological material" to be recollected, as a young artist told me, working on algorithm-based dance performances? It is not likely that at least some "we" agree.

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## Endnotes

1. Claude Levi-Starss, "Race et histoire", in *Anthropologie structurale deux* (Paris: Plon, 1973).
2. Hito Steyerl, "Proxy Politics: Signal and Noise," *e-flux Journal*. 2014, no. 60. <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/60/61045/proxy-politics-signal-and-noise/>
3. Marie-Jose Mondzain, "What does seeing an image mean?" *Journal of visual culture*, 2010. Mondzain argues here that making a picture by hands on a cave wall and stepping behind to watch it made humans humans.
4. Hans Belting, *Bild-Anthropologie: Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft* (München: Fink, 2011).

5. Marie-Jose Mondzain, *Image, icon, Economy: The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary*, trans. Rico Franses (Stanford University Press, 2004).
6. Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). Ch. 16. It is characteristic that on the cover of the German edition published in 1991, there is a Latin image of the so-called "veronica" painted by Memmling, on the cover of the American edition there is an orthodoxe icon, on the cover of the Russian edition, published in 2002, there is also an orthodoxe icon.
7. Serge Gruzinski, *Images at war : Mexico from Columbus to Blade Runner (1492-2019)*, trans. Heather MacLean (Duke University Press, 2001).
8. Pavel Florensky, "Ikonostasis", in *Selected works on art* (St. Petersburg: Mithril, 1993).
9. Florensky, "Ikonostasis", 96-98.
10. Florensky, "Ikonostasis", 88.
11. Florensky, "Ikonostasis", 136.
12. Florensky, "Ikonostasis", 132.
13. Florensky, "Ikonostasis", 133, 138 (*italics added*).

# Exhibiting the Posthuman: A Dispositive Analysis of the Postmodern Public in *Les Immatériaux*

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## **ABSTRACT**

The paper focuses on the 1985 exhibition “Les Immatériaux” and discusses the posthumanist thematic which underlies the curatorial program. It examines the ways in which an exhibition ‘produces’ its visitors, drawing on the Foucauldian method of dispositive analysis, which is analyzed as a further development of discourse analysis. It maintains that displays and spatial arrangements in an immersive, interactive, and multi-sensory exhibition constitute cultural technologies that trigger embodied acts that invoke, animate, regulate, and act upon the production of their viewers. The paper mainly contributes to visual methodologies that analyze subjectification as articulated through fields of power/knowledge embedded in post-representational regimes of visibility.

## **KEYWORDS**

Media Art Methodologies and Historiographies; Museum Studies; Posthumanism; Dispositive Analysis

Brian O' Doherty was perhaps the first to discuss the ways in which the modern gallery produces the bodyless, eye-centered beholder – a concept based on the forceful and artificial separation of the senses. Jean-François Lyotard, one of the curators of the 1985 exhibition “Les Immatériaux” at the Centre Pompidou, remarks, however, that this beholder emerged during modernity with the introduction of the perspectival system and the panel painting, and in his exhibition proposed a different notion of the beholder/participant<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, media art exhibitions such as “Les Immatériaux” enhance the significance of sensory codes that foster a heightened sense of synesthesia and somatosensory awareness, since they support the viewer's in-depth involvement with technological and informational apparatuses and networks.

To examine the ways in which apparatuses work and ‘produce’ their visitors, I will deploy insights from the Foucauldian theory of subjectification. As with all social constructionist theories, the individual is not understood in an essentialist but in a performative manner, meaning not as an autonomous and sovereign entity but rather as an *effect* of the discourse in which said individual partakes. The paper maintains that the formative role of media technology corresponds to the emergence of the post-industrial, non-anthropocentric, and posthumanist notion of the self, rooted in the informational networks of contemporary technoscience. Drawing on media theory's posthumanist insights, which reconstruct humanness from the machine world, rather than vice versa, subjectivity is entangled with aesthetics and digital technology's materiality that perpetually recompose it. Here, I seek to demonstrate that displays such as those deployed in “Les Immatériaux” serve as a Foucauldian dispositif (*dispositif*) that produces posthuman subjectivities entangled in knowledge/power relations. Displays constitute cultural technologies that trigger embodied acts that invoke, animate, regulate, and act upon the construction of their own viewers articulated through viewing practices and embedded in post-representational “visibilities,” a term used by Gilles Deleuze to describe Michel Foucault's methodological approach.<sup>2</sup>

I will pay particular attention to the exhibition's spatial layout (*mise en espace*), notable for its labyrinthine structure, the suspension of walls and vitrines, the absence of separate rooms, the conflation of entrance and exit area, the lack of explanatory labels, the use of mirrors and other semi-transparent spatial barriers, as well as the deployment of devices, such as monitors, keyboards, interactive screens, and headphones. The visitor was enveloped in whole environments (a maze of some sixty-one different so-called stations) with interactive and networked installations. In addition, each visitor was given headphones at the entrance to hear texts and sounds broadcast in thirty-one infrared transmission "zones" distributed over the entire exhibition area. During the exhibition, the visitors could also use five Minitel terminals connected to a central server to access the entries written by twenty-six writers, including philosophers and social scientists, who contributed to one of the earliest collective and networked writing experiments. The exhibition used the new media technologies of the time (notably pre-Internet) both as the means of display and as a topic of the exhibition.

The exhibition's display system aimed not only at making the visitor an active participant but, most importantly, at demonstrating the new status of the human, which steadily develops towards what early commentator of the posthuman condition, Kathrine Hayles, called an "embodied virtuality."<sup>3</sup> According to Hayles,

"the posthuman view configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines. [...] The posthuman subject is an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction."<sup>4</sup>

Hayle's critique of the all too optimistic visions of the proponents of the posthuman, a hypothetical future being "whose basic capacities so radically exceed those of present humans as to be no longer unambiguously human by our current standards"<sup>5</sup> corresponds with Lyotard's questioning of

the foundational assumptions of humanism following the ideas of the Enlightenment. By using the concept of the “inhuman”, and in line with the anti-humanistic philosophical tradition initiated by Nietzsche and continued among others by Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida, Lyotard described all those things that humanism has excluded from its definition of man, while he criticized the dehumanizing effects of modern technology that can already be observed today.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, he saw in them the chance to open a space of possibilities, since they do not fix the human being to one stereotype of agency obtained by means of reason and ideals such as autonomy and progress. This critique of the anthropocentric humanist philosophy and its legacy is articulated in the exhibition as a critique of progress-oriented technoscience, which dictates everyday life and establishes the proliferation of devices and hardware (*matériels*) that handle digital information, as Lyotard and his co-curator design theoretician Thierry Chaput make clear in the printed material accompanying the exhibition.

It was clear to the curatorial team of the exhibition that technology was a sign of the decline of the ideology of the modern, which, although offering the means to reflect upon itself, placed humanity once again in a condition of a technologically devised immaturity. In a lengthy section of the material accompanying the exhibition, Lyotard explains how the notion of the exhibition is linked to postmodernism’s questioning of the subject:

There is a relation implied in this concept of exhibition, the relation of a subject who visualizes objects, works, who confronts them, who looks at them face-to-face, with this visualization – that of those who have conceived the exhibition – controlling it through the spatial layout itself. Thus on the part of the recipient who is the visitor, there is the principle that he is foremost a man who looks, an eye.<sup>7</sup>

Lyotard is clearly aware of the subjectifying aspects of exhibition-making since he refers to the aim of the exhibition as being:

to question, and I would even say to disquiet, the idea of the will and intelligence of an all-powerful subject, in order to produce instead a sort of effect of modesty in the anthropological atmosphere in which we live – the problem is that it effectively risks ending up in failure.<sup>8</sup>

Criticizing humanism means to abandon as an illusion the notion of the subject as well-defined and of autonomous agency through self-knowledge while highlighting the contradiction –but also the ambiguity– of any kind of identity. Moreover, if it denies the distinction between material body and immaterial soul, it proposes an understanding of man as a non-dualistic entity. The critical posthumanist attitude is clear in the text (which is to be found in the exhibition’s guide *Petit Journal*) that accompanied the first exhibit, an ancient Egyptian relief showing a goddess: “The symbol of the given life marks what is at stake in this manifestation. Is there something today that man is meant to be? Do we have to give the soul back, that last sigh?”<sup>9</sup>

In this area, the breath of a person could be heard in the headphones used by the spectator. The attention of the visitors would be focused on an activity of their own body, an activity that is not perceptible under everyday conditions. Also, in the next room, the actual entrance, in which the visitor could hear samples of blood circulation, the *mise-en-scène* made the viewing subject take the place of the exhibit. At the same time, the viewer was confronted with a critical deconstruction of humanist discourses related to human existence, notably the religious dogma of the soul’s immortality.

Such a shift, in which museum visitors are immersed in a consonance of sensations and various contents, demonstrates clearly that this kind of temporary media-based exhibitions has been developed into performative and experiential sites of personalized experience. For the site “*Corps chanté*,” (zone 5), for instance, over 100 music video clips were sampled to elucidate the aesthetic of bodies, speed, and rhythm that prevailed in this new media format, which had appeared for the first time with MTV in 1981. Lyotard commented upon the fragmented and de-materialized body of the singers, which was visually constructed to match the music but also confronted the

viewers with new viewing habits and modes of reception. The site “*Arôme simulé*” included an installation from which different synthetic and natural smells were diffused, challenging the visitors to identify which of them was artificially created, accompanied by the projection of a computer-generated 3D animation of a virtual fruit basket.<sup>10</sup> The site “*Deuxième peau*” prominently featured skin samples produced by a variety of methods, including human skin cells, cultivated pork skin, and artificially created skin grafts. The station showed various samples of artificial skin that had been shrink-wrapped and nicely framed and presented next to each other on a metal mesh wall. Also, the site “*Langue vivante*” dealt with DNA research which had experienced rapid advances since the 1950s. The conception of the genetic code of DNA, and the decoding and encoding of molecular language, was central to Lyotard’s understanding of language as a hinge of new ontological regimes. The station, “*L’ange*,” featured the work of the artist duo Klonaris/Thomadaki, in which the figure of the hermaphrodite played a seminal role while non-binary gender discourses were employed. However, as Antonia Wunderlich observes, the gender-changing subject is no longer a heroic ruler who knows how to subordinate the properties of matter to her will and her competence, but a ruling designer who adapts a matter understood as a message, i.e., as information, code or energy to her projects while modifying their basic properties.<sup>11</sup> In the image and film projection as well as through the lifeless puppets, the body is presented as raw material, as a naked substance.

Lyotard’s curatorial concept deploys semiotics as its methodological anchoring. Modernity transforms everything into a message that has a sender/author, a recipient, a support medium, and an encoding/decoding system (code). As Lyotard maintains in an important essay published one year prior to the opening of the exhibition, this concept, which has become a “commonplace” can be used to discuss, for instance, architecture, art, cosmological or biological data.<sup>12</sup> The ‘translation’ work done in articulating the actual message/referent/content is both technoscientific and historical. However, this work destabilizes modernity. This is the meaning of “the negation in- in ‘immaterial.’” This is “a confrontation that opposes the subject,

the subject of will, of spirit, of the gaze.”<sup>13</sup> For Lyotard, this unfinished business of the Enlightenment era has political repercussions since, “the idea of an enlightened, luminous society, a society transparent to itself, whether we call it a socialist or liberal society, it doesn’t really matter, has receded considerably for us today.”<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the exhibition is understood not as a presentation of the miracles of technology, but rather as a “mourning” of certain aspects of modernity that “seem illusory or dangerous.”<sup>15</sup> The posthumanist vector of postmodern society is evident as a “reinforcement, an exaggeration almost, of the intimacy between the mind and things.”<sup>16</sup> Biogenetic engineering, completely synthetic artificial intelligences, cybernetic feedback loops and advanced information management tools are the means through which “the human subject becomes no longer a subject but, I would say, one case among others, albeit a case which retains this privilege, until proven otherwise.”<sup>17</sup> Lyotard discusses the technoscientific metaphysics of the subject (from Descartes to our time), which is also a metaphysics of domination, the domination of science over human beings, and the mastery of the human being over the physical world, although he maintains that this ontology is becoming less and less pertinent. Lyotard’s posthumanist attitude identifies in it, “a decline of humanism, of the self-satisfaction of man within the world, of narcissism or anthropocentrism, and that an end of humanism may emerge.”<sup>18</sup>

I maintain that the posthumanist thematic of the exhibition, which is mirrored in its unique spatial layout, finds a parallel in its intended reception format which corresponds with the subjectifying process implied by the Foucauldian notion of the dispositive. Although the notion of the dispositive was introduced into the realm of academic discussion during Foucault’s lecture on January 18, 1978 at the Collège de France, it had been insinuated within a broader conceptual cluster of medial dispositives since the 1970s by Jean-Francois Lyotard, among others.<sup>19</sup>

The dispositive relates to the notion of the discourse, which is central to Foucault’s arguments and methodology during his archeological phase, but also in his genealogical work, in which he developed a theory of power/knowledge. What Foucault was interested in studying

‘archaeologically’ are the conditions that determine which statements are accepted as meaningful and true in a particular historical epoch. These conditions are immanent and historical rather than transcendental or phenomenological. Possibilities of experience, which at the same time are disciplinary knowledge practices such as speaking and writing, are not defined by abstract laws but by actual historically and culturally specific social conditions.

Also, exhibition-making is a set of political technologies through which human beings are incited to constitute themselves. They are enacted in an institutional apparatus (for instance, a museum) and adhere to regimes of knowledge (academic art history, the art market, etc.) that determine what is true and false, which grants them coherence. In this regard, the modern art museum, with its rituals related to the presentation of art, its physical and moral constraints, but also the visual-material properties of art objects and art practices, belong to the larger modern administrative apparatuses for governing citizens analyzed by Tony Bennett in his seminal Foucauldian study on the emergence of the public museum.<sup>20</sup>

But by 1978, Foucault made in his discussion of discipline, security, and governmentality, an explicitly political and aesthetic decision to replace the conceptual term apparatus (*appareil*) with the term dispositive (*dispositif*), as Davide Panagia argues.<sup>21</sup> According to Foucault, a *dispositive* relates to institutional technologies, meaning, the practical techniques, “a disparate set of tools and methods” used to practice that power/knowledge based on the performative agency of the individual who enacts this practice, thus, conforming to its power.<sup>22</sup> However, art viewing also constitutes a Foucauldian dispositive, next to the *panoptic dispositive* or the *sexual dispositive*, on which discourse analysis often focuses.

However, and as Panagia maintains, Foucault’s reading of Édouard Manet’s paintings in his late 1960s lectures was instrumental in understanding his appreciation of various visualizations of power structures, such as the Panopticon:

... the Manet canvas allows Foucault to appreciate Jeremy Bentham's architectural drawings of the Panopticon as drawings on a flat surface and thus to read his writings as if they were tableau-like objects that render available perceptibilities.<sup>23</sup>

Panagia maintains, that “after Manet, Foucault will no longer be interested in looking at the function of representation in juridical and scientific writing, or political theory but will instead look for the practices of formal organization and arrangement in images.<sup>24</sup> One should not forget the opening section of Foucault's “The Order of Things” (1966), in which he discusses Diego Vélazquez' “Las Meninas”, precisely in explicating in what ways the painting's surface compositional logic devises hierarchies of both vision and power.<sup>25</sup> The discussion, no matter how accurate or debatable it might be, is no longer about the inner mimetics of the painting, but is instead directed “at bringing us towards the missing spectacle, outside the painting, but implied in the painting, by the gaze of the figures therein looking out”.<sup>26</sup> When discussing art, Foucault is concerned with how to paint the force of perception rather than representing the world.<sup>27</sup> In this regard, Foucault's discussion of the art of Manet and Vélazquez is mainly concerned with the place of the beholder, meaning, the ‘formation of a viewer’ that is always entangled with a set of historical, visual, and material dispositions; in short with regimes of visibility, enacted by dispositives. Therefore, Foucault discusses the Panopticon, as a “schema”<sup>28</sup>, that is to say

not as normative spaces of ideological positioning (the apparatus qua reflex) but as surfaces upon which dispositional powers do their work of arranging and adjoining (the dispositif qua complex of agencement).<sup>29</sup>

Foucault clearly makes an epistemological break with the Althusserian notion of apparatus (ISAs and RSAs) that has dominated the academic world since the conception of the term. This is significant because the dispositive evades the determinism of interpellation and the subsequent formation of an identity implied by Althusserian apparatus theory.

Foucault's basic materials were statements accepted as meaningful and true in a particular historical epoch. However, and notwithstanding the fact that Foucault focused his research on the system of stratified enunciations (which can encompass literary texts, oral confessions, court testimony, juridical rulings, etc.), one can argue that his epistemology, as Panagia suggests, is also profoundly ocular.<sup>30</sup> The dispositive does not function like (nor does it belong to the function of) a language. One can gain insights regarding regimes of visibility (and its subsequent production of effects of truth created within discourses) from other types of "material enunciations", such as diagrams, architectural plans, documentation images, etc. According to Siegfried Jäger, objects are understood as the conditions and results of sensory human activity, thus allowing Foucault to depart from a narrowing understanding of discourse as a solely language-oriented activity.<sup>31</sup> These tools and methods are termed by Jäger as "objectifications" or "materializations" (*Vergegenständlichungen*).<sup>32</sup> A dispositive consists of discursive practices (discussing with others, reading a label, etc.), non-discursive practices (standing in front of an exhibit, looking at it, walking through corridors, etc.), and objects/materializations (vitrines, walls, museums, etc.). The collective interplay or the disposing of these elements is called, according to Jäger, dispositive.<sup>33</sup> In other words, an object such as a display in an exhibition, or an installation is not a dispositive *per se*, but *becomes* a dispositive when paired with an institution (the museum) and a social activity (art viewing, conversing, and writing about art). In this respect, the process of observing is also not sovereign but rests upon the specific material and spatiotemporal conditions, which *allow* for such an image on display to be seen and potentially comprehended within a specific nexus of power/knowledge.

Thus, a "dispositive is a far more general case of *episteme*", since it goes beyond language, thus "the episteme in contrast to the dispositive in general, which is discursive and non-discursive, and whose elements are a lot more heterogeneous, is a specifically discursive dispositive".<sup>34</sup> And although Foucault does not say in what empirical relationship discourses and things and/or events/reality are linked to one other, he maintains, that the

dispositive has “a primarily strategic function”.<sup>35</sup> Strategic, in this regard, means that the interplay of speech, non-discursive practices and objects/materializations address a specific need people have to allocate meaning to things and vice versa, a need to be perceived as individuals through such an anchoring to things.

The notion of the dispositive designates precisely this set of material/technological and specifically temporal conditions - what can be termed here as visible material enunciations, which account for the shaping of different notions of the self within a specific historical setting. In this regard, subjects are the successful or failed *effects* of an exhibition, which is understood as a dispositive. This can be said too for the partially unsuccessful reception of “Les Immatériaux” by the contemporaneous public, accustomed as they were to the classical viewing habits of the white cube.

In the end, a dispositive analysis can be seen as an inquiry into how variables (the spectator, the object of the spectator’s viewing, and the context of the viewing practice) evolve with respect to each other. In line with Panagia’s and Jäger’s insights, Karen Barad also contributes to the novel method of dispositive analysis (although she does not point out the conceptual difference between an apparatus and a dispositive) while maintaining that,

apparatuses are particular physical arrangements that give meaning to certain concepts to the exclusion of others; they are the local physical conditions that enable and constrain knowledge practices [...]; they are productive of (and part of) the phenomena produced; they enact a local cut that produces “objects” of particular knowledge practices within the particular phenomena produced.<sup>36</sup>

This materialist-performative understanding of the dispositive has major implications regarding the notion of the work of art. According to Barad,

‘Things’ don’t preexist; they are agentially enacted and become determinately bounded and propertied within

phenomena. Outside of agential intra-actions, ‘words’ and ‘things’ are indeterminate.<sup>37</sup>

In this regard, a work of art and its interpretations are constituted as part of this encounter, which in itself “is made possible through specific material practices.”<sup>38</sup>

Returning to Lyotard, one can detect conceptual similarities between the materialist agential intra-actions of the Foucauldian dispositive and Lyotard’s notion of “interaction”<sup>39</sup> that aims not only at destabilizing identities but also at exposing the postmodern subject, which is utterly intertwined, if not constituted by technology’s logic often expressed in cybernetic terms. What Lyotard calls, “the capacity to intervene instantaneously in the object’s behavior” is exemplified in the cybernetic feedback loops that sustain the immediate interaction with computational machines, for instance, what “allows a composer to intervene in the production of synthesized music as it is listened to,” describes the performative self-constitution of the subject.<sup>40</sup> The curatorial program of “Les Immatériaux” was to make the viewer experience this foundational principle of the postmodern (and for Lyotard, utterly capitalist) condition since intra-actions constitute real-time effects, in which performativity and paralogy in language games – the main aspects of the postmodern condition as this has been exemplified in Lyotard’s bestseller – come to the fore.<sup>41</sup> Media, and in this regard, exhibitions – understood as dispositives – are not the anthropomorphic “extensions of man” (Marshall McLuhan); rather, human beings are part of the mediatic processes, transformations, and events, which make up media. The study of the exhibition’s display logic provides the theoretical means to assess in what ways all sort of displayed artifacts constitute reality-producing events and processes of meaning-making, which have been acquired by the socially embedded and technologically enhanced performative agencies of the observer/performer. Lyotard calls the exhibition an “auto-identificatory visual machine”<sup>42</sup> in which formal arrangements clearly indicate that the visitor is also part of the exhibits. Disposition, arrangement, movement, and the contingency of the encounter are open-ended features of the exhibition’s reception based on the multiplicity of routes to be taken through the

exhibition. This dictates that the postmodern subject loses their traditional position of domination over the exhibits (the vista at the white cube) and is thus exposed to far-reaching changes in modalities of perception that affect their social, political, and individual identity. In effect, Lyotard's conclusions from these reflections serve to bring the viewers closer to the consequences for their own living context and is a figure of thought that also plays a role in postmodern knowledge.<sup>43</sup>

The construction of the human subject as a being constituted by both language and imaging means to go beyond the logocentric emphasis of the humanities and researching both the affective and material dimensions of such an interaction between a viewer, an object, and its display context. Contributing to the image and media turn in humanities, the conceptual anchoring of the curatorial program of “Les Immatériaux” proposed not only a highly innovative treatment of the ‘exhibition medium,’ in which a narrative unfolds that makes the process of exhibiting manifest -as an early project description maintains- but put forward a novel methodological approach towards the viewing subject. In line with Foucault’s insights, “Les Immatériaux” addresses curatorial practices as to how subjectivities are formed, defined, and disseminated in relation to the workings of an exhibitionary dispositive. In the long run, the proposed methodology in this paper is to be understood as a museological application of a dispositive analysis, meaning the analysis of the material/signifying practices in which subjects are made up, and “visibilities” (truth/power) are constructed. “Les Immatériaux,” thus, belongs to another epistemological historiography, one that also needs to be written and entails a critical genealogy of Media Art Histories and its cultural, political, and social implications analyzed from the perspective of social subjectivities produced through curatorial practices.

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## Endnotes

1. Brian O' Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: the Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), Jean-François Lyotard, "After Six Months of Work...", (1984) in *30 Years after Les Immatériaux – Art, Science and Theory*, ed. Yuk Hui and Andreas Broeckmann (Lüneburg: Meson Press, 2015), 46.
  2. Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989): 57
  3. Katherine N. Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1999): 1
  4. Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 3.
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5. For the theoretical distinction between a) cultural posthumanism, a branch of cultural theory critical of the foundational assumptions of humanism and its legacy, b) philosophical posthumanism or anti-anthropocentrism, a philosophical tradition, which examines the ethical implications of expanding the circle of moral concern and extending subjectivities beyond the human species, and c) transhumanism, an ideological, pseudo-scientific movement, which seeks to develop and make available technologies that eliminate aging, enable immortality and greatly enhance human capacities, in order to overcome the human, see, Francesca Ferrando, "Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Antihumanism, Metahumanism, and New Materialisms: Differences and Relations", *Existenz* (2013), Retrieved 2014-03-14.
6. Jean-François Lyotard. *The inhuman: Reflections on time* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 47-57.
7. Lyotard, "After Six Months of Work": 45.
8. Lyotard, "After Six Months of Work": 60.
9. Jean-François Lyotard, "Qui a peur des "Immatériaux"?" in *Le Monde*, 3.5.1985, translated by the author.
10. In the adjoining text in the *Inventaire*, Lyotard made explicit reference to Jean Baudrillard's concept of the "simulacrum" exemplified here.
11. Antonia Wunderlich, *Der Philosoph im Museum: Die Ausstellung Les Immatériaux von Jean-François Lyotard* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2008): 122, 126.
12. Lyotard, "After Six Months of Work", 31.
13. 31.
14. 31.
15. 31.
16. 31.
17. 31.
18. Lyotard, "After Six Months of Work": 36.
19. At the same time, Lyotard distances himself from psychoanalytic notions of the apparatus proposed by Jean Louis Baudry and other suture film theorists, who take the existence of a libidinal subject for granted.
20. Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 2013).
21. Davide Panagia, "On the Political Ontology of the Dispositif", *Critical Inquiry* 45 (Spring 2019): 715.
22. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison* (London: Allen Lane, 1977): 26.
23. Panagia, "On the Political Ontology of the Dispositif", 718.
24. 728.
25. 726-727.
26. 728.
27. 731.
28. Michel Foucault, *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1973-1974*, ed. Jacques Lagrange (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 75.
29. Panagia, "On the Political Ontology of the Dispositif", 733.
30. Thomas R. Flynn, "Foucault and the Eclipse of Vision" in *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*, ed. D. M. Levin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993): 273-286.
31. Siegfried Jäger, "Discourse and knowledge: theoretical and methodological aspects of a critical discourse and dispositive analysis" in *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, ed. Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (London: Sage, 2001), 40.
32. Jäger, "Discourse and knowledge", 38.
33. Jeffrey Bussolini discusses the etymology of dispositif from the Latin *dispositio* and shows how it relates to the verb *dispono* that "concerns placing here and there, setting in different places, arranging, distributing (regularly), disposing; it also addresses specifically setting in

- order, arraying, or settling and determining (in military or legal senses)", Jeffrey Bussolini, "What Is a Dispositive?" *Foucault Studies* 10 (Nov. 2010): 96.
34. 40.
35. Michel Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 120.
36. Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2007), 147.
37. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 150.
38. 148.
39. Lyotard, "After Six Months of Work", 37.
40. 38.
41. Lyotard's discussion of the exhibition's mise-en-scene draws from his analysis of modern and postmodern urban spaces, or the "the nebula of conurbation" to be more precise, and most specifically, from Paul Virilio's text, "Une ville surexposée". Virillio argues, that with the passage to the absolute speed of present-day telecommunications, our focus shifts from space to time and, ultimately, to light, to the electromagnetic waves that permit the interactivity of space and time. Electromagnetic proximity (simultaneous and instantaneous), informational networks and "telaction" contribute to the emergent representational paradigm, which Virillio terms an "aesthetics of disappearance" closely linked to an understanding of the virtual as a guiding principle of both the postmodern city and the information society. Virillio's understanding of the urban space accounts however, not only for the specific scenographic concept of "Les Immatériaux", but also for re-thinking the dispositive of the exhibition as such, which, according to Lyotard should not be considered "an exhibition [exposition], but a surexhibition [surexposition]", clearly designating its conceptual character. Lyotard, "After Six Months of Work", 55.
42. Lyotard, "After Six Months of Work", 47.
43. Wunderlich, *Der Philosoph im Museum*, 121.

# Visualising Sound Waves: Complex Media Art and Chladni Patterns

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## **ABSTRACT**

Ernst Chladni's 18th-century discovery of the visualization of wave movements in the form of the so-called Chladni's sound figures still fascinates viewers today. Hans Jenny's subsequent experiments in the 1960s with electronically generated sounds and different materials, e.g., in liquids, also attracted significant attention and led, among other things, to new forms that sometimes had a psychedelic character, and also influenced various artists. This article examines how and under which conditions, Jenny's experiments were taken up by Alvin Lucier in the early 1970s for a sound art composition. In addition, two different ways of dealing with Chladni's sound figures in a contemporary manner in the first half of the 2000s are analyzed – one is oriented towards minimalist aesthetics, while the other belongs to the realm of bio-art with a subversive tendency. To round off the discussion, a perspective of the current possibilities of digital fabrication for the creation of Chladni sound artworks is provided.

## **KEYWORDS**

Chladni, Media Art, Sound Art, Cymatics, Digital Fabrication

### **Introduction**

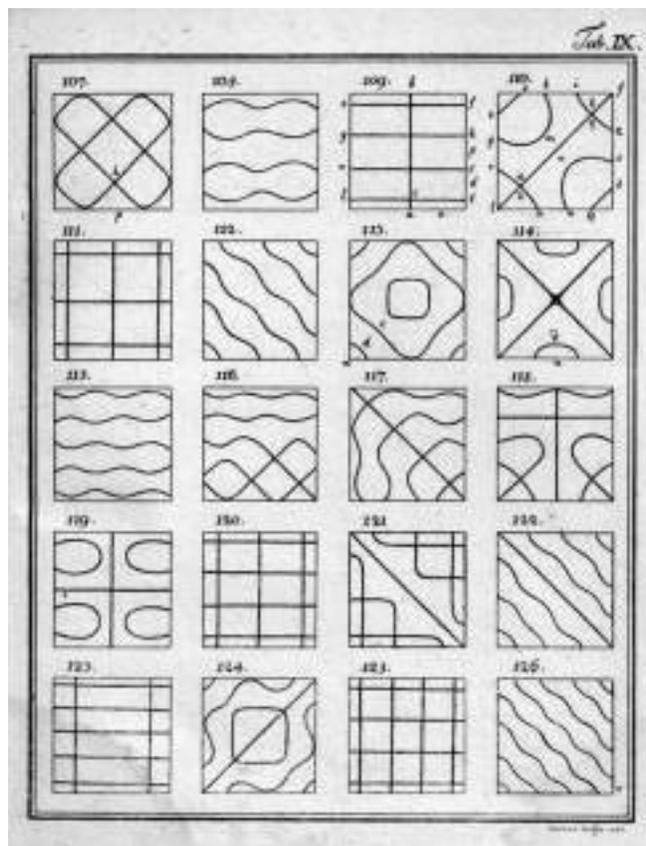
Ernst Chladni's 18<sup>th</sup>-century discovery of the visualization of wave movements in the form of the so-called Chladni's sound figures still fascinates viewers today.<sup>1</sup> Hans Jenny's subsequent experiments in the 1960s with electronically generated sounds and different materials, e.g., in liquids, also attracted significant attention and led, among other things, to new forms that sometimes had a psychedelic character, and also influenced various artists.<sup>2</sup> This article examines how, and under which conditions, Jenny's experiments were taken up by Alvin Lucier in the early 1970s for a sound art composition. In addition, two different ways of dealing with Chladni's sound figures in a contemporary manner in the first half of the 2000s are analyzed – one is oriented towards minimalist aesthetics, while the other belongs to the realm of bio-art with a subversive tendency. To round off the discussion, an outlook of the current possibilities of digital fabrication for the creation of Chladni sound artworks is provided.

The paper begins with a short overview of the history of the sound figures from Chladni's discoveries to Jenny's experiments, which is helpful for a cultural-historical analysis of the selected artworks. Due to the interdisciplinary subject, different research areas must be taken into account—in addition to visual studies, the history of sound waves and music is also significant. Although the selected works have already been studied by researchers such as Christopher Cox and Inge Hinterwaldner, among others, a more detailed comparison of the different art positions as shown in our paper has not been provided in the literature to date.<sup>3</sup> With such a comparative perspective, the various symbolic connotations of Chladni's sound figures become clear.

### **From Chladni's Sound Figures to Hans Jenny's Cymatics**

The sound wave research of Ernst Chladni (1756–1827) has a prehistory that goes back to individual observations by Leonardo da Vinci and Galileo Galilei.<sup>4</sup> Chladni took up a later finding by the English scientist Robert Hooke (1635–1703), who noticed knot patterns associated with the vibrations of a glass plate containing flour caused by a violin bow on 8 July 1680.<sup>5</sup> Chladni

was able to produce different patterns for different pitches by striking a violin bow against a thin metal plate with sand sprinkled on it. Chladni called them “sound figures” (“Klangfiguren”) and published them as abstract patterns without any depth effect for the first time in *Discoveries in the Theory of Sound* (*Entdeckungen über die Theorie des Klanges*, 1787) and later in his famous book *Acoustics* (*Die Akustik*, 1802).<sup>6</sup> He also displayed the sound figures experiment at public lectures in different European cities, which became very popular. The German Romantics were also interested in these experiments because the sound figures seemed to attest to the hidden order and harmony of nature. Novalis, for example, associated them with the “cypher-writing” (“Chiffrenschrift”) of natural forms.<sup>7</sup>



**Fig. 1.** Ernst Chladni’s Sound figures (*Entdeckungen über die Theorie des Klanges*, 1787, plate 9)

The phenomenon of Chladni patterns was explored by other mathematicians and physicists in subsequent decades and the scientific images showing the patterns generated became more detailed and realistic with time. In 1885, the Welsh singer Margaret Watts-Hughes (1842–1907) invented a device called an *eidophone*.<sup>8</sup> This device allowed her to create flower- or tree-like patterns with colored liquids using the sound waves produced by her voice. The *eidophone* inspired Henry Holbrook Curtis (1856–1920) to use a very similar device to experiment with singers' voices but which used sand as Chladni did. He called this device a "tonograph" and intended to use it to train singers.<sup>9</sup> However, as other media (e.g., phonograph records with the auditory reproduction of sound signals) were more successful at the time, he did not pursue this further.

In the 1960s, Hans Jenny (1904–1972), a Swiss doctor and amateur physicist, again used the tonograph for voice experiments but named it tonoscope. In his opinion, the tonoscope had the potential for speech education for the hearing-impaired.<sup>10</sup> However, with time, better technical opportunities for such voice training became available and cochlear implants became more widespread. Jenny used modern electronic devices for creating and documenting Chladni sound figures and also incorporated various materials such as quartz sand and powder as well as various membranes and liquids into his experiments. With frequency and vibration generators and piezoelectric amplifiers, a wider range of frequencies could be made visible.<sup>11</sup> Hans Jenny introduced the term "cymatics" to describe the study of visible sound vibrations and was influenced by Rudolf Steiner's esoteric anthroposophy.<sup>12</sup> According to Jenny, all forms in the universe are caused by an invisible vibrational force that becomes visible in cymatics. The photos of Jenny's experiments attracted a lot of attention because the soundwaves in liquids had a deeper three-dimensional effect than the earlier illustrations of Chladni sound figures on plates. In addition, they showed very unusual shapes reminiscent of lunar landscapes. The special psychedelic-like aesthetics of his experiments suited his time and the contemporary New Age movements.<sup>13</sup>

### **Alvin Lucier's *The Queen of the South* – Cymatics and Sound Art**

Strongly influenced by John Cage, Alvin Lucier (1931–2021) explored the nature of sound in his groundbreaking experimental compositions and drew inspiration from the work of renowned physicists.<sup>14</sup> For his 1972 work *The Queen of the South*, however, he also demonstrably drew on the experiments of Hans Jenny. In a short score written in prose, Lucier outlines an open process arrangement.<sup>15</sup> The performers are to produce different sound patterns on various solid bodies and the sound produced by voices or microphones can amplify instruments. For his own performances, Lucier, like Jenny, preferred sine oscillators as a sound source because the sound figures were easier to produce with long continuous tones.<sup>16</sup>



**Fig. 2.** Alvin Lucier, *Queen of the South*, setup (picture credit: Thoben, “Look at the Natural World,” 111).

For creating the sound figures, Lucier recommends several materials that are clearly inspired by the ones used by Jenny.<sup>17</sup> To guide the performers, Lucier also provided many image associations such as lattices or spirals

influenced by Jenny's experiments.<sup>18</sup> This clearly shows that Lucier's focus in *The Queen of the South* is not on the sounds but rather on the creation of the images.<sup>19</sup> A collective image should emerge, and details of such an image should be projected enlarged onto monitors.

As the conditions for performances of experimental sound art pieces are usually not as ideal as they were in Jenny's experiments, it was challenging to create the images in *The Queen of the South* and they are normally not so good, clear, or precise as those in Jenny's experiments.<sup>20</sup> However, it can be seen as an advantage that the video shows all stages of the forms on a bigger scale, also the intermediate stages that show imperfect patterns, or the stages with no patterns that are generally not represented in the illustrations of Chladni sound figures.

In Lucier's *The Queen of the South*, video projection is very relevant to the composition's central topic of transformation. Thus, sounds are transformed into sound figures. Sometimes there is also a preceding electronic amplification of the sounds of humans or musical instruments and then the mechanically generated visual phenomena are transformed into two-dimensional vertical electronic video images.<sup>21</sup> Lucier preferred to show enlarged details on the video screens.<sup>22</sup> For Lucier, the topic of transformation has alchemical connotations, which is why he chose the title *The Queen of the South*.<sup>23</sup> While seeming cryptic at first glance, this term refers to the New Testament name for the Queen of Sheba which was also associated with the allegory of wisdom.<sup>24</sup> In alchemy, she also embodies the divine power to bring about transformation, and her transformative substance is also seen as an image for the macrocosm according to psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung's study *Psychology and Alchemy* (1944) read by Lucier while working on *The Queen of the South*.<sup>25</sup> Fittingly, the early performances were also attributed to a special and very intense atmosphere that seemed almost religious and suited Lucier's alchemical celebration of natural mysteries.<sup>26</sup>

Lucier's work *The Queen of the South* thus brought cymatics into the realm of sound art at the beginning of the 1970s, which was made possible because music performance and progressive art practice converged during this period. As Lucier used contemporary technologies such as loudspeakers

and closed-circuit TV for his performances, his work is considered a precursor for the preoccupation with sound figures in the fan yields of media arts.<sup>27</sup> Although the unusual nature of the performances with their reduced musical events was challenging for the audience, they were nevertheless accepted by them which probably has to do with the general fascination caused by the transformation of sounds into sound figures.<sup>28</sup>

**Carsten Nicolai's *Wellenwanne* (Engl. *Wave Tub*) and *Milch* (Engl. *Milk*) – The Poetry of Minimalist Aesthetics Combined with Scientific Experiments**



**Fig. 3.** Carsten Nicolai, *Wellenwanne* (Engl. *Wave Tub*), 2000 (picture credit: Carsten Nicolai, *Static Fades*, 19)

Carsten Nicolai's (\*1965) use of cymatics in two of his works from the early 2000s is far more precise and appears more scientific than Lucier's. Unlike Lucier, this German artist did not use solid surfaces and strewn materials, but liquids, which received greater attention in the context of a visual representation of sound waves based on Jenny's experiences. In particular,

Nicolai concentrates on lower frequencies that are inaudible or less audible for humans. The first work titled *Wellenwanne* (Engl. *Wave Tub*, 2000) consists of four flat aluminum trays that are filled with water and rest on speakers which play low sinus frequencies that cause the water to move.<sup>29</sup> The resulting play of patterns in the water invites the viewer to reflect on the alternation of chaos and structural order.<sup>30</sup>

Nicolai's second work titled *Milch* (Engl. *Milk*, 2000) consists of a ten-part photo series (each 80 x 66 cm).<sup>31</sup> Nicolai photographed vibrations of certain frequencies ranging from 10 to 110 Hz in milk. The patterns taken from above become smaller and smaller with higher frequencies – a phenomenon pointed out by Ernst Chladni and Hans Jenny.<sup>32</sup> The *Milk* series photos were presented together with the *Wave Tub* in several exhibitions.<sup>33</sup> Visitors were thus encouraged to look more closely at the rapidly changing patterns in the *Wave Tub*, as the *Milk* photographs freeze a specific moment and show a specific pattern in detail.

Because Nicolai chose milk as the liquid, the pattern contours created in the bluish-gray liquid by the sound waves are visually similar to the early graphics of Chladni's sound figures with their white ground, but at the same time have more depth than these early figures. On the one hand, while Nicolai's photographs resemble the documentation of a series of experiments,<sup>34</sup> they are far more appealing as they are also presented like art photographs in a larger format with finer print quality. The more abstract forms do not immediately make us think of milk like some photos with drops in Jenny's *Cymatics* do.<sup>35</sup>

While *Milk* as the title might be surprising for viewers and the photos seem enigmatic at first glance in terms of their content and aesthetics, they are actually more akin to minimalist painting. Significantly, Nicolai visualizes sounds that are not (or barely) audible for humans. The photographs thus seem to continue John Cage's famous exploration of silence, although Nicolai does not focus on ambient sounds but rather on limited human perception.<sup>36</sup> Very fittingly, Nicolai has chosen a white liquid to represent the barely perceptible sounds because white can be seen the visual equivalent of silence. For instance, Robert Rauschenberg's *White Paintings* are considered a fitting

visual counterpart to Cage's thoughts on silence.<sup>37</sup> The special aesthetics and the art-historical references were probably also decisive for Gerhard Richter (born 1932) to select Nicolai's photographs as models for two paintings and two color serigraphs in 2004.<sup>38</sup> Richter, however, does not use *Milk* as the title, but *Abstract Painting (Skin)* (German original: *Abstraktes Bild (Haut)*). This change of title is also possible because of the abstract nature of Nicolai's photographs, which offers several possibilities of association.

More than a decade later, Nicolai created another wave pool for the *Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial* in 2012. He added the acronym *Ifo* to the title *Wave Tub (Wellenwanne)*, which stands for "low-frequency oscillator."<sup>39</sup> The installation consists of a more complex wave tub into which a stroboscope has been integrated. Soundwaves from a two-channel composition generate interference patterns that are made visible on a screen. Nicolai's experiment is common from physics lessons but was now transferred on a large scale into the exhibition space.<sup>40</sup>

Although Nicolai is not religious, he believes that nature is based on a "master plan" and wants to visualize various facets of this plan with his works.<sup>41</sup> This view is, of course much less esoteric compared to the reflections of Jenny and Lucier, which is also reflected in the cool and clinical character of Nicolai's works – especially in comparison to those of Lucier. Nicolai's experimental arrangements are much more controlled and thus the resulting sound figures are very precise and symmetrical.<sup>42</sup> While his experiments and their photographic documents in the exhibition space increase the level of interest in a physical worldview, they can also be perceived poetically as, according to Christoph Cox, they would invite one to think about the vibrational dynamics that animate matter.<sup>43</sup>

### **Roland Maurmair's *Club Moss Field Generator* – Sound Figures and Critical Bio-Art**

The Austrian artist Roland Maurmair (\*1975) was also inspired by Chladni's sound figures and he created a *Club Moss Field Generator (Bärlappfeldgenerator)* for an exhibition in Linz in 2005.<sup>44</sup> Like Lucier, he works with solid materials and, in this case, sound figures are formed using

tiny club moss spores – the Latin term for them is *lycopodium* – on a membrane stretched over a substructure with several loudspeakers. Visitors can speak or sing into two microphones that hang above the construction and are also connected to the loudspeakers. This participatory involvement of the visitor is a novelty compared to the work of Nicolai or Lucier. By playing sine frequencies when the visitors do not activate the microphones, the visitors become aware of the differences between individually generated sounds and the pure tones—especially with the self-generated sounds, the sound figures are more unusual.

**Fig. 4.** Roland Maurmair,  
*Club Moss Field  
Generator*  
(*Bärlappfeldgenerator*),  
2005 (picture credit:  
Maurmair, *Nature's  
Revenge*, 35).



Maurmair's interactive installation refers to the earlier eidoscope/tonograph by Margaret Watts Hughes and Holbrook Curtis from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century mentioned in the first part of this paper.<sup>45</sup> They were also taken up by Hans Jenny, who, in contrast to his earlier experiments, had not yet integrated any newer electronic technology into his tonoscope replicas, whereas Maurmair now incorporates microphones and loudspeakers.

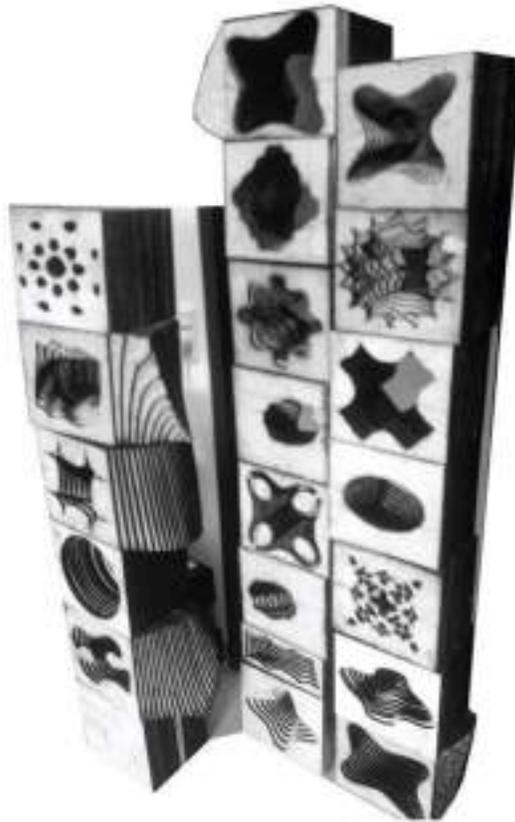
Through the title *Club Moss Field Generator*, Maurmair highlights the strewn club moss spores that he used on the membrane and Chladni already used that in addition to sand for experiments. The work belongs to a series that bears the name of the botanical classification, namely the cryptogams.<sup>46</sup> They are non-flowering or secretly flowering plants. For Maurmair, this also has a symbolic meaning on a political level. In a 2005 interview, he emphasized that those who act in secret, like the cryptogams, can infiltrate the system and the apparatus and thus become dangerous.<sup>47</sup> In his installation, the sound figures made of club moss spores enable the enrichment of perception in “a society heavily influenced by media and surveillance”<sup>48</sup> and encourage the visitor to think about individual vs standardized sounds, artificially produced sounds, and subversive strategies. Due to the special connotation of the material used, Maurmair's installation can be classified as bio-art and is more socially critical than Nicolai's works. Because of the connotation of the club moss material and its participatory character, it is a unique and impressive work that is simultaneously the least esoteric of all the works presented.

### **Experiments with 3D Chladni patterns**

With the advent of digital fabrication technologies, creating three-dimensional representations of Chladni patterns have become more accessible. Several 2D mages of Chladni sound figures can be combined into a 3D model, which can then be fabricated, as done by Dutch Designer Ricky van Broekhoven with the *Soundshape Speakers* (2013).<sup>49</sup> In some of our previous works, we experimented with creating three-dimensional representations of Chladni patterns in an educational setting. 2D Chladni patterns were created, transformed into 3D models, which were fabricated

and assembled into a collective sculpture called the *Chladni Wall*.<sup>50</sup> This *Chladni Wall* transfers the collective image created in Lucier's *The Queen of the South, so to speak*, into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and translates it into a permanent 3D artwork. Significantly, the individual style of each student is preserved even more powerfully in the single bricks.<sup>51</sup>

In 2016, an approach to transfer Chladni's sound figures to the third dimension was introduced by a research group at Freie Universität Berlin.<sup>52</sup> It is explored further in one of our current works,<sup>53</sup> but a great deal remains to be discovered and supported concerning the potential of 3D Chladni works in the field of visual arts as art and science crossovers and collaborations.<sup>54</sup>



**Fig. 5.** Anca-Simona Horvath and students from Aalborg university, *The Chladni Wall*, 2020 (picture credit: Horvath and Rühse, “The Chladni Wall,” 5).

### Conclusion

Although the *Chladni Wall* captivates with its particular sculptural style, it, of course, does not offer the viewer the opportunity to experience the direct relationship between the acoustic signals and the visual forms as in Lucier's *The Queen of the South*, Nicolai's *Wave Tubs* and Maurmair's *Club Moss Field Generator*. The "archaic indexicality" distinguishes the Chladni sound figures created in these pieces from other sound visualizations in the field of visual music.<sup>55</sup> Like Chladni's own presentations of his experiment in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, live experiments with sound figures still draw a lot of attention because one can experience "tone painting in its most literal sense" (Roland Maurmair).<sup>56</sup> The experiments of Hans Jenny were especially inspiring for those working with sound figures in sound art, largely because of his use of liquids and contemporary technical devices. Lucier was one of the first artists to be inspired by Hans Jenny's work during an important era of change and turned away from several traditions in his piece *The Queen of the South*, especially by allowing an open-ended process.<sup>57</sup> The patterns created in this work are more imperfect than those of Jenny, as the conditions are less ideal in performances. The alchemical connotation of the transformation of the image sections into video images in Lucier's piece is also very special.

At the turn of the millennium, art in conjunction with science attracted more attention, and Carsten Nicolai was one of the artists who worked with Chladni's sound figures in this context. Nicolai worked with low frequencies to reflect on silence. Like Jenny, Nicolai used liquids but renounced using esoteric connotations. His artworks are characterized by a restrained minimalist aesthetic that deals with the properties of sound in a poetic way.<sup>58</sup> Roland Maurmair worked with sound waves in solid materials in an installation—his *Club Moss Field Generator* belongs to the bio-art genre and is a participatory artwork with a subversive character. It has parallels to the eidoscope device invented by Margaret Watts Hughes, although modern technology is applied in this case. For some years now, 3D Chladni visualizations can be created more easily. We made an experiment where we tried to transfer sound images into 3D representations. However, there is still a lot of undiscovered potential of 3D Chladni sound figures in the field of

visual arts and the aesthetics and the symbolic connotations of future Chladni sound figures will be interesting for research.

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## Endnotes

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4. Leonardo da Vinci, *Notebooks*, 542; Galilei, *Dialogues*, 101.
5. Hooke, *Diary*, 448 (entry of July 8, 1960).
6. Chladni, *Theorie des Klanges*; idem, *Die Akustik*.
7. Novalis, *Werke*, 95; Lydon, "Signatura rerum."
8. Watts Hughes, *Voice figures*.
9. Curtis, "The Tonograph;" idem, *Voice building*, 233-238.
10. Jenny, *Cymatics*, 63-64.
11. Blamey, *Sine Waves*, 209.
12. Hans Jenny used "Kymatik" [Cymatics] for the title of his book project; Stuten, "Foreword," 15.
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17. Lucier and Simon, *Chambers*, 94-95; Jenny, *Cymatics*, passim.
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19. Ibidem, 94; see also Wilson, "Interview with Alvin Lucier," 2.
20. Lucier, "Origins of a Form," 8.
21. Thoben, "Look at the Natural World," 113.
22. Ibidem, 114.
23. Lucier, Origins of a Form, 11.
24. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, 367.
25. Idem., pp. 386-387, see also Thoben, "Look at the Natural World," 114.
26. Johnson, "The Minimal Slow-Motion Approach."
27. Cox, *Sonic Flux*, 186f.
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29. Carsten Nicolai, *Wellenwanne* (Wave Tub), 2000, aluminium trays, cd player, cd, amplifier, loudspeakers, water, variable size, see also Somaini, "Catching the Waves," 59.
30. Hollein, "Forword," 21.
31. Carsten Nicolai, *Milch* (Milk), 2000, 10 Hz, 20 Hz, 25 Hz, 40 Hz, 50 Hz, 55 Hz, 75 Hz, 80 Hz, 95 Hz, 110 Hz, lambda print face mounted to plexiglas, 80 x 66 cm each (images are published in Carsten Nicolai, *Static Fades*, 12-17). – See also Hasegawa, "Snow," 44, and Somaini, 2005, 59f.
32. See for instance Jenny, *Cymatics*, 35.
33. See the installation view in Hollein and Modelsee, *Anti Reflex*, 92-93.
34. The *wellenwanne* installation is also presented as a test arrangement – see Koepnick, *Resonant Matter*, 92.
35. Hans Jenny, *Cymatic experiments with liquids*, 1960s, photo: H. P. Widmer, published in UNESCO 1969, 3.
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37. Robert Rauschenberg, *White Painting* [three panel], 1951, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, oil on canvas, 182.9 x 243.8 cm; see Revill, *Roaring Silence*, 205/452 [eBook], and Kauffman, "The 'Theory of Silence,'" 4.
38. See Gerhard Richter, *Works on Paper*, 16-17.
39. Carsten Nicolai, *wellenwanne lfo*, 2012, metal, glass, acrylic glass, mirror, audio equipment, water, light, sound, room installation, dimensions variable; see also Koepnick, *Resonant Matter*, 93.
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44. Roland Maurmair, *Club Moss Field Generator (Bärlappfeldgenerator)*, interactive installation, 2005, club moss spores, subconstruction, membrane, microphone, PC; see also O.K. Centrum, *Ordnung der Natur*, 62-65.
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46. Maurmair, *Nature's Revenge*, 27.
47. Ibidem, 38.
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49. Horvath and Rühse, "Chladni Patterns Gone 3D," 320 (with illustration).
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# Digital Migration of Generation X and Eco-techno Utopia: The Case of Novi Sad New Media Scene

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Information Age focuses on scientific and artistic research on the feedback loops between individuals, social systems, mechanical systems, and the global ecosystem. This paper analyses the digital migration of Generation X and the preconditions of the emergence of a new media scene in Novi Sad (Vojvodina/ Serbia) which had evolved in a state of extreme social complexity—the constitutional breakdown of SFR Yugoslavia and the effects of the Yugoslav wars causing the downturn of political, economic, cultural, artistic and moral values of the society. The research was focused on eco-techno utopia and differentiation of regional identity within the perspectives of the Anthropocene culture (1800–). The outcome was a chronological map of site-specific media art history which took into account the personal epistemology of an artist which had been formed in a volatile environment, specifically: 1) *Autopoiesis* of the artist and construction of identity through the process of adapting to the environment, *Physical–Virtual*; 2) Simultaneous adjustment to the complexity of the environment and artist's complexity; 3) Generation X augmentation with the products of the information-based economy; 4) Emergence of information art in Novi Sad, e.g., environment art, tactical media, computer art, digital art installation, glitch art, software art, Internet art, and gaming.

## **KEYWORDS**

Site-Specific Media Art History; Post-Yugoslav New Media; Environment Art; Eco-Technologies; Artist's Perspective

### Introduction

The province of Vojvodina was formed as a legal administrative body after World War II. The dynamic socio-cultural development of Yugoslavia, colloquially called the *Belle Époque* (1957– 1988), was a period of peace and industrialization within socialist democratic centralism based on a delegate system and the “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,” which included economic and cultural equality but without equality of “political or other opinion.” The *Belle Époque* timeline began with the extinguishment of the labor camp Goli Otok (1956), and the relaxation of Agitprop policy by *separation of the cultural front from the ideological front* (1957). It lasted until the Anti-Bureaucratic Revolution (1988), which had been induced at the provinces Vojvodina and Kosovo, as well as the Republic of Montenegro, followed by the outburst of nationalism, political repression and economic downturn.

This paper is a primary documentation of an artist. A digital migration of Generation X was given as the milestone events organized in order as an actor on the scene had perceived it. The interpretation of the situation was made from the perspective of an artist passing through the political dismantlement of Vojvodina autonomous rights (1988–1990), the Yugoslav wars (1991–1999), the international isolation and economic sanctions on SR Yugoslavia (1991–1995), the advent of the Internet in Serbia (1996), the globalization and the latter evolutionary leap to the state of *posthuman* due to the penetration of mobile telephony (2013–).

### The Conuncture 1957-1988

The city of Novi Sad (*lat.* Neoplanta, *hu.* Újvidék, *sl.* Nový Sad, *de.* Neusatz an der Donau, *sr./hr./ro.* Novi Sad, *abbreviation* NS) is the cultural and political center of Vojvodina, northern Province of the Republic of Serbia, situated in the Pannonian Plain. The Province of Vojvodina is one of the largest hydro-systems in Europe that has been built from the beginning of 18th century. It was developed under the auspices of different states and economic systems: the Austrian Empire, the Dual Monarchy Austria-Hungary, and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). Massive

hydro-technical works, the colonization motivated by political goals of Austrians, Hungarians and Serbs, and the economic migrations of various Central European and Balkan nations, generated a cultivated habitat. It is the site of European hydro-technical heritage including: Great Bacska Canal (Danube–Tisza, 1802); *Lock Bezdan* (Danube, underwater concreting 1855/56); *Hydro-nod Mali Stapar* at Great Bacska Canal (Lock, 1802; Mill, 1848; monument *Goddess of Fertility Pannonia*, 1872); *Lock Bečej* (Tisza, power plant 1895–98); *Steam pump Žabalj* (Tisza, 1898); *Diesel pump station Plavna* (Danube, 1912); and *The Hydro-complexes Klek and Itebej* (Bega Canal, 1910–1914).<sup>1</sup>

The closure of water management of Vojvodina was completed by the construction of the Danube-Tisa-Danube system (1947–1977) and the dam on the river Tisza (Novi Bečej, 1977). Four hundred engineers worked on the D-T-D major project that included over 1,300 studies and 35,000 graphic drawings, while 130 million cubic meters of soil was dug in order to compound the D-T-D canal network.<sup>2</sup> The Province of Vojvodina was a case of regional identity differentiation within the epistemology of the Anthropocene culture. Nikola Mirkov, the author of the D-T-D system wrote: *The new system of water management produced a new province, a new life, a new civilization, a new culture, and a new human.* Urbanization and colonization began in the Age of Enlightenment (18th century, the Austrian Empire) on the principles of *Physiocracy* based on the idea that *land development*—population growth (migration and colonization) and agricultural development (canal construction and drainage of wetlands)—was the main source of wealth of nations and a foundation for the development of trade, crafts and tax revenue of the state. The closure of the *D-T-D anthropocene cultural pattern* was made within the conjuncture of SFR Yugoslavia, defined by *socio-cultural patterns* such as: self-governing socialism, left-liberal progressivism, non-aligned politics, multiculturalism, brotherhood and unity.

The D-T-D system should be regarded as the most significant eco-techno-utopia project of SFR Yugoslavia, which had been built in symbiosis with cultural development of Vojvodina and economy grounded in

the light industry (e.g. AIK-DTD, *en.* Agro Industrial Complex Danube–Tisza–Danube based in Novi Sad). The D-T-D system had functioned as a cyber-anthropological pattern due to its socio-cultural impact. The awareness that human had managed to modify the environment with hydro-technical works so that s/he can regulate and control it, was the basis of cyber-anthropological thinking and should be considered as the foundation of the cybernetic discourse within the site-specific history of art, e.g. genesis and epistemology of land art projects in Vojvodina. The cyber-anthropological aspects are important to understand the influence of conjuncture on the emergence of site-specific phenomena within the context of art history. Rapid environmental change was captured in the 1960s ‘informel art’ from Vojvodina (Ács József, Pal Peterik, József Benes, Bogdanka Poznanović); *land art* interventions and *water art* interventions (Bogdanka Poznanović, Bosch+Bosch, KÔD); as well as at the work of the EK Group (1969–1971) which operated within the production resources of the art colony in Senta. Group EK (erót kölcsönző) was an informal assembly that performed socially engaged multimedia works (symbiosis of fine art and applied art practices) in relation to the environment art and mass media.

An early example of a mediated image—extracted from the aesthetics of *old movies* and *old jazz*—was the “Dei Leči” *snapshot-motion-pictures actionism* made in Downtown Novi Sad by Bora Vitorac and Dragoljub Pavlov (1957-1965). The late 1960s were the expansion of mass culture, words like “super” and “image” entered the urban vocabulary of Yugoslav subculture. The Yugoslav Broadcasting was founded on November 12, 1952. The beginnings of television date back to 1958 and the founding of the Yugoslav Radio Television, whose members were regional information centers in Belgrade, Zagreb, Skopje, Ljubljana, Sarajevo, Titograd (Podgorica), Novi Sad and Pristina. By the decision of the Workers’ Council of Radio Novi Sad (February 4, 1971), the working unit “Television under construction” was established with the task of infrastructural preparation for the construction of a self-financed television station, equipped to broadcast programs in several languages.<sup>3</sup> The first TV Novi Sad News, broadcast from Mišeluk (November 27, 1975), marked the beginning of the production of Novi Sad

television, which was of fundamental importance for the development of the local media sphere and popular music culture. TV Novi Sad art-specials were specific tactical media production, which can be treated as the “guerrilla” intrusion into the state-television worldview, such as Judit Šalgo (1941-1996) rhetorical performance *The Positions of Literature*, recorded in the studio of the TV NS news program.<sup>4</sup>

Since the beginning of the 1960s, according to global trends, Yugoslavia has been working on digitalizing the process of managing military, communal and economic systems. The Vinca Institute and the Mihajlo Pupin Institute developed the Yugoslav series of *CER-Digital Electronic Computer* (sr. *Cifarski Elektronski Računar*, 1960-1975). The first mainframe computer, *Honeywell-model 200*, was imported in Novi Sad in 1970, based on the “Decision on pooling funds of the Municipality of Novi Sad for the joint financing of the procurement of equipment for Electronic Computer Center” (December 27, 1968). The first *Electronic Computer Center* (ECC) in Novi Sad became operational on January 15, 1971. Also, the companies formed their own local ECCs, e.g. unified payment operations in the housing company of Novi Sad have been carried out since 1975, after the purchase of the *ICL – model 2903* in 1974.<sup>5</sup> In the context of Vojvodina neo-avantgarde, historical examples of *digital arte povera* were created from computer consumables such as the graphic interventions on computer prints of Slavko Matković *Processing of discarded computer material* (1970) and the photo-action of Bogdanka Poznanović *Computer tape & body* (1973).

The rapid development of communication networks and the globalization of the media cultural space formed a growing-up pool of Generation X. Since the 1980s; experimental video expression has dominated an image of popular music, e.g. David Bowie’s *Ashes To Ashes* (1980). Television as a creative media was challenged by the long-awaited apocalyptic 1984, which began with the first satellite installation, Nam June Paik’s *Good Morning Mr. Orwell* (1984). TV program was broadcast live from studios in America, France, Germany and South Korea. Paik opposed to the dystopian view that television contributes to alienation and destroys people’s intimacy, and opted for the utopia of global communication. He combined different

visual sensibilities and musical genres into a unique syncretic installation, which influenced the polygenre telematic thinking of Generation X.

Yugoslav multimedia was based on the formula TELEVISION + MUSIC + COMICS = MULTIMEDIA. An urban media image had been “liberated from the Balkan complex.”<sup>6</sup> It was shaped by punk and new wave music scene (Belgrade, Zagreb, Novi Sad, Rijeka, Ljubljana) and by the young authors of comics (e.g. *Novi kvadrat*, Zagreb). In Novi Sad, the first punk single was “Being Ugly, Smart and Young” (1979), by the group Pekinška Patka (en. *Beijing Duck*), which held the concert at the shop window “Live at NORK” (Novi Sad, 1979) and defined the new image of “Punk with a diploma.”<sup>7</sup> From the beginning of the 1980s through the 1990s, Novi Sad post-punk music scene (Imperium Of Jazz, Luna, La Strada, Boye, Obojeni Program) was a cacophony of music, poetry, performance and the visual arts strongly influenced by the 1970s neo-avantgarde artists such as Branko Andrić-Andrla (Imperium Of Jazz) and Slobodan Tišma (KÔD, (Æ-KÔD; Luna, La Strada). Electronic music and post-industrial multimedia marked the 1980s in Vojvodina. In 1984, group Autopsia from Ruma created a digital work *IkkONA* on *Spectrum*, the posters *Economy of Death* (1981-85), and released the album *Factory* (1989): “There is only one formal attribute of meaning for post-industrial art: repetition! No progress! No development! Everything is the same. Every difference is the same. New differences are the repetition of old differences. And so on.”<sup>8</sup> Group Rascep from Zrenjanin introduced voice-performative expression, music performances that included visuals and vocalization in a “new” fictional language. The representatives of Novi Sad multimedia scene were schoolmates REX Ilusivii (electronic music) and Zoran Janjetov (comics). Unique Novi Sad music phenomena, and the first Yugoslav female band Boye—“I’m Joyful” (1983) and “Coffee at the Bottom of the Ocean” (1983)—announced the alternation of the melancholic micro-world of the 1980s, to the technologically driven dynamism of the 1990s, e.g., single “Ludilo mašina” (*The madness of machines*, 1997), a music video directed by Aleksandar Davić.<sup>9</sup>

During the 1980s, IT cabinets were formed in Yugoslav primary and secondary schools. IT literacy was propagated via specialized magazines (*World of Computers, Galaxy*), TV shows (*Computer School*) and radio shows (*Polarotor*), which gave impetus to the development of school and home computers in Croatia, Serbia, Vojvodina and Slovenia. Novi Sad-based Company *Novkabel*, Electronic Computers Department, manufactured a personal computer *ET-188*; and a conference communication BBS system was established for the 29th Chess Olympics (Šonsi, Novi Sad, 1990). The IT consumer market flourished due to the growth of personal standard of the Yugoslav middle class. In 1983, Voja Antić sketched the first Yugoslav home computer *Galaxy*, based on the do-it-yourself principle. In-line with Antić's instructions published in a special issue "Computers in your home" (*Galaxy* magazine special edition, January 1984), about 8,000 people made the computer *Galaxy*. Affordable personal computers (*ZX Spectrum, C64*) became common to Generation X, that spun the market for Indie video games—the first Yugoslav publishing house Suzy Soft operated in Zagreb (1985-1988).

Electronic art penetrated the Yugoslav cultural system during the period of mainframe experimentalism by a distinctive exhibition/symposium *New Tendencies* held in Zagreb ("Tendency 4: Computer and Visual Research," 1969; "Tendencies 5: Constructive Visual Research, Computer Visual Research, Conceptual Art", 1973; magazine *Bit*). In a text on mail art in Yugoslavia, artist Bálint Szombathy situated the beginning of information-based art in the 1950s, concerning "the parafluxus objects" created by multimedia artist Vladan Radovanović (founder and head of the Electronic Studio of Radio Belgrade (1972– 99)).<sup>10</sup> At the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad (founded in April 22, 1974), Bogdanka Poznanović introduced a methodologically innovative course "Intermedia Research" and a studio equipped for video production (1979/1980). The "Intermedia Research" was built upon Fluxus practice—as depicted in *Intermedia Chart* by Dick Higgins (19 January, 1995)<sup>11</sup>—thus Novi Sad label "new media" usually refers to the diachronic development of expanded media, way back to the 1960s. After a decade of stillness, electronic art renaissance occurred in the period

1989–1991, within a conjuncture of the 1980s PC revolution. The 1989 Ars Electronica (AE) featured two artists from Novi Sad, Vojin Tišma received an honorary mention in the field of computer music for the work *Marshy Sounds*, while Predrag Šidjanin participated within the cooperation-based telematic project by Roy Ascott (*Aspect of Gaia*, 1989).<sup>12</sup> In addition, AE honorary mention in the category of computer animation received the work *The Dream* (1989) by Franz Curk produced in the studio of RTV Ljubljana.<sup>13</sup> The advance of the digital art scene in Yugoslavia occurred in 1991, within the framework of the exhibition “Computer Art” held at the ULUS Gallery in Belgrade, introductory texts in the catalog were written by artists Predrag Šidjanin, Vladan Radovanović, and Miroslav Miša Savić. The “Computer Art” exhibition was meant to be an occasion to establish the Yugoslav Association of Electronic Media Artists (AUEM), but the initiative was prevented by the Yugoslav wars (1991-1999).

Yugoslavia had been part of the European Academic Network (domain co.yu) since 1989, but Serbia was disconnected from international networks due to the warmongering politics. The Academic Network of Serbia was founded in 1992. After the UN sanctions against FR Yugoslavia ended at the end of 1995, The Academic Network of Serbia was connected to the Internet on February 28, 1996. At that point international e-mail, chat, forum and specialized database services became available to the academic community in Serbia. Re-actualization of the war-torn initiative was a symposium “A Brief History of Electronic Art,” held at the Rex Theater of the B92 Cultural Center (Belgrade, 1998). Gordana Novaković and Miroslav Miša Savić (Belgrade), the pioneers of Yugoslav electronic art and organizers of the event, invited regional artists active in the field of digital art in an effort to initiate the “establishment of the national collection and archives of Yugoslav new media practice.” Still, for the second time, the efforts did not yield the desired result.<sup>14</sup> Instead, the post-Yugoslav scene became well-known for the Internet Flame Wars, e.g. implosion of the *Syndicate* mailing list<sup>15</sup> (The Kosovo War, 1999), and the case of Andrej Tišma, a mail-artist / net-artist, and an art critic of newspaper *Dnevnik* (Novi Sad) at the time.<sup>16</sup>

### The Digital Migration of Generation X

The siege of Vukovar (SR Croatia), conducted by the Yugoslav people's army (*JNA*), was the city long-lasting trauma expressed in the re-enacted antiwar graffiti "Shame on you Novi Sad Corps." The period 1991–92, was marked by the anti-war protests in Vojvodina. The civil crisis headquarter in Senta demanded the calling of a referendum—*whether the citizens want war or not*. In Zrenjanin, a petition was organized demanding *JNA* neutrality.<sup>17</sup> *The Spiritual Republic of Zicer* was founded in the village of Trešnjevac, intangible republic did not have a territory, but it had an ambassador and a Constitution that guaranteed the right to freedom of opinion. The opposition to military and political repression was rooted in an urban culture. In 1993, *The good bands of Vojvodina* recorded a wake-up call of Generation X, a song "Voša zove" (*Vojvodina Calling*).<sup>18</sup> The socio-linguistic game of naming a band reflected the attitudes of Generation X, e.g. The Great Contempt, Generation Without a Future, Up in Arms Against Kidnappers, Scream of The Generation, *Eva Braun*, Deaf Bitches, Instant Karma, etc. The trajectory of revolt led to the first edition of the Novi Sad music festival EXIT (2000), held as a rebellion at the time of Slobodan Milošević overthrow.

The generation shift, *Baby boomers*→*Generation X*, took place in the 1990s, within the context of renewal of the modernist paradigm. The analysis of the 1990s Novi Sad art cycle, i.e., the top-notch exhibitions Museum of Contemporary Art Vojvodina (MoCA Vojvodina, Novi Sad) and art magazine *Projeka(r)t* (Novi Sad, 1993-2001), indicated that the most influential Belgrade art critics and theoreticians (J. Denegri, M. Šuvaković) found a mitigation gateway from traumatic and unlivable war reality by complex linkage with the heroic time of Yugoslav Neo avant-garde form the '60s and the '70s. The theoretical re-enactment of concept art and art requisite to the time of mechanical mass production, stabilized artistic identity in a mode of "functional art". In the 1965 *New Tendencies* catalog, Dimitrije Bašičević Mangelos wrote on art, that discontinued with "metaphysical categories" in a favor of "research methods"—"Functional art is no longer a picture of the world. It does not represent an object. It creates the object." The discourse of "modernism after postmodernism" (Tomaž Brejc),<sup>19</sup> or „retroavangarde" (Peter

Weibel),<sup>20</sup> set a stage for the emergence of computer-based artworks in Novi Sad. An artwork transferable into the formal codes of the Information age has changed the artist's perspective. An artist–scientist hybrid Staniša Dautović wrote, “An artist as a source of information who emits non-redundant artistic ideas. In that way, the artist-Catholic joins the general explosion of information, fighting on his way against the implosion of the meaning.”<sup>21</sup> Dautović challenged a reader to establish a connection between Malevich's *Black Square* and the following algorithm ( $x$  is a rational number):

Set[Background,White];  
Fill[Rectangle[x],Black]

A milestone event was the Encounter Centre *Movement #1*, initiated by artist Igor Antić, held at the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad (Intermedia Research Studio, 18. February–16. April 1995). Seven-week seminar “Morality and Mythology in Contemporary Art” gathered artists, scientists, and art critics. It was produced as a *workshop on contemporariness* upon the methodology of the Institute of High Fine Arts Studies from Paris (I.H.E.A.P.). The event influenced the orientation of the NS scene toward the site-specific practice based on „social engagement through esthetics”<sup>22</sup>, which triggered the transition *expanded media*→*new media*. In Novi Sad, the U turn of the 1990s *ethics over aesthetics*, came through the antiwar actionism in performance and media art: *DADA-Symposion 1922-1992* (12.12.1992), a happening at the Catholic port organized by Milica Mrđa and Cultural Center Novi Sad; TV video *The Last Dada Performance* (1992), scenario by Jasna Jovanov, directed by Aleksandar Davić, production TV Novi Sad; the works of Bálint Szombathy (1990–1999); *The Flood* (1993) an action at Zmaj Jovina street performed by Led art; *La Pljuzza* (1994) a polygenre action by Branislav Petrić; an action *Human* (Mostar, 1996) and a documentary *1/1* (Vukovar, UNTAES controlled zone, 1997) by association Apsolutno; tactical media campaign *URTICA MEDICAMENTUM EST* (1999-2001) a rite of passage 1988–2001; *The Traveling of The Dead* (2001) directed by Aleksandar Davić; and a glitch art by

*Urtica I remember the facts I don't want to, and I cannot forget the facts I want* (2001) displayed at the shop window of devastated NORK.

The 1990s new media scene in Novi Sad came into being as dispersive formation. An overlapping point would be „information art,” an amalgam of *art, technology and science* by way of Stephen Wilson’s definition. The emancipatory potential of ICT became a substitute for the ideas based on internationalism, avant-garde, and the utopian belief in sustainable techno-ecology. Serbo-Croatian, the broken language of Yugoslavia (RAS.ЦЕП), was substituted with *broken English*. The protagonists of the Novi Sad new media scene migrated into the field of digital networked culture and continued to develop production in an interaction with the international media art community. The most prominent grass-root organizations in Novi Sad were New Media Center *kuda.org* (2001), NAPON The Institute for Flexible Cultures and Technologies (2005) and Share Lab (2015). MoCA Vojvodina had been co-organizing computer art exhibitions since 2003, and *The Center for Intermedia and Digital Art* was founded within the Museum in 2013. An art historian Kristian Lukić introduced a notion of a formatted scene in Novi Sad (new media, digital art) in text “Digital art in Vojvodina” (MoCAVojvodina, 2008).<sup>23</sup>

Due to the Yugoslav war and frozen political conflict, many artists had left Novi Sad. Thus the selection criteria for Novi Sad Generation X—a chronological order of art initiatives that could be analyzed from the point of site-specific media art history and environment art—were made in relation to: 1) artists who received their higher education in Vojvodina/ Serbia; 2) artists that spent the 1990s in FR Yugoslavia; 3) artists that were living in Novi Sad when their most important works were created but at the same time were active internationally. The result was chronological map labeled as “Novi Sad *digi.povera*” (*NS digi.povera*).<sup>24</sup> The compound “*digi.povera*” was coined to *signify hi-fi concepts in lo-fi production, the digital art works created in poor conditions, from poor materials, cracked software programs, cheap and used computers*. During the adaptation to environmental complexity *Physical—Virtual*, the artists of Generation X formulated new identities: “artist-Catholic” (Petrić–Dautović–Maruna), “neutral researchers of

absolutely real facts” (Apsolutno), “anonima” (Urtica), and “hacker” (Eastwood). The chronological map of *Novi Sad digi.povera* could be divided into the following sequences.

*Sequence 1995–2000*, encompassed the period from 1995, when peace agreements were signed that stopped the war in Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, until the fall of Slobodan Milošević’s regime in Serbia on October 5, 2000. Media artists who emerged onto the Novi Sad scene in the mid-1990s took part at the seminar “Morality and Mythology in Contemporary Art” (Apsolutno, Davić, Dautović), and most of them took part the programs emerged within the cultural policy of New Europe aiming to connect East and West, e.g. Forum OSTranenie (1993-1999), or *Syndicate* and *Nettime* (Davić, grupa Baza, Apsolutno). The crossing *Baby boomers*→*Generation X* was marked by the video works of Aleksandar Davić (1961- 2020) and the new media activism (e.g. *Hybrid WorkSpace*, Documenta X, Kassel, 1997). Davić’s video installation *Eyewitness* (1995) was a milestone set-up that introduced the notion of probabilistic nature of the worldview. The *artist-engineer* team Branislav Petrić, Staniša Dautović and Vladimir Maruna were exploring formal systems in the arts, the relationships *Art—Science* and *Science—Religion*. The installation *Chirp Chip/ The Night Sparrow* (Petrić–Dautović, 1996) was inspired by the vision of cutting edge bio-computing (organic DNA computer *TT-100*, Leonard Adleman, 1994)—they based the *symbolic game* on an idea that in the future wildlife will be used for the purpose of calculating and storing data. Association Apsolutno (Dragan Rakić, Zoran Pantelić, Bojana Petrić and Dragan Miletić) realized artworks under the umbrella project of counting down to the beginning of the new millennium 1995:2000. Multimedia artworks of Apsolutno were net art project *0003 Absolute Sale* (1997) produced within the ecosystem of Soros Center for Contemporary Art and CD-ROM *0002 The Greatest Hits* (1998) that problematized the relationship between control and freedom in the context of the ecology of the Information age.

*Sequence 2001-2012*. The activities of art groups *Urtica*, *art and media research group* (Violeta Vojvodić Balaž and Eduard Balaž) and *Eastwood–Real Time Strategy Group* (Kristian Lukić, Zvonko Gorečan, Vladan Joler) were

distinctive of the post-October 5 period of new media art in Novi Sad. These artists mostly exhibited their works on the international new media scene, where they achieved professional affirmation and verification of their work. Urtica and Eastwood explored forms characteristic of information technology (database, gaming, interface, icons), some of their works had been produced successively in software versions (*Civilization VI* by Eastwood, *Social Engine 4.0* by Urtica). The common themes for these artists were infowar, cyber-eco systems and relationship *Art—Economy—Society*. Particular project of Urtica that followed the tradition of experiments based on multilingualism in Vojvodina was *Dictionary Of Primal Behaviour* (2003). It was made as an aesthetic communication experiment that combines verbal and nonverbal codes to create a message that is understandable to a wide audience despite their cultural background, linguistic knowledge or world knowledge. The most complex artwork of Eastwood was *Civilization VI* (the 2015 edition), a modification of the popular computer game that introduced as a novelty an authentic interface design and simulation of cyber warfare between the 12 largest world companies in the fight to conquer the Internet.

*Sequence 2013-2022.* The last segment of the observed cycle defines development concerning the social stratification of actors. The artistic activity was concentrated in the public sector, a move to the academic level included artists that had been working as professors at the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad. It was a representative example of the point at which the social system achieves homeostasis in relation to art as its subsystem. The characteristic representatives were Vladan Joler and Stevan Kojić, and the thematic link between these authors was “new extractivism.” Vladan Joler explored the invisible infrastructures of virtual economy. A casestudy map *Anatomy of an AI System* (2018), by Vladan Joler and Kate Crawford, visualized the resources used in the Amazon Echo production cycle which led to the paradoxical conclusion that sophisticated renewable energy technology was based on non-renewable natural resources.<sup>25</sup> *L'art pour l'art* artistic experiments made by Stevan Kojić—amalgam of hydroponic grow systems, digital systems, simple robots and luminous objects—could be decoded as a network of the processed signals that we experience as a work of art. The

continuation of NS digi.povera chronological map, the transition from Generation X to Generation Y (*Millennials*), should include early works of Isidora Todorović such as mobile app. political game *One Good Day* (2013) and strategic game *Can You feel the spill?* (2014) by *Les Misérables*, etc.



**Fig. 1** Map of the Information art in Vojvodina / Novi Sad digi.povera Design: Memoduct 2022, Violeta Vojvodić Balaž and Eduard Balaž

### Conclusion

A paradigm shift of media-born Generation X was rooted in the phenomena such as the microworld, socializing among peers and like-minded people, contempt for the state institutions, principles of self-organization, an idea of the revolution in art, and the influence of mass media products such as music, comics, video, advertising, graphic design, strategy games, and video games.

The analysis made from the perspective of Anthropocene culture—a trajectory of environment art and tactical media in Vojvodina—showed that in the process of adaptation to the complexity of a volatile environment, the artists of Generation X adapted to those segments of the environment, which enabled the maintenance of a stable identity, which implied digital migration and the replacement of real world by virtual world.

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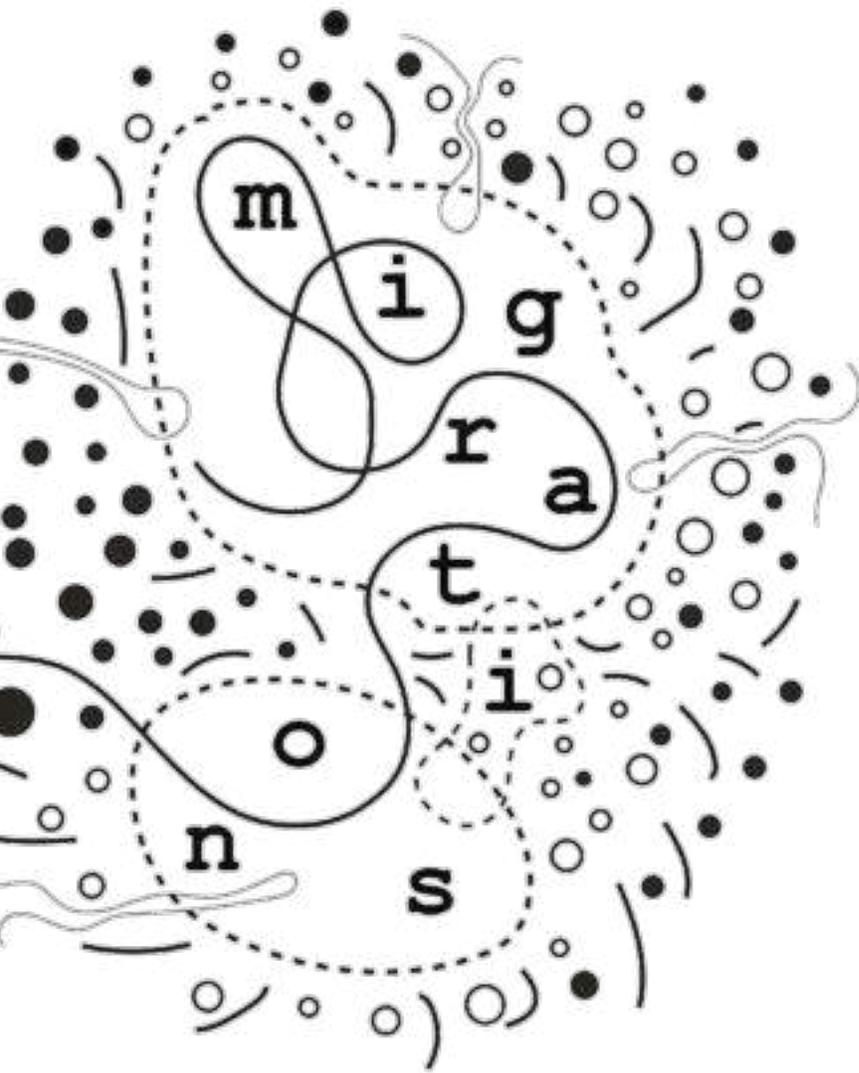
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# Missions as Contact Zones

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## Session 6



## Session 6

# Missions and Missionaries in the Early Modern World: Colonial and Global Art Histories

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### **Introduction**

In the early modern world, missions and missionaries played a key role in the migration of objects, materials, and technologies between (and within) the Americas, Asia, Africa, and Europe.<sup>1</sup> European engravings, paintings, sculptures, and other decorative objects entered Spanish America through missionaries traveling from Italy, Germany, Flanders, and Spain. Yet Spanish American missions were more than recipients of European visual traditions—many of them were also important artistic centers and distribution sites, permitting the development of complex exchange networks. Some missionaries were trained artists or architects, introducing new aesthetic vocabularies and building technologies, while others established workshops for the instruction of indigenous artists and the incorporation of native knowledge. Extant visual objects, structures, and archival texts still attest to the exchange and interplay of peoples, materials, and ideas that resulted in a vibrant and generative early modern environment.

### **The Mission at Maynas**

In 1707, the Jesuit cartographer Samuel Fritz and Juan de Narváez, a member of the Society of Jesus who was skilled in the art of copper engraving, printed a map depicting the Amazon River. The map demonstrates the territorial dominion that the Jesuit Province of Quito had

attained over the region, while emphasizing the imposition of *policía*, or Christian civility, in what was known as the mission of Maynas. Thus, the map depicts the innumerable *reducciones* that were established along the rivers. At the bottom of the image, a stone slab provides detailed information about this territory. An indigenous figure, his head adorned with feathers but wearing a tunic and a Christian cross around his neck, directs the spectator's attention to the written text. The inscription describes the course of the river, the plants, and trees from the region, and provides a list of Jesuit martyrs who offered their lives doing apostolic work (the sites where their martyrdom had taken place is marked with a cross on the map). Interestingly, in noting some of the useful natural resources from the Amazon, such as cocoa, sarsaparilla, different types of woods, and bark for making pigments, the inscription also underscores the knowledge and technologies that the missionaries had learned from indigenous peoples.

The mission of Maynas in the Amazon region comprised over one hundred *reducciones*, or indigenous towns. Established by Jesuit missionaries during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the mission was headed by the Jesuit College in Quito. Although remains of the colonial settlements are scarce, detailed descriptions of their art and architecture have been preserved in the writings of missionaries. One of the most comprehensive accounts of this mission was written by Manuel Uriarte in Ravenna, Italy, the author's home after the Jesuit expulsion of 1767.<sup>2</sup>

Uriarte conducted missionary work in various *reducciones* of the Amazonian basin. Remarkably, the discussion of his order's apostolic work emphasizes the material and visual culture of the missionary project. Thus, his account is filled with references to artisans (European, Creole, and indigenous) who participated in the building of churches. He also gives detailed information about the paintings, sculptures, and engravings that adorned church walls and altarpieces. Most astonishing, Uriarte explains the innovative use of local materials and pigments.

Uriarte spent many years in the *reducción* of San Joaquín de Omaguas, an important town in Maynas and the center of missionary activity in the region. In his description of this settlement, he begins by noting the area's cultural diversity, a mixture resulting from the forced relocation of various indigenous nations. Each indigenous nation had specialized

knowledge in a distinct trade. Recognizing the variety of proficiencies, Uriarte stressed the fact that indigenous artists excelled in the production of textiles and ceramics, as well as in carpentry and wood carving, skills that could clearly serve Christian purposes.

With regard to the church of San Joaquín, Uriarte states that the main altarpiece was built by George Winterer, a Jesuit from the Tyrol. Winterer first participated in the remodeling of the Jesuit church in Quito, before traveling to Maynas. According to Uriarte, the magnificent altarpiece of the church of La Compañía (Quito), carved in wood and adorned with Solomonian columns, served as a model for the smaller *retablo* in San Joaquín, which was painted and adorned with silver leaf. Other artisans continued Winterer's work in Omaguas. Among them were Spanish, Creole, and Portuguese carpenters, sculptors and painters. Particularly intriguing is the fact that Uriarte recognizes the work of indigenous artists, including sculptors and wood turners who carved religious statues and made the *retablos* (or altarpieces). Javier Tyri and Bartolo Yurimagua are just two of the names presented in this primary text that have been ignored by traditional historiography.

Missions received supplies of textiles and tools from the nearby towns of Lamas and Moyobamba. References to the "socorro" or "material aid" from Quito are also frequent. Tools, needles and garments, as well as devotional objects such as crosses and rosaries, were included in the "socorro" from the Jesuit College. So, too, were materials for the adornment of churches. Thus, Uriarte notes that he had requested small books with silver leaves that were used to embellish the altarpieces in the church of San Joaquín. Statues and paintings, some of them carved or painted by renowned Quiteño artists, were also sent as precious gifts to the missions. San Joaquín received, for example, a small statue of the Presentation of the Virgin dressed in rich garments and adorned with jewelry. European images also arrived, such as a sculpture of the Virgin of the Rosary and another of the Omaguas' patron saint, St. Joachim. Mention is also made of a small sculpture of the Immaculate Conception, carved in ivory, perhaps imported from Europe or Asia.

Uriarte continually writes about arches, vaults and columns, which were used in the building of churches. Particularly interesting is the

innovative use of local materials. Although Uriarte does not necessarily state it, it is obvious that this involved the learning of local building technologies. Walls were built with “*tapia francesa*” and “*bahareque*,” construction techniques that combined branches or reed and clay, a practice employed in other Jesuit missions (as in Paraguay). Repeatedly, the author mentions the use of *achua*, a type of palm tree that was employed for making columns and arches. Finally, builders sought to reproduce the appearance of European churches. Using mineral pigments made of colored earth, and “*leche de palo*”, the resin of a local tree, artists simulated the appearance of jasper and marble.

Uriarte’s account is revealing of the importance of Jesuit missions in the Amazon for the study of both colonial and global art history in the early modern period. Such missions were instrumental in the spiritual and territorial conquest of the frontier, assuring forced acculturation and relocation of indigenous populations. While they guaranteed the migration of European artists and art objects, materials, technologies and styles, missionaries also depended on the appropriation of local materials, knowledges and technologies. But what we find especially relevant about missionary art and architecture (and the mission of Maynas is an example of this) is that it redirects our attention from the main artistic centers (such as Mexico City, Lima, Cuzco and Quito) to the margins of the Spanish empire, as well as to cultural exchange networks and circuits, both regional and global.

### **The Early Mexican Mission and Pedro de Gante**

The celebrated Franciscan missionary, Peter of Ghent (Pedro de Gante), arrived in Mexico as the Aztec capital was still smoldering from Spain’s catastrophic military assault.<sup>3</sup> Arriving in Texcoco in 1523, Gante asked the indigenous prince, Ixtlilxochitl, for furnishings and tapestries; he then used these items to setup “an altar, on which he placed an image of Our Lady and a small crucifix.” That evening, the source continues, he led the first vesper service in Texcoco.<sup>4</sup> If true, this would be the first instance that the Flemish missionary allowed for the blending of European imports and indigenous materials for the staging of Christian performance. Only a few years later, Gante established San José de los Naturales, a church, conversion center, and indigenous art school all in one. Standing adjacent to the Franciscan

monastery in Mexico City, the foundation equipped New Spain's churches and chapels with diverse images of Christ, the saints, and the Virgin Mary.

Gante is linked to some of the most remarkable early Franciscan achievements following the fall of Tenochtitlan, including the production of pictographic, Nahuatl, and trilingual catechisms. More than any other early mendicant in the sixteenth century, he is credited with fomenting a dynamic visual culture. Not surprisingly, then, his connection to specific pictorial objects (whether real or assumed) is frequently stressed. It is taken for granted that one of his own indigenous students, an anonymous artist, crafted the feathered Mass of Saint Gregory (1539) now held in the Musée des Amériques in Auch France. Commissioned by the Nahua noble Diego de Alvarado Huanitzin, nephew and son-in-law to Moctezuma II, we know the exquisite object was intended as a gift for Pope Paul III. Another former student, the Nahua artist Marcos Aquino, supplied the Chapel of San José with a new altar and, more significantly, completed a Marian painting rendered on cactus fiber for the nascent hermitage in Tepeyac; the work became the most celebrated miraculous icon in the Americas. Another former, the famous Diego Valadés, went on to produce and publish *Rhetorica Christiana* (Perugia, 1579), a lavishly illustrated monumental treatise that highlights the order's missionary strategies and achievements in New Spain. The publication appeared several years after Gante's death, but perhaps it is *the* work—with its didactic engravings rendered in a manner so evocative of the sixteenth-century Franciscan tradition—that most closely reflects the Fleming's philosophical and aesthetic ethos.

Feathered artworks, miraculous Marian paintings rendered on maguey fibers, and finely drawn copper engravings—the breadth of objects directly or indirectly connected to Gante is impressive indeed. Yet despite his status as the founder of the viceroyalty's earliest and most important art school prior to the Royal Art Academy of San Carlos, Gante appears in the surviving material corpus only as a specter. We think we see him in every painting or featherwork produced in sixteenth-century Mexico City, but his signature evades us. Even more fascinating, this propensity to envision him everywhere is not entirely ours. By the late seventeenth century, his name was attached to a variety of objects in search of legitimate pedigrees. One of the most unusual is the Virgin of Tepepan, an alabaster Marian sculpture

from the area surrounding Xochimilco (southern edge of modern-day Mexico City). Franciscan friar and chronicler, Agustín de Vetancurt (1697), claimed the painted alabaster sculpture was fashioned after the Virgin of Remedios and installed in the Franciscan monastery in Mexico City by Gante himself. It was then taken to Xochimilco “because at that time there was a shortage of images.” Thereafter, according to the author, the object was installed in the church at Tepepan. The Jesuit Francisco de Florencia (ca. 1695) is even more direct: Gante wanted to replicate the miraculous Remedios sculpture and specifically chose the quarried stone for the task. The Tepepan sculpture was then taken to San José de los Naturales “where it stood for a long time in the church’s chapel.” Florencia explicitly links this location and duration to the presence of Gante, “who at that time labored in that convent.” The Jesuit implies that it was only after the death of Gante that the image journeyed to Xochimilco—“for reasons unknown”—until finally arriving in Tepepan where “it extinguished the false adoration [practiced by] some Indians who were vehemently venerating two idols.” In Florencia, the unusual alabaster icon becomes an avatar for the Flemish friar, battling idols well past the sixteenth-century Franciscan “Golden Age.” Needless to say, not a single sixteenth-century source ties Gante to the sculpture at Tepepan. Nevertheless, the *need* to make that connection was real, a desire confirmed by text and image. An eighteenth-century portrait of Gante kept in the National History Museum in Chapultepec (Mexico City) has the educator proudly standing beside a writing desk that sustains the (now dressed) Tepepan sculpture.

The surviving visual corpus speaks to the rich breadth of materials and objects that were fashioned in the indigenous art school founded by the Franciscan lay brother Gante. The center was home to international mendicants and imported visual models but was clearly not limited by these prototypes. San José became a generative complex for creative thought and visual production and quickly gained the status of artistic epicenter both during and after the lifetime of its founder. Seventeenth-century histories attest to the school’s vibrancy and often lend prestige to individual objects; but in their effort to authenticate and fortify, the late colonial sources might also compel us to recklessly trust in the ghost of Gante.

### By way of conclusion

The migration of persons, objects, concepts, materials, and technologies is inherent to missionary art and culture, as attested by the examples from Maynas and New Spain. This is also noted in the essays that follow, which underscore the need to understand missionary culture in a global context. Problematizing cultural and artistic transfer, these studies encourage us to think beyond the dissemination of European knowledge and artistic models while recognizing multi-directional motion and itineraries. Authors, too, reflect on conceptual approaches to the study of missionary art and culture, bearing in mind the difference between accommodation, acculturation and inculturation. Comparative discussions also stress the need to contextualize adaptation, borrowing and innovation. This permits us to understand variances between artworks that developed either in response to isolation or when enduring persecution, as well as distinctions between colonial and non-colonial contexts. Calling attention to issues of identity, the missions themselves are presented as sites for cultural and artistic exchange.

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### Endnotes

1. Literature regarding missions and missionary art in the Americas is extensive. A very short sample includes Gauvin Alexander Bailey, *Art on the Jesuit Missions in Asia and Latin America 1542-1773* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: 2001); Clara Bargellini, "El arte de las misiones del norte de la Nueva España, 1600-1821: Cicatrices de la fe", *Revista de la Universidad de México* 66 (2009): 43-48; Ramón Gutiérrez, "Propuestas urbanísticas de los sistemas misionales de los jesuitas", *Un reino en la Frontera: Las misiones jesuitas en la América colonial* (Quito: Abya Yala, 2000), 173-184; Ramón Gutiérrez, "Las misiones circulares de los jesuitas en Chiloé. Apuntes para una historia singular de la evangelización", *Apuntes* 20, 1: 159-167; Renata María de Almeida Martins, "Uma cartela multicolor: objetos, praticas artísticas dos indígenas e intercambios culturais nas Missoes jesuíticas da Amazonia colonial", *Caiana* 8 (2016): 70-84; Pedro Querejazu, *Las misiones jesuíticas de Chiquitos* (La Paz: Fundación BHN, 1995); Adolfo Luis Ribera, *La pintura en las misiones jesuíticas de guaraníes* (Buenos Aires: Instituto de historia argentina y americana, 1980).
2. Manuel J. Uriarte, *Diario de un misionero de Maynas* (Quito: Abya-Yala, 2021). Uriarte (1720-1801) was born in Spain. He travelled to Napo in 1750, where he remained until the Jesuit expulsion. He provides the most detailed account of the material and visual culture of the Jesuit missions in Maynas.

3. Pedro de Gante was born in Flanders, joined the Franciscan Order as a lay brother, and arrived in Mexico-Tenochtitlan in 1523 (preceding the “Franciscan Twelve” by six months).
4. Gante’s make-shift altar is described by Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl (“Thirteenth Relation”), a governor of Texcoco and direct descendent of Texcoco’s pre-Hispanic ruler. See *The Native Conquistador. Alva Ixtlilxochitl’s Account of the Conquest of New Spain*, eds. and trans. Amber Brian, Bradley Benton, and Pablo García Loaeza (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 2015).

# ***Ad Tartaros:***

## **Latin Christian Missions to Mongol East Asia, c. 1300**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Beginning from a stone identified as the 1332 tombstone of the Franciscan friar Andrea of Perugia, Bishop of Quanzhou, this essay is a study of the visual culture associated with the early Christian missions in Mongol Yuan China. Recent work on missions as contact zones stresses their role as centers of cultural exchange, while the art of Yuan China is often presented as uniquely open to imported influences and forms. There are distinctive issues in exploring the early Latin missions as contact spaces, including that so little survives. Yet they were important in the self-presentation of the trecento Franciscan Order in Italy, and the limited evidence suggests their role as spaces of artistic and cultural encounter.

### **KEYWORDS**

Andrew of Perugia; Bible of Marco Polo; Yuan China; Artistic Exchange; Franciscan Order.

In 1946, a stone was discovered near the old city walls in Quanzhou. At the top was a relief scene with two flying angels in flowing robes, their hands stretched out to hold a large lotus flower. The base of a cross was still visible within the lotus, but the angels had been defaced, and the stone had been broken at both its top and bottom edge, destroying the rest of the cross. The imagery of divine flying figures flanking sacred symbols is ancient, and images of apsaras holding lotuses can be widely found in medieval Buddhism.<sup>1</sup> But the iconography of angels flanking a cross on a lotus is associated with the Church of the East, sometimes called the Nestorian Church, which is recorded in southern China as early as the Tang Dynasty (618-907). In Quanzhou, there are other thirteenth- and fourteenth-century tombstones with similar imagery, clearly linked to the Church of the East.



**Fig. 1.** Tombstone identified as that of Andrew of Perugia, Bishop of Zayton. c. 1332. 54 x 45 cm. Maritime Museum, Quanzhou, mus. 139.

Below the relief with the angels was an inscription, fitted somewhat awkwardly into the centre of the space. The small and uneven characters were very difficult to read, but in 1954 a British scholar proposed that the writing was not in Syriac, the language of the Church of the East, but in Latin, and that it copied a fourteenth-century European merchant hand. The following transcription was given:

† *Hic* (in P F S) *sepultus* est  
 Andreas Perusinus (de  
 votus ep. Cayton.....  
 .....ordinis (fratrum  
 min.) .....  
 .....(Jesus Christi) Apostolus  
 .....  
 .....(in mense) .....  
 M (cccxx)xii +<sup>2</sup>

With the inscription deciphered in this way, the stone emerged as the memorial of a fourteenth-century Italian Franciscan friar, Andrea da Perugia, known as Andrew of Perugia in English. From 1322 until his death, Andrew was the Latin Christian Bishop of Quanzhou, a city known as Zayton or Zaitun from its Persian and Arabic name. With this identification, the Quanzhou stone became a testament to Latin Christian activity in China in the years around 1300, long before the better-known sixteenth-century arrival of the Jesuits and other Catholic orders. This medieval mission in East Asia is also recorded by surviving documents, including a number of letters, written by the missionaries themselves and sent back to Europe to report on their work and to ask for news and support from home.<sup>3</sup> This missionary activity followed the uniting of much of the Asian landmass under the linked states of the Mongol Empire, all subject at least notionally to the Great Khan of the Mongol Yuan Dynasty.

The visual culture associated with this mission in Yuan China is the focus of this short essay.<sup>4</sup> The research here was first presented in the CIHA session “Missions as Contact Zones.” The concept of “contact zones” derives from the foundational work of Mary Louise Pratt, who defined them as:

“social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today.”<sup>5</sup> Pratt drew her primary examples from the Spanish colonial Viceroyalty of Peru, and her model has been particularly influential in studies of European missions of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries in colonial contexts.<sup>6</sup>

The potential interest of framing the medieval Latin Christian missions as contact zones is clear. As the Europeans spread into Central and Eastern Asia, they moved into regions that had been essentially unknown to medieval Europe before the Mongol rise. They encountered new peoples, languages, and cultures, and very different cultural and artistic models, presumably requiring new visual and social strategies to enable communication and interaction. At the same time, these missions were distinctive in fundamental ways from later models: they were never part of a colonial or military mission, they remained small and scattered, and they lasted only about fifty years, from roughly the mid-1290s to the 1340s. They also present specific challenges of evidence and analysis, as so little artistic and material culture survives to examine them. The Quanzhou stone is itself a cautionary example, as we will see.

In Latin Christian Europe (as in many places), the sudden Mongol rise from the early thirteenth century was framed in apocalyptic terms.<sup>7</sup> Initially, some writers identified the unknown horsemen attacking Muslim kingdoms with the followers of Prester John, a legendary Christian ruler said to live in the extreme east or northeast of the world. Very quickly, however, the invaders were compared instead with the forces of Antichrist. Among the many ethnicities of the Mongol forces was a group called the Tatars; in Europe they became Tartars, linking them to Tartaros, the netherworld of antiquity.

At its fullest extent in the later thirteenth century, the linked states of the Mongol Empire stretched from Korea to the Black Sea. These vast spaces were divided into four khanates; in three of them, the ruling elites would eventually adopt Islam, while the Yuan dynasty embraced Buddhism. But the

Mongols were ethnically and religiously diverse, and initially respectful of all religions. The recently created Dominican and especially Franciscan Order took the lead in the mission into Mongol Asia, setting up in port cities with foreign communities (Quanzhou, Yangzhou) and in the major political centres (Hangzhou, Beijing). By 1300, there were Latin Christian missions in all parts of the Mongol Empire except the Chagadai Khanate of Central Asia. Under a Franciscan called Giovanni da Montecorvino, Dadu (ie Beijing), the capital of the Great Khan of Yuan China, became the first archbishopric of the Asian missions in 1307.<sup>8</sup> There were two Latin churches in the city by this time, one of them big enough to hold 200 people and close enough to the imperial palace, according to Montecorvino, for the Khan to hear the three bells and the singing of the Mass.<sup>9</sup>

Much recent literature on the art of Mongol Yuan China explores it as cosmopolitan and culturally diverse, shaped by many different resident foreign communities and by intense and ongoing contact with other regions of the Mongol Empire.<sup>10</sup> For instance, when a new ceremonial building, the Cloud Platform (or Terrace), was put up from 1342 at Juyong Pass, north of Dadu, it had sutras transcribed in six different scripts (to render Sanskrit, Tibetan, Mongolian, Uighur, Tangut, and Mandarin Chinese); a further inscription marking the construction and dedication used all the same languages except for Sanskrit.<sup>11</sup> For this reason alone, we would expect the art and churches of the Latin mission to be spaces of contact and encounter: they were located in the most important cities of a vastly multiethnic empire.

They also served diverse and polyglot congregations. Most Christians in Mongol China, including some significant figures among the Mongols themselves, were members of the Church of the East: the mother of the first Yuan emperor Khubilai Khan (ob. 1294) was one. Soon after John of Montecorvino's arrival in 1296, he made a major convert of the Öngüt king called *Kuolijisi* in Chinese sources (possibly for the Syriac name Giwardis), closely related by marriage to Khubilai. According to Montecorvino, "King George" had granted the Latin Christians a church in his capital, and even had his own son baptized with the name John, after Montecorvino himself. With the ruler's early death his subjects reverted to the Church of the East, and

Montecorvino was unable to reclaim what was lost.<sup>12</sup> But there were other Christian congregations, including Armenians, Alans, and other Syriac Christians from Western Asia, who seem to have embraced the friars. In Quanzhou, it was an unnamed Armenian woman who paid for the Franciscan church.

Unfortunately, no church or building surviving from the Latin missions has yet been found. Some were presumably claimed for other religions with the rise and fall of local and imperial favour. In 1311, for instance, the Yuan literati painter and bureaucrat Zhao Mengfu, acting as imperial administrator, oversaw the transfer of two disputed buildings in Zhenjiang (near Yangzhou) from Christians (most likely Nestorian) to Buddhists.<sup>13</sup> Other sites, including what were identified as possible traces of the church in King George's capital in what is now the Chinese region of Inner Mongolia, have disappeared in the last century.<sup>14</sup>



**Fig. 2.** Paris. Traveling Bible known as the Bible of Marco Polo. c. 1240. Ink on parchment, 11.5 by 7.5 cm. Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, ms. Pluteo 3, capsule 1.

The single medieval book that can be tied to the Chinese missions gives an impression of limited resources. It is a small manuscript Bible, produced in Paris around 1230-40, and now in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence.<sup>15</sup> This is one of many such pocket-sized Bibles created in Paris for the mendicant friars and meant to be carried in travel; this version of the Bible text can be associated with the University of Paris from after about 1225. The book is damaged, but originally it had approximately 500 folios, of which 343 remain. This was a serviceable, working object: the whole manuscript was written by the same hand, two columns per page, and only the first letter of each Bible book was given a basic filigree decoration.

This Bible was brought to Florence in 1685 by Father Philippe Couplet, who gave it to the Grand Duke of Tuscany. Couplet was Procurator of the Jesuits in China at that time, and in a note that is still kept with the book, he stated that it had come from the region of Nanjing. The manuscript had been carefully hidden and preserved by a single Chinese family for four centuries, remaining as a local record of the Latin missions of the Yuan Mongol period. It would have been carried to southern China as the personal Bible of a Latin missionary friar. The book also testifies to reuse: there are marginal annotations in several different hands, suggesting, like the date of production, that the friar who took it to China was not its first or only owner.

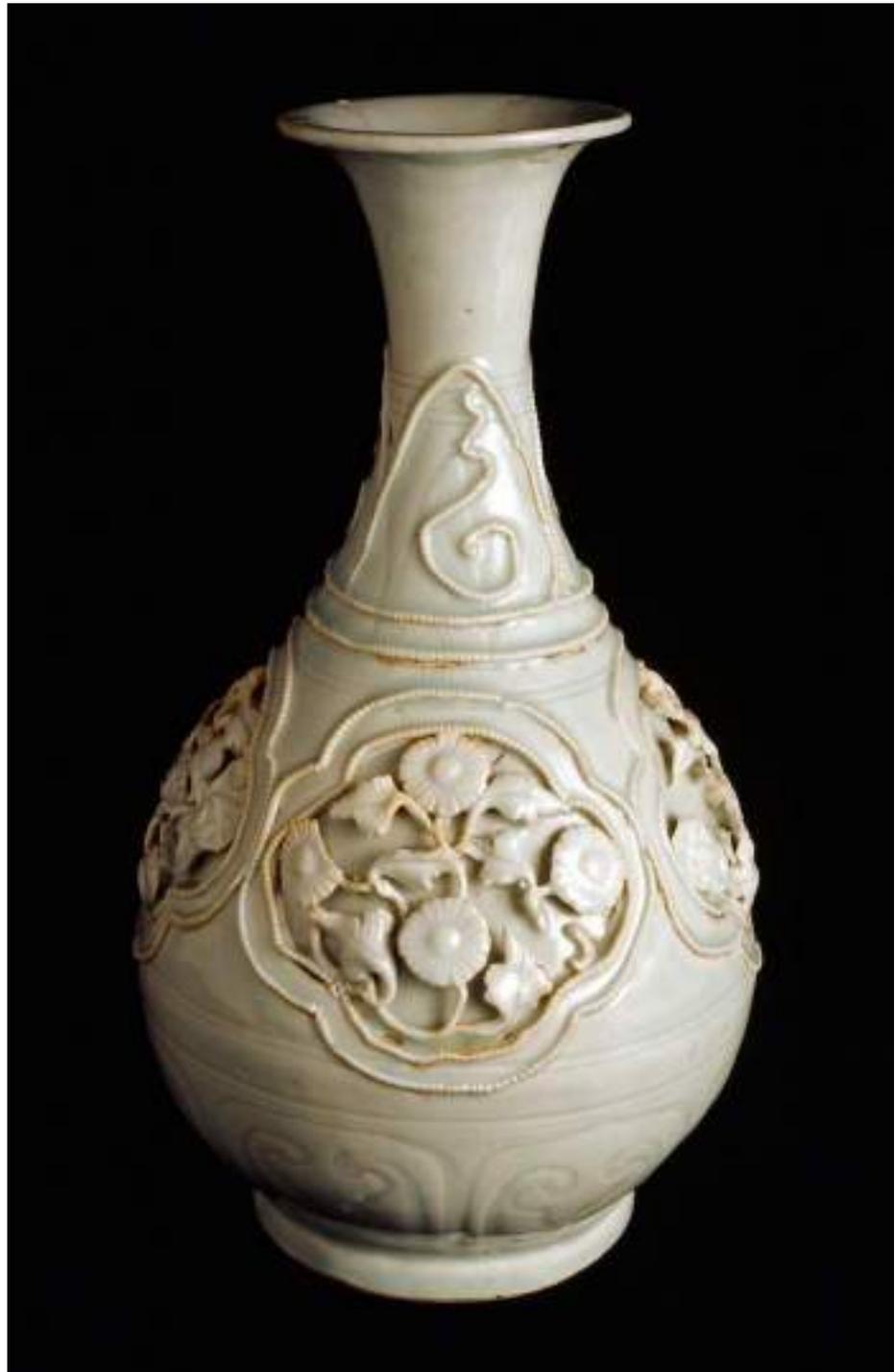
The sense of limited resources that this Bible evokes echoes what we know of the missions in general. In 1306 the friars in Beijing had only a breviary and a missal: in one of his two letters on the mission, John of Montecorvino begged for a gradual, legends of the saints, and choir books to be sent so they could be copied. The *Dadu* masses were sung by boys and young men that Montecorvino had bought to raise in the faith: few Latin missionaries ever even reached China. In 1307, six newly consecrated suffragan bishops set out from Avignon toward Beijing, but three died along the way, and the other three may have arrived as late as 1313 to celebrate Montecorvino's investiture as archbishop.

One of the three was Andrew of Perugia, later Bishop of Quanzhou. Given the limited evidence, the tombstone identified as his monument (fig 1)

is therefore extremely precious. It certainly supports a reading of the Latin missions as spaces of exchange for both visual and written languages.<sup>16</sup> As far as can be determined in its broken state, its shape was similar to memorial tombstones for other “imported” religions with older roots in southeastern China, notably Islam and Nestorian Christianity. Its relief adopted an existing iconography associated with Christians, although a different sect (the Church of the East), and this in turn was drawn from much older imagery shared with Buddhists and others. This made the meaning of the monument potentially intelligible to both the local carvers charged to make it from local stone, and to local viewers who might then see it. At the same time, the Latin inscription and foreign script were reminders of the otherness of Andrea da Perugia and his mission, and would have been unintelligible to local people except as signs of alterity.

But the identification presents problems. The scholars who first worked to decipher the inscription on the tombstone were working from poor photographs made from enlargements of small and grainy originals taken by the Quanzhou scholar Wu Wenliang. In the transcription, the words in italics were considered secure readings, those in plain type had been agreed upon by at least two scholars, and any words in brackets - that is, most of the inscription - were “mere guesses based upon one or two letters and a certain amount of space.” Many specialists were sceptical about the link to Andrew of Perugia, and recent research remains cautious.<sup>17</sup> A larger flattened area around the rather small inscription may suggest it was not the original or the intended text. In a further complication, at least one scholar has suggested that the stone now displayed in Quanzhou may be a copy of the one recorded in 1946, and the whereabouts of the original unknown.<sup>18</sup>

There are also difficulties with another object sometimes associated with these missions: a porcelain vase now in Dublin.<sup>19</sup> It dates from the early fourteenth century, and the ceramic type is known as *qingbai* ware from its bluishgreen-white glaze. It is the oldest intact porcelain object known to have reached Europe, where, as we know from two eighteenth-century drawings, it was converted into a ewer with the addition of a metal handle and spout.



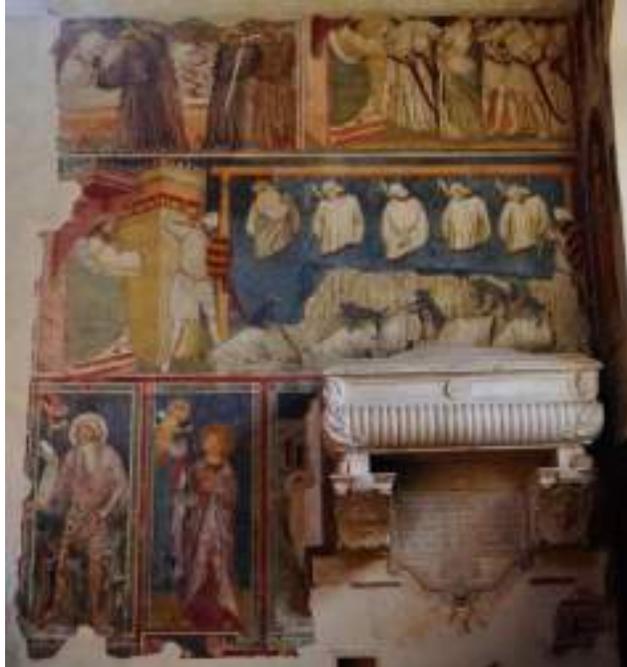
**Fig. 3.** Jingdezhen. *Qingbai* vase known as the *Fonthill Vase*. Early fourteenth-century. Porcelain, h. 28 cm. National Museum of Ireland, Dublin, DC 1882.3941.

The vase was thought to have reached Europe through embassies around the Dadu mission. After Giovanni da Montecorvino's death sometime around 1328, the Beijing see sat vacant for many years. Finally, at the repeated request of local Alan Christians, an embassy was sent from the Yuan court to the Pope to ask, among other things, for a replacement priest to serve the church. A delegation to Beijing left Avignon in 1338, carrying treasures including rock crystal objects from Venice. When they finally arrived in Dadu in 1342, the Yuan court seems to have been more interested in a horse sent as a gift than in the people and objects from the far west of the world: a number of years ago, Eugene Wang examined the lack of representation of them in Chinese sources, concluding that the arrival of foreigners had long been so common at Chinese courts, even before the Yuan Dynasty, that this latest group did not raise any particular interest.<sup>20</sup>

The metalwork on the Dublin vase had heraldry and mottos associated with the royal houses of Hungary and Anjou, and it was once thought to have reached Louis of Hungary with the Chinese delegation. It has now been established that the heraldry and mottos on the mountings were those of Margaret of Durazzo, Regent of Naples, sometime after 1386. This later dating weakens the link to the Beijing missions, although it is worth noting that when the *qingbai* vase reached the Naples court, it was clearly recognized as a treasure and framed for a new context and display.

Despite the limited material evidence, it is clear that the missions left their mark in the public sphere of fourteenth-century Italy. To reach Yuan China, friars passed by land and sea through Muslim polities. As Mongol state control began to fail in the early fourteenth century, these journeys became potentially more dangerous; a small number of friars were killed for their faith. The Franciscans in particular created spaces and images to celebrate these deaths. In the most notable case, in 1321, three friars, Thomas of Tolentino, James of Padua, and Peter of Siena, were killed with their interpreter, a lay-brother named Demetrius (Georgian or possibly Armenian). They were bound for the missions in Yuan China, but were forced ashore at Thane, near modern Mumbai, where they were housed with some Christians of the Church of the East. When the wife of the household denounced her

husband to the local judge, she called the friars as witnesses. They were asked to give their opinion about Muhammad, condemned for slandering Islam, and subjected to various tortures by the local ruler before being beheaded. Later the ruler and his entire family were put to death by for their acts.

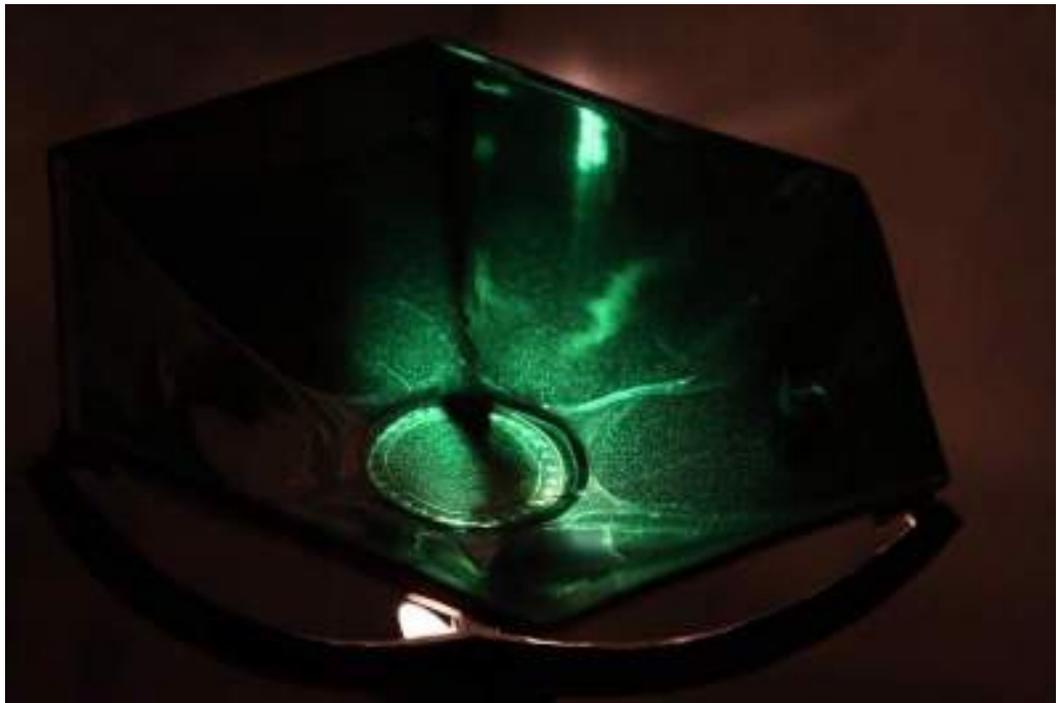


**Fig. 4.** *Frescoes of the Martyrs of Thane.* Circa 1350. Nave, San Fermo Maggiore, Verona.

The stories of these deaths were once painted across two bays of the nave in San Fermo Maggiore in Verona, though only three scenes now remain (fig. 3). At the top left, the friars appear to the corrupt ruler in a dream, warning of his evil end. Beside this scene, he is sentenced by the emperor, who then oversees his hanging and dismemberment with all his male kin.<sup>21</sup> The Thane events were also painted in the cloister of San Francesco in Siena, now lost but known from descriptions, and quite possibly in other Franciscan houses, including for instance at Tolentino, where a chapel to Thomas is recorded from the end of the fourteenth century. The events at Thane overlapped with the mission into Asia of another Franciscan, Odoric of Pordenone (Odorico da Pordenone).<sup>22</sup> Around 1322 or 1323, Odoric had followed the friars on their route toward China. At Thane he collected their

remains, bringing them for reburial at Andrew of Perugia's community in Quanzhou. In Udine, now in the Civic Museum, there are fragmented scenes from a fifteenth-century cycle that present these events; again, there are likely to have been other representations.<sup>23</sup>

Images like those at San Fermo Maggiore might seem most striking for their *lack* of any exoticizing reference, but their goal was to fit the new encounters in Asia into existing Christian narratives of mission and martyrdom—to frame the foreign and unknown through familiar models. Yet, and to conclude, there is some evidence to think that cultural contact, and some mutual intelligibility, could and did exist around the Latin missions.



**Fig. 5.** Eastern Mesopotamia. *Sacro Catino*. Greatest width c. 40 cm. 1<sup>st</sup> century CE? Genoa, Museo del Tesoro di San Lorenzo.

Most basically, in his short letters, John of Montecorvino's descriptions of the Dadu mission suggest a polysemic space. The cross on the church was red, an auspicious color locally; further, he had six images made with scenes

from the Old and New Testament, labelled in Latin, Persian (a mercantile *lingua franca* among other things) and what he called “Tatar,” presumably either the Mongol of the court or a Turkic language, like Uighur, used by the Mongol elites. Though the images may have been painted in the church, it is possible that they were done on cloth for use in public preaching and as the friars moved. This too would have been meaningful in both local and Latin visual terms. Cloth images associated with the Church of the East and Buddhist thangkas were a local precedent, but images on cloth are also recorded in trecento Franciscan communities in the regions around Venice and elsewhere.<sup>24</sup>

Though the friars often cast the larger and established Church of the East as adversaries, there is at least one object, not normally linked to the mission *ad tartaros*, that underlines how much common ground there was between them, in both cultic and aesthetic terms. It is a large green glass dish in Genoa, known as the *sacro catino*, studied and restored in 2016.<sup>25</sup> Its intense green color comes from the presence of iron in the raw materials, and also, more unusually, from copper, possibly introduced by melting bronze into the mixture as it was repeatedly poured into a large mould and left to cool. Both the production technique and the chemical composition of the glass link it to eastern Mesopotamia, but the date of manufacture remains uncertain. It may have been made as early as the first or second century CE.<sup>26</sup>

In the Middle Ages, however, the green dish in Genoa was linked directly to Christ’s own institution of Christian mission. Rather than glass, it was said to be made from a single giant emerald, and to have been used at the Last Supper before being carried into Europe after the 1099 seizure of Jerusalem in the first Crusade. This story is recorded by an eye-witness in 1287, who described it as:

a six-sided paten, made of emerald, and the people there told (us) that it was this paten from which our Lord ate the Passover with His disciples, and that it was brought there when Jerusalem was captured.<sup>27</sup>

Like the Bible now in Florence, the *qingbai* in Dublin, or the Quanzhou stone, the *catino* has moved and changed identities repeatedly over its long life. It has no direct link to Yuan China, where glass was in any case rare. Yet this 1287 account was originally written in Persian and translated in the early fourteenth century into Syriac; the writer was a monk of the Church of the East called Rabban Bar Sauma, and he had come to Genoa from Dadu, the Yuan capital. Bar Sauma was probably an ethnic Uighur with family roots in Central Asia ('Rabban' means master or teacher). He was in Genoa because, having travelled west from Beijing with a companion, he had been sent as an envoy to the Pope and Christian Europe on behalf of the Mongol ruler of Persia and Western Asia, the Ilkhan Arghun. As an honored guest, he was shown the *sacro catino*, and he clearly valued it both for its precious materials and as a relic just as any local Christian might have done.

With Bar Sauma standing before the *catino*, we also come full circle, since his embassy to the pope was a direct spur for the China missions. When Giovanni da Montecorvino left Europe to reach Yuan Dadu, he carried letters from Pope Nicholas IV to the Ilkhan and to the Patriarch of the Church of the East, Bar Sauma's own disciple and friend.<sup>28</sup>

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*Asia*. Edited by Karin Gludovatz, Juliane Noth, Joachim Ree. 85-105. Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2015.

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## Endnotes

1. This research has been drawn from my Australian Research Council Discovery Project (2019-2022), "Eurasian exchange and artistic change in Italy, c. 1250-1450."
  2. John Foster, "Crosses from the Walls of Zaitun," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (April 1954): 17-20.
  3. The basic source is *Sinica franciscana. Itinera et relationes Fratrum Minorum saeculi XIII et XIV*, vol. 1, ed. Anastatius van den Wyngaert (Florence (Ad claras aquas): Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1929). See also Thomas Tanase, "*Jusqu'aux limites du monde.*" *La papauté et la mission franciscaine, de l'Asie de Marco Polo à l'Amérique de Christophe Colomb* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 2013), and for English translations of key texts: Christopher Dawson, *Mission to Asia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980).
  4. The fundamental study is Lauren Arnold, *Princely Gifts and Papal Treasures: The Franciscan Mission to China and its Influence on the Art of the West 1250-1350* (San Francisco: Desiderata Press, 1999). On Quanzhou, there is now also Roxann Prazniak, *Sudden Appearances: The Mongol Turn in Commerce, Belief, and Art* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019), 199-221 and nts. Liu Shiqiu (an author in this volume) is currently completing a PhD at the University of Melbourne that will include the Quanzhou material.
  5. Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," *Profession* (1991): 34.
  6. Norbert Hintersteiner et al., "Mission Studies in Contact Zones," *Mission Studies* 38 (2021): 1-4; see also the essays in Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia, *A Companion to the Early Modern Catholic Global Missions* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).
  7. For an overview: Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West 1221-1410* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2005).
  8. In 1318 a second archbishopric was created at Soltaniyeh, recently made the capital of the Persian Ilkhanate; another see emerged beyond the Mongol-ruled states, in Kollam (Quilon, India, where the friars often landed and embarked) in 1330.
  9. Montecorvino wrote three letters that survive. Two of these, from 1306, concern the Dadu mission and are the major source on it. For translations: Dawson, *Mission to Asia*, 224-31.
  10. To cite only recent work in English: *The World of Khubilai Khan*, eds. James C.Y. Watts et al (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2010); Jennifer Purtle, "The Far Side: Expatriate Medieval Art and Its Languages in Sino-Mongol China," in *Confronting the Borders of Medieval Art*, eds. Jill Caskey et al (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 167-97; Shane McCausland, *The Mongol Century: Visual Cultures of Yuan China, 1271-1368* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015).
  11. McCausland, *The Mongol Century*, 29-31.
  12. Tjalling H.F. Halbertsma, *Early Christian Remains of Inner Mongolia: Discovery, Reconstruction, and Appropriation* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008), 38-46.
  13. Arnold, *Princely Gifts*, 76, who also notes (137-9) that a church near Nanjing may have been incorporated into the monastery complex and tomb of the first Ming emperor as Wuliang Hall at Linggu (Spirit Valley) Temple. This suggestion is not accepted for instance by Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, *Chinese Architecture: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2019), 221-3.
  14. Halbertsma, *Early Christian Remains*, 135-44 and 251-70.
  15. *In via in saecula. La Bibbia di Marco Polo tra Europa e Cina* (Rome: Treccani, 2012).
  16. For a development of this reading, Purtle, "The Far Side," 184-9.
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17. Foster, "Crosses from the Walls," 18, who also noted the doubts expressed by the sinologist A.J. Moule: "Conjecture, even if based on wishful thinking, is a most legitimate and valuable thing, so long as it is not put down as fact; but I cannot get even as far as conjecture." Lieu et al., *Medieval Christian and Manichean Remains*, 130, noted the difficulties of reading the inscription as now displayed, and simply reproduced Foster's transcription.
18. Iain Gardner, Samuel Lieu, and Ken Parry, eds. *From Palmrya to Zayton: Epigraphy and Iconography* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 226.
19. Zsombor Jékely, "The Budapest Drawing of the Fonthill Vase," *Ars Decorativa* 34 (2020): 7-17. It is often called the Fonthill (or Fonthill-Gaignières) vase from its provenance in these eighteenth and nineteenth century collections.
20. Eugene Wang, "Why Was There No Chinese Painting of Marco Polo? The Vexed Art of Intimacy," in *The Itineraries of Art: Topographies of Artistic Mobility in Europe and Asia*, eds. Karin Gludovatz, Juliane Noth, Joachim Ree. 85-105. Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2015.
21. Louise Bourdua, *The Franciscans and Art Patronage in Late Medieval Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 46-50, who notes that there are further fragments beyond an inserted sixteenth-century chapel, possibly from earlier scenes in the same cycle: a bearded and haloed friar, a figure with his hands tied before him, and traces of a throne. For this cycle and those discussed below, see: Anne Dunlop, "Mongol Eurasia in the Trecento Veneto," *Convivium* 7.1, (2020): 122-4.
22. The critical edition is Odorico da Pordenone, *Relatio de mirabilibus orientalium tatarorum*, ed. Annalia Marchisio (Florence: Sismel-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2016); see also *Sinica franciscana*, 381-495.
23. For detailed images of the cycle and a series of studies, see now Cesare Scalon, ed. *San Francesco di Udine. Un monumento da salvare e riscoprire*, vol. 1 (Udine: Gaspari, 2020).
24. Purtle, "The Far Side," 192-3.
25. Marco Verità et al., "The Sacro Catino in Genoa," *Journal of Glass Studies* 60, (2018): 115-28.
26. Ingeborg Krüger, "Zu einigen großen Smaragden aus Glas," *Journal of Glass Studies* 53, (2011): 118.
27. Pier Giorgio Borbone, "A 13<sup>th</sup>-Century Journey from China to Europe. The 'Story of Mar Yahballaha and Rabban Sauma,'" *Egitto e Vicino Oriente* 31, (2008): 231.
28. Halbertsma, *Early Christian Remains*, 43-4.

# From Cartography to Christian Iconography: Giulio Aleni's Cosmological Images and Jesuit Science in 17th-Century China

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research seeks to examine the process of Giulio Aleni's (1582–1649) construction of his system of cosmological images from cartography to iconography and to discuss how his works coordinated with previous and contemporary Jesuit publications. It will analyze how Jesuit world maps paved the way for the Chinese audience's understanding of the Christian visual arts, grasp the differences between Aleni's cosmology and other cosmological theories in late Ming China, and interpret the symbolic meaning of the world picture Aleni portrayed in his works. Taking Aleni as an example, this project intends to re-examine the introduction of European cosmology and worldview through Jesuit visual devices from the perspectives of art history and science history.

## **KEYWORDS**

Jesuits; World Map; Cosmology; Scientific Imagery; Early Modern China

### **The Icon of Tianzhu and the Cosmos in Aleni's *Jingjie***

Aleni was the founder of the Catholic Church in Fujian Province. Like his predecessors and contemporaries, he was a missionary-scholar who published a series of Christian and scholarly treatises, among which the most important one might be his illustrated treatise of Gospel stories titled *Tianzhu jiangsheng chuxiang jingjie* (“Scriptural Explanations on the Incarnation of the Lord of Heaven with Selected Illustrations,” 1637, hereafter cited as *Jingjie*), an adaptation of Jérôme Nadal’s (1507–1580) *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines* (1593, hereafter cited as *EHI*).

Although Christian visual arts produced in China were not unprecedented before the production of Aleni’s *Jingjie*, it is still the first treatise published in China which functioned as the equivalent of the Gospels.<sup>1</sup> The term “Tianzhu” in the title, which literally means the Lord of Heaven, is the Chinese translation of Deus or God, or his incarnate hypostasis, Jesus Christ. When Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) referred to “Deus” as “Tianzhu” in his translation of the Ten Commandments and in his catechism *Tianzhu shiyi* (“The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven,” c. 1607), he intended to help Chinese people better understand the Christian faith and underline the supremacy, omnipresence, and omnipotence of God through the appropriation of their worship of Heaven.<sup>2</sup>

The image on the frontispiece of *Jingjie*, entitled *Tianzhu jiangsheng shengxiang* (“The Sacred Image of the Incarnation of the Lord of Heaven,” Image 1), is a woodcut replica of Hieronymus Wierix’s (1548–1624) engraving of the Salvator Mundi.<sup>3</sup> It indicates a half-length bust of Tianzhu facing the spectator, with his right hand making a gesture of blessing and his left hand resting on a globus cruciger, a traditional symbol of authority, which depicts a pattern of the cosmos. This woodcut indeed can be recognized as an icon of the Salvator Mundi according to its attributes, but the poem under it identifies the person in the woodcut as the creator and ruler of heaven, earth, humans, and everything else in the world, and emphasizes his omnipotence and transcendence beyond space and time.<sup>4</sup>



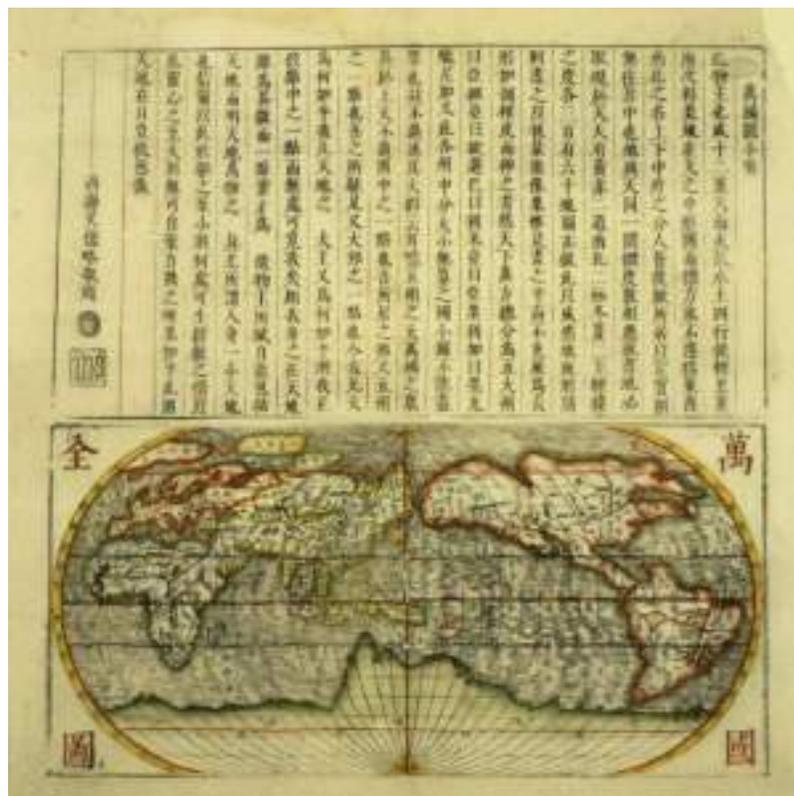
**Fig. 1.** *Tianzhu jiangsheng shengxiang*, In Giulio Aleni, *Jingjie*, 1637, woodcut, folio 4 recto, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford, UK. Photograph by the author, credit to Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, UK.

This poem was originally an independent work written by the Chinese convert Xu Leshan (1548–1627). By appropriating it to annotate this icon of Tianzhu, Aleni attenuated the eschatological implication of the icon and induced the audience to understand Tianzhu from the perspective of

creationism. Therefore, the orb with a cosmos pattern becomes the metaphor of the world created and ruled by Tianzhu. The essential knowledge for the Chinese spectator to understand the metaphor, namely the heaven and earth are spherical, as they are represented in the orb, is already implied in Jesuit world maps published previously.

### The New Knowledge of Heaven and Earth in Jesuit World Maps

Aleni first visualized the knowledge of spherical earth in his world map *Wanguo quantu* (“The Completed Map of Ten Thousand Countries,” 1620, Image 2), which is adapted from Ricci’s famous 1602 world map *Kunyu wanguo quantu* (“The Completed Terrestrial Map of Ten Thousand Countries”). However, this knowledge is incompatible with the traditional Chinese cosmology Tian Yuan Di Fang (“Round Sky and Square Earth”).



**Fig. 2.** Giulio Aleni, *Wanguo quantu*, 1620, woodcut on colored paper, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vatican City.

The idea Tian Yuan Di Fang is embodied in the earliest and largest surviving colored Chinese world map *Da Ming Hunyi Tu* (“The Amalgamated Map of the Great Ming,” c. 1389, Image 3), in which the Ming Empire is in the center, which also indicates the center of earth and heaven. Its layout is portrayed as a square, suggesting order and civilization; by contrast, foreign countries in the West and the East are all small and in a state of disorder.<sup>5</sup> In this kind of map, “China” or Zhongguo becomes what this title means: the Middle Kingdom. This contrast is especially true at the thought of the discriminatory title for the foreigners: Manyi (“Barbarians”). When Jesuits like Ricci and Aleni were recorded in Chinese documents, sometimes they were still given this title.<sup>6</sup> The Northern Song scholar Shi Jie’s (1005–1045) words can further illustrate this thought: “The sky is above, and the ground is below; in the center of heaven and earth is the Middle Kingdom (i.e. China), and outside the center are barbarians of the four directions.”<sup>7</sup> This statement indicates that premodern Chinese believed they are located in the center of the cosmos. In consideration of this idea, to convince the highly-proud Chinese people that the deity Tianzhu from the faraway Western civilization is the supreme master of the cosmos, Aleni had to break not only the cosmological idea of Tian Yuan Di Fang, but also the Sinocentric worldview. And his means is the world map.



**Fig. 3.** Anonymous cartographer(s), *Da Ming Hunyi Tu*, c. 1389, stiff silk, 347×453 cm, The First Historical Archives of China, Beijing, China.

The first illustration in Aleni's geographical treatise *Zhifang waiji* ("Unofficial Records of the Foreign Countries," 1623) is a reduced version of his world map *Wanguo quantu*, followed by the hemisphere maps of the northern and southern poles, which visually proves that earth is a sphere. Aleni also added two diagrams of solar and lunar eclipses to indicate the relative positions of earth, sun, and moon in the cosmos. Before these illustrations are two introductory articles by Aleni. The first one at the beginning demonstrates that Tianzhu is the creator of humankind and the cosmos.

The second is an introduction to the geographical information in the world map, which clearly states that: "Since earth is spherical, there is no place which cannot be the center (of earth)."<sup>8</sup> The combination of image and text become a powerful proof of and challenge to the irrationality of Ming people's cosmological idea Tian Yuan Di Fang and Sinocentric worldview.<sup>9</sup> The formula of Ricci's and Aleni's world maps derives from Abraham Ortelius's (1527–1598) oval projection in his *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (1570).<sup>10</sup> Both of their maps function as visual media to convey the European worldview, which is rational, scientific, universal, and Christian. By re-arranging China in the European-format world maps, Aleni was meant to assimilate China as a part of the world picture established by the Europeans.

The preface to his *Wanguo quantu* can be regarded as a miniature of his geographical treatise *Zhifang waiji*, in which Aleni briefly introduced how Tianzhu created the twelve layers of the spherical cosmos, and then further emphasized the idea of spherical earth composed of five continents (i.e. Asia, Europe, Africa, America and Magallanica).<sup>11</sup> This statement presents a profile of the geocentric model in the Aristotelian-Scholastic cosmology and the European worldview in the Age of Discovery, and attributes everything in the cosmos to the Creator, which is the identity of Tianzhu that Aleni demonstrated with the icon on the frontispiece of *Jingjie*. Thus, his world map not only paved the way for the Chinese audience's understanding of Christian visual art, but also challenged the Chinese people's Sinocentrism and conventional cosmological thought.

### Cosmological Theories in the Late Ming Dynasty

Aleni's emphasis on Tianzhu's identity as the Creator reflects the paramount problem in the early phase of the Jesuit China missions of the existence of an omnipotent deity, namely Tianzhu, the creator and ruler of the cosmos, that the Jesuits were attempting to prove. However, Neo-Confucianism, the orthodox philosophy and ideology of the late Ming Dynasty, rejected the existence of anthropomorphic deities and other kinds of mysticism, supernaturalism, and irrational elements in religions, cosmology, and metaphysics.<sup>12</sup> The late-Ming Chinese scholars argued that the reason for the inchoation and evolution of the cosmos is rooted in everything itself rather than ruled by a supreme deity.<sup>13</sup>



**Fig. 4.**  
*Jiuchong tian tu*,  
in Matteo Ricci, *Kunyu wanguo quantu*, 1602,  
woodcut,  
Library of Congress,  
Washington,  
D.C., USA

Under this circumstance, in his catechism *Wanwu zhenyuan* (“The True Origin of Ten Thousand Things,” 1628), Aleni also introduced the geocentric model in the Aristotelian-Scholastic cosmology in order to refute the Neo-Confucian cosmology, and used Thomas Aquinas’s (1225–1274) “*Quinque viæ*” to prove the existence of Tianzhu.<sup>14</sup> His cosmology is stemmed from the Jesuit principal astronomer Christopher Clavius (1538–1612), whose cosmological theory is a revision of Johannes de Sacrobosco’s (c. 1195–c. 1256) theory. The impact of Clavius’s cosmological theory on the China-based Jesuits is evident in their visualizations of the cosmos, exemplified by Ricci’s *Jiuchong tian tu* (“Diagram of the Nine Layers of Heaven,” Image 4), which is a combination of two diagrams in Clavius’s commentary on Sacrobosco’s *De sphaera mundi* (c. 1230).<sup>15</sup>

Aleni witnessed an unprecedented calendric-astronomical reform in the Ming Dynasty. During the reign of the Wanli Emperor (1563–1620, r. 1573–1620), several major astronomical prediction mistakes and the expansion of calendar error ushered Chinese astronomy and calendar towards a crisis.<sup>16</sup> In 1611, under the advice of the officials of the Board of Rites, represented by the famous convert Xu Guangqi (1562–1633), the Ming Empire decided to carry out a calendric-astronomical reform by absorbing European astronomical science.

The core astronomical consultants of this reform are the Jesuits Johann Adam Schall von Bell (1591–1666), Giacomo Rho (1593–27 April 1638) and Ferdinand Verbiest (1623–1688), all of whom were deeply affected by Tycho Brahe’s (1546–1601) astronomical observations and cosmological theory.<sup>17</sup> With their efforts, the Tychonic system, a geoheliocentric model, replaced the Ptolemaic system and Chinese traditional cosmological theories as the Ming Empire official explanation of the structure of the cosmos. When Aleni published his *Jingjie*, the orthodox status of the Tychonic system has been demonstrated in *Chongzhen lishu* (“The Chongzhen Almanac”), the collective title for the Western astronomical and mathematical works translated during this reform.

It seems that the reform did not affect Aleni’s cosmological theory, which is still based upon the Ptolemaic system. Nevertheless, Aleni should be

very familiar with this reform and the astronomical achievements at that time, since his mathematical treatise *Jihe yaofa* (“The Key Theories of Geometry,” 1628) was included in *Chongzhen Lishu* and he was still teaching European astronomy to the local lay believers in Fujian, even though he was immersed in missionary works during the period of this reform.<sup>18</sup> According to a story recorded in the Jesuit biographical treatise *Kouduo richao* (“The Daily Record of Oral Instructions,” 1630–1640), a Chinese lay believer used to hold an armillary sphere and asked Aleni and his colleague Andrius Rudamina (1594–1632) about astronomy, and Rudamina explained to him the structure of the cosmos based on the Tychonic system rather than the Ptolemaic system:

The Sun has two types of rotation, one is auto-rotation on its own celestial layer, and another is rotation driven by the Primum Mobile. Its auto-rotation is from the West to the East, [...], one round per year. The rotation driven by the Primum Mobile is from the East to the West, [...], one round per day.<sup>19</sup>

This episode also reflects the cosmological debate in the Catholic Church: because of the Galileo Affair, the Roman Catholic Church issued a ban against Copernicanism in 1616. For the Jesuits in China, it has become their duty to fight against the heliocentric model and defend the special status of earth in the cosmos.<sup>20</sup> However, for the science-driven Jesuits working for the reform at the court, the Ptolemaic system is no longer fit for purpose as the weapon to retort the Copernicanism, as this century-old geocentric model has already been questioned by many European astronomers. Compared with the Ptolemaic and Copernican systems, astronomical observations based upon Brahe’s geoheliocentric model can give the most accurate data at that time.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the Tychonic system became an ideal replacement for the Ptolemaic system: it could balance Heliocentrism and geocentrism on both the religious and scientific levels.

Aleni’s insistence on the Ptolemaic system in his religious works can be explained from the perspective of pragmatism. As an indispensable attribute of Tianzhu’s identity as the Creator and supreme master of the cosmos, Aleni had to maintain the conventional geocentric pattern of the

cosmos in *Jingjie* to convey the symbolic meaning of the icon. With a glance to the function of his *Jingjie* as the visual device to evangelize the Chinese people, especially the illiterates, Aleni should avoid any potential risks that may cause the bewilderment of the Christian faith among them. This can explain why Aleni did not mention in his treatises the Tychonic system nor disproving the Ptolemaic system, and just adopted the pattern of the cosmos in Wierix's engraving instead of portraying a more accurate cosmological diagram. As a pragmatist, Aleni in his works presents the most “appropriate” cosmology, instead of the most “accurate” one.<sup>22</sup>

### The Symbolic Meaning of Aleni's Cosmological Images

The icon on the frontispiece depicts the juxtaposition of Tianzhu and the cosmos. This image appears once again in the last illustration of *Jingjie*, which is entitled *Madonna Coronated and Sitting Above All Angels and Saints* (Image 5).



**Fig. 5.** *Madonna Coronated and Sitting Above All Angels and Saints*, In Giulio Aleni, *Jingjie*, 1637, woodcut, folio 19 verso, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford, UK. Photograph by the author, credit to Bodleian Libraries, Oxford, UK.

According to Aleni's annotations, this illustration can be divided into four sections, containing "St Trinity coronates Madonna as the Empress of All Saints and Angels," surrounded by "The angels of nine hierarchies worshipping Madonna," beneath are "Monarchs and citizens of all countries praying Madonna becoming the Heavenly Protector Mother of all ages," behind are "People of all directions in the world building temples to worship Madonna and receiving her benediction."<sup>23</sup> The icon on the frontispiece, namely Tianzhu holding the celestial orb, is portrayed on the top right of the illustration as a constituent of the first section.

Despite the large adaptation on the lower half of the illustration, it is still possible to recognize that this illustration, especially the top half, is derived from the last engraving of Nadal's *EHI*. Aleni omitted the middle part of the original engraving depicting the Assumption of the Virgin, and added a group of Chinese lay believers, including the Ming Emperor, elites, and ordinary people, worshipping the coronation of the Virgin. In this woodcut, the Chinese believers on the left and the European believers on the right become the personification of the encounter between the Eastern and the Western civilizations.

The East and the West have encountered in Aleni's world map *Wanguo quantu*, in which he disproves China's Sinocentrism based on the cosmological idea Tian Yuan Di Fang to demonstrate Tianzhu's supreme status. This theological implication used to be covered up by the practical function of the world map as a geographical material, and now it is visually revealed in the woodcut.<sup>24</sup> By picturing the monarchs of the East and the West worshipping Madonna and Tianzhu, Aleni underlined the equality between the two civilizations, and made the originally non-Christian country, China, Christianized. In the preface to his world map, Aleni, after pointing out that Tianzhu is the Creator, has demonstrated the tininess of individuals and earthly countries in front of the supreme power of Tianzhu.<sup>25</sup> The last illustration of his *Jingjie* is therefore a visual supplement to the statement in his world map, and claims that, even for a powerful person like the Ming Emperor, who is regarded as "Tianzi" ("the Son of Heaven"), he still needed to worship Tianzhu, the Lord of Heaven.

However, in this illustration, the Chinese believers and their Western counterparts are separated from Tianzhu by the clouds in the middle, which symbolizes the borderline between the earthly and heavenly worlds.<sup>26</sup> As Aleni states at the end of the preface to his world map, although the physical bodies of humans are minuscule compared with heaven and earth, the souls, as the endowments from Tianzhu, are so great that can comprehend the cosmos and understand Tianzhu; we human beings, as the beings created and endowed by Tianzhu, should not be arrogant nor self-contemptuous, because we are inherently linked with Tianzhu.<sup>27</sup> Whereas the physical association between humans and Tianzhu in the illustration is blocked by the clouds, humans' worship and prayer can make them linked with Tianzhu on spiritual level.

In order to demonstrate the power of prayer and worship, Aleni depicts the lay believers having a "Vision" of the heavenly world and seeing the scene of the Coronation of the Virgin in person. Madonna in this woodcut is depicted as the Powerful Queen of Heaven, a characterization of the Virgin emphasized in the Catholic Church after the Council of Trent (1545–1563).<sup>28</sup> The emphasis on the worship of the Virgin in the Society of Jesus can be traced back to Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), who used to have a Vision of the Virgin holding the Child in her arms.<sup>29</sup> The China-based Jesuits also kept propagandizing the worship of the Virgin among the Chinese people, but this also encouraged some Chinese believers to misunderstand the God in the Christian faith as a woman.<sup>30</sup> While depicting the scene of the Virgin being coronated by St Trinity as the Queen of Heaven, Aleni clarified that the power of the Virgin comes not from herself but from Tianzhu. The supreme status of Tianzhu in the Christian hierarchical system is further stressed by the pattern of the cosmos in his celestial orb, which the original engraving does not include. With the added pattern, Aleni claims that Tianzhu is the ruler of heaven and earth on the physical and religious levels, which echoes the cosmological statement in his catechism.<sup>31</sup>

Contents of the illustration from top to bottom, containing Tianzhu, the crown, the Virgin as the Queen of Heaven, the Papal tiara, and the lay believers of the East and the West, function as a visual guide to tell the

audience of *Jingjie* how Tianzhu's benediction transmits from the heavenly world to the earthly world. At the same time, it also instructs the lay believers the correct way to receive the benediction from Tianzhu and understand him, which is to worship and pray to Tianzhu and the Virgin as the Queen of Heaven under the witness and the guidance of the Catholic Church.

### Conclusion

From cartography to Christian iconography, Aleni reconfigured a system of cosmological images by adapting previous well-known Jesuit visual sources to his own missionary work and the sociocultural context of the Ming Empire so as to stress the omnipotence and supremacy of Tianzhu and evangelize his Chinese audience through the visualizations of the Christian cosmos. This marked the beginning of a global cosmological imagery. Evident in his cosmological images, his theological imperatives distinguish his strategy from that of his collaborators in the service of the court and at work on the calendric-astronomical reform of the Ming Empire. The different ways in which the European cosmological theories were visualized in subsequent publications also reveal the constant interaction between religion and science in the Jesuit China missions.

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  17. Elman, *On Their Own Terms*, 83–84.
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# Missions of Gold and Purity: Migrating Images from Portugal to America (XVII-XVIII centuries)

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## **ABSTRACT**

Portuguese agents in Bahia, Brazil, in 1500. Important discoveries led to an intense gold rush from the Atlantic coast inland to Minas Gerais.

This paper concerns ideas about purity, mental images, and visual images that migrated to Minas Gerais in the "mission" that encompassed material gain (through precious metals and stones), the Christianization of this society, and the development of urban settlements with countless altars, fostered by different groups. Unlike other missionary efforts in Christianity, this one seldom had access to printed images and books since typography was forbidden in Portuguese America.

I am interested in specific notions of purity that encompass the alleged value of human beings and nature in several aspects, such as the appraisal of metals ("white gold" as opposed to "black gold") and genealogical lineage. These became associated with Mary's privilege of an Immaculate Conception without the stain of sin. I endeavor to explain aesthetic practices, visual appearances, and functions of a few objects of visual culture in this realm.

## **KEYWORDS**

Catholicism; Imperialism; Goldrush; Colonial Brazil; the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary

One can hardly overestimate the importance of the late seventeenth-century discovery of gold, silver and precious stones in Minas Gerais, which became the most important region of the Portuguese Empire. From 1700, Brazil took the place that formerly belonged to Mexico and Peru as providers of precious metals: throughout the eighteenth century, over 800 tons of pure gold were exported from Portuguese America towards Europe<sup>1</sup>. This goldrush "mission" carried political, economic, ethnic and cultural ideologies that – in just a few decades – transformed not only border regions but, moreover, the geopolitical migrations of the Atlantic.

Mission in Minas became a vehicle of formal and informal migration. A different configuration of Catholicism emerged, centered in parishes in villages and chapels that congregated lay associations such as confraternities, guilds, and third Orders. In Minas, the Crown forbade the presence of monasteries and convents – the main artistic centers in cities by the coast – since these had a fiscal exemption.

The main patron saint of 74 parishes of the colonial period in Minas (over 20%) was Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, or simply *Imaculada*<sup>2</sup>. No other region in Brazil had a similar percentage of parishes dedicated to her<sup>3</sup>. Minas became the center of an immaculist cult in Brazil, incomparable to other inland regions that also developed in the eighteenth century, such as Goiás and Mato Grosso. Each parish had several ornate altars with wooden sculptures, including the most special one of the patron saint upon the main altar. The foundation of a parish – and also of its fraternities – depended not only on catholic clergy but also on royal permission and approval. Patronage of the arts depended, therefore, on royal donations as well as on the local community.

Society in Minas also presented gender and ethnic features that became more evident there than in social contexts by the Atlantic coast. Women were scarce in the early years of mining and eventually there was a predominance of "black" and mulatto women, both slaves and emancipated slaves<sup>4</sup>. "White" women were rare. Minas Gerais, the most populated captaincy in Brazil (20,5% of colonial society), witnessed one of the highest rates of "black" and mixed-race individuals. "White" individuals ranked only

22,1% of the population of Minas in 1776, and 25,5% in 1821<sup>5</sup>. Other social traits in Minas stand out as singularities in the first captaincy founded in geographic isolation from the Atlantic coast: the prevalence of families with an absent father figure (who was often involved in mining), urban life<sup>666</sup> with accelerated migrations. Consequences of the gold rush included the Crown's heavy taxation on mineral extractions, poverty, prostitution, and riots (the Emboabas war in 1707-09 and in 1720, revolts in Pitangui and in the capital, Vila Rica). In this scenario, both the Church and the Crown promoted Marian devotion as a vehicle to foster obedience towards both institutions, ideally within families perpetuating Portuguese culture (and not only single "black" or mulatto mothers with the undesired offspring of their forced prostitution as slaves)<sup>7</sup>.

King John V (1659-1750) nourished a personal devotion regarding the Immaculate Conception that informed his patronage of the arts and of new foundations, such as that of the Royal Academy of History in Portugal. In the 1720's, many churches dedicated to the *Imaculada* were raised to the status of parishes in Portuguese America. Many books focusing on Mary's Conception and family — sermons, above all — were also published at this time. These tendencies reflected John V's recommendation in 1717 that the liturgical feast of the *Imaculada* (8 December) be celebrated with even greater solemnity and ostentation. He commissioned a "huge silver-gilt" life-size statue of the *Imaculada* for the patriarchal church in Lisbon, made in "*puro argento dorato*" by artists in Rome<sup>8</sup>.

Royal devotion perpetuated King John IV's attitude as "faithful vassal" and "protector" of the Immaculate Conception. John IV (1604 -1656) proclaimed her to become the Patron of the Kingdom, its domains and the monarchy since 1646. He commissioned a coin in gold and silver with the name *Conceição*, portraying on one side the crown, arms and the cross<sup>9</sup>. The other side of the coin presents the *Imaculada* with six biblical allegories. This iconographic type is known as the *Tota Pulchra*, emphasizing visually the link between beauty and purity (or absence of the stain of sin, as in the Song of Songs, 4,4). She is crowned with stars and steps on a crescent moon, elements from the iconography of the Woman clothed in sun of the

Apocalypse (Revelations, 12). The serpent below the moon leaves no doubt that this is the one who defeats sin and its agents (Gen. 3,15).

This coin may have circulated in Portuguese America. Unlike other lightweight artistic objects that did circulate – prints and drawings I found in archives – the coin has a special proposal associating its form, function and material. The ideal form of the circle – as seen in hosts and even in catholic architecture – shapes the most valued metal, associated not only with Christ as light of the world but, moreover, with His mother's purity of sins. Behaving as a vassal, John IV used these gold coins to pay a tribute to a sculpture portraying Mary as Queen in his family chapel in Vila Viçosa<sup>10</sup>. The names of the King and the Kingdom inscribed on the coin are associated with the heavenly Queen, often described as the feminine counterpart of the monarch. Mary's mother Anne also was compared to a coin, as we will soon see.

Gold was a major object of desire for many who traveled to Minas and the clergy associated it with the Virgin Mary – and her image – in two important metaphors. Mary's queenship allowed for promises of concessions of gold to those who were "truly devoted" to her<sup>11</sup>. These concessions could be mediated by an image of the Immaculate Conception in the church of Our Lady of Carmel (Ribeirão do Carmo, currently named Mariana), which was commissioned by its "noble" confraternity, probably composed of "white" men<sup>12</sup>. Surely, this promise meant to encourage the visitation and cult of this sculpture.

Furthermore, because of her divine maternity, Mary's body is itself identified as the *locus* of mineral riches<sup>13</sup>. We have already encountered examples of two Portuguese kings commissioning images of her in gold and silver. Unlike medieval sculptures that opened as golden shrines in which the Trinity lay<sup>14</sup>, *Mary is a mine*, in which God Himself lay hidden for nine months<sup>15</sup>.

Gold mines were associated with the wombs of Mary and her mother Anne. In Spain, Anne was the patron saint of miners because she also hid gold in her womb, as the mines themselves<sup>16</sup>. This gold could easily be related to the daughter's title invoking her "Immaculate Conception", since no other name evoked so closely Mary "hiding" as a fetus. In Minas Gerais, Anne

became the second most important female saint (after her daughter)<sup>17</sup>.

Portuguese preachers compared Saint Anne to "the treasure hidden in the fields" (Matthew 13) in their sermons<sup>18</sup>. This parable about the man who found the treasure would most likely be very eloquent in Minas Gerais, corresponding to the dream of many men. Even priests sought mineral treasures there. The exegesis of Matthew 13 became a metaphor for associating the purest of women with the most valued metal, as in the *Conceição* coin.

In Lisbon, the mint workers (*moedeiros*) dedicated a liturgical feast to Anne every year, and this custom was adopted also in Salvador, the first capital city of Portuguese America. Sermons preached in cathedrals in both cities draw on the same analogy between Anne and the treasure. Priests in Brazil received and transmitted ideas that circulated in Portugal, even before they were printed<sup>19</sup>. Anne is exalted as "the most precious coin, the purest and finest" that, having been minted with the "image" of "our Divine King" was "transformed and transfigured into this same image"<sup>20</sup>. Anne and Mary were also portrayed with the host, the "holiest of Sacraments" that the mother holds in an ostensory: the body of Christ is visually linked to his female ancestors<sup>21</sup>.

Preachers Anna compared more often to the *field* that withheld the treasure (rather than the treasure itself). Her womb is similar to this field wherein "purity is a hidden treasure"<sup>22</sup>. Anne is also compared to some biblical attributes her daughter is associated with, in Marian iconography and liturgy. Anne is the "mysterious Arch that carried Mary, vase of gold"<sup>23</sup>.

A rare manuscript witnesses that these ideas printed overseas were also part of the catholic culture in Brazil. The author is Rosa Maria Egipcíaca da Vera Cruz (1719- after 1765), a slave who was born in Nigeria and lived in Minas Gerais. When emancipated from slavery and the life of prostitution associated with it, she converted to Catholicism and bequeathed the first manuscript written by a former slave in Brazil. Rosa created a rosary for saint Anne<sup>24</sup>. According to one of the 15 mysteries of this rosary, Anne was acknowledged by the Fathers of the Church, the Patriarchs and Prophets as "the safe in which the most High placed the treasure of supreme purity,

without mixture nor stain, the intact Virgin"<sup>25</sup>. Rosa's religious experiences combine sophisticated theological ideas, popular notions and visions in which the image and its prototype are intertwined, typical of baroque culture in Europe.

In Minas Gerais, several men also came to associate gold with Mary's Conception. Some miners built chapels dedicated to the *Imaculada* as ex-votos in thanksgiving for finding gold<sup>26</sup>. The attitude of these men – similar to that of Rosa – witnesses the reception of ideas and gestures that originated in the Iberian Peninsula and were adopted in Brazil, concerning both a spiritual mission as an economic one, intertwined in the social history of images. We have come full circle: as in the case of the *Conceição* coin, golden sculptures and gilded places of worship are offered to the Heavenly Queen, owner and dispenser of mineral riches, herself made of gold.

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### Endnotes

1. Cf. Jacques Marcadé "O quadro internacional e imperial" in Frédéric Mauro (Coord.) *O Império Luso-Brasileiro 1620-1750*, (Joel Serrão et A. H. de Oliveira Marques (Dir.) Nova História da Expansão Portuguesa, vol. 7 (Lisboa, Estampa, 1991), p.87.
2. Parishes in Minas elected 17 marian titles - and only 2 Christological titles - in a total of 33 patron saints.
3. Minas encompasses 19,4% of parishes dedicated to the Imaculada in Portuguese America. Even the oldest parish in Minas (Raposos) honored her as patron.
4. Cf. Luciano Figueredo, *O avesso da memória: cotidiano e trabalho da mulher em Minas Gerais no século XVIII* (Rio de Janeiro, José Olympio/ Brasília, DF, Editora da Universidade de Brasília, 1993); Leila Mezan Algranti, *Honradas e devotas: mulheres da Colônia: condição feminina nos conventos e recolhimentos do Sudeste do Brasil, 1750-1822* (Rio de Janeiro, José Olympio/ Brasília, D.F., Editora da Universidade de Brasília, 1993); Paulo Amora *Rebelião das mulheres em Minas Gerais*. (Rio de Janeiro, GRD, 1968).
5. Cf. Dauril Alden "The population of Brazil in the late Eighteenth Century: a preliminary survey" in *Hispanic American Historical Review*, XLIII (may 1963), pp.173-201, Kenneth R. Maxwell *Conflicts and Conspiracies: Brazil and Portugal 1750-1808* London/ New York, Cambridge University Press, 1973, pp.263-266).
6. Cf. Guy Martinière, "A implantação das estruturas de Portugal na América (1620-1750)" in Frédéric Mauro (Coord.) *O Império Luso-Brasileiro 1620-1750*, p.186.
7. From 1719 to 1723, 90% of the children born in des Minas Gerais were considered "illegitimate": this situation emphasized the need for stable families. Jesus's parents and grandparents became models of the ideal stability for families. Cf. Laura de Mello e Souza *Desclassificados do Ouro. A pobreza mineira no século XVIII*. (Rio de Janeiro, Graal, 1982) and

- the Thesis by Renato Pinto Venâncio (Université de Paris-Sorbonne).
8. Angela Delaforce, *Art and Patronage in Eighteenth-Century Portugal*. Cambridge University Press, 2002, p.428 (our emphasis), p.199-201. The church was destroyed in the 1755 earthquake.
  9. Photos of the 1648 silver coin are available in these websites (access june 05, 2022):
  10. Photos of the sculpture in Vila Viçosa are available in these websites (access june 05, 2022) <https://ippem.pt/sobre-nos/>
  11. A miner that was interrogated for acting in a forbidden area answered that "diamonds belonged to God alone" in order to justify himself (cf. L. de Mello e Souza, op.cit., p.211). This statement serves as another example of ideas about divine ownership of mineral riches.
  12. Cf. Agostinho de Santa Maria, *Frei. Santuario mariano, e historia das images milagrosas de nossa senhora, e das milagrosamente apparecidas*, (Lisboa, Antonio Pedrozo Galram, 1707-1723), vol. 10, p.251 (our emphasis).
  13. Cf. A. de Santa Maria, op.cit., vol.1, p.12 et vol. 2, p.127.
  14. Photos of this type of sculpture are available in this website (access june 05, 2022):
  15. Cf. A. de Santa Maria, op.cit., vol.3, pp.4-5 (our emphasis).
  16. Cf. Manuel Trens Maria. *Iconografia de la Virgen en el Arte Español* (Madrid, Ed. Plus Ultra, 1947).
  17. In 1770, the governor of Sao Paulo promoted great public feast in honor of Saint Anne and in thanksgiving for the discovery of gold in Tibagi. Twelve years later Pius VI proclaimed saint Anne "patron and protector" of the bishopric of SP (she became the patron of the bishopric of Rio de Janeiro since 1759). Cf. Luiz Mott, Rosa Egipcíaca. *Uma santa africana no Brasil*. (Rio de Janeiro, Ed. Bertrand, 1993), p.502
  18. Portuguese preachers claim the author of this exegesis to be John of Damascus (Sermon of the Virgin's Nativity). For Jorge de Carvalho, just as Jesus Christ is the "image" of God, Mary is a "copy of sainte Anne". One is the other's "portrait" (p.5-6). Cf. Jorge de Carvalho *Sermão... em dia de Santa Anna, no Mosteiro de Santa Anna...* (Lisboa, Officina de Lourenço de Anveres, 1646), pp.1-20.
  19. Frei Antonio de Santa Anna "Sermão II da gloriosa Senhora Santa Anna, Mãe da Mãe de Deos, e Avó de Jesu Christo, que se havia de pregar na Santa Sé Metropolitana de Lisboa Oriental na festa, que anualmente lhe fazem os seus devotos da Casa de Moeda, anno 1730" in *Sermões Varios*. This sermon was published in Lisbon in 1738 (pp.460-483).
  20. Cf. João Alvares Soares, *Sermão da gloriosa S. Anna, Mãe de Maria SS. Senhora Nossa, na festa que lhe consagrão os Moedeiros na Cathedral da Cidade da Bahia* (Lisboa, Officina Augustinianna, 1733), pp.1-31.
  21. A photo of this sculpture in the Parish dedicated to Santíssimo Sacramento e Sant'Ana, in Salvador, is available in this publication (access june 05, 2022): <https://g1.globo.com/bahia/noticia/igreja-com-quase-300-anos-na-ba-e-reaberta-apos-11-anos-de-obras-de-restauracao.ghtml>
  22. Cf. Jorge de Carvalho, *Sermão... em dia de Santa Anna...*, pp.5-6, 20. Furthermore, obedience is a "pearl", as saint Anne is compared to the sea.
  23. Cf. Frei Francisco da Madre de Deus "Sermão da Senhora Santa Anna, Pregado no Real Convento da Madre de Deos " in *Sermões tome I* (1798), pp.228-256 (our emphasis). This sermon is based on Matthew 7: the tree that is known by its fruits. "Ella he a mysteriosa Arca, que teve em si a Maria Santissima, urna de ouro, em que esteve nove meses encerrado o celeste manna Jesus Christo Bem nosso. Ela he a terra santa, em que nasceo a çarça sempre viva e viçosa de Maria, que teve em si o Homem Deos, sem perder o verdor de sua virgindade , e sem que se queimasse de modo algum o candido lirio da sua pureza. Ella he a mystica estrella de Jacob (...) nutriendo as virtudes (...)" (p.253).
  24. Cf. L. Mott, op. cit., p.122, 496-497.
  25. Idem, p.496-49 (our translation and emphasis).
  26. "Antonio Dias was a rich and powerful man from the city of São Paulo"; he was one of the

first to arrive in these gold mines with his "many slaves, black individuals and indians". Cf. A. de Santa Maria, *op.cit.*, vol. 10, p.243 (our translation)." This parish is named Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception of Antonio Dias in Vila Rica do Ouro Preto (the first capital city of Minas).

# Angels in the Clothes of Apsara: Study on the Angel Motif of the Tombstones at Quanzhou

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper will argue that paired angel motif found on Yuan-era Christian steles in Quanzhou was a new development through an exchange with Ilkhanate Persia. Although there was a Buddhist influence, the angel motif should not be regarded as a direct borrowing from the Buddhist apsara. The Christians of the Church of the East had given this motif their own meanings, and used it to symbolize their identity.

## **KEYWORDS**

Paired Angels; Church of the East; Uighur; *Apsara*; Yuan China.

### Introduction

When the Mongols conquered the prosperous lands of East Asia, not only did they bring slaughter and ‘barbarian’ rule, they also indirectly stimulated the encounters of different cultures, which resulted in some interesting forms of art. One of them, the angels on the Christian tombstones discovered in Quanzhou, a coastal city of China, will be the focus of this paper. On some of these Christian stones, there is a motif of two angels holding a cross on a lotus. The angels wear crowns, with plaited hair falling behind their ears. They also have the “cloud collar” (云肩 *yunjian*), a popular Yuan period (1271-1368) costume worn over the robe with four corners hanging down to the shoulders and chest. Ribbons flow around their bodies and their legs are obscured under the robes. Some angels depicted also have wings on their back and are flying among clouds.



**Fig. 1.** *Angels flanking a cross*, Yuan period, igneous rock, 75 × 28 cm, provided by Quanzhou Maritime Museum.

These stones have caught the attention of scholars ever since they were first discovered and published. Scholars have debated the origin of the angel motif and its meaning for Christians.<sup>4</sup> Previous study has argued this motif

originated from the Byzantine image of two flying deities carrying a wreath and may have come to China through Sogdian or Uighur influence with the early expansion of the Church of the East from the eighth to tenth century.<sup>2</sup> The presence of the Quanzhou ‘angels’ has encouraged some to speculate that this motif may have been passed down within China among the East Syrian Christians with a borrowing from Buddhist elements, but the lack of visual evidence between the Tang (618-907) and Yuan period makes this assumption doubtful.<sup>3</sup> Further, the notable difference between the images of the two periods strengthens the questioning of whether they came from one single source.

This paper will continue the discussion initiated by previous studies on these angel images and will further discuss the possible factors affecting the iconography of the Quanzhou angels. It will examine materials in Ilkhanate Persia (1256-1335) and the channel for their transmission to Quanzhou.<sup>4</sup> The aim of this paper is to propose that the transmission of this motif under the Mongols shows a complicated cultural fusion happening both in Ilkhanate Persia and Yuan China, and the motif symbolized a Christian interpretation for their own foreign identity in the Yuan society.<sup>5</sup>

### **The paired angels**

The Church of the East (also sometimes called the Nestorian Church) was named ‘Jingjiao’ (景教 ‘the brilliant religion’) when it came to China around the seventh century. Although the new religion prospered for a while in the Chinese lands, it then seems to have disappeared from East Asian records until the resurgence with the coming of the Mongols.<sup>6</sup> In the later period, a common motif used by these Christians is the so-called ‘cross-on-lotus’, a cross standing on a lotus flower with bifurcated arms or pearl-end arms of equal length, as shown on tomb steles discovered in Inner Mongolia.<sup>7</sup>

In China, the earliest appearance of the angel motif related to these Jingjiao Christians is discovered on a stone pillar of 829 in Luoyang.<sup>8</sup> The Luoyang pillar contains two groups of angels flanking a cross, surrounded by floating ribbons, and flying over the clouds. They could be regarded as under the influence of the Tang *apsara* images, especially those in the Luoyang area.<sup>9</sup>



**Fig. 2.** Epitaph of a Christian, Yuan period, ceramic, 39 × 46.5 × 6 cm, Inner Mongolia Museum, photo taken by the author.

The same cross symbol was maintained on most of the Christian tombstones in Quanzhou with slight variation.<sup>10</sup> Although the iconography on the Quanzhou stones shares a similar composition with the Luoyang pillar motif, by this later time, the angels have different costumes and headpieces.

Some have wings, and mostly they hold the base for the ‘cross-on-lotus’ instead of flanking it. They look like the *apsara* (Buddhist celestial beings) but are very different from the Tang examples.

The appearance of this motif in another area of the Mongol empire may reveal a possible contemporary influence for the Quanzhou motif in the iconography. An illustration of an ‘Enthronement’ scene from the Diez album in the Topkapi palace produced around 1300 shows a Mongol figure, above whom are three winged creatures.<sup>11</sup> These celestial beings, or angels, wear red cloaks over their shoulders and have pink wings folded behind them. They all wear crowns with water-drop-shaped ornaments.

In an illustrated version (dating to around 1300) of the book *Wonders of Creation*, written by the Muslim scholar Zakarīyā ibn Muḥammad al-Qazwīnī (c. 1203-83) (hereafter referred to as the London Qazwīnī), these angels appear again in an ‘Enthronement’ scene.<sup>12</sup> They are wearing long robes, decorated by golden strips on the arms and at the cuffs. One of the figures has Mongol-style plaited locks tied behind the ears. The three-peaked crown is a particular feature of these angels. The two figures hold a ribbon over the king’s head, and their legs are wrapped by the under-ropes to form a ‘fish-tail’ shape like the legs of the Quanzhou angels. A more comprehensive form appears in a manuscript of *Shahnama* dated 1341.<sup>13</sup> In this ‘Enthronement’ scene, the two angels, holding onto the central object, wear crowns with curving patterns. The one on the left has the same hair plaits hanging over the ears, but their legs are now simplified into floating ribbons. The wings are open on the back of the angels with clear layers of feathers. In these two illustrations, there is the consistency of a symmetrical composition of two crowned angels holding a central object and the depiction of the obscured legs. It also seems that the images produced in the Ilkhanate offered flexibility in the depiction of wings, as some have them while others do not.

The Quanzhou images follow the same combination of elements. The ‘cross-on-lotus’ is now sitting on a base, hand-held by both angels who share the symmetrical composition, the crowns with curving patterns, plaits of hair behind the ears, and the wrapped, tail-shaped legs. There is also the same flexibility with the use of wings. In the basic components of the motif, they

nonetheless are closer to the Persian images than to the Tang Luoyang one. A further adaptation of the angels in China is demonstrated by the addition of a small cross on the crowns that appear on the steles both in Quanzhou and Yangzhou.<sup>14</sup>

Further evidence to link the Quanzhou images to Ilkhanate influence is the angel with four wings. It is not clear what filled the niche above the angel who is sitting in a frontal view, with a crown on his head.<sup>15</sup> This angel wears a double-layered robe with a 'cloud collar' and holds a cross in his hands, sitting on clouds with ribbons floating behind him. The most noticeable thing is that the angel has four wings in two pairs.



**Fig. 3.** *Angel with four wings*, Yuan period, igneous rock, 53.5 × 50 cm, provided by Quanzhou Maritime Museum.

At present, there is little record about the division of angels in the Church of the East in medieval times. Fragmented manuscripts do not offer much information. It is again the London Qazwīnī that resonates most closely with the Quanzhou images. It includes three images of archangels, two of them in a seated position, all with multiple wings, wearing large three-peaked crowns. Further, the Angel of Death is depicted as standing with his four wings spread behind.<sup>16</sup> The iconography of the Angel of Death possibly provided a prototype for the four-winged angel, as it is described as having “70,000 feet and four wings” and is called ‘Izra’il (Azrael) as God’s agent to take the human spirit.<sup>17</sup> This meaning could be suitable for a burial context, considering the four-winged angel is used on a tombstone at Quanzhou.

However, the artisans who made the stones in Quanzhou did not merely copy their Persian models. They added Chinese elements and adapted the angels into a visual format they were certainly familiar with. The wide-sleeved robe, the ‘cloud collar’, and the floating ribbons are all patterns native to the Chinese, being used on images for Buddhist monuments, such as the relief carvings on the pagodas in local temples; also, the seated angel is shown in a frontal view instead of at a three-quarter angle.<sup>18</sup> These treatments in Quanzhou make it difficult to locate specific Western Asian influences that the makers might have absorbed.

Nonetheless, the Quanzhou angel motifs contain the most diverse elements, including crowns (with or without cross), plaited hair, wings (or without wings), floating ribbons, ‘cloud collars’, and obscured, tail-shaped legs. They have highlighted certain exotic details from the Persian motifs, including that both angels are holding the central object (the cross), wearing patterned crowns and that some have wings. The depiction of the open eyes with elongated corners also seems to copy Persian examples. As the Quanzhou images include the most abundant and diversified elements, it is likely that these images were produced later than those in Ilkhanate during the cultural translation of this motif from the West to the East when they absorbed elements both from Persian and local Buddhist images.

### **The interaction with Buddhist art**

Going back to the first angel images discovered in China, on the Luoyang pillar, the paired angels flank the central cross on the lotus pedestal without holding onto it, while most of the Quanzhou images are holding the base for the cross. It is relevant to consider the winged form with the image of *Kalavinka*, a human-bird hybrid from Buddhist art.<sup>19</sup> However, the specific pose of the paired angels holding onto the central object on the Quanzhou stones requires further search in Buddhist art.

An early example of such paired *apsaras* holding a central object appeared at the Tamamushi Shrine in Japan. In a panel showing the monks making offerings to Buddhist relics, a pair of *apsaras* float above, holding a small bowl with a lotus on top. Scholars believe this image presents an act of praise to Buddha.<sup>20</sup> This example is quite early as the shrine is regarded as produced around the late seventh century. A second example is closer to the Mongol period. In the murals of Mogao Cave 207 at Dunhuang, regarded as created during the Uighur period (mid- or late-ninth century), two *apsaras* wearing Central Asian style flower crowns hold a lotus-form bowl with flowers in it.<sup>21</sup> Their legs are wrapped in robes with floating clouds and ribbons surrounding them. Although the basic form of the *apsara* with wrapped legs was preserved in Liao (907-1125) and Jin (1115-1234) relief images on several pagodas, none holds a central object even if they are in symmetrical pairs.<sup>22</sup>

A connection with Uighur art could be found with the enthronement scenes from the Diez album mentioned above. It shares a similar depiction and composition with one of the fragments related to the Manichaeans discovered in Khocho. The fragment shows a central figure and a smaller attendant, accompanied by another winged figure wearing flower crowns of the Central Asian type.<sup>23</sup> Judging from the composition, there would have been another figure in the symmetrical position to form a pair.

When the Mongols conquered Central and West Asia, the Uighurs were living in the extended area across the Mongol steppe into northern China and their movement later across the Mongol empire could very well have extended across to West Asia.<sup>24</sup> Christianized Buddhist stories have included

Manichaean elements, and ‘Buddhist art’ in Ilkhanate manuscripts is also composed by elements possibly passed from the Uighur Tarim area, as the example shown above.<sup>25</sup> It could be inferred that Ilkhanate depictions of these figures came under Uighur Buddhist influences.<sup>26</sup>

However, the crown with curving decorations for the angels in the manuscripts seems to be a new motif added by the Persians. Relief carvings on the walls in Konya, a city in the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum, show figures with a similar kind of crown. This was probably a Byzantine influence on Ilkhan art, as shown by an illustration of 1260 where the first Ilkhan ruler Hülegü (r.1256-1265) and his Christian wife Doquz Khatun wear similar crowns.<sup>27</sup> However, in Persia, this type of headwear seemed to indicate a celestial divinity rather than having a specific Christian meaning, since this same motif was applied to angels, celestial gods and kings.<sup>28</sup> The shared hair plaits on the Konya figures and the London Qazwīnī angels, similar to the Mongol hairstyle, also added an exotic nature for the images.

There are many reasons that such combined borrowings could have happened in Ilkhanate Persia. That the Ilkhan Mongols held an open attitude to other religions, and married women of different beliefs were acts greatly encouraging the patronage and social status of various religions.<sup>29</sup> Since West Asia was a meeting place for the Byzantine Church, the Church of the East and the Islamic schools, there was a great possibility that artisans who made the manuscripts in the Ilkhanate for their new Mongol patrons were familiar with iconographies from various art traditions and could choose from a large pool of different motifs for their artistic purposes.<sup>30</sup> The fact that a large Christian population was living and travelling between the Ilkhanate and the Crusader lands should also be considered as a possible influence on these visual choices.<sup>31</sup> The movement of artisans under the Mongols also provided the platform for artistic exchange. The encounter of multiple religions and their art in the Ilkhanate could have generated this new form of angels.

### **The Quanzhou interpretation**

Returning to the stones in Quanzhou, as the angel motif is largely linked to Christian communities of the Church of the East, it is necessary to know

where these Christians came from. The Christians in Quanzhou during the Yuan period included Uighurs, Mongols, and Tanguts, and the linguistic elements in the inscriptions indicate that they were from northern China: the Turkic language of the Uighur Christian community in Quanzhou shared similarity with that used in the North.<sup>32</sup> The linguistic evidence suggests that these Quanzhou Christians during the Yuan came from the northern area through an overland route.

However, the visual evidence is not as persuasive. Only rare examples with the paired angel motif have been discovered north to the Yangzi River. A stele discovered in Almaliq shows paired angels flanking a cross, but the angels on this stone wear long, tight robes, flanking a cross on top of a central-recessed base.<sup>33</sup> Another Christian stele in Yangzhou also features paired angels but again they wear tight robes. The latter is possibly related to the Quanzhou images on a certain level as they share similar 'fish-tail' shaped legs and cross-topped crowns, but the similarity between the Quanzhou images and those in the Ilkhanate manuscripts is stronger. The connection with the Uighur communities in both geographic areas could be an important link. The transmission of Buddhist motifs through the Uighurs to West Asia, along with the Uighurs among Buddhist, Manichaean, and Christian communities, may have enabled the spread and acceptance of this Buddhist-Christian hybrid motif across the Eurasian empire.

As evidence from the North is limited, more visual materials would be helpful to check if a northern type of angel image existed. Based on what is presented here, it is suggested that the transmission of the angel motif was more likely through the sea route. Located in the southern coastal province of Fujian, Quanzhou was the most prosperous port city during the Yuan period. A superintendency for maritime trade was set up there as early as 1087, and under the Mongols, it remained the leading port in the South attracting global trade and merchants.<sup>34</sup> On route connected with the Gulf area, a large group of Persians resided in this commercial city of Yuan China, who also set up communities in Southeast Asia to form a commercial network, particularly along the coast of India and in hub ports such as Ma'bar.<sup>35</sup> Among these Persian communities, there were also traders belonging to the Church of the

East in Java and south Sumatra.<sup>36</sup> The Chinese recorded that native Christian merchants, presumably of the Turkic groups, were also among those who participated in foreign trade.<sup>37</sup>

Apart from the merchants, there were also embassies between the Yuan and the Ilkhanate that passed through Quanzhou. One epitaph discovered in Quanzhou recorded a delegate traveling from Quanzhou to Hormuz in the early Dade period (possibly from 1297 to 1299), who returned to his home in Quanzhou and died in 1304.<sup>38</sup> As the delegate had brought back gifts given by Ilkhan Ghazan (1271-1304) himself, it must have been a high-level official embassy. During the time of the Quanzhou delegate's travel, the governor of Fujian, whose seat was in Quanzhou, was also a Mongol Christian.<sup>39</sup>

These records prove that communications existed with the Ilkhanate both at commercial and official levels in which Christians were involved. Thus, it is very possible that a channel existed providing these Christians in Quanzhou with materials from Persia.

Then what promoted the Quanzhou Christians to choose the Persian image? In the local Quanzhou culture, there is no lack of Buddhist visual elements, and they were indeed used on objects for other religions.<sup>40</sup> However, the Christian community did not choose a local Buddhist *apsara* image as their Tang predecessors had done in Luoyang centuries earlier. The reason could only be that the Christians living in Yuan Quanzhou wanted to be distinguished from the local Buddhist believers and intentionally chose to use the new, imported images rather than those from the local culture. This Jingjiao interpretation had already been suggested by scholars studying the Luoyang pillar images, proposing that they were borrowing the *apsara* to create their own angels that were never used in a Buddhist context.<sup>41</sup> It is possible to see how they interpreted the new motif along with the old ones, as the Jingjiao motif of the 'cross-on-lotus' is maintained and has replaced the central object in Persian models while the angels nearly all keep exotic crowns or wings. It is also possible that the celestial divinity in the Persian image appealed to these Yuan Christians when they allowed the addition of the 'cloud collar' to the angels since for cultures under Mongol influence, the 'cloud collar' also refers to divinity from heaven.<sup>42</sup> The addition of a cross on

top of the angel's head on some stones further enhances the Christian interpretation. Through this combination, the angel motif at Quanzhou demonstrates a distinctively different symbolism from the Buddhist *apsara* and thus produces a strong foreign color for a Christian identity.

### Conclusion

This paper has compared the angels on the Quanzhou stones with illustrations from Ilkhanate Persia and proposes that the Quanzhou images were developed based on Persian models. The shared Buddhist influence in both areas, the movement of the Uighurs under the Mongols, and an allowance for an adapted interpretation could have facilitated the transmission of the paired angel motif across the Mongol Empire. The deliberate choice of the exotic image and the meaning given by the Christians made this motif different from the Buddhist *apsara*, however similar they may look in form. By using this specific motif on their tombstones, the Christians were trying to express their unique identity among the many foreign communities living in Quanzhou. The imagery also testifies to the close communication and cultural fusions under Mongol rule through the maritime trade. Unless there are new discoveries of the same motif from Mongolia, this specific image in Quanzhou should be regarded as a renewed adaptation by the Jingjiao Christian community in Yuan China.

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# The Global Lives of Emperor Qianlong's Battle Pictures in Eighteenth-Century China and Beyond

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## **ABSTRACT**

Copperplate prints of battle scenes produced in eighteenth-century China are, in nature, material objects of transcultural significance. Circulated worldwide, they have continuously aroused scholarly attention in art history and Qing (1644-1912) studies. How was the copperplate printing technique, among other Western knowledge of image-making, introduced to and transformed in China from the seventeenth through the eighteenth centuries? This paper intends to investigate the global lives of these battle pictures, the agency of Jesuit missionaries, and a Suzhou-based Manchu official to shed light on our understanding of the migration of visual images and techniques from a transregional perspective. In addition to numerous copies of silk painting and copperplate engraving, a curious suite of carved lacquer panels depicting Qianlong's Taiwan Campaign, six of which belonged to the German Emperor Wilhelm II's collection, awaits further study. By delving into the circulation of these images across the Qing Empire and beyond, as well as the visual "migration" from copperplate etching to lacquer carving, I attempt to uncover the multifaceted meaning of the material objects shaped by various agents through cultural and technological exchanges within shifting historical contexts.

## **KEYWORDS**

Jesuit China Mission; Qing Court; Emperor Qianlong; Carved Lacquer; Copperplate Engravings.

### Introduction

The Qianlong emperor's (r. 1736-1795) rule in eighteenth-century China marked the apogee of the "High Qing," characterized in part by this Manchu ruler's victory in pacifying the northwestern and southwestern frontier regions. He commissioned a series of battle scenes and portraits of meritorious generals across different media to glorify the victorious campaigns and Manchu military prowess. Copperplate prints of battle scenes produced during the Qianlong reign are, in nature, migrated material objects of transcultural significance. Circulated worldwide, they have continuously aroused scholarly attention in the fields of art history and Qing studies. Previous studies of these images of war have focused on two perspectives: First, based on French sinologist Paul Pelliot's (1878-1945) ground-breaking work, scholars have continued to evaluate the role of the East Turkestan Campaign engravings within the framework of Sino-French artistic exchanges, as well as its technical and stylistic paradigm for all subsequent series, in light of a large pool of specimens discovered from public and private collections worldwide.<sup>1</sup> Second, scholars such as Ya-chen Ma have traced the visual lineage of Qianlong's etchings of battle scenes back to the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) through the early Qing, revealing the way in which the Manchu subjectivity was represented through the appropriation of European visual culture.<sup>2</sup>

This article intends to highlight three aspects: agents, technology or knowledge, and the circulation of material objects. Qianlong's ambitious agenda involved different agents across geographical boundaries within the Qing Empire and beyond. On the other hand, the proliferation of images came hand in hand with the spread and evolution of technology and visual representations. This paper intends to investigate the global lives of these battle pictures as well as the agency of Jesuit missionaries and a Suzhou-based Manchu official to shed light on our understanding of the migration of visual images and techniques from a transregional perspective. In addition to numerous copies of album painting and copperplate engraving, a curious suite of carved lacquer panels depicting Qianlong's Taiwan Campaign (hereafter "Taiwan Campaign panels"), six of which belonged to the

German Emperor Wilhelm II's (Friedrich Wilhelm Viktor Albert, 1859-1941) collection, awaits further study.<sup>3</sup> By delving into the circulation of these images in the Qing Empire and beyond, as well as their visual “migration” from copperplate etching to lacquer carving, I attempt to reveal the multifaceted meaning of material objects shaped by various agents through cultural and technological exchanges within shifting historical contexts.

### **Jesuit China Missions and Copperplate Engraving**

How was the technique of copperplate printing, among other Western knowledge of image-making, introduced to and transformed in China from the seventeenth through the long eighteenth centuries? Jesuit missionaries played a key role in the introduction of etchings – a legacy of China missions – in late imperial China, thus providing the foundation for Qianlong's commemorative images. In the early seventeenth century, the renowned Italian Jesuit priest Matteo Ricci (Li Madou, 1552-1610) brought to China some holy images, four of which were incorporated into an ink-stick catalogue, entitled *Ink Garden of the Cheng Family* (*Chengshi moyuan*), published by ink-maker and merchant Cheng Dayue (1549-1616?) from Xin'an (present-day Huizhou) (Figure 1). Although the originals Ricci brought no longer exist, these etchings from illustrated books circulated in Asia and served the Jesuit missions.

Ricci's Italian successor Giulio Aleni (Ai Rulüe, 1582-1649) took further advantage of such Jesuit visual pedagogy in his translation work to serve his China mission by utilizing woodblock print, a popular media that appealed to the local readership. Published around 1637, Aleni's book based on Nadal's *Evangelicae historiae imagines*, titled *Tianzhu jiangsheng yanxing jilue* or *Explanation of the Incarnation and Life of the Lord of Heaven*, was the first biography of Jesus written in Chinese.<sup>4</sup>



**Fig. 1.** Cheng Dayue, “Mary and Jesus” from *Ink Garden of the Cheng Family (Chengshi moyuan)*, early 17th century; woodblock print, 32×31cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

There are fifty-five illustrations throughout the book, which vividly introduce the story of Jesus. Considering Aleni’s China mission was mainly based in Fujian, this book was probably the work of woodblock carvers and publishers on the Southeastern Chinese coast. The illustrative images crafted with the Chinese hands hardly changed Nadal’s originals in terms of composition, although the former replaced the Latin texts with Chinese characters. However, the differences between woodblock carving and copperplate engraving in visual representation and underlying concepts are evident. The unified source of light emitted from the upper left in Nadal’s originals, which decides the direction of shades on the ground, disappears in the woodblock illustrations. In the iconic scene of the “Annunciation,” the distinct contrast between the dark interior household and bright outdoor environments vanished in the

woodcut. And judging from the deformed rooftop we can assume that the Chinese artisans clearly did not understand the visual theory of linear perspective derived from West Europe.

During the early Qing, the Kangxi emperor's (r. 1661-1722) curiosity and interest in Western knowledge led Jesuit missionaries, including Italian Jesuit Matteo Ripa (Ma Guoxian, 1692-1745), to play a more influential role in the imperial court. Ripa served the emperor with his skills by contributing to imperial projects of map-making and copperplate printing. His depiction of thirty-six views of the Summer Mountain Resort (Bishu shanzhuang), located in the river valley of Rehe (present-day Chengde), was integral to the cultural construction of a multifaceted Qing subjectivity, combined with Manchu, Chinese, and Western elements. The architectural complex was built in 1703. When the main construction was almost completed ten years later, Kangxi sent Chinese court painters and Ripa to depict the selected thirty-six scenic sites, accompanied by his imperial poems in Chinese and Manchu, respectively, and printed in album format.

Based on the woodblock print with Manchu texts of 1712, Ripa's experiment in etching (with Chinese texts) was completed a year later, in 1713 (Figure 2). Although scholars have pointed out that some scenes were executed by Ripa's Chinese students, the characteristic Western visual concept distinguishes them from woodblock counterparts given their treatment of shadows with meticulously incised ink lines.<sup>5</sup> Ripa and his apprentices utilized the media and technique through arranging different shades of lines to create the illusive realism unmatched by woodcut. By contrast, the woodcut landscapes in ink display the brushwork reminiscent of the *Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting* (*Jieziyuan huapu*), showing signs of the bond between traditional Chinese painting and the printing industry. While Aleni and Ricci's etchings reproduced in China stopped at Christian iconography, Ripa's innovative experimentation accommodated Western visual culture to Chinese landscape painting.



**Fig. 2.** Matteo Ripa, “Morning Glow on the Western Ridge (Xiling chenxia)” from *Illustrated Imperial Poetry on the Summer Mountain Resort*, circa 1713; copperplate print, 28×45cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

### **Picturing Battle Scenes through Transcultural Exchanges**

Qianlong’s conquest over the East Turkestan region occupied the paramount position in his self-claimed “Ten Great Campaigns (*shiquan wugong*)” and associated commemorative images. Though the making of the East Turkestan Campaign engravings was a labor-intensive and time-consuming project driven by the imperial agenda, it was the artistic collaboration between Jesuit painters and French artisans that materialized Qianlong’s vision. The drawings prepared by four painters – Giuseppe Castiglione (Lang Shining,

1688-1766), Ignatius Sicklart, (Ai Qimeng, 1708-1780), Jean Denis Attiret (Wang Zhicheng, 1702-1768), and Joannes Damascenus Salusti (An Deyi, ?-1781) – were sent to Canton (Guangzhou) for shipment to France for engraving. In the next almost ten years, the Parisian artisans completed the engraving and printing and then sent the finished products back to Beijing.<sup>6</sup> The collaborative process in printmaking was also evident in the inscriptions appended at the bottom of each scene, which show the identities of the four drafters from the Qing court (lower left), the atelier’s director Charles-Nicolas Cochin (1715-1790) (lower middle) and engravers (lower right) in Paris. Completed in 1779, this globalized project between Beijing and Paris made Qianlong’s kingship and visage known in Europe and comparable to Louis XV (1710-1774) of France.



**Fig. 3.** Giuseppe Castiglione, “Storming of the Camp at Gädän-Ola” from the East Turkestan Campaign engraving, circa 1779; copperplate print, 58×94.7 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Existing scholarship has elaborated on the Sino-West hybrid compared with their European counterparts. Special exhibitions on Qing court art also offer opportunities to examine those delicate shades of ink lines and appreciate their exquisite craftsmanship.<sup>7</sup> For example, the horse

soldier holding a long spear in the scene “Storming of the Camp at Gādān-Ola” (Figure 3) portrays the meritorious Mongol general Ayuxi, based on his portrait by Castiglione after the victory of the East Turkestan Campaign in 1755.

Although the East Turkestan Campaign prints served as a paradigm for all the subsequent series in terms of technical parameters and stylistic feature, the localization of copperplate printmaking in the Qing court inevitably reduced the latter’s Western influence. After Jesuit lay brother Castiglione’s passing in 1766, this was particularly the case when all the procedures of drawing, engraving, and printing were executed in Beijing with no technical support or assistance from European artisans.

The Taiwan Campaign series was reduced to twelve battle and ritual scenes, as follows: (1) Lifting the Siege at Zhuluo; (2) Battle of Dapulin; (3) Conquer of Douliumen; (4) Conquer of Daliyi; (5) Battle of Jijipu; (6) Attack on the Mount Xiaobantian; (7) Capture of the Rebel Chief Lin Shuangwen; (8) Battle of Dawulong; (9) Battle of Fangliao; (10) Capture of Zhuang Datian; (11) Crossing the Ocean and Triumphant Return; (12) Victory Banquet.

The emperor’s conquest over Taiwan lasted for nearly one and a half years, from 1786 to early 1788.<sup>8</sup> All the large silk paintings appended with imperial texts composed by Qianlong were completed by eight ethnic-Han Chinese painters, followed by the procedures of copperplate engraving and printing in the imperial workshops. In the eleventh scene “Crossing the Ocean and Triumphant Return,” the diagonal distribution of naval ships of the Qing army recalls a silk painting depicting the first Qing conquer of the Taiwan Islands during the Kangxi reign. This seems not a coincidence given that Qianlong perhaps followed his grandfather’s footsteps through displays of martial prowess in both actual action and image-making.

In addition to silk paintings and prints, a suite of twelve carved lacquer panels exemplified the transmedia proliferation of battle pictures. Measuring 72 centimeters in height and 108 centimeters in width, the panels apply polychrome lacquer carving with sandalwood frames inlaid with semi-precious stones in the form of *hulu* gourds and vines. From top to bottom, the lacquer layers varnished include red, yellow, and dark green,

representing (1) mountains, trees, architecture, figures; (2) diaper background; and (3) streams, ocean, and sky, respectively (Figure 4). As mentioned above, six of the eleven extant Taiwan Campaign panels are housed in the Museum Huis Doorn, Netherlands.<sup>9</sup> They have drawn little attention due to the marginalized status of carved lacquer in Qing court art.



**Fig. 4.** “Lifting the Siege at Zhuluo” from the Taiwan Campaign panel suite, 1795; carved polychrome lacquer, 72×108cm. Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Berlin.

#### **Local Agency and Media Transfer in Suzhou**

Drawing on textual sources from the *Compiled Archives of the Palace Board of Works under the Imperial Household Department (Qinggong Neiwufu Zaobanchu dang’an zonghui*, hereafter “DAZH”), this section investigates the production, technique, and media of the Taiwan Campaign panels and traces the circulation of images between the central and the local.<sup>10</sup> Challenging the

preoccupation that these panels were imperially commissioned products, I instead propose that they embodied the active agency of a Manchu official as well as technological and material exchanges through the bureaucratic system between the court and Suzhou. The social life of copperplate engravings and this panel suite offers new insight into the role of high-ranking officials in Chinese material culture during the Qing dynasty.

After the completion of twelve battle scenes in album form by the tenth lunar month of 1789, the fifty-fourth year of Qianlong's reign, they were transferred from the Hall of Wish Fulfilling (Ruyiguan) to the Imperial Household Workshop for copperplate engraving by the court artisans. All the twelve copperplates were prepared successively from early 1790 through 1792. By the end of 1792, nearly two hundred printed copies were ready for distribution and circulation across the Qing Empire.<sup>11</sup> Following the paradigm of the East Turkestan and Jinchuan Campaigns series, the Taiwan Campaign engravings were sent to temporary and provincial palaces as well as bureaucratic mansions for storage and display.<sup>12</sup> According to a list of tribute gifts in early 1795 from DAZH, this set of lacquer panels was among the personal tributes of Qifeng'er, Governor of Jiangsu province.<sup>13</sup>

The bannerman official Qifeng'er had assumed charge of the Suzhou Weaving Department (Suzhou zhizaoshu) in the 1780s. His tribute gifts include several kinds of objects that represented Suzhou's exquisite craftsmanship (*Suzuo*), such as jade carving and lacquerware.<sup>14</sup> Like his predecessor Sazai (?-1786), another bannerman who supervised the Suzhou Weaving Department at least twice between the 1750s and the 1770s, Qifeng'er also commissioned a special type of vermilion coreless lacquers in the shape of chrysanthemums as gifts for the emperor.<sup>15</sup> Their similar official career in Suzhou and local resources exerted a great impact on their choices of commissioning local tributes and strategies to meet Qianlong's preference and taste. It is likely that after receiving the imperially bestowed engravings in early 1793, Qifeng'er commissioned artisans to produce the lacquer panels in Suzhou by appropriating the printed copy as a template, and then sent them to the court in early 1795 as part of his gifts dedicated to Qianlong.<sup>16</sup>

Since 1739, the making and repair of lacquerware – mostly carved lacquer – was largely assigned to the Suzhou Weaving Department. Established during the Ming dynasty, three weaving departments – at Suzhou and two other Jiangnan cities – were responsible for the production of various textiles, clothes, and robes mainly for the imperial court, accompanied by commissioned orders for other artifacts. Judging from their material practices, imperial orders along with approved models or sketches were issued from Beijing, samples or products then were transported from Suzhou back to the court via the Grand Canal.<sup>17</sup>

The decision to establish a new production system within the Jiangnan-based workshops encouraged technological exchanges and transmission of motifs between different media, such as hardwood, bamboo, ivory, and lacquer carving. Artisans from various ateliers were frequently exposed to each other's works and, as a result, the designs show signs of mutual inspiration. In particular, the three-dimensionality of lacquer motifs in relief carving suggests the close collaboration of artisans skilled in working with a broad range of materials, including hardwood, bamboo, jade, and ivory. The participation of ivory artisans in the making of carved lacquer in the early years of both the Yongzheng (r. 1722-1735) and Qianlong periods indeed supports the possibility. The meticulously combed seascape pattern surrounding dragons or fish on carved red lacquerware, for instance, was probably inspired by early Qing designs of ivory carving. Shared visual features also suggest that the imperial lacquerware with Qianlong's marks and these lacquer panels were in the hands of the same group of artisans in Suzhou.<sup>18</sup>

### **Afterlives in the Hall of Purple Splendor and Beyond**

After the Taiwan Campaign panels were presented to the emperor, according to official records in the *Archives of Zhongnanhai* (*Zhongnanhai dang'an*, hereafter "ZNHD"), they were later transferred to the Hall of Purple Splendor (Ziguangge) to the west of the Forbidden City.<sup>19</sup> Ma has revealed that Qianlong's battle scene prints and portraits of meritorious generals were collectively displayed and/or stored in the Hall of Purple Splendor, an

architecture complex renovated during the Qianlong reign.<sup>20</sup> Stored together with different formats of battle scenes and portraits in the same architectural space, the Taiwan Campaign panels were incorporated into the imperial holdings as part of Qianlong's commemorative images.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, details of their production and their identity as personal gifts when entering the imperial court has been forgotten and lost in history, only can be pieced together with scattered records.



**Fig. 5.** Giuseppe Castiglione and Jean Denis Attiret, *Imperial Banquet at the Garden of Ten Thousand Trees (Wanshu yuan cian tu)*, 1754; colors on silk, 221.2×419.6 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.

During the Qianlong period, imperial banquets that celebrated the victory of military campaigns and honored the returning generals and soldiers were usually held at the Hall of Purple Splendor. The emperor occasionally ordered court painters such as Giuseppe Castiglione to depict these banquet scenes, which feature the iconic two-story façade of the building. As two different banquet scenes show, one held in the Garden of Ten Thousand Trees (Wanshu yuan) at the Mountain Resort in Chengde, while the other at the Hall of Purple Splendor in the last scene of the East Turkestan Campaign print, they share a nearly identical composition (Figure 5).<sup>22</sup>

Despite the initial intent of documenting ritual events in these pictures, duplicating visual elements based on a modular system was adopted by court painters as well.

The afterlives of these battle pictures dispersed outside China in the early twentieth century makes ideal material to explore the collecting history of Chinese antiquities in the West. To date, a large proportion of these images in various formats can be found in Germany's public museums and private collections. Based on the inventories and archival records of the National Museums in Berlin, Nie Chongzheng is among the first who have connected the German occupation during the Boxer Rebellion with the looting of artifacts originally from the Hall of Purple Splendor. Based on Nie's observation, Ching-Ling Wang has listed a comprehensive pool of general portraits in German collections, which had originally been from the Hall of Purple Splendor.<sup>23</sup> In addition to the battle pictures found in Germany, six of the extant Taiwan Campaign panels entered the German emperor's collection, also due to the political turmoil of the Boxer Rebellion around 1900. They are housed in Wilhelm II's late resident, Huis Doorn, situated in Utrecht province of Netherlands, later transformed into a museum (Museum Huis Doorn) in 1956.

From 1900 to 1901, after the outbreak of the Boxer Rebellion, the Eight-Nation Alliance brought 20,000 armed troops to China to defeat the Imperial Army. Of them, the German troop led by General Field Marshal Alfred von Waldersee (1832-1904) occupied the West Park (Xiyuan) or Zhongnanhai, where the Hall of Purple Splendor was situated. Their occupation resulted in plundering treasures of battle pictures from Qing China to Europe, especially Germany. As the German general von Waldersee recalled in his diary: "At these auctions you could buy anything that China produced – porcelains, cloisonnés, bronzes, red-lacquer wares, fur, silks (mostly in bale), embroideries, clocks, real pearls, precious stones, and various ornaments. ..."<sup>24</sup>

In contrast to von Waldersee's hypocritical tone as an eyewitness vividly describing the American, British, and Russian troops plundering countless Chinese artifacts in Beijing, the German army was also involved in

the looting. One of the prime examples was the Ancient Observatory (*gu guanxiangtai*) in Beijing. The instruments that the German army obtained from the observatory were shipped to Potsdam as war trophies and Emperor Wilhelm II placed them in the gardens of his palaces there. Following Germany's defeat in World War I (1914-1918), under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, the instruments were to be returned to China; this happened in June 1920, and they arrived in Beijing in April 1921. In addition to the astronomical instruments, a huge silk painting fragment depicting the East Turkestan Campaign, still in the collection of the Museum of Ethnology (Museum für Völkerkunde) in Hamburg, was believed to have been looted during the Boxer Rebellion.<sup>25</sup> Many of those looted treasures were presented to Wilhelm II as booty, making their way into public museums such as the Asian Art Museum and Huis Doorn, while others private collections or auction houses.

The German defeat in World War I marked a watershed for Wilhelm II. His military advisors suggested he flee to the neutral Netherlands where he lived in Doorn until he died in 1941. It was said that more than 30,000 objects of his collection and property were transferred by train from the royal palaces in Potsdam and elsewhere in Germany to the Netherlands.<sup>26</sup> His residence and treasures in Doorn later turned into a national museum and collection. Hence the legacy of these battle pictures ironically witnessed the victory of the two once most powerful rulers across the Eurasian continent, the Manchu Qing emperor from the East and the last German emperor in the West.

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3. In 2003, the special exhibition organized by Herbert Butz, then director of the Museum für Ostasiatische Kunst (present-day Staatliche Museen zu Berlin) in Berlin, published a large quantities of artifacts, such as copper engravings and general portraits, originally from the Hall of Purple Splendor. See Herbert Butz ed., *Bilder für die “Halle des Purpurglanzes”*: chinesische

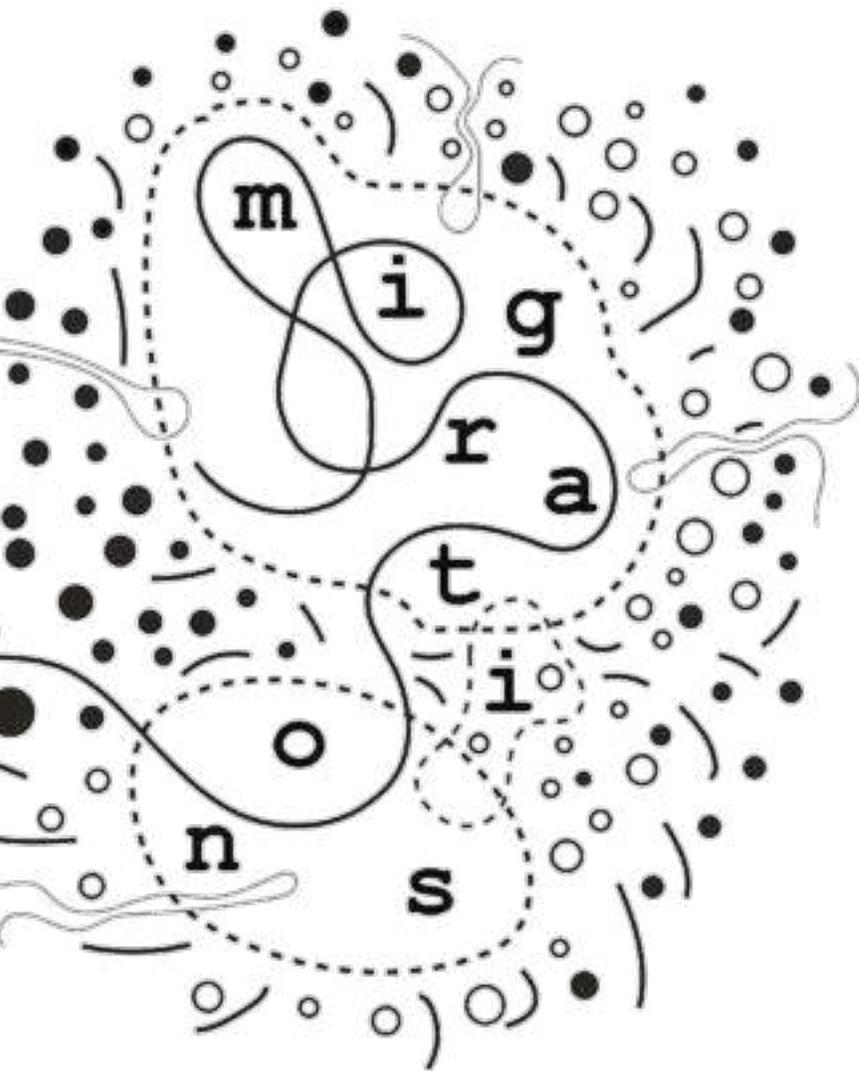
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  8. For further details about Qianlong's Taiwan Campaign, see Chuang Chi-fa, *Qing Gaozong shiquan wugong yanjiu* (Taipei: Guoli Gugong bowuyuan, 1982).
  9. I viewed the six panels from the Huis Doorn during my field trip to Germany in 2017, where they were temporarily transferred to the Museum of Asian Art in Berlin for repair and conservation at the time.
  10. Most pivotal are records of the activities of various bureaus of the Palace Board of Works (Zaobanchu), the division of the Imperial Household Department (Neiwufu) responsible for the production of all material artifacts for the imperial court. Grouped under the heading "Yangxindian Neiwufu Zaobanchu gezuo chengzuo huoji Qingdang," these archives are kept in the First Historical Archives of China (Zhongguo diyi lishi dang'anguan) in Beijing and they serve as primary sources of most significant scholarship used in establishing the timeline of developments of imperial artifacts made during the Qianlong reign. Archival records of the Yongzheng and Qianlong periods were compiled by the First Historical Archives of China and the Chinese University of Hong Kong in DAZH.
  11. DAZH, vol. 50, 659-660.
  12. Ma, *Kehua zhanxun*, 229-230.
  13. DAZH, vol. 55, 744.
  14. DAZH, vol. 55, 744.
  15. DAZH, vol. 38, 703; vol. 38, 445.
  16. In Qifeng'er's memorial, now in the First Archives of China, he expressed his gratitude for the imperial favor in early 1793, confirming that he, alongside other provincial governors and generals, was bestowed with ink rubbings of imperial poems and the Taiwan Campaign engravings. See also Zhenpeng Zhan, "Diguo jixun yu difang gongpin: Qianlong chao 'Pingding Taiwan desheng tu' diaoqi guaping kao," *Guoli Taiwan daxue meishushi yanjiu jikan*, no. 45 (2018): 212-213.
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  19. ZNHD, vol. 23, 27.
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  22. For a comparative study of these two banquet pictures, see Zhan, "Diguo jixun yu difang gongpin," 221.
  23. Nie Chongzheng, "Cong gaoben dao zhengben de 'Ziguangge gongchenxiang,'" *Zijin Cheng*, no. 249 (2015): 124-141; Ching-Ling Wang, "Bolin shoucang de Ziguangge gongchenxiang jiqi xiangguan zuopin xinlun," *Gugong xueshu jikan* 34, no. 1 (2016): 153-214.

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26. See the introduction on the website of the Museum Huis Doorn: <http://www.huisdoorn.nl/en/museum/house/> (February 8, 2018).

# Moving Bodies: The Transformative Power of Body Art

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## Session 7



## Session 7

### **Moving bodies.**

# **The Transformative Power of Body “Art”**

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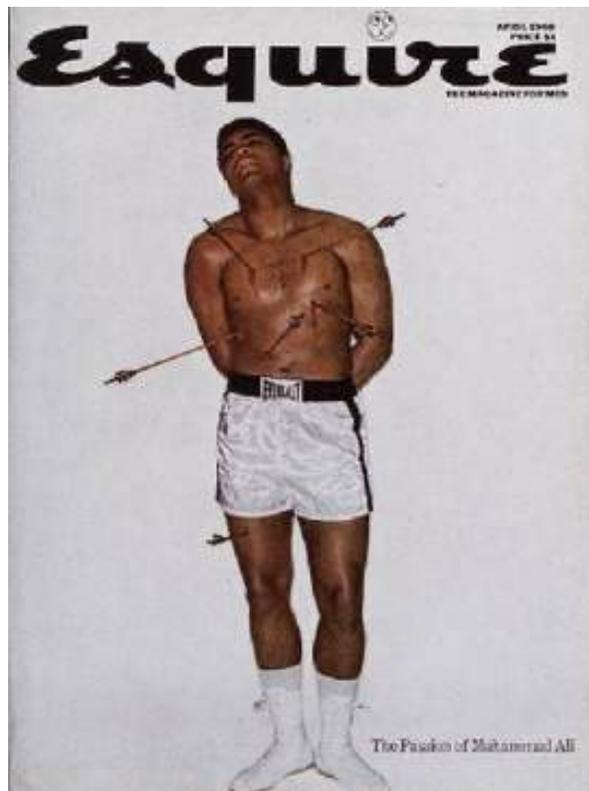
Universidade Federal de Uberlândia

In April 1968, a photograph of the US-American boxer Muhammad Ali was published as the cover of the US-American magazine for men “Esquire” [Fig. 1]. Muhammad Ali is set against a white background wearing white shorts, shoes, and stockings. The black title of the journal heading, the black belt of the boxing star as well as his hair mark a strong black-and-white contrast that frames and highlights Muhammad Ali’s muscular body. Disturbingly arrows stuck deep in the body and caused marks of blood. The blood stains the flawlessness of the body. The wounded man has tilted his head far backwards and appears in this way in a strong foreshortening.

It is immediately clear that the iconography of the Christian Saint Sebastian was the role model for the photo of the boxing star.<sup>1</sup> This mise-en-scène raises a lot of questions. Obviously, gender is a topic here: The body image of Saint Sebastian follows very much the dominant tradition of Sebastian as it was characteristic in the Italian Quattrocento [Fig. 2]. Research has pointed out that Sebastian received in the 15<sup>th</sup> century an emphatically youthful and delicate body which was interpreted as effeminization.<sup>2</sup> The motif of Sebastian with his effeminated appearance quoting 15<sup>th</sup> century Italian painted models is in the photography on the cover of Esquire set in tension with the hypermasculinity of the boxing star.

This raises further questions about the intersectional qualities of this ironic presentation.<sup>3</sup> How race, class and gender interact here is to be discussed. Muhammad Ali had at that time already made public his membership with the nation of Islam, an “ethno-religious movement” claiming moral supremacy of people of color compared to the white

population.<sup>4</sup> This movement of black supremacy was founded in 1930 and answered the racism of the 30s in the US. Muhammad Ali was at that specific moment under heavy criticism for refusing to take part in the war in Vietnam. The subtitle “passion of Muhammad Ali” refers especially to this aspect. He is wounded – not as a soldier in Vietnam but under fire by public offensive statements.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, Muhammad Ali was not only especially well-known for his boxing talents, he was also famous for advocating for a new self-confidence and pride of people of color. The posture thus oscillates between suffering and pride or self-awareness. Some authors have also pointed out that Muhammad Ali is staged here as a religious confessor who is willing to suffer for his beliefs. Just as Sebastian suffered for Christianity, Muhammad Ali defends his commitment to Islam: „a man who [...] suffered for his beliefs“.<sup>6</sup>



**Fig. 1** Muhammad Ali as Saint Sebastian, Cover of the magazine “Esquire”, April 1968, art director George Lois and photographer Carl Fisher



**Fig. 2** Antonello da Messina, Saint Sebastian, circa 1478, Oil on panel, 171 x 85,5 cm, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden

What interested me about this presentation concerning the general topic of the panel *Moving bodies*. *The transformative power of body “art”* is the question of how the reference to Saint Sebastian changed the body of Muhammad. On the one hand, we deal with a body because photography is not a painting, and photography has an indexical relationship to the existing body which is photographed. The body is not an image; it is the body. However, the body is subject to a continuous transformation between, on the one hand, a given form – what he has become, what he is, and what he looks like by nature – and on the other hand a forming process. The body has the potential to change the given form in becoming. The pose does not only show the body in itself, but implies always processes of taking shape and generating not the body as such but a formed body. In the display of the pose, the body is body and image at the same time. It is a culturally coded sign and nature at the same moment.

In the performance for the photographer Muhammad and Sebastian merge, and they are differentiated at the same time because Muhammad

does not only perform as Sebastian he also contradicts the model in quoting it.

This is especially true when we think about sainthood and skin color, sainthood and whiteness or people of color. Entries in dictionaries of saints point out the skin color of saints when the skin is of color, they are not mentioning the whiteness of saints.<sup>7</sup> This tells us something about the unconscious perception of concepts of holiness and sanctity in body images. The normative framework makes the white saint the rule and the black saint the extraordinary, the exception. By making this the norm, the color of the light skin becomes transparent, while the skin of the black saint is perceived as opaque. One can never look through it without perceiving it. This is a problem that critical whiteness studies address in a very precise way by pointing out that we should talk about whiteness in order to make the often unmarked character of whiteness more conscious.

To date, Critical Whiteness Studies,<sup>8</sup> a field in which important innovative research has taken place in recent years, so far had hardly any impact on the analyses of the Christian community of saints in art and church history. Although there were early fundamental studies on saints with dark skin color<sup>9</sup>, the demand of Critical Whiteness Studies not to make people with dark skin color the object of investigation, but to place the mostly unmarked, white viewer position at the center of analyses, was rather neglected in the study of religious iconography until recently. However, the relational quality of the categorizations should always be kept in mind to raise awareness, from a Critical Whiteness Studies perspective, of the hegemonic significance of the unmarked speaker position and the enforcement of a hierarchized relationship between norm and deviance through a "speaking-about" in a broader horizon.

The significance that the positions of Critical Whiteness Studies can have for Christian hagiography, in general, becomes immediately clear when standard works such as lexicons and encyclopedias are considered. For the unmarked 'white' speaker position is ubiquitous there. Exactly this applies to the consideration of the Christian hierarchies of saints up to the present: As lexicons or survey works<sup>10</sup> document, the light-skinniness of saints remains unmentioned. Only dark-skinniness is marked as a deviation. In this way, sainthood and brightness of the skin are unspokenly presupposed as a

normative connection in the lexicons simply by the structure of the lemmas. The unmarkedness of whiteness claims it being the norm whereas the saint as man or woman of color is seen as the exception, the deviation of a given norm, not taking into account e.g., a large number of existing Aethiopian saints, especially as we know from Brazil like king Kāleb/São Elesbão and Santa Ifigênia.<sup>11</sup> From the perspective of intersectionality research, however, it is striking that race and class are intertwined here in a specific way: Ethiopian saints, for example, are often attributed a noble or even royal origin in the saints' legends.

Taking into account the King of boxing Muhammad makes us conscious of this tension between the normative whiteness of the saint and the proud body image of Muhammad as a member of a black supremacy movement.

It is especially interesting to have a closer look at the theoretical image status of this image of the body. When the body is simultaneously understood as a medium and as mediated, in other words, as a subject and an object of representation, this oscillation remains unsolved in representations of the human being. Body images in art therefore have a different character of reality — “Realitätscharakter” or status — than other motifs. They are — as human counterparts — more often captured in their being-as-it-is and less in their being-formed. This oscillation between the medium and the unmediated, the medium and the immediate presence, becomes particularly explosive when a cultural hierarchization of body colors is at the centre, as it is here. Because in this context, naturalizations mean essentialization. Color starts to speak. This is the case with the interaction on the page between the white boxer shorts and shoes as well as the white background and the black heading, the black hair of the star. These sharp contrasts are part of the composition and have an effect. The discussion of whether the tension between culturally coded sign and the nature of the body can be easily solved with terms like “trans-corporeality”<sup>12</sup> as proposed by Stacy Alaimo has to be discussed, describing the nature-culture dichotomy rather as fluidity. However, the marking of skin color on the cover of *Esquire* seems to be a deliberate mark of difference that denies fluidity but highlights and immobilizes difference.

The medial status of the body and the question of which narratives are generated with body images referring to them as an object of design and creativity or as a given claiming authenticity for a static conceptualization of the body, is especially relevant when processes of mobility and migration are taken into account. The body is a place where narratives of singularity and collectivity are told and reinforced by creative acts. Body design produces a specific category of images because these “artifacts” are always more than an artifact. They oscillate between nature and culture, between the presence of the body itself and the simultaneous representation of preceding images of bodies that served as a model. The main thesis of the panel is that aesthetic practices in this area, which were seen as art forms beyond the traditional canon should play a more prominent role in art history. The consequence would also be that art historical terms associated with the body image are to be reformulated in non-Eurocentric art history. What is e.g. a portrait in the transcultural space of negotiation?



**Fig. 3.** Mummy on a palanquin, Guaman Poma de Ayala, *El primer nueva corónica i buen gobierno*, 1600–1615, pen and ink drawing Copenhagen, Det Kongelige Bibliotek, GKS 2232 4<sup>o</sup>, page 258

Here, for example, one could reflect on the image-theoretical status of the mummy,<sup>13</sup> which also oscillates in a remarkable way between presence, presence evocation, and representation. Similar to botanical or medical specimens,<sup>14</sup> mummies are not only bodies; in the mode of display, they also have pictorial qualities, as Hans Belting has already emphasized in his volume on “an anthropology of the images”<sup>15</sup>. The body image of the mummy is more than a corpse. The embalmed body has become the image of a living one. The mummy is activated as an image in the act of presentation.

It was precisely this ambiguity between death and life that the first Spaniards encountered in America, when they recognized with astonishment the way indigenous people in the Viceroyalty of Peru handled the mummified bodies of Inca rulers. Their families preserved the dead regents in the palaces, where they were regularly re clothed and provided with food and drink. At certain religious festivals and at moments of critical political actions, the embalmed bodies left their place inside the houses and — as the chronicler Guaman Poma de Ayala vividly describes in his chronicle entitled “El primer nueva corónica i buen gobierno”, written between 1600 and 1615 [Fig. 3] — were carried through the city on palanquins and publicly displayed in squares. At these moments, they were assisted by a family member who acted as the mummy's mouthpiece. In this way, as research has shown, noble families could exert their political influence even when they were not in power.

This “image” production in the Inca empire from prepared human bodies is also particularly remarkable because the mummy cult was also carried out with reference images, which had the function of “doubling” the fragile body images of the Inca rulers. These “image copies” were called “*guaques*,” which means “brothers”. Bernabé Cobo explains how they were used:

“[...] los cuales pusieron a cada uno con su *guáque* en casa de por sí con el número de ministros y sirvientes competente, según su calidad, cuidando dellos siempre los señores y cabezas de las parcialidades, y dedicándose toda la familia al culto de los suyos. Sacábanlos de allí muy acompañados a todas sus

fiestas solemnes, y sí no lo eran tanto, sacaban en su lugar sus *guáuques*, y en la plaza los asentaban todos en ringlera conforme su antigüedad, y allí comían y bebían los criados que los guardaban [...]"

"Each body was placed along with its *guauque* in a house of its own with an adequate number of attendants and servants, befitting the rank of the deceased. However, the lords and chiefs of their family units always looked after them, and the whole family devoted itself to paying tribute to their deceased. The bodies were brought out with a large retinue for all solemn festivals, and for less solemn occasions, in place of the bodies, their *guauques* were brought out. In the square they were seated in a row according to their seniority, and there the servants and guardians ate and drunk."<sup>16</sup>

William Harris Isbell has assumed that the "guauques", which resembled effigies, were made primarily because the mummies were endangered and could be damaged if they were carried on ambassadorial journeys or war campaigns, for example in the warm, humid lowlands.<sup>17</sup>

That the body image, in the sense of Hans Belting's "Bildanthropologie" ("anthropology of images"),<sup>18</sup> also had a long tradition in Europe as a pictorial medium becomes clear not only in consideration of medieval veneration of relics, but also when one recognizes how European body images were activated in entangled transcultural histories that are marginalized and forgotten today. In my opinion, this is demonstrated by the treatment of the body of Charles V at the beginning of the 17th century in Spain.<sup>19</sup> Charles V was "discovered" to be miraculously mummified, i.e., intact, during the reburial of the body under Philip IV in the Escorial. This "miracle", which was also immediately attributed to divine intervention by the chroniclers from the Hieronymite order,<sup>20</sup> took place, in my opinion, not by chance in a time in which an increased preoccupation with the mummies of the Inca rulers can be observed in Spain, which ultimately led to the destruction and annihilation of the mummies in the Viceroyalty of Peru. Only by looking at these "body image histories" from an entangled histories perspective does it become possible to recognize that at the moment the mummy is erased as a memory image of South American rule, the

Habsburg ruler who commanded the conquest of the continent celebrates resurrection precisely in this body image,<sup>21</sup> thus acquiring time-transcending qualities. One memorial is erased, the other made permanent.



**Fig. 4** Martín Rico y Ortega, Sketch with the mummy of Charles V, drawing, 22 x 31,2 cm, 1871, New York, The Hispanic Society of America, © Courtesy of The Hispanic Society of America, New York

Art history has hardly dealt with the mummy of Emperor Charles V [Fig. 4], which was shown to scholars and state guests on their visit to the Escorial until the 19th-century<sup>22</sup> and of which early photographs also exist. It was seen only as a Spanish or European phenomenon of the worship of rulers. Thus, unlike the portraits of Charles V in the Prado, the mummy and the numerous photographs of the mummy have been excluded from the art historical analysis of image production. Here, in contrast, shall be proposed not only an expansion of the art historical subject area in the sense of a “Bildwissenschaft” (“visual studies”), but also to give the expansion of this subject area a decidedly transcultural twist. The mummies of Peru should not be included in the European tradition of portraiture, which would repeat the imperial act of the 17th century and, moreover, inadmissibly shorten the pictorial status of the mummies, but, conversely, the term “guauque” should be introduced for this form of body image in general, a term that has

survived in the Spanish sources for the mummy portraits, but which obviously did not originate in the Spanish vocabulary. Proceeding in this way would have the advantage of also decisively broadening the view of the European "image" tradition, and with this term the body images of relics and ruler mummies up to Jeremy Bentham's "auto-icons"<sup>23</sup> could be included differently in the historiography of art. My plea that book titles such as "The Tradition of Portraiture from Jan van Eyck to Frida Kahlo"<sup>24</sup> should in the future read "The Tradition of Guauques from Jan van Eyck to Frida Kahlo" is not to result in a neo-Indigenism in which Eurocentrism is replaced by another hegemonic discourse formation that makes a universalism claim for neo-Inca narratives. Rather, the goal is for us to feel challenged by this thought-provoking exercise to critically examine our own art historical master narratives and to question, or rather to recognize in their complexity, the purifications that follow a European narrative of progress and secularization and that are largely based on 16th- and 17th-century writings on art theory. For if we want to get serious about overcoming Eurocentrism, it is not sufficient to expand the subject area to shift the "edges," but it is indispensable, in the act of "decentering," to look at Europe from the "edges" and thus also to redefine the "heart" of the discipline. Then it would quickly become clear that the European epoch narrative of a vivification of painting based on the study of antiquity and the imitation of nature is also incomplete for Europe itself. For here, too, vivification does not only go back to mimesis, but the use of images knows the most diverse forms of pictorial "agency", which — for example, starting from the use of portraits of rulers from late antiquity<sup>25</sup> — would be much more compatible with the concept of the "guauque" than with that of the "portrait".

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### Endnotes

1. In research, among the numerous depictions of Sebastian in the Quattrocento, a painting by Francesco Botticini is often cited as a model (Jonathan Eig. *Ali: A Life*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt [2017], 256).
2. Daniela Bohde. "Ein Heiliger der Sodomiten? Das erotische Bild des hl. Sebastian im Cinquecento." In *Männlichkeit im Blick. Visuelle Inszenierungen in der Kunst seit der Frühen Neuzeit*, 79–98. Eds. Mechthild Fend, and Marianne Koos. Cologne et al.: Böhlau, 2004; Alessandra D'Agostino. "Seduzioni dell'adolescenza. Angeli, santi ed efebi nell'arte rinascimentale toscana." In *Immagini del bambino e dell'adolescente nel Rinascimento. Percorsi evolutivi nell'arte toscana*, 93–109. Eds. Ivan Nicoletti, and Sara Ugolini. Florence:

- Nicompi, 2010; on the sexual allusions and the ambiguities of the body image see Bette Talvacchia. "The Double Life of St. Sebastian in Renaissance Art." In *The Body in Early Modern Italy*, 226–248. Eds. Julia L. Hairston, and Walter Stephens. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2010. Without reference to gender aspects: Paola Pacifici. *San Sebastiano. Nudità, sangue e peste nella pittura devozionale toscana (1350–1500)* (= Arte & saperi, 1), Livorno: Debate editore, 2017. On the transformation of the iconography of St. Sebastian in the viceroyalties of the Americas see Margit Kern. "St. Sebastian in Iberoamerica: Transcultural Negotiation on Body Images and Concepts of Sacrifice in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries". In *Sacrifice and Conversion in the Early Modern Atlantic World*, 273–297. Ed.. Maria Barbara. I Tatti Research Series, 1. Florence: Villa i Tatti, The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, 2021.
3. Stuart Hall. „The Spectacle of the ‘Other’." In *Representation. Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, 223–290. Ed. Stuart Hall. London: Sage 1997. Cf. also the introduction of Katrin Meyer. *Theorien der Intersektionalität zur Einführung*. Hamburg: Junius [2017].
  4. Harald Krämer. *Muhammad Ali*. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt-Taschenbuch-Verl., 2001; Peter Kemper. *Muhammad Ali*. Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010; Eig. *Ali: A Life*.
  5. Alexxa Gotthardt. The Photograph That Made a Martyr out of Muhammad Ali. In *Artsy Nov*. 7, 2018 <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-photograph-made-martyr-muhammad-ali> (abgerufen am 16.1.2022).
  6. Eig. *Ali: A Life*, 258.
  7. E.g. Jochen Boberg. „Elesba(a)s (Elesboas, Kâlêb) von Äthiopien.“ In *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, vol. 6, col. 114. Ed. Engelbert Kirschbaum, 8 vols., Freiburg i. Br. 1968–1976: „E. m. schwarzer Hautfarbe zu Pferde“ („E. [= Elesbas] with black skin color on Horseback“ translation M.K.). Whereas the female saint from Wales Edwina on the same double page goes without a reference to skin color. Gabriela Kaster. „Edwina from Anglesey.“ In *ibidem*, vol. 6, col. 112.
  8. Leena Crasemann. *Unmarkierte Sichtbarkeit? Weiße Identitäten in der zeitgenössischen künstlerischen Fotografie*. Paderborn: Brill, Wilhelm Fink, [2021]; Anna Greve. *Farbe – Macht – Körper. Kritische Weißseinsforschung in der europäischen Kunstgeschichte*. Karlsruhe: KIT Scientific Publishing, 2013.
  9. Gude Suckale-Redlefsen. *Mauritius. Der heilige Mohr*. Houston: Menil Foundation, 1987; Erin Kathleen Rowe. *Black Saints in Early Modern Global Catholicism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Grace Harpster. "The Color of Salvation. The Materiality of Blackness in Alonso de Sandoval's De instauranda Aethiopia salute". In *Envisioning Others. Race, Color, and the Visual in Iberia and Latin America*, 83–110. Ed. Pamela A. Patton. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2016.
  10. See the example from the LCI in note 4. Sabine Poeschel. *Handbuch der Ikonographie. Sakrale und profane Themen der bildenden Kunst*. 4th Edition, Darmstadt: Wiss. Buchges., 2011; *Reclams Lexikon der Heiligen und biblischen Gestalten. Legende und Darstellung in der bildenden Kunst*. Ed. Hiltgart L. Keller. 14th Edition, Stuttgart: Reclam, 2019.
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  13. Thomas B. F. Cummins. "Living Image." In *Lexikon of the Hispanic Baroque. Transatlantic Exchange and Transformation*, 206–211. Eds. Evonne Levy and Kenneth Mills. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013; Margit Kern. "Tote Körper – lebende Bilder. Das Körperbild der Mumie als Gegenstand transkultureller Aushandlungsprozesse im Vizekönigreich Peru." In *Heilige Bücher, Leiber, Orte. Festschrift für Bruno Reudenbach*, 171–183. Eds. Daniela Wagner and Hanna Wimmer. Berlin: Reimer, 2018; Margit Kern. "Globale Renaissance – multiple Antiken? Fragen von „Norm und Form“ in der Kunst der Frühen Neuzeit." In *Multiple Epochisierungen?*

- Literatur und Bildende Kunst 1500–1800*. 101–127. Eds. Klaus Hempfer and Valeska von Rosen. Berlin: J.B. Metzler, 2021.
14. Johannes Grave. „Selbst-Darstellung. Das Präparat als Bild.“ In *Kritische Berichte* 37/4 (2009): 25–34; Hans-Jörg Rheinberger. „Präparate – ‚Bilder‘ ihrer selbst. Eine bildtheoretische Glosse.“ In *Bildwelten des Wissens. Kunsthistorisches Jahrbuch für Bildkritik*, Bd. 1, 2 (2003): 9–19. On the conceptualization of the "living image" as a media-dependent cultural construction cf. also Peter Geimer. „Das lebende Lichtbild – ‚Mumie der Veränderung‘.“ In *UnTot. Existenzen zwischen Leben und Leblosigkeit*, 162–181. Ed. idem, Berlin: Kulturverlag Kadmos, 2014.
  15. Hans Belting. *An Anthropology of Images. Picture, Medium, Body*. Translated by Thomas Dunlap. Princeton, NJ [et al.]: Princeton Univ. Press, 2011.
  16. Bernabé Cobo. *Obras* (Biblioteca de autores españoles 91/92), vol. 2, 164. 2 vols. (Madrid: Atlas, 1956), Historia del nuevo mundo, book 13, chap. 10, emphasis in original; engl. translation cited in Bernabé Cobo. *Inca Religion and Customs by Father Bernabé Cobo*, 40. Ed. and transl. by Roland Hamilton. Austin, Tex: University of Texas Press, 1990.
  17. William Harris Isbell. *Mummies and Mortuary Monuments. A Postprocessual Prehistory of Central Andean Social Organization*, 38. Austin, Tex: University of Texas Press, 1997, 56.
  18. Belting, *An Anthropology of Images*. See also *Den Körper im Blick. Grenzgänge zwischen Kunst, Kultur und Wissenschaft*. Eds. Beat Wyss and Markus Buschhaus Paderborn: Fink, 2008; *Bild und Körper im Mittelalter*. Eds. Kristin Marek, Raphaële Preisinger, Marius Rimmel and Katrin Kärcher. Munich: Fink, 2008.
  19. Diane H. Bodart. *Pouvoirs du portrait sous les Habsbourg d'Espagne*, 94. Paris: CTHS [et al.], 2011; Rosemarie Mulcahy. *The Decoration of the Royal Basilica of El Escorial*, 189–192. Cambridge [et al.]: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994.
  20. „Solo la providencia de Dios puede de essa manera conservarlos“; „Only divine providence can preserve them [= the bodies] like this“ Francisco de los Santos. *Descripción breve del Monasterio de S. Lorenzo el Real del Escorial, única maravilla del mundo*, fol. 147v. Madrid: Imp. Real., 1657.
  21. The fact that the report on the death of Philip IV noted that his physicians discovered a stone in his liver when embalming the body after the ruler's demise, (Steven N. Orso. *Art and Death at the Spanish Habsburg Court. The Royal Exequies for Philip IV*, 5. Columbia, Miss.: University of Missouri Press, 1989), in my opinion, speaks for the fact that the physicians were concerned with the king's internal organs in order to preserve the body. The embalming of rulers in the early modern period has not yet been fundamentally addressed in research, yet there are numerous references in the literature that suggest that this practice was widespread (Kristin Marek. *Die Körper des Königs. Effigies, Bildpolitik und Heiligkeit*, 12, 204 and 239. Munich: Fink, 2009) and did not only serve to temporarily preserve the bodies for transfer, as Weiss-Krejci assumes (Estella Weiss-Krejci. „Excarnation, Evisceration, and Exhumation in Medieval and Post-medieval Europe.“ In *Interacting with the Dead. Perspectives on Mortuary Archaeology for the New Millennium*, 155–172. Eds. Gordon F. M. Rakita (et al.). Gainesville (et al.): Univ. Pr. of Florida, 2005).
  22. Bodart, *Pouvoirs du portrait sous les Habsbourg d'Espagne*, 95f.
  23. Hans Belting. *Bild-Anthropologie. Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft*, 37–106, on Bentham's „Auto-Icons“ see 106. Munich: Fink 2001.
  24. Recent research on portraits has made interesting attempts to expand the subject area into non-European contexts, but this has not yet left any traces in the terminology. *Figurationen des Porträts* (Morphomata, Bd. 35), 11. Eds. Thierry Greub and Martin Roussel. Paderborn: Fink, 2018.
  25. Hans Belting. *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art*, 190f. Chicago [et al.]: Univ. of Chicago Pr., 1994.

# Nature, Commodities and Bodies in Baroque Ballets across the Savoy State: Choreographies of Transmutation and Consumption

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper analyzes four ballets staged across the Savoy Duchy from 1645 to 1660 and lavishly documented by Giovanni Tommaso Borgonio. In these spectacles, the dancing bodies moved in two different environments – domestic mountains (the Alps) and foreign oceans (Atlantic and Indian oceans) – while they interacted choreographically with natural resources such as grain, milk, tobacco, and pearls. This paper explores the potential of these courtly performances and their bodily animation in staging transformative processes and dynamics of mobility. Moreover, taking a cue from Mark Franko's rumination on the baroque dancing body as a highly charged ideological medium, it also illustrates how the Savoy dancers performed two contrasting forces at play in the geopolitical agenda of the Duchy.

## **KEYWORDS**

Baroque; Ballets; Savoy; Commodities; Geopolitics.

Gently sloping hills in pale green with slate-blue and gold pen hatchings embrace the city of Turin, capital of the Savoy Duchy, in a large drawing currently held at the National Library of Turin<sup>4</sup>. In the background, the color fades from greenish-blue to almost white as the slopes flanking the valley become steeper and the Alps starts to rise. This view of Turin seen from the east, the hills rising behind the city, and an excerpt of the Alpine chain is actually an image within an image. As documented by the drawing, this landscape was in fact painted on the largest wall (or, more likely, a backdrop hung on that wall) of one of the halls in the Castle of Rivoli, near Turin, for an elaborate and unusual spectacle staged in 1645.



**Fig. 1.** Giovanni Tommaso Borgonio, *Il Dono del Re de l'Alpi*, n.d. [second half of the seventeenth century], fol. 8r. Pencil and gouache on paper. Ministero della Cultura, Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria di Torino.

At the center of the hall, twenty-two guests seated around a long table are dining pleasantly under the gaze of Christine of Bourbon-France (1606-1663), seated in the pavilion to the left. The daughter of Marie de Medicis, Christine was the regent of the Savoy Duchy following the death of her husband Vittorio Amedeo in 1637 on behalf of her underage son Carlo Emanuele<sup>2</sup>. This spectacle, entitled *Il Dono del Re de l'Alpi* (*The Gift from the King of the Alps*), was put together by Christine's favourite, Filippo d'Agliè, to celebrate her birthday<sup>3</sup>. For this occasion, four room's walls of the Rivoli castle were decorated with a landscape of one of the Duchy's four major provinces: namely, in order, Savoy, Piedmont, Monferrato, and Nice<sup>4</sup>. In each room Christine and her courtiers were presented dishes showcasing the province's main products while a female personification of that region performed a song declaiming the landscape features and resource-wealth of the territory she represented<sup>5</sup>. What is more, at the very end of the dinner, some dancers appeared to perform choreography evoking the craft techniques involved in preparing the food that had been offered.

This event was part of a series of courtly performances, mainly *ballets à entrees*, staged at the Savoy court between 1640 and 1660<sup>6</sup>. They were acted out by the noblemen themselves in front of an audience of aristocrats and ambassadors – although the relationship between the audience and performative space could be rather fluid as we see in *Il Dono* itself – and they have been all documented by twelve albums created subsequent to the events by court calligrapher and cartographer Giovanni Tommaso Borgonio<sup>7</sup>. Composed of manuscript texts and drawings in pencil, ink, and gouache with silver or gold accents, these albums were designed to commemorate each ephemeral performance in all its constituent parts, including sets, dancers and costumes, choreographic indications, plot and lyrics (with the exception of the extant musical scores which are not included here)<sup>8</sup>. This extensive archive – it comprises almost one thousand pages – is the means through which I explore the four events selected as the focus of this investigation. In these events, the dancing bodies moved in two different environments: domestic mountains, specifically the Alps, and foreign oceans, the Atlantic and Indian, where they interacted choreographically with natural resources

such as grain, milk, tobacco, and pearls – to name the main critical examples examined here.

Christine's interest in this kind of performance was politically motivated. Through these events she legitimized her power as a female – and foreign – regent and pursued, I argue, the celebratory project of re-framing the Savoy Duchy as a resource-rich, culturally and commercially dynamic actor on the European and, eventually, global stage of powerful brokers. Let see how these four spectacles fit into this propagandistic framework. As we have seen, in *il Dono* the long wall opposite the entrance of each of the rooms featured a wide view of the province capital (Montmélian for Savoy, Turin for Piedmont, Alba for Monferrato, and Nice for the County of Nice) and, as noted above, the dishes served in each room emphasized the characteristic product of the province being showcased<sup>9</sup>. While the fertile Piedmont foothills and Monferrato area offered a profusion of cereals and wine, for instance, the mountainous Savoy provided game and dairy products. Nice, finally, was represented by fish and aromatic waters (it should be noted that Nice, together with Oneglia, was the Duchy's only outlet to the sea; however, the Duchy's territory was non-contiguous, with both of these cities cut off from the main Piedmontese area by the Alps and Republic of Genoa, respectively)<sup>10</sup>. The pavilion with Christine, the long table, and the diners in their chairs were all transported from one room to the next by a mechanism of sliding boards (described in the album as animated “by the occult power of winches”)<sup>11</sup>. The album pages do not depict or describe the specifics of this mechanical system; at the Savoy court, however, a similar mechanism of winches and moving planks had already been used in a 1627 dancing-banquet. The function of these albums, it bears noting, was not preparatory: rather than documenting technological aspects, they were tasked with preserving and amplifying the mysterious wonder of the past fiction<sup>12</sup>. At the end of the dinner, the guests were moved to a fifth room where the spectacle acquired a more conventional setting: a stage positioned before the audience hosted one male couple and female couple for each province using distinctive movements and gestures to convey the way natural or animal resources were converted into products to make the food offered to the guests. The

performers thus played the part of game hunters, milk curdlers, grain reapers and threshers, grape harvesters, fishers, and sellers of scented waters, in that order<sup>13</sup>. The two female milk curdlers from the Alpine Maurienne valley, for instance, entered the scene with a butter churn and proceeded to plunge the churning stick up and down to imitate the act of transforming cream into butter. “New shapes I imbue with motion”, each of them sung while beating the rhythm with a wooden spoon<sup>14</sup>.



**Fig. 2.** Giovanni Tommaso Borgonio, *Il Dono del Re de l'Alpi*, n.d. [second half of the seventeenth century], fol. 23r. Pencil and gouache on paper. Ministero della Cultura, Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria di Torino.

Similarly, the grain threshers (called “faudalette”) came on stage with bundles of ripe wheat that they beat in order to convert “the straw into a crown, the wheat into food”<sup>15</sup>. The color palette of these two couples’ clothing, white and yellow respectively, connected them to the products they manufactured while their suggestive choreographic movements evinced

pride for the labour involved in managing livestock or game and harvesting agricultural commodities. Through this type of descriptive gestuality – an element that appears in almost every one of these spectacles – the choreography also advertised orderly and compliant wealth production relationships between the central power at court, its subjects across the state, and the natural resources of its territories<sup>16</sup>. Finally, the song performed by all sixteen of the characters intertwined in a dancing circle at the end reminded the diners that all the provinces united “bear with reverence the gentle yoke” of Christine’s rule<sup>17</sup>. Throughout the entire banquet the audience was thus immersed in a performance taking place within and outside their bodies, enveloping them while at the same time engaging their senses of sight, smell, taste, and sound. In so doing, Christine’s sovereignty as a regent was legitimized: as declared at the beginning, in putting together this event Christine’s still-underage son was offering his mother his own kingdom “to be tasted”<sup>18</sup>. This legitimization was all the more necessary given the civil war that had raged in the Duchy from 1638 to 1642 and had Christine’s regency contested by the pro-Spanish faction led by her two brothers-in-law – one of them present among the diners<sup>19</sup>. By ingesting the Duchy’s landscapes turned edible commodities, Christine therefore literally appropriated these lands through the act of eating.

With their extreme ruggedness, the Alps divided the Duchy’s territory in two parts. In these spectacles the synergy between the set design and bodily animation could be conducive to conveying a specific image of the Alps: not spatial closure, an immense protective barrier defending the Italian peninsula, but rather a traversable and exploitable terrain. An example of such representation can be found in the drawing documenting the ballet *La Primavera trionfante sull’Inverno* (*Spring Triumphant Over Winter*) staged in 1657 in Turin<sup>20</sup>. This performance, dedicated entirely to celebrating the transition between winter and spring in the mountainous parts of various climate zones, entailed highly complex scene changes and wondrous machines such as a ship mounted on wheels pretending to run aground in the ice and a snow fortress rising from the floor<sup>21</sup>. However, the element I

would like to briefly delve into is the scenography depicting the Mont Cenis pass.



**Fig. 3.** Giovanni Tommaso Borgonio, *La Primavera trionfante sull'Inverno*, n.d. [second half of the seventeenth century], fol. 68r. Pencil and gouache on paper. Ministero della Cultura, Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria di Torino.

Located between the French Maurienne and the Italian Susa Valley, Mont Cenis had become increasingly crucial as part of a policy to make the Duchy a privileged bridge for major international traffic<sup>22</sup>. It was traversed on a daily basis by a vast stream of pilgrims, merchants, and diplomats descending or ascending along a rough path not accessible by coach. The scenography was formed by a simple two-dimensional backdrop flanked by two sculptural wings. A pair of actors took possession of the stage by sliding down from the top of these wings to the floor on sledges driven by another

pair of actors impersonating the sled-drivers locally known as “Marrons”<sup>23</sup>. In this case as well, the ballet offered an opportunity to celebrate the inhabitants and crafts of the area: these Marrons were in fact local professionals responsible for transporting travelers and their goods through the Mont Cenis pass, leading ascents and descents with the help of mules, chairs, or by pulling sturdy sleds built from tied-together branches (known as *ramazze*). Of the coeval writers documenting their activity, the abbot Giovanni Rucellai wrote in the diary recording his journey to Paris to extol in particular these men’s dexterity during the “precipitous” and “frightening” journey down Mont Cenis in winter – as the Marrons in the *Primavera* were meant to do<sup>24</sup>. In the ballet, however, this highly labor-intensive descent was converted into the gracefulness of a dance step: like in the case of the grain threshers, for example, the arduous manual labour characteristic of peasant life was transfigured into nimble, balletic gestuality and postures. Moreover, as previously outlined, for this scene a two-dimensional backdrop was combined with two wings jutting out onto the stage. In this multi-part yet cohesive scenography, the rocky protrusions, the space formed by the two rock wings, and the confluence of the trails come together to create a figurative pattern of triangular forms that carries the viewer’s gaze deeper, towards the winding valley in the background, rather than hampering it. While the spectatorial gaze was drawn toward the horizon, the dancers projected themselves toward the audience. The act so performed, their sliding down the wings, was thus instrumental to thematizing this landscape as a territory traversed on a daily basis by commuters traveling for commerce or migration; a space for social exchange between the peoples living on both sides of the Alps and who, at these latitudes, were part of the same state.

Although the Savoy Duchy was a mountainous state, not engaged in any colonial activity, the viewers of these spectacles were also pervasively immersed in fictive maritime environments, and the extensive imaginative presence of these bodies of waters was fraught with propagandistic and expressive implications that I will try to succinctly outline at the end of my argument<sup>25</sup>. To begin, I would like to briefly presenting the ballet *Il Tabacco*,

staged in Turin in 1650. Here the ocean was conceived as a connective tissue, the environment thanks to which, “through trade, [tobacco] is passed on to all the nations of the world”<sup>26</sup>. This spectacle thus took the viewers on a journey following tobacco’s migration across the Atlantic world, bringing on stage imaginary characters from the Americas to the Middle East engaged in the act of preparing and consuming this commodity. By examining Borgonio’s album together with botanical treatises, travel reports, and circum-Atlantic attitudes toward tobacco, in a previous study of mine I demonstrated how this event told the story of a transcultural commodity, a sacred social institution among American natives that became an economic institution, desacralized and alienable, on the other shores of the Atlantic<sup>27</sup>. In the unfolding of the spectacle, spectators would have been treated to a view of the many-sided history of this product in the variety of forms it assumed and associated choreographic gestures performed by the dancers. In the first part of the ballet, in fact, tobacco appeared in its land of origin as a plant, *nicotiana tabacum*, in the form of dried leaves pressed into balls to be burned in rituals for their ability to grant prophetic visions, and as coiled ropes, a particular way of spinning *nicotiana* leaves into thick lanyards in preparation for export to Europe<sup>28</sup>. As for the movements, the actors in this latter scene, for example, made their entrance onto the stage performing twirls while, at the same time, coiling the tobacco ropes into a ball. Another couple performed serpentine movements to mimic the swirl of smoke stemming from the pair of two-foot-long pipes they held in their hands<sup>29</sup>. In the second and last part, dancers demonstrated the cultural habits engendered by smoking in some Old World countries, such as Spain and Turkey. In this case, the movements conveyed the effects of smoking for personal pleasure on these exceptionally all-male bodies (probably mirroring the common belief that tobacco was a product not suitable for female consumption)<sup>30</sup>. The audience thus watched, for example, the Spaniards interspersing slower movements with lively dancing in order to express the physiological mood-change caused by tobacco consumption<sup>31</sup>. As in the previous dancing-banquet, therefore, in *Il Tabacco* the dancers used their bodily movements to imitate the gestures involved in preparing a specific product but also, in this case, to act out the

way it was consumed and its effects on national groups (especially in the second act). One of the aspects that makes this ballet so interesting is its timely setting and relevance. Starting in 1647 tobacco, began to appear at the center of a series of regulations issued in the Duchy regarding the taxation of its importation and the management of its domestic cultivation, manufacturing, and marketing<sup>22</sup>. This string of decisions guaranteed such a considerable new profit stream for the Savoy coffers that, at the end of the following century, tobacco marketing came to represent the third most important source of revenue in the state budget<sup>23</sup>. The spectacle thus celebrated the process of accommodating this new drug's production and consumption among the folds of Savoy domestic society while asserting the Duchy's standing in the expanding global community of consumption and associated policymaking processes. Moreover, singing and dancing in front of – in this case – a more simple stage backdrop featuring a stretch of ocean, the bodies together with the objects recounted the story of a natural resource which, appropriately processed by human beings, had spread to unpredictably conquer ever-more new bodies and societies. In telling this path-forming story, the ballet constructed a small symbolic realm in which the production and circulation of tobacco was presented as devoid of any reference to violence or forced labour, thus adhering in some way to the carnivalesque spirit of depicting reality turned upside-down<sup>24</sup>.

Oceanic bodies of water were also the setting for the last case study of this essay, *L'Unione per la peregrina Margherita reale e celeste* (*The Union for the Royal and Celestial Pilgrim Margaretha*) staged in 1660 for the marriage of Christine's daughter<sup>25</sup>. Like *Il Tabacco*, this spectacle was also dedicated entirely to celebrating a specific product, pearls. In contrast to the previous spectacle, however, in this case the sea was not simply a bidimensional painted background. As the generative space of pearls, the water in this performance took on material consistency to invade part of the scene and affect the dancers moves in such a way that their steps will “appear somehow liquid”<sup>26</sup>. In this narration natural history, biblical metaphors, and travel reports were mixed in an intriguing way to recount, first, how pearls originate in bivalve shells from a synergy involving moonlight, the dew, and salt water.

Secondly, this ballet records contemporary fascination with the geographic distribution of pearls in the world: deposits known from ancient times, as the Persian Gulf and coastal area around the Bay of Bengal, were mentioned together with relatively new sites such as the ones off the east coast of Venezuela. At the end of the spectacle, however, all the pearls “extracted” from these different seas (“estratte da diversi mari”) converged in the city of Turin<sup>37</sup>. Embedded throughout this critical source is also a marked curiosity about foreign labor regimes and the chain of value construction: namely, how pearls were fished using a variety of accoutrements, how they were cleaned to enhance their color and prepare them for sale to Europeans (using salt, mortars, and even more bizarre methods such as ingestion by pigeons), and how they were mounted in jewelry or thrown away to consume only the cooked flesh of the mollusks. Of these fishing tools, one of the drawings displays two characters holding an imaginative version of the stones and ropes, a practice also documented by Jan van der Straet in his series *Venationes Ferarum, Avium, Piscium*<sup>38</sup>.



**Fig. 4.** Giovanni Tommaso Borgonio, *L'Unione per la peregrina Margherita reale e celeste*, n.d. [second half of the seventeenth century], fol. 99r. Pencil and gouache on paper. Ministero della Cultura, Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria di Torino.



**Fig. 5.** Giovanni Tommaso Borgonio, *L'Unione per la peregrina Margherita reale e celeste*, n.d. [second half of the seventeenth century], fol. 114r. Pencil and gouache on paper. Ministero della Cultura, Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria di Torino.

This technique consisted of a rope with a stone tied to one end, the stones functioning to hold the divers deep under the water while other workers on the canoes used the ropes to lift the divers up once they had collected the oysters<sup>39</sup>. Once again, the bodily movements were designed to mimic all of these activities of fishing, cleaning, and eating, thus evoking in the spectators' minds the journeys and transformations pearls underwent from seabed to land markets, from a raw to a polished state, from hand to hand. Unlike all the other spectacles described above, however, *L'Unione* also touched on further issues, such as the brutal social and ecological repercussions of this resource extraction and circulation. For instance, two widows from the Gulf of Paria hinted at the extremely dangerous conditions

braved by pearl collectors by dancing out their grief for the deaths of their diver husbands. Conversely, two female merchants from Ormuz came on stage offering each other the pearls that comprise their merchandise, while making an act of greedily jingling bags full of gold earned thanks to their lucrative traffics. The fishermen from Borneo – the only figures in the entire corpus of Borgonio’s drawings to exhibit stereotypical Black facial features – appeared instead on stage declaring that they carried “death in their hands” on account of all the blood and destruction surrounding their acquisition<sup>40</sup>.

In her volume *American Baroque: Pearls and the Nature of Empire*, Molly Warsh emphasizes a critical point, noting that the environmental alchemy underlying pearls’ origin as well as their trade characterized by mobility, connection, and contending for wealth allowed the jewel to retain “a powerful association with mastery of the seas” in the European imagination, even when it was actually “eclipsed as a source of profit by other commodities and trades”<sup>41</sup>. Through the allure evoked by pearls, therefore, this spectacle expressed a chief concern of the Savoy state, namely the need to promote its engagement with a wealth reaped from maritime domination and colonial ventures, even though the Duchy’s maritime power was still quite limited at that time<sup>42</sup>.

The story that transpires from an exploration of these spectacles and their extant archive is composed of both the desire for global trade and the husbandry of local wealth and prestige. Through this investigation, I have been able to probe the way Savoy dancers performed two contrasting forces at play in the propagandistic agenda of the Duchy. On one hand, by staging the Alps’ natural resources and geographical elements, the Savoy court re-configured this difficult environment as a producer of desirable goods and pivotal connective tissue, despite its rough terrain. On the other hand, performing old and new foreign commodities such as tobacco and pearls, along with the associated maritime environments from which they were made to travel, extracted and exported, was a means of re-imagining Turin as lying at the confluence of sprawling commercial circuits and ventures. Analysis of these events, in which dancing bodies, natural history, and geopolitics were intertwined, sheds light on the transformative power of

courtly spectacles – how they transmuted nature into products, the consumption of goods into effects on bodies, and destructive forces into ideal landscapes. In this idea of theater as a conversion machine, bodily animation acted as the pivot around which stories unfolded, things were set in motion, and media were bound together.

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## Endnotes

1. This research is part of the ANIMATE project, funded by the EU Horizon 2020 programme, Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement no. 101025547. The album (BNU Q V 60, fol. 8r) measures 22.5x16 inches about.
2. Christine was regent until her son's majority in 1648 and unofficially retained power until her death in 1663. See, for instance, Martha D. Pollak, *Turin 1564-1680* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 108-150; Kristine Kolrud, "The Prolonged Minority of Charles Emmanuel II," in ed. Matthew Vester, *Sabaudian Studies* (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2013), 191-209.
3. Mercedes Viale Ferrero, "I balletti di corte sabaudi. Maurizio di Savoia e Filippo d'Agliè," *Antichità viva* 5, 4 (1966): 7-22; Margareth McGowan, "Les fêtes de cour en Savoie. L'oeuvre de Philippe d'Agliè," *Revue de la Société d'Histoire du Théâtre* 22, 3 (1970): 181-241.
4. Only one of these rooms survived in its original set-up; "History," Castello di Rivoli, accessed May 17, 2022, <https://www.castellodirivoli.org/en/la-residenza-reale/storia/>.
5. Fol. 2r-3r and 11r. For an analysis of these figures' clothing and heraldic references see Fausto Testa, "L'allegoria dello Stato sabauda nel banchetto del Dono del Re de l'Alpi," in eds. Howard Burns and Mauro Mussolin, *Architettura e identità locali II* (Firenze: Olschki, 2013), 431-446.
6. Margaret M. McGowan, *L'Art du Ballet de Cour en France, 1581-1643* (Paris: CNRS, 1963); Mercedes Viale Ferrero, *Feste delle Madame Reali di Savoia* (Turin: Istituto Bancario San Paolo, 1965); Clelia Arnaldi di Balme and Franca Varallo, eds., *Feste barocche* (Milan: Silvana, 2009).
7. See Franca Varallo, "Il Laberinto de Groppi," in *Le dessin et les arts du spectacle*, ed. Cordélia Hattori (Paris: AEC, 2019) 109-24;
8. BNU, Q M 85 A-D.
9. On Montmélian in lieu of Chambéry see Ferrero, *Feste*, 48.
10. Fols. 3r, 6r, 7r, 10r. Laurent Ripart, "Nice et l'Etat Savoyard," in *Le Comté de Nice. De la Savoie à l'Europe*, eds. Jean-Marc Giaume et al. (Nice: Serre, 2006), 13-24; Blythe Alice Raviola, "I governatori sabaudi di Nizza e Villafranca tra XVIe-XVIIe secolo," *Les frontières dans la ville* 73 (2006): 233-252; Paolo Palumbo, "Un dialogo difficile," in ed. Blythe Alice Raviola, *Lo spazio sabauda* (Milan: Angeli, 2007), 163-191, 163-164.

11. "Dalla occulta forza degli argani"; fol. 2r and 7r.
12. See *Relatione della splendidissima festa...per gli anni felici di S.A. Sereniss.* (Turin: Cavalleri, 1628), 26-28, Archivio Storico della Città di Torino, Simeom Collection no. 2394.
13. Only the male couple paired with the grape harvesters, impersonating two zither musicians, is not related to a natural resource.
14. "Novelle forme con il moto ispiro"; fol. 22r.
15. "In corona le paglie, in cibo il grano"; fol. 26r.
16. On this type of choreographic movement see Mark Franko, *Dance as Text: Ideologies of the Baroque Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 5 and *passim*.
17. "Il soave giogo dell'impero di M. R. [Madama Reale, namely Christine] con riverenza"; fol. 37r. Further symbolical implications are suggested in Fausto Testa, "L'identità territoriale del Ducato sabauda...nel 'Figurato Balletto' del Dono del Re de l'Alpi," *Accademia Raffaello* 2, 1/2 (2012-2013): 39-77, 55-56 (see this contribution also for an in-depth analysis of the acts following the ballet of the provinces).
18. Fol. 2r.
19. Fol. iv (later annotation); Testa, "L'allegoria dello Stato sabauda," 432.
20. BNU Q V 55.
21. Fols. 35r and 78r.
22. Vera Comoli et al., eds., *Le Alpi* (Turin: Celid, 1997), 23-83.
23. Fols. 67r and 69r.
24. Giovanni Fr.co Rucellai, *Un'ambasciata: diario dell'abate*, eds. John Temple Leader and Giuseppe Marcotti (Florence: Barbèra, 1884), 57-61. See also Franca Nemo, "I Marrons del Moncenisio," Laboratorio Val di Susa, last accessed 7 November, 2021, <https://www.laboratoriovalsusa.it/blog/un-po-di-storia/i-marrons-del-moncenisio-una-storia-1-unga-oltre-dieci-secoli>.
25. See Franca Varallo, "Le feste sull'acqua," in eds. Elisabetta Ballaira et al., *La barca sublime* (Milan: Silvana, 2012), 99-106, and Marco Emanuele, "Per un repertorio delle piscatorie," in eds. Mariarosa Masoero et al., *Politica e cultura nell'età di Carlo Emanuele I* (Florence: Olschki, 2007), 529-552.
26. "Col traffico vien tramandata à tutte le Nationi del mondo"; BNU Q V 59, fol. 2r.
27. Elisa Antonietta Daniele, "Drawing Worlds: Bodies and Smoke in the Courtly Ballet *Il Tabacco*," in *Making Worlds: Global Invention in the Early Modern Period*, eds. Bronwen Wilson and Angela Vanhaelen (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022): 85-109.
28. Niccolò Gavelli, *Storia distinta e curiosa del tabacco* (Ferrara: F. Altieri, 1758), 11-12, 65-67. This processing method is described, for example, by Orazio Busino (the Venetian ambassador in London) in a letter he wrote to the Contarini family on January 10, 1618, see Biblioteca Marciana, Ital. VII, 1122 (6541), 69r.; Luigi Monga, "La Londra secentesca nell'Anglipotrida di Orazio Busino," *Annali d'Italianistica* 14 (1996): 553-574, 562.
29. Fol. 15r.
30. On women smoking in 16<sup>th</sup>-century treatises, see Jerome E. Brooks, ed., *Tobacco: its history illustrated*, vol. 1 (New York: The Rosenbach Company 1937), 282, 218, 324 and *passim*.
31. Fol. 23r. Regarding the beliefs around tobacco physiological effects see, for instance, the treatises collected in Brooks, *Tobacco*, 248, 334-335; Craig Rustici, "Tobacco, Union, and the Indianized English", in Jonathan Gil Harris, ed., *Indograpy: Writing the Indian in Early Modern England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2012), 117-131, 124; Sander L. Gilman and Zhou Xun, eds., *Smoke: A Global History of Smoking* (London: Reaktion, 2004), 41.
32. Felice Amato Duboin, "Della gabella del tabacco," in *Raccolta per ordine di materie delle leggi*, vol. 11 (Turin: Baricco e Arnaldi, 1847-1868).
33. Federica Uras, "La Sardegna nel period sabauda," (PhD diss., Università degli Studi di Cagliari, 2010), 76.

34. Regarding the use of carnivalesque procedures (reversal, distortion...) in 17<sup>th</sup> century burlesque courtly ballets, see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Cambridge: MIT, 1968), 33-34, 101-103; Franko, *Ideologies*, 7.
35. BNU Q V 53.
36. Fol. 51r. On sea recreations on stage see Philip Steadman, *Renaissance Fun* (London: UCL, 2021), 96-99.
37. Fol. 2r.
38. The British Museum, "Plate 26," accessed March 24, 2022, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_1957-0413-54](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1957-0413-54).
39. See the description by the Jesuit scholar Giovanni Botero, who served at the Savoy court of Christine's father-in-law, in his *Delle Relationi Universali...da lui corrette e ampliate. Prima Parte* (B. Mammarelli: Ferrara 1592), 242-243.
40. Fols. 92r, 121r, 103r.
41. Molly Warsh, *American Baroque. Pearls and the Nature of Empire* (UNC Press: Chapel Hill, 2018), 193.
42. For the Savoy later expansion see the map in Pierangelo Manuele, *Il Piemonte sul mare* (Cuneo: L'Arciere, 1997), 7; and Pierpaolo Merlin, "Una frontiera sul mare," in Raviola ed., *Lo spazio sabauda*, 289-306.

# Criminal and Saintly Bodies. A History of Punishment and Dissection

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## **ABSTRACT**

The development of anatomical knowledge depended largely on the availability of corpses to dissect. Restrictions of moral and religious nature prevented any bodies from undergoing such a treatment. For these reasons, one turns to the body of the criminal. A calculated economy of punishment was able to regenerate the body of the condemned. On the gallows, it was an object of contempt and a cause of horror, while stretched out in the middle of the anatomy theater, it became an iconic lesson in human destiny. Placed next to the body of the criminal, in a play of reflection and reversal, was that of the saint. Apparently antithetical, they sometimes shared the unhappy fate of the *sectio*. The saint, in fact, who, during his life, had often displayed the signs of divinity on his flesh, possessed for medicine, and even more so for the Church, an incomparable, precious and unique body.

## **KEYWORDS**

Artistic anatomy; Criminal; Saint; Dissection; Autopsy.

The whole history of Western anatomy is characterized by a stubborn insistence on the association between dissection and condemned criminals. To paraphrase Andrea Carlino, we might say that in Europe, right from the early-modern period, dissection only existed within the wider context of justice.<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Sawday also agrees that we would misunderstand the true meaning of anatomy, if we failed to bear in mind its close link to the punishment of the criminal.<sup>2</sup> After all, a calculated economy of punishment<sup>3</sup> was able to regenerate the body of the condemned: on the gallows, it was an object of contempt and a cause of horror, while stretched out in the middle of the anatomy theater it became “an iconic lesson in human destiny”.<sup>4</sup>

In these few pages, I will seek to place the dissected body of the condemned at the center of a system of references whose underlying themes are the esthetic question and the formation of the artist. For reasons of clarity, I have chosen to precede the analysis of some specific cases with an introductory section in which, in general and inevitably incomplete terms, I outline the theoretical frame that delimits the facts recounted. While the latter part looks at what happened in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the framework that precedes it has a wider focus, and sketches a model of interpretation which summarily may prove to be valid for a period of time stretching from the end of the Middle Ages to the “Murder Act” approved by the British Parliament in 1751.<sup>5</sup> Only eighty years later, in fact, the “Anatomy Act” gave British physicians the right to dissect bodies donated to science. By modifying the terms of anatomical practice, Parliament sought to halt the illegal market in corpses and began the process of revision and modernization of the activity.<sup>6</sup>

Two considerations come to mind before any other when we approach the subject of dissection in the early-modern period: one of moral nature, the other of esthetic character. A punishment similar to that suffered by the soul is inflicted on the body of the condemned. The infamy of dismemberment is accompanied by eternal torment, and the body ends up acting as an emblem, exhibiting materially that which could not be perceived except through an act of faith and imagination. However, not all the corpses of criminals could be dissected: they had to belong to foreigners, who had died far from their

fatherland and were thus unlikely to be claimed by their families. Within this limited number, only those that were quite young, in good condition, healthy, their muscles still taut and turgid, so as to allow the evidence of the demonstration, were taken into consideration by anatomists<sup>7</sup>. The choice of bodies to be dissected was therefore dependent on a dual inquiry, which from the scale of the punishment inflicted finally also considered the physical characteristics of the condemned.

Of all the forms of execution, anatomists preferred hanging. This, in fact, allowed them to operate on a body still intact, not disfigured by cuts, abrasions, burns or mutilations. The penalty had to suit not only the crime, but also the destination of the remains, the use that would be made of the corpse. In central Italy, hanging seems to have been reserved, at least from the sixteenth century, for criminals from the lowest social orders and for the most heinous crimes, while aristocrats and honorable people were granted a noble form of execution: beheading.<sup>8</sup>

What little information there exists allows us to grasp the complexity of a question for which the right balance between jurisprudence and medicine had to be found. The problem, in fact, risked appearing in all its absurdity: while on one hand the punishment inflicted had to be commensurate with the crime committed, on the other hand a relationship of inverse proportionality between the beauty of the corpse and the brutality of the sentence was becoming established. In other words, if the scale was tipped in favor of justice, the corpse risked being useless for medical purposes; while if it was tipped towards medicine, then jurisprudence was ultimately not applied correctly. The embarrassment of a discipline such as anatomy, which looked for beautiful, well-proportioned bodies in the most wretched sectors of society, among thieves, murderers and prostitutes, became increasingly evident.

In an article from 1994 entitled “The Criminal and the Sainly Body,” Katharine Park touched on many aspects of this paradox, defining first of all the difference between dissection and the practice of autopsy.<sup>9</sup> When we talk of the executed body of the criminal, in fact, and imagine it transported to the anatomy theater, washed, laid on the table ready for the scalpel of the

*sector*, we cannot but refer to it as the object of dissection. The practice of autopsy, although involving an analogous procedure, had different aims right from its birth: it was practiced when it was necessary, through post-mortem investigations, to determine the cause and manner of death. This happened mainly in noble families, in order to avoid the transmission of mortal diseases. Dissection, on the other hand, rather than concentrating on the physical state of a single individual, aimed to illustrate to students the general principles of anatomy and physiology. For this reason it established a canon and used it to procure the bodies that satisfied the purposes it had set itself. In a more recent article, Maria Pia Donato, too, discusses the problem and points out the inappropriate use of terms that would seem to be synonymous, but that in reality are not.

From the first medieval records, we can identify two main types of *sectio*, anatomical (or philosophical) and medical, that is what in modern terms we would define as dissection and autopsy. The former serves to demonstrate the structure of the body *abditarumque ejus partium*, is carried out in the setting of universities and is charged in the modern era with ritual aspects and moral implications; the latter is conducted for diagnostic purposes of a legal, medical (epidemics, unknown diseases) or pathologic nature, is generally limited to the three cavities - head, chest and abdomen – and is practiced in the presence of a small number of specialists.<sup>10</sup>

The distinction between the two types of *sectio*, although apparently far from our specific interests, actually has a theoretical value that cannot be underestimated: the body of the criminal, in fact, while frequently the object of anatomical *sectio*, is rarely subjected to medical *sectio*. Transformed into an ideal body, laid out on the anatomical table, opened and explored in each of its parts, it attained a form of redemption or of eternal damnation – according to how we wish to interpret it – which made it the protagonist of a magnificent public liturgy.<sup>11</sup> The rituality and the completeness of the dissection, which was not limited to the three customary cavities, but

involved the corpse in its entirety, were the exact opposite of the practice of autopsy, a private activity which, by ensuring that the body remained intact, did not compromise the funeral rites.

Placed next to the body of the criminal, in a play of reflection and reversal, was that of the saint. Apparently antithetical, they sometimes shared the unhappy fate of the *sectio*. The saint, in fact, who during his life had often displayed the signs of divinity on his flesh, possessed for medicine, and even more so for the Church, an incomparable, precious and unique body. This peculiarity allowed its autoptic examination and dismemberment. Opposed to that of the saint, analyzed to record its typical features, the body of the criminal lost its individuality and became a replaceable image that took on meaning only if read in succession with many other similar bodies. The esthetic canon of anatomical iconography formed around the dissected bodies of individuals, many of them criminals, who lost their own specific quality. This conduct, the same as that which accompanied the establishment of a classical canon in painting and sculpture,<sup>12</sup> generated a separation: on one hand the dissected corpse of the criminal, anatomical (or philosophical) *sectio*, the representation of the ideal body and the study of normal anatomy; on the other the remains of the saint, medical *sectio*, the textual and visual recording of a specific body and the study of practical medicine understood as pathological anatomy. These series of opposites, although they should be outlined, must not be interpreted in a rigid manner. As Donato suggests, “in view of the current state of research, it is necessary to proceed by means of hypotheses and clues, aligning scattered elements,” which will acquire meaning “only [through] careful reading of the sources”.<sup>13</sup>

Let us therefore ask ourselves a precise question, and let us try above all to formulate an answer by looking at a well-defined group of examples. The question is the following: what is the relationship between the study of the dissected body of the criminal and the teaching of artistic anatomy? The small group of examples, on the other hand, will serve to provide a visual frame within which to arrange the terms of our reflection.

If we consider the period between 1750 and 1840, roughly that between the “Murder Act” and the “Anatomical Act,” the best known iconographic

reference on the theme of art and the dissection of the criminal is undoubtedly the last engraving in the *Four Stages of Cruelty* series by William Hogarth, published in 1751, the same year as the approval of the British law on the dissection for public utility of the corpses of the most heinous criminals.<sup>14</sup> The fourth print in the series, entitled *The Reward of Cruelty*, shows the tragic epilog of the anti-hero Thomas Nero (fig. 1).



**Fig. 1.** William Hogarth, *The Four Stages of Cruelty*, 1751. Plate 4: *The Reward of Cruelty*.

The engraving belongs to the substantial body of works that describe the fate of the criminal from the scaffold to the anatomy theater, and for this reason assumes a marginal value here, serving as an *incipit*.<sup>15</sup> A value that is not negligible, however, as by taking it as a starting point we can identify the features of another specific category of anatomical images, characterized by a

pervading sense of affliction and torment. As scholars have shown, this series includes famous illustrations executed before Hogarth's engraving: from Govert Bidloo's flayed backs to William Cheselden's praying skeleton. The former, executed by the painter Gérard de Lairesse for the Dutch physician's *Anatomia humani corporis* (Amsterdam: Johann Someren et al., 1685), show the flaying of a woman's body.<sup>16</sup> Of the four plates that make up the small cycle, all devoted to the depiction of the dorsal muscles, number 30 shows most clearly the signs of the punishment (fig. 2).

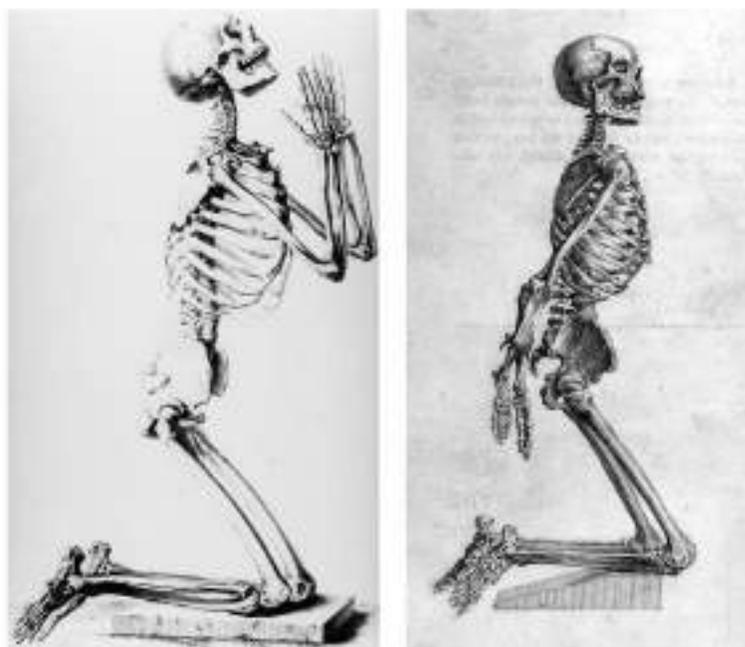


**Fig. 2.** Gérard de Lairesse, Plate 30, from Govert Bidloo, *Anatomia humani corporis*, 1685.

The noose that supports the head and the rope that binds the woman's wrists recall a scene of hanging and encapsulate in a single image the moment of execution, that following of the dissection and the conclusive moment of the public display of the flayed body. For this reason, the

illustration seems to confront the delicate theme of the redemption of the body of the criminal.

The second illustration referred to above is the praying skeleton depicted in plate 34 of the *Osteographia* (London: William Bowyer for the author, 1733) of William Cheselden. The work of Gerard Vandergucht, the drawing shows a praying skeleton, kneeling on a low slab of stone, his hands about to meet at chin level and his head turned upwards. The image does not at first seem to relate closely to those of constriction and torment considered above, until we consider that seven years later, in the revised edition of another work by Cheselden, *The Anatomy of the Human Body* (London: William Bowyer for the author, 1740), Vandergucht himself adapted the figure, which remains largely unchanged but is now shown with his arms behind his back (fig. 3).<sup>12</sup>



**Fig. 3.** Left: Gerard Vandergucht, Plate 34, from William Cheselden, *Osteographia*, 1733. Right: Gerard Vandergucht, Plate 10, from William Cheselden, *The Anatomy of the Human Body*, 1740.

It seems unnecessary to point out that the pose is completed by the addition of a ligature that binds the wrists together. Vandergucht's praying skeleton was thus that of a poor supplicant criminal. In this case, too, repentance, prayer, torment and dissection defined the stages of a path, imposed on the criminal by the system of justice, which concluded with the redemption of a body that would otherwise be unusable and damned forever.

There is no doubt that if we paused to reconsider these illustrations more carefully, we would be able to identify others of a similar kind, and thus substantially increase the nucleus of our collection. However, what is more pressing at the moment is to show how this theme of constriction, punishment and agony, together with that of the redemption of the criminal, was also present in the following century. Before, however, it is worth making a brief digression in order to point out that the ligatures, ropes and nooses that appear in the works of Lairesse and Vandergucht are the same instruments of coercion of the body that we find in use not only on the scaffold and in the anatomy theater, but also in the art academies and in artists' studios. While in the first case they prevent escape and in the second allow the correct exhibition of the bodies, in the third case such instruments alleviate the fatigue caused by maintaining the same pose for long periods of time. The ropes and cords I refer to are those that allow the model, posing in front of an audience of promising pupils or a master who wishes to study a subject from life, to place his body in the attitude chosen and to maintain the position for as long as possible. It is clear that in special circumstances, when the pose is particularly dramatic, these instruments assume considerable importance. This is the case (one of many) of the *Male Nude, with Arms Up-Stretched* (1828-30), an oil painting by the English artist William Etty (fig. 4).



**Fig. 4.** William Etty, *Male Nude, with Arms Up-Stretched*, 1828-30. Oil on cardboard, 59.7 x 47 cm. York Art Gallery.

The man's position, which recalls that of Prometheus bound to the rock, conveys a disturbing sensation in which suffering and erotism combine. The raised arms, the head hanging backwards, the cold tones of the flesh and the bent legs recount the suffering of a prisoner and the privations to which his body is subjected. The harshness of the lighting, the white drape on which the pale body rests and the lingering of the artist's brush on certain anatomical details (the sternocleidomastoid muscle, the hair under the arm and the sole of the left foot) suggest the opposite a type of sensuality whose roots seem to lie in the painting of Caravaggio.<sup>18</sup>

However, what makes Etty's painting interesting is not only the ambiguity of its content and the sensation of corrupt sensuality it arouses in the observer, but also the uncertain quality that characterizes, more generally, the role of the life model and his relationship with the ideal of beauty. The body painted by the English artist, poised precariously between myth and reality, moves, according to who interprets it, between two poles: one constituted by the heroic image of Prometheus who faces his punishment courageously, the other embodied in the ignoble features of the criminal who pays for his sins and bears the mark of his crime on his skin. This duality acquires value if it is elevated to the status of the symbol of a widespread contradiction, the very contradiction we saw in action a little earlier when the anatomist looked for the features of an ideal beauty in the dissected body of the criminal. In the same way, members of the art academies must have had serious worries about the question of the decency of the model's pose; by "decency" I mean its appropriateness with respect to the characteristics and the story of the figure that the model was meant to interpret, albeit temporarily and anonymously. It was, in fact, often members of the lower social classes who were more available, and whose bodies, above all, were better suited. And while for the Herculean muscularity of the male body the academies often turned to soldiers, pugilists, jugglers and trapeze artists, it was, on the other hand, impossible to avoid engaging prostitutes to pose as their female counterparts.<sup>19</sup> All this led to a rather disturbing disjunction, which nobody, however, could rectify; examples of virtue and value were shaped from a mold that was frequently anything but virtuous and valorous.

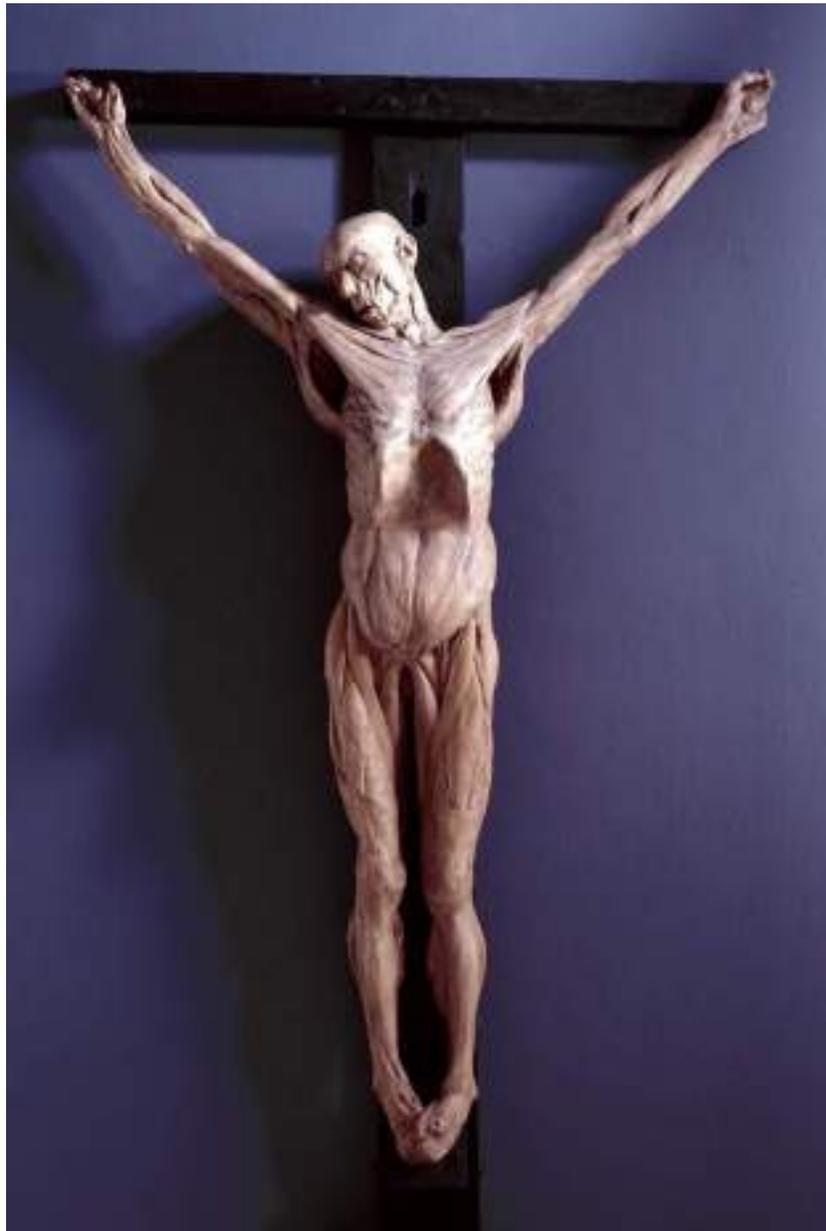
However, if this kind of disjunction of meaning was created when a wrestler, a soldier or a jousting knight assumed the pose of a mythical hero, what happened if the same men, or even worse recognized delinquents (perhaps even condemned or executed), impersonated saints or enacted the sacred suffering of Jesus? In this case, the contradictions (theoretical, ethical, esthetic and theological) emerged in all their force: the interchangeable body of the delinquent replaced the uniqueness of the body of the saint, and the ignominy of the former risked obscuring the divinity of the latter.

In early nineteenth-century London, however, the idea of crucifying the corpse of a criminal to test its reaction to the force of gravity was evidently not considered to be absurd.

Sometime in the year 1800, three of the greatest men of their time, namely, Mr. West, President of the Royal Academy, Mr. Banks, and Mr. Cosway, [...] having agreed amongst themselves that the representation of the crucifixion did not appear natural, though it had been painted by the greatest artist of his age, wished to put this to a test. They, therefore, requested me to nail a subject on a cross, saying, that the tale told of Micheal Angelo and others was not true of their having stabbed a man tied to a cross, and then making a drawing of the effect.<sup>20</sup>

The only first-hand account of this incredible event was provided by the surgeon Joseph Constantine Carpue. The trio of undaunted experimenters who involved him in the undertaking was composed of the painters Benjamin West and Richard Cosway and the sculptor Thomas Banks. The body of the criminal, executed, flayed and then crucified, belonged to James Legg, a Chelsea pensioner hanged publicly on 2 November 1801 for the murder of William Lamb. The corpse, taken from the Newgate gallows, was flayed carefully, after which a first cast was made. It was then nailed to a cross and a further cast was made, proving that a body devoid of life but still not hardened by rigor mortis would fall naturally into the terrible pose of the crucifixion. The one surviving plaster cast of the pair made by Banks is now a celebrated image, representative of a particular way of viewing science in the

service of art. It established a direct link between two apparently unconnected spaces: the “modern” art academy and the “premodern” gallows (fig. 5).



**Fig. 5.** Thomas Banks, *Anatomical Crucifixion (James Legg)*, 1801. Plaster cast, 231.5 x 141 x 34 cm. Royal Academy of Fine Arts, London.

The English intellectuals of the time were enraptured: the brilliance of three artists and the skills of an anatomist finally made it possible to put to one side the extraordinary stories regarding Michelangelo and to capture precisely the appearance of the muscles in the passage from life to death. The representations of Matthias Grünewald, Raphael, Alessandro Allori and Peter Paul Rubens were no longer the benchmark. Painters and sculptors who wanted to tackle the theme would now have to bow to scientific evidence and reconsider the real physiology of a man executed on the cross.

Despite this, the experiment was not unique; it was, rather, the last episode in a tradition that had become established precisely within the new-founded Royal Academy, promoted by the celebrated Scottish anatomist William Hunter. Elected as Professor of Artistic Anatomy in 1768, Hunter had perfected a technique for making casts from life which, unique in its kind, he had used to produce the illustrations for his greatest work, *Anatomia uteri humani gravidi* (Birmingham: John Baskerville, 1774). Employing this technique, even before he joined the Royal Academy, he had made plaster casts of a number of flayed bodies. Of the three recorded after his appointment in 1768, only two are still housed in the Academy's collections. Both cast from the bodies of recently executed criminals, one reproduces the pose of Jean-Antoine Houdon's *Écorché au bras levé*, the other that of the *Dying Gaul* in the Capitoline Museums. In reference to the crime committed by the man whose body served as the model, the latter assumed the name *Smugglerius*, by which it is still known.<sup>21</sup> While not perhaps customary, the experiment conducted by Banks, Cosway and West was thus part of a well-defined current of anatomical studies, whose main addressees were artists themselves and whose success was guaranteed by the British justice system. The experiment gave new value to the established tradition of the study of the anatomized body in art academies. Going beyond the limits of mimetic representation, it fixed in images that which by definition is perishable. It rectified not only the works of great artists, but also the scientific illustrations that had preceded it. It combined anatomical truth and the language of art. Or, perhaps we should say, it thought it could do all this.

While before the trio of English artists Berengario da Carpi and Jacques Gamelin had already tried to demonstrate what happens below the skin when a body is crucified,<sup>22</sup> now Banks and his companions produced an image that, although closer to reality, continued to suffer the pains of fiction (Legg's true death by hanging versus death staged on the cross) and the even sharper pains of philosophical incoherence (the singularity of Legg's death versus the universality of crucifixion; the punishment of the criminal versus divine sacrifice). There was no remedy for these contradictions. However, for the last aspect at least a way out seems to have existed, assuming the features of the "penitent thief," Saint Dismas, the redeemed criminal crucified to Christ's right. Seen in this light, Banks's *Anatomical Crucifixion* becomes an image of redemption, as it places the sinner at the service of the very society harmed by his actions.<sup>23</sup> It is Gamer, once again, who offers these reflections on the crucified body of the poor Legg:

If the *Anatomical Crucifixion* is undoubtedly an image of a sinner, it may also be an image of a redeemed sinner, one whose penitence and redemption were effected precisely by and through his execution. In this context [...], Banks's cast emerge as a wholly, if unexpectedly, positive image: the result of a morally licit and technologically progressive experiment, a model and a source for the making of religious art, and a testament even to the spectacular and redemptory power of the British penal system.<sup>24</sup>

The case of James Legg responds to the question we asked at the beginning, demonstrating not only the relationship that can exist between the body of the criminal and the study of artistic anatomy, but also the number and the complexity of the questions it involves.

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## Endnotes

1. This article is a re-elaborated version of my previous essay "Condannati alla dissezione: criminali, anatomia, belle arti," in *Les enfants de Caïn. La représentation du criminel en France et en Italie, de la Renaissance au début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. Amélie Bernazzani (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), 239-64.

2. Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London-New York: Routledge, 1995), 54-84.

3. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon, 1977), 38. An interesting critical re-reading of Foucault's theories has been proposed by Florike Egmond, "Execution, Dissection, Pain and Infamy – A Morphological Investigation," in *Bodily Extremities: Preoccupations with the Human Body in Early Modern European Culture*, eds. Florike Egmond and Robert Zwijnenberg (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 93-128. For a rich visual transposition of Foucault's text, see Lionello Puppi, *Lo splendore dei supplizi: liturgia delle esecuzioni capitali e iconografia del martirio nell'arte europea dal XII al XIX secolo* (Milan: Berenice, 1990).

4. Sawday, *Body Emblazoned*, 72.
5. On the “Murder Act” (1751, sometimes 1752) see Sawday, *Body Emblazoned*, 54.
6. On the illegal market in corpses and on tomb robbers, known as *resurrectionists* or *sack 'em up men*, see once again Roberts, Tomlinson, *Fabric of the Body*, 478-83.
7. Carlino, *Books of the Body*, 93-98.
8. Carlino, *Books of the Body*, 94.
9. Katharine Park, “The Criminal and the Sainly Body: Autopsy and Dissection in Renaissance Italy,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (1994): 1-33; republished in *The Renaissance: Italy and Abroad*, ed. John Jeffries Martin (London-New York: Routledge, 2003), 224-52.
10. Maria Pia Donato, “Anatomia, autopsia, *sectio*: problemi di fonti e di metodo (secoli XVI-XVII)” in *Anatome. Sezione, scomposizione, raffigurazione del corpo nell'Età Moderna*, eds. Giuseppe Olmi and Claudia Pancino (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2012), 140, my translation. On this subject see also Rafael Mandressi, *Le regard de l'anatomiste. Dissections et invention du corps en Occident* (Paris: Seuil, 2003), 167-216.
11. Andrea Carlino, “L'anatomia a teatro tra didattica, celebrazione e edificazione,” in *L'anatomia tra arte e medicina. Lo studio del corpo nel tardo Rinascimento*, eds. Andrea Carlino et al. (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana Editoriale, 2010), 17-18.
12. On the constitution of canons in the visual arts, see two important essays by Ernst H. Gombrich, “Art history and the social sciences” and “Canons and values in the visual arts – a correspondence with Quentin Bell,” in *Ideals & Idols. Essays on Values in History and Art* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1979).
13. Donato, “Anatomia, autopsia, *sectio*,” 154, my translation.
14. On the history of public executions in England, see Douglas Hay, *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Allen Lane, 1975). On the relationship between dissection and visual arts, again in England, see Fiona Haslam, *From Hogarth to Rowlandson: Medicine and Art in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996).
15. Analyzing the image, critics have pointed to the close links between the figure of the anatomist-surgeon and that of the judge. See Kenneth B. Roberts, “The Context of Anatomical Illustration,” in *The Ingenious Machine of Nature: Four Centuries of Art and Anatomy*, eds. Mimi Cazort, Monique Kornell and Kenneth B. Roberts, catalog of the exhibition (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1996), 84, note 52.
16. Unusually, and well in advance of what happened later, female bodies are flayed and dissected to study organ systems other than the reproductive system (Mimi Cazort, entry 71, in *The Ingenious Machine*, 186).
17. On the engraving see the brief comment in Roberts, “The Context,” 84-5.
18. Martin Postle, entry 14, *The Artist's Model: Its Role in British Art from Lely to Etty*, eds. Ilaria Bignamini and Martin Postle, catalog of the exhibition (Nottingham: University Art Gallery, 1991), 46-7.
19. Martin Postle, “The artist's model from Reynolds to Etty,” in *Artist's Model*, 19.
20. The quotation – “Obituary: Joseph Constantine Carpue, FRS,” *Lancet* 47, no. 1171 (February 1846): 167 – is cited in Meredith Gamer, “Criminal and Martyr: The Case of James Legg's *Anatomical Crucifixion*,” in *Sensational Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice*, ed. Sally M. Promey (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 2014), chap. 30, note 1, Kindle. See also: Julius Bryant, “Thomas Banks's Anatomical Crucifixion: A Tale of Death and Dissection,” *Apollo* 133, no. 352 (June 1991): 409-11. On the legendary episode from the life of Michelangelo, see Giorgio Vasari, *La vita di Michelangelo nelle redazioni del 1550 e del 1568*, ed. Paola Barocchi (Milan-Naples: Riccardo Ricciardi Editore, 1962), vol. II, 120-32, note 109.
21. Martin Kemp and Marina Wallace, eds., *Spectacular Bodies: The Art and Science of the Human Body from Leonardo to Now*, catalog of the exhibition (London: Hayward Gallery, 2000), 85-90.

22. Jacopo Berengario da Carpi, *Commentaria cum amplissimis additionibus super Anatomia Mundini* (Bologna: Girolamo Benedetti Editore, 1521), f. 519 verso; Jacques Gamelin, *Nouveau recueil d'ostéologie et de myologie* (Toulouse: J.F. Desclassan, 1779), vol. II, plate 1.
23. Mitchell B. Merback, *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel: Pain and Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 69-100.
24. Gamer, "Criminal and Martyr," Kindle.

# From a Modern Woman to a National Painter: Flowing Identities of Bodies Constructed in Pan Yuliang's Paintings

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## **ABSTRACT**

Pan Yuliang, as a representative modern female artist in China, is always perceived to be limited to the gaze of women and the revival of Chinese painting, therefore, the studies of Pan Yuliang are thus often confined to private romantic histories or national historical narratives. This paper wants to focus on Pan Yuliang's transmedia artistic creations and reflect on her life beliefs and artistic ontology, so as to view the marks of the times on individual women from a microscopic perspective. The most popular genre of Pan Yuliang's works are self-portraits and female nudes, from which this paper explores Pan Yuliang's use of female bodies as a mediator of self-realization, which not only completed the domestication of the new women by the Chinese elites, but also finally escaped the patriarchal gaze of her family and motherland by using ink as an art medium and realized the self-subjectivity. The paper ultimately lands on Pan Yuliang's combination of nudity and line drawings, achieving a de-masking of the self through a circuitous translingual path of Chinese art history.

## **KEYWORDS**

Pan Yuliang; Self-Portraits; Nudity; Calligraphic Lines; Motherhood.

### **Introduction**

In the 20th century, when China was staging the New Cultural Movement, “new women” and “fine arts” were both imported concepts reshaping the nature of culture.<sup>1</sup> This reflected a dialectical cultural competition that for female artists, the recording one’s name in art history is, rather than sufficient evidence of one’s feminine agency, merely exacerbates the cultural and political dominance of male intellectuals.

When Linda Nocklin famously asked, in 1971, why there are no great women artists? As early as 1936, in *History of Modern Chinese Art* published by Liang You Company included Pan Yuliang among the representatives of modern Chinese painters, along with Xu Beihong, Lin Fengmian, Liu Haisu and Chen Baoyi and other reformers of the Fine Arts Revolution. During the same period, Michael Sullivan who had been deeply involved with the Chinese art world introduced Pan Yuliang as an outstanding example of one of the few contemporary Chinese painters who have been able to fuse Chinese and European art technically and aesthetically.<sup>2</sup>

In this sense, her entry into Chinese art history symbolizes a new historical point, but this is not necessarily in sync with her personal art history. Therefore, in terms of her artistic career, one needs to look at her reproduction of female bodies, especially with her self-gazing.

### **The Physical Education of Self-Portraits**

Before Pan Yuliang became a well-known female painter, her personal history is seriously lacking in historical evidence and personal statements are scarce. Still, one thing is clear that Pan Yuliang's artistic career was launched and supported by male leaders as patrons in the New Culture Movement, especially her husband, Pan Zanhua. Just as Yuliang changed to her husband's surname only after she married him, and her social identity as a female painter was also given, so in this sense, we can find traces of performance and typicality in her self-portraits.

Many dramatic legends about her original name and her life, before she met her husband, have never been confirmed. From today's perspective, these allegorical legends become the hidden threads in her paintings. There is

a saying that her original name was Chen Xiuqing, yet after the death of her father at the age of one, she changed to her mother's family name and was renamed as Zhang Yuliang and followed her uncle to Anhui later sold to a brothel after the death of her mother at the age of fourteen, where she met her husband, Pan Zanhua.<sup>3</sup> This story of the redemption of a lost girl is a much-needed historical allegory and the structure of feeling for the same period of Chinese history, namely, a new generation of Chinese intellectuals who evoke the cultural subjectivity of their motherland through a translingual intellectual practice.

The neighbor of the newlyweds called Hong Ye happened to be a faculty member of the Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts. As a result, her husband, Pan Zanhua, and her painting teacher, Hong Ye registered as Pan Yuliang's two guarantors who recommended her to Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts. More than that, the witness of their marriage Chen Duxiu who was one of the founders of the New Culture Movement, and also a friend of Pan Zanhua, personally recommended Pan Yuliang to Liu Haisu, the vice president of Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts at the time. It is not surprising at all that in 1920, Pan Yuliang, along with a total of twelve girls were enrolled to the first professional art school, Shanghai Art Academy, which was the first time for boys and girls studying in the same classroom in the history of Chinese art education. <sup>4</sup>The beginning of her artistic career thus can be considered the result of the joint planning and anchoring of this group of male elites in the art world.

Pan Yuliang seemed to use her name as a rip to tear up the safety net of social connections and career path that male art patrons have built for her. She registered at Shanghai Art Academy under the name Pan Shixiu and it was said that Pan Zanhua gave her the name when she came of age. She signed this name on one painting only, *Ready to start off from Tonglu* (presumed 1937). Interestingly, the only two times she used the name Shixiu were before she suffered the controversy of lowly birth and female nude paintings that led her to leave China twice and study in France instead. In one of her iconic self-portraits, *Self-Portrait in Red*, she signed her name Yuliang on a letter in her hand, making it an important symbol in the picture. This

letter with her name on it marks the picture as a modern intellectual woman who could read and write, and not only that, but her makeup, hair, and clothing are all symbols of the fashionable Chinese of the time.



**Fig. 1.** Self-Portrait in Red, Oil Painting, 90cm x 64cm, Date not Clear, Anhui Museum

Pan Yuliang's self-portraits depict herself as a stylish, modern new woman, which were inseparably linked to her art education in Shanghai, a space for romanticizing the modern Chinese visual experience. Pan Yuliang was born in Yangzhou, which was once one of centers of Chinese literati arts and has ceded its cultural and economic status to Shanghai since the 20th century. The newlyweds moved to Shanghai in 1913, where Pan Yuliang began her training as a professional painter. In her self-portraits, repetitive patterns can be seen, as she portrays herself as a modern woman with slick bob hair and bangs, finely lined eyebrows, a straight Greek nose, and a cherry-sized lip

of traditional aesthetics. Pan Yuliang portrays a typical modern Chinese woman in a hybrid mask that translates the image of a female face and body into modernized and Westernized pictorial types. This performative mask also helped her to break through the class classification and gender division in Chinese social reality,

Georg Simmel saw prostitutes as the pioneers of a new fashion, because they were naturally placed by society to be eliminated, so they in turn reaped an aesthetic of destroying impulse.<sup>5</sup> So far, we have no way of confirming whether Pan Yuliang was a prostitute, worked in a brothel, or was completely unrelated. What we can confirm is that she was among the socially excluded and marginalized due to her unimpressive appearance, low birth and drawing her naked body in the mirror at school. Thus, she found refuge in the typical image of the urban woman, with fashion providing her universal imitateness and personalized adornment.

In the painting, her eyes are steely, looking straight ahead without evasion. Her body is not thin and weak, showing the health of regular exercise and, more importantly, she wears a new style Qipao. All of them are associated with popular ornaments of a new urban woman, in contrast to the softness and slenderness of the traditional picture of a lady. The Qipao emphasized the body's contours with close-cutting pieces while traditional Chinese clothing tend to be loss, using the entire width of a piece of fabric. This new style of health and beauty offered new ways of viewing women, helping to shape the male gaze into an illusion of the object body, the ideal figure in exotic clothing, Hollywood star style in a Western atmosphere.<sup>6</sup> Women's faces and body curves are considered as a kind of landform and are taken up as urban spectacle to show the urban space.

In her self-portrait, she plays as a new middle-class urban woman through typical fashion, fulfilling the inner male desire to a westernized self. This shows that the Qipao is actually a performative dress that manifests the way physicality exists and makes the new woman visible. However, this is not merely an artificial transformation of imperialist colonization but also implicitly hooks the face of the female body to the aspirations of Chinese modernity. The iconic bobbed hair she wore in every self-portrait was once

thought to imply an unmarried state and a probable student status. At the same time, cutting hair also symbolizes the desire to become a man<sup>7</sup>. Pan Yuliang consciously plays her non-role in her paintings to broaden the boundaries of her social role in real life, and in Baudelaire's words, giving Pan Yuliang a modern beauty and heroism.

Here we see not only the dialectical nature of fashion as unifying social groups and dividing social classes but also Pan Yuliang as the kind of female role model needed by the new cultural movement, both regulated by the expectations of China's new generation of intellectual elites and at the same time exploring the self-growth and ideal appearance of women. In fact, this overlay of ambivalence is also a weave of multiple historical times that can be seen in the costumes of Pan Yuliang's self-portrait. As Walter Benjamin said, "The eternal is in any case far more the ruffle on a dress than some idea."<sup>8</sup> His use of the folds of clothing as mediating channels to bridge the organic world and inorganic time between bodily pictures has the power of a revolutionary historical movement. The patterns on Pan Yuliang's Qipao are isomorphic to her changing between various surname names and the folding back of her art education in Shanghai and Paris, a folding of the flesh, of memory and of historical time. In doing so, she realized that if she pursued subjectivity in the ruffle, she had to take off the curse of the "newness" of women projected on her by her male patrons.

### **From the Biological Mother to the Mother of the Earth**

The Qipao was at first considered a modern look. Still, it was soon used as an identity symbol of traditional national dress in the merging of modernism and Darwinian evolutionary theory. After the outbreak of the Second World War, it became a silent protest by Chinese women, and thus a symbol of patriotism.<sup>9</sup> The contradictory and ambiguous nature of the Qipao lies not only in the simultaneity of the brief history of clothes, but also in the radical aesthetics of the body and the conservative cultural politics.

The Qipao emphasizes the curves of the female body, which is the opposite of the traditional Chinese connotation of subtlety and elegance as

beauty. Nevertheless, the origin of the Qipao is traced in Eileen Chang's "A Chronicle of Changing Clothes" (Geng Yi Ji) as actually imitating male dress. In fact, the Qipao is not just out of a desire to imitate men, but a fusion of Chinese men's robes, Manchu women's robes, and Western one-piece dresses, thus hybridity of historical time. Here, the Qipao is what Judith Butler calls the gender yoke that is neither an agency nor a locus, but an identity woven in time. And this typicality can only be de-gendered in Roland Barthes' view when stripped down to the nude.

Nude painting is imported, scientific, and even humiliating to the history of Chinese art. Nicholas Mirzoeff introduced Jacques Derrida's concept of the blind to interpret that the premise of the history of European art is the physiological structure of the visual faculty, i.e., that art history is actually the insight and understanding of female objects constituted by male artists.<sup>10</sup> The origin of painting itself metaphorized the body, and thus classical art gained scientific status as evidence of the superiority of the white race. The logic behind Chinese art education's motivation to introduce nude sketching into the classroom for the sake of scientific realistic technique is an acknowledgment of the backwardness of the intellectual system, that is, the autonomous placement of Chinese art at the end of a Hegelian linear art historical narrative.

Pan Yuliang also has many paintings on this topic, such as *Two Sitting Female Bodies* (1938) and *Black and White Female Bodies* (1939), revealing the hidden side of artistic production by placing mixed-race people together in the pictorial space, the individuals checking and balancing each other, and there is no clear division between primary and secondary. Her reflection on the body as a culturally constructed medium also has a rather personal perspective, that of foot fetishism in the sense of artistic symbols.

The foot is a morally regulated sexual organ in traditional Chinese aesthetics, and the abolition of the custom of foot-binding was one of the important ideas and contributions of the New Culture Movement. From a cross-cultural perspective, foot-binding personifies the barbaric image of Chinese culture: "Foot-binding was construed as the ultimate sign of China's uniqueness and Otherness and has continued to fuel the Euro-American's

imagination of a mysterious, exotic, and barbaric Orient.”<sup>11</sup> Yet within Chinese history, foot-binding ladies implied a superior bourgeoisie class. Pan Yuliang is at a historical point where the old and the new aesthetic concepts meet, and her dual identity as a female artist and a national painter is interrogated, which becomes a wedge for her to break the hypocrisy and illusion of the male elite.

Pan Yuliang always intentionally places women's feet prominently in the most conspicuous foreground part of the picture, in surprisingly large proportions, making it difficult for the audience to ignore them. Alternatively, the viewer is guided down to the foot by having the painting subject touch the foot with her hand, with the sight downward. It is hard not to think of it as an inferiority complex. The ghostly symbol of social class is her large feet, not that her feet were unusually large. Still, she came from a time when the practice of foot-binding had not yet been abolished at the legal level. Thus, women born in the upper classes of society usually had three-inch lotus-like feet, implying economic affluence without labor and moral chastity without leaving the boudoir. For example, Su Xuelin, her classmate and a good friend who stayed in France with her, recalled in her autobiography that her grandmother began to urge her mother to wrap her feet when she was four years old, which eventually led to her becoming “formally disabled” and “unable to hold her head up for life!”<sup>12</sup>

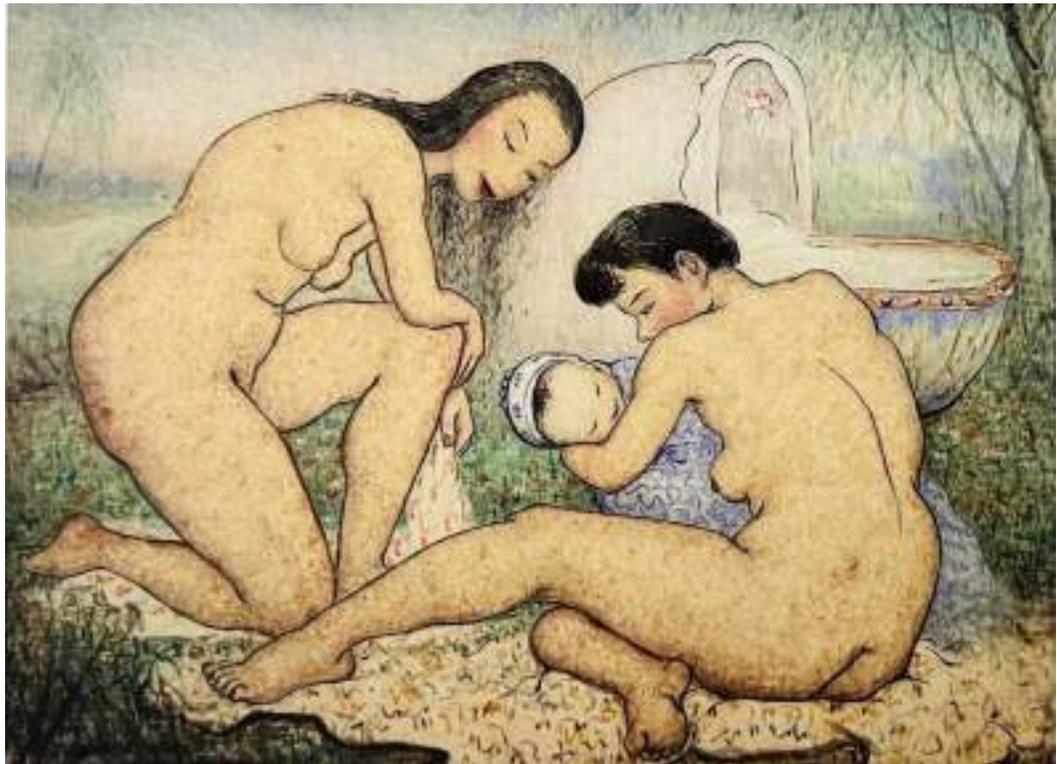
Pan Yuliang's self-struggle is reflected in the monstrous portrayal and deliberate enlargement of her feet. Still, her self-reconciliation is also reflected in the careful application of brightly pink nail polish to her toes: she begins to admire her big feet and invites the attention of the audience. The exaggerated feet, heavy bodies and deformed movements of the women in the paintings constitute a reaction to the traditional pictures of ladies. The artist thus opens up a female perspective of self-examination.



**Fig. 2.** *Two Sitting Female Bodies*, Color Ink, 91cm x 68.5cm, 1959, Anhui Museum

In addition to the deformed big feet, Pan Yuliang paid extra attention to the representation of voluptuous female figures in nude paintings, especially the interaction of children with breasts. It is important to know that Pan Yuliang and Pan Zanhua never had any children.

In her painting, *My Family* (1933), Pan Yuliang invited her husband's child with his first wife to join the picture to establish a family of three. However, while Pan Zanhua and his son are looking at the family in the mirror together, Pan Yuliang is turning his head to look directly at us outside the picture. The indifference in her eyes already implied her withdrawal from the coherent family structure. This indifference to a fulfilled family life becomes more and more pronounced in her subsequent paintings, which are directly manifested in the self-sufficiency of motherhood and the absence of the father.



**Fig. 3.** *Maternal Love*, Color Ink, 80cm \* 107cm, 1958, Anhui Museum

In the painting *Maternal Love*, the baby is shown sleeping peacefully under the watchful eyes of two women, implying independent parenting by the mother.

On the one hand, we can see this as her desire for children and motherhood, but more importantly, her awareness of self-sufficiency in family life, that is to say, no longer needing the male to play the role of savior. In her later portraits of women, the subject of nursing children can often be seen. And it is interesting to note that none of the spaces where women nurse their children take place indoors, but are exposed to nature surrounded by mountains, rivers, and trees. The situation of breastfeeding in nature constructs a disorder and confrontation between public and private space, which confirms the indistinguishability of patriotic feelings and personal love in China at that time.

The Chinese female body was nationalized at the time. In the context of the fall of the nation and the destruction of the race in modern China, male intellectuals blamed the catastrophe of the motherland on women's mistakes. Thus, breastfeeding became an important guarantee of a strong nation and a strong race, and the female body was repeatedly publicized and nationalized.<sup>13</sup> Since women are transformed into a construct of collective identity in a patriarchal civilization, Pan Yuliang goes in the opposite direction and tries to reproduce the image of self in female nude paintings until it becomes an ever-generating dynamism. This returns to the Chinese mythological tradition of Nüwa's creation of humans, in which Nüwa created and constructed human society by making a man out of the earth in imitation of herself.

### **The Transmedia Practice of Lines**

In the painting *Pleasure on the Beach*, nine nude women are in the midst of nature. However, judging from their facial features, the picture has only the painter herself. It can be considered that Pan Yuliang arranged nine poses of herself to appear in one space at the same time in this painting, creating a stage of simultaneity of individual images. The tenth figure is a macaque monkey hanging from the top of a tree, climbing in a manner that echoes the

nude woman at the center of the image, suggesting the two creation narratives of biological evolution and Nüwa's creation of man. The composition of this painting resembles Sandro Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* and thus could be considered as a footnote to a translingual art historical dialogue.



**Fig. 4.** *Pleasure on the Beach*, Color Ink, 94cm \* 177cm, 1959, Anhui Museum

Not only does the composition of this painting attempt to trace the paradigm of the European Renaissance, but the group of nude women playing by the water also reminds us of Paul Cézanne's *Women Bathing*. Cézanne united the three-dimensional space of Perspectivism with the two-dimensional flatness of easel painting by applying horizontal and vertical brushstrokes. According to the linear development logic of European art history, such speckled brushstrokes were difficult to understand, so Roger Fry borrowed a Chinese aesthetic concept "Calligraphic Lines" to interpret Cézanne and Matisse's brushstrokes:

In the portrait, the lines are forced into a scheme of extreme simplicity. Merely to distinguish these methods (not to define them) we may call them respectively calligraphic and structural. The word calligraphic is perhaps unfortunate here and needs

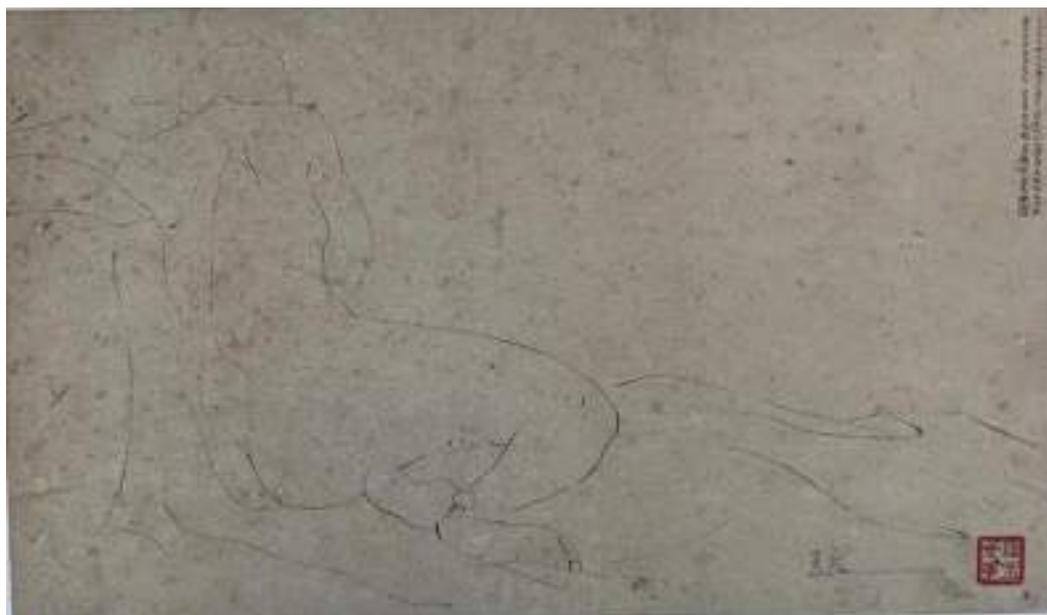
some explanation. For although perhaps the most striking thing about this drawing is its astonishing beauty of line, nothing could be further removed than this from the bravura of the highly skilled artist who from long habit has become able to state the commonplaces of form with a desolating assurance and certainty. Here, though all is rapid in actual execution, the line has an almost exaggerated delicacy and sensibility. To an eye accustomed only to academic drawing it might even seem helpless and incompetent.<sup>14</sup>

In Fry's view, "Calligraphic Lines" stay on the paper, while structural lines enter into three dimensions. As a result, the calligraphic line is undoubtedly a subversive new aesthetic concept. It marked the abandonment of Western painting's realistic portrayal and direct reference to nature, and the shift to the multiple subjects and musical qualities of egolessness. This interpretation is actually a kind of collaborative writing on the classical Chinese aesthetics of "vividness and rhythm", but he adds a layer of modernist semantics to it. As the calligraphic line is a record of a pose, the body becomes a linear movement toward the depths of matter.

In fact, before Pan Yuliang turned to the ink medium and completed *Pleasure on the Beach*, the intention of several of her oil paintings was more clearly to imitate European painting's portrayal of the body, especially the harmony of the nude group in the picture. For example, her *Spring (Rong)* (1930) recreated the character interactions in Matisse's *La Dance II*, while *Ode to Spring* (1930) again copied the basic composition of Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*. Thus we know that Pan Yuliang's nudes bypass the development of European art from the Renaissance to Modernism. In this journey of pictorial types, Pan Yuliang's portraits of bodies challenge Confucian culture's definition of beauty, which excludes physical beauty.<sup>15</sup>

This helps us understand Pan Yuliang's more emancipated female figure when she shifted from the medium of oil painting to ink painting. Here, emancipation means that Pan Yuliang prefers to express the vivid lines of ink and brush rather than the materiality of the figurative nude. In fact, long before Pan Yuliang's second trip to France, Chen Duxiu had already recognized her artistic transformation from her line drawings of figures.

Chen Duxiu wrote in the painting *A Sitting Female Body* inscription: “This recent painting of the human body by Yuliang is a fusion of Chinese and Western painting methods. This painting is pursued to the extreme simplicity, the achievement is bound to be huge.” Chen Duxiu's prophecy was one-sided; he only saw the maturity of Pan Yuliang's technique but did not draw enough attention to her inner growth.



**Fig. 5.** *A Sitting Female Body*, Line Drawing, 24.5cm \* 32cm, 1937, Anhui Museum

Even though the traditional Chinese female figures in Court Ladies Painting (Shi Nü Tu) had a long history of applying line drawing technique, the body is usually sheltered under the dress, so the metaphor of the lines turns the beauty to an ornament to emphasize the complex process of manufacturing the silky texture. Jonathan Hay called this seductive surface to attract the viewer's gaze wandering, walking around it, even touching it. In his view, the beauty figure is both a dynamic subject as well as an image of an object, and can also be seen as a metaphor for an ornament as a source of pleasure.<sup>16</sup> The danger of this viewing pleasure lies in the fact that the body only has value under the gaze, that the lines in the painting are given weight only when they become ruffles of dress in the picture, and that in this

relationship, the lines themselves have no materiality.

Roger Fry has already clarified the connotation of “Calligraphic Lines” as the gist of which is to transcend a structural control through rapidness, thus achieving a spiritual escape, and the line drawing could be regarded as poetic and lyrical. Based on the Modernist Paintings, Hubert Damisch points towards another history of painting that paintings no longer consider that the splendor of clothes is only about the roughness of the fabric itself, but begin to express ideas in another, non-commodity language.<sup>17</sup> For Damisch, the way to achieve this artistic practice is to bring clouds into the interior, cutting through the steel frame of the train station, and breaking up the visual order of the perspective method.

Pan Yuliang consciously tried the ink play of lines in her paintings. Not only does she place the female nude in the natural landscape of the sea and the forest, but in her later ink and wash. She also suspends the human body in the movement of the lines. Such void space to some extent is typical of literati portraits, as unsatisfied with social reality, male painters detach themselves from their environment with a gesture of rejection.<sup>18</sup> But the difference is that Pan Yuliang's line movement abolishes the presence of spatiality completely in the carnival of lines, thus she is not seeking a utopian escape, but facing the presence of corporeality.

In the painting *Nudes and Masks (1956)*, there are two naked women in the picture, one with her back to the viewer, and another woman with obvious facial features of Pan Yuliang holding a mask with another mask placed beside her feet. Moreover, there seemed to be many masks remaining in the red box between the two. The naked woman holding the mask reveals an asymmetry between the face and the body. As Giorgio Agamben argues, social morality requires people to leave their faces bare, but dictates that their bodies need to be covered.<sup>19</sup> Pan Yuliang seeks to completely strip away the value of display by replicating his own face and then externalizing his face into a mask as an object, thus trying to explore what remains of the beautiful nudity.

### Conclusion

This paper attempts to articulate that categorizing female artists' entry into art history as an individual achievement oversimplifies the issue, since art history has always been closely linked to the intellectual production of cultural politics and is therefore an action of state governance in the Gramscian sense. This does not mean a complete loss of female artists' agency and this paper takes Pan Yuliang as a case study, exploring her transmedia and translingual intellectual practice. Pan Yuliang's artistic journey has benefited from the male elite and thus suffers from the projection of family and motherland on the ideal woman. Through persistent self-observation and self-portrayal throughout her artistic career, Pan Yuliang continues to break the feeling of shame as an object of the gaze and a human being. Whether it is the exploration of painting techniques or the search for subjectivity, Pan Yuliang is always thinking about the issue of imitation and authenticity. Through a global vision of art history, molding the face, body and coexistence relationship of women, she finally materializes her belief of being into the representation of female nudity, and towards the objecthood of lines.

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# When Species Migrate. Becoming-Animal in Contemporary Art

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## **ABSTRACT**

Being human is not a definite state of being but a performative act that is always in the process of becoming. It has fuzzy boundaries towards the animal as well as the inorganic. While the figure of the cyborg, the hybrid between man and machine, has long been at the center of considerations on the potential of posthumanism, I focus on human-animal border crossings. I discuss performative artworks in which artists attempt to imitate animals, empathize with animals, merge with animals, and even 'become animal' by means of imitation, prostheses, surgery, or blood transfusion. The transgressions, entanglements, and becomings redefine species boundaries and open up post-anthropocentric sensory, physical, and affective aspects of worlding.

## **KEYWORDS**

Becoming-Animal; Posthumanism; Animal Studies; Species Transgression.

### **Introduction**

The alleged fundamental discontinuity between humans and other animals turns out to be an anthropocentric fallacy.<sup>1</sup> The question of where an animal body ends and a human body begins cannot be answered with certainty. All bodies are the site of histories of cross-contamination and symbiotic relations. If, for example, humans were genetically analyzed together with their microbiome, the totality of microorganisms that live in and on them, only about ten percent 'human' would be left. Xenotransplantation or the gene transfer of human cells into laboratory animals for the purpose of researching diseases, further challenge the idea of a clear human-animal divide. Also, evolutionary theory, ethology, and animal studies question criteria that have long been considered purely human characteristics and expose the dogma of human exceptionalism as no longer tenable. Former hallmarks of anthropological difference such as language, consciousness, self-awareness, empathy, and culture have been observed in many other animals as well.

In what follows, I want to focus on human-animal boundary transgressions and on artists who are trying to overcome ontological, morphological, ethological, and affective limitations of the human by migrating into animality.<sup>2</sup>

My approach is informed by the scholarship of Cary Wolfe<sup>3</sup>, Rosi Braidotti<sup>4</sup>, and Donna Haraway<sup>5</sup> who oppose the anthropocentric orientation of humanism, which produces the normative human through the human-animal dichotomy. An ontology of the human derived from the human-animal distinction discriminates against or subjugates everyone not human. This dominant stance can be challenged not only by rejecting anthropocentrism, but also by subverting it through hybridization.

### **Pop cultural body modifications**

A radical and rather literal form of becoming animal that points to the mutable qualities of the human flesh is embodied by people who permanently alter their own bodies to become animal-like, for example by the completely tattooed and in part surgically enhanced Cat Man or Tom

Leppard. Their striving to become animal is often a romanticized escapism and can be considered as a kind of neo-primitivism. Cat Man, for example, explained his transformation to be a self-realization.<sup>6</sup> Since he felt like a cat, his tattoos, sharpened teeth, and silicone implants only made visible on the outside what he already was on the inside. He claimed to have telepathic access to cats and saw his Native American roots as essential to this close relationship. Thus, going through the process of externalizing inner truths was part of his personal ‘rite of passage’, as was the experience of pain and the public display of his self-evolution. It seems like Cat Man wanted to become more authentic through body modification. But seeking to ferret out the identity of an animal by physical assimilation means equating being an animal with being an animal body which is a rather reductionist view of animality. Another animal person, Tom Leppard, wants his body modification to be understood as resistance against the Western capitalist lifestyle.<sup>7</sup> But of course his own lifestyle as a ‘human leopard’ is also part of a consumer culture. He partakes of its goods and services, such as those offered by tattoo artists, to make his skin look like the fur of a leopard.

What nevertheless interests me about these subcultural animal people is that they are perceived as attacking the prevailing order and a danger to civilized society. A defamatory discourse that calls such people “freaks” is based on a human-animal boundary that is believed to be immutable. While forms of body modification through dieting, bodybuilding, hair styling, makeup, earrings, or piercings are accepted forms of self-expression, protest or personal experimentation, more extreme body modifications are not sanctioned by society. Public opinion is rather hostile towards these individuals, they are regarded as pitiful psychopaths or attention-seeking exhibitionists profiteering from the spectacle. In social media comments, these animal people are often called “perverts” or “sickos” and compared to other “deviants” such as homosexuals and transgender people.<sup>8</sup> Apparently, anything that transgresses traditional dichotomies of gender or species traumatizes dominant orders. Any attack on one of the most vehemently defended boundaries - the one between humans and other animals - the primordial boundary that makes humans human - is considered provocative.

### **Ritualistic animal imitation**

Becoming animal can also find highly diverse, mostly performative and often very witty and multilayered manifestations in the visual arts. Alluding to Judith Butler's notion of “undoing gender” one could almost speak of a new trend of “undoing species”.<sup>9</sup>

Marcus Coates, for instance, imitates and embodies various species in Westernized shamanistic performances, mimics animal voices, and dresses up as an animal. In *Journey to the Lower World* (2004), he wears deerskin with head and antlers attached to a bicycle helmet imitating the sounds of British wildlife. He undertakes his ritualistic performance on behalf of a marginalized community, the residents of a tower block in Liverpool that will soon be demolished. By communicating with animals, Coates retrieves messages for the residents, offering them guidance during uncertain times. Coates costumes seem unfinished and amateurish and his whole demeanor is often reminiscent of a child imitating an animal with the simplest of means. And just like such a child, Coates wants to be taken seriously. As Mircea Eliade has shown regarding shamanism, the important thing is not the dressing up in animal skins, it is what one feels when masqueraded as an animal.<sup>10</sup> The magical transformation is a ‘going out of the self’ in an ecstatic experience that transcends the limitations of the body or of humanity itself. Through trance-like states Coates tries to mimetically empathize with animals and to judge human behavior from a point of view outside the human realm. As absurd as many of his performances may seem, the artist insists that an actual crossover is taking place during the performance. Coates thereby contradicts philosopher Thomas Nagel, who famously argued that humans can never know what it is like to be a bat.<sup>11</sup> Coates is sure that humans are able to share emotions and affects with other animals: “I mean, you can feel different degrees of empathy, but it's in the attempt that you realize so much, even if you fail”.<sup>12</sup>

And sometimes such an attempt is realized by imitating the locomotion of an animal. In one of his early projects, *Stoat*, Coates designed stilt-like prostheses because he wanted to move around like an ermine.



**Fig. 1.** Marcus Coates, *Stoat*, 1999, video still, <https://vimeo.com/76657054>

Before creating the stilts, he studied the exact footfall of a weasel by taking paw prints and measuring their step length. In the *Stoat* performance, recorded on video, he then struggled to adopt the posture of the small predator for his own body. The goal was to establish an ‘intuitive relationship’ with the animal. “Stoat”, says Coates, “was an attempt to become an ermine through a process I couldn’t control. I found that the only way to move was to move sideways. This produced a hopping rhythm not unlike the weasel’s gait. [...] In an unconscious process I became an animal ... I immerse myself completely in this animal. [...] It is a detachment from the idea of being a separate entity; I pass into a state in which I do not know who I am and in which I have doubts, in which I regard my identity as partial”.<sup>13</sup> The immersion is apparently not total, but remains stuck in a vague in-between state, which seems to make up the aesthetic tension of the work and which coincides with the becoming-animal figure of thought developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*.<sup>14</sup> Here becoming-animal refers to the experience or the necessity of stepping out of binary hierarchies. By

detritorializing oneself in the process of becoming animal, a person may enter into alliances with the non-human and partake of their intensities. Becoming-animal can thus offer a possible way out of repressive social and psychological orders.

Coates also puts his artistic strategy of becoming-animal to use in the service of species conservation. On the Galapagos Islands, ludicrously costumed as an endangered blue-footed booby, he diagnosed the state of human society. From the bird's perspective, he narrates not only the customs and traditions of humans – which, from an extra-human point of view, are nonsensical – but also the exploitation and pollution of their habitat by humans. With the botched character of his costume, he is making a fool of himself, sabotaging any superior authority that a white male genius-artist might traditionally have been assigned. Behind the mask of the simpleton, Coates addresses important questions about the detrimental and complicated relationship of humans and animals in the Anthropocene.

### **Surgical Metamorphosis**

Becoming animal may have therapeutic effects. At least, this seems to be the case in a work by Rodrigo Braga. Background for his work *Compensation Fantasy* (2004) is an experience from his youth when he was suffering from social phobia and panic attacks. One day on the way to school, he encountered a very sick dog, knelt down, looked the animal in the eye and burst into tears in the middle of the street.<sup>15</sup> This story recalls Friedrich Nietzsche's legendary collapse when confronting a maltreated cab horse, an incident at the turn of the year 1888/1889 that marked the beginning of Nietzsche's mental breakdown. For Theodor Adorno this episode exemplified “the inability to further endure a creature's abuse” which, as he says, leads “to an irrational action, which precisely in its irrationality criticizes the state of affairs in which ill treatment of horses is a commonplace”.<sup>16</sup> In Braga's case, the encounter with the dog brought him to seek more help from his family and to start psychological therapy. In hindsight, he realized that he had cried because he had recognized himself in the pitiful dog and that this encounter

was the start for his psychological recovery. He then decided to artistically embody his identification with the dog in a radical act of metamorphosis.



**Fig. 2.** Rodrigo Braga,  
*Compensation Fantasy*, 2004

He made a lifelike silicone cast of his own face, obtained the body of a dead Rottweiler who had been euthanized in a shelter because he had not been adopted, and hired a veterinarian to dissect the dog and sew his ears and muzzle onto the cast. He made photos of the procedure as well as photos of his own head in the same angle and photoshopped them in a way that the idea of the fusion of a living human face and a dead dog's face became uncannily real. With this real and imagined as well as digitally rendered collision Braga processed his earlier troubled self. In addition, the work could also be read as a gesture of solidarity with the sick dog from his youth or the dead dog whose body parts he used and whose life had been considered

disposable. Furthermore, in the age of transgenic animals, such an image also raises the question of how to treat a human-dog-hybrid if it really existed. Does such a creature have a ‘face’ that, as Emmanuel Levinas says, demands an ethical response from us – or is it a monster to which we are not morally obligated?<sup>17</sup> When human beings are decentered in such a way, it is no longer possible to tell who counts as a moral object and who counts as a moral subject. And the problematic ideological construction of ‘the animal’ as an oppositional term to define ‘the human’ is destroyed by the hybridization.

### **Prosthetic Humanimality**

Confrontation and interaction with nonhuman animals not only challenge us ethically and affectively, but also shape human thought, aesthetics, technology, and language. Roberto Marchesini has convincingly argued that the developments of aviation can be traced back to imaginings of a human-bird hybrid. Humans observed birds in flight, and the idea of ‘I am a human, I want to fly like a bird’ represented a highly productive shift in perspective that would have been impossible without living birds.<sup>18</sup> According to Marchesini, every invention, every technology is born from such a change of perspective, that is then technologically translated. This is also the approach taken by Thomas Thwaites: He conceived his project *A Holiday from Being Human (Goat Man)* when he encountered a happy and carefree dog – a state of mind that seemed very desirable to him: “... I was fed up with my life anyway and I needed a break. I was jobless, had a lot of personal problems, and found everyday life so stressful. [...] One day, walking a friend's dog I was struck by how the dog just seemed really happy about life, without any worries, and I thought to myself that it would be really great to be like that for a day”.<sup>19</sup> Thwaites demonstrates a pessimistic view of humanity - to be human is to worry - and wants to escape the general misery. In search of the supposedly simpler life of an animal, he took a timeout from his human existence trying to live not as a dog but as a goat. In practice, however, this turned out to be so cumbersome that the realization of the project rather seems like a satire of the attempt of modern man to find a simpler life. The project documentation which is part of the artwork reveals how Thwaites’

approach is becoming more and more complicated and technological, thus more and more human as he works through it. After visiting a shaman who advised him on the best choice of animal, he used sophisticated tools and technologies for his transmogrification into a goat. He prepared for his project by studying goat ethology, physiology, anatomy, and engineering, and consulted with goat experts from around the world. Thwaites learned all about goat locomotor systems and digestive organs, participated in dissections of goat bodies, visited a goat sanctuary to get to know living goats, and studied mythological lore about goats. Finally, he built an elaborate and patently uncomfortable exoskeleton and, with the help of doctors and chemists, constructed a prosthetic goat stomach capable of digesting grass.



**Fig. 3.** Thomas Thwaites, *A Holiday from Being Human (Goat Man)*, 2015, Photo: Tim Bowditch

In several instances, his experiment put him in serious danger, as when he took potentially toxic substances extracted from bacteria in an attempt to digest grass. He learned from an ethologist that goats lack a human notion of time and are stuck in the present. To achieve a similar mind, he persuaded a neuroscientist to subject him to transcranial magnetic stimulation. In this procedure, a diagnostic technique that originated from neuroscience research, a coil was applied to the skull briefly generating a strong magnetic field to trigger activity potentials for inhibiting areas of the brain. This quite radical intervention in Thwaites' journey to becoming a goat was intended to manipulate his brain waves in the hope of freeing his mind of any thoughts of the past or future. Eventually, he spent some time with a herd of goats in the Swiss Alps. According to the goatherd, the herd accepted him and apparently even one of the goats became attached to the artist. Just like Marcus Coates, Thwaites is neither embarrassed nor afraid of looking foolish. In the end, his physical inadequacies, his unwieldy equipment, and the unpredictable and inhospitable habitat constrained his project. Still, it may be that – through early failure and unexpected successes, such as the goat apparently seeking his friendship – Thwaites gained a direct physical understanding of the fragility and embeddedness of all animals, human and non-human, in a shared environment. Most certainly the work points to alternative ways of knowing and understanding the world.

### **Blood relations**

In their theatrical performance *May the Horse Live in me* (2011), the artist group Art Orienté Objet (Marion Laval-Jeantet and Benoît Mangin) staged an even more transgressive becoming-animal attempt. With the aim of turning her own body into a receptacle for an animal, Marion Laval-Jeantet underwent a blood transfusion with horse blood in front of an audience. Her first idea was to use panda blood because she wanted to become a container for the genetic material of an endangered animal at the brink of extinction. Panda blood was hard to find, though, and the artist group turned to readily available horse blood. Beforehand, Laval-Jeantet was immunosensitized for several months with equine immunoglobulins – the proteins that distinguish

between self and other and fight off invaders such as bacteria and viruses – to make her blood compatible with that of the horse. Fusing animal and human blood in this manner manipulates the part of human biology that makes cells, organs and bodies recognize and maintain themselves as individual entities.

Before the blood-transfusion, the artist visited the horse for weeks to get to know him as an individual and to gain his trust. For her performance, Laval-Jeantet also became externally horse-like by strapping prosthetic hooves to her legs to be at eye level with the horse. In fact, in some shots, it is impossible to tell their bodies apart. Visually, they form a centaur. Perceptive empathy and physical assimilation, however, were not enough for *Art Orienté Objet*. Instead, they wanted to create an actual embodied reality beyond species limitations by removing the physical boundary lines between humans and horses at the level of blood. Laval-Jeantet incorporated the horse's alterity on a molecular level and metabolized it. In the days following the transfusion, she allegedly experienced a peculiar jumpiness, restlessness and anxiousness but also felt strong: "I had the impression of being extra-human. I was not in my ordinary body. I was hyper powerful, hypersensitive, hyper nervous, skittish, with the emotionality of an herbivore. I couldn't sleep. I had the feeling, a bit, that I was possibly a horse".<sup>20</sup>

*Art Orienté Objet* explain these experiences by the fact that the immunoglobulins selected for transplantation targeted specific organs or muscles and triggered biochemical chain reactions. They interpret the asserted psychological experience as a physiological reaction that was provoked by the radical transgression and through which Laval-Jeantet established, at least temporarily, a horse-like relationship with her environment: "I feel powerful yet .. I am startled by small noises, afraid of everything, but it's a fear without awareness, somewhat instinctive and non-existential. [...] My understanding of time is different from that of the others around me. I need to walk constantly".<sup>21</sup> Of course, such explanations are part of the work and an additional level of staging. The scientific verifiability is beside the point here, truth or scientific factuality are not necessary criteria in the context of art. The statements might derive from some form of self-hypnosis or they might consciously ridicule attempts in

medicine to boost human physical or sexual performance or to rejuvenate people with the help of animal blood or other animal body parts. Animal bodies or bodily fluids (including horse urine) are also used in hormone therapy, xenotransplantation, or organ cloning to maintain or improve human health. Art Orienté Objet's approach has to be distinguished from this form of objectification and instrumentalization of animals. By employing the same techno-scientific methods and staging associated with such procedures, the performance rather becomes an affirmative critique of such appropriating practices. *May the Horse Live in me* is creating a powerful image of speculative possibilities of symbiosis and sociality with non-human actors in an artwork. After all Laval-Jeantet claims that "Art exists in order to extend the limits of consciousness and consequently to understand the Other."<sup>22</sup>

Elizabeth Grosz calls art political when it develops the possibilities of new sensations that are different from those we already know.<sup>23</sup> And in this sense, 'becoming horse' might be a transformative event that points to future possibilities to form solidarities with other animals.

### **Interspecies Mothering**

Donna Haraway, having stated in the 1980s that she would rather be a cyborg than a goddess and referring to OncoMouse as her sister in the 1990s, recently asked to "make kin, not babies".<sup>24</sup> The fantasy of making bodily kin with an animal is also found in Maja Smrekar's *ARTEmis*. Departing from her desire to be fertilized by dog sperm so she can give birth to a hybrid puppy, for the project she had one of her own ovocytes removed and, after it had been denucleated in the laboratory, made it available as a host for one of her dog Ada's body cells. The work addresses the instrumentalization of women's bodies and represents Smrekar's attempt to decolonize her own reproductive freedom. She has chosen to share her life not with a human family, but with her dogs. In the same spirit, she conceived her long-term project (*M)other*, which centered on her mothering of her little dog Ada including breastfeeding her.



**Fig. 4.** Maja Smrekar and Manuel Vason, K-9\_topology:  
Hybrid Family, Berlin, 2016

Smrekar treated her body with a special diet, psychological and physiological training, and with a breast pump applied every four hours, to get it to the point where she could function as her puppy's wet nurse. A side effect of the release of prolactin, which stimulates the flow of milk, is that increased amounts of oxytocin are released, a hormone associated with empathy and maternal love.

Physical forms of mothering animals are not socially accepted and are often pathologized as misguided, deviant love. Yet this phenomenon is not at all uncommon: In particular, puppies and piglets were and are breastfed at different times in different areas and for different reasons: to save motherless young, but also to stimulate milk flow, to avoid mastitis or to prevent pregnancy. In modern industrial societies, because of the sexualizing of the female breast, transspecies breastfeeding is viewed as akin to bestiality. Moreover, it represents an assault on the animal-human boundary. Smrekar questions the idealized notion of breastfeeding as an expression of a 'natural'

mother-child relationship, something that is not usually portrayed as exhausting labor. While fatherhood is constructed as something active, as a social and cultural institution, motherhood is often viewed as a purely automatic and biological process. Smrekar counters this with a motherhood that is self-chosen and active and creates a powerful image for the co-evolution and kinship of dogs and humans.

### **Becoming-human**

The discussed artists radically manipulate their bodies in performative, imaginative art projects to point to the material entanglements of humans and other animals. But Maja Smrekar will never be Ada's biological mother. And Marcus Coates, Cat Man, Rodrigo Braga, Thomas Thwaites, or Marion Laval-Jeantet will not really become blue boobies, cats, dogs, goats, or horses, but will always remain people pretending to become blue boobies, dogs, goats, or horses. And precisely this could be considered an expression of human autonomy and human exceptionalism. The idea "I would like to be another animal" is genuinely human, no other animal would think this way. Seen from this angle, the projects not so much undermine, but rather redefine or consolidate the boundary between humans and other animals.

Animal studies scholarship has long criticized the reduction of animals to mere symbols or metaphors for something else because this denies their individuality and agency. Although the animals in the discussed artworks are not simply display objects, decorative props, or decipherable symbols, they are still somehow vehicles of meaning. Even though the involved animals are clearly influencing and guiding the artists and his or her thought processes and creative actions, the animals' agency and the animals' subjectivity play a subordinate role in the projects.

Having said this, it is important to point out that these artworks avoid universal narratives and entrenched meaning concerning the notion of 'the animal'. They work against essentialist thinking, species hierarchies, and suppression of alterity. The artists not only recognize the creative potential of the idea of the animal, but they also recognize the animality of the human and their evolutionary and speculative ties to other animals. They present

homo sapiens as a malleable species and contribute to an understanding of its connectedness and kinship with other animals. And this creates opportunities for solidarity with other animals and for rethinking both the non-human and the human. Cary Wolfe has pointed out that posthumanism is not about outdoing, rejecting, or superfluing humanity, but about rethinking it, along with its meaning, its means of communication, interactions, and affects, and about recreating it in relation to other living beings.<sup>25</sup> The prostheses that the artists design for themselves function as aesthetic crutches for new experiences that go beyond the purely physical and question the boundaries between species. The transgressions acted out in the flesh introduce post-anthropocentric sensual, bodily, and affective aspects of knowing the world. Through aesthetically becoming animal, a momentary empathy with the other becomes tangible. Speculative experiments of fluctuating potentialities and of new forms of humanness illustrate that being human is also a performative act, one that is always evolving.

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## Endnotes

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# **St. Francis' *Stigmatized Body*: Processes of Transcultural Negotiations in New Spanish Art of the 16th Century**

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## **ABSTRACT**

When the Franciscan order started its missionary activity in New Spain in the early 16th century they had at their disposal a body image that turned out to be especially attractive in their new mission area: St. Francis with its stigmatized body. In the New Spanish convents of the Franciscans the concepts of artistic decorations practiced show a significant emphasis on the depiction of St. Francis' stigmatization, his wounded body as well as his five wounds visualized separately. These motifs were here generally rendered in a remarkable way with a striking plasticity and an astonishing emphasis on his injured and actually marked body. This phenomenon seems to be explainable by the fact that body images had already played an important role in prehispanic local image cultures and served hereby also as manifestations of the divine. Therefore, St. Francis' body as an 'image of god'—or at least of an encounter with the divine—was apparently especially suitable for processes of transcultural translation between local traditions and the imported Christian faith. This article discusses body images as a condensed form of iconic transcultural translations, as by thorough consideration every act of image reception can be understood as a sort of 'incorporation', as a transformation of an external picture into an internal image.

## **KEYWORDS**

St. Francis, Stigmata, New Spain-Mission, Body Images, Entanglement.

During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, missionizing activities were carried out in New Spain (contemporary Mexico) by three European mendicant orders: by 1524, twelve Franciscans had landed in Veracruz; the Dominicans arrived in 1528, with the Augustinian Hermits following in 1533. The Franciscans were not just the first to reach the former Mexica Empire. After the initial and disastrous destruction of local cult objects and the indigenous cultural heritage, they were also the first to grasp the necessity of invoking pre-Hispanic traditions in some form: only this, they realized, would allow them to render comprehensible the Christian belief system they sought to disseminate. Observable to a striking degree, in fact, in the visual cultures produced in the Christian convents is a marked preference for iconographies that are characterized by what Margit Kern has called “strategic double-coding,” meaning a preference for motifs that permit to be perceived from both indigenous and Christian perspectives.<sup>4</sup> Such motifs should facilitate a fusion of horizons, albeit self-evidently—at least from the standpoint of the monks—against the background of Christian hegemony. Recent research has however produced a consensus according to which the processes of translation initiated thereby were not aimed unidirectionally toward Christian dogma. Inevitably, both poles of such a translation became entangled in processes of transcultural negotiation, which generated new and characteristically colonial-era semantics.

The Franciscans in particular soon recognized that they had at their disposal a body image that seemed to be especially appealing and culturally ‘compatible’ in the context of their new mission: that of St. Francis with his stigmatized body. In the New Spanish convents of the Franciscans depictions of St. Francis and his stigmata display a remarkable emphasis on the bodily act of stigmatization as well as on his five wounds, which were also visualized separately. To a remarkable degree, these motifs were here generally rendered with striking plasticity and with an astonishing emphasis on the saint’s injured and actually marked body.

In the year 1224, according to legend, St. Francis received the five stigmata of the Savior from an apparition of the crucified Christ in the form of a six-winged seraph; the event is said to have taken place on the mountain

of La Verna in Tuscany, situated just a few kilometers north of Arezzo.<sup>2</sup> In the European context as well, the Franciscans emphasized the similarity to Christ on the part of their charismatic founder, interpreting it as confirmation of his special chosenness. In New Spain depictions of St. Francis and his wounds were with greater frequency rendered in the medium of sculpture, so that the visualization of the body experienced an emphatic potentiation; in the ‘corporeal medium’ of sculpture, the ‘body image’ engendered by the stigmata was endowed with a marked object character.

This is true as well for a relief depicting the stigmatization that adorns a small chapel in the Franciscan convent of *Nuestra Señora de la Asunción* in Tlaxcala (Fig. 1). Tlaxcala was among the order’s first settlements in New Spain, and the chapel is found in the spacious *atrio* of the complex, which was heavily frequented by the indigenous population.<sup>3</sup>

Turning our attention now to the virtually square relief from Tlaxcala, we see the figure of St. Francis set in a mountainous landscape along the lower right-hand edge of the image; through the rotation of his head, he is linked to the theophany of the seraphic Christ visible in the upper left corner. The figure of the saint has been artfully integrated into the surrounding landscape. This aspect is important to the pictorial narrative: Otherwise, it is only the rotation of the head that creates a connection with the point of emission of the mystical stigmata, while the rest of the figure is oriented nearly frontally toward the beholder. Conspicuous in particular are the oversized hands, held out toward the viewer rather than toward the Savior who reveals himself to the saint. Even today, despite weathering damage, the stigmata chiseled into the palms of St. Francis’s hands remain visible. In a captivating way, this significant motivic accent corresponds to the image’s stylistic traits. The forms—their execution even reminds of woodcut technique—are set off sharply from the plane background that lies parallel to the picture surface. The figure of the saint is displayed mainly either frontally or in a clearly delineated profile view. The incisive scoring of the motifs into the material promotes a corporeal mode of vision: when the eye scans the deeply-incised forms, a viewing of the relief becomes a haptic experience. Emerging as well as a result is a correlation between pictorial content and the

relief's formal traits: because the stony surfaces of St. Francis's hands are integrated in the uppermost plane of the relief, an analogy emerges between the divine markings on the saint's hands and the forms of the relief, which seem to have been punched out. In this constellation, finally, the formal rigor of the work, with its slight tendency toward abstraction, gives rise to the emphatic corporality of both the figure of Francis and the relief itself. Much more could be said about the resemanticizations to which the motif has been subjected through its confrontation with local traditions;<sup>4</sup> but this would lead too far here. Instead, an important observation Raúl Flores Guerrero made, shall be mentioned: According to him, the vault of the interior of the small chapel containing the St.-Francis-relief is decorated with flower motifs that allude to pre-Columbian religious rituals involving scarification.<sup>5</sup>



**Fig. 1.** Local sculptor, *The Stigmatization of St. Francis*. Relief in stone, 16<sup>th</sup> century. *Capilla posa*, former Franciscan convent Nuestra Señora de la Asunción, Tlaxcala (Tlaxcala)

Depicted on the closed side of the chapel, moreover, is the emblem of the Franciscans in New Spain, consisting of the five stigmata of St. Francis, displayed now in isolation (fig. 2). Close examination reveals that the five wounds,<sup>6</sup> depicted here in red, take the form of encrustations: a red-dyed mortar has been pressed into depressions that were worked into the surface. In conjunction with the scene taking place on Monte Alverna, visualized in the relief displayed on the front of the chapel, it seems remarkably telling that here, the wounds were not simply painted on or applied sculpturally, but instead penetrate the surface of the chapel wall. In this way the wounding of the ‘body’ by the stigmata is also performed medially (which is to say: it is reproduced sculpturally), and so to speak became embodied in the chapel architecture.



**Fig. 2.** Franciscan coat of arms. Relief with red incrustations, 16<sup>th</sup> century. *Capilla posa*, former Franciscan convent Nuestra Señora de la Asunción, Tlaxcala (Tlaxcala)

While the motif of the five wounds had already been adopted in Europe as a symbol of the Franciscans, it became almost ubiquitous in the convents of the order in New Spain. As Christian Duverger has convincingly shown, it also allowed a reading from the perspective of pre-Hispanic pictography, thereby generating a semantics that—while not identical to the European iconography—nonetheless seemed comparable with it in certain respects. In visualizing the wounds, local sculptors in most instances used the

disk shape of the so-called *chalchihuite*, or jade pearl, which symbolized precious fluids, sacrificial blood in particular, while the rendering of fluent, dripping blood reflected pre-Columbian modes of depicting flowing liquids.<sup>7</sup> In this context, it is worth emphasizing that precisely through this symbolic-glyphic charging of the wounds, formulated in such a pointedly physical fashion, and the drastic rendering of the flowing blood, the New Spanish variant of the motif emphasizes physical vulnerability to an extreme degree. This further heightens the image's focus on the wounds, hence counteracting a tendency toward abstraction on the part of the motif through the fragmentation of the wounds.

At the same time the reduction to the central elements of similarity between Christ and the stigmatized Francis harbors a certain explosiveness, so to speak, for given the glyphic, reductive mode of depiction, it ultimately remains an open question exactly whose wounds are being visualized.



**Fig. 3.** Local sculptor, *Franciscan emblem*. Stone, 16<sup>th</sup> century. Installed above the entrance portal to the atrio, former Franciscan convent San Andrés, Calpan (Puebla)

Such a highlighting of the similarity between archetype and image (meaning Christ and St. Francis), one that comes close to suggesting actual identity, is performed as well by the sheer visual ubiquity of a motif adopted by a second Franciscan emblem in New Spain, namely that of the crossed arms of first Christ, and secondly Francis, which display the pierced palms of their hands (fig. 3). In the New Spanish context, the extremities of Christ and St. Francis, depicted as fragments, can be associated with highly similar pictorial formulae from the local visual cultures: A detail from the *Codex Laud* shows an arm—its protruding bone suggesting it was torn off—that has been interpreted by Escalante Gonzalbo as a sacrificial offering.<sup>8</sup> Many place glyphs, some still in use today, display arm segments as elements of the image composition, for example, the place glyphs for Zacualpan de Amilpas (Morelos) and Acolman (Estado de México).<sup>9</sup>



**Fig 4.** Local sculptor, *Franciscan emblem*. Relief on a massive stone block, 16th century. Mexico-City, Museo de sitio de Tlatelolco

A massive block of stone unearthed during archaeological excavations on the premises of the former, in the year 1536 consecrated *Colegio de la Santa Cruz de Santiago* in Tlatelolco (fig. 4) also displays the Franciscan motif of the crossed arms, framed by a Franciscan cord, with the wounds of the passion respectively the stigmata visible on the palms of the hands as deep gouges. Even in depictions of St. Francis whose positioning conceals the wounds from the viewer's eyes, as with the sculpted Francis-figure seen on the facade of the *capilla abierta* in Tlahuelilpan (Hidalgo) enlarged photographic details reveal that these are nonetheless present as sculptural hollows in the stone surfaces of the saint's palms; and it seems conceivable that originally, encrustations—perhaps pieces of jade—were set into these depressions.

Standing out in particular among the numerous depictions of the stigmatization found in the Franciscan convents is the one of the second *capilla posa* in the *atrio* of the monastery of Calpan (Puebla) (fig. 5).<sup>10</sup> The sculptural highlight of the chapel is a fully rounded, kneeling figure of St. Francis set at the corner of the recessed base of the cupola. The saint is oriented toward the cross that crowns the cupola; his hands, held before his upper body, suggest a depiction of the scene of La Verna. Interestingly, the acroteria-style extensions visible on the exit-side of the chapel contain elements in the form of cactus flowers; and the cacti thorns were used in the local context for the ritual perforation of the skin.<sup>11</sup> This fully three-dimensional visualization of the stigmatization-scene, that was relatively uncommon in the European context, evokes a striking physical presence; the saint's figure is not framed, there is no delimited image-space as in a painting, but instead—and despite its elevated positioning—it occupies the same spatial environment as the beholder, namely the *atrio* of the cloister complex.

But exactly how is this emphasis on the marked, wounded, violated corporeality in the depictions of St. Francis and his wounds—observable in so many examples—; how is this to be interpreted in the context of 16<sup>th</sup>-century New Spain?



**Fig. 5.** Local sculptor, *Stone-figure of Saint Francis*, 16th century. Second *capilla posa*, *atrio*, former Franciscan convent San Andrés, Calpan (Puebla)

There can be little doubt—as documented by a number of texts—that the Franciscan monks were familiar with the exceptional importance of body marking in Ibero-American cultures. Within the territory of the mission in New Spain, temporary body painting, tattoos, skin incisions, and scarifications played a central role in religious ritual, as did the ornamentation of the body through ear or nose rings or the so-called *bezotes*, what is a chin ornament.<sup>12</sup> In connection with the hypothesis, presented above, that the stigmata of a number of Francis-figures—but also of Christ-figures—originally contained incrustations, I would like to recall the pre-Hispanic tradition of slicing open and scarifying certain parts of the body to create small pockets of skin into which bits of jade, obsidian, or other precious stones were inserted.<sup>13</sup> For the most part, such techniques for adorning the body were reserved for members of the political and religious

elites. Just how deeply rooted such practices were in the local belief systems is suggested by the circumstance that certain divinities were depicted with specific colors and specific patterns, which the priests used in maintaining the respective cult. Found in the *Codex Florentinus*, composed under the aegis of Bernardino de Sahagún, as well as in the earlier *Primeros Memoriales* (an earlier version of this famous manuscript), are a number of models for face painting that consistently correspond to specific pre-Hispanic gods.<sup>14</sup> The mystical connection with a divinity through the display of its specific signs or symbols on the human body, is familiar as well from the practice of tattooing and body painting with so-called *sellos* and *pintaderas*, round and flat stamps used for the purpose of printing onto the body.<sup>15</sup> Against this background, it becomes understandable that the figure of St. Francis encountered quite fertile ground in New Spain.

The main thesis of this article, then, is that in New Spain, the iconography of the stigmatized St. Francis was perceived and understood as a body image so powerfully because there, it was embedded in a local image culture in which various body image-practices were still current. This observation points to an aspect that has been marginalized in European art history: body image techniques such as tattooing were used intensively by Christians as well, and had been important markers of Christian identity from early Christian times until at least the Middle Ages—and still are to some extent today, when we think of the tattoo studios of Coptic Christians in Jerusalem or in Egypt.<sup>16</sup> In European art history up to the present day, however, the body image of St. Francis has been interpreted and contextualized in a discursive tradition that has tended towards sublimation and transcendence, thereby leaving the body in its physical agency behind. The study of non-European art histories can hence also yield new insights into traditional fields of European art history. It can bring to light suppressed motifs of European image cultures, thereby engaging with so-called entangled histories of art.

Established recently in the disciplines of history and cultural studies was a methodological approach known as *entangled histories*, whose basic intention is to deconstruct the grand European, Western master narrative,

which assumes that—following Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria, “Europe and its ‘Other’” developed “independently of one another before the products of European progress were exported,” which means that “Europe is said [...] to have radically changed the world, without having been affected itself.”<sup>17</sup> In opposition to this, there is a growing awareness among scholars that all “regions of the world—including Europe—were not merely the points of departure for such outcomes, but instead themselves result” from such processes of entanglement.<sup>18</sup>

An art history that has been enriched by the perspectives of cultural studies, and which brings together the often till today institutionally segregated European and non-European histories of art in a contextualized way, regarding them as the products of transcultural exchange, also makes possible a reevaluation of the putatively all-too-familiar phenomena of European art history. For such an approach encourages us to consider aspects that have been excluded from the canon of traditional European art history.

Such a shift of perspective is relevant not just on the level of the historical objects, but also on the level of the discourses that shape our discipline. Accordingly, a confrontation with the histories of non-European art has the potential to refocus our attention again on repressed aspects of European art history. In this instance, it means asking whether these sculptural depictions of St. Francis with their emphases on the wounded body found in New Spain might somehow alter our view of the ‘European’ Francis; whether a confrontation with the New Spanish depictions of the 16<sup>th</sup> century might induce us to perceive the ‘European’ Francis from unfamiliar angles.

But why exactly is such a revision of our image of the figure of St. Francis in the context of European art history necessary in the first place?

Within the history of European-Western discourse, the fact that body images belonged to the earliest forms of artistic expression has led to classify them as archaic. Which is precisely why they have been regarded—and may still be regarded today—as emblematic of societies that used for a long time to be classified as ‘primitive’. Moreover body mages were regarded within modern societies—as formulated so radically by Adolf Loos in his famous

essay *Ornament and Crime*—even as typical of criminality,<sup>19</sup> in short: body images have been attributed to the ethnically and socially ‘Other.’<sup>20</sup>

But this means ignoring the fact that since antiquity, bodily marks have served as a crucial factor in the construction of identity within Christian societies: in the framework of a relationship with God that was characterized by humility, Christian believers declared themselves to be ‘slaves of the Lord.’ And during the era of the persecution of the early Christians, they were in fact stigmatized as religious renegades by means of bodily insignia. For this reason, they developed and practiced a tradition of self-marking, taking up the negative connotations of such practices that prevailed in the Greco-Roman context and revaluing them in positive terms,<sup>21</sup> bringing to life the concept of the stigmatized individual as a charismatic figure.<sup>22</sup> Crusaders and seafarers in particular displayed tattoos as signs of their inextinguishable affiliation with the Christian community, while in the Holy Land, pilgrims had symbols signifying their belief engraved on their bodies or under their skin. Jerusalem and Bethlehem, but also Loreto in Italy, were regarded as strongholds of pilgrim tattooing, with a motivic focus on depictions of the Cross, the Arma Christi, and the insignia of the Virgin.<sup>23</sup>

Till today, art-historical researchers have largely failed to integrate this in reality long-standing Christian tradition of purposefully deployed bodily markings into its investigations of the body imagery of the figure of St. Francis.

Hans Belting and Urban Küsters, who have in the German speaking context been preoccupied with representations of the stigmatized Francis,<sup>24</sup> elaborated their interpretations by extending figures of thought that had been developed earlier by medieval hagiographers. In doing so, they occupy a discursive context for which an understanding of the stigmata as a miracle engendered by inner religious powers is crucial. Required already in the context of the political instrumentalization by the order and the ecclesiastical canonization of the body image of St. Francis were processes of disembodiment and spiritualization. And since art-historical interpretations followed the paradoxical hagiographic traditions of understanding the stigmata, they have focused primarily on the oscillation between the facets of

the real-bodily and the metaphorical-miraculous image, rather than situating it in the context of the cultural history of Christian body markings. Furthermore, art-historical research has referred mainly to images, or more precisely to *paintings* of the stigmatized Francis, meaning: to images of a body image (in particular from Giotto's hand), and not to the stigmatized Francis as an image.

But as such a real body image, he was perceived with greater intensity when—as in the New Spain of the 16<sup>th</sup> century—fully three-dimensional, sculpted figures of St. Francis were positioned side-by-side with actual, real, living, human bodies carrying body markings. For such a side by side makes it clear that in the European context as well, the stigmatized Francis has to be understood in connection with widely disseminated practices of deliberate body marking, which are traceable all the way back to early Christianity, and which played an important role in popular piety—and this in spite of all of the discursive traditions concerning the mystification and allegorization of the stigmata to the level of a divine and supernatural miracle.

In closing, I would like to touch on an aspect that seems particularly relevant in the context of body “art”:<sup>25</sup> my preoccupation with the role of the stigmatized Francis formed part of my second book on transcultural processes of translation in the New Spanish missions of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>26</sup> Central for me was the question of whether and the degree to which images or picture acts (in German: ‘Bildakte’) were predestined to undermine or fracture thinking in dichotomous cultural structures. In this context, in fact, body images—as I would like to argue—represent a precedent. This is related to the fact that bodies per se figure as a liminal place, as they constitute an interface not just between nature and culture, but also between presence and representation, corporeality and symbolicity, inner and outer, subject and object, self and other, own and foreign. Body images disrupt binary orders because they are never simply given as such, but instead possess an intensely performative character, so that through the act of embodiment, the above-named parameters continually shift in relation to one another—and become displaced. And from this perspective, I wondered whether body images such as that of St. Francis could not be understood almost as a

symbolic concentration of the operations through which picture acts per se can be linked to processes of transcultural translation.

With an eye toward the stigmatization of St. Francis, Hans Belting argued that “for his part, Francis was a beholder, but one who became an image of that which he beheld.”<sup>27</sup> Taking up this argument, I would like to conclude by shifting to another dimension of the body image of St. Francis—but in a certain sense every body image includes these aspects of outer and inner image, in so far as, like also in the case of the *sellos* mentioned below, the outer image becomes in a process of incorporation, of embodiment an image of one’s own body or: of one’s own.

From my perspective, Belting here describes a quite fundamental mechanism of pictorial experience *in genere*, one that—according to my thesis—acquires special virulence in the context of intensified processes of transcultural negotiation. It would be possible to sharpen Belting’s formulation by saying that in every act of reception, strictly speaking, image viewing and ‘image-becoming’ are superimposed: every act of reception is realized as an “embodiment”<sup>28</sup> of an initially external image into the universe of my internal images. And the repertoire of my internal images that is enriched in this way will flow into all of my future experiences with images, tending to condition each of them, to a certain degree. Stated differently: for the observed image, the body of the beholding subject represents a second medial agency, and the viewing of every image is realized in the form of a complex interweaving of outer and inner factors. In this way, every picture act fluidizes dualistic structures, suspends them temporarily, and exposes them to a process of creative refiguration. The beholding subject and the perceived object are inscribed onto one another reciprocally, so that in the process of pictorial perception, experiences of self and of alterity proceed hand-in-hand, and the demarcation lines separating these poles lose their clear contours, albeit without being fully dissolved. The stigmatized Francis is in this sense a pictorial formula that also reflects upon the far-reaching consequences and implications of acts of reception, of picture acts, and which can hence be termed a dispositive of appropriation, or more precisely: a dispositive of the transformative dimensions of picture acts.

The erratic nature of images<sup>29</sup> is by no means exhausted in their capacity to travel between cultures. The images migrate, so to speak, into our bodies and through them, leading a will-of-the-wisp existence in the interspace of our bodies, within which they themselves are unavoidably transformed. In this sense as well, it becomes possible in the field of visual studies to encircle “moving bodies” and the “transformative power of body ‘art’” analytically.<sup>30</sup>

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## Endnotes

1. See Margit Kern, *Transkulturelle Imaginationen des Opfers in der Frühen Neuzeit. Übersetzungsprozesse zwischen Mexiko und Europa* (Berlin and Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2013), especially 100–115.

2. A good overview of the various versions of the legend is provided by Achim Wesjohann, *Mendikantische Gründungserzählungen im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert. Mythen als Element institutioneller Eigengeschichtsschreibung der mittelalterlichen Franziskaner, Dominikaner und Augustiner-Eremiten* (Berlin: LIT Verlag Dr. W. Hopf, 2012), 234–249.
3. John McAndrew, *The Open-Air Churches of Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 333. See also: Cecilia Gutiérrez Arriola, “El convento de Nuestra Señora de la Asunción de Tlaxcala en el siglo XVI. Notas sobre un dibujo de Diego Muñoz Camargo,” *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* 19, no. 71 (1997): 16.
4. This topic is discussed in detail in the author’s habilitation thesis *Bilder der Alterität – Alterität der Bilder. Zum transkulturellen Potenzial von Bildern in Übersetzungsprozessen zwischen Neuspanien und Europa im 16. Jahrhundert* (manuscript, University of Hamburg 2021, in preparation for publication in the publishing house De Gruyter).
5. Raúl Flores Guerrero, *Las capillas posas de México* (Mexico-City: Ediciones Mexicanas, 1951), 51.
6. See for the motif of the five wounds Ekkart Sauser, “Wunden Christi,” *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, vol. 4, 1972: columns 540–542.
7. See Christian Duverger, *Agua y fuego. Arte sacro indígena de México en el siglo XVI* (Mexico-City: Landucci Editores, 2003), 132–134.
8. See Pablo Escalante Gonzalbo, “Manos y pies en Mesoamérica. Segmentos y contextos,” *Manos y pies* (= *Archeología Mexicana* 12, no. 71 (2005)): 25, e.g. the figure on page 25, below right, with the caption „Brazo cortado como ofrenda“.
9. Other examples of such arm fragments can be found, for example, in the *Codex Durán* as part of the place glyph of Tlaxcala, see Diego Durán, *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España y Islas de la Tierra Firme*, introduction by José Rubén Romero Galván and Rosa Camelo (Madrid: Banco Santander, 1990–1991 [1867]), vol. 1, 316.
10. See for the *capillas posas* of the convent *San Andrés* in Calpan (Puebla): Flores Guerrero, *capillas posas*, 37–43, for the second *capilla posa* 39–41; Raúl Flores Guerrero, *Las capillas posas de Calpan y Huejotzingo* (Puebla: Secretaría de Cultura, Gobierno del Estado de Puebla, 2002), 9–19.
11. See Hanns J. Prem, *Die Azteken. Geschichte, Kultur, Religion* (Munich: Beck, 2003), 33 & 57.
12. See for the various local traditions of body images: Enrique Vela, *Decoración corporal prehispánica. Catálogo visual* (= *Arqueología mexicana*, special issue 37) (Mexico-City: Raíces, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2010).
13. See for this procedure called *escarificación* Vela, *Decoración corporal*, 62.
14. See in Vela, *Decoración corporal*, the passage with the subtitle *Pintura facial*, 34–43; a very revealing compilation of illustrations showing these patterns of face painting associated with certain deities, taken from the *Primeros Memoriales* and the *Florentine Codex*, can be found in this publication on page 37.
15. See on the tradition of tattooing Vela, *Decoración corporal*, 56–59, and for the so-called *sellos*: 46–55.
16. The fact that this tradition is still cultivated today by Coptic Christians in Egypt or Jerusalem, for example, is also documented by recent reports: Adelaide Mena, “*Heiliges Tattoo! Eine 700 Jahre alte christliche Tradition blüht in Jerusalem*,” CNA German, broadcast July 10, 2017, accessed May 14, 2019, <https://de.catholicnewsagency.com/story/heiliges-tattoo-eine-700-jahre-alte-christliche-tradition-bluht-in-jerusalem-2085>.
17. Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria, „Einleitung: Geteilte Geschichten – Europa in einer postkolonialen Welt,“ in *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus. Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*, ed. Sebastian Conrad, Shalini Randeria, and Regina Römhild (Frankfurt on the Main and New York: Campus, 2013 [2002]), 35, 47.
18. Conrad and Randeria, *Einleitung*, 2013 [2002], 18.

19. Adolf Loos, "Ornament und Verbrechen [1908]," in: *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Adolf Opel (Vienna: Lesethek, 2010), 364.
20. Alfred Gell analyzed tattoos as characteristics for the "class Other" as well as for the "ethnic Other"; see: Alfred Gell, *Wrapping in Images. Tattooing in Polynesia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 8, 10.
21. See for the Christian tradition of body markings: Jane Caplan, "Introduction," in *Written on the Body. The Tattoo in European and American History*, ed. Jane Caplan (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), xvi–xix; Stephan Oettermann, *Zeichen auf der Haut. Die Geschichte der Tätowierung in Europa* (Frankfurt on the Main: Syndikat, 1979), especially chapter 1.2 "Unter Christenmenschen," 12–20.
22. For the relationship of stigma and charisma see: Wolfgang Lipp, *Stigma und Charisma. Über soziales Grenzverhalten* (Berlin: Reimer, 1985).
23. See Caplan, *Introduction*, xvii. In this introduction on page xviii can be found an illustration of the motifs from the place of pilgrimage in Loreto, Italy; Oettermann (Oettermann, *Geschichte der Tätowierung*, 1979) shows on page 16, fig. 2, an illustration of the Jerusalem tattoos of the Prussian Otto von Gröben from 1694.
24. Hans Belting, "Franziskus. Der Körper als Bild," in *Bild und Körper im Mittelalter*, ed. Kristin Marek, Raphaële Preisinger, and Marius Rimmele (Munich: Fink, 2006), 21–36; Urban Küsters, "Ebenbild und Spur. Der gezeichnete Körper des Hl. Franziskus," in *Schrift und Bild und Körper*, ed. Ulrike Landfester (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2002), 43–66. My intention is not questioning the importance of these studies, both are absolutely worth reading and very compelling. However, the body image of St. Francis in the present article is analyzed from a quite different perspective.
25. This formulation refers to the title of panel 7 of the CIHA SÃO PAULO 2022 – *Moving bodies. The transformative power of body "art"*, led by Margit Kern and Marco Pasqualini—in the context of which the paper on which this article is based was given.
26. See the indication in footnote 4.
27. Belting, *Franziskus*, 24.
28. Belting, *Franziskus*, 30.
29. The adjective 'erratic' is borrowed from Édouard Glissant's *Philosophie de la relation* and the cultural philosophy of what he called "errance" contained therein. See Édouard Glissant, *Philosophie de la relation: poésie en étendue* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), e.g. 61–63.
30. The phrases in quotation marks are taken from the abstract of panel 7 of the CIHA SÃO PAULO 2022 - Motion Migrations written by Margit Kern.

# Neither Female, nor Male. Image, Performance and Crossdressing in Early 20th-Century Argentina

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## **ABSTRACT**

During the nineteenth century and a great part of the twentieth, fashion was a clear marker of gender, as well as a device for disciplining the body. Being dressed according to biological sex, occupation and social class was imperative for the rising bourgeoisie, who saw extreme danger in transgressing any of these norms.

This paper analyses some of these occasions and the conflicts raised by public opinion when crossdressers and “serious” actresses filled the central theaters thanks to their drag shows. Likewise, liminal characters on the edge of the law made crossdressing a way of life, allowing them to travel, hide and intervene from the margins.

Moreover, it focuses on the images of these crossdressers, paying particular attention to the styles and poses used to shape their appearance. My main hypothesis sustains that the identity of these “other” genders was effective precisely because it understood and mimicked “correct” female or male identities that, in turn, were based on a masquerade. Even at the beginning of the twentieth century, the public persona of “proper” men and women rested on stereotypical and theatrical forms, in which preestablished poses obliterated the personality, psychology and particular ways of each human being.

## **KEYWORDS**

Crossdressing; Argentina; Buenos Aires; Gender; Identities.

### Introduction

During the nineteenth century and a great part of the twentieth century, fashion was a clear marker of gender as well as a device to discipline the body. Being dressed according to biological sex, occupation and social class was imperative for the rising bourgeoisie who saw an extreme danger in transgressing any of these norms.

These habits spread throughout the western world and became hegemonic in Argentinian cities. Thanks to wealth concentration and European-style civility, Argentine urban dwellers adopted the then-dominant patterns when it came to shaping and assessing appearance.



**Fig. 1.** Mario Zavattaro, “Those who have a lot of fun. Cheap costumes”, *Caras y Caretas*, February 12, 1910.

Building and maintaining sex differences through clothing was key in a period in which sex, experienced as a natural quality of human beings, served to ensure social order reproduction and to discipline those defying gender norms.<sup>1</sup> Studying fashion in a context of rigid and unequal separation between men and women and a strict “heterosexual imperative” set by cultural norms and internalized by individuals<sup>2</sup> is also examining the spaces for resistance and trickery.

Clothing gender norms were defied not only by performing artists, but also by people from the so-called “underworld”, an even, on specific occasions such as carnival, by “decent” men and women, using crossdressing as an artistic, political or even utilitarian element.

Men and women who did not comply with clothing parameters according to gender sometimes gained ephemeral, sometimes long-lasting fame. However, it is important to differentiate crossdressing as a stage performance from that which became a permanent way of life.

Understanding the different contexts of crossdressing is critical to capture its implications and significance. Using clothes that did not correspond to the “natural” gender of the wearer, which tricked the canon, gave place for performances where agency was materialized not only on a theatre stage but also outside the norms of bourgeois morality. The disruption of gender common sense (men dresses like men, women dresses like women) enabled to escape the codes of decorum and move between margins different from those set by heteronormative sexuality. Travesties and crossdressers acted not only in show business but also in environments considered marginal or criminal. They were labeled as freaks, prototypes of what might happen to people if dressing norms were defied.

The same society who felt strongly drawn to crossdressing in music and theatre performances cruelly persecuted crossdressers outside the stage in the belief that “public gender presentation” gives an account of “private sexual practices”.<sup>3</sup> The spectacular interest for crossdressers could rapidly shift to pathologizing condemnation, as, in the legal and medical narrative, this behavior was labeled perverse.

However, the uneasiness about the perversion or deviation of crossdressers on stage was scarcely reflected in the reviews. On the contrary, what abounded was the fascination exerted by the majesty of the performance to fool even the most trained eye. It was the costumes, the makeup, and the poses that tricked the audience and “made brass pass for gold”, as it was commonly said back then.

Never has been clothing a mere set of items covering the body, and even less so in the nineteenth century. Garments conveyed well-rooted meanings and values oriented to maintaining the status quo in relation to the spheres and roles assigned to men and women. This binary construction which pretended to be hegemonic did not succeed, nevertheless, in burying the great fascination exerted by those who were capable of playing with gender lines and pushing the limits to the extreme.

The opera and theater divas—such as the French actress Sarah Bernhardt (1844-1923), who made three tours in Argentina between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth—used to play *in travesti* roles, that is, assuming a male appearance and attire. For example, in 1905, at the Opera theater, Bernhardt recreated *L'Aiglon*, a verse drama by Edmond Rostand, in which she played the role of the son of Napoleon I wearing men’s clothes on stage, as she had done in *Hamlet*. Her awesome versatility allowed her, being then sixty-one years old, to adapt well to the frock coat, the jabot and the boots required by the adolescent character. She claimed to prefer male roles, as they provide greater intellectual challenges. In regards to her adaptability, the reviews emphasized that her art was “polyphonic” and that her genius had no sex.<sup>4</sup>

Women crossdressing in academic drama was a phenomenon that became popular in the nineteenth century. In general, women played youthful, passionate or weak male characters, that is, those attributed with a certain ambiguity in relation to their sexual or emotional maturity.<sup>5</sup> They also gave proof of the dramatic and physical capacity of the performer, capable of overcoming the limitations of body and gender, thereby reaffirming their great professional competence. Yet, we should not disregard the erotic charge induced by wearing the attire of the “other” for these transvestite actresses.

Crossdressing allowed the spectrum of sexual identities to broaden, and body parts such as legs and buttocks, usually hidden or disguised by female costumes, to be exhibited.<sup>6</sup>



**Fig. 2.** Paul Boyer, *L'Aiglon*. Sarah Bernhardt, Paris, 1900, postcard.

As Christie Davies argues, theater—understood as the home of costumes and a space where no protagonist has a single essence but a disparate number of masks, attires and makeups—was a tolerant refuge for stigmatized people and for persons with dubious identities,<sup>7</sup> the perfect place to fulfill the clothing fantasies, whether in plays where performers donned the clothes of the “opposite” sex to act certain roles or in shows in which crossdressing was the one and only attraction.

Buenos Aires, like many other capital cities in the world, participated in the turn-of-the-century fascination for those characters who could be male and female at the same time. Crossdressing shows proliferated in theaters such as the Casino, the Scala, the San Martín and the Politeama, many times with the antecedent of having been successfully received by foreign audiences. Many articles in the press recounted the achievements of the crossdressers who were filling the theaters in Europe and the United States.

The enchantment induced by these actors and actresses who were capable of transforming into another character in just seconds thanks to a change in the tone of voice, the pose and, of course, the attire was a recurring phenomenon in the Argentinean theatre scene.

Italian Leopoldo Fregoli (1867-1934) was the most renowned transvestite performer to cross the world and arrive to the country, although not the only one. Fregoli was considered the creator of the genre, his name was a synonym for crossdressing and it was used as an adjective (Fregolian) or equivalent to describe this type of entertainment.

Between 1895 and the 1920s, Fregoli performed extensive tours across Argentina. His shows, with suggestive names such as *Chameleonic*, *Fregoloid* or *Whirlwind* seemed never to tire the audience. His overwhelming success at the box office led a critic to write with sarcasm that thanks to transformism Fregoli had “transform” himself into a millionaire.<sup>8</sup> However, as part of the extended homosexual apprehension in the period, the same sources made it clear that he was not “a ladylike type, that neither in his public nor in his intimate performance could he suggest suspicions of equivocal sex to the malicious gossip”.<sup>9</sup>

His favorite public was, apparently, the female audience. The hilarity was probably due to women feeling identified with the complex artifice on which their own gender affirmation rested. In his shows he constantly mutated from one character to another of the opposite gender, evoking the most diverse social types and geographies: A Chinese monk, a clown, a thief, the Spanish singer “La bella Freghero”, or “Lola Fuller”, the serpentine dancer. Quick costume changes were key to his performances, as well as the voice

modulations, generally displayed in musical acts that conclusively ratified the repertoire of the transformation.

Something similar would happen to his successor, the also Italian Fatima Miris (1882-1954) who visited the country in five extensive *tournées* between 1905 and the 1930s. On the first occasion, she received a “very flattering welcome” being introduced as a little “Fregolina” who emulated the prototype of crossdressing by presenting a program that included an imitation of Loïe Fuller's serpentine dance and parodies of different military types.<sup>10</sup>

Like her predecessor, Fatima Miris stood out for her amazingly quick costume changes, but above all for her vocal skills that extended from the register of a baritone to that of a soprano, as well as for her gifts of ventriloquist that allowed her to interpret dialogues between several characters simultaneously.

Fatima, who had had her hair cut like a man, defined herself as a “male born female”.<sup>11</sup> However, the reviews on crossdressing performances did not reflect such anxieties. On the contrary, the artists were described neither as effeminate men nor as manly women, and beyond their performing costumes which crossed gender boundaries, they were unquestionably heterosexual.

In the multiple studio photographs, Fatima, the crossdressing diva, posed with her eminently womanly face and mischievous smile, smoking enigmatically or with a cigarette at the corner of her mouth, combining her feminine features with the tailcoat, the waistcoat and the bow or tie around her neck, thus establishing the style parameters of the drag kings that would populate the movies over the twentieth century.



**Fig. 3.** Alberto Rabbi, *Fatima Miris*, Bologna, 1912, photography, Juan Aletta de Sylvas donation, Museo Histórico Provincial de Rosario "Dr. Julio Marc."

Imitation gestures are elusive. Their ultimate meaning escapes us, warns Roger N. Lancaster in his attempt to approach contemporary transvestite practices from an ethnographic perspective.<sup>12</sup> That is to say, what was complex, exciting, and attractive about these transformations was that they did not achieve a uniform effect. They did not homologate the features of women and men, but rather combined them in unique ways that were specific to each individual who performed them.

The identity construction of this gender “other” (than man and woman) was effective precisely because it knew and imitated the “correct” feminine or masculine identities. These imitations or substitutes revealed that their “authentic” versions, that is, those in which genitality and gender coincided, were also, following Judith Butler, products of intentional and performative acts.<sup>13</sup> Even at the beginning of the twentieth century, seeing oneself as a man or a woman rested in stereotypical ways of dressing and behaving. The pre-patterned poses blocked the personality, the psychology, and the particular ways of each individual. The verisimilitude achieved by crossdressing performers called into question the naturalness of the process of gender affirmation.

In general, men embodying female characters accentuated a fixed and superficial image of femininity in which they emphasized, as recurring features, the narrow waist, the prominent bust, the recline of the head as a sign of modesty, and the soft and expressive positioning of the hands. It was not the modern woman who had begun to simplify her hairstyle and show straighter silhouettes, the woman imitated by crossdressers. On the contrary, the parameter was set by the pulpy matrons, with prominent necklines and voluminous hairdos; it was a kind of hyperbolized emulation of their object of inspiration. It is interesting to note how this typology, which would continue to model the practice of drag queens into the twentieth century, was already defined in these initial years.

I think that the main attraction of these shows lay in the possibility of combining feminine and masculine attributes in the same body, without one gender ending up subsuming the other. For example, in the photographs of Fregoli from 1895, the attire and body posture connoted as feminine

coexisted with a face with rough features, unmistakably masculine. Although he resorted to masks and wigs, the performer was known for not wearing makeup and showing himself in bare face. His transvestism did not seek an absolute feminine identity, but rather, he played with the disruptive effect of the opposites coexisting in the same body.



**Fig. 4.** Antoni Esplugas, *Whole body portrait of Leopoldo Fregoli characterized as a lady of high society*, Barcelona, ca. 1895, Generalitat de Catalunya. Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya, ANC-1-402-N-7132

It might not be surprising that for a society that wanted to keep clothing differences between the genders so categorically, crossdressing became a way of having fun, but also a catalyst for surviving these rigid norms through humor and entertainment. However, the consequences of transgression had a much more dangerous and disruptive potential if it was practiced outside that fictional space contained between the stage and the seats of a theater.

Dressing up as the opposite sex could have functioned as trickery, a stratagem, a disguise in order to obtain a better job, become someone else, perform a misdeed, or just go unnoticed. Or perhaps it was the other way around. The need and desire to identify with the clothes of the “opposite sex” led crossdressers to seek other ways of life, to pursue more or less decorous occupations not considered appropriate to their biological sex, and to find survival paths. Like every social practice, transvestism bears “multiple nuances” and complex intentions among which class status is not a minor component.<sup>14</sup> What happened to those women and men, generally from popular sectors, who wore in their public life clothes that were not expected for their sex? At what point did these acts of dressing and making up cease to be acceptable pantomimes to become “morbid” pantomimes?

Liminal individuals made transvestism a way of life to hide in or intervene from the margins, self-proclaiming themselves actresses or singers of variety theatre and thus adopting the performance-art characteristic implicit in crossdressing. In general, they were immigrants who acted at the edge of legality and the entertainment market. They became the subject of abundant literature, especially from the medical and legal fields but also, they were spectacularized by mass-circulation newspapers and magazines which, through criticism, also turned them visible.<sup>15</sup>

The pathologizing readings associated inadequacies of dressing habits with illness and crime. Categorizing these behaviors as perversion made up for the crisis of the “matrix of intelligibility”, in terms of Butler, that establishes an inevitable coherence between sex, desire, sexual practice and gender,<sup>16</sup> being clothing one of the most ostensible vehicles of the latter. Therefore, items such as a corset, a skirt, a blouse, a pair of pants could

convey shifting meanings, could mutate from a synecdoche for femininity or masculinity into perversion depending on who was wearing them. Over the span of time examined here, as well as for most of the twentieth century, there was not much space for nuances. It was not possible to “visualize a body outside of a heterocentric sexual representation system”.<sup>17</sup> In short, the garments came to ratify or pervert the identity given by the sexual organs under them.

Precisely, Doctor Francisco de Veyga, a federal police investigator and legal medicine teacher at the University of Buenos Aires, associated criminal types with their clothing strategies. Thus, crossdressing, vice and illegal behavior became equivalent. In a context of strong positivism, scientific publications such as the *Archives of Criminology, Legal Medicine and Psychiatry* made use of photography as a control device for the pathologized subject.

It is interesting to analyze the photos of the “sexual inverts” that appeared in the specialized publications as well as in the mass press in confrontation with theatre crossdressing and to examine carefully the clothing strategies revealed in these images. In the cases of Manón, Aída and Luis D. (alias La Bella Otero), they were portrayed in studio photographs far distant from the typical front and side view pictures of mug shots. Instead, these transvestites, who, according to the press, dressed as women in every possible occasion, surrounded by furniture and vegetation, emulated the poses and decorum also performed by bourgeois girls. Unlike the theatre transvestites, who parodied gestures and emphasized female sensuality based on features such as necklines, bare arms and visible calves, these crossdressers seek to homologate with the natural modesty and the usual postures of society ladies by having their portrait taken at the best photographic studios.

They were demure girls, who did not show too much of their bodies and sought to reaffirm their appearance as “honest women.” The hands were hidden or covered with gloves as a sign of modesty, the boas gave glamor and modernity to the outfits, and the face was mediated with the veil, a key device

for social distancing which provided an aura of mystery to the ladies of the period.



**Fig. 5.** “Sexual invert imitating the honest woman [Aída]”, *Archivos de criminología, medicina legal y psiquiatría*, January, 1902: 369.

For example, Aída posed with a dress that covered her up to the neck, shaping a feminine silhouette that, like that of any fellow lady, relied on the pressure exerted by the corset and the volume of the petticoats. The gloves, the ostensive dress tail, a subtle floral decoration in her updo hair and a lace mantilla resting on one of the chairs in the studio, reinforced the idea of a young bride, homologating the usual wedding portrait.<sup>48</sup> Other figures, such as Aurora, a 30-year-old “Paraguayan man,” “a hairdresser as a spare job,” accused of robbery and injuries, were assimilated into sensualized matrons. Aurora’s construction of gender was a complex, and “even the most basic underclothes [...] chemise, stockings, drawers, were female. Corset and petticoat, corset-cover and garters were worn as well as every other piece that made up the garment of the sex pretended to embody”.<sup>49</sup> No matter how surprising this verification was for the criminologist; we know that “real”

femininity also rested on the effectiveness of all these shaping devices, so it is not strange that the alleged impostors used them too for the same purposes.

In addition to their convincing appearance, the chronicles also emphasized the distinctive womanly traits that were manifested in these girls: the adoption of female manners and voice, the autosuggestion, the use of melodious and romantic names, and their joyful devotion to “feminine” activities such as music, flowers, sewing, and poetry.

On the other hand, the practices of women who wore outfits of men were justified by jobs that implied physical strength and virile qualities. Such had been the case of Berta Veiss, who “always wearing a male suit” had managed to work as a “coachman, a stable hand, a valet”, to the “complete satisfaction of her employers”.<sup>20</sup> Or the situation of young María López who, arriving from Spain and with the aim of dedicating herself to agriculture, “thought that by wearing a male attire, it would be easier for her to get a job and achieve a better pay.”<sup>21</sup>

It is difficult to corroborate whether María had opted for men’s clothing to find a better position or, on the contrary, had decided to carry out agricultural tasks as appropriate to her desire to cross-dress. We know that she was arrested by a police officer and taken to the police station to give a statement, to be later released because there was no reason for her arrest. Although at the beginning of the twentieth century the practice of transvestism was not legally penalized, it could be used in a discretionary way for the detention and even for the deportation of foreign men and women, before and after the formal sanction of the law in 1902.

Several women suffered arrest and imprisonment for wearing the “wrong” attire; such as a three-piece suit, a pair of boots and a scarf around the neck, basing their choice on the possibility of moving more freely in public space or in the job market. Such was the case of the Russian Lucía Sagoruicó who was arrested when she was trying to take a train to Junín. In her defense, she claimed that she resorted to wearing pants to get out of misery: Lucía was a good-looking young woman and dressing like a peon with shirt, pants and hat, which she had bought for five pesos, worked as armor to preserve her from male harassment. “Dressed as a man, she could be free”

stated an article of the time. In this regard, the same article said that in the second decade of the century, there were more than a thousand women in Buenos Aires who wore a “male suit” daily, as well as three thousand men who engaged in a robbery using female attire.<sup>22</sup>

The press approved the rectification of behavior for these “women in pants” or “women dressed as men”, while it could not help but show fascination for the transforming power of clothing. The photos portrayed them in their masculine poses and outfits but also in the female attires imposed against their will but necessary to be admitted in jail. In other words, the “right” outfit made of skirt and apron was imposed as an act of coercion and state violence.

In some cases, the simulation was total and absolute. For example, Dafne Vaccari, transvestite under the name Arturo de Aragón, had moved to Buenos Aires from her native Italy as a sailor, in line with the history of immigration and social advancement, moving through various jobs. From being a farmworker and a bricklayer, Arturo became a debt collector for the Moltedi Company, where he stood out for his capacity and honesty. His prosperity was accompanied with an improvement in his way of dressing. Apparently, crossdressing was less risky than dressing the clothes of self-perceived identity undecorously: “the work attire was replaced by that of a young man who likes to dress well; the former peon has now turned into an elegant man who enjoys the comforts of better economic status”. The story culminated in the narration of how Arturo, fallen from grace, had to accept a position in the police force to end his days wearing the suit “that corresponds to her sex.”<sup>23</sup> It is interesting to note how even in those who were not engaged in criminal activity, the crime was conveyed by resisting biological identity and by “usurping” through clothing an identity that was not their own.

The cases analyzed here prove the central power that gender parameters of clothing had in the culture of the beginning of the twentieth century, patterns that remain in force even today. Dresses and skirts, in most of the Western world, continue to be outfits that represent the feminine, surviving longer than the association between pants and masculinity. Furthermore, the protocols and uniforms of certain formal or institutional

events continue to recommend women to wear a skirt. In critical times such as the current ones, of revision and deconstruction of gender identities and assumptions, we still assume as logical that each one dresses according to their biological sex. However, the history of the first years of the century shows us that the categories of gender were not as stable as advertising, education and bourgeois morality tried to represent them.

Even in contexts of strong determination and will of control, some individuals managed to trick gender parameters by performing on the stage of a theatre or walking on the city streets. And for the case of those who did not dare to do so, the actresses, actors and crossdressers stood as attractive reservoirs of freedom.

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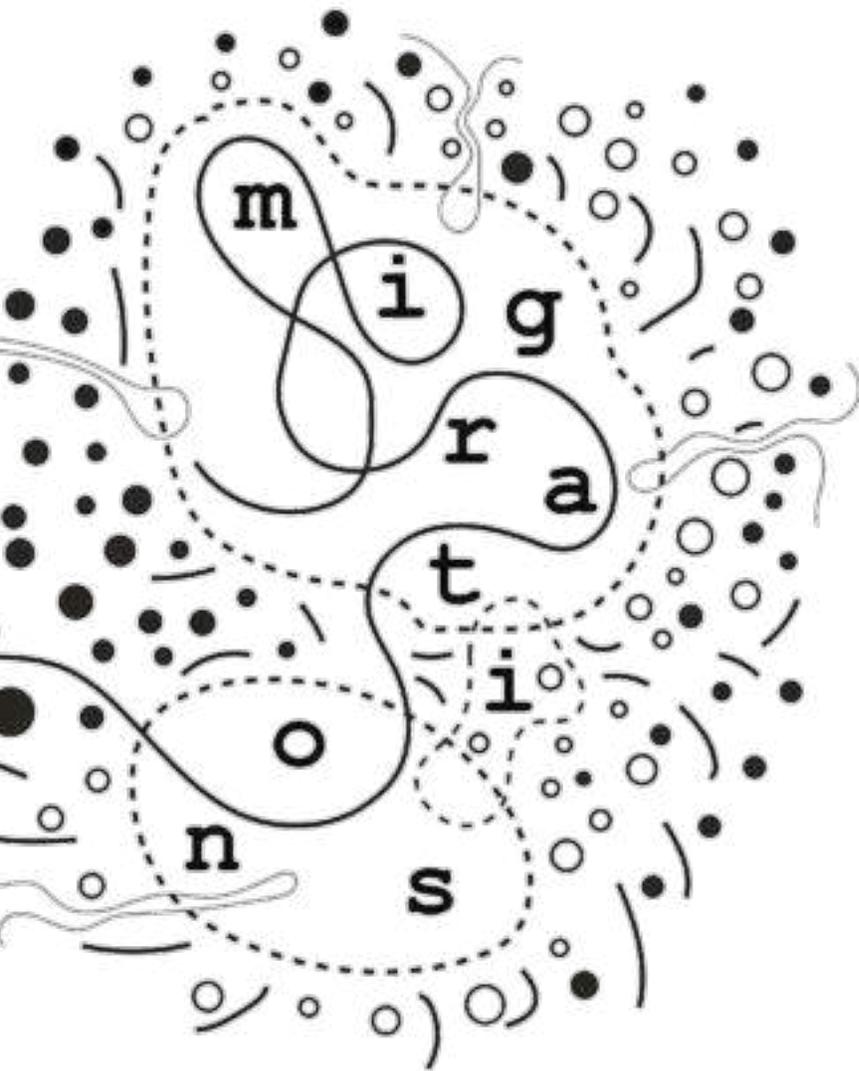
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Note: *This paper develops some ideas extensively addressed in my recently published book: Bien vestidos. Una historia visual de la moda en Buenos Aires (1870-1914) (Buenos Aires, Ampersand, 2021).*

# Questions of Restitution

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## Session 8



## Session 8

# Questions of Restitution: Repair, Negotiations and Discussions on Expropriated Objects

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Restitution often involves questions of identity, memory and patrimony placed in relation to the “other”. The loss of cultural patrimony, plundered from one country and taken to another, has brought about heated debates across the globe. Central to these discussions are issues about decolonizing museums and the formulation of ethical standards for collecting objects. Further to this, is the adoption of legal frameworks and culturally sensitive models in handling cultural objects. Therefore, this session focused on the large range of ideas and practices surrounding the restitution of works of art as well as human remains, often violently taken from their original sites to other locations during periods of authoritarian regimes, wars, or colonial occupations. At the crux of the restitution debate is President Emmanuel Macron’s 2017 declaration at Ouagadougou to retribute African artworks in French collections to Africa. A follow-up to this declaration is the Sarr-Savoy report which recommended that artifacts that were taken away without consent should be returned. The report has generated several responses and reactions as well as negotiations and initiatives towards the repatriation of art and human remains to several African countries, from Post-Nazi-Germany to Greece, Egypt, Australia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Cambodia, Namibia, and Tanzanian.

This session seeks to develop a wide debate on central aspects of the theory and practice of restitution across the world through the analysis of specific examples: What is the relationship between restitution and

power? How legitimate is the claim for restitution? What models and formats exist that can be applied in forging new relationships through restitution? Where lies the power of decision? In what ways can national laws be circumvented or changed? How plausible is the concept of shared ownership of objects? What does this concept mean? How can loans, instead of restitution, contribute to identity formation in view of the roles of myth and mythology in identity formation? Which role can technology play in this process? What is the relevance of provenance research to this debate? Does it hamper or aid the restitution process?

One of the main characteristics of the contemporary discussion on the restitution of artworks is the location of its epicenter in European and North American institutions, understandably so, since the artifacts are located there. This session adopts a more inclusive structure by inviting students, scholars, academics, museum professionals, artists from diverse regions and backgrounds, as well as people from local communities to take part in the debate.

# Ours Once More: The Polarized Discourses of the Parthenon Marbles in Contemporary Greece

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## **ABSTRACT**

Removed from the Athenian Acropolis by Lord Elgin in the 1800s and sold to the British Museum in 1816, the 5th century BC Parthenon marble sculptures have been at the center of Greece's cultural policy since the country's independence (1830). The official demand for the Marbles' repatriation was first placed in 1982 by Melina Merkouri, the then Greek Minister of Culture, who challenged the sculptures' ownership and elevated the international profile of the campaign. Over the years, the appeal for the return of the Marbles resurged on several occasions.

The present paper seeks to examine the polarized discourses which the demand for the restitution of the Marbles has evoked in today's Greece. Starting from the recent financial crisis in Greece and the subsequent European Union bailout (2015) to the current neoliberal Greek government (2019), who sought to link the restitution of the Marbles with the familiar discourse of the "uninterrupted continuity of the Greek nation." It tries to elaborate on the ways polarized discourses seek to instrumentalize the demand for the Marbles' restitution. On a second level, it seeks to register these conflicting discourses within the broader discussion about the ethical issues surrounding restitution and decolonizing culture.

## **KEYWORDS**

Parthenon Marbles; Restitution; Reunification; Greek Crisis; Decolonization.

### **Introduction**

The description that follows is an image that is common to people traveling to and from Eleftherios Venizelos International Airport – the main airport of Athens and the largest in Greece: A few years ago, voting booths were installed in the main departures area of the airport, asking departing visitors to give their opinion on whether or not the Parthenon Sculptures should be returned from the British Museum. The idea behind this action is that as the tourists passing through the airport will have visited both the Acropolis and the Acropolis Museum, this would allow them to make a reasonably informed judgment about whether the Acropolis Museum would be the most suitable location for the display of the sculptures.

In my view, the image of the voting booths summarizes the central position that the restitution of the Parthenon marbles holds in Greek cultural life. Indeed, the marbles restitution saga is the most common cultural discourse in contemporary Greece. It has almost been identified with the country's official cultural policy for decades.

The focus of this present paper is not so much on the restitution claim itself, but the multiplicity of discourses that the claim unfolds in Greece today. What is more, I would like to shed light on the recent developments that the restitution claim has created in the light of new historical research and the bicentenary celebration of the Greek War of Independence against the Ottoman Empire that in 1830 led to the establishment of the first independent Greek nation-state. I wish to make clear that I am not a scholar of restitution policies. Rather, my research on the topic was instigated by research tendencies that address Greece, its heritage and cultural production within the framework of postcolonial studies.

### **History of the removal**

By the term Parthenon Marbles, also known as the 'Elgin Marbles' although that term, instituted in 1816, is currently deprecated by the international community, we denote a group of sculptures depicting mainly mythological scenes from the fifth century BC Temple of Parthenon, held in the collection of the British Museum.

More specifically, the Museum holds half of the original frieze, fifteen metopes and seventeen pedimental fragments. Among the Museum's collections are also included a caryatid and a column from the Erechtheion on the Acropolis. A small number of fragments from the Parthenon sculptures can also be found in several other museums such as the Louvre and museums in Denmark, Austria and Italy.<sup>1</sup>

The story of the marbles is quite well-known: they were removed from the Parthenon in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Athens was still part of the Ottoman Empire, by Thomas Bruce, 7<sup>th</sup> Lord Elgin, British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire between 1799 and 1803. According to Elgin's own account, he asked the permission of the Sublime Porte to have artists measure, sketch, and make molds of important pieces of sculpture and architectural detail. The rationale for the marbles' removal was a later idea arising out of the concern he had about potential damage being done to important architectural artworks of Greece.

According to the British Museum officials, this permit was issued, as Lord Elgin claimed. However, the only written evidence today is that of an Italian translation of an "official letter" initially in possession of William St. Clair, a Cambridge historian, later acquired by the British Museum. According to it, Elgin is authorized "to take away any pieces of stone with old inscriptions or figures."<sup>2</sup>

Contemporary research casts doubt on the permit's authenticity. Turkish researchers Prof. Dr. Fatma Zeynep Aygen and Orhan Sakin have researched the Ottoman Empire's official records, proving that there was no official document issued by the Sultan that granted Lord Elgin permission to remove the sculptures from the Acropolis monument. The document the British Museum has in its archives is, in reality, a later Italian translation of an administrative letter from the Kaimakam of Constantinople to the authorities of Athens. According to the researchers, it is not a permit that allows the Parthenon to be stripped bare but a permit for the excavation of volumes of earth around the Parthenon.<sup>3</sup>

Elgin's collection remained private for the next 10 years. A public outcry arose over the removal of the sculptures, and Elgin was denounced for

vandalism and dishonesty by several writers of the era, including Lord Byron. A Parliamentary committee was subsequently established to examine the possibility of gaining the collection for Britain. Hence in 1816 the entire collection passed from Elgin to the British Museum for the sum of £35,000, to repay part of Lord Elgin's large personal debt.<sup>4</sup>

### **Repatriation as cultural nationalism discourse**

The first Greek claims for the repatriation of the Parthenon Marbles were already being made from the earliest days of the newly established independent Greek nation-state in 1830. The official national discourse argued for the uninterrupted continuity of the Greek nation, so the aim was to confirm modern Greece's direct lineage with classical Greece.<sup>5</sup>

Although the issue appeared in the texts of many writers in the intervening years, their restitution only became a matter of the country's official cultural policy in 1981. This was when the Minister of Culture and former actress Melina Merkouri made the restitution her personal crusade, and since then, her legacy has been intricately linked with the issue. Her efforts resulted in the first official request to the British government in 1982, after a decision by the Greek Ministerial Council, and the next year Greece submitted a special request before UNESCO.<sup>6</sup>

Back in the 1980s the discourse of the Greek claim was based on arguments focusing on the 'Greek identity of the Marbles', 'pride', and 'artistic excellence'. This discourse of cultural nationalism, which according to Juliette van Krieken-Pieters stresses the relationship between cultural objects and national heritage<sup>7</sup>, sought to raise patriotic feelings among Greeks, confirming thus the uninterrupted continuity of the Greek nation, and hence legitimizing their present as rightful inheritors of a glorious past.

Even though the state's official discourse has changed since then, several voices, even official ones, are still heard insisting on Greece's "moral right" over the marbles. It is not by chance that ever since the 1980s, the restitution of the Parthenon marbles has remained a central issue in the political discourse of Greece, often emerging as one of the so-called "National

Issues”. All political parties, from the ultra-nationalist to the Communist seem to cherish the claim for the return of the sculptures.<sup>8</sup>

### **Reunification discourse**

In the mid-1990s the official Hellenic government discourse changed, placing less emphasis on the argument for repatriation based on heritage “ownership” and moved towards highlighting the argument for the monument’s reunification, making a claim for the proper aesthetic appreciation of the entire monument. Academia-led and highlighting aesthetics, the reunification thesis privileges monumentality and the universal significance of the Marbles, considering the Parthenon not solely as a major Greek monument, but a landmark of World Cultural Heritage, whose symbolic capital urges its treatment in its entirety.<sup>9</sup> Despite being the official discourse, as Kalliopi Fouseki revealed in her research, the reunification argument does not necessarily manifest the views of the broader Greek public. Instead, the repatriation claim is emotionally grounded, summarizing the pursuit of the Greek people for social justice and identity reaffirmation in the global arena.<sup>10</sup>

The debate for the monument’s reunification continued steadily, as the country was preparing for the 2004 Athens Olympic Games, part of which was the institution of the New Acropolis Museum. Designed by Bernard Tschumi and built between 2001 and 2009, the new Museum summarized Greece’s 1990s decade of modernization, which ended with the collapse of Greek economy and, in 2008, resulted in the harsh crisis that has been tormenting the country ever since.

Described as a “new arc for the nation”, in the words of the then Greek prime minister, K. Karamanlis<sup>11</sup> the Acropolis Museum was expected to fulfil a very specific agenda, as it was planned to a great extent as a counter-argument against the British Museum’s claim that the Greeks had no suitable museum for the Parthenon marbles even if they ever returned to Athens. Moreover, it was to fulfill the main objective of unifying the artifacts and the rock of the Acropolis, with the three sculptural groups (the pediments, the frieze and the metopes) to be exhibited in visual contact with

the monument.<sup>12</sup> The reunification claim is clearly reflected in the exhibition design of the New Acropolis Museum. The visitor is called to engage with the notion of void and absence, with empty spaces left to indicate the missing pieces.<sup>13</sup>

### **The British Museum as a universal museum argument**

The British Museum's reaction to the reunification campaign was the development of a novel discourse which established its existence as "a universal museum". A notion that was propagated by the 2003 "Declaration on the Importance and Value of Universal Museums", which was signed by the directors of eighteen of the world's most renowned museums.<sup>14</sup>

In reality this declaration is said to have been a request to support the British Museum, which at the time, according to its director Neil MacGregor, was experiencing grave alarm at how Greece was applying political pressure over the Marbles.<sup>15</sup> By introducing the concept of the universal museum, Neil MacGregor alluded to the institution's authority to represent all cultures. In his argument, museums do so, not from any singular perspective, but on behalf of the entire world,<sup>16</sup> allowing different stories to be told. In reality, as researchers such as Eleni Stefanou have pointed out that this argument is actually based on nineteenth-century British narratives and colonial ideas about the universalism of culture.<sup>17</sup>

The official discourse of the British Museum seems not to have changed since. The Museum's official website has dedicated a special webpage to hosting the Trustee's statement on the Parthenon sculptures, which seems to reproduce the institution's mission to tell the story of cultural achievement throughout the world, with the Parthenon sculptures being a significant part of that story.<sup>18</sup> And, what's more, Lord Elgin is still presented as acting "with the full knowledge and permission of the legal authorities of the day in both Athens and London".<sup>19</sup>

### **The discourse of debt**

Over the last decade, another discourse on the repatriation of the marbles has been fostered, which echoes the recent financial crisis in Greece and the

subsequent European Union bailout (2015). In this framework, the repatriation claim juxtaposes the debt to ancient ancestors with the Greek financial debt.<sup>20</sup> As Yannis Hamilakis states, the Parthenon Marbles are thus elevated into a symbol of plundering, which is not limited to that which Greece and its antiquities underwent from the Europeans in the 19th century, but also of the hardships it has been recently undergoing amidst the economic crisis, privatization, unemployment, etc.<sup>21</sup>

Several activist events have raised the Parthenon marbles as a symbol of looting. Hence, in 2015, the Jubilee Debt Campaign, that is the international campaign against debt in collaboration with the social justice international organization, Global Justice Now, organized a protest of solidarity at the Duveen Hall of the British Museum.

Obviously alluding to the imminent referendum of the 5th of July 2015, in which the Greeks would be asked whether or not they acceded to another series of austerity measures driven by EU, the activists raised a banner that read OXI No – No More Looting – Support Greece. Earlier in 2015, another protest in this same hall was organized by a team of Greek archaeologists and students along with members of the Coalition of Resistance and the Greek Solidarity Campaign with a banner that stated “Cannot pay. Will not pay. Solidarity with Greece.”<sup>22</sup>

Having the concept of debt at their core, researchers highlight the reversal of roles that these activist events sought: while Greece is a modern European borrower, Europe has to repay its huge cultural debt to Greece, from which it borrowed its classical values.<sup>23</sup> These events, contextualized as decolonial practices, are informed by theories that treated Greece in the light of a dominant crypto-colonial discourse, which came to inform the way historians interpret the country’s past. Although never a colony, Greece is among what anthropologist Michael Herzfeld calls the “buffer zones between the colonized lands and those as yet untamed”, regions that acquired their political independence at the expense of massive economic dependence.<sup>24</sup>

### **The loan issue and its polarized discourses**

Although over the years the appeal for the return of the Marbles has resurged on several occasions, in September 2019 the issue acquired new publicity as Kyriakos Mitsotakis, Greece's newly elected Prime Minister in an interview published in *The Observer* proposed the "loan" of the Parthenon Marbles to Greece on the occasion of the bicentenary celebration of the Greek War of Independence in 2021.

According to the Prime Minister, the timing was excellent for such a development, as this loan would be "a first step" for the final return of the Parthenon Sculptures. In return, the Prime Minister proposed to organize an archeological exhibition at the British Museum with very important objects which would be traveling abroad for the first time. For him, this mobility was justified by the "the concept of [promoting] our common European culture."<sup>25</sup>

Despite the fact that the Greek Prime Minister clarified that the demand for the final return of the Marbles remained intact, the Prime Minister's initiative was met with harsh criticism, as the leftist main Opposition party declared him naive for allowing the British Museum to appear as the rightful owner of the Parthenon sculptures.<sup>26</sup>

For her part the spokeswoman from the British Museum declared the institution's intention to consider any loan request, on the basis that Athens would acknowledge the preconditions placed upon any loan. One of which would be the acceptance of the museum's ultimate ownership of the Marbles.<sup>27</sup>

The Parthenon issue came back into the news in October 2021, when the Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property (ICPRCP) of UNESCO issued a recommendation urging the British Museum to revisit the Greek request regarding the restitution of the Parthenon Marbles. This recommendation was actually the result of an address by the Greek Minister of Culture, Lina Mendoni, to UNESCO's Committee, instigated by the revelation that water was leaking into the British Museum's Greek galleries. The Minister raised concerns over the safety of the sculptures, despite the British Museum's later statement of reassurance.<sup>28</sup>

Despite the recommendation, the two parties have not moved from their initial positions. Thus, for the British any loan or any other treatment of the collection would be a matter for the trustees of the British Museum, not the UK government. The Greek party on other hand, in the words of the Greek Minister argued that the issue “is of an intergovernmental nature.” Plus, she seems to repeat the cultural nationalist discourse of the 1980s stating that “Greece has a valid and legal claim to demand the return of the sculptures to their place of birth.”<sup>29</sup>

The loan issue came again to the fore in early 2022. A fragment of the Parthenon temple, on loan from the Antonino Salinas Regional Archaeological Museum of Palermo, was displayed at the Parthenon Gallery of the Acropolis Museum. The "Fagan fragment" as it is commonly known was welcomed as “the first piece of the sculptures of the Parthenon to return to Greece from a foreign museum.”<sup>30</sup> In reality, the fragment from Sicily has not returned, but it is part of a loan agreement which offers the opportunity to the Acropolis Museum to display it for four years, a loan period which can be renewed for another four years. Nor is it the first time it is shown in Greece, as it was exhibited in 2008 and for two years at the Acropolis Museum before being returned to Palermo when the loan period expired.<sup>31</sup> Nor is it true that it is the first piece of the Parthenon marbles to be returned to Greece. The first piece to be returned was the fragment from the collection of the Heidelberg University Museum in 2006, depicting a figure holding an olive branch. It has been displayed at the Acropolis Museum since its establishment in 2008.<sup>32</sup>

One might wonder about the incorrect treatment of the monument’s restitution claim. However, the reply is more than obvious to the cultural workers living and working in Greece. Following neoliberal policies in the administration of cultural heritage, the most obvious example of which is the detachment of the Early Byzantine antiquities found during the excavations of the Venizelos metro station in Thessaloniki, a monumental ensemble whose destruction has caused the issuing of a Heritage Alert from the ICOMOS<sup>33</sup>, and the proposed separation of the country’s major archaeological museums from the state archaeological service<sup>34</sup>, the Greek government has

sought a story that would highlight the government's commitment to culture. Indeed, the Parthenon sculptures restitution case appears to be a priority the Mitsotakis government has chosen to rely on from the very first months of its coming to power. The Fagan fragment success story restores the Prime Minister's and the entire government's damaged image, which according to their view sets a precedent for Parthenon Marbles to return. The announcements were harshly criticized by the Opposition and the Association of Greek Archaeologists, who consider that an eventual loan request from the British Museum will undermine the campaign for the marbles permanent return.<sup>35</sup>

Despite the internal criticism the loan option has recently started to gather international supporters, such as an editorial opinion published in January 2022 in the London *Times*. According to the editorial board, the agreement made between Italy and Greece looks like a solution to the unresolved issue.<sup>36</sup> The *Times'* change of perspective was welcomed by the Greek press as a step towards the monument's reunification.<sup>37</sup>

### **Against white supremacy discourse**

According to several voices, among which was that of Elizabeth Harlowe writing in *Hyperallergic* in a piece published October 2021, the different treatment of the Parthenon marbles when compared to other cases of plundered patrimony such as the Benin Bronzes or the Maqdala treasures, is obviously based on the powerful myth of "Western civilization." Both the Greek government and the British Museum are considered by the article "as self-proclaimed inheritors of the classical tradition," that is, engaging in an act of interfamilial bullying. Considering the Parthenon marbles a white restitution case, she argues that the sculptures should not be returned before others which involved real violence, such as the case of the Benin Bronzes.<sup>38</sup>

Harlowe is not alone in her stance. Similar positions are also expressed by classicist and activist Lylaah Bhalerao, who argued that the current approach of the Greek campaign is integrated within the white supremacy discourse. In her argument Bhalerao questions how the display at the Acropolis Museum is differentiating itself from the aestheticized

approach of the Duveen Galleries, which ignores the decorative character of the Parthenon marbles as architectural sculptures, and emphasizes their whiteness and uniqueness. Acknowledging that there is no easy solution, she concludes that returning the Parthenon marbles will not be an act of decolonization, in the sense that it will not address the restitution issue outside the white supremacy discourse. Instead, she proposes a critical display to be initiated at the British Museum, which will center around the conditions of the sculptures' removal, and thus contribute to the restitution conversation.<sup>39</sup>

In a follow up article that also appeared in *Hyperallergic* Rafael Cardoso is sympathetic towards Marlowe's overall view that museums should be working towards implementing decolonization practices. However, he disagrees with her position that the Parthenon marbles should not be restituted before others, adding that her argument fails when it "creates a false equivalence between Greece and Britain." Cardoso continues by arguing that the plundering of the sculptures was not "a wrong done by White people to White people." And that one could not blame the Greeks for northern Europeans' appropriation of their ancient culture.<sup>40</sup>

Cardoso's approach places the sculptures' plundering within the broader framework of decolonization. In his views, he seems to be aware of research tendencies that during the last decades have been addressing the ideological implications of the establishment of the modern Greek state within the framework of postcolonial studies. From the same perspective Stathis Gourgouris has explored the ways in which, during the 18th century, Europe discovered in the myth of ancient Greece the paradigm for the organization of modern nation-states. Their founding narratives were based on an ancient Greek ideal, legitimizing thus their genealogies. Therefore, the Philhellenic movement that flourished in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries essentially embodied the need to create a Greek state that would connect the nations of Western Europe with classical antiquity. Informed by Edward Said's postcolonial thinking, Gourgouris' work treats the Western imaginary representations of Hellas, that is the myth of classical Greece, as a form of orientalism.<sup>41</sup> In this framework, the Western fantasy of the ancient Greek

ideal and the role it played in the formation processes of the new nation-state functioned as a cover for the power relations that developed within the colonialism of the Great Powers in the Orient.

**To conclude:**

**integrating the Greek claim in the decolonizing discourse**

To conclude, in this paper I sought to discuss the multiple, and often contradictory discourses that have developed in today's Greece on the issue of the Parthenon marbles restitution. Cultural nationalism gave way to the reunification discourse, which is still the dominant in the official repatriation campaign. At the same time, several voices contextualize the issue within the practices of decolonization.

Hence, I agree with Rafael Cardoso when he reminds his readers about the historical framework of the plundering. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Greeks were subject to domination by a foreign power. And in contradiction to the idealized art representations of the country and its inhabitants, racial classification theories considered modern Greeks an inferior and degenerate race.

This recent *Hyperallergic* debate, in reality, reveals the flawed part of the Greek argument in ethical terms. Seeking to differentiate its position from other decolonizing restitution claims, the Greek campaign highlights the reunification argument of a World Heritage monument. And to have a chance, the Greek part seems to be willing to acknowledge the ownership of the British Museum over them. In reality, the repatriation claim is instrumentalized by the current Greek government for political reasons with temporary benefits. Moreover, by accepting the loan alternative, the campaign of the Greek government itself is integrated within the crypto-colonial framework in which the official Greek policies have been developed over the last two centuries of the country's life as an independent state.

In my view, the right option would have been the opposite: acknowledge the Parthenon plundering as an act of colonial violence, which has continued, disguised as economic dependency on the Western powers,

throughout the two centuries of existence of the modern Greek state. It is only by acting within the framework of decolonial practices that the campaign will give justice to the restitution claim itself, and it will have the chance for its eventual resolution.

### **Post-scriptum (March 2023)**

The article was written in January 2022, with few additions being made in April of the same year. Since then, a series of events have taken place advancing the case of the restitution of the Parthenon sculptures.

In May 2022, the Antonio Salinas Regional Museum and the Italian government have decided to return the “Fagan fragment” permanently, an act which was hailed as the first in a step toward bringing back the other sculptures of the Parthenon from the British Museum.

In early 2023, negotiations between the Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, and George Osborne, Chair of the Trustees of the British Museum, began in secret. According to Osborne, efforts are being made to devise a “hybrid” deal regarding the restitution of the Parthenon Marbles, in what he hopes will be a mutually beneficial arrangement for both sides. In reality, and as the 1963 British Museum Act currently prohibits a full return of the artefacts, the Chairman proposes a series of loans with a swap of other antiquities, such as the frescoes of Santorini, dating back to 1700 BCE, which will guarantee the return of the Parthenon marbles. At the same time, the Greek government keeps insisting that no acknowledgement of the British Museum's legal ownership will be made, sticking to the official position of the country towards the Parthenon sculptures. While the negotiations appear to reach a dead-end, the Greek Prime Minister expressed his hopes that the repatriation of the marbles is a target that could be achieved after the elections that are to take place this Spring.

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# A 21st-Century Perspective on International Cultural Exchange

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## **ABSTRACT**

It may be time to ask whether international museum exchange initiatives could update earlier utopian ideals on which museums were founded, i.e., institutional collections in service of regional or national public experience and education, to a purpose that serves audiences beyond museums' physical boundaries.

Could we consider a place for artifact stewardship as part of a global museum enterprise built on a foundation of collection-sharing through institutional partnerships? Could museum collections evolve into a universal library, with each museum contributing to a meta-collection, a new ideal where artifacts circulate to benefit a global public?

The concept of ownership currently being challenged by tribal descendants and nation-states has been a catalyst to move the dialogue from "ownership" to "stewardship." An international museum enterprise built on sharing and mutual trust holds the promise of museums becoming more responsible and engaged institutional citizens of the world.

## **KEYWORDS**

Cultural exchange; Repatriation; Museums; Collection Storage; Partnerships

This paper might appear to counter the restitution theme of this session, but that's not what I intend.

I'm offering what some might consider an unrealizable dream given the survivalist and tactical nature that defines much of museum practice today. It's a dream that comes close to collective stewardship of the world's cultural heritage. I offer it not as an alternative to present-day repatriation and restitution initiatives but as an addition to those same ambitions.

My proposal — this dream of mine, which I offer from the perspective of a former museum professional — is based on the view that, on the one hand, repatriation alone will never permanently and completely alter the collecting identity of long-established museums around the world; and, on the other, that objects kept in storage, particularly in the largest museums in the West, will be increasingly harder to justify politically, socially and economically as the century goes on. I believe what some would call "retentionist hoarding", in the guise of protection and scholarly responsibility will be more complex and harder to justify in future decades.

Most museum observers would accept that, despite the energy of recent discourse regarding the repatriation and restitution of cultural property, the return of the vast majority of pillaged objects now residing in public collections other than those of their country of origin will never fully readdress the number of objects taken in times past. We accept this despite our greater collective consciousness that the Enlightenment not only provided the rationalist taxonomic structure and aesthetic philosophy for creating museums but also spawned the intellectual foundation for the legitimization of empire and its corresponding notions of racial superiority. As we know, these factors, along with nineteenth-century nationalist ambitions, resulted in the justifications for institutional collecting that so many today are focused on addressing. But repatriation alone will not deplete the enormous collection depth of western museums that were established in the past. Therefore, I maintain that we need other means of better utilizing the vast quantity of stored collections for audiences in the later 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond. Where do we put the 'orphaned' objects, decontextualized as they long have been, split from their location of origin now that history has

upended our knowledge of that location and that original location is lost forever. Returns alone can't address the enormous number of works involved, especially when considering the practical and legal barriers that will continue to remain.

We have seen that recent repatriation initiatives undertaken by European countries in the multi-national aftermath of the French government's Sarr-Savoy report are currently few despite dominating media attention, which seems to run in parallel to questions that capture public interest. For example, "who will next give up their Benin bronze to the new museum being designed by a star architect in Benin City?" Or, "will all the Parthenon marbles move to a museum closer to its original context in Athens?". Even though we can expect that these high-profile acts of repatriation will be realized at some future time, others will very likely continue to be numerically modest concerning the number of objects taken over the previous two centuries.

I ask, therefore, whether it's time to initiate energetic programs representing a more collaborative form of stewardship, display, and learning, with collections, exhibited and variously interpreted at different sites around the globe through expanded, long-term international partnerships. I ask, too, whether international museum exchange initiatives could update ideals of public experience, education and learning to a purpose that goes beyond traditional notions of ownership and ones that can also serve audiences beyond a museum's physical boundaries. Could we consider a place for artifact stewardship in the global museum enterprise? One that is built on foundations of sharing through such partnerships; looking at museum collections as almost a kind of universal library, with each institution contributing to a meta-collection; a new ideal where artifacts circulate for the benefit of a global public.

Such initiatives, even if only some are realized, would result in greater access to the vast number of works hidden in the storage facilities of our larger museums, taking them from the invisible to the visible, recontextualizing and reinterpreting them for new audiences, as these programs make a further contribution to social and humanistic discourse. It

would also bring institutions and their staffs closer together over jointly held values of care and interpretation of historical objects for learning as well as experience.

It's a program of collection exchange that would be a significant addition to acts of repatriation and restitution. More importantly, it's a program that recognizes that a growing public in origin countries will want museum experiences involving objects other than ones representing their own national heritage, as the appetite and curiosity for works of art from many cultures grows. Such partnership programs could be decades long, involving many objects. They could be exchanges accompanied by the possibility of near-permanent ties between institutions, a talisman for cultural contact and understanding, as these objects move across borders. Some might fear that the resulting exchanges would bring only the mediocre up from storage, but such a view overlooks the potential of curatorial imagination and administrative initiative when programmatic creativity is directed at scholarly interest linked to public benefit.

The storage of collections represents a major cost for arts institutions, a conundrum given that many museums see access to their publicly held collections as a special responsibility. Despite professional efforts ranging from open storage schemes to regional branches for some national museums, the vast majority of the millions of works in museum storage — from those in the West that house so-called “encyclopedic” collections to those of national museums and archeological sites in origin countries — remain, for the most part, off view. They are available by special appointment and not easily accessible to the general public.

While I believe this dream can be achieved in future decades through ambitious institutional leadership, numerous factors keep such a goal from being realized in the near term and on a large scale. In starting to list them, I do it not as a deterrent for moving forward but as a challenge to the profession and to those who believe in the values underpinning the vision. Immunity from seizure agreements and insufficiently funded national indemnity schemes to assure lenders of the safety of artifacts are currently significant barriers to more accessible exchange, along with current policies

of many cultural ministries in countries where objects have the status of national patrimony that too often limit the length of loans to foreign institutions. Thus, a considerable number of objects, often archaeological objects, remain little seen as more and more are excavated to join them. In addition, the offers of loans of potentially repatriated objects can be looked on skeptically by many in origin countries fearing the perception of defeat in a repatriation claim by accepting such a loan.

There are also internal museum operational issues that are a deterrent. Museum professionals would certainly proclaim an interest in sharing collections if asked. Still, institutions are, by nature, conservative organizations whose preservation mission is supported by the attitudes and professional training of curators and conservators. While the profession has been able to transfer objects with care far more successfully in recent years than in the past, there's a reluctance to move art and artifacts from a museum gallery or an institutional storage space to the uncertainty of damage at an exhibition location that one does not fully control. It's often easier to say "no" to exchange opportunities when asked.

Many larger museums also see themselves as study centers for research with collections available and accessible to scholars who visit their destination. Open storage has been an institutional answer to accessibility, a taxonomic if not excitingly curated opportunity for display that unfortunately harks back to the "cabinet of curiosity" exhibition form. And to many professionals, the even more popular idea of a fully realized, digitally accessible collection as a virtual means of sharing also passes as a substitute for exchange in spite of the fact that all those associated with museums accept that the digitized object is no substitute for the experience and power of the real, the foundation of the museum experience. And why lend, it is thought by some, conscious as they are that the largest museums in the West's mega-cities attract an increasing number of visitors from around the world to their museum sites?

Partnerships are also hard, especially when institutions are uneven in their resources and have different value systems based on history, mission, economic realities, and cultural traditions. It's a challenge to reconcile the

different perspectives of potential museum partners when institutions are at different stages of development in terms of conservation, security, curatorial expertise, and financial support. There's also skepticism of schemes that attempt to be "global," superseding the prioritization of fostering regional identity in a period when works of art and other forms of material culture are regularly linked to national and ethnic pride. And, for some, there's also an obstacle in the attempt to form a partnership between nationally centered art and archeology collections common in museums in origin countries and the international collections of the so-called "encyclopedic" museums of the West — albeit for others this challenge could catalyze an imaginative partnership program.

One could cite parenthetically here that the notion of the museum as "Encyclopedia" has been and continues to be challenged in new museum buildings being realized around that world. Taxonomic sequencing in these newly formed institutions is being shed as professionals curate with alternative, often thematic goals reflecting current intellectual engagements as well as audience interest. Most curators and directors not engaged in new museum expansion programs, like the Los Angeles County Museum, wish they had an opportunity of rethinking their architecture and exhibition spaces to encourage the more innovative curatorial ambitions of our time that younger staff crave, installations that can also more effectively attract the interests of younger audiences

Indeed, we are well familiar with the current pressures encouraging museums to rethink their interpretive programs and other historical practices at this time of social change and political unrest. At the same time, we have to recognize one of the most significant barriers to international partnerships, that is, the transactionally centered museum culture of the recent past, focused as it has been on institutional growth or survival through the development of ever-expanding sources of income. This direction in a museum's value system has come to see collections as a special kind of capital, a source for operating revenue or an extension of an institution's "brand" rather than cultural assets whose essential purpose is public experience, learning and knowledge. This reality is not only evident in

examples like the Louvre Abu Dhabi or the growing number of satellites of western museums recently being realized in China. The fees generated by exhibitions, both large and small, represent the “commodification of culture” values that are driving many institutions.

“Art for money” is indeed one form of exchange, but who can “play to play” remains an issue for many museums around the world, including those in South Asia, Africa or South America, or smaller museums in any country. This “uneven playing field” regarding financial resources is heightened by other factors of unevenness as one examines museums internationally. When an institution is at an earlier stage of growth in terms of conservation, security, curatorial sophistication and expertise (not only when they’re funded more modestly), one can ask whether such an institution could ever join in a global partnership.

However, unevenness of resources and the difficulty of institutional and country to country partnerships will change as the world’s economies rebalance in the future. We see evidence of this in the new institutions being formed in Africa and India. These asymmetries of today should not be seen as long-term barriers but as current opportunities. They allow us to learn both from start-up partnerships and from the reconception of existing programs at certain of the largest institutions.

For all these reasons, museum professionals should not be stifled by the seeming impossibility of current administrative and diplomatic hurdles. Such a dream can only be realized incrementally, one program at a time, driven by entrepreneurial individuals leading specific institutions and professionals willing to draft partnership programs supported by governing bodies. Initially, they are likely to be funded beyond existing museum budgets, including private individuals who believe in the vision. It’s through practice, not through theoretical, ideological posturing, that real change can evolve. Trial ventures resulting in successful outcomes are the only way to address existing obstacles. The wisdom of partnerships begun and practiced in the near term will prove increasingly far-sighted in the longer term, as currently disparate institutional resources and internal cultures re-align over time.

The vast museum collection storages of unseen objects will be increasingly difficult to justify and to sustain economically, politically and socially. Governing bodies, as well as the public, will begin to take greater notice. Furthermore, as the years go on, the “what’s in it for me” question that emanates from parties currently coming to the table for potential partnership discussions could and should include the benefit of professional cooperation and stronger programmatic impact as staffs work together and the broader public enjoys the benefits of such initiatives. Recognizing monetization in exchange as simply one form of benefit, but not the only form, will result in more meaningful, less transaction centered interactions in the future, contributing to a flattening of the playing field among museums. In this process, staff and audience will become part of a larger world, exciting the public in new ways with benefits both direct and indirect.

The museum sector that exists today is the result of more than 200 years of history, one that has evolved by adapting its founding ideals to ever-changing public attitudes and policies, civic and national priorities, economic and aesthetic philosophies. I suggest that ownership claims currently being challenged by tribal descendants and nation-states in the form of repatriation and restitution claims can exist alongside and, simultaneously, be a catalyst in moving museum discourse from “ownership” to “stewardship” through the promise of international partnerships built on sharing and mutual trust. Museums must think creatively now as they face decades of service in the future. This goal, even if only partly realized, would result in more responsible institutions as they expand the publics they serve, both near and far.

# Repatriating Histories. The Subaltern Voices of Museum Objects

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## **ABSTRACT**

Neil MacGregor's BBC Radio 4 program (and subsequent book) *A History of the World in 100 Objects* (2010) was a resounding international success. The argument, however, had its flaws. Nearly ten years after the radio program was broadcast, it is time to return to its narrative, particularly to the formerly subaltern nations it left out. Where are the stories of the objects as seen by people who once used them? In what ways do colonial collecting practices inform the knowledge about an object? How can new object biographies be incorporated into museums display? Do they have the power to support calls for repatriation?

This paper introduces ideas that originated in a 2019 workshop in Kingston, Jamaica, to include new object histories largely written by participants of the 'Global South'. Its ultimate goal is to address broader questions concerning art historical methods and museums' role in tomorrow's multicultural societies. It works under the premise that an object's original function and later (colonial) appropriation are integral parts of its biography. Knowledge forms were rarely stable across different regions, borders, and periods; it is exactly in processes of motion, transit, and transmission that knowledge forms and contents were defined and put to work. In other words, one object can have 100 histories of 100 worlds.

## **KEYWORDS**

Museums; Heritage; Decolonization; Repatriation; Colonialism.

### Introduction

Why hold a workshop on the British Museum in Jamaica? — one of the administrators at work asked, shaking his head in disbelief. The reputation of Jamaica as a tropical paradise is so ingrained that it does not immediately register as an ideal meeting venue to launch a project on colonial collecting for many people in Britain. The images that spring to their minds are those of beaches and reggae music. The fact that the broader public might not be aware that Jamaica is a former colony of the British Empire says plenty about Britain's approach to its colonial past. Nor might people who visit the British Museum be aware that it was in Jamaica where Sir Hans Sloane compiled the kernel of London's British Museum and Natural History Museum collection in the eighteenth century. Or that the transatlantic slave trade provided the infrastructure that allowed Sloane and his European contemporaries to build their collections, supplying specimens for Sloane and others.<sup>1</sup>

Those were the traces we were looking for. We — that is, a growing international and diverse network of researchers, curators, activists, artists, and heritage stakeholders from now more than fifteen countries, mainly from the 'Global South' — initially met at the University of West Indies (UWI Mona) campus in Kingston, in 2019. The campus was formerly a plantation site and graveyard for enslaved people. We experienced the site as multi-layered, inextricably, and perennially linked to colonial trauma and violence. During the meeting, we engaged with heritage professionals and explored new avenues for developing stories about museum objects with each other. How many stories can one object contain?<sup>2</sup>

By shifting the geographical focus to a former British colony and choosing Kingston as a venue to reflect on the British Museum's collection, my hope, as the organizer, was to find new pathways and avenues to these troubled histories in both a metaphorical but also a physical and material sense. Where are the stories of museum objects presented as seen by people who once used them? Where is indigenous knowledge presented; who is at the centre of museum narratives, and who is on their margins? How is knowledge about museum objects informed by colonial collecting practices; and how is this context presented in museums today? How can formerly

excluded voices be empowered to tell their own histories beyond these frameworks? How can such new object biographies be incorporated in museum display, and do they have the power to support calls for repatriation? If objects are not returned to their countries of origin, how can their malleable stories be ‘returned’ to the museum in a sustainable but porous way?

The workshop grew into a collaborative project, the approach of which I will discuss in the following sections of this paper. After providing some context, I will reflect on new methods such a project could potentially yield, particularly concerning object biographies. I will close with an outlook to the future, and reflect on the relationship between objects and humans, a thread that will be persistent throughout this paper. In doing so, I will look into the practicalities of carrying out such a project, including geopolitical challenges and visa regimes.

### **Context**

In Europe’s museums, empire persists and proliferates in the present through material representations and celebrations of the past. Colonial exploration is still rendered mainly as a triumphalist and heroic narrative, leaving little room for alternative interpretation. Museums, however, have a responsibility. The objects they contain play a crucial role in producing concepts of ethnicity, gender, class, and racial identity. They impact how audiences perceive not just artifacts in public life, but history itself.

What if important aspects of history are eradicated? What if these legacies persist in ongoing global injustice and do not just lie in the past? What if nations and communities desperately want some objects to be returned? In light of the repatriation debate, the ways in which objects are currently contextualized in many museums warrant urgent intervention. Our discussion is naturally embedded in recent debates surrounding, for example, France’s plans for the repatriation of colonial objects as announced by President Emmanuel Macron. There has also been increased pressure on museums such as Berlin’s new and problematic Humboldt Forum, a

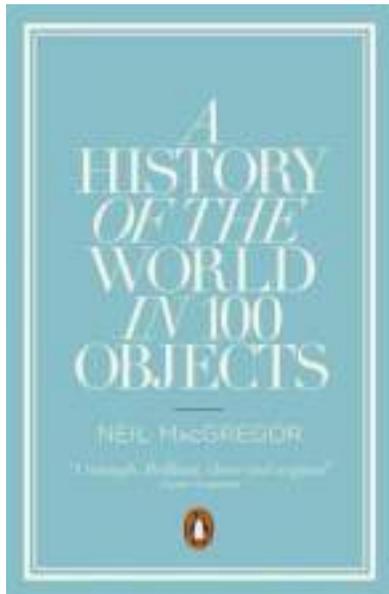
reconstruction of the imperial Berlin Palace in the heart of the city, which now also houses colonial collections.



**Fig. 1.** Humboldt Forum Creator: Alexander Schippel  
Copyright: © 2020 by Alexander Schippel

With several curators on board, including some directly involved in projects at the British Museum and the Humboldt Forum, we hope that our project can also advance conversations about repatriation. In other words, we are inside the museum but also outside of it.

Our starting point was Neil MacGregor’s successful program on BBC Radio 4 and the subsequent book “A History of the World in 100 Objects” (Fig. 2); at the time, he was the director of the British Museum.<sup>3</sup>



**Fig. 2.** *A History of the World in 100 Objects* book cover, by Neil MacGregor

Both were released in 2010. Neil MacGregor’s approach impacted future museum projects as he became one of the founding directors of the above-mentioned institution, the Humboldt Forum. The radio program reached new audiences with the ambition to provide a global outlook and to present history through the lens of 100 objects. Yet the argument had its flaws: the program was seen by some as a prime example of exclusion. Colonialism had ultimately produced not just inequalities of power but also a distorted view of history. The program was silent about the controversy raging over repatriating artefacts, almost completely ignoring the provenance of objects. Instead, it reinstated the idea of a ‘view from nowhere’ and everywhere at the same time. It presented the museum as a place to see the world, yet without reflecting on how the institution itself obtained and reframed the objects to create its own seemingly universal narrative.<sup>4</sup>

Nearly ten years after the program’s release, we return to the subaltern voices it had left out. But unlike the museum objects now in London, we also ‘returned’ to Kingston as an original collection site to make the point that one object contains “100 histories of 100 worlds”. This has resulted in a publication project with a digital website (Fig. 3) created by our editor Benjamina Efua Dadzie.



**Fig. 3.** *100 Histories of 100 Worlds in 1 Object* website

The music that opens all our podcasts is played by the Ghanaian Akan band Kwan Pa. They were interviewed by Benjamina Efua Dadzie to show that famous British Museum objects like the Akan drum (Fig. 4) are not only symbols of slavery but also live on today.<sup>5</sup>

Our goal is to develop new methods, approaches, and formats to achieve more than an alternative history of the British Museum. Instead, we work towards a multilateral fusion of object histories and presented legacies in museums and their collections as seen by contributors from the 'Global South'. We aim to develop a new vocabulary and discourse for an ongoing debate. Institutional barriers and ethnic discrimination in the museum and academic sector remain high. We, therefore, operated with the ultimate goal of supporting the democratization of often exclusive museum spaces. This would seek to recognize and empower diverse ethnic audiences and their material past.



**Fig. 4.** Museum number: Am, SLMisc. 1368.  
Drum made of wood, root (cedar), skin (deer).  
© The Trustees of the British Museum

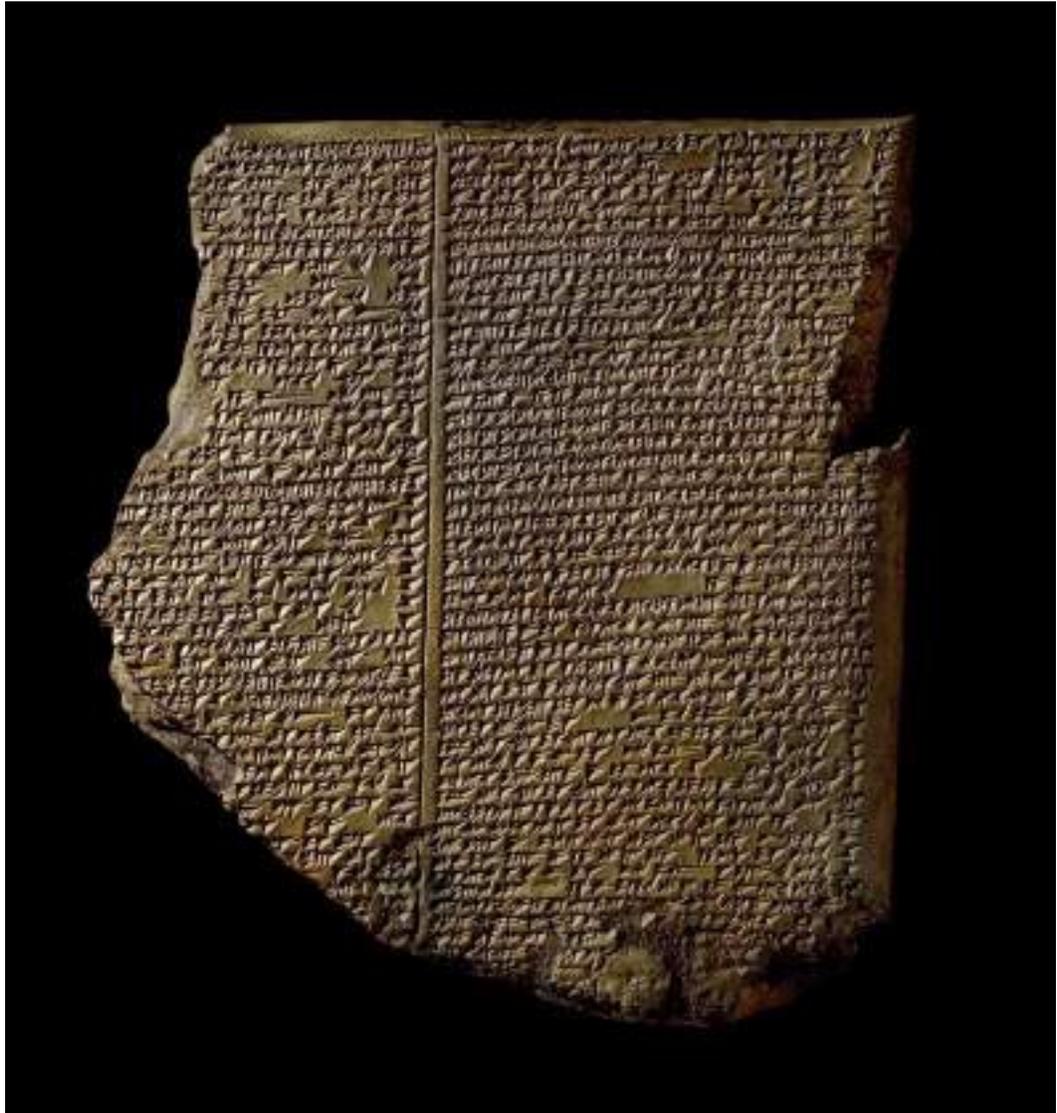
For our launch event, as well as for the website and the Call for Action that followed from it, each contributor picked an object from the British Museum podcast and presented ideas on how its narrative could be expanded through new stories and approaches, and often new objects. For

instance, there are objects from Peru, Honduras, and Mexico, but remarkably none from Brazil.

What can be said about such gaps? What can be said about British Museum attractions such as the Rosetta Stone – on which Heba Abd El Gawad spoke –, the Benin plaques – discussed by Sani Yakubu Adam –, the Gweagal Shield – put forward by indigenous Australian Leah Lui-Chivizhe – by people from the countries who once owned them, or still use them (or would use them, if they were around)?<sup>6</sup>

Abd El Gawad, for example, showed how the people from Rashid were, in fact, involved in the decipherment process of the stone, so why was Champillon singled out as a hero?<sup>7</sup> Subhadra Das pointed out to what extent the Parthenon sculptures represent largely unquestioned ideologies about race and difference, which ultimately imply that (white) Europeans are superior.<sup>8</sup> This historical context is not explained on museum labels. Nor is the fact that Greece wants to see the Parthenon sculptures returned. All authors work under the premise that an object's original function and its later (colonial) appropriation are integral parts of an object's biography. Such functions were often erased through its journey into the museum and replaced by a 'European version' of the story.<sup>9</sup>

The scarcity of attempts to illuminate the stories of people and (often ongoing) local practice in relation to objects is troubling. Instead, fixed in a postcolonial context, imperial vision underlies the master narratives of many European museums. Depending on their colonial past, their history has long been told as a continuing narrative of Europe's involvement in various regions of the world. This one-dimensional narrative was perpetuated by the 'two-dimensional' documents in archives that surround these objects. Yet archives are rarely neutral in value. Institutionally managed documents, practices, and ideologies thus often fail to give credit to engagement with the material past outside disciplinary frameworks, which museums often rely on. So how can 'indigenous archives', oral histories, social media, personal memories, fiction, poetry, performance, photographs, and artworks present alternative 'counter-archives' to construct new stories about objects?<sup>10</sup>



**Fig. 5.** Museum number: K.3375  
Epic of Gilgamesh, tablet 11, story of the Flood.  
© The Trustees of the British Museum

Many of our contributions regarding objects across the globe from New Zealand, Namibia to Mexico share one concern: the relationships between objects and the people who care(d) for or about them. A collection of ‘alternative object histories’ (used here to indicate something deviating from the dominant, not the ‘normal’) must, therefore, also go beyond established academic and curatorial approaches to address the stories and people that

remain invisible in archives. Addressing the functions objects had, or indeed still have, the contributions show how excluded voices can be empowered to tell their own histories beyond these frameworks.

Some contributors thus used a more inclusive range of philosophies that injected a much-needed critique into a discourse dominated by Western-style scholarship. Several addressed local resistance to colonial collecting and preservation practices or the aftermath of scientific exploration, exploitation, and slavery. Others showed how Western disciplines such as anthropology, archaeology or art history promoted and underpinned ideologies of human variation and ‘race’, and vice versa. Others alluded to the ‘divide and rule’ approach of museums: by neatly separating and ‘handpicking’ certain ethnic groups, they erased others from their not-so-universal narrative to make it their own, ignoring that both objects and people were, in reality, rarely stable, but in constant transition and movement.

My own case study looked at a famous cuneiform tablet from Ancient Mesopotamia (Fig. 5). Neil McGregor’s podcast focussed on Ancient Mesopotamia as the origin of writing and the cradle of Western civilization.<sup>11</sup> My version talks about nineteenth-century British Imperialism, which sought not only to excavate these kind of ancient objects to appropriate them as the origins of European history but also to exploit the Middle Eastern landscape by extracting oil. What was further erased were the stories of the modern people of these lands who excavated these objects with their own hands.<sup>12</sup>

To highlight that these connections are ongoing, my object biography ends with the chants of protesters at the British Museum, which took place when an exhibition on King Ashurbanipal opened a few years ago.<sup>13</sup> Ironically, the show was sponsored by the fossil fuel giant BP. This exhibition displays objects excavated during the above-mentioned imperial nineteenth-century excavation. When I titled this paper *Repatriating Histories*, I did not always refer to the repatriation of an object but also to repatriating parts of a history that was formerly erased, acknowledging the economic exploitation that led to ongoing conflict, war, and inequality in this particular region. Repatriating

that history is the first step towards achieving justice and more equal global power balances.

### **Methods: The Future of Object Biographies**

Doubts are also part of the project. Can an entirely new History of the World be told through a certain number of objects? The concept as such a highly reductive and yet, at the same time, seductive idea used by many since, deserves to be critiqued. As has been the case in India, the ‘100 Objects model’ can be deployed at a time of vehement nationalist resurgence, a recurring theme in our discussion. This raises more general and important questions about the role of Western museums in shaping museological practices elsewhere, and the format we seek to pursue with our own work.<sup>14</sup>

Our ‘new histories’ must be not just different methodologically and multilingual, but also dynamic and open for future additions and narratives that others might want to add. Considering this, what could we potentially offer in terms of new methods?

Object biographies are an established approach in heritage and museum studies.<sup>15</sup> Recently, they have been used to better understand the life cycle of museum objects removed during colonialism. However, this journey was rarely circular. Research has often focussed on how ‘non-European’ objects have ‘traveled’ towards Europe. Here, the major goal was to fill in formerly erased gaps in the objects’ provenance rather than the meaning they held before they left their original context. This approach has therefore been criticized as Eurocentric.

When repatriation and restitution are at the forefront of public debate, it seems valid to ask what a more equal future of object biographies might look like. The ultimate goal will be to address broader questions that concern art historical methods and the role of museums in the multicultural societies of tomorrow. We work under the premise that an object’s original function and its later (colonial) appropriation are integral parts of its biography. Knowledge forms were rarely stable across different regions, borders, and periods; rather, it is exactly in processes of motion, transit and

transmission that the forms and contents of knowledge were defined and put to work. In other words, one object can have 100 histories of 100 worlds.

Instead of only asking what the objects' meaning was before they were removed, however, one might also ask what their meaning will be, if and when they are returned. More specifically, can histories be repatriated even if an object is not repatriated?

Recently, I took part in a project in Ghana involving a repatriation case concerning objects in the Berlin collections, where different stakeholders have different versions of an object's history, and it's unclear to whom it should be returned.<sup>16</sup> Potentially conflicting narratives, in other words, yield their own story. What kind of object biographies will matter the most? Who should tell them, and for whom, as objects are on their often-difficult journey back to their place of origin, usually after having spent years in storage?<sup>17</sup> If objects are repatriated, how do origin communities deal with the 'poisoned' history that adheres to these objects? And how can they deal with the potential void if no repatriation takes place to start the process of healing? Many agreed that the issue of return remains problematic as nationalism is on the rise. This also refers to white elites in control of the heritage sectors in many countries of origin. At the core is the question of the importance of such histories for achieving more equal and truly intercultural conversations about the legacies of colonialism and the meaning of heritage on an international but also on an internal, national level.

### **Futures**

We aim to be a dynamic platform that centres how different communities benefit from decolonisation efforts, not simply and primarily Western museums. Therefore, rather than setting the terms of the conversation, our grassroots initiative intends to center on what different communities need from decolonisation. The idea of flat hierarchies and collaboration lies at the project's methodological core. To that end, our project recently asked our editors and authors for input to jointly decide which role 100 histories should play in future discussions related to decolonization, repatriation, restitution

and reparation. What can we, as a digital platform, do? For which purpose is project funding needed as we approach the next steps?<sup>18</sup>

As a grassroots project, we have hardly any research funding. An Activist Museum Award enabled us to hire two graduate students to help us organise a future World Café event series to facilitate conversations between researchers, heritage and museum practitioners in the Global South.

They will act as focus groups for the evaluation of our website and serve as an opportunity to co-develop the future direction of the project. We plan to eventually expand the range of public engagement capabilities of the website, as we look to develop this resource to become an interactive space of dialogue rather than just dissemination. Our first World café took place in September, 2022, and it addressed three themes: Objects, Institutions and People. We asked all participants the following questions: What can the *100 Histories of 100 Worlds in 1 Object* website and project do to make possible these changes? What would you like to see research grant money funding used for?

*100 Histories of 100 Worlds in 1 Object* is naturally concerned with objects, which was our first theme of discussion. We agreed that our focus should be to connect objects and stories to local/source communities. Although objects are important, they are not always enough to fulfill community needs, desires and priorities at any given time. As one of the participants, Golda Ha-Eiros, a curator from Namibia, movingly put it: in a German museum storage, the object is just a number, in Namibia it has meaning to people.<sup>19</sup> In some museums, there are no objects — they are taken away during colonialism or for political reasons, for example. But the idea of a museum without objects is not so radical; it already exists in Palestine or the Museum of British Colonialism. Might this be a model we can aim to replicate? Can *100 Histories* act (digitally) as a horizontal platform that moves away from an object-centered approach towards centring people and their stories — holding as opposed to simply hosting them?

Under the umbrella of the second theme — *institutions* — participants talked about Western narratives and taxonomies and how these have shaped both the objects in our collections and also the foundations of

our institutions. Institutions are resistant to change, and yet they tend to dominate the discussions about repatriation, indeed, and decolonization by extension. Although these institutions (predominantly Western) do have the resources to finance ambitious and intellectually expansive projects, these also come with the pressure that funding structures brings along. Taking into account financial, administrative, digital, political, and language barriers, we aim to shift the conversation away from Western museums. Yet, while it is our goal to decenter museums, and of course, ultimately, the British Museum, it is also necessary to engage museums, as they are where financial resources and power often lie.

The idea of operating “ethically” needs to recognize the uneven reality of the world we are operating in. We are both outside and inside the museum to create a dialogue that will lead to a greater multitude of stories in institutional spaces. We also want to recognize that each country, including those in the Global South, has its own decolonization movement.

Finally, under the headline of *people*, we discussed our long-term goal to center how different communities of association and origin can benefit from decolonization efforts, not only Western museums. How can we create a system of mutual benefits, and are there pathways for new career types, such as shared curatorships? We also reflected on the need to undo the idea that objects represent people. Rather they are moments in time that mean different things to different people. The project can make space for these different people to share their narratives. The meaning of objects would not exist without communities. Without people, none of this can exist.

### **The Realities of Travelling Objects and People**

Legacies of empire live on in practicalities. For example, when I organised the launch event of the 100 Histories of 100 Worlds in 1 Object website, I noticed that flight routes are legacies of empire. Almost all participants had to fly via the imperial metropolis, London, to travel on to Jamaica where some of them also needed visa, which again, reflects colonial power structures.

Earlier this year, Germany rejected the visa of colleagues from Cameroon.<sup>20</sup> There was an outrage on social media, not least because the

scholars were supposed to help European museums ‘decolonize’ their collection – the irony could not be more obvious. This example is pertinent because of the stark discrepancy between the apparent willingness to repatriate objects and the willingness to accept migrating people, who are repatriated in abundance at the margins of the European Union. In other words, legacies of colonialism, including visa rejections or the lack of reliable internet access, became a practical hindrance in the workshop planning itself.

Many countries frequently reject the visa of scholars from the African continent who want to attend conferences elsewhere; not only during the pandemic. Diversifying is a challenging task and requires listening, empathy, patience, and stamina. It also relies on the support of those with privilege and power and on funding bodies and institutions who recognize the urgent need to decentralize and shift power structures in research and curating, in particular in the name of ‘decolonizing the museum’.

As institutional barriers persist and many excluded voices are still not being heard, the question arises of how successfully the project will plug into the museum landscape, public discourse, and mainstream media as a counternarrative to McGregor’s own project. A different way of asking this question is: how willing are institutions to put more care into people, rather than objects, to move beyond pure ‘object fetishism’ and the Western preservation paradigm? As many objects are migrating back in the near future, the real question is how many people will be allowed to migrate in as this process is underway. The cartoons by the Egyptian artist Nasser and Heba Abd El Gawad puts the finger on the problem. When Heba (who is one of the cartoon characters) asked her friend why he dressed up as a mummy, he answers that this way he might perhaps be able to travel to Europe more easily.<sup>24</sup>



**Fig. 6.** Comic by Nasser Junior.

Translation:

(a) Heba: Did you know that British-led excavations have discovered thousands of artefacts in Egypt and exported some of them to 27 countries?

(b) Heba: What are you doing?!!

(c) Nasser: Tell them you discovered a mummy who wants to travel

In: Heba Abd El Gawad and Alice Stevenson 2021 (Figure 1).

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# “We are Tupinambá and We Want the Cloak Back”: Indigenous Restitution Claims at the *Mostra do Redescobrimento* (Sao Paulo, 2000)

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## **ABSTRACT**

The turn of the millennium in 2000 marked the quincentenary of the Portuguese “discovery” of Brazil and catalyzed a broad re-evaluation of the nation’s colonial past and its canonical historical narratives. A monumental exhibition entitled *Mostra do Redescobrimento* (Rediscovery Show) marked the occasion from April to September 2000 at the Ibirapuera Park (São Paulo). The curatorial principle of its artistic director, Nelson Aguilar, divided the exhibition into twelve thematic sections dedicated to indigenous, black, popular, and modern art, among others, capturing the concept of the *Museu das Origens* idealized by Mario Pedrosa, after a fire at the Museum of Modern Art, Rio de Janeiro, in 1978.

This paper examines the display of a 17th-century Tupinambá feather cloak, part of the collections of the National Museum of Denmark (Nationalmuseet i København), within the Indigenous Arts section of the *Mostra do Redescobrimento*, investigating its reception among local communities and the ensuing restitution claims by the Tupinamba from Olivença, Bahia. The discourse extends to situate these claims within a restitution agenda that gained momentum in the early 2000s, and to dissect the political implications of these claims within debates and practices surrounding museum collections.

## **KEYWORDS**

Indigenous Art; Cultural Restitution; Brazilian Art History; Exhibition Histories.

The emblematic date of April 22, 2000, marked 500 years of the so-called “discovery” of Brazil by the Portuguese, igniting a broad debate surrounding the term to which the celebrations were dedicated. Within this context, discussions regarding the echoes of Brazil's colonial past, the struggle of indigenous people for land demarcation, and the narratives around the place of these communities in national history were, as they are today, at their heyday.

To commemorate this date, a massive exhibition was organized in São Paulo from April to September 2000. The exhibition occupied an area of 60 thousand square meters within the complex of buildings designed by architect Oscar Niemeyer at the Ibirapuera Park (Sao Paulo). Curated by Nelson Aguilar, the show was titled *Mostra do Redescobrimento (The Rediscovery Show)*, and was organized into twelve sections, each structured around themes like *The First Discovery of America, Indigenous Arts, Letter from Pero Vaz de Caminha, Baroque Art, Afro-Brazilian Art, Black in Body and Soul, Popular Art, 19th Century Art, Modern Art, Images of the Unconscious, Contemporary Art* and *The Distant Gaze*.

The preparatory phase for the *Mostra* commenced in January 1997, with the intent to align with what curator and critic Mário Pedrosa had envisioned for a *Museum of Origins*. This museum concept, which never materialized, emerged following a fire that consumed the collections of the Rio de Janeiro’s Museum of Modern Art in 1978. The central concept in Pedrosa’s museum project was the idea of exploring the notion of “origin” around four central axes: indigenous, black, popular, and modern arts. “In itself, such a project would represent the utopia of a culturally ‘updated’ country in permanent dialogue with its roots, which, in the long run, would publicly consolidate an autonomous tradition”, explained art historian Taísa Palhares<sup>4</sup>.

For the *Mostra do Redescobrimento*, Nelson Aguilar envisaged a more comprehensive thematic coverage. For instance, he considered that Pedrosa’s project overlooked archaeology. Amidst the preparation of the *Mostra*, elucidated Aguilar, “the oldest skeleton in the Americas, Luzia, was unveiled, prompting a reconfiguration of the project to encompass the significance of

this discovery in human evolution, the dawn of humanity, and the human settlement in the Americas”<sup>2</sup>. Aguilar also discerned the musealization of a purported Brazilian origin to be problematic, particularly when correlating Indigenous contemporary creations to a remote and “primitive” past. He asserted that “putting the indigenous in the museum is akin to stating that they no longer exist.”<sup>3</sup>

To address these issues, Aguilar enlisted the expertise of Lucia Hussak Van Velthem, anthropologist and then director of Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi, and José Antônio Fernandes Dias Braga, professor in the Department of Anthropology at the Universities of Coimbra and Lisbon, to curate the Indigenous Arts section. Located in the Oca (Ibirapuera Park, São Paulo), alongside the archaeology module, the exhibit aimed to highlight the diversity and contemporaneity of indigenous culture, while fostering methodological dialogues with the realm of anthropology. In an endeavor as broad and encompassing as the *Mostra do Redescobrimento* itself, the curation included about 500 pieces from private collections and European and Brazilian museums, produced by over 100 different communities, spanning a period of five centuries, from 1500 to 2000.

Aiming to move beyond the “established models of ethnographic exhibitions, where objects are showcased by ethnic groups or organized by morphological-functional criteria”<sup>4</sup>, the exhibit was structured around two cross-cutting axes: “What constitutes art in indigenous societies? (*O que pode ser arte nas sociedades indígenas*)” and “Artistic objects, activities, and effects (*Objetos artísticos, atividades e efeitos*)”. The first axis underscored the equivalence between indigenous artifacts and works of art, their original usage and cult values, as well as their relationship to a Western art perspective, subdivided into two streams: *Hybridizations* and *Imakhé<sup>5</sup> Objects*. Broadly, it aimed to detach the artistic nature of the objects from a purely functional aspect. Items such as bowls, masks, musical instruments, hunting gear, and scarifiers shared space with multimedia productions like videos or installations by Indigenous artists. Its “cenographic project”, as were called most of the display projects at the *Mostra*, was conceived by Paulo Pederneiras and Vera Hamburguer (Fig. 1 and 2).



**Fig. 1 and 2:** Indigenous art module at the Mostra do Redescobrimento, 2000. Cenographic project by Paulo Pederneiras and Vera Hamburger. Installation shot.

One of the core arguments propelling the show was the idea to reaffirm the contemporaneity and diversity of indigenous arts which, as per Van Velthen, should no longer be viewed as remnants of a “lost paradise”<sup>6</sup>.

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In light of this context, it is relevant to juxtapose the curatorial approaches of *Mostra do Redescobrimento* (2000) with those of the 1980s, a period marked by tentative efforts to explore alternative forms of displaying Indigenous art.

During that decade, several exhibitions attempted to bridge the dialogue between indigenous production and the modern and contemporary art field. Notable examples include *Arte Plumária do Brasil* (1980) organized by Norberto Nicola at the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo; a similarly titled exhibit curated by historian Ulpiano Bezerra de Menezes for the 17th Bienal de São Paulo (1983); and *Tradição e Ruptura - Síntese da Arte e Cultura Brasileira* (1984-85), presented by the Fundação Bienal.

Within this frame of reference, Ulpiano Bezerra de Menezes and anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro explored the nuances of indigenous arts in the book *História Geral da Arte no Brasil*, edited by curator Walter Zanini (1983). While Menezes spotlighted the fallacies of theories attempting to trace Western art attributes in “native” productions, Ribeiro delineated the intersections between the practical and the aesthetic values inherent in Indigenous arts.

Three decades earlier, precisely in 1953, Darcy Ribeiro founded the Museu do Índio in Rio de Janeiro. His vision diverged from classical ethnology—which perceived “primitive peoples simply as fossils of the human race”<sup>7</sup>—and the natural sciences. In his article, *The Museum of the Indian*, published in *Museum* magazine, edited by UNESCO in 1955, Ribeiro elucidated the objectives underpinning the institution’s creation. He criticized traditional ethnology museums for presenting communities as exotic entities; where visitors were exposed to myths of headhunters, cannibals, and self-mutilation practices, evoking terror and perplexity, but

seldom an empathy or appreciation for the artistic creations of the cultures on display.



**Fig. 3.** Catalog of *Arte Plumária do Brasil* (1980), Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo.

Despite the resonances and critiques surrounding Ribeiro’s museological project, the effort to provide an exhibition framework for indigenous productions grounded in contextual narratives resonates with the ideas of Pedrosa and Aguiar, thereby influencing the narrative adopted by the curators of the Indigenous Arts module.

These longstanding inquiries echo the critique directed at the traditional museum display paradigm and the “ways of seeing” as described

by Svetlana Alpers<sup>8</sup>. In her discussion, Alpers alludes to the transformative effect that museums have on objects when they are isolated from their original or functional contexts, and placed within the institutional setting for a contemplative gaze. This act not only alters the object's relational dynamic but also categorizes it within the realm of 'art' akin to the aesthetic and cultural paradigms familiar to the viewer. The act of seeing, thus, becomes a culturally loaded act that is mediated by institutional, historical, and aesthetic frameworks defining not just what is seen, but how things are seen and understood.

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At the *Mostra do Redescobrimento*, the display of a distinctive piece poses further questions to the exhibition histories commented on here, while bearing on the broader re-evaluation of the 2000 commemorations. This piece is the 17th-century Tupinambá feather cloak, initially taken from Brazil to the Netherlands by Maurício de Nassau in 1664. It was later gifted to the King of Denmark's cabinet of curiosities before eventually becoming part of the National Museum of Denmark (Nationalmuseet i København) collection in Copenhagen. Art historian Amy Bueno, in her work "Historicity, Achronicity, and the Materiality of Cultures in Colonial Brazil" (2015), delves into the remarkable transatlantic trajectory of the feather cloak. She underscores the multiplicity of agencies, temporalities, and narratives that prompt an ongoing reevaluation of the semantic layers embodied by this piece.

In the early modern period, however, Tupi feathered capes and crowns were among the most familiar New World artifacts; they were so crucial to the conceptualization of the Americas in early modern European scientific and religious contexts that the historian William Sturtevant referred to the development as the "Tupinambization" of the Atlantic world. These objects also remain crucial touchstones of Brazilian national and indigenous identity today.<sup>9</sup>

A striking instance of a process of contemporary resemanticization occurred precisely during the *Mostra* when the Tupinambá from Olivença (Bahia) came to visit the show, at the invitation of a popular local media outlet, the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*. Despite the sensationalist angle of its journalistic coverage, this initiative provided a platform for the Indigenous group to engage in discussions surrounding their ethnic identity tied to Tupinambá ancestry—a part of an identification process that had been unfolding for decades. The visit culminated in the request for the restitution of the cloak. “We are undergoing a [...] cultural revival [*resgate cultural*]. Recovering the cloak brings the memory of our ancestors closer,” said educator Núbia Batista da Silva to the *Folha de São Paulo* following her visit to the exhibition. The newspaper also captured the poignant experience of two other community leaders upon encountering the ancestral featherwork:

As they approached the Tupinambá cloak, Nivalda Amaral de Jesus and Aloísio Cunha Silva were moved to tears. They remained silent for an extended period. “It was remorse I felt,” attempted to articulate Dona Nivalda. “I heard a voice, the origin of which I can't discern, telling me: 'This is the one. There's no other. The entire history of our people is here.'” Aloísio was astounded by the design of this artifact. “We can't recreate anything like this, a garment that drapes down the back. Now I understand: when the colonizers appropriated the cloak, they seized our power and, weakened, we lost everything.”<sup>10</sup>

Aloísio's utterance epitomizes how the cloak symbolizes the usurped vigor that the process of identity formation seeks to reclaim. Hence, its ramifications extend to the legal recognition of lands and rights, intersecting with indigenist policies in place during the 2000s. The demand also rekindled discussions around colonial histories, repatriation of cultural heritage, and the agency of indigenous peoples in curating and interpreting their own historical narratives. This scenario not only highlights the living histories and present-day implications of colonial-era artifacts but also underscores the potential of exhibitions like the *Mostra do Redescobrimento* in fostering a

discursive space where contemporary indigenous voices can converge, interact, and challenge traditional narratives.



**Fig. 4.** Nivalda Amaral de Jesus and Aloísio Cunha Silva observe the Tupinambá cloak. Photo: Flávio Florido - May 21, 2000/Folhapress

“Although it is a somewhat eccentric claim, this was wonderful, since the cloak belongs to the Royal Museum of Denmark, a gift from Prince Maurice of Nassau to his brother. If not for the European collections that have preserved these objects over all these years, we would have nothing, as the tropical organic chemistry is very harsh”, expressed Nelson Aguilar at the time<sup>4</sup>.

It is clear that the focal point of concern is not merely the preservation capabilities of the Danish Museum or the virtues of the Nordic climate in retaining the artifact, as noted by Aguilar's remarks. Within the broader discourse surrounding the restitution of historical and ethnographic objects taken during the colonial era, it's crucial to recognize how the claim intersects with significant debates regarding the land demarcation campaigns undertaken by the Tupinambá from Olivença, as well as the politics of memory encompassing the official commemorations of the “500 years of Brazil.”

Inhabiting the Atlantic Forest region of southern Bahia, the Tupinambá of Olivença have a history steeped in disputes and ambivalence

toward their indigenous identity. Although they occupied the region before the arrival of the first European fleets, they were confined by landowners who, from the end of the 19th century, seized large areas for cocoa cultivation, converting them into pastures or monocultures. Presently, the prevailing attitude among the conservative authorities regarding their identity is still tainted by substantial distrust, perpetuated by the myth that they are no longer pure Indigenous<sup>12</sup>. Notably, in the 2000s, they embarked on a struggle that challenged stereotypical narratives and worked to reaffirm their cultural heritage and rights.

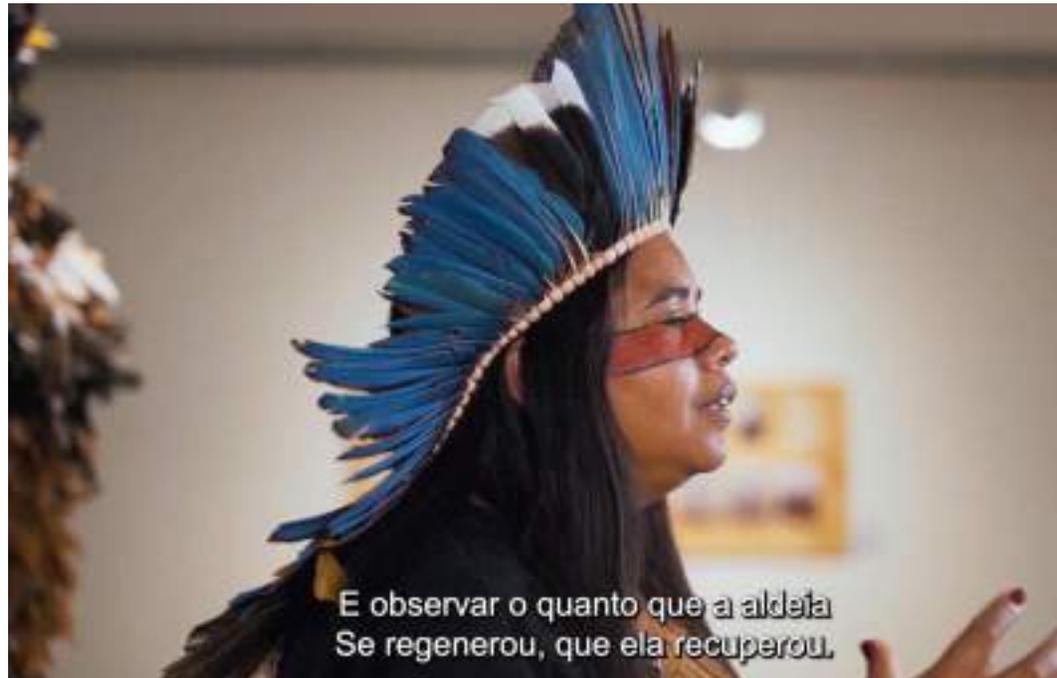
In his work, *Etnogênese Indígenas*, anthropologist José Mauricio Arruti (2005) delves into the concept of ethnogenesis, urging to understand the social dynamics that enable a specific group to establish identities. He advocates for examining the motivations, pathways, and mechanisms that assist a group in forming its communal bonds, whether by championing the acknowledgment of their unique characteristics in an environment of indifference, or by establishing clear boundaries where only continuity and homogeneity were assumed previously. From this viewpoint, the reclamation of the 17th-century feather cloak displayed at the *Mostra* stands as a potent symbolic gesture and a crucial testimony to a narrative that contributes to the nurturing of communal identity among the Olivença group.

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It is important to note that, at the *Mostra do Redescobrimento*, references to the notable mantle were also visible in the Contemporary Art module, especially in the works of non-indigenous Brazilian artists like Lygia Pape. Pape displayed a series of works dedicated to the piece, made between 1996 and 2000. Her creations, which varied from spheres adorned with guará feathers to red smoke surrounding Guanabara Bay, are evidence of how indigenous references have been incorporated into Brazilian art.

Earlier, in the late 1970s, Pape, along with Mario Pedrosa and a cohort of anthropologists and archaeologists, had planned an exhibition titled *Alegria de Viver, Alegria de Criar* (Joy of Living, Joy of Creating). This

exhibition, intended for 1979 at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio, was to feature a range of indigenous pieces, including the Tupirumbá cloak. However, it was halted due to the 1978 fire.



**Fig. 5.** Glicéria Tupinambá talks about the process of reproducing the feather garment techniques in the context of the exhibition *Essa é a grande volta do manto tupinambá*, 2021.

Now, over two decades later, the significance of these experiences has only amplified. A notable example is the exhibit *Essa é a grande volta do manto tupinambá*, displayed at Funarte Brasília and Casa da Lenha, in Porto Seguro, in 2021. Curated by Augustin de Tugny, Glicéria Tupinambá, Juliana Caffé, and Juliana Gontijo, the exhibition revolved around the history and revival of the Tupinambá feather works' creation modes.

The exhibit featured three cloaks fashioned by Glicéria Tupinambá in 2021, along with artworks by Edimilson de Almeida Pereira, Fernanda Liberti, Gustavo Caboco, Livia Melzi, Rogério Sganzerla, and Sophia Pinheiro. Glicéria, an artist, teacher and leading political figure from the Serra do Padeiro community in Olivença explained that the Tupinambá mantle is “a revered

attire for our people. It, therefore, personifies a character, embodies vitality, is a divine gift from heaven to earth, and is adorned by the pajés and the majés. It serves as an instrument, a sacred garment”<sup>13</sup>. Equally important to her were the contributions of Nivalda Amaral de Jesus, who passed away in 2018. As we have read before, she was part of the group that traveled to São Paulo, in 2000, to see the Tupinambá feather cloak. “She returned to the village with this renewed spirit and sparked this awakening of the Tupinambá people,” Glicéria recounted<sup>14</sup>.

More recently, Glicéria played a symbolic role in the negotiations that culminated in the official announcement of a "donation" of the artifact by the Danish Nationalmuseet to the Brazilian Museu Nacional (Rio de Janeiro)<sup>15</sup>. Shortly before the submission of this article for final publication in July 2023, a feature by journalist Elisângela Roxo was published in the local media. In it, Roxo detailed Glicéria's involvement in a workshop held in September 2022 at the Nationalmuseet, titled *Different Pasts – Sustainable Futures*. This event, occurring nearly a year before the mantle's repatriation disclosure, deliberated on the evolving narratives and collaborative prospects within ethnographic museums. Roxo vividly described the moment when Glicéria engaged the audience, drawing parallels to the restitution claims made during the *Mostra do Redescobrimento*:

Glicéria wore a headdress of blue macaw feathers and a yellow dress. She spoke in Portuguese, with simultaneous translation into English and Danish. On her left, the mantle that will be returned rested upright, inside a glass case. “In the year 2000, the piece in this room visited us in Brazil and was recognized by Valdelice Tupinambá’s mother, Dona Nivalda. This meeting helped our struggle, it helped people to know that we never left our territory. We have lived there traditionally until now. Today, I find myself here by the call of the mantle. The link between the past and the present is not broken. The threads of the mantle brought me to Denmark and made it possible for us to be together in this moment.”<sup>16</sup>

While Glicéria's narrative rekindles the spiritual connection of the Olivença with the mantle, tracing back to their encounter with the piece in

the 2000s, new dialogues are emerging within academic, political, and diplomatic circles. Here, it's crucial to note that, beyond the celebratory initiatives this return may evoke, a critical outlook toward the political instrumentalization of this process is paramount. In this light, several questions surface concerning the research agendas and the preservation policies and collection formation that will be embraced following (and beyond) the restitution of the item in question. As the feather cloak makes its journey to the Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro, it extends an invitation for creating a conducive environment for the stewardship and contextualization of such artifacts, ensuring they resonate meaningfully within new museological practices for the future.

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### Endnotes

1. Palhares, p. 10, 2006.
2. Aguilar, n.p., 2001.
3. Idem.
4. Grupioni, p. 75, 2000.
5. *Imakhé* is a Wayana term denoting “what is (intrinsically) mine,” translated into Portuguese by the indigenous people themselves as “enfeite” (ornament) (Van Velthen, 2010, p. 149)
6. Van Velthen, p. 59, 2000.
7. Ribeiro, p. 5, 1955.
8. Alpers, p. 27, 1991
9. Bueno, p. 21, 2015
10. Antenore, p. Ei, 2000.
11. Aguilar, n.p., 2001.
12. “Tupinambá de Olivença - Povos Indígenas No Brasil.” Instituto Socioambiental. [https://pih.socioambiental.org/pt/Povo:Tupinamb%C3%A1\\_de\\_Oliven%C3%A7a](https://pih.socioambiental.org/pt/Povo:Tupinamb%C3%A1_de_Oliven%C3%A7a).
13. Depoimento de Glicéria Tupinambá, Oct 7, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9cB-2MBYQjY>
14. Idem.
15. Cardoso, n.p., 2023.
16. Roxo, n.p. 2023.

# Guns and Wealth: The Curious Return of Colonial Collections to China

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## **ABSTRACT**

At the turn of the last millennium, China began to culturally reprocess its “century of humiliation” and joined the heated debate over the repatriation of important collections. Initiated by a survey on the distributed Dunhuang manuscripts and raised by the Sino-French argument over the auction sales of a bronze zodiac animal head (looted from the old Summer Palace during the Second Opium War), China's demand for returning its “national treasures” was made official at the UN General Assembly in New York in 2009. Instead of resorting to the UNESCO heritage charters, conventions or laws, “buying back” seemed to be the only method viable to recover such objects. However, unlike Greece or Egypt, China did receive the returns of “war booty” after the two world wars. At the same time, the country has a history of applying a museum diplomacy to solicit military or financial assistance from the West. According to this Chinese experience, the restitution of colonial collections can only be a result of hard power struggle. Today, these collections termed “world cultures” have become an important diplomatic token, and returning them (physically or digitally) a tactic for the countries of “universal museums” to devise a foreign policy for the making of important agreements of trade or investment with the “countries of origin.”

## **KEYWORDS**

Repatriation; Colonial Collection; Universal Museum; Decolonization; Art Market; Museum Diplomacy; Sino-Western Relations; Victor Hugo.

### Introduction

Statute of limitations and utilitarian perspective of moral judgment are the two most often used reasonings for declining the demand for returning the cultural heritage of the Other acquired during colonization. A historical study of the Chinese experience in retrieving its national treasures lost to the West in the New Imperialism era will shed some light on the hard facts of “who owns the past”.

Long before these rationales took the ground, it had been made explicit that the colonial collections resulting from “crime” should be returned to their original countries.

One of the most known documents of such an opinion is a letter written by the French writer Victor Hugo to the (Irish) British captain William Butler. Dated on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November in 1861, the letter commented on the sack of China’s imperial gardens (the old Summer Palace or Yuanming Yuan of the Qing court) in Pékin (Beijing) by the British and the French troops during the Anglo-French Expedition to China (or the Second Opium War in Chinese) in 1860 (Hugo 1861).

The devastation of the Summer Palace was accomplished by the two victors acting jointly. Mixed up in all this is the name of Elgin, which inevitably calls to mind the Parthenon. What was done to the Parthenon was done to the Summer Palace, more thoroughly and better, so that nothing of it should be left. All the treasures of all our cathedrals put together could not equal this formidable and splendid museum of the Orient. It contained not only masterpieces of art, but masses of jewelry. What a great exploit, what a windfall! One of the two victors filled his pockets; when the other saw this he filled his coffers. And back they came to Europe, arm in arm, laughing away. Such is the story of the two bandits. We Europeans are the civilized ones, and for us the Chinese are the barbarians. This is what civilization has done to barbarism. Before history, one of the two bandits will be called France; the other will be called England. But I protest, and I thank you for giving me the opportunity! **the crimes** of those who lead are not the fault of those who are led; Governments are sometimes bandits, peoples never. The French empire has pocketed half

of this victory, and today with a kind of proprietorial naivety it displays the splendid bric-a-brac of the Summer Palace. I hope that a day will come when France, delivered and cleansed, will **return this booty** to despoiled China.

As shown in the letter, Hugo alleged the French and the British governments the bandits who thieved in the Chinese, although the former regarded themselves as “the civilized” and the latter “the barbarians.” “Hope that a day will come when France, delivered and cleansed, will return this booty to despoiled China”, said Hugo.

Unfortunately, the appeal of Hugo had been dismissed by his government and the like for more than 150 years until when the French President Emmanuel Macron sparked hope for the countries of origin in the rest of the world with a public speech at the University of Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso on the 28<sup>th</sup> of November in 2017. “Starting today, and within the next five years, I want to see the conditions put in place so as to allow for the temporary or definitive restitution of African cultural heritage to Africa”, said Macron (Harris 2018). However, with a new “relational ethics” – meaning a decision-making model that outlines mutual respect, relational engagement, bringing knowledge back to life, and creating environment (Putman 1991) – the Savoy-Sarr Report, in the attempt to follow suit the idea of Macron, was severely criticized by the French museum and heritage professionals and ended with little achievement (Noce 2022).

### **Restitution: An Intereuropean convention becoming global**

One might think that it was still “barbaric” at the time of Hugo regarding the protection of cultural heritage or the restitution of art spoils or war booties. However, the fact is that the European countries were rather “civilized” towards each other. Already half a century prior to Hugo writing his letter, to return the cultural heritage of the Other taken during the war had been well established and practiced in Europe. For instance, in 1815, after the Napoleonic wars, in seeking a new power balance among European countries like Austria, Great Britain, Prussia and Russia, the Treaty of Paris was signed at the Congress of Vienna. More than redefining the borderlines of these

countries, the Treaty mandated the repatriation of France' art spoils to their provenances. Nearly 5,000 artworks, historical artifacts and archaeological finds were returned to their countries of origins – within Europe (Eustace 2015).

In the long 19<sup>th</sup> century, rather than fighting against each other these leading European powers concentrated on expanding their overseas colonies as in Africa or Asia. As a consequence, colossal amounts of war plunders from the colonized countries were shipped back to the metropolises, as seen in Paris, London or Berlin, where “national museums” – now “universal museums” or “encyclopedia museums” (Schuster 2004) – were constructed one after the other to host, safeguard and display these prestigious heritage artifacts of the Other. By doing so, these museums became “the public archive of the colonial system” (CCP 2019). The “crime” that Hugo criticized apparently was but one of the innumerable many the colonial governments committed to the “countries of origin” outside Europe in the rest of the world, where the cultural systems and social traditions were genuinely heterogenic to the West.

After this museum boom in Europe, in 1907, a heritage convention was created to follow and extend the idea of the Treaty of Paris in 1815 about the restitution of art loots – the Hague Convention. It suggested that “in sieges and bombardments, all available precautions must be adopted to spare buildings devoted to divine worship, art, education, or social welfare, historical monuments.” However, WWI still saw as many as before the plunders and spoils of artworks, historic buildings, and monuments. Again, in 1919, the Treaty of Versailles mandated Germany to return its war booties to their provenance. For example, the much-appreciated Altarpiece by Van Eyck, created in 1432, was given back to Ghent in Belgium.

It is worth noting that such conduct was defined or interpreted as “punishment” by the Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye. Does it mean that it should be legitimate to keep the art spoils or war booties as such for the winning parties of the war? The answer seems positive as we saw that, for example, after WWII, the Russian art spoils were not mandated to return (to Germany), but the German ones were. Viewing the unprecedented scale of

such detriments, after WWII, in 1954, a second Hague Convention was established for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (targeting movable art treasures and immovable historical monuments).

To enlarge the scope of heritage protection from wartime to peacetime, the following Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property was created in 1970. The goal was to prohibit illegal excavation and dealing of heritage artifacts on a global scale. And this has become the foundation for the judgment of most restitution cases today in terms of cultural heritage. In this line of thought, the UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects was established in 1995 – which has remained to this day the only legal instrument for the countries of origin to recover their lost cultural properties.

A brief review as such on the development of international heritage charters, conventions and laws makes it clear that the protection or restitution of cultural heritage was originally an Intereuropean affair. It became global only in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when most of the former colonies or semi-colonies became independent. More importantly, none of these conventions or laws should apply to the colonial collections expropriated from the countries of origin during colonization.

### **Between the West and the rest (China)**

As indicated above, the return of art spoils to their countries of origin outside of Europe is a postcolonial question. It is not until the end of the 1970s that the very first appeal of the sort from the non-Western countries was heard in the international forum.

In 1978, the “plea for the return of irreplaceable cultural heritage to those who created it” was made by the first African Director-General of UNESCO (a Sorbonne graduate who served France during WWII) (M’Bow 1978). Following this plea, an intergovernmental committee was created by UNESCO for promoting the return of cultural property to its countries of origin or its restitution in case of illicit appropriation. By far, twenty-two

member states of UNESCO were elected for the committee, excluding the former colonial powers like Britain or France.

China has not been in the committee either, being a semi-colonized country from 1840 to 1997 (when Hong Kong and Macau were given back from Britain and Portugal). The Chinese call for returning its national treasures lost to the West in the Age of New Imperialism only emerged with public enthusiasm after the turn of the last millennium (although the idea was firstly discussed in the 1970s). This time, the call was initiated because of the Dunhuang manuscripts, the medieval encyclopedia of Central Asia, discovered by the Western explorers in the late of 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, like the British archaeologist Marc Aurel Stein and the French sinologist Paul Pelliot, from the Silk Roads in the province of Xinjiang (or Chinese Turkestan). The manuscripts were quickly taken from the provenance and distributed to dozens of museums, libraries or archives around the world. In 1996, a fieldwork was carried out by a Chinese historian from the Pékin University to investigate the whereabouts of the Dunhuang manuscripts abroad. In 1998, at a Dunhuang Academy meeting to prepare Dunhuang Centenary, the call for the return of the lost manuscripts from overseas was discussed (Rong 1998). In 2000, via Chinese Central Television, the director of the Dunhuang Academy, Fan Jinshi, publicly expressed her wish “to see the restitution of the Dunhuang manuscripts one day.” To this end, in 2001, the National Fund for Protecting Important Cultural Artefacts was established under the Ministry of Culture in China – consisting of private donation (an initial amount was RMB 50,000,000) and an annual subsidy coming from the government. In 2002, the “rules on using this specific funding to purchase nationally important cultural relics” was issued by the State Administration of Cultural Heritage.

It was also the time when the British Museum published the declaration of “universal museums,” which was signed by eighteen directors from the major art museums of West Europe and North America (DW 2003) in response to the demand of the Greek government for the restitution of the Parthenon Marbles (“The Official Greek Position” 2004). This internationally renowned dispute also triggered an angry reaction from Chinese historians

and cultural experts, who then wrote a “public letter” on the Chinese press and media to protest in 2003.

### **China buying back national treasures in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

In fact, the attitude of the Chinese government toward the restitution of colonial collections had remained unclear. It is not until 2009, such a demand was made official by the government. The near cause was a Sino-French legal argument over a Christie’s auction in Paris for a bronze zodiac animal head – looted from the old Summer Palace during the Second Opium War by the Franco-British troops, as criticized by Hugo in the letter quoted above.

The story about the recent ownership over these bronze zodiac animal heads (a set of twelve in total originally) can be traced back to the 1980s – when China just reconnected to the world with its opening-up policy and Taiwan enjoyed a thriving economy being one of the Four Asian Tigers. In 1987, a private collector from Taiwan found at Sotheby’s New York one of the bronze animal heads and purchased it for USD 130,000. In 1989, the same collector bought another three (bull, tiger, and horse) from Sotheby’s London – with the horse alone costing USD 250,000. In 2000, he released these three pieces to the market.

The Poly Art Museum in Beijing bought the tiger from Sotheby’s Hong Kong with HKD 14,000,000 (USD 1,783,474) as well as the horse and the bull from Christie’s Hong Kong with HKD 7,400,000 (USD 942,693) and HKD 7,000,000 (USD 891,737). The fore mentioned National Fund for Protecting Important Cultural Artefacts has sponsored these acquisitions without details revealed. In 2003, a donation of RMB 6,000,000 was made to the Fund by the Hong Kong-based millionaire Stanley Ho for the Poly Museum to acquire the bronze head of pig from the United States. And it was also him who bought the horse head in 2007 from Sotheby’s Hong Kong and donated it directly back to the heritage site museum of Summer Palace in Beijing in 2019.

The legal argument in Paris in 2009 mentioned above was about the other two bronze zodiac animal heads, the mouse and the rabbit, released by the French collector Pierre Bergé, the co-founder of the fashion label Yves Saint Laurent. The auction at Christie’s was concluded by a Chinese

businessman, who eventually refused to complete the deal afterward saying that “they were looted and illegally exported from China”. The Chinese brought a lawsuit to the court in Paris without success. However, the argument ended up with another French fashion tycoon Francois Pinault – who had a big share of luxury goods market in China – buying the two heads and donated them to the National Museum of China in Beijing.

It is worth noting that, coinciding with this French donation in 2009, the demand for returning the national treasures lost to the West in the Age of New Imperialism was made official by the Chinese government through the Chinese ambassador Liu Zhenming at the 64<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly in New York.

### **Museum diplomacy from the West to the rising China**

The good publicity of “returning” national treasures back to China as such does not go unnoticed. Around the same period in the 2000s, among all these disputes over the ownership of colonial collections, universal museums were observed to play a diplomatic role in conversations with emerging economies outside of Europe, like China.

In 2006, to refuse the Greek appeal for the return of the Parthenon Marbles and to attest the “importance of universal museums” as declared, the British Museum for the very first time in its 250 years of existence organized a tour exhibition for its colonial collections to go outside of the museum door and outside of the country, to Beijing and Shanghai (Boyd and MacGregor 2006). The exhibition comprised a total of 272 prestigious artworks and historical artifacts (including a copy of the Rosetta stone) of “world cultures”, ranging from the Middle East to Africa and Asia. Curiously, none of them was originated from China, one of the biggest “source country”. Perhaps it was out of precaution, as the question of repatriation was asked by local Chinese journalists at every single press conference held for the show in China.

One important fact which was not disclosed on the same page together with the exhibition news is what happened under the stage. A year ago, in 2005, when the exhibition contract was to be signed, also came to Beijing together with the British Museum’s director Neil McGregor was the

British prime minister, Tony Blair. While the former concluded the contract for the temporary tour exhibition, the latter some other deals with substantial benefits. Immediately after the show, we saw that China's foreign direct investment in the UK increased dramatically – from USD 35 million in 2006 to USD 500 millions in 2007.

**China received art loots from  
Germany after WWI and Japan WWII**

In retrospect, there was another way other than buying to retrieve its lost national treasures that became the colonial collections of the colonial powers. Compared to Greece, Egypt or any other former colonies or semi-colonies in the rest of the world, China was an exception regarding the repatriation matter.

After the 1911 Revolution when the Republic of China was established, a large portion of the Chinese territory remained controlled by colonial countries like Russia, Germany, Britain, France and Japan. As WWI extended to the European colonies overseas (including part of China), the Chinese government took side with the Allied Powers and joined the war by sending the labor force to the battlefield of Europe. Consequently, when the Treaty of Versailles mandated the return of Germany's war booties back to their original countries, China was included. Under such circumstances, the semi-colonized China has received the return of its "national treasures" that became the colonial collections of the West. The return was half of the "astronomical observatory," created in 1442 and installed ever since on the corner of Pékin City Wall. (The other half was at the hands of the French.) Just like the bronze zodiac animal heads looted from the Summer Palace during the Second Opium War, these astronomical instruments were plundered by the Franco-German troops under the command of the German Allied Supreme Commander Alfred Count von Waldersee during the Eight Nations Allies (a military coalition that fought in Beijing) in 1900. Right after the loot, the German booty was shipped back to Germany under the mandate of the German Emperor Wilhelm II, for his own Summer Palace in Potsdam.

A similar case happened to China after WWII. This time it was with Japan and when China ended the war being one of the Big Five together with

the United States, the UK, the USSR and France. However, due to the interference of the United States and the negligence of the Far Eastern Advisory Commission (which later became the Far East Commission in Washington), only about five per cent of the cultural objects plundered by the Japanese Empire (between 1931 and 1945) were handed over to the Chinese government.

### **A Chinese museum diplomacy to the West in crisis**

Considering that the West much wanted the archaeological finds and historical artefacts, China began to formulate a museum diplomacy in the 1930s to solicit military and financial supports from the leading world powers in the West to fight against the Japanese Empire, which began to invade Manchuria on the 18<sup>th</sup> of September in 1931. In 1932, Sir Percival David, one of the most prominent collectors of Chinese art and antiques at that time, proposed an exhibition plan for Chinese art for the Royal Art Academy in London. The idea was conveyed by the aforementioned French sinologist Paul Pelliot to the Chinese government, to which Pelliot had maintained a good relationship due to close collaborations on the studies of Dunhuang manuscripts. The Chinese government took it as an opportunity to win over the heart of the European public for supporting China in the war with Japan. As a result, the British warship H.M.S. Suffolk was sent, not to fight Japan, but to escort these “national treasures” of China from Shanghai to London for the exhibition. In 1935, a total of 93 boxes full of “treasures from China” arrived at Portsmouth, including 1,022 items of bronze, ceramics, and paintings.

The exhibition received a grand success. Out of envy, the museum directors from the United States, Russia and even Japan have proposed to host the tour exhibition in the following years in their own countries. Due to the intricate domestic politics and foreign policy of China at that time caused by the conflicts between the Nationalist Party and the Communist Party, the proposal of the United States – made by Herbert Eustis Winlock, the curator of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, was turned down. The proposal of Russia was accepted. Therefore in 1940 these national treasures

were again sent for a tour to Moscow in exchange of financial and military assistances.

During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such a museum diplomacy was continued by both the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China (Taiwan) under the rules of Mao Zedong and Jiang Kai-shek. In the 1950s, the former sent a series of Dunhuang art exhibitions to Southeast Asia and East Europe, including Burma, India, Czech Slovakia and Poland, as well as Japan. In 1961, the Republic of China sent its national treasures (removed from the mainland to Taiwan after 1949) for a tour exhibition in the United States.

After the Cold War, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, such a practice was picked up again by the government in Taiwan led by the Independence Party. The purpose was to seek supports from the West vis-à-vis the threat of China from across the strait. As a result, several special exhibitions were organized by the National Palace Museum in Taipei for a tour show to the United States, Japan, France and Germany.

### **Repatriation: A matter of war**

According to the Chinese experience recounted above, the prospect for the countries of origin to retrieve their cultural heritage expropriated to the West during colonization does not appear to be very optimistic. As it seems to suggest that the matter can only be resolved through the combat of hard power. By far, the countries of origin (the former colonies or semi-colonies in Africa or Asia) often stressed on the concept of “cultural identity” or “national dignity”, and the universal museums (in West Europe or North America) the idea of “enlightenment spirit” or the fact that they safeguarded the objects when the former suffered continuous wars. For the argument, a variety of neutralized terms have been invented for the two parties. For instance, “source country” was to replace “the countries of origin” or provenances, and “destination country” or “market country” to “the colonial powers” or the metropole. Furthermore, the latter was often described to be the keeper of the cultural heritage for all mankind with a “cultural internationalism”, and the former the self-centered party with a “cultural nationalism”.

This historical study has proved these arguments fruitless and pointed out one simple answer to the question “who owns the past” – and that is through war, be it an armed one or monetary one. One might say that there is law to resort to, instead of war. For instance, the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects. But then, again, this convention does not cover the colonial collections, and as a matter of fact by nature – law is war. This has been made explicit in the letters between Einstein and Freud while questioning “why wars” (Freud and Einstein 1932):

Thus, under primitive conditions, it is superior force – brute – violence, or violence backed by arms – that lords it everywhere. We know that in the course of evolution this state of things was modified, a path was traced that led away from violence to law. But what was this path? Surely it issued from a single verity: that the superiority of one strong man can be overcome by an alliance of many weaklings, that **l'union fait la force**. Brute force is overcome by union; the allied might of scattered units makes good its right against the isolated giant. Thus we may define “right” (i.e., law) as the might of a community.

In this light, the UNESCO heritage charters, conventions or laws are veritable a war zone, for the “weaklings” (the former colonized or semi-colonized countries, the global south or the countries of origin) to unite and fight for the return of their lost cultural heritage from the West (the former colonial powers, the global north and the universal museums). And this specific war is invincible as like said all these legal or semi-legal instruments have a statute of limitation that rules out the colonial collections. If not the UNESCO way, then the Chinese way? For the important collections to return from the universal museums to their countries of origin – to serve in priority the people(s) who created them but were deprived of – the only way seems to be either by the force of guns or wealth, the hard power always.

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# Orphaned Objects: The Waste And Excess Of Restituted Cultural Property

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## **ABSTRACT**

One of the responses to the ongoing repatriation debates is questioning the valid use of the objects recovered from adhering to international conventions alone. In the absence of this, the restitution process remains incomplete. The case in hand is the vast caches of smuggled artworks and antiquities accumulated over a long career. They form a corpus of things exhibited as subjects of international obligations, to return and accept their return. But the value obtained by antiquities through restitution is often subject to waste (where the return of recovered objects is stalled halfway due to lack of funds and interest, or kept in storage sites away from the public eye), as the instruments of international law don't detail beyond the sovereignty of national ownership. Restituted objects released from the monetary exchange sphere are suspended in an economy of excess and waste. This paper seeks to define the unintended consequences of the formal repatriation mechanism as a possible cause for the abandonment of the universalist project of protecting and restituting cultural property.

## **KEYWORDS**

Repatriation; Rubbish; Collecting; Storage; Indian Art.

The term 'Orphaned Objects' is used in the art market's parlance as a descriptor for artifacts of significance with missing provenance. The term has three noted definitions, the first being small fragments of whole greek vases. The Italian carabinieri calls them *orfanelli*.<sup>4</sup> These broken shards are collector items, where the goal is to collect all the pieces of a singular vase so that the conservators can reconstruct it. The second definition of the term alludes to the objects whose findspot is unknown. In this case, they may also be called 'unprovenanced objects'. In this context, the appearance of an object suggests clandestine digging, theft, or illicit export of the object from its situ. The third, and the most novel use of the term, refers to objects whose acquisition is declined by western encyclopedic museums owing to legal or ethical reasons.

One of the dialectics of the cultural property debate is woven around the two counter-views of what makes an object orphaned. Is it when it is unclear where the object has come from? Or where will it go? Either way, being in this liminal space of being out of place and context can be seen as most resembling the substance showing the much-discussed properties of cultural property, which is subject to various legal regulations, interpretations, mandates and ethical codes. While referencing the ethics and counter-ethics of resourcing orphaned objects, Phillippe de Montebello of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET) has said:

“As archaeologists have said, these unprovenanced objects are orphans, as their parentage through the absence of a known find spot is lost. But would these same archaeologists abandon a shivering orphaned child on a cold rainy day in the street or would they look for an orphanage? We museums are the orphanages of these objects.... They bring the works they acquire into the public domain. We display them. We publish them electronically as well as on paper. So to those who say do not buy an unprovenanced object, no matter how unique, brilliantly conceived and masterfully crafted it is, I would again ask, and what do you propose should be done with that object? Of course, it is to be deplored that works of ancient art are removed clandestinely from their site. Much knowledge is lost as a result, but we should not compound that loss by helping

the work of art to disappear. That would be a violation of our *raison d'etre*.”<sup>2</sup>

If, in museum spaces, ethical narratives are deployed to acquire unprovenanced objects, the same ethics of parentage are re-engendered to stop their repatriation to the source country. It is often touted that the objects carefully preserved, studied, and made visible in a western museum will get damaged and lost in obscurity outside of their stewardship.

As a museum piece, an object becomes a *singularity*, a terminal condition of being inalienable from the museum. ‘Repatriation’, from this perspective, is an act of violence to the integrity of the museum. The British Museum, for example, declined to repatriate the Parthenon Marbles, arguing that there is no suitable place to preserve the marbles at the Acropolis. Taking a pragmatic approach, the Greek government built a new museum so that the Parthenon Marbles could be stored and displayed in Athens while making them as carefully preserved as they are in the British Museum. The same is true for the Benin Bronzes, which are going to be displayed in a new museum whose chief purpose will be to house and display the Benin Bronzes. This mode of thinking has a streak of colonialism, that seeks to accumulate objects and resources from the margins to its center, which is better connected and has more resources to expend.

In 1954, W. G. Archer, the Keeper of the Indian Section of the V&A Museum, spent some months traveling around India. He visited several site museums in Sanchi, Sarnath and Kahjuraho, only to express his view that they should be closed and their contents moved to the National Museum in New Delhi. For him, site museums amount to “rather a waste of good sculpture”.<sup>3</sup> A relevant contemporary view was also featured in the essay ‘Mythology of the Antiquities Market’<sup>4</sup>, by author Ricardo J. Elia, who confronts the socio-functional aspect of the myth of collectors as Guardians of the past. According to the author, this myth created by the art market aims to sever the link between collecting and looting. Thus the idea of guardianship plays a pivotal role in transforming the view of the museum-going audience, which begins to view the objects as rightfully

collected even if many of them were purchased by the museum, knowing they are unprovenanced and highly likely to have come from looted sites.

This line of reasoning extends as a corollary that once repatriated the objects will not receive the same protection, attention and care that they receive in the well-endowed cosmopolitan encyclopedic museums of the world, further legitimating their collection. The threat of negligence comes in the form of a growing risk to cultural heritage from the politically motivated groups in nations where “new incentives for cultural purification”, “as more nations lose the illusion of national economic sovereignty or well-being”.<sup>5</sup>

Repatriation of cultural property is seen as benefiting only the ruling elite. Take, for example, the recently returned statue of goddess Annapurna from Canada to India, smuggled out of Varanasi by Canadian Norman Mckenzie. While studying MacKenzie’s collection during the preparation for her exhibition ‘From India to Canada and Back to India’, Divya Mehra, a Winnipeg-based artist, brought attention to the fact that the statue had been stolen from India over a century ago. The object thereafter was voluntarily repatriated by the University of Regina, where it was part of the Mackenzie Art Gallery, over to the High Commissioner of India, at a Zoom meeting, in 2020. The following year a ceremony to commemorate the repatriation was held in the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi. Many delegates, including the cabinet Minister for Culture, G. Krishan Reddy, were seen venerating an Annapurna sculpture. In his tweet addressing the event, he said:

Under the relentless pursuit of the @NarendraModi Govt, #BringingOurGodsHome continues & this morning, joined by several Union Ministers, puja was performed to Annapurna Devi Murti retrieved from 🇨🇦 at @ngma\_delhi.

Looking at the ceremony pictures, one could mistakenly assume that the sculpture at the center of the Hindu ceremony is the one that has been repatriated. The difference in size between the sculpture shown and the one repatriated is symptomatic of the very magnification which is required in

order to make sense of the repatriation itself (Fig 1). Also, there is no mention of the scholar whose work was responsible for uncovering the story being the sculpture's provenance and history of theft. Instead, the ceremony brings our attention to the return of the Annapurna sculpture, showing the commitment of the Prime minister in whose constituency the image was stolen and restituted. All the while, the actual idol remains missing from the scene.



**Fig 1.** The University of Regina officials preparing to repatriate the stolen 18th-century image of Annapurna to India.



**Fig 2.** Shri G. Kishan Reddy formally hands over Idol of Goddess Annapurna to Uttar Pradesh Government in the presence of several Union and State ministers.

In his book *The lives of Indian Images*, Richard Davis traces the biography of Pathur Nataraja, a bronze image from south India rediscovered after having been buried underground for centuries. In tracing its social life, he follows the object from its loss to its acquisition by the Canadian Bumper

Corporation in a series of exchanges where the object's value kept increasing with each transfer, and the information about its findspot became more and more obscure. The Indian government discovered it when the British Museum brought it temporarily for restoration. In hot pursuit, the court case between the temple authority of Pathur and the government of India Vs. the Corporation began in London. The most memorable turn of events from the ordeal was the court appearance of Lord Shiva in the hearing to secure his own image as Nataraja.

The repatriation of the Nataraja was a well-publicized event that drew considerable attention in the national media. The Indian high-commissioner to England, speaking on the importance of the case, said that the recovery of the Pathur bronze would deter “international gangs of idol lifters.” While the Chief Minister of the State of Tamil Nadu, to where it was repatriated, Jayalalitha, said that “our priceless cultural treasures have been plundered by foreign countries and we have been forced, through circumstance, to bear all in silence”.<sup>6</sup> This could have been a happily ever after for story of the Pathur Nataraja had it been not so keenly observed by Davis, who found out how the piece has been locked up in the Icon center in Tiruvarur since its repatriation, where it is not displayed and accessible to the devotees.

How can we reconcile this fate of repatriated images?, asks Davis. Images are being brought back to India only to be put in deep storage, remaining inaccessible. What can we make of this negligence? Is repatriation of images and pieces merely photo-ops, used to mobilize sentiments of nationalism and patriotism for political purposes?

For the devotees of the Nataraja, the Icon Centre represented an incarcerating space. The icons, which are literally the embodiment of living deities, are suffering from the bronze disease. When a bronze icon is within a south Indian temple, it is considered the lord of the temple. There, they are bathed, fed, prayed to, and even sing lullabies. The deities also listen to the devotees who come from far and wide places just to see the lord. Daily *abhiksha* activities include rituals such as bathing the icons in milk and other offerings. These daily rituals amount to caretaking that keeps the icon from

corroding and catching the degenerative bronze disease. Thus the existence of these idols in cold storage is considered unacceptable to devout believers.

Looking back to the history of repatriation, we can see that it has a transformative effect on the objects. It is known that Leonardo Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* was not a masterpiece and the most famous painting at the Louvre before it was stolen in 1911. For nearly 400 years, the *Mona Lisa* was relatively less known, at least certainly when compared to its status today, until it went missing. Parisians, including Franz Kafka, came rushing to see the empty slot where the *Mona Lisa* once was. The slot was named the "mark of shame." The Italian Art thief Vincenzo Peruggia believed that Napoleon had stolen the *Mona Lisa* and was bringing it back to Italy, the place of its birth. The return of Monalisa with much fanfare transformed it into the masterpiece and centerpiece of the Louvre collection, where it is still the most famous painting on display.

The act of loss and repatriation has a similar effect on the status of the object, which is then shown in a different light, and another chapter is added in its biography. This is true in the case of objects returning to India as well. They are often brought back by high-ranking delegates and are rarely received by the prime minister of India himself (Fig 2).

The objects are shown at press conferences, and the images of their return are widely circulated in the media. Sometimes, objects are also worshiped in reconsecration ceremonies where the idol undergoes ritual services such as *abhisheka* to transform them into living deities. They are sometimes also the center of diplomatic meetings focused on cultural exchanges, such as the time when the Australian Prime Minister brought back stolen idols from the National Gallery of Australia to New Delhi (Fig 3), or when Angela Merkel handed over the Kashmir Valley Durga (housed in Stuttgart). In these instances, they transcend their identities as idols and art objects to become messengers of goodwill between nations while telling the stories of vulnerability, precarity, and the simultaneous devotion of those who willed them back into their homes.



**Fig 3.** Prime Minister of India Mr. Narendra Modi examining repatriated images.



**Fig 4.** Prime Minister Abbott of Australia returns Shiva Nataraja idol and Ardhanariswara idol to the Prime Minister Narendra Modi

According to a Comptroller Auditor General report on ASI in 2013, the government body was found to be functioning under serious financial and human resources deficits.<sup>7</sup> Some of the findings of the audit pertaining to the preservation, display, and storage of antiquities are worth recounting here. The audit found that even valuable antiquities found during excavations are held in poor storage conditions. At the time, there did not exist centralized information system for the antiquities, which posed a significant risk of theft or loss. 131 antiquities were stolen from sites and monuments and another 37 from the site museums recently. It was estimated that 95 percent of all antiquities were stored without ever being put on display.

Upinder Singh has noted that there are many things to be considered when thinking about storage in India. The clear-cut categories of storage and display are often not so porous in the context of India, which has a long history of state-sponsored excavations. The museum display and its storage are considered the inverse of each other. However, it is more common for site museums in India to have storage sheds that are halfway between storage and display. The storage can be seen to have three levels. The most important sculptures and antiquities are put under roofed spaces in a gallery space where visitors may examine them. Second, spaces are unroofed but bounded areas where antiquities are arranged in corridors along traversable pavements. Here, the antiquities are considered important but secondary to the most important specimens of sculpture and carvings. Lastly, many loose sculptures and fragments are shown in open spaces which are fenced within the site compound, an area protected by law.<sup>8</sup>

While describing the problems of storage in archaeology, Israeli scientist Morag Kersel — in the paper titled “Storage Wars: Solving the Archaeological curation Crisis” — points out the privilege of excavation and field archaeology over storage and curation at a policy level. She suggests that the future of archaeology is in the excavation of the archive rather than the sites.<sup>9</sup> If, on one hand, the ethical dilemma with the objects is whether to acquire them or not, Kristen Smeds brings our attention to yet another crisis in the museums, that of “what to keep and what to let go”. She compares the vast archives of stored objects in the museum to a non-representative dump. She remarks:

“Museums are bellying by the mass of their enormous collections, of which only a fraction will ever be displayed in expositions. What should we do with it all? Could we treat it differently than we do now? Could we perhaps at least be questioning the somewhat absurd idea of “eternal preservation” which is the word of the day in this business?”<sup>10</sup>

Within India, much of the concern regarding the preservation of cultural heritage focuses on the lack of proper facilities to store even the

antiquities seized or retrieved from smugglers. The vast open storages where antiquities are dumped resemble more like indistinguishable rubbish than the invaluable heritage of the people of a country. Yet, this forms a veil over an even more inconvenient reality of the vast amounts of unclassified objects lying unattended in the Museum storage of Indian museums.

As Michael Thompson has shown in his work *Rubbish Theory*, rubbish is, by its very nature, overlooked. Its visibility and presence often result from its placement. In other words, rubbish is only visible when it is out of its place, which can be said of the antiquities lying in open dumps rather than similarly amorphous antiquities collections in museums. This is an uncomfortable reality of repatriation faced by anyone who is enthusiastic about decolonising their regional and national heritage in western encyclopedic museums. But Thompson reminds us that rubbish is not a permanent condition, it is a liminal state in-between durable and transient, which every object must endure in order to be durable.

The antiquities storage is a space of nothingness where time has stopped by the virtues of the presence of all times simultaneously, without identification and classification. Seen through the lens of rubbish, the open storages are far from being valueless, and the dump is very rich. This rubbish should not deter anyone from accumulating it. It represents a category of objects that embodies a significant amount of potential for re-emergence through recycling, re-use, and re-absorption into everyday lives. Rubbish, according to Thompson, is an in-between category that lies between objects of transience and durable objects with practises of finding, displaying, or transforming and re-using.

To put these theoretical musings about the treatment of museum objects both as inalienable possessions and optically and ontologically resembling rubbish, I will draw upon the biography of a standing Buddha image, which has been returned from the Metropolitan Museum and is now displayed in the Gallery of Retrieved and Confiscated Antiquities at Purana Quila, New Delhi. The object in question is possibly a 6th-7th century AD Gupta period Buddha image from Bodh Gaya. It has the distinction of being

the place where the Buddha attained his enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. It is a place visited by Buddhists from around Asia and the world.

The first Buddhist temple in Bodh Gaya was built in the 3rd century BC by King Ashoka, which had possibly attracted pilgrims from across different lands. A stupa was constructed nearby, along with a railing to surround the Bodhi tree to protect it from wild animals. Later in the Gupta Period, the main structure of the Mahabodhi temple was constructed, and it remains there till now. It was in this period that the standing buddha image was probably made. It is believed the main icon of the temple was made of gold as far back as the 7th century, when Chinese pilgrim Huen Tsang visited the place. In the following centuries, royal patronage started to decline slowly, and the influence of Buddhism began to diminish with the resurgence of the vedic faith and Muslim invasions soon after. Many of the broken sculptures in the Bodh Gaya site museum bear testimony to this period, as does possibly the standing Buddha we see here. The Burmese kings repaired the temple many times till about the early 14th century. From then on, the site had turned into a forest, and the Bodh Gaya was left deserted, neglected and abandoned.

In the 16th century, an ascetic Shri Ghamandi Giri, came upon the ruins while seeking solitude to meditate in the forest. It is said that he was unaware of the history of this place. He found the place suitable to establish a *math* near the ancient ruins of Bodh Gaya. The materials from the ruin were repurposed to make the new *math*. Many of the images of Buddha were brought into the new *math* where they became objects of worship by the local people, along with Shiva, who was the presiding deity in the *math*. It is likely that the standing buddha image was already a free-standing image by that time, and was venerated by the pilgrims who visited the *math* and its mahant.

In the later Mughal period, Bodh Gaya received royal grants, and more deserted idols of the buddha were brought into the *math* as the place started witnessing a flow of pilgrims. At this time, it is difficult to say how many knew about the history of the place. When the first British surveyors of India saw Buddha images in Bodh Gaya they were bewildered by the presence. They

were more accustomed to seeing Buddhist images in other places outside India, like Tibet, Thailand, and Burma, where Buddhism was a living religion. The Bodh Gaya was the property of the shaivite *math*, and it was only in the 19th century that Buddhist monks from Myanmar start rediscovering it from ancient texts. One can see the Burmese monks in Bodh Gaya till this day.

In the second half of the 19th century, Sir Alexander Cunningham, who was the Director-general of The Archaeological Survey of India, reconstructed the temple from its ruins. The temple, as it is seen today, is the result of the repair and restoration work carried out by the Cunningham and Belgar in 1880. The free-standing Buddhist images were brought into the Bodh Gaya compound and displayed in permanent corridors and galleries. These images, even if they are meant to be displayed as art, are worshipped by the devotees, who put gold leafs on them (fig 4). Had the Metropolitan Buddha not been stolen, it would have been considered a sacred image of the Buddha by the devotees.



**Fig 5.** Images of Buddha at the bodhgaya math adorned by the golden leaves placed by devotees.

The rediscovery of Bodh Gaya restituted the buddha images to their original significance as Buddhist.

Another shift in the meaning of the objects took place in the beginning of the 20th-century, transforming idols into art objects. This taxonomic shift happened with the writings of E. B. Havell, and Ananda Coomaraswamy, in the 1910s, and was institutionally completed with the excellent show “The Art of India and Pakistan”, held at the Royal Academy of Arts in London, in 1947-1948.

In his quest to redefine Indian art as a category of “fine art”, Havell was advancing certain images, such as meditating buddhas and dancing shivas as central to the Indian artistic traditions. Havell set up Indian art in opposition to the Western Canons of art. For him, it was the Other for European taste and sensibility. He wrote, “while the Christian art of the middle ages is always emotional, rendering literally the pain of the mortification of the flesh, Indian art appeals more to the imagination and strives to realize the spirituality and abstraction of a supra-terrestrial sphere”.<sup>14</sup> Following this discourse from the writings of Havell and Coomaraswamy, Buddha’s and Other images such as the Pathur Nataraj, also became collectable items of fine art in the context of the museums, where before they were merely considered as antiquities meant to shed light on the history of a place. The way the Metropolitan Museum of Art sees the standing buddha image from Bodh Gaya is not as an idol but as an art object.

Sometime after the independence, the management of the temple was removed from the *math*, and a new independent management was created under the Bodh Gaya Temple Management Committee Act 1953. It was in 2002 that Bodh Gaya was recognized as a UNESCO world heritage site.

The Standing buddha image before us was located in the compound of the Bodh Gaya *math*, where it was seen by the former director general of ASI Dr. Debala Mitra in her 1987 visit. However, on her next visit in 1989 the sculpture was no longer there. An image of the standing buddha, published in the Metropolitan Museum’s catalog, ‘Arts of South Asia and South-East Asia’ drew attention due to its similarity with the missing sculpture. After an inquiry, the object was returned to India on 23rd march 1999. Ever since its

return, the sculpture would have spent most of its time at the central antiquities collection in Purana Quila, with the premier repository of sculpture under the custodianship of ASI. It was only in August of 2019, that the image went on display at the newly commemorated Gallery of Confiscated and Retrieved Antiquities (Fig 5). Here, the idol tells its viewers not a story of the history or rediscovery of the place of Buddha's enlightenment but the danger to the place if the illicit trade of antiquities does now stop.

Similar to Greece and Benin, the gallery space now represents the rehabilitative context where objects can be at home and put on display, as is expected by western museums. The standing buddha represents a case where the object has been orphaned more than one time and has lived various lives, as an idol of buddha, as an orphan in a forest, as an unnamed ancient deity, as a fetish, as an antiquity and as an art object in a museum. Each of the phases has further enriched the life of the standing Buddha.



**Fig 6.** 6th-7th century Standing Buddha image repatriated from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, currently on display at the Gallery of Confiscated and Retrieved Antiquities, Purana Quila, New Delhi.

### Conclusion

Repatriated objects which are kept in prison, like vaults and storages, acquire an additional characteristic that sets them apart from regular archaeological and historical artifacts. They develop the potential to tell stories of restitution even as their own restitution may be ceremonial or symbolic. Objects such as the Standing Buddha in The Gallery of Confiscated and Retrieved Antiquities are able to transcend transitory states of rubbish and become invaluable durables. This is not the rule but rather an exception, as countless antiquities still remain in the homogenous barrage of antiquities just a few doors down from this gallery at Purana Quila's 'Central Antiquities Collection'. How long they remain as unyielding rubbish might also determine the fate of both repatriation outcomes and the enthusiasm for it.

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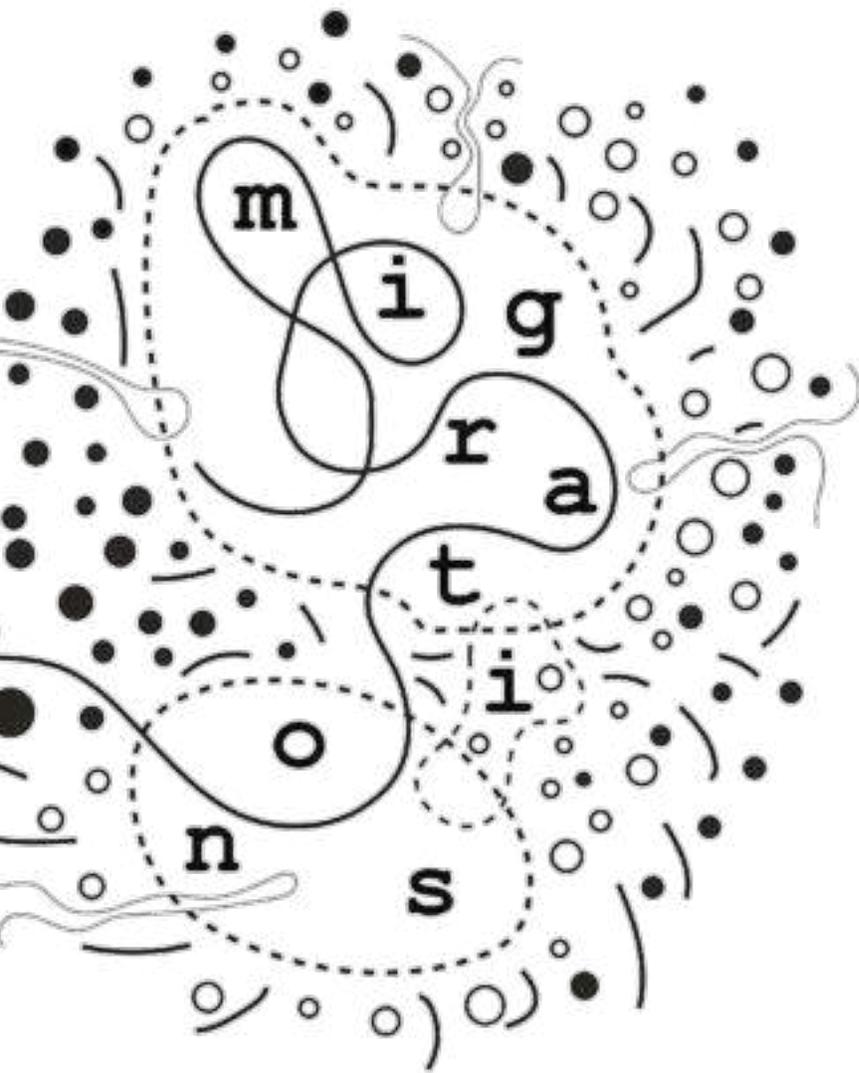
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# Transcending Borders

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## Session 9



## Session 9

# Transcending Borders: Reshaping Cultures through Ideas and Images

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Interdisciplinary studies are encouraged by scholars to create and acclaim cultural awareness as society progresses. With the dispersion of the ethnic population, the initiatives to understand the new human state and multi-cultural studies are crucial to assimilate better the consciousness of human behavior and influence of cultural context upon him. Human nature has been constantly interpreted and determined by each unique and specific cultural background. Transcultural perspicacity helps simplify the attitude of a researcher to understand different perspectives better.

Being part of the Indian Subcontinent, we have been familiar with the multicultural facets and diversity of beliefs that the past has given and acknowledge the relationship that historical and contemporary research require to widen the aesthetic, cultural, material, and socio-political context of art.

Progressively rising technology, such as social media platforms, online interactive techniques platforms, and a broad range of contemporary art forms, are crucial and integrated into intercultural understanding.

The term “transcultural” probably constitutes one of the most important and widely discussed conceptual keywords in recent years’ humanities and social sciences. This session aimed at analyzing and evaluating the relationship between the transcultural paradigm and various more or less established academic disciplines or research fields. The

contributors to this session have all worked in the context of an interdisciplinary research institution dedicated to developing and advancing the transcultural approach in the humanities and the social sciences.

CIHA has been one of the communities of researchers and practitioners to place the effort of finding new ways to approach the field. Such studies show how these developments have influenced human culture and education in promoting mutual understanding among various ethnic groups for better cultural development in a pluralistic society.

In this 35th session of CIHA, we discussed and shared our ideas on different migrations in a concrete, historiographical, and conceptual way.

The session also attempted to articulate new ways to highlight/outline the complexity that goes into the makings of transdisciplinary practices.

This session offers the contributors the chance to describe their traditionally defined academic research fields while also showcasing the merits of applying a transcultural approach.

# Shifting Frameworks: The Common Foundations of *Kulturwissenschaft* and *Kunstwissenschaft* in the 19th Century

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## **ABSTRACT**

While Aby Warburg worked under the title of *Kulturwissenschaft*, some of his contemporary art historians intended to establish *Kunstwissenschaft*. Nonetheless, the two fields, both born in a similar intellectual milieu, shared theoretical sources and methodological approaches in many aspects. By exploring and comparing the thoughts and views of several leading scholars on some core issues, this essay attempts to reveal that the boundaries between these two frameworks were not always explicit and settled.

## **KEYWORDS**

Kulturwissenschaft; Kunstwissenschaft; Psychic Unity; Psychophysiology Evolution.

Edgar Wind once distinguished Warburg's *Kulturwissenschaft*, which situated art in its cultural milieu, from Wölfflin or Riegl's *Kunstwissenschaft*, based on pure artistic vision.<sup>1</sup> Even in a recent lexicon of *Kunstwissenschaft*, the development of art historical methods is described as oscillating between the poles of isolation and contextualization of works of art.<sup>2</sup> Trained as an art historian, Warburg turned to work he described as *Kulturwissenschaft*. What is the similarity or difference between *Kunstwissenschaft* and *Kulturwissenschaft*? Do they have anything in common in the methodological approaches and primary problems they seek to solve? How did they construct their respective frameworks from scientific instruments and theories, either natural or human?

To answer the questions, we need to observe both frameworks in the interdisciplinary context of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, rather than describing the development of art history as a single, autonomous line of enquiry. *Kunstwissenschaft* and *Kulturwissenschaft* were woven into a complicated and interrelated tapestry of theoretical sources and intellectual concepts, most of which were born in other fields.

### **Psychic Unity**

Although Warburg is thought to have had a “burning faith in the potentialities of *Kulturwissenschaft*”, as Gombrich put it,<sup>3</sup> he was concerned with the *essential* problems of art history, most of which were also debated in the realm of *Kunstwissenschaft*. The aims of Warburg, I shall argue, did not differ very much from those of contemporary art historians, and the main difference between them is the means they used. Warburg's approach, in his own words, is “a cultural science oriented towards the study of art”.<sup>4</sup> Instead of demarcating between disciplines, knowledge and ways of researching, which are not always fixed but shifting at all times, Warburg famously encouraged his colleagues, in his article on the astrological decoration of the Palazzo Schifanoia, to extend the methodological borders of *Kunstwissenschaft* without fear of “grenzpolizeiliche Befangenheit”.<sup>5</sup>

In this article, Warburg concentrated on the work of a “schwächere” (weaker) artist, Francesco Cossa, to explore how antiquity influenced the

artistic culture of the early Renaissance. He believed the flaws of undistinguished work could, more clearly, reveal the intention of the artist, since “the complicated structure of the major work made the problem much harder to pick out, because the artist resolved it with such a display of virtuosity”.<sup>6</sup> With a similar attitude, Warburg sought the parallels between the cultures of American Indian tribes and pagan Europe in order to investigate how the pagan worldview developed, in his words, “from primitive paganism, through the paganism of classical antiquity, to modern man”,<sup>7</sup> so enabling him, as he thought, to trace the origin of *Pathosformeln* in “primitive” cultural phenomena.

Warburg hoped to observe the history of symbolic forms in the ornaments on Hopi vessels and kachina headdresses.<sup>8</sup> Ornamentation, as preliminary forms of art, attracted not only Warburg, but also many protagonists of *Kunstwissenschaft*, who wanted to investigate the laws of art history. Semper, Riegl, Strzygowski and Worringer had all published works about the history of ornament.<sup>9</sup> It was an interest in the origins of art that led art historians to look at “primitive” culture, and this interest relied heavily on contemporary *Völkerpsychologie* and anthropology.

In a review of a book on ethnology, Adolf Bastian maintained that stereotypes of thought were most clearly evident in primitive mentalities and that these stereotypes would permit the highest cultural questions to be addressed.<sup>10</sup> As one of the founders of the Berlin Anthropological Society, Bastian’s argument reflects the interest in *Naturvölker* of the time.<sup>11</sup> From ‘natural people’ anthropologists hoped to examine the essence of the nature of men. With the evolution of culture, it was argued intellectual life becomes richer and more complex, in which the mind is relatively independent, and the matter is under the influence of its environment. The original patterns of primitive societies are “passed on as truth to the next generation.”<sup>12</sup> The anthropologists’ quest for the nature of humanity in primitive societies was echoed by art historians’ research into the origin of art.

The fundamental idea underlying the quest for stereotypes in *Naturvölker* is the belief in the psychic unity of mankind. Bastian claimed that psychological elements were “circulating in regular and uniform rotation in

the heads of all people and that this is so for all times and places” and encouraged a psychological approach to human civilization.<sup>13</sup> Theodore Waitz, in the introduction to his *Anthropologie der Naturvölker*, stated that psychology was a crucial method to research the cultural phenomena of mankind and insisted on the “general uniform intellectual capacity in all human populations from the Greeks to the Hottentots”.<sup>14</sup> In a similar sense, Warburg put the sentence “Das ist ein altes Buch zu blättern/Athen-Oraibi alles Vettern” at the beginning of his “Serpent Ritual” lecture, which was based on his journey to the region of the Pueblo Indians.<sup>15</sup>

Following earlier studies of *Völkerpsychologie*, Bastian believed that all people had the same psychological elements, but local and temporal variations caused different thought patterns.<sup>16</sup> Although there is no evidence of Riegl’s reading of Bastian, his *Kunstwollen*, which was discussed among scholars of the time, paralleled Bastian’s theory.<sup>17</sup> Riegl advocated the view of creative autonomy and persisted that the artistic forms and concepts were transmitted from one generation to the next and from one culture to another, similar to Bastian’s argument that “original patterns of primitive societies passed on to the next generation”.<sup>18</sup> All people all over the world and at all times have their artistic impulses. Still, they are different because of “outside local, and temporal variations,” which in Riegl’s words is “All such human *Wollen* is directed towards self-satisfaction in relation to the surrounding environment...man wants to interpret the world in accordance with his inner drive (which may change with nation, location and time). The character of this *Wollen* is always determined by what may be termed the conception of the world at a given time [*Weltanschauung*]”.<sup>19</sup> As the driving force of art, Riegl’s *Kunstwollen* is also a kind of stereotype shared by all humans but appearing in different forms, which are recognized as styles.

*Völkerpsychologie*, which emphasizes the psychological force behind the cultural phenomena of all peoples, not only expanded the research scope of art historians to objects outside fine art, but also enabled *Kunstwissenschaftlers*, such as August Schmarsow, to construct the science of art.<sup>20</sup> Ernst Grosse, in a book on the origins of art, discussed the purposes and methods of *Kunstwissenschaft*. He tried to make art history more

scientific with the help of comparative ethnological methods. Based on his belief in psychic unity, the essential motives, means, and aims of the earliest art are at one with those of art of all times.<sup>21</sup>

### **Body-based Psychology**

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, as today, art history borrowed ideas and methods from other fields but aimed to establish its autonomy. Influenced by and following the classification systems of the natural sciences, *Kunstwissenschaft* subjected works of art to an analysis of, in the words of Hans Sedlmayr, “their internal organization and structure; it can accurately classify works according to their natural groups and establish genetic connections among works based on their properties; it can arrive at an understanding of the historical events the products of which it is studying and of the forces at work behind these events.”<sup>22</sup> Studies in style offered a chance for art history to practice the classification of works of art and the law of their evolution. Sedlmayr concluded that the purpose of *Kunstwissenschaft* was practically the history of style.<sup>23</sup>

Wickhoff, Riegl, and Wölfflin linked styles with modes of visual perception, which echoed the kinesthetic theory of Hildebrand, and regarded psychology as the foundation of the historical study.<sup>24</sup> The rise of psychology not merely supplied art history with a fundamental approach but also built up the entire ground of *Geisteswissenschaften* in the sense of Dilthey. Psychology was considered one of the most important scientific methods to interpret human cultures and to enable the human sciences, which study consciousness or inner experience, to be on an equal footing with the natural sciences, which focus on outer experience.<sup>25</sup>

Although Max Dessoir, the founder of the *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, traced the history of psychology from the ancient conception of the life of the soul, Kant seems to be more closely associated with later psychological approaches in art history.<sup>26</sup> In his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781), Kant analyses the faculties through which the human mind represents reality and perceives time and space. The *a priori* features of the mind were further discussed and developed into cognitive

psychology in *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* (1798).<sup>27</sup> Later philosophers and psychologists developed Kant's transcendental aesthetics in a more materialized direction, which led art historians to concern themselves with the physiological functions of the human body.<sup>28</sup>

Herbart, the successor of Kant's chair at Königsberg, observed ideas in the human mind from a mathematical perspective which is not dissimilar to physiologists' quantification of neurological behavior. With the efforts of figures like Hermann Helmholtz, Gustav Fechner, Hermann Lotze, and Wilhelm Wundt, all of whom shared a medical background, a more experimental data-based psychology was shaped, which emphasized the mathematical relation between mind and body. Wundt, for example, analyzed the sensations and reflexes of the body and the neural activity of the eye when studying the perception of color.<sup>29</sup> He explored the concept of *Ausdrucksbewegung* (expressive movement), which readily finds its echo in Warburg's "historischen Psychologie des menschlichen Ausdruck", and linked the inner psychic emotions with outer expressions of the body.<sup>30</sup>

Under the influence of Wundt, Robert Vischer distinguished *Sehen* (seeing) and *Schauen* (scanning) in visual perception, in his *Über das optische Formgefühl* (1872). The former is merely a passive reception of optical organs when we have a first impression of the object, and the latter involves the active wandering of eyes to explore individual characteristics.<sup>31</sup> Hildebrand, twenty years later in his *Das Problem der Form in der bildenden Kunst* (1893), argued that "If his vantage point is distant, ...the overall image is two-dimensional...If the observer steps closer to the object, ...He will divide the overall appearance into several visual impressions connected by his eye movements of his eyes...Now seeing becomes scanning, and the resulting ideas are not visual [*Gesichtsvorstellungen*] but kinesthetic [*Bewegungsvorstellung*]."<sup>32</sup> This has many points of contact with those well-known polarized schemas of *Kunstwissenschaftlers*, such as Wölfflin's linear and painterly and Riegl's tactile and optical.<sup>33</sup>

August Schmarsow was also indebted to physiologically based psychology. In his opinion, the process of perception not only involved the movement of the eyes, but also the movement of our bodies in order to

observe every aspect of the object. With respect to this movement in the space, Schmarsow held that people in certain periods created unique connections between bodily experience and the external world, which reflects a *Weltanschauung*, a term shared by many *Kunstwissenschaftlers* in their speculations on problems of style.<sup>34</sup> By referring to psychology and physiology, art historians at the turn of the century tended to link varied perceptive modes with certain artistic styles in history.<sup>35</sup>

Although he also employed the psychological approach, Warburg didn't resort to the discourse of "pure vision", since the act of seeing in his view is always conditioned by circumstances. Here we see a bifurcation between *Kunstwissenschaft* and Warburg's *Kulturwissenschaft*. He intends, in the context of experience or cultural milieu, to determine the "factors conditioning the formation of style more thoroughly".<sup>36</sup>

Instead of focusing on the role of movement in the process of perception, Warburg was concerned with the movements of figures in images per se, although he referred to Robert Vischer in the notes of his dissertation.<sup>37</sup> In this regard, he is closer to Wundt, whose concept of expressive movement is reminiscent of his historical psychology of human expression, as mentioned above. Certainly, Warburg was inspired by Darwin's "*On the Expression of Mind*" and Piderit's "*Mimik und Physiognomik*," which he read during his stay in Florence, where he attended Schmarsow's seminar.<sup>38</sup> Yet we should notice that both Schmarsow and Warburg were readers of Wundt, and for Schmarsow, Wundt's *Völkerpsychologie* had built a most important foundation for *Kunstwissenschaft*.<sup>39</sup> Though they seemingly chose different approaches to pursue the problems of style, the scholars, whether they worked in the realm of *Kunstwissenschaft* or left for *Kulturwissenschaft*, started from a similar psychophysiological point.<sup>40</sup>

### **"Descent with Modification"**

One of biology's most momentous impacts on *Kunstwissenschaftlers*, who wished to theorize art history and coin principles for it, was its evolution model. Wölfflin compared the evolution of architecture to that of organic life forms and mistakenly assumed that its direction was towards perfection.

However, he later acknowledged the divergent modes of imagination of different epochs and admitted that “it experiences all manner of breaks, constraints, and transformations in the actuality of lived history...particular developments merge into a long-term development...”<sup>41</sup> In other words, Wölfflin proposes a twofold model: “an internal development...occurs of its own accord within the perceptual apparatus” and “an external impulse that determines the transformation,” both of which are actually at play.<sup>42</sup> It means that outside impulses or chance adaptations may lead to distinguished styles in art history. Lauren Golden has noticed a Darwinian account in Wölfflin’s writing that “In the old form, the new is already contained just as, besides the withering leaves, the bud of the new already exists” is similar to Darwin’s discussion of the growth of a tree, which uses the words such as “decayed,” “fresh,” “fossil state” and “ramifications”.<sup>43</sup> No matter if Wölfflin had or had not referred directly to *The Origin of Species* when he wrote this passage, he seemingly composed it in a biological way of thinking.

In praising Burckhardt’s study of the art of late antiquity, Riegl alike employed the metaphor of *Keim* (bud) to state that this *Kunsthistoriker* can “recognize the seeds and buds of new life even in works of very late antiquity among signs of death and decay”.<sup>44</sup> Both Wölfflin and Riegl had implied, with their *Keim* metaphor, that the new style comes out of the old ones and the old survives in this way, which somewhat reminds us of Darwin’s “descent with modification”.<sup>45</sup>

In multiple places, Darwin mentioned the re-appearance or reversion of a character of certain species, which were possessed by its progenitors and had been latent in successive generations.<sup>46</sup> The certain appearance of a genus can be observed in a new species after generations of selection and modification. Elaborating a concept of periodicity, Wölfflin discovered classic and baroque in both modern and antique times, and Riegl identified the “baroque” qualities in Roman monuments.<sup>47</sup> It is the *Kunstwollen* that determines what kind of artistic variation would be adopted and would thus form a new style, whereas the others remain dormant and wait to be awoken by a future *Kunstwollen*.<sup>48</sup>

With the aim to establish a historical model for images and within the framework of evolutionary theory, Warburg also paid, even more, attention to the notion of survival, through which artists of the Quattrocento recognized the antique as a model.<sup>49</sup> The gestures in classical art were still able to arise a corresponding emotional response even in the attenuated form in which they had come down to later periods, and Warburg viewed the gestures or *pathosformeln* as diminished traces of the past. The survivals from the past are actively adapted to the present, which is precisely exemplified in Warburg's term "Auseinandersetzung" (dialectical engagement).<sup>50</sup> The word *Nachleben* was not exclusively occupied by Warburg but also mentioned by his contemporaries, such as Julius Schlosser, who used the English word "survival" instead of its German counterpart because it was originally a concept of Anglo-Saxon anthropology, being used in Edward Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1871).<sup>51</sup> Although this book cannot be guaranteed as a direct theoretical source for Warburg, its discussion of the science of culture and survival within culture should not escape our notice when discussing Warburg's *Kulturwissenschaft*. But as Gombrich has pointed out, Tylor devoted himself to the residues of a past phase, while Warburg was more concerned with "revivals."<sup>52</sup> In his speech for the CIHA in 1912, Warburg encouraged his colleagues to treat the ancient, medieval, and modern worlds as a coherent historical unity and called for building, in an evolutionary sense, the "Entwicklungs-Kategorien" [evolutionary categories] of art history.<sup>53</sup> And in his lecture on the serpent ritual ten years later, Warburg, mirroring the absence of the temporal dimension in anthropology, developed his anachronist historical model. When he recalled the trip to New Mexico, he practically fulfilled his wish of crossing the "borders" by establishing the correspondence between "primitive culture" and the classical tradition.

### Conclusion

Despite working under the title of *Kulturwissenschaft*, Warburg, in reality, was constantly concerned with the issues of art history. Even his last and least definable project, the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, attests to his endeavor to reformulate the problem of style.<sup>54</sup> He is dissatisfied with aestheticizing art

history and opposes “the autonomy of artistic developments and the unconnected spontaneity of artistic creation” placing himself, “against the overrating of purely formal criteria for the understanding of works of art.”<sup>55</sup> As he wrote in a letter to Franz Boas about the program of his library, two key points on which Warburg insisted were the internal psychological problem and the historical context of image.<sup>56</sup> Warburg and his contemporary *Kunstwissenschaftlers* shared an interest in physiologically based psychology, but the historical context in the eyes of his colleagues is just one of the factors that bring about the diversity of styles. And by opening up to anthropology and focusing on the uniform intellectual capacity of mankind, they turned to primitive culture and the so-called minor arts to search for certain stereotypes. The taxonomic system and evolutionary theory in biology, furthermore, provided art history with the classifications of style and time model of development, which significantly overturned the traditional art historical narrative.

On the one hand, art historians borrowed a methodological basis from natural sciences, evolutionism, psychology, empathy theory, anthropology, and much else, yet intended to, on the other hand, distinguish themselves from the confines of other disciplines through the exploration of style. Warburg chose a different title for his work, but in many respects, he shared common currencies with those who studied in the name of *Kunstwissenschaft*. Their intellectual frameworks often shift without precise and settled boundaries. Perhaps what matters more are the problems they aimed to resolve rather than the frameworks assigned to their approaches.

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### Endnotes

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2. Rainer Donandt, "Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte und als Kulturwissenschaft," in *Metzler Lexicon Kunstwissenschaft*, ed. Ulrich Pfisterer (Stuttgart, Weimar: Verlag J. B. Metzler, 2011), 250.
3. Ernst Gombrich, *Ideals and Idols: Essays on Values in History and in Art* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1979), 53.
4. Bernd Roeck, "Aby Warburgs Seminarübungen über Jacob Burckhardt im Sommersemester 1927," *Idea. Jahrbuch der Hamburger Kunsthalle* 10 (1991): 88-89. See also, Ernst Gombrich, "Unpublished Sources," in *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Bibliography* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1986), 345.
5. Aby Warburg, "Italienische Kunst und internationale Astrologie im Palazzo Schifanoja zu Ferrara," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Band II (Leipzig, Berlin: B. G. Teubner, 1932), 478; for English translation see "Italian Art and International Astrology in the Palazzo Schifanois, Ferrara," in Aby Warburg, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*, trans. David Britt (Los Angeles, The Getty Research Institute, 1999), 563-592.
6. Edgar Wind, "Warburg's Concept," 34.
7. Aby Warburg, *Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians of North America*, trans. Michael P. Steinberg (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 4.
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11. See Andrew Zimmerman, "Anthropology and the Place of Knowledge in Imperial Berlin" (PhD diss., University of California, 1998), especially chapter III.
12. Klaus-Peter Köpping, *Adolf Bastian and the Psychic Unity of Mankind: The Foundations of Anthropology in Nineteenth Century Germany* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2005), 179-180.
13. Köpping, *Adolf Bastian*, 180; Gombrich, *Aby Warburg*, 89.
14. Ulrich Pfisterer, "Origins and Principles of World Art History-1900 (and 2000)," in *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches*, eds. Kitty Zijlmans and Wilfried van Damme, (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2008), 73. Many scholars have mentioned that Warburg was a reader of Bastian, see Gombrich, *Aby Warburg*, 90; and David Freedberg, "Warburg's Mask: A Study in

- Idolatry,” in *Anthropologies of Art*, ed. Mariët Westermann (Williamstown, Massachusetts: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute), 6.
15. Aby Warburg, *Images*, 1.
  16. Pfisterer, “Origins and Principles,” 74; and Köpping, *Adolf Bastian*, 180.
  17. For example, see Yojö Hirn, “The Art-Impulse,” in *The Origins of Art: A Psychological & Sociological Inquiry* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1900), 18-29.
  18. Alois Riegl, *Problems of Style: Foundations for A History of Ornament*, trans. Evelyn Kain (Princeton and New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), xxvii.
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  26. See Max Dessoir, *Geschichte der neueren deutschen Psychologie* (Berlin: Verlag von Carl Dunker, 1902), and this book was dedicated to Dilthey.
  27. Katherine Arens, *Structures of Knowing: Psychologies of the Nineteenth Century* (Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 17.
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# Shamanism, Christianity, and the Art of Migrating Hungarians

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## **ABSTRACT**

The last chapter of the medieval Migration Period in Europe was the invasion of the Carpathian Basin by the Hungarian people at the end of the 9th century. Archaeologists recognized a highly characteristic artistic culture in the region typical for the 10th century. Traditional nationalistic research identified it with the autochthon culture of the ancient Hungarians, brought from Asia and given up in the 11th century during Christianization. Unquestionably, there were dramatic changes in the Carpathian Basin around 900. The emerging Slavic states of the Moravians and the duchy of Mosaburg, representing a typical Carolingian artistic culture of the 9th century, suddenly collapsed and gave way to the new artistic milieu associated with the Hungarians.

However, the origin of this new art is a complicated problem. There are no early signs of its presence in the Steppe and Ural region where the Hungarians came from. In reality, it was the result of the combination of earlier nomadic art, the influences of their new Byzantine neighbor, and artistic elements found in the region. It was created by cross-cultural connections in their new home, forming a transitional period that prepared the intensive Christianization after 1000. Thus, the last wave of early medieval migration not only changed the cultural landscape of Central Europe but it transformed the migrating people even more radically.

## **KEYWORDS**

Migration Period; Hungarians; 10th Century; Simurgh, Byzantine Artistic Influence.

Hungarian people have been living in Central Europe for more than one thousand years.<sup>1</sup> However, despite this long history, we should not forget that this resulted from migration from the east during the 9th century. In fact, the wandering of the Hungarians (or Magyars) was the last phase of the medieval migration period, starting in the late 4th century. Hungarians' conquest of the Carpathian Basin around 895 resulted in dramatic political changes. Before, the western part of the region was ruled by the Carolingian Empire, while territories in the north belonged to the Moravian Principality. With the arrival of the Hungarians, all that changed radically. The Frankish rule was withdrawn from the west, and the early Moravian state collapsed in a few years. These early states produced high-quality art and architecture. The Moravians built small churches in great variety, and yielded rich jewelry, unmistakably Christian.<sup>2</sup> While the Moravians inhabited parts of the present-day Czech Republic and Slovakia territories, in the western parts of the Carpathian Basin, a dependency of the Carolingian Empire was created centered at Zalavár (Mosaburg). Excavations revealed the significance of this center in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, proven by a large basilica decorated with stained glass and stone carvings with interlacing motifs. Burials with rich jewelry attest to the high living standards of the local aristocracy.<sup>3</sup>

All these promising early results of Christianization and state formation of the local people disappeared suddenly when the nomadic Hungarians conquered the Carpathian Basin at the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The 19<sup>th</sup>-century Romanticism imagined how the humiliated local people greeted the arriving Hungarians.

In the painting of Mihály Munkácsy (1893), Duke Árpád, sitting on his white horse, is equipped with typical Indian Mughal weaponry from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This painting is still kept in the Hungarian Parliament in Budapest.<sup>4</sup>

By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, our knowledge has been developed enormously, partially thank such archaeologist as Gyula László (1910-1998). He used authentic archaeological finds as well as ethnographic analogies for his reconstruction of the early Hungarians.<sup>5</sup> Contemporary or 19<sup>th</sup>-century examples taken from folk art of Hungarian peasants or the Mongols of the Far

East is methodologically problematic. However, many elements, especially the metalworks represented in his drawing are based on real findings from the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

These Hungarian metalworks can be easily identified based on their remarkably individual style.<sup>6</sup> For example, the hat was occasionally decorated with a metal top, made of gilded silver. The ornamental decoration applied on this object consists of a net of palmette leaves. These are arranged symmetrically, the ends of the lateral leaves are curved, the inner surface of the leaves are patterned with lines and dots, and usually parallel lines are chiseled at the edge of the leaves. There are two examples are known, a high-quality object from the Sub-Carpathian Beregszász (Beregovo in Ukraine)<sup>7</sup> and a less sophisticated work found quite recently in Central Hungary (Jászberény, Hungary).<sup>8</sup>



**Fig. 1.** Top of a hat from Beregszász (Budapest, Hungarian National Museum)

The early Hungarians were famous soldiers, and they used a new type of saber. Some of these weapons were decorated richly, such as the famous Hungarian saber kept in Vienna, in the Imperial Treasury (once it was part of the coronation regalia of the Holy Roman Emperors), or another one found in East Hungary (Gesztéréd).<sup>9</sup> Both of them are decorated with golden mountings representing the same type of palmette leaves. Hungarians kept their belongings attached to their belt; thus, this was one of their most important objects. These belts were usually decorated with silver mountings. The number and quality of these gilded mountings might have expressed the rank of their owner.

From an art historical point of view, the most significant object was the sabretache. This small bag, containing fire-making tools and other essentials, was usually made of leather, and the cover was strengthened with metal mountings. These mountings themselves were often richly decorated, as we can see it in a piece discovered in the territory of present-day Budapest.<sup>10</sup> However, the most spectacular objects were the silver plates covering the sabretache. These objects, less than 15 cm high, still offered a relatively large surface for the goldsmith to prove his abilities. There are different types of compositions. In some cases, such as in the one found in Central Hungary (Dunavecse),<sup>11</sup> it seems like the mountings of the four corners and the central one were united into one common composition. The four corners as well as the center are covered by the usual symmetrical palmette leaves. Another type is less centrally organized but represents an endless net of palmette leaves and tendrils. It looks like a piece of textile, and we can only hypothetically assume that similar patterns were indeed used for clothing.<sup>12</sup> There are no two identical pieces among the preserved sabretache plates; it seems that all of them were produced with an individual pattern. The newest discovery, a sabretache found in Central Hungary some ten years ago (Bugyi-Felsővány) is again surprising: this is the only known example with a frame consisting of tendrils and half-palmette leaves.<sup>13</sup> Altogether there are 27 plates known so far. Their uneven distribution in the Carpathian Basin is one of the unanswered problems of the period.



**Fig. 2.** Sabretache mountings from Budapest-Farkasrét (Budapest, Hungarian National Museum)

Women were dressed equally luxuriously. They owned wonderful necklaces, earrings, bracelets, and their vestment was decorated with silver mountings. The most spectacular element of their jewelry were the disks attached to the end of their braided hair. There are two types, the openwork and the laminar. Many of the hair disks are decorated with the usual palmette motifs. However, in certain cases, animals were depicted in hair disks. One of the most famous representations among these is the hair disk from Rakamaz (East Hungary), depicting an eagle catching smaller birds.<sup>14</sup> Another interesting piece was found in the neighboring Ibrány, representing a lion.

The legs and the tail of the lion are remarkably transformed to leaves; thus the animal is gradually losing its figural characteristics and is being converted to an ornamental motif.<sup>15</sup>



**Fig. 3.** Hair disk from Ibrány (Nyíregyháza, Jósa András Múzeum)

All what we know about the art of the early Hungarians are the results of excavations. Metalworks were preserved relatively well; wooden objects and textile were not. In some cases, bone carvings survived and these attest that the typical Hungarian palmette decoration was not limited to metalworks but probably was used generally.<sup>16</sup> However, we have to be

extremely cautious reconstructing the world of the early Hungarians consisting exclusively of palmettes, even if the variability of this type of decoration seems to be enormous.

This is an exceptional style unmistakably typical for the early Hungarians. There are not too many phases in European art history when so characteristically local styles were in use. Surprisingly, this style was never analyzed by art historians. As it was pointed out, Hungarian art historians started their national narrative with 1000, when the process of Christianization and state formation resulted the emergence of a European style in the Hungarian Kingdom. The late Ernő Marosi, once the leading authority in Hungarian art history, stated *expressis verbis*: “there is no modern art historical concept on the art of the migrating Hungarians. The revelatory artistic production of the exhibition on the early Hungarians in the National Museum (that was never presented in such a richness together) remained practically without interpretation regarding its art historical significance and position.”<sup>17</sup>

Thus, our present view is based on the contributions of archaeologists. One of the directions most popular among archaeologists since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century is the hypotheses on the relationship between Hungarian and Islamic art. The first serious attempt was done by József Hampel in 1907.<sup>18</sup> A few decades later, in the 1930s Nándor Fettich deduced the palmette decoration of the sabretache plates from the Arabic ornaments.<sup>19</sup> More recently, Károly Mesterházy argued that the structure, form, and organization originates in the art of Abbasid Iraq, in its Samarra period (836-892).<sup>20</sup> A few years ago, in 2013 he analyzed some bell mountings and caftan decorations found in 10<sup>th</sup>-century Hungarian tombs and compared them to Islamic artefacts.<sup>21</sup> While the aniconic character of the early Hungarian art and some of the details indeed seem to be comparable to 9<sup>th</sup>-century Islamic artistic production, the connections were probably not direct. Also, from a historical point of view, Islam's influence seems unrealistic since early Hungarians had no intensive connection with the Islamic world.

There are no signs of Muslim converts among the Hungarians, whose religion was most probably a variant of pagan Shamanism.

Hungarians were migrating from the East, probably from the eastern side of the Ural. Obviously, archaeologists tried to find the objects' predecessors in the Carpathian Basin somewhere in the territory of modern Russia and Ukraine. A leading researcher collecting materials from these regions was István Fodor in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. More recently, Attila Türk and the Archaeological Institute of the Pázmány Péter Catholic University conducts promising research at sites near to the Ural. They collected finds from sites as Sineglazovo and Uelgi and argued convincingly that these are related to the early Hungarians.<sup>22</sup> However, the analogies they found, such as the mountings with rosette motif, albeit very similar to objects from the Carpathian Basin, do not belong to the high-quality production of the early Hungarian art. In other cases, the palmette is comparable but not identical. Of course, there is a big geographical and chronological distance and motifs might have been transformed migrating together with the Hungarians.

Nevertheless, despite all efforts, convincing analogies are very rare from the huge Russian territories. Exceptionally, sabretache plates were found; however, their palmette decoration differs significantly from the Hungarian type. An interesting example was found in a 10<sup>th</sup>-century Mari tomb (Mari people belong to the Finno-Ugric people, linguistically related to the Hungarians).<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, the object has been lost. Nevertheless, what we can see in its picture, is quite far from the compositions so far presented from Hungary. The lions are more realistic and the palmette leaves lack the usual characteristics (lines and dots in the middle, parallel lines at the edges).

István Fodor, originally elaborating this research direction in the 1970s, made use of the monography of Boris Marshak, published on silverwork of Sogdian origin in 1971.<sup>24</sup> The Hungarian objects were compared to dishes belonging to the so-called School B. Indeed, there are some objects, decorated with palmette leaves, in which the lines and dots can be found. However, the lines on the edges are missing, combined with realistic animal representations. The types of objects are also different. It would be hard to argue that there is any connection between the Iranian goldsmith traditions and the metalworks produced by the early Hungarians, but no direct

relationship can be proven. Most probably, post-Sassanid Iranian art, including the workshop production of the Sogdians, was part of a larger artistic koine, to which other cultures, such as Arabic and Byzantine, also contributed.

István Fodor also interpreted the Hungarian ornamental decoration as an expression of their Shamanistic belief.<sup>25</sup> This theory was most elaborated by István Dienes.<sup>26</sup> He thought that the leaves are schematic trees, and thus symbolize the central element of Shamanism, the World Tree. According to scholars of religious and ethnographic studies, early Hungarians believed in the three layers of the world (the human world, the world of the gods, and the world of the evil spirits) that are connected by the World Tree. Shamans have the ability to move on the tree and thus collect information from the other worlds.

A key object in this respect can be the sabretache plate found in East Hungary, at Tiszabezdéd (now preserved in the Hungarian National Museum in Budapest).<sup>27</sup> Following the interpretation of István Fodor, this may be an excellent example of the religious syncretism of the early Hungarians.<sup>28</sup> The palmette leaves have been interpreted as symbolizing the World Tree of Shamanism, following the general pattern. However, there are additional, unusual elements in this plate. In the middle, there is a cross that has almost identically long arms (although the descending arm is somewhat longer but its length does not follow the pattern of the Latin cross). A cross in 10<sup>th</sup>-century Central Europe cannot refer to anything other than Christianity. Finally, there are animals in the corners. This is surprising because so far this is the only Hungarian sabretache plate that was decorated by figural motifs. The lower right corner is damaged, and the lower left corner motif seems unfinished. However, the animals of the upper corners are well elaborated. On the right, a winged lion can be seen. It has a strange body part on the top of its head. Thus it was once interpreted as a unicorn.<sup>29</sup> However, unicorns usually do not have wings and never have a lion's head. On the left, another mythological animal can be identified. It also has wings and the claws of a lion. Its tale is similar to that of a peacock. The animal represented with the tale of a peacock, a head of a dog, and the claw of a lion is the Persian

simurgh. I am not sure whether in the Hungarian plate the animal has a head of a dog or that of a lion, but this question does not seem to be crucial.



**Fig. 4.** Sabretache plate from Tiszabezdéd (Budapest, Hungarian National Museum).

The simurgh or senmurv is an important element of Iranian mythology. The simurgh was able to purify the land and waters and bestow fertility. The mythical bird represented the union between the earth and the sky, serving as mediator and messenger. Thus, István Fodor argued that migrating Hungarians met with different cultures such as Christianity and Iranian Zoroastrianism and mixed them with their own Shamanistic beliefs.

In his way the sabretache of Tiszabezdéd can be the symbol of the cross-cultural experience of migrating people in history.

Simurghs, of course, were frequently represented in Persian art. It can be found in metalworks as well as in textiles. The Persians were famous of their silk production that was imported in all over Europe. However, simurghs can be found in Byzantine textiles, too. Moreover, the simurgh was represented in stone carving as well, as a large piece proves from the 10<sup>th</sup> century, kept in the Archaeological Museum of Istanbul. This animal was also represented in the famous golden diadem, found in Preslav, former capital of the First Bulgarian Empire.<sup>30</sup> Among the enamel plaques of this diadem, another one depicts a winged lion, which by the way, has also a strange body part on the top of its head (although it points backward, not forward as the one in the Tiszabezdéd plate). All in all, the simurgh is not exclusively Iranian but it was favored by Byzantine artists, too.<sup>31</sup>



**Fig. 5.** Enamel plaques of a diadem from Preslav (photo author)

The cross, as we have seen, seems to belong to the group of Greek Crosses, which also points toward Byzantium. Even the palmette motif is an

essential part of Byzantine art. A bracelet, found in a 10th century Hungarian tomb in Tiszaeszlár-Bashalom in North-East Hungary, was long regarded as a Hungarian metalwork. However, its relation to Byzantine goldsmith work was realized, proven by a Byzantine chalice in the Treasury of San Marco collection in Venice. By now, the bracelet is regarded as an original piece from the Byzantine Empire; but it was so close to the taste of early Hungarians that they used it as their own production.<sup>32</sup> Wonderful, high-quality objects adorned with palmette decoration, originating from 10<sup>th</sup>-century Byzantium, were also found in Hungary, such as the silver situla from Beszterec in East Hungary.<sup>33</sup> Thus, it seems that the major components of the sabretache plate of Tiszabéd (the cross, the simurgh and the palmette leaves) came from Byzantium in a package.

This can be generalized to the entire early Hungarian style. Since we have not found clear evidence that Hungarians used similar objects before arriving to the Carpathian Basin, it is more probable that this artistic culture emerged only after the Hungarians arrived in the Carpathian Basin. This is the result of the combination of earlier nomadic art, the influences of their new Byzantine neighbor, and artistic elements found in the region. Objects from 10<sup>th</sup>-century Hungarian tombs prove that in certain cases Byzantine jewelry was preferred by Hungarians, such as the golden earrings found at Kecel.<sup>34</sup> Even cult objects, such as enkolpions from the Holy Land were found in early Hungarian cemeteries.<sup>35</sup>

To sum up, it seems that the 10<sup>th</sup>-century art of the Carpathian Basin was not the last flower of the Hungarians' previous nomadic culture, but it was created by cross-cultural connections in their new home. The 10<sup>th</sup> century formed a transitional period that prepared the intensive Christianization after 1000. Thus, the last wave of early medieval migration not only changed the cultural landscape of Central Europe, but it transformed the migrating people even more radically. Slowly changing taste and cultural attitudes, the migrating Hungarians, originally following Shamanistic beliefs under the influence of their new neighbors, turned towards the leading trend of European culture of the Middle Ages. Probably that's why Christianization and state formation, started around 1000 by the

first Hungarian king, (Saint) Stephen I, was so successful that it guaranteed the survival of this people for the following thousand years.<sup>36</sup>

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# From India to Southeast Asia: A Building Transcends an Ocean

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## **ABSTRACT**

This essay concerns the spread of shrines dedicated to the memory of Shahul Hamid across South and Southeast Asia as a reflection of Tamil migration patterns to places such as Sri Lanka, Singapore, Penang and more. Blessings given at the shrine of Shah al-Hamid, a sixteenth-century Sufi saint whose teaching quarters and residence were in Nagore, Tamil Nadu, were associated with good health and safety in travel. Hindus, as well as Muslims, sought and still seek the saint's protection. This desire was transported to distant lands where the saint's devotees established new homes and shrines that commemorated Shah al-Hamid's karamat, his miracles, in the diaspora.

## **KEYWORDS**

Sufis; Dargahs (Muslim shrines); Miracles; Health, Travel.

One normally thinks of transcending borders as part of a process of migration. But migration, in this case, the migration of Tamil workers to Southeast Asia from the late eighteenth century on, can generate another movement, one that they would consider primary, not secondary, that is, magically flying through the air. Tamil Muslim workers who migrated from Nagapattinam, in present-day Tamil Nadu some 325 kilometers from Chennai, brought with them deep devotion to the sixteenth-century Sufi saint, Shah al-Hamid, and constructed shrines dedicated to him, ones that replicate the form of the shrine in Nagore. So close are they in form to prominent parts of the Nagore shrine that they are easily recognized. Because the shrine is a *dargah*, and a saint – or anyone, for that matter – can only be buried in one place, Shah al-Hamid's *karamat* (miracles) are imagined to have flown, literally flown, to the various locations where there are shrines that function as Nagore dargahs, as they are called. The shrines, each of them believed to house the miracles of the saint.<sup>1</sup>

The Sufi, Shah al-Hamid,<sup>2</sup> traveled widely crossing the Arabian sea, the Red sea, and perhaps the Bay of Bengal,<sup>3</sup> suggesting why even today for some he is the saint of choice to be invoked before, while and after crossing the waters. Upon his return to the India he cured a Raja, a Hindu king ruling over parts of south India, and in thanks was presented with land in Nagore that became first his teaching headquarters and then a dargah. However, I recently was told that the shrine was built on land donated by the Hindu Chettiar community as gratitude for miraculous interventions during their migrating sea voyages.<sup>4</sup> The lore that has developed around Shah al-Hamid's performance of many miracles focusing travel, on water and his awesome curative powers has a highly hagiographic nature.

The dargah of Shah al-Hamid on the Tamil coast has attracted the attention of scholars due to its fusion of Muslim and Indic practices. Ritual includes not only the recitation of the Quran, the singing of qawwali – associated with Muslim traditions but also Indic ones such as seeping holy water with ritual herbs and tonsuring the head to commemorate life cycle observances. As noted, multiple dargahs to Shah al-Hamid, really to his miracles – *karamat* – are extremely rare in Islam and there has been

relatively little exploration of parallels in practice and appearance of this unusual phenomenon. Investigating this is a challenge due to a lack of archival documentation and changing norms of Islam throughout much of this region, but what we do learn provides insights into Tamil migration patterns across the Indian ocean.

The Nagore shrine is visited equally by Muslims and Hindus, who are seeking cures for ailments and safety in travel. He's particularly associated with saving ships. Those who wish to be healed or secure safe journeys offer votive plaques with an image of the afflicted body part or a ship, a car or even an airplane. In early-modern times those about to take a sea voyage would make an offering to the shrine and, when returning, gave a monetary tribute that was ten times the original amount.<sup>5</sup>



**Fig. 1.** Votive plaque of afflicted body parts to be donated to the Nagore Shrine of Shah al-Hamid. Tin, 11 x 6.5 cms. photo: 2007

Nagore is a site of pilgrimage as popular posters attest.<sup>6</sup> I met people who had come from Singapore, Kerala and Pondicherry all from families who

had originally migrated from the Tamil coast. Those from Southeast Asia not only visit but also endow the shrine. There are inscriptions indicating the shrine's restoration by Malaysians whose ancestors had migrated from the Tamil coast. Records indicate that Acehnese devotees donated money to the shrine, while in 1888, Tamils who migrated to Singapore raised a large sum of money to purchase a crystal chandelier for the Nagore shrine.<sup>7</sup> Today the Nagore dargah's popularity is seen in the numerous hotels that fill the town. Seven visits to Nagore are said to be equal to one to Mecca.

It is a large complex but its most notable feature are its multiple minarets. Three were given by prominent Muslim ship owners who were engaged Southeast Asian trade, while the tallest one was constructed by a Hindu raja.<sup>8</sup> These minarets are fundamental to the flag-raising ceremonies performed at the annual commemoration of Shah al-Hamid's death by both those in Nagore and those who migrated to the diaspora.<sup>9</sup>



**Fig. 2.** Dargah of Shah al-Hamid, 16<sup>th</sup> C. on, Nagore, Tamil Nadu, India.  
Photo: 2011

The favor that Shah al-Hamid found was so great that when Indian merchants who came largely from the Tamil coast migrated across the waters of the Indian Ocean and settled abroad in the new colonial colonies in South and Southeast Asia they then duplicated his dargah in multiple venues.<sup>10</sup> Although I have no date for the establishment of the shrine to Shah al-Hamid in Aceh, Indonesia, it was probably the first of these since Tamils from Nagore had been trading and migrating there long before Europeans exercised their interests in Southeast Asia. The Aceh shrine was probably founded by Tamil Muslims who dominated trade in Indian textiles, oils and salt for spices, betel nut, and more.<sup>11</sup> Marrying local wives, they established roots in Aceh and endowed religious structures such as mosques and shrines. I've been unable to ascertain if the Aceh shrine still exists but given the events of the last decade or so it's unlikely. The Dutch scholar Snouck Hurgronje, the first to study the shrine, provides no description. I've not found an image suggesting that it was undistinguished and probably lacked the minarets associated with the Nagore shrine and at least four other shrines in the diaspora. It likely resembled Aceh's tiered mosques.<sup>12</sup>

Although visual proof is lacking for a link between the Nagore and Aceh shrine, other evidence confirms their connection. Hurgronje's account indicates that in Aceh Shah al-Hamid's hagiography accorded with that in Nagore as was belief that devotion to the saint assured safety in travel.<sup>13</sup> The giving of talisman to the shrine in return for the fulfillment of wishes for good health also paralleled the practices at Nagore. In Aceh the well-being of children was stressed. If a child were ill a pure gold or silver plaque depicting the afflicted organ would be donated, and if the illness was extensive, a gold cord, as long as the child's height, was offered. Tamil traders then took them to Nagore, indicating these migrants kept in close touch with their roots.

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, a shrine dedicated to Shah al-Hamid's karamat was founded on Sri Lanka's east coast. It was built by Muhammad Tambi Lebbe, a merchant from Tamil Nadu, who had a vision of Shah al-Hamid instructing him to drink lime juice and seawater to cure his leprosy.<sup>14</sup> This dargah, today known as Beach Mosque, is popular among Sri Lankan Tamils. Like those in Nagore and Aceh is not only associated with

health but also safety in travel, for he is believed to magically plug leaks in ships while at sea. The complex, with two minarets inspired by those multiple towers at Nagore, is located at the ocean's edge. At each site the minarets' multiple stories are marked by protruding ribs. The shrine has been modernized and I had assumed this resulted from the 2004 tsunami but locals assured me that the complex received no damage, thanks to the saint's powers. The shrine includes an empty cenotaph dedicated to the Nagore saint's many miracles — a phenomenon common to Southeast Asian shrines. The flag-raising ceremony at the Sri Lankan shrine is coordinated with that at the Nagore shrine so the first flags are raised at precisely the same time.<sup>15</sup> While the flag raising ceremony parallels the one at Nagore, there is no indication that talisman are offered to the shrine. This part of Sri Lanka is heavily Muslim so the lack of Hindu devotees or Indic practices is not surprising.



**Fig. 3.** Shrine for Shah al-Hamid, today known as Beach Mosque, Kalmunaikkudy, eastern Sri Lanka photo: 2009

We have a more detailed idea of the history and development of the Penang shrine dedicated to the memory and miracles of Shah al-Hamid. Even before colonial intervention a Tamil saint was associated with clearing Penang's land for habitation while four others, two related to good health and healing and another two with safety in travel, were part of the island's pietistic landscape.<sup>16</sup> Tamil Muslims began to emigrate to George Town in large numbers. The British described them as "thrifty, industrious and enterprising; plucky mariners and expert traders,"<sup>17</sup> They desired both a permanent mosque, for only temporary structures for prayer existed at that point, and shrine for the memory of Shah al-Hamid. In a letter of August 1798, the East India Company issued a grant to Tamil Muslim merchants for the Nagore Durgah in Penang<sup>18</sup> Then, three years later on the second of November 1801 land was granted by the Lieutenant Governor of the East India Company for both the Nagore Dargah and the Kapitan Kling Mosque.<sup>19</sup> The dargah was then built by Nethersah Jemadar, a Tamil who also had bequeathed land and buildings known as an Ashurkhana for the ritual Muharram ceremonies in Penang. The Ashurkhana is largely ruined today but it was an important focus of the ritual life of Penang's Muslim community. Today Muharram is considered a Shia rite, however, in the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century South Asia and the diaspora, Muharram was commemorated by Sunnis as well as Shias. In Penang Nethersah Jemadar's provision of funds for the Ashurkhana to accommodate all the needs of Muharram was for the well-being of a diasporic Sunni community.<sup>20</sup>

Nethersah Jemadar's dargah survives in considerably better condition than his Ashurkhana. The dargah is a long rectangular building set at the corner of two streets. The long side contains shops whose rental fees go to the maintenance of the shrine. Many of these shops are occupied by jewelers whose forefathers maintained links with Nagore and would travel between Nagore and Penang on business.<sup>21</sup> I met a couple who owned a jewelry shop near the George Town shrine whose forefathers had migrated from India. They had just returned from their annual pilgrimage from Nagore. The dargah's shorter side, located on the main street, is marked by three arched entrances but they are not the original design. An early photograph shows

that initially a flat lattice worked pediment was supported by two columns.<sup>22</sup> Each corner of the roof is marked by short, ribbed minarets echoing those larger ones at Nagore. The stepped minarets, heavy moldings and lattice work are said to be that of Tamil workmen and reflect a style then common in George Town. Those migrant laborers clearly had the Nagore shrine in their mind as they built in the new colony. For example, before George Town's famous Kapitan Kling mosque was rebuilt in the Indo-Saracenic style that we see today, it originally bore features similar to those of the nearby dargah.<sup>23</sup> The shrine today has two domes but at the time of its construction there was only one. About 1910 the shrine urgently needed structural repairs. At this same time a German architect, Henry Alfred Neubronner, was designing a cupula for the Kapitan Kling Mosque. As a trial for the mosque's dome, he added a second one over the shrine's entrance.<sup>24</sup> The arches at the entrance were probably added then as well.



**Fig. 4.** Dargah of Shah al-Hamid, George Town, Penang. Photo: 2012

After World War II the Tamil population of Penang decreased sizably thus investment at the shrine also diminished.<sup>25</sup> Processions associated with the flag raising ceremony eventually stopped, as I was told that getting permission was too difficult. Photographs of the original shrine during flag raising indicate that it resembled a sailing ship, apt for a saint associated with safety in travel. A photograph from 2013 indicates many fewer flags in place.<sup>26</sup> The shrine, which has always attracted Hindus and Muslims, these day is mostly a sanctuary for people who need a place to pray or rest.<sup>27</sup> During one visit I encountered a young Hindu woman who assured me that Shah al-Hamid would grant any request. She said this emphatically several times. While many Penang Muslims maintain their devotion to Shah al-Hamid, the officer who oversees the shrine expressed tension to me over his Sufic leanings and the pressure from the orthodox to reject the veneration of Sufi saints.<sup>28</sup>

Five more shrines were built along Malaysia's coasts.<sup>29</sup> Those at Alor Setar and Taiping have been transformed into mosques, although their original role as shrines to Shah al-Hamid is acknowledged. The other three at Ayer Panas, Endau and Kuala Terengganu, I've not yet been able to trace.<sup>30</sup> There was also a shrine in Rangoon which was destroyed in 2011 by government forces.<sup>31</sup> An old photo of it in the Nagore Dargah, Singapore indicates the Rangoon shrine too had minarets similar to those at other Shah al-Hamid shrines. While the history much less the appearance of these shrines remains murky, the Singapore one is better known.

By the early 1820s Singapore had a considerable Tamil population and a number had settled in what is now China Town. Published records indicate that in 1827 land at the corners of Telok Ayer and Boon Tat Streets was granted to a Tamil, Katter Pillar, for 99 years from October 1, 1827.<sup>32</sup> This was under the condition that the edifice was not constructed from wood or attap to help prevent fires.<sup>33</sup> It was built of brick between 1828 and 1830 by two brothers, Mohammed and Haji Mohideen, as a shrine to Shah al-Hamid's karamat. While today the shrine is inland thanks to land reclamation, however originally it sat on a sandy beach and would be the first structure seen by those disembarking from boats. While this much is documented

many believe that a makeshift shrine existed even before the British claimed the island. Over time the Dargah was governed by a series of trustees and in 1974 was deemed a national monument. It fell into a state of dilapidation. Then in the early 1990s it was boarded for repairs and officially reopened as Singapore's Nagore Dargah Indian Muslim Heritage Centre in 2011. Today, it is under the purview of the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore.



**Fig. 5.** Nagore Dargah, Singapore, now known as the Nagore Dargah Indian Muslim Heritage Centre. Photo: 2018

Although it is commonly considered a replica of Shah al-Hamid's shrine in Nagore, Tamil Nadu, in fact, it's only the minarets that recall Nagore. The lower façade's appearance is closer to the original dargah in Penang built only 20 years earlier that had only a single dome. The Singapore building is, like its Penang counterpart, rectangular in format, but larger and more elegant in its detail. The three arches of the Singapore entrance are flanked by European style inspired columns showing the Tamil immigrants now close contact with their British colonizers. These Europeanizing elements have

been part of the façade since its inception, but over the years various restorations have changed details. The National Museum of Singapore and the Singapore National Archives have collections of old photographs of the shrine that I had planned to study to understand changes to the building but I was prevented from this work due to the Covid-19 epidemic.<sup>34</sup> Today the high quality stucco work on the entrance arch rendered as a centrally placed crescent moon and star subtly marks the Singapore dargah as a Muslim building. At each corner of the building is ribbed minaret, present since its founding, intended to evoke those taller ones in south India. The niches in these minarets were once filled with lamps to illuminate them at night during the multiday celebration commemorating the death of Shah al-Hamid. The longer side facing Boon Tat Street bears rounded arches, common to the colonial architecture of Penang and Singapore of this time. The colonial nature of the building, at the time of its construction cutting-edge, is revealed by fan windows with colored glass. Once across the street from the dargah there was a compound for cooking food and qawwals, musicians who play and sing in honor of the saint. An image in the National Museum of Singapore indicates that its entrance and corners were marked by ribbed minarets like those on the dargah.<sup>35</sup>

Some of the ritual practiced at other Shah al-Hamid shrines was observed here as well including processions and the flag raising ceremonies. Flags preserved in both the dargah and the Indian Heritage Centre, Singapore indicate they are extremely large.<sup>36</sup> They are raised at the same time as those in Nagore and Sri Lanka. And even flags can migrate for in the past flags raised at shrines in the diaspora would be sent to Nagore for the saint's blessing and then returned.<sup>37</sup>

Although the dargah is a Heritage Centre now and has lost its status and function as a shrine, its use was once more personal. Nineteenth and early twentieth century Tamils who had migrated were reluctant to return to India in part because of the sea journey and in part from lost revenue when shops were closed.<sup>38</sup> Asking for protection through Shah al-Hamid's intercession, the traders would stay in the Singapore Dargah for up to three days before any sea voyage. I haven't found any indication that the Singapore

dargah was associated with curative powers, although work I had planned before the pandemic in the National Archives might help. The archival documents I've seen don't suggest that many Hindus frequented the shrine, but the Hindu S.R. Nathan, President of Singapore from 1999 to 2011, found refuge there as child.<sup>39</sup> When I was invited to the Heritage Centre in 2018 to meet its supporters a number of Hindus were present. One of these men, a Chettiar whose grandparents had migrated in the early twentieth century, had a great interest in not only the Dargah of Shah al-Hamid but in other Muslim shrines still active in Singapore. He told me his grandfather and generations earlier always first visited Hindu temples and then spent the night before setting off for India in the Nagore shrine. Is he, like his emigree predecessors, a devotee of Shah al-Hamid or is he a Singapore history buff? I'm not sure.

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## Endnotes

1. I thank the many people who have helped me with this project and essay, especially the late Rick Asher who assisted me every step of the way.
2. For hagiographies see: Muhammad Yusuf Sahib, *Tazkirat-e-Aftab-e-Nagore* (Nagore: Dargarh Sharif, 1993); hereafter this work will be known as *Tazkirat*; Shaikh Hassan Sahib Qadhiri, *The Divine Light of Nagore* (Nagore: Habeeb and Fahira Publishers, 2007); M.A Hyder Ali and M.J. Ali Abu Thahir, *His Huliness Kadhahir Vali Redeemer of Faiths and Creeds, The Saint of Nagore* (Nellikuppam: Mumthaaj Publishers, 2008). This hagiography, the newest among them, plays down Shah al-Hamid's travels and contacts outside of India and focus on his Indian experiences. For example he talks with Mira Bai and has many cups of tea with Guru Nank; Scholarly works include Vasudha Narayanan, "Nagore: Dargah of Hazrat Shah al-Hamid," in *Dargahs, Abodes of the Saints*, ed. Mumtaz Currim and George Michell. (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2004), 136-47; Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 91-94, 113, 115, 119, 1123-25, 230-35; S.A.A. Saheb, "A 'Festival of Flags': Hindu-Muslim Devotion and the Sacralising of Localism at the Shrine of Nagore-e-Sharif in Tamil Nadu," in *Embodying Charisma: Modernity, Locality and the Performance of Emotions in Sufi Cults*, ed. Pnina Werbner and Helene Basu (New York: Routledge, 1998), 55-76 and the following three essays by Catherine B. Asher, "Water: Its Meaning and Powers in the Indian Sufi Tradition," in *Water Histories of South Asia: The materiality of Liquesance*, ed. Sugata Ray and Venugopal Maddipati (London and New Delhi: Routledge, 2020), 159-184. "The Sufi Shrines of Shahul Hamid in India and Southeast Asia," *Artibus Asiae*, LXIX,2 (2009), 247-58; "Out of the Desert: Water Traditions in the South Asian Landscape," *Rivers of Paradise: Water in Islamic Art and Culture*, ed. Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 264-91. These sources contain basic information about the Nagore shrine in India.

3. Sahib, "A Festival of Flags," 59.
4. Subbiah Lakshman wrote this to me as if it were common knowledge in an email of March 2021.
5. Lore told to me at the Nagore shrine.
6. See: <https://www.art365.in/islamic-art-prints-paintings>.
7. Torsten Tschacher, "Witnessing Fun: Tamil Speaking Muslims and the Imagination of Ritual in Southeast Asia," *Ritual, Caste and Religion in Colonial South India*. eds. Michael Bergunder, Heiko Frese and Ulrike Schroder, (Halle: Franckeschen Stiftungen zu Halle, 2010), 196.
8. Narayanan, "Nagore: Dargah of Hazrat Shahul Hamid," 145-46.
9. See Saheb, "A Festival of Flags," pp. 61-74 for a detailed discussion of flag raising at the dargah. In Urdu the death anniversary is known as the 'urs, but in Tamil as the *kanduri*. For flag raising festivals at the Madurai temple see A.V. Jeyechandrun, *The Madurai Temple Complex* (Madurai: Mudarai Kamaraj University, 1985), pp. 210-12.
10. Those at Penang and Singapore still stand. For the Rangoon shrine, see: Tschacher, "Witnessing Fun," 196, 198, 202. I was told by Dennis McGilvray it was destroyed by Islamicists, but the United States Department Reports claim it was the Myanmar government. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2011/eap/192615.htm>, accessed 5 June 2014. For the Sri Lankan shrine, see: <http://jailani.org/mcgilvray.htm>, (accessed 24 June 2014). This is an on-line version of: Dennis B. McGilvray, "Jailani: A Sufi Shrine in Sri Lanka," eds. Imtiaz Ahmad and Helmut Reifeld, *Lived Islam in South Asia: Adaptation, Accommodation & Conflict* (Delhi: Social Science Press, 2004) 273-289. For the shrine at Aceh, Indonesia and more sites in Malaysia, see: Khoo Salman Nasution, *The Chulia in Penang: Patronage and Place Making Around the Kapitan Kling Mosque, 1786-1957* (Penang: Areca Books, 2014), 70.
11. Nasution, *The Chulia in Penang*, 36-37.
12. For a surviving example of this mosque type see: <https://dome.mit.edu/handle/1721.3/133898?show=full> (accessed 16 May 2022)
13. C. Snouck Hurgronje, *The Achehnese*, 2 vols. trans. A.W.S. O'Sullivan (Leyden: E.J. Brill, 1906), I:216-17.
14. McGilvray, "Jailani: A Sufi Shrine in Sri Lanka," accessed 5 June 2014.
15. MacGilvay, "Jailani: A Sufi Shrine in Sri Lanka."
16. Nasution, *The Chulia in Penang*, 39, 57, 58. 65-7.
17. Nasution, *The Chulia in Penang*, 11-12.
18. Nasution, *The Chulia in Penang*, 70.
19. Nasution, *The Chulia in Penang*, 59.
20. For a photo and plan of the Ashurkhana and images of Muharram, see: Nasution, *The Chulia in Penang*, 186-87.
21. Nasution, *The Chulia in Penang*, 413.
22. Nasution, *The Chulia in Penang*, 69.
23. Nasution, *The Chulia in Penang*, 200-01.
24. Nasution, *The Chulia in Penang*, 293-94.
25. Nasution, *The Chulia in Penang*, 71.
26. For both images, see: Nasution, *The Chulia in Penang*, 69.
27. Nasution, *The Chulia in Penang*, 14, 67-68; <http://waliofallah.blogspot.com/2012/06/shrine-of-syed-shahul-hamid-george-town.html> (accessed 21 April 2022)
28. In 2014 I interviewed a Shrine authority who during the interview was clearly troubled by Sufi belief. Also see <http://waliofallah.blogspot.com/2012/06/shrine-of-syed-shahul-hamid-george-town.html> (accessed 21 April 2022)
29. Nasution, *The Chulia in Penang*, 70.

30. Kuala Terengganu is particularly conservative in terms of Islam so it's unlikely that a Sufi shrine there still survives.
31. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2011/eap/192615.htm> (accessed 24 July 2013)
32. Vernon Cornelius-Takahama and Joanna Tan, "Nagore Durgah Shrine," Typed document preserved in Singapore National Archives. No number was included.  
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34. For some images see: <https://www.roots.gov.sg/Collection-Landing/listing/1260343> (accessed 16 May 2022)
35. See the first photograph at: <https://www.roots.gov.sg/Collection-Landing/listing/1260343> (accessed 16 May. 2022)
36. Rajesh Rai and A. Mani, ed., *Singapore Indian Heritage* (Singapore: Indian Heritage Centre, 2017), 263.
37. Told to me by Mr. Peer M. Akbur at Nagore Dargah, Singapore on 11 August 2018.
38. National Archives of Singapore, Oral Histories:  
<http://cord.nhb.gov.sg/cord/public/internetSearch/catalogueForm.jsp?command=loadUpdate&id=12515&xAccess=false&total=28&currentPageNo=3&startPageNo=1&startNoBatch=0&thesaurusFlag=on&searchType=0&startIndex=20&count=10&simpleSearch=nagore&Bt=Search>, (accessed 28 June 2007).
39. S.R. Nathan had run away from home twice as a child. That he was cared for by a poor Muslim named Kedar is well-known while Nathan's stay at the dargah was reported to me by Mr. Peer M. Akbur. A Tamil plaque at the shrine commemorates Nathan's stay there.

# Hanna Levy-Deinhard and the Theory of Pure Visibility

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## **ABSTRACT**

With the rise of Nazism in Germany, Hanna Levy-Deinhard, a German historian of art of Jewish origin, seeks asylum in Paris in 1933, where she would study at the Sorbonne under the guidance of Charles Lallo and Henri Focillon. Her 1936 doctoral thesis, entitled *Henri Wölfflin: sa théorie, ses prédécesseurs*, deals critically with the Theory of Pure Visibility, analyzing authors such as Konrad Fiedler, Adolf von Hildebrand, and Heinrich Wölfflin. Hanna Levy-Deinhard will seek to demonstrate in France that Fiedler was too idealistic in his conclusions about the process of artistic creation; that Hildebrand does not sufficiently consider the artist's individuality in his theory, and that Wölfflin first problematically based on a racial principle the inequality of development of the arts, secondly establishes fundamental concepts of art history that are purely concepts of style, and not historical indeed, and finally neither considers the artist's individuality, constructing a nameless art history that is not defensible. Hanna Levy-Deinhard's thesis had some repercussions at the time and contributed to the discussion on French soil of this German school of thought about art.

## **KEYWORDS**

Hanna Levy-Deinhard; Art theory; Art historiography; Theory of pure visibility; History of ideas.

Hanna Levy Deinhard (1912-1984), an art historian of Jewish and German origin, became known in Brazil for her articles on Brazilian colonial art, published in the *Revista do Serviço do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional*, especially the one entitled *European Models in Colonial Painting* (1944). In the United States, where she also worked, her most influential work is the book *Meaning and Expression* (1970), which deals with the sociology of art. In the present paper, I will address a part of her doctoral thesis in philosophy, entitled *Henri Wölfflin: sa théorie, ses prédécesseurs*, defended at the Sorbonne and published in 1936. Hanna then signed with her maiden name, Levy, and had as a doctoral advisor the art historian Henri Focillon. She had started her doctorate in Munich but had to leave Germany due to the rise of Nazism. It is then a young Jewish art historian and refugee who will challenge, in her thesis, theories such as those of Fiedler, Hildebrand, and Wölfflin, in order to, together with her friend and tutor Max Raphael, propose the establishment of the discipline of the sociology of art. Hanna Levy's thesis, probably due to the war and her status as an émigré, did not have wide repercussions. However, I consider her thesis a fundamental work for the understanding of Hanna Levy Deinhard's future research. For example, in the introduction to *Meaning and expression*, Deinhard makes the following claim:

In other words: any theory that places Works of art outside history, be it about their origin or their effects, cannot explain the existence of the different arts, the immense diversity of Works of art, nor for the fact that these Works are evaluated differently at different times (Levy 1936, 1).

Her concern with the historicity of works of art forms the basis of the criticism she will address in her thesis on Fiedler, Hildebrand, and Wölfflin's theories. But this does not mean that she does not perceive the risks of a too-narrow reading of the works as an "illustration" of history, which is also made clear in the introduction to *Meaning and Expression*:

If, however, artistic activity and the work of art are regarded solely as the expression and result of a unique

set of historical conditions, there is the risk of degrading the work of art to the status of a mere example of economic, religious, social, or political forces, in which case what is specifically artistic is overlooked or remains unexplained (Deinhard 1970, 1).

A milestone in the joint project of Levy and Raphael to establish the sociology of art on a Marxist basis was the publication, in 1933, of the work *Proudhon, Marx, Picasso. Trois études sur la sociologie de l'art*, by Raphael, a work mentioned by Hanna Levy in her thesis. Hanna Levy's thesis is, in my view, another milestone, as it seeks to prepare the ground for the sociology of art by questioning basic assumptions of European art historiography that, like Max Raphael, considers traditional and “bourgeois” (Modigliani 2008, 26). Although Hanna Levy is, as we shall see, quite harsh in her criticisms, it cannot be disregarded that both she and Max Raphael do not completely abandon ideas that can be found in the authors criticized. The sociology of art that both proposed in the 1930s does not dispense with the direct analysis of the works and the consideration of their formal qualities.

In my brief paper, I will stick to the criticisms made by Levy to Hildebrand, Wölfflin, and, above all, Fiedler, directly related to the theory of pure visibility.

Hanna Levy begins chapter IV of her thesis by presenting Fiedler's theory of art, primarily from the analysis of *Du jugement des oeuvres de l'art plastique* (1876). She recognizes that Fiedler seeks a new theory of art, but raises the following main question: “Did Fiedler really find an objective method that allows solving the problems of theory, history, or art criticism?” (Levy 1936, 123) The question raised by Levy denotes the concern that she and Max Raphael present with finding an “objective methodology” for the study of art, capable of explaining both the social dimension and the formal dimension of the works. Continuing her analysis, Levy states that Fiedler establishes his thinking about art from the theory of knowledge, and has a special interest in the “origin of artistic activity”. However, Levy here already begins to see in Fiedler what she understands as a lack of concern with the historicity of this origin:

After acknowledging the merit of Fiedler's work, in comparison with those of other art historians previously published, she highlights that relying on the theory of knowledge makes him seek to answer a different set of questions than those faced by previous researchers (Levy 1936, 124).

Levy pays special attention to the way Fiedler explains the development of visual perception. For her, on this specific point, Fiedler makes mistakes for two reasons: “not establishing a definition of different processes: perception, representation and expression” and “excluding from artistic activity all issues related to the development of the artist's representation” (Levy 1936, 128). Specifically, concerning the process of expression, Levy points out that Fiedler doesn't explain how are developed other modes that appear with “different forms of expression”, modes such as those exemplified by Levy, the scientific, the musical, the philosophical, etc. (Levy 1936, 131).

Levy proceeds with the development of her argument, reinforcing the criticism related to the role of history in Fiedler`s method. For her, first of all, Fiedler indicates that in a work of art form and content are identified. This identification, for Levy, necessarily means that Fiedler “denies all historical development, all evolution in general [...]. It seems that Fiedler was perfectly aware that his identification of form with content excludes all historical development” (Levy 1936, 131). This identification, for Levy, makes it impossible, in short, for the same content to acquire historically varied artistic forms. Of course, Hanna Levy here is still attached to form and content dualism, in any case, it is the resource she uses to try to map the ahistoricity of Fiedler's method.

Hanna Levy insists on the limitation of the artist`s role in Fiedler's theory: “Thus, for Fiedler, the only task that the artist can have, an absolutely autonomous task, is the realization of visibility” (Levy 1936, 132). In this observation, she is not alone. Many years later, Michael Podro would reformulate the comment, referring in broader terms to the dimension of human presence in Fiedler's texts:

In the writings of Fiedler the image of human personality has become so limited, and so little detailed experience of works of art or anything else is called upon, that it is hard not to see him as the end of the tradition (Podro 1972, 120).

Hanna Levy, and like her Max Raphael, argued that art develops due to a complex intersection of different factors, individual, social, historical, material and psychological. Therefore, for Levy it is strangely enough to identify in Fiedler the indication of only one factor that generates artistic development: “Fiedler remains logical with himself in taking from his premises that the only stimulating factor in the development of art results from the differences in value between artists’ talents” (Levy 1936, 133).

Even in the part of the thesis where she presents Fiedler's theory, as we can see, Levy already anticipates a large set of criticisms of his assumptions. The question of history, in all of them, is the one that gains more importance. This is how Levy states that Fiedler “is in any way opposed to any historical consideration that would attempt to ‘explain’ a work of art” (Levy 1936, 133), or even that “Fiedler's reality has no relation to concrete historical reality” (Levy 1936, 133)”. From this she concludes that, for Fiedler, the “real existence of work of arts” seems to be a minor fact (Levy 1936, 134). The issue of access to works of art according to Fiedler's theory also interests Levy, and again we see her critical eye here: “Art, Fiedler explains to us, constitutes a kind of secret language accessible only to the initiated” (Levy 1936, 134). It is worth remembering at this point that for a long time Hanna Levy would address the issue of the relationship between lay people, amateurs, and art, has even developed a project on the subject and with it tried to obtain a Guggenheim fellowship in New York. Therefore, her concern with an idea of art open only to “initiates” appears already here.

Another text by Fiedler that Levy would comment on in her thesis is *Observations on the essence and history of architecture* since he wanted to see how the author proposed a practical application for his general theory. Based on these commented texts, she will elaborate the following summary of the main points of Fiedler's theory:

1. Art is a faculty of knowledge that apprehends the visible world by creating it. Thus, art has the same value as science.
2. The concrete existence of works of art has only relative importance concerning the artistic faculty (I open a parenthesis here to remind that Levy specifically criticizes the small role that material used for the creation of artistic forms seems to play in Fiedler's theory: "It is curious to note that Fiedler, even recognizing that matter constitutes the fundamental basis of all form, never considers matter as such, nor its relations with form" (p. 136)).
3. The work of art is, in fact, strictly individual and is addressed to a single individual, its author. Generally speaking, only artists can truly understand works of art.
4. The form of a work of art contains in itself its expression and its content.
5. Artistic creation is a unique and indivisible process.
6. The development of art is exclusively determined by the differentiation of talents.
7. When art flourishes, it is independent of concrete history. During the decadent periods, only the ideas of those times exert an influence on artistic production.
8. The history of styles is the history of forms (Levy 1936, 138-139).

Next, Hanna Levy dedicates herself to the critical part on Fiedler's theory, showing at the outset her concern to see if Fiedler has managed to develop a method that clarifies the origin of artistic activity and solves "essential problems of history, theory or of art criticism". It is in this part that she identifies an idealist bias in the author's theory (Levy 1936, 140), which would help to explain his little concern, in her view, with historical concreteness.

Hanna Levy unfolds her analysis when she indicates that Fiedler, when researching the act of knowledge, would have left out the study of the medium of knowledge, thus ignoring its character, which could only be "the result of a historical process" (Levy 1936, 142). For Levy, now considering the functioning of the visual perception process, Fiedler would also have little

information about its development: “Fiedler does not analyze or provide anything other than these two indications:

1. This process presupposes the existence of perception
2. This process is only possible under the condition that these perceptions disappear (Levy 1936, 143).

The next criticism she presents is that Fiedler, by eliminating “the concrete external world that is at the origin of the internal sense” (Levy 1936, 144), thus destroys the relationship between the sentient human body and the external world. In order not to remain only in abstractions, Hanna Levy proposes a more concrete example for her criticism: in his text on architecture, “he excludes from the process of artistic knowledge all internal equivalents of perceptions, Fiedler notably neglects the active role of the religious element without which we cannot fully grasp Gothic art”. It follows that, once again, for Levy, Fiedler “denies all historical development” (Levy 1936, 144).

So many criticisms later, Levy returns to the question posed at the beginning of the chapter, namely, whether Fiedler finds the solution to the problem of the source of artistic activity and essential problems in the history, theory, and criticism of art, and then finally answers it:

We can only answer this question in the negative. It would be false, however, to regard this lack as a particular weakness of Fiedler's. We will show, in the last part of this work, that his work reflects, in fact, perfectly the determined historical situation in which the artists and intellectuals of the bourgeoisie of his time found themselves (Levy 1936, 145).

It is important to emphasize that, if, on the one hand, Levy's intense criticism of Fiedler's theory seeks to pave the way for a new approach to art, on the other hand, more recent critics have had more generous readings of this theory. Salvini sees in Fiedler's theory the anticipation of a new [modernist] aesthetic by detecting “insufficiency of knowledge by the intellect” and by pointing to another type of artistic knowledge” (Salvini 1988,

17), Francisca Pérez Carreño seeks to demonstrate that for Fiedler, only in artistic creation “is a strictly visual or sensitive representation of the world possible” (Carreño 1991, 36), Christopher Wood recognizes the indebtedness of art theory to Fiedler (and Hildebrand):

Fiedler and Hildebrand created a new language for analyzing form, so revealing the impoverishment of nineteenth-century historical scholarship. Without this language, art history remains stretched between the ingratiating narratives of the historians (Taine) and the pathos of the critical word-poets (Pater) (Wood 2019, 270).

Finally, Paul Wood, Charles Harrison, and Jaison Gaiger reinforce the importance of this theory for the avant-garde art of the early 20th century, especially that of Klee and Kandinsky:

However, his insistence on art as an independent and legitimate form of inquiry, distinct from cognitive knowledge, whose activity does not take place in the head or even in the eyes alone but directly on the canvas or stone itself, parallels that search for a new artistic vocabulary which characterized innovative developments in the arts through into the early years of the next century (Wood, Harrison and Gaiger 1998, 685).

Some findings made by Levy would, however, also be taken up in a milder tone by later critics, as when Moshe Barasch, analyzing *Concerning the origin of artistic activity* (1887) states that

Fiedler’s essay differs from all the others in that he did not focus on the nature and function of the articulately shaped work of art. He did not pay much attention to the product of artistic activity; he had little to say about the picture or the statue. Instead, he concentrated fully on the creative process (Barasch 1998, 128).

Adolf von Hildebrand also, as already indicated, deserves a chapter in Hanna Levy's thesis. The Hildebrand text she analyzes is *The problem of form in painting and sculpture* (1893). As she had done with Fiedler's theory, Levy points out that Hildebrand also “places the specifically artistic element in the object's relation to the act of seeing” (Levy 1936, 147). Levy focuses, among other points, on the two definitions of vision developed by Hildebrand, simultaneous vision (which apprehends the two dimensions) and successive vision (which apprehends the three dimensions). The two views, according to Hildebrand, are continually related. The object of perception, according to Hildebrand, read by Levy, has two qualities, namely, form-existence and form-effect.

As she had done with Fiedler's theory, Levy summarizes the main problems around which Hildebrand's theory revolves:

- I. Relationship between space and object.
- II. Role of the subject (artist) as a carrier of perceptions and representations
- III. Role of Artistic Matter (Levy 1936, 161).

In Hildebrand's theory, Levy also notes that the problem of space predominates. Even so, he would have, in her view, a “unilateral way of posing problems”; even when dealing with concrete art he would reach “a kind of formalism” (Levy 1936,167).

Such formalism is also characterized, in practice, by the almost total elimination of the artist in the configuration of the process of artistic creation: it is worth, in this sense, to read this excerpt from Levy, in which she discusses the relationship between the object of creation and the artist in Hildebrand's theory:

If we now consider the object of representation as the bearer of conditions, determined qualities, etc., on the one hand, and the artist as a reasonable, sentimental, historical subject, etc., on the other hand, we find the following results: the object is absolutely fixed in one of its qualities, namely, as a support of space; artistic creation is reduced to a simple imaginary and formal activity (albeit incomplete) in which the artist, as a

sensitive, social being, in short, as an individual, is almost entirely eliminated (Levy 1936, 170).

Taking the theory as a whole now, Levy points out, in Hildebrand's formalism, three gaps worthy of mention:

1. The actual relationship between the content and form of an object is not analyzed or re-explained by each object;
2. the subject (the artist) is in no way taken into account in his unique existence; then it follows that
3. the subject's relationship with the object is not controlled (Levy 1936, 171).

As she had done in her reading of Fiedler, Hanna Levy attacks in Hildebrand what she calls the “absolute character” conferred “on the pure representations of the object he abstracted in a non-dialectical manner” (Levy 1936, 172-173). She also attacks the absence, in theory, of a historical perspective, a constant in her criticisms, taking up the idea of eliminating the subject:

We can see here again that Hildebrand neglects the historical character, which is a variable consequence of the object. He considers in the latter only the typical and not the individual, what is constant and not what moves. Hildebrand proceeds in the same way about the subject, which leads to his elimination (Levy 1936, 172-173).

The concern with the material that forms the work and with its conceptualization and analysis motivates another criticism of Levy, this time of the simplification, by Hildebrand in his theory, of the relationship between spirit and matter:

Hildebrand reduces the relationship between spirit and matter, which is by nature profoundly dialectical and multiple, to a single constant relationship. Just as he had limited the possible relations between the two

dimensions and the third [...], so he takes into account only one attitude of the artist towards matter: overcoming matter by the spirit, forming the work of art as a spirit purified from all matter [...]. Hildebrand remains logical with himself. Had he not previously declared that artistic representation should develop independently of matter? (Levy 1936, 175).

For Hanna Levy, works of art are composed of artistic matter, which deserves specific analysis, as it attests to the concreteness of the work, opening the way to think about its historicity as well. But Hildebrand, insensitive to matter, presents, for Levy, a great gap in his theory:

Not only does Hildebrand eliminate the reciprocal relationship of explanation between matter and spirit, but he also renounces considering the artistic matter in its own quality. Insofar as he does so, however, matter for him represents only an element to overcome (Levy 1936, 176).

Moreover, historicity will be for Hanna Levy an important factor in the comparison between Wölfflin, the central theme of her thesis, with his predecessors. In this case, Levy will consider Wölfflin's theory more promising than those of Fiedler, and those of Hildebrand:

[...] The importance of Wölfflin's concepts concerning Fiedler's and Hildebrand's theories lies precisely, according to us, in the fact that Wölfflin tried to bridge the abyss that separates the theory of these two authors from historical reality. The principles of art established by the latter are, in fact, too abstract or too general to be able to explain the historical individuality of a work of art (Levy 1936, 180).

The more concrete character of Wölfflin's concepts, their greater potential for application also deserve praise from Hanna Levy, when contrasted with the characteristics of the theories of their predecessors:

The fundamental difference between Wölfflin's concepts, and Fiedler's intuitive views, Hildebrand's modes of perception and Burckhardt's style characteristics lies in the fact that Wölfflin makes his concepts an immanent and rational principle of the development of art. We can easily explain what leads Wölfflin to formulate this principle: on the one hand, this allows us to underline and accentuate the importance of the immanent development of art neglected by Burckhardt, on the other hand, it guarantees Fiedler's and Hildebrand's purely abstract conceptions of visibility and modes of perception a certain relationship with the concrete data of the art history (Levy 1936, 180).

Having made these initial compliments, Hanna Levy goes on to criticize the Wolfflinian theory. Again, the non-adoption of a view of history as a dialectical process will be criticized by Levy:

Wölfflin does not conceive history as a dialectical process, that is, as a history made by man and within which the different cultural domains represent spiritual processes that, as such, possess and develop a certain value of their own, relative autonomy and their own conditions; it makes history autonomous and absolute. Wölfflin does not admit the intermediate links that would inevitably arise from a dialectical relationship; he forges absolute and abstract concepts from which he formulates criteria (Levy 1936, 187).

The result, in Levy's view, is that Wölfflin embraces an abstract notion of history (Levy 1936, 188). The fundamental concepts, equally abstract, would prove fragile due to the lack of support in the concrete historical reality. In Levy's words,

To summarize: Wölfflin starts from abstract thinking to establish historical concepts; these pure abstractions lead him to an incomplete conception of the multiple reality of living development; starting from this

incomplete conception, which can only correspond to his abstract ideas, he returns there and establishes in this way the fundamental concepts (Levy 1936, 189-190).

Another item of criticism deserves special attention in Levy's arguments: Wölfflin's abstraction of cultural relations, which become subordinated to "national and racial criteria" (Levy 1936, 191). At this point, Hanna Levy takes the same position as Max Raphael, who also argued that art history could not be structured based on racial and national criteria. Levy footnotes the following observation about Wölfflin's adoption of racial criteria: Wölfflin "bases on the racial principle his explanation of the inequalities in the development of the various arts, as well as their changes in importance" (Levy 1936, 193, note 1). This is yet another point at which, should prevail, for Levy, an analysis criterion grounded in history, rather than a racial one.

From the beginning of her thesis, Hanna Levy rejects the possibility that Wölfflin's fundamental concepts are universal. The reason, as we can already imagine at this point, is its historical fragility:

The fundamental concepts established by Wölfflin do not represent historical concepts for us, either in terms of style or art; for us, they are pure style concepts. Furthermore, its scope of application should be limited to classical and baroque art [...]. In any case, it seems necessary to designate them as concepts of style, and not as "true artistic principles (Levy 1936, 195).

Wölfflin, like some of his predecessors, would not allow space for the artist's individuality in his analyses either, according to Levy's point of view, another serious flaw in the theory:

It is already apparent from these few indications that the individuality of the artist who decides both the choice of method and the means of presentation and expression is of paramount importance concerning the finished work. An "anonymous history of art", a "history

without names”, as Wölfflin’s historiographical point of view is sometimes called, is, therefore, for us, untenable (Levy 1936, 201).

Levy concludes her analysis of Wölfflin by identifying a deficient, idealistic view of history as a major problem with his theory (Levy 1936, 214). Such a lack would even have repercussions on the way he used philosophical and psychological concepts in his theory:

We could also see that the philosophical and psychological concepts he uses are partly arbitrarily deformed, partly very imperfectly defined, precisely because of the fundamental lack of a satisfactory conception of history (Levy 1936, 207).

To conclude this paper, I would like to accompany Hanna Levy in the last chapter of her thesis, a sociological study. If her Marxist orientation of study was already perceptible in previous chapters, with the mentions of history, material, and dialectical dimensions, it is even more evident in this closing chapter. Levy believes that we can only understand the theoretical positions taken by Wölfflin and his predecessors by knowing the historical context of the period. When painting, the object of study of all the authors analyzed, came into contact with the bourgeoisie, it would have been “impregnated by the capitalist system, and their works increasingly assumed the character of a commodity” (Levy 1936, 224). Traditionalist artists, not wanting to bend to the changing tastes of the German bourgeoisie, leave Germany, as is the case with Marées and Hildebrand (Levy 1936, 226). Levy understands this change as an escape, also metaphorized in the principle of 'art for art's sake' adopted by them”. Fiedler would then react, with his theory, to the principles of artistic production of these self-exiled artists. According to Levy, in short:

Fiedler's work reflects exactly the artistic production of this group of artists [...]: the total liberation of art from society, therefore the rehabilitation of pure, eternal art, the rebirth of the real artistic problems, general and

constant. The fact that Fiedler stuck to pure theory is also explained by the state of artistic production of his time (Levy 1936, 227).

To escape from history is to escape the conflicts of capitalist development (Levy 1936, 227). Still according to Levy, “Fiedler tries to escape this development whose anarchic character he recognizes. He believes he can achieve this by rejecting the content of development, considering only the forms” (Levy 1936, 227). As for Wölfflin, whose theory Levy considers failed in its universalizing intent, the author has two possible justifications for this failure: personal incapacity or “general embarrassment of the bourgeois science of his time”. Hanna opts for the second interpretation (Levy 1936, 230), which she formulates in the following terms:

We emphasize how precious are the contributions brought by Wölfflin to the problem of the history of styles. Since, for all his farsightedness and profound erudition, Wölfflin failed to solve the problem, the reasons for this failure can only be sought in the very social order that determines the frameworks and methods of science (Levy 1936, 230).

Are there other 19<sup>th</sup>-century voices that could profitably be heard by art history, different from those of Wölfflin and his predecessors? Levy believes so, and points to the sketchy sociological methods found in the thought of Proudhon (as we have seen, taken up again by Max Raphael), Taine, and the Guyaus, among others.

I will end by noting that in recent years there has been a resurgence of interest in the work of Hanna Levy Deinhard and Max Raphael. The sociology of art they proposed still deserves further study, since, as we have seen briefly here, it did not accept the strict formalism of pure visibility, but neither did it accept the norms of socialist realism as practiced under Stalin.

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# Religious Flows and Shaping Cultural Milieu in Central Asia: Artistic Expressions of Solar Cult (III-I Millennia BCE)

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper<sup>1</sup> discusses the solar symbolism in Central Asian art, based on the concept of “religious semiosphere”. It traces the oldest layers of a “religious semiosphere”, or interconnected beliefs that existed in Central Asia during the III-I millennia BCE, through the way of their artistic representations and expressive symbolism. The aim is to analyze a symbolic representation of the solar cult and its co-existence with other religious beliefs, such as totemism and shamanism, and an evolution of the artistic forms of this representation.

Among the artifacts found in the region, the following types of iconographies are highlighted and discussed: the “sun-head” people, the sun-animals, the circle signs, and the solar symbolism among the Xiongnu/Hunnu. These iconographies refer to various forms of expressive symbolism - the rock art and material artifacts from the burial mounds and royal burials, including statuettes, silver and bronze standards, remnants of the horses. Following the analysis of the iconographies, the paper concludes that as one of the oldest beliefs, the solar cult survived the time and found itself either simultaneously or later in other religious symbolic representations of the sacred through signs, images, symbols.

## **KEYWORDS**

Religious Semiosphere; Solar Symbolism; Solar Cult; Central Asia.

### **Introduction**

Throughout the end of the Bronze Age and during the Iron Age, various civilizations (Mohendjo Daro and Harappa, Ancient Chinese, Ancient Egyptian, Hittites, etc.) appeared, followed by a certain apotheosis or an “axial period” of human spiritual development happened around 500 BCE, between 800-200 BCE (Jaspers 2021 [1953]). The appearance of major spiritual searches within Chinese, Greek, Indian, Jewish, and Persian philosophical and religious traditions was paralleled with expanded geospatial social and political organizations both in the East and West (Greek, Han, Kushan, Macedonian, Maurya, Saka, Persian, Xiongnu/Hunnu, other empires). Various and plural forms of artistic expressions and styles could also be attributed to this time. On the vast Eurasian space, the zoomorphic/animal/Saka/Scythian style developed and flourished for almost a millennium.<sup>[2]</sup> Religious flows and exchanges had significantly shaped the cultural milieu of “pre-historic” and ancient Central Asia.

The periods preceding the “axial age” of human history, though are less known, are significant. They could shed light on the process of origin/development of religious beliefs, their symbolization, and a sacred and artistic representation.

In the “prehistory” of humankind when people depended on nature for their survival, the cosmos and nature dictated the rhythms of life and activities of social groups. These rhythms of regular changes repeating daily and seasonally again and again, for social groups provided predictability, stability, and regularity embedded in ritual. Therefore, the inseparability between a person and nature logically implied the deification of nature and space through certain rituals.

The daily movement of the celestial sphere’s objects - the sun, the moon, stars, and planets – and their significance for the survival of social groups was equated with the regular rhythm of time and stability. Being endowed with an exceptional meaning, these celestial bodies, therefore, received their symbolic representation as sacred, benevolent, protective symbols in people's social and economic life.

One may assume the solar, lunar cults to be among those major beliefs that impacted people's religious systems. The paper's hypothesis is that irrespectively of its ancient "primordial" roots, the solar cult didn't disappear at later periods, rather it was modified, co-existed with other beliefs, and acquired a new meaning of the sacred. This new meaning could be found in solar symbolic representations "inscribed" along with symbols of other beliefs in artistic works. What were the symbols and forms of this survival – these are the questions will be discussed in this paper.

Therefore, the paper aims to trace the solar symbols in the artifacts relating to the religious symbolization in Central Asian art throughout III-I millennia BCE, and to discuss this continuity. In a broader sense, numerous artifacts, particularly related to the field of the sacred, could speak about the specificity of religious beliefs, and cross-religious and cross-cultural interactions in the region.

The research on artistic representation of the solar cult in ancient Central Asia, whether as such, or in relation to other beliefs, is still a rather underdeveloped theme. Broadly, the solar cult has been partially touched upon within the larger themes, particularly, relating to the rock art. The theme of the rock art of Central Asia, Siberia, Mongolia, northern Eurasia has been a focus of extensive research, the earliest of which was made as early as in the middle of XX century by A.P. Okladnikov, followed by his research school, who explored the rock art, deer stones of Siberia, Sayano-Altai, Trans-Baikal regions, Mongolia (Okladnikov 1954; same 1974; same 1981; same 1989; Okladnikov and Zaporozhskaya 1970; Okladnikov and Mazin 1976; Okladnikov and Mazin 1979). The scholar from Tuva M.H. Mannai-ool significantly contributed towards highlighting the traditional culture of the Tuvan people throughout the Saka/Scythian period (or so-called Uyük culture), in which he discussed, particularly, such forms as deer stones, and legends of local and Siberian people relating to the cosmic universe (Mannai-ool 1970).

A. Rogozhinsky and V. Novozhenov are among the leading contemporary scholars on rock art in Central Asia, who found, and classified the existing and recently discovered artifacts and made their typology

(Rogozhinskiy 2009; same 2019; Rogozhinskii and Novozhenov 2018; Bedelbayeva, Novozhenov and Novozhenova 2015; Lapshina 2012, etc).

The solar cult has been generally discussed within another broader theme, i.e., of the Xiongnu/Hunnu and their steppe empire. For the last three decades there appeared special volumes summarizing and detailing the knowledge on the Xiongnu/Hunnu (Giscard 2013, Eregzen 2011, Xiongnu Archaeology 2011, Encyclopaedia Xiongnu 2013), deer stone culture (Turbat, Gantulga, others 2021), the ancient bronzes of Ordos region, north Eurasian steppe (Bunker 1997; Bunker 2002; Leus 2019, etc).

The research on specific monuments – *kherek-sur* mounds and deer stones – though not much extensive, is of the interest for the theme due to the fact, that these monuments, particularly those found in Tuva, Mongolia, could be viewed as the symbols of the sun reflecting its key feature – the movement (Kilunovskaya and Semenov 2019). The theme of the symbolism of the zoomorphic/animal/Saka/Scythian style that included the traits of various beliefs including the solar cult, recently became a subject of a focused research (Yerekesheva 2021).

Therefore, the special analysis on the symbolic representation of the solar cult in relation to the art of the region, is yet to be made. This article is an attempt to partially fill in this gap. The author understands certain limitations of this attempt. First, the need to stock and inventory most available artifacts requires extensive research and could be implemented within the larger research project. Second, there is a need to discuss in greater details the typology of the symbolical representation of the solar cult in general, and in Central Asia, in particular. In this paper, this typology is based on the artistic forms and traditions of the solar representation based on the available artifacts found in the region. Among them, I propose the following types: the “sun-head” people, the sun-animals, the circle signs, the solar cult among the Xiongnu/Hunnu. The iconography of the “sun-head” people refers to the rock art, of the sun-animals – to the rock art and material artifacts from the burial mounds and royal burials, whereas the circles’ sign – mainly to the artifacts from burial mounds and royal burials.

Geographically Central Asia is understood here as a geographical-cultural rather than a geopolitical space. The space of the region follows the given natural geography and includes territories of modern Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan (so called “Middle Asia”); Xingjian-Uighur Autonomous Region and Inner Mongolia of China; Northern Afghanistan; Mongolia; Southern Siberia; Northern parts of India and Pakistan.<sup>[3]</sup>

### **Methodology**

The relations between culture and religion are perhaps one of the oldest and steady phenomena in the history and art of humankind. In the reciprocal process of their interplay, both culture and religion influence each other, interact, and create certain “*cultural-religious homeostasis*”, similar to the biological field, as a process of maintaining an organism’s stable internal environment by adapting it to external changes. Equally, both culture and religion undergo the process of adapting to each other, the net result of which is the creation of new patterns and forms of expressive symbolism. This flexibility creates, anticipates, or reflects an idea of the sacred and its various cultural patterns. At the same time, it allows this or that cultural patterns to be spread, advanced, and further expanded geographically and chronologically. (Yerekesheva 2023)

Specificity of the culture is that it operates on the symbolic level - ‘a cultural life exists only in symbols ... cultural reality is in its essence symbolic reality’ (Tillich 1958:10). Therefore, in religion as a part of culture (Parsons 1985), symbolic representation plays a significant role too. The religious element of “*cultural-religious homeostasis*” implies the general characteristics of the sacred; whereas different historical periods and geographical locations could reveal its various and plural manifestations. The multiplicity of the forms of the symbolic representations and their co-existence irrespectively of time is a phenomenon that in semiotics is known as *semiosphere*, a semiotic space (Lotman [1984] 2005:208).

According to this theory proposed by Yuri Lotman, “Since all levels of the semiosphere — from human personality to the individual text to the

global semiotic unity — are a seemingly inter-connected group of semiospheres, each of them is simultaneously both participant in the dialogue (as part of the semiosphere) and the space of dialogue (the semiosphere as a whole)” (Lotman [1984] 2005:225).

The semiosphere approach to culture and religion may imply that their respective various elements could be viewed as both participants of the dialogue and their space and environment at the same time. In other words, it could be proposed that in “religious semiosphere” various religious beliefs and traditions, as participants of the dialogue, could interact and influence each other either directly or indirectly - as an integral part of the religious and broader cultural environment and milieu, or as established traditional patterns and a subconscious echo of the past. Therefore, the indirect way of the influence presumes diachronic perspective or imprint caused by the most archaic and “primordial” religious beliefs on all those that emerged later.

Theoretically speaking, in this paper, I will make an attempt to trace the oldest layers of “religious semiosphere”, or interconnected beliefs that existed in Central Asia during the III-I millennia BCE, through the way of their artistic representations and expressive symbolism. In doing this, I will focus on the solar cult (1) to show its symbolic representation and “survival” even in the later periods and its co-existence with other religious beliefs such as totemism and shamanism, and (2) to trace an evolution of the artistic forms of this representation.

### **Solar Symbolism**

The following typology of symbolical representation of the solar cult in the region will be discussed further: the “sun-head” people, the sun-animals, the circle signs, the solar cult among the Xiongnu/Hunnu.

#### *The “Sun-Head” People*

Chronologically the first known representations of the solar symbolism and cosmogony could be attributed back to the Neolithic (c. VII millennium BCE) era, when the ancient rock art petroglyphs and signs dotted the landscapes throughout Eurasian continent. In later periods, during the Bronze Age and

Iron Age (III-I millennia BCE), solar symbolism could be found as a part of archaeological complexes, sculptural compositions, discovered on the territory of modern Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia (Siberia, Altai, Tuva), in northwestern and northern China, Mongolia, northern Afghanistan, Turkey (Afghanistan 2007; L'Asie des steppes 2001). Among them are remarkable and in many ways unique examples - *khereksury* mounds, deer stones, ritual standards and objects (incense burners, sacrificial altars), artifacts of decorative and applied art and jewellery, in particular, made in the so-called animal/zoomorphic style also known as Saka/Scythian/Siberian (Yerekesheva 2021).

One of the oldest and most significant forms of ancient expressive symbolism is rock art (images and signs, petroglyphs), which is, perhaps, a universal expression of human creative spirit and a form of the deification of nature. Found almost in all continents, this type of creativity could be considered as typologically regular. The “stone books” (Okladnikov 1989:40) should be viewed as a part of a wider background and context that included certain sacred locations and acts of sacrifice and other rituals that took place in these special sanctuaries. From this perspective, rock art was not just an engraved image and sign, rather it was a representation of the belief systems of people, a “primordial” reflection of views, ideas, rituals. Rock drawings and inscriptions were carved on stones of various heights and lengths, which stretched for several meters or were part of rectangular or round areas, located in the mountains, in open spaces along the banks of rivers, or in forests and taiga. Wonderful examples of rock art are important artifacts and material evidence that help us to decipher the ideas, religious views and rituals of people of the distant past. (Yerekesheva 2023)

Among the various objects carved on the rocks (such as people, shaman masks, animals, religious rituals, hunting scenes, dances, erotic scenes, etc.), solar-lunar-astral (or celestial) symbolism stands out as one of the most archaic and perhaps basic ideas and religious beliefs of people. The images of heavenly symbols have their own stylistic specifics and depend on the region - Central Asia, Siberia, Mongolia, Western and Northern China.

The images of the sun are done in various forms and styles: (1) the sun as a part of larger compositions, which also include figures of people performing rituals and dances, and animal figures; (2) the sun, which is “carried” by animals (deer, elk, horses, bulls) on their horns; (3) so-called “sun heads”, or people with sun instead of their heads. The images of the so-called “sun-heads”, or people with the sun instead of a head are one of the most striking types of representation of the sun found in Central Asia. (Fig. 1) These various representations are associated with the rituals and religious beliefs of people, being an important source for understanding the religious life in ancient times.



**Fig. 1.** On the left: “Sun-Head People” in Tamgaly-Tas Site, Almaty Region, Kazakhstan. Source: After (Rogozhinskiy 2019). Photo courtesy: V.A. Novozhenov. On the right: “Sun-Head People” in Saimaluu-Tash Site, Kyrgyzstan. Source: After (Petrov 2011). Photo: Ushakov and Tenkova, [www.photo.kg](http://www.photo.kg)

The visualization and depiction of the sun in the form of “sun-head” people was most common in certain parts of Central Asia, within which, in turn, one can note various stylistic, iconographic traditions of depiction. Particularly, scholars distinguish 3 such iconographic styles: (1) southern (Saimaluu-Tash in Kyrgyzstan and Sakhaba in the Ferghana Valley); (2) northern (the place of Baikonur in the southwestern part of the steppe zone of the Kazakh Sary-arka region); and (3) along the corridor of the Chu-Ili Mountain range (Tamgaly-Tas in Almaty region, no earlier than XIV-XIII BCE), which could be the result of a syncretic mutual influence of the other two and

was rather specific and unique than universal, and widespread (Rogozhinskiy 2019).

Though there are other 8 places where carved figures of “sun-head” people are found on rocks, mainly in Kazakhstan (Karakyr, Akkainar, Kuljabasy, Baikonur and Eshkiolmes, Bayanzhurek) and Kyrgyzstan (Saimaluu-Tash, Chilisay and Ornok) (Rogozhinskiy 2009:60), however, images of “sun-head” people, reminiscent of images on Tamgaly-Tas, have not yet been found (Rogozhinskiy 2019), what makes this site a unique one.

In Kyrgyzstan there are other places and monuments with stone-inscribed petroglyphs found on an 80-kilometer stretch between Cholpon-Ata near Lake Issyk-Kul and Balykchy (II millennium BCE - VIII century CE), which can be called an open-air temple, a sanctuary where cults and religious rituals took place (Petroglyphs of Cholpon-Ata, n.d).

The “sun-head” people depicted on the rocks may reflect the original ideas about the importance of the sun for the survival of people, its worship, and related ceremonies and rituals. Accordingly, the figures of “sun-head” people (semi-anthropomorphic and semi-sun) can be considered as a symbol of the sun as an object of worship. According to some authors, the “sun-head” people could be intermediaries between the worlds of gods and people, i.e., shamans (Bedelbayeva, Novozhenov and Novozhenova 2015:71).

Therefore, these most ancient representations of the sun were associated with the solar cult. They also reveal the important role that some categories of people, perhaps, the shamans, played during the rites related to the sun-deification. It is possible that images of these people, or shamans, were inscribed on the stones to attribute their significance during the rituals that took place at these sacred places. One could conclude that deification of the sun (as well as later – of some categories of animals) was among the oldest (back to neolithic era) religious beliefs that had own symbolic representation. The symbolism of the sun as we trace in the rock art reveals the pristine clear natural forms and lines, geometrically circular in form and with depiction of sun rays. This “children-like” natural and primordial basic representation and image of the sun could also be attributed to those periods of humankind's development when its union with nature and cosmos was

perceived as a natural course of life, as life's regularity, harmony and, hence, beauty. This view survived the time and, as an echo of the past, found its way later in Greek philosophy, both in Pythagorean school and in the adoration of the "most harmonic" figure – a circle – by Plato. From the modern perspective, those were periods of the height and maximum power of ecological thinking and living.

Celestial objects, including the sun, embodied nature's might, regularities, order, balance, harmony, and became synonyms of power, eternity and stability. Their adoration and deification had been associated with rituals. Symbolic representation in creative expressionism of art was a part of this worship, and the keyway towards their appease. The rock art and some artifacts could give us a glimpse on what these rituals and religious life in general might looked like.

#### *The Animal-Sun*

The images of the sun, moon, stars, and their inclusion in other scenes - worshipping and hunting - show the importance of solar, lunar and astral symbolism as part of the daily and religious life of people. The existence and survival of people depended on the environment in which animals played a significant role too. Thus, animals also acquired an important and sacred dimension and, in addition, were associated with the power of the sun and other elements of the cosmic universe. Solar-lunar-astral symbolic images carved on the rocks were intermingled with the images of numerous animals, usually elk and deer (as in Siberia and East Asia), or horse, bull, stag (in Central Asia), which were deified by local hunters as an object of worshipping, and as a representation of the sun.

Rock paintings of the IV-III millennia BCE in Siberia testify to the exceptionally high role of the elk as the sun, which passes through the sky and the universe from one end of the firmament to the other and then disappears into the waters of the underworld in order to reappear the next morning in the sky (Okladnikov 1989:46). According to the existing beliefs, this journey through the sky was made on special solar boats, where the sun was

symbolically depicted in the form of an elk or stag (sometimes they were accompanied by other figures of animals and shamans).<sup>[4]</sup>

The beliefs of the sun boats found in Siberia, Egypt could be paralleled with the ideas and respective images of the sun chariot in a later period, as in case of Trundholm sun chariot from Denmark (Trundholm). This could speak about typological regularity, though localized in various regions of the world based on local geography and cultural patterns.

The association of the sun with some animals may represent a certain stage in the religious beliefs of people of Central Asia, Siberia, the Amur region. For them their life and survival depended both on celestial objects, such as the sun, and on large and strong animals that lived in the mountains, steppes, rivers or taiga and forests. Thus, for different geographical areas, various animals, such as stag and elk, as well as horse and bull, played an important role similar to the sun and, accordingly, they acquired a sacred character. As a result, new forms of syncretic religious beliefs began to emerge in these regions, where these animals became associated with the sun.

For example, the Tungus people greatly revered the white or sacred stag *Amgun*, who was associated with the sun and was considered the guardian and protector of both animals and people. According to (Okladnikov and Mazin 1979:62-63), “it was not allowed to ride on it, only shrines were transported in its bags, it lived to a natural death ... If this stag disappeared, they did not look for it. Before and after migration, he was fumigated. In the caravan, he went first or second”. L. Steinberg, for example, identifies the following categories of sacred stag among the Tungus - wild males, all males under the age of 1 year, then white stag, which everyone considered the real representatives of the sun on Earth (Cited in: Okladnikov and Mazin 1979:62-63). Interestingly, among the Orochs of Siberia, not only the sun, but also the stars, star constellations, planets, rainbows, dawns, and even the entire cosmic universe were depicted as a large eight-legged elk, uniting the three worlds - the upper one or the world (where good spirits live), the middle world (inhabited by people), and the underworld (evil, bad, or malignant spirits).

Stag, elk, horse, bull were revered as the personifications of the sun, so the rituals of sun worship were intertwined with the worship of a particular animal, whose zoomorphic images, it was believed, could protect from adversity and evil. Thus, consequently, religious beliefs became syncretic - the sun, the direct protector and object of worship, became less exposed and more abstract, while the figures of particular animal came to the fore to more profoundly acquire the role of the protector of people and social groups. In the field of religious beliefs, this transformation was associated with totemism, animism, zoomorphic cults, and shamanism.

The images of so-called stag-sun, elk-sun, horse-sun and bull-sun, i.e., animals depicted with elements of solar symbolism attributed to this process and are found across the Eurasian continent – in Siberia, Mongolia, northern China, Central Asia, Western Asia. (Fig. 2) This may indicate the typological regularities of the development of religious beliefs that underwent similar stages from solely solar worshipping towards further amalgamation with zoomorphic cults.



**Fig. 2.** On the left: Bronze Ceremonial Standard, Alacahöyük, Turkey, 2nd half of III millennium BCE. Source: The Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, Ankara, Turkey. Photo: Bjørn C. Tørrissen, CC BY-SA 3.0, On the right: Sun on the “Horned” Horse, Saimaluu-Tash, Kyrgyzstan. Source: After (Petrov 2011). Photo: Ushakov and Tenkova

The bronze ceremonial standard from a royal burial place Alacahöyük discovered in the central part of modern Turkey (Fig. 2, left) show well the transformation of these religious ideas. This is an example of how the previous “pure” solar standards made in the round or square form, were subsequently combined into more syncretic images with the inclusion of a deer-sun, a bull-sun (Yerekesheva 2023).

In this unique standard, the sun is symbolically depicted twice: as a circle carried on the big horns of the bull (not depicted), and as the figures of a stag, accompanied by two bulls and posted inside the solar circle. The whole arrangement represents the local manifestation of the solar boats/sun chariots. The incorporation of the sun-animals in the solar deification highlights the transformation towards more syncretic beliefs, where the sun as an object of deification is still there. However, it shares the space with other elements of adoration as well, i.e., with sacred sun-animals.

The mentioned above typological regularities could be supported by the analogous depiction of some sun-animals such as deer/stag in other parts of the continent. In Siberia, Transbaikal, Tuva, Mongolia numerous engravings were found on so-called deer-stones of galloping deer with a sphere on their horns. According to (Okladnikov 1954:207-220) these animals are represented as if soaring through the sky with the characteristic symbols of the sun — disks. Okladnikov even coined a special term for them — the Deer/Stag-Golden Antlers — symbols of the sun. Similar findings were later found at Mount Xianglushan in northeastern China, where rock carvings of deer with a disc over their horns represented local versions of the deer-sun, “a zoomorphic deity or celestial companion of the sun god.” (Zabiyako and Van Jiangling 2017:75).

Similar patterns of images of the solar disk carried on the horns of animals, particularly, “horned” horses, were found in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan too - in Saimaluu-Tash in Kyrgyzstan (Fig. 2, right), in Central and Eastern Kazakhstan.

In Central and Eastern Kazakhstan many burial mounds, rock art monuments, and petroglyphs were discovered, including images of horses

dating back to the first half — third quarter of the II millennium BCE (Bedelbayeva, Novozhenov and Novozhenova 2015:47).

On one of the vertical stone slabs found in Central Kazakhstan, of which most of them are turned to the east, there is a depiction of a horse with large backward-curved horns (Fig. 3, left). The horse is filled with dynamism and inner energy and is part of a large stone triptych. According to scholars, this image refers to the early nomadic period, when the “horned” horse was a symbol of the sun and sky, and the “simple” horse (without horns) was considered the main element of the economic life of the steppes of antiquity (Bedelbayeva, Novozhenov and Novozhenova 2015:49, 51).



**Fig. 3.** On the left: Image of a “horned” horse, Konyrzhon, Karkaraly district (Central Kazakhstan), first half - third quarter of the II millennium BCE. Source: Photo author and courtesy Victor A. Novozhenov. On the right: Smart Decoration of the “Horned” Horse from Berel-11 Burial Mound, Eastern Kazakhstan, Saka Period, IV-III BCE. Source: Photo and reconstruction Krym Altynbekov. Photo courtesy Napil Bazylkhan.

The image of the “horned” horse on a rock found in Central Kazakhstan corresponds to the remnants of horses found in the Berel-II mound (Fig. 3, right) in the Kazakhstan Altai (Eastern Kazakhstan), in the Pazyryk mounds in the Russian Altai, and in the Chu-Ili ridge (Ankeldy site in the Zhambyl region of South Kazakhstan) (Bedelbayeva, Novozhenov and Novozhenova 2015:98-99).

All these symbols of the sun represented in the “horned” horse can be interpreted as a further development of the idea of the sun, but in a different subcultural and geographical context of Central Asia. It is possible to assume that the original image of the sun on the horns of a stag and an elk, widespread in Siberia, or of a bull and stag found in Anatolia (Turkey), was also a characteristic of the steppe zone of Central Asia, where this solar symbolism acquired local dimension. In other words, the same perception and representation of the sun associated with the elk and stags, animals with long and large horns, received its further transformation. As a result, the image of a horse — an animal without horns — got a new iconography, opening the way to a completely different figurative perception of a horse - as an animal with long horns on which the sun is rested. This representation was based on a similar idea and worship of the sun, to which the deifying of a certain animal was added through personifying it with the sun and attributing to it the qualities of a solar deity. Thus, in the steppe zone of Central Asia, the horse began to be considered a symbol of the sun, a sacred animal, whereas the features and stylistic forms associated with the traditions from other geographical spaces were inherited as a substantial part of its iconography. (Yerekesheva 2023)

As noted above, religious ideas implied a dual perception of the horse - on the one hand, as a deity and a sacred animal or a horse-sun. On the other hand, the horse, as an important element of economic life, was associated with a nomadic way of life, and therefore, as in the case of white one-year-old elks and stag from Siberia, it was considered an indispensable assistant.

In the Kazakh steppe environment, the sacralization of the horse had its own features: a young golden-red stallion and a white horse were considered sacred. It seems the colors were chosen to enhance the parallels with the sun, particularly the golden, red, orange colors that also implied an active energy and power.

The horse from the Berel-II mound, with large, curved horns and a mask, covered by a bright blanket decorated with painted gold plates, buried together with the ruler or leader of local tribes is evidence to this. According to archaeologist Z. Samashev, who explored this mound, horned horse was

considered the personification of people's beliefs about the three worlds and resembled the horns of argali or mountain goats (Tayna 2019).

Mentioned above artifacts speak about a continuing and enduring tradition of religious beliefs associated with the high role of the deification of the sun, but in a more syncretic and complementary form. Within the framework of these belief systems, the sun was personified with a certain animal — in the case of the steppe zone of Central Asia, it was a horse.

### *Circle Signs as Solar Symbols*

The other way of how the sun was symbolized were the circle signs, spiral shapes and wavy lines that marked the bodies of animals. This representation, highly symbolic and laconic at the same time, is an important stage of solar symbolism and its further amalgamation with other symbols. At this stage, the sun was depicted more graphically and schematically rather than figuratively, in smaller rather than bigger sizes. Though as if shrunken, the symbols still reflected the might and power associated with the sun. The solar symbol endowed a particular animal with its sacredness, and as a special marker, it highlighted the animal's sacred and privileged status. Below are given some images of sun animals, on the body of which solar symbols are clearly shown in the form of two or three spherical circles as if nested in each other.

A wide geographical range of found artifacts - sculptures and figurines of animals with solar symbols on the body - should be noted. They were found in Alacahoyuk, Turkey (Fig. 4, left), Jetysu/Semirechye in Southern Kazakhstan (Fig. 4, middle), China (Fig. 4 right), Mongolia. This may indicate extensive migration flows and movements of various tribes across the Eurasian continent that took place over many centuries and millennia. At the same time, this could equally speak about typological patterns associated with the development of religious beliefs that experienced similar stages and acquired similar regularities.



**Fig. 4.** On the left: Bull Statuette, Alacahoyuk, Turkey, Second Half of the III Millennium BCE. Source: After (MAC, The Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, n.d.:66).

In the middle: Statuette of Bronze Bull, Central Asia, Semirechye, VI-III BCE. Cast, chasing. 4x2,8x5 cm. Inventory Number: CA-3185. Source: © The State Hermitage Museum, Russia. Photo by Vladimir Terebenin.

On the right: Statuette of “Golden Monster”, Xi’an, Shaanxi History Museum, China, c. II BCE – I CE, Length: 11cm, Height: 11.5cm. Source: Shaanxi History Museum, China. Photo by Jesse, CC BY-SA 4.0

Chronologically, these representations were widely spread too – from the III millennium BCE (in Alacahoyuk) through the Saka period, VI-III (or VIII-VI) BCE (in Semirechye), to the Xiongnu/Hunnu period, II BCE-I CE (in Shaanxi, China). This range could speak about the steady and profound tradition of syncretic religious beliefs that for almost three millennia, survived the time and showed its vitality. By the I millennium CE the representation of the sun in its “pure” form was rather marginalized and became an integral part of other religious traditions (well traced in the Saka/Zoomorphic style).

#### *Solar Symbolism of the Xiongnu/Hunnu*

It was during the Xiongnu/Hunnu period only that the solar representation in its “primordial” natural form continued showing its vitality. This could be attributed to the specificity of the religious beliefs of the Xiongnu/Hunnu tribes – for this first steppe empire the worship of the sun and moon was the official religion. As the daily religious ritual of Xiongnu emperor Shanyui

indicates, he “prostrated every morning before the rising of the sun and every evening before the rising of the moon.” (Giscard 2001:149)

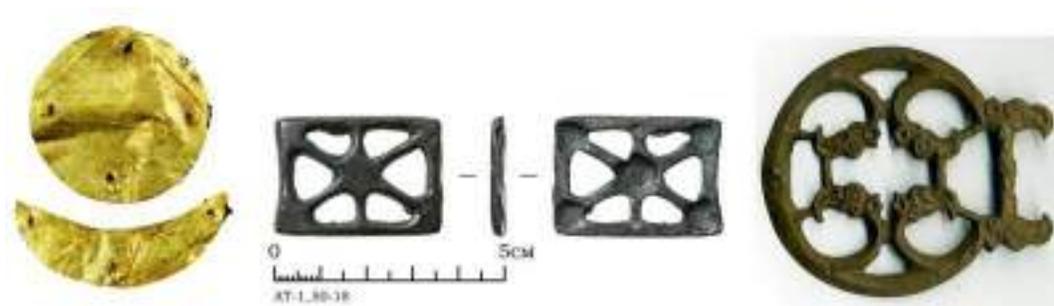
The above statuette of “Golden Monster” (Fig. 4 right) is a very representative one that could give a glimpse of these religious beliefs. In fact, this is a statuette of a golden elk, the animal widely spread in Siberia, Trans-Baikal region. This exquisite work relating to the Xiongnu/Hunnu period, depicts a sacred animal, an elk-sun, on the body of which multiple circles as solar symbols are spread all over. Magnificent horns/antlers follow the previous tradition when the sun was “carried” on the horns of the animals that represented or “substituted” the sun, as was in case of “the solar boat” tradition. The antlers are the masterpiece in themselves – several heads of gryphons carved there attribute to the zoomorphic cults and strengthen the feeling of the majestic character of this sun-elk. The gold material intensifies this attitude of sacredness as symbolizing the solar deity and particular animal as the representation of the sun and an object of deification. From religious beliefs perspective, solar cults and totemic worship, i.e., adoration of the sun, a deification of a particular elk-sun as an important totem are vividly presented and intertwined here.

The sun and moon (crescent) sheet decorations found on the covers of the coffins in Xiognu burial place in Gol Mod (Fig. 5 left), as well as in other mounds such as Egiin Gol in Mongolia are bright illustrations, indicating the deification ritual based on the natural rhythms of cyclic time.

Another artistic expression of the solar symbolism related to the Xiognu period, are the artifacts found few years ago in Ala-Tey 1 and Terezine burial mounds in Tuva (Russia). Among them are samples of the previously unknown belt openwork plaques “with an ornament in the form of six rays diverging from the center to a rectangular frame” (Fig. 5, middle) with total number exceeding 100 pieces (Leus 2019:54). Solar symbolism is presented here in a classic form of rays of the sun.

This type of plaques is paralleled with another piece found at the same Terezine site. The round shaped form of the bronze belt plaque (Fig. 5, right) is a direct reference to the solar symbolism. The symmetric composition of four paired heads of gryphons (that stylistically are almost

identical to the “golden monster” statuette discussed above) harmoniously structures the space of plaque making it almost weightless, light and transparent. This effect is reinforced with the refined depiction of the gryphons’ heads what reveals the 9 hole-circles and produce an effect of the weightlessness, exquisiteness and subtlety. The idea that stylistically this piece relates to the Saka/Scythian zoomorphic art but with the elements of new cultural patterns (Leus 2019:60) is worth supporting.



**Fig. 5.** On the left: Gold Sheet Decoration in the Form of the Sun and the Moon. Gol Mod Necropolis, Khairkhan, Arkhangai Province, Mongolia, gold, II BCE - I CE. Tomb-75, d 3 cm (Sun); Tomb-20, length 5,6 cm (Moon). Source: Institute of Archaeology, Academy of Sciences of Mongolia. Photo author and courtesy Gelegdorj Eregzen. In the middle: Six-Ray Belt Plaque, Ala-Tey 1, Tuva, Russia. Bronze, II-I centuries BCE. Source: Photo author and courtesy by Pavel Leus. On the right: Belt Plaque from Terezine T/8, Tuva, Russia. Bronze, II-I centuries BCE. Source: Photo author and courtesy by Pavel Leus.

In the context of the current theme, it should be added that zoomorphic style itself embraces various religious traditions such as totemism, fetishism, shamanism, within which the solar deification indirectly finds its place too. Bearing in mind that “the territory of Tuva became the link between the regions of Inner Asia and the Sayan-Altai and was in the sphere of influence of the Xiongnu and their cultural and artistic traditions” (Leus 2019:62), it was not surprising that the solar deification by the Xiongnu had an impact on the expressive traditions that unified the solar and zoomorphic symbolism together.

### **Conclusion**

In the proposed “religious semiosphere” approach various religious beliefs and traditions interact among themselves, both as participants of the dialogue and as an integral part of the religious and broader cultural environment and milieu. In this interaction, they influence each other either directly, or indirectly, through the symbols inherited from the past. As a result of this molding, new symbolic and cultural patterns emerge.

The solar cult symbolization supports this approach and reveals a certain evolution of the stylistic symbolic representation of the sun in the artifacts found in Central Asia.

The oldest of them, found in rock art provide a glimpse of how the deification of the sun might look like in the distant past, around IV-III millennia BCE. Stylistically these symbolic representations follow the ancient beliefs about the ecological unity of the people and nature and cosmos, and represent the sun in the “pure”, pristine forms. At the same time, deification of the sun as seen in ancient “solar boats,” also speaks about the increasing role of certain animals as symbolic substitution of the sun, as its representatives, for which they were deified too. This deification was a part, a sacred element of the rituals conducted by special people, the shamans.

Therefore, the animal-sun concept could be viewed as an artistic symbolic representation of the totemic beliefs, that could be generally traced in the various images of the animals in the art. Perhaps, one of the biggest such representations extended for almost I millennium BCE, is the zoomorphic style.

However, totemic beliefs and shamanism in general, were not free from the previous religious traditions - the solar deification. Though less exposed and indirectly, solar deification, however, still profoundly and continuously influenced other religious traditions. This could be viewed in the symbolic representation of the sun, among which are: the images of numerous animals-sun (when the sun was personified with a certain animal - in the case of the steppe zone of Central Asia, it was a horse) on rocks, as silver and bronze standards, burials of the horses with “horns”, circles on the body of the “sacred” animals, and, as the highest octave of the solar

deification triumph, the realistic images of the sun and moon (crescent) and other artifacts of the Xiongnu/Hunnu.

Therefore, the “survival” of the solar cult, even in the later periods, its continuing and enduring legacy, co-existence with other religious beliefs such as totemism, shamanism, and evolution of the artistic forms of its symbolic representation (that lead to more sophisticated and new syncretic patterns) – all this supports the “religious semiosphere” concept and could be generally traced in the artifacts of various types. As a result, the art imbued in itself and expressed highly dynamic and flourishing cross-religious and cross-cultural interactions in the region.

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## Endnotes

1. The article is based on the paper presented at the 35th CIHA World Congress on “Motion: Migrations”, São Paulo, Brazil, 17-22 January 2022; Session 9 – Transcending Borders: Reshaping Cultures through Ideas and Images; and on the author’s article “Solar signs and symbols in the art of ancient Central Asia” submitted to the “Atlas of the Symbols of the Turkic World” (forthcoming).
2. The lowest chronological period of the animal style could be referred to the IX BCE, based on the discoveries of the Arzhaan-1 and Arzhaan-2 royal mounds found in Tuva (Russia) in 1990s and 2002. K.V. Chugunov proposes the most possible dates of the Arzhaan-1 mound as between 807-772 BCE (Chugunov 2020:229-230), what significantly expands the previously adopted chronological frames of the animal style, i.e., V-II BCE. This also supports the ideas on the direction of its spread from the East towards West and South.
3. On detailed description of the space of Central Asia based in various definitions, including that of UNESCO, see (Yerekesheva 2013).
4. For the depiction of the sun boat on the rock at the Basynai river site in Eastern Siberia see: (Okladnikov and Mazin 1976:9).

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# The Role of Migration of Ideas, Practices, and People in the Coming of Concrete Art in Sao Paulo

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## **ABSTRACT**

Concrete art appeared in Sao Paulo city at the beginning of the 1950s, with an exhibit that gathered a few visual artists. Later, the visual artists convened to the poets. This paper explores how the social environment of the city and Brazil shaped the coming of concretism and how these artists have created new social spaces. The method applied is the method of collective biography with the aid of the concepts of field of Pierre Bourdieu and the generation of Karl Mannheim.

## **KEYWORDS**

Modern Art; Concrete Art; Brazilian Art; Collective Biography; Sociology of Art.

### **Introduction**

Concrete art avant-garde in the city of Sao Paulo was developed by fifteen poets and visual artists in the 1950s. Such art came into light in 1952 with the exhibit Rupture (Ruptura, originally), accompanied by the homonymous manifesto. It was grounded in geometric abstraction, which was new in Brazilian art.

This article is devoted to analyzing the role of migration of ideas, practices, and people in the coming of concrete art in Sao Paulo. That is to say, it explores how these elements have shaped and collaborated with the appearance of concretism. It focuses on the different places that the fifteen artists used to visit or have created.

The article derives from the author's master's dissertation<sup>1</sup>, which was based on three theoretical and methodological tools. First, the collective biography method was developed by French historian Christophe Charle<sup>2</sup>. Then, the concept of the field according to French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu<sup>3</sup>. Lastly, the concept of generation by Hungarian sociologist Karl Mannheim<sup>4</sup>. All three are explained below.

The structure of the text is as follows. The theoretical and methodological tools are explained in the first section. The characteristics of the avant-garde are developed in the second section. The third one explores the relations of concrete art, visual arts, and poetry to other languages, such as gardening and graphic design. The fourth one presents the collective biography that was obtained. The fifth one describes the difficulties and limitations of the method of collective biography. Lastly, the final remarks draw conclusions from the text and present some possible future research.

### **Theoretical and methodological tools**

The collective biography method, as Christophe Charle<sup>5</sup> puts it, is useful for extracting socially relevant pieces of information from defined populations. A biographic questionnaire is applied in order to describe the dynamics involved (political, social, etc.). It is a form of doing sociology of the past. Its use provides analysis of internal relations in a group. This method is generally

used to study numerous groups consisting of hundreds of people. However, in this case, the group consists of fifteen people. This small number brought about some difficulties that are discussed below.

The concept of the field from Pierre Bourdieu's<sup>6</sup> social theory helps specify the collective biography method, as sociology proposes using this concept in many fields. The field in question here is artistic. For Bourdieu, a field is a relatively autonomous space.

Another concept that brings more materiality to the method is the concept of generation, as Karl Mannheim<sup>7</sup> puts it. To the Hungarian sociologist, there are four notions of generation, which gradually narrow and are more concrete. The more abstract notion refers to generation localization, whose fundamentals rely only on chronological and biological factors. On the other pole, the concrete generation refers to a group of individuals with strong and narrow ties – all of whom know each other. In this case, the concrete group is the Rupture group, composed of 12 members, all of them visual artists. The poets had known the visual artists, but they formed another core, the Noigandres trio, which was composed by the brothers Haroldo de Campos and Augusto de Campos and Décio Pignatari. The Campos brothers and Pignatari gathered since their youth.

### **Characteristics**

The main characteristics of this avant-garde are the following<sup>8</sup>. First, its aim was to exclude representation, i.e., not to represent known figures of the surrounding world. Instead, it wanted to replace representation with geometric abstraction, which, in the artists' opinion, was a way to represent ideas (geometric, mathematic, etc.) with colors, lines, and shapes. It is important to note that until then, in Brazilian art, geometric abstraction had only appeared in the foreground of paintings or in decorative arts.

Second, the concrete artists from Sao Paulo wanted to expel subjectivity from art. As the Rupture manifesto puts it, "(...) considering (art) a form of knowledge that is deductible from concepts, placing it above opinion (...)". The artists aimed to develop an objective art, in which there was a

hierarchy. First was form, the second was color, and the last was the background.

Another aspect of this movement was the lack of color tones. They preferably used industrial paints (however, many of their works have been done with tempera or oil paint). Industrial paints did not favor the creation of color tones, so they usually formed flat surfaces.

The movement wanted to develop an egalitarian art, i.e., they intended to create artworks that did not demand any prior knowledge of the spectators. Anyone could understand the pieces with no reference to pieces of information or references.

Lastly, the concretist movement of Sao Paulo was transnational because it had strong ties with artists and critics from other parts of the world, for instance, Argentinian painter and theoretician Tomás Maldonado, and Swiss artist Max Bill, among others.

### **Concrete art and other languages**

The concrete artists believed that their art should go beyond artworks like sculptures and paintings. They wanted art to be spread throughout the cities in posters, gardens, and shop windows, among others. That is why they have tried to mix concretism principles with graphic design, gardening, and preparation of stands for shop windows, not to mention others.

### **Collective biography obtained**

The collective biography obtained has shown that there were some important places where the visual artists and poets gathered. Also, these artists helped to create some important places for their socialization. Here, some of these places have been picked and are discussed briefly.

The most important art school for concrete artists was the Contemporary Art Institute (originally IAC, Instituto de Arte Contemporânea) of the Masp museum, which was recently founded in 1947. It was a school that followed the Institute of Design of Chicago model and focused on design. Alexandre Wollner, one of the concrete artists, attended the classes of this

school. He later went to study at the School of Ulm. After he came back to Brazil, he became a pioneering designer. It opened in 1951 and closed in 1953.

In Sao Paulo city, two schools offered courses to teach the pupils handcrafted occupations. They were Arts and Crafts Lyceum and Male Professional Institute. In the former, Rupture manifesto signers, Hermelindo Fiaminghi and Lothar Charoux took classes. Another signer of the manifesto, Luiz Sacilotto, took classes in the latter. The most important aspect of these artists studying at these schools is that it shows their social background, that is, a proletarian one.

The concrete artists also, of course, attended some artistic places in the city, such as museums. Most of the museums in the city were recently founded: Masp, the Modern Art Museum of Sao Paulo, and the Arts Section of the Public Municipal Library, which was founded in 1945 and is considered to be the first modern art museum in the city, as it had a collection of art and magazine books, paper art, and art reproductions. Masp was a crucial spot for these and other artists as it became possible for the to see old and new art, especially in many retrospective shows, such as Max Bill's one. The Modern Art Museum opened in 1948 and mainly focused on modern art. It is important to note that showing and collecting modern art at that time was a risky bet.

On the side of the places created by the concrete artists, the first one to mention is Unilabor, which was a furniture design studio founded by Geraldo de Barros and others in 1954. In furniture design, it is crystal clear the intent is to take advantage of some artistic principles to create day-to-day pieces. In them, it is noticeable the straight lines, the industrial materials, and the easiness of compounding different pieces of furniture. It closed in the following decade. Later, De Barros opened another furniture studio, now with a more for-profit perspective.

Waldemar Cordeiro, another manifesto signer and so-called leader of the Rupture group, owned a gardening studio. He also aimed to take advantage of artistic principles from constructivism and others to create modern gardens that showed shapes, textures, and colors. His enterprise was named Avantgarde Gardens and he designed about 200 projects.

### **Difficulties and limitations of the method of collective biography**

The application of the method of collective biography have implied some difficulties and brought about some of its limitations. Basically, they refer to three aspects. First, the size of the population. Then, the primary sources. Lastly, teamwork.

The population studied was very small, only fifteen people. The method is usually deployed to study humongous populations. However, when studying art, defining a huge and coherent population is challenging because artists usually have strong particularities. That is why a small population was chosen. It was a way to deal with a well-defined group, which had straight ties from the inside and worked relatively together against other groups. According to Brazilian historian Flavio Heinz, there is a risk of overrepresentation in small populations, that is, when the number of individuals is small, it may distort reality by selecting not-so-relevant individuals<sup>9</sup>. However, the collective biography method may serve as a structure when the population is small, considering it provides pathways to collecting data and analyzing it.

Another difficulty that was faced referred to the primary sources. For instance, few interviews with concrete artists from Sao Paulo were available. Interviews with artists and other relevant individuals are important to provide insights, opinions, and pieces of information unavailable in texts. In the face of it, the author has tried, during his masters, to interview some of the living artists and other individuals, such as the first and most important collector of such art production, Adolpho Leirner<sup>10</sup>. Another missing material was the art dictionaries, which did not fully cover those artists. This aspect compromised the fulfillment of the spreadsheets with data on them, which were a starting point of the research.

The collective biography method is usually applied when there are teams involved in the research, as this method generally deals with huge amounts of people and data. Nevertheless, teamwork is quite uncommon in art studies in Brazil, so the application of such a method ends up being a solitary one. Another bad outcome is that the lonely work misses the scale

gains, as Flavio Heinz<sup>4</sup> puts it, considering that a team can improve the velocity of the activities involved.

### Final remarks

The concrete artists of Sao Paulo may be considered proletarians of art. That is, they were part of the petite bourgeoisie who made themselves artists, nevertheless the difficulties they had to face, as they could not live on their artworks.

This article has shown that flows of people, ideas, and practices have benefited the coming of concrete art in Sao Paulo. The burgeoning city, with ties to various regions of the world, favored the coming of this new art. Also, the coming of these concrete artists has created new flows, as they have started the establishment of the then-new abstract geometric art that opposed to both figurative and informal abstraction.

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# Traveling Families. An Approximation to Indian Matrimony in Lebrija (Sevilla)

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## **ABSTRACT**

Throughout history, migration processes have been experienced in different territories, being motivated by various reasons. In the relationship between Europe and America, the colonial period is a significant turning point that implements migratory flows between both worlds, favoring social and cultural encounters and exchanges, feedbacking the collective imaginary and the reality of both multiple views.

Marriage between Europeans and the American population was a significant practice that contributed to the co-existence and knowledge of both cultures. From a cultural perspective, the hybridization of these unions was conditioned by the establishment of families on both sides of the Atlantic, implying an adaptive process that influenced people's way of life and social practices.

This paper focuses on the role of migration in the formation of mixed families. It takes the analysis of the Indian marriage between José de Mora and Manuela de Mory, as a way to underscore vital patronage and religious sponsorship episodes, while paying special attention to the female figure.

## **KEYWORDS**

Lebrija (Sevilla); Yanguitlán (Oaxaca); Patronage; Religious sponsorship; Manuela de Mori y José de Mora.

### **Introduction**

The multiple reality that essentially meant for Europe and America, "discovering" — or rather, knowing and introducing in the collective imagination of both worlds the existence of one, for all, new territorial, social, political, and cultural dimension — marked a before and after in the conception of what was known until then.

In America, after the events of 1492, an important period began. It was called the colonial period. Its change processes were enormous and profound, although they hindered the survival of a series of cultural continuities in the Indies, as many others merged with European influences. Art was conceived as a result of cultural hybridization; the European matrix fused with aboriginal elements, giving rise to a symbiotic style with a strong personality.

An essential part of the artistic manifestations developed in this context is linked to the spread of the religious phenomenon during the 16th century. Through the missionary expansion in Mesoamerica, we witnessed the establishment of religious orders such as the Dominican, which founded conventual establishments that would act as a center, not only religious but also as cultural and economic catalysts. This is the case of the Mixtec Convent of Santo Domingo de Yanhuitlán.

This paper has its origin around the history of this center. Dealing with the cultural expressions generated by the encounter between two diametrically opposed universes — the Mexican and the Spanish — we will address a specific case of patronage and religious sponsorship of a family of merchants from Yanhuitlán, settled in Lebrija (Sevilla).

This activity has its turning point in the period following the return of the family to Sevilla, around 1757. From then on, the participation of marriage in the church of Lebrija, and, very significantly, the female intervention made this case paradigmatic in the cultural context of his time.

He was a native of Sevilla, and his wife was from Oaxaca. On both shores, they carried out intense participation in the ecclesiastical life of their respective towns, leading, individually and jointly, various foundations and pious works. They not only made possible the maintenance of the

communities and establishments to which they were spiritually united, but also promoted the execution of various artistic works that ennobled and defined these religious spaces iconographically and devotionally.

The analysis of this case allows paving the way for knowledge of the phenomenon of Indian patronage in the town of this first known incursion. Additionally, it allows the reflection on the particular issues leading to the development of this activity by the couple, through a series of episodes in which the female role is essential for its execution.

Studies on women in the arts and their active role throughout history constitute a prominent stream of studies that has exponentially developed in recent years.

Inscribed in this line of research from the outset and linked to the local perspective, we have also addressed in different publications the diverse role of women in artistic production and the collecting and patronage phenomenon. All these questions have, firstly, allowed us to grasp the existence of some women whose interventions were remarkable in the field, while making room for their personas and works through the reconstruction of their biography. Here, we highlight the character of María Manuela de Mori y Cosíos.

### **Who was she?**

A first approximation must refer to her life's chronology. In previous studies, the activity of María Manuela de Mori has been approached by academic publications directly referencing altarpieces. Therefore, they addressed neither her character nor her integral activity as a patron. She was thus cited as a promoter or co-promoter of works, being relegated to a secondary role with respect to the importance of artistic works and their creators' analysis.

On the other hand, we had other references about María Manuela de Mori, more information about her origin and part of her activity. However, there is the limitation of not systematically and precisely referring to the sources, which blocks the search and accurate identification of the documentation referred to in the summaries of the data provided.

From this base, our study performs a new reading and reinterpretation of the documentation in some of the bibliographic sources, bringing to light a series of notarial and ecclesiastical documents, which outline various issues of life and religious and cultural promotion carried out by this family.

Despite the location of varied documentation allowing to reconstruct some chapters of María Manuela's promotional activity, the circumstances inherent to the first years of her life and her American stage are unknown. The data collected do not allow us to elucidate the exact date of her birth.

In the diverse notarial documentation she produced during her life, she repeatedly stated her geographical origin and her closest family affiliation. By adoption from Lebrija, she came from Santo Domingo de Yanhuitlán, a Mixtec town located in the valley of the current state of Oaxaca, under the religious mandate of the Bishopric of Antequera. Her family's initial relationship with the Old World is also known. She was born from a marriage formed by a Spanish father, a Captain of the Spanish Militia Infantry, and a mother linked to the Indies, from the town of Teposcolula.

María Manuela's relationship with Spanish lands intensified as she married José de Mora y Romero, from Lebrija. He lived in America for more than twenty years, exercising commercial activity. Among the reasons for marriage, we can consider the economic ones, although in the case of the husband, given his status as a migrant, also those of social position.

We do not know if Manuela de Mori belonged to some Creole elite in her relationship with her maternal family. Her life trajectory and her documented activity give rise to this hypothesis, given her behavior, her determination and administrative skills, for the sake of her own and common property, we assume that one more probable training would also justify her activity for the arts.

If so, this social group was careful to express its power publicly. One way to materialize this was the patronage activity, primarily associated with the exercise of charity. Likewise, the realization of pious works for religious institutions, in which part of the fortune obtained was used, thus assuming the European tradition. Although among the motivations for carrying out this

activity would also be the spiritual one: donations not only as guarantors of their wealth but also of their piety, enabling them the obtention of graces for their devotion.

The role of women in patronage varies considerably depending on their marital status and depending on whether they own their capital (hereditary or not). Widows and single women in New Spain were a group with an important activity of religious patronage in both male and female institutions, some of them being wives or daughters of Spanish merchants. These notable cases have already been documented.

In the absence of a husband and without any offspring, María Manuela she took the reins of the foundations, continuing pious works and artistic sponsorship until her last wishes. This was carried out alone, with the most dignified autonomy, without requiring the intervention of men or other family members — except when distance forced her to grant some power. In the notarial documentation we find her unique signature in all types of deeds, as well as a series of restrictions and impositions that, depending on the case, condition from its foundations to the regulation of her inheritance.

She, like so many other women, constitutes the germ of the phenomenon of artistic matronage, the object of an arduous process of historical rereading in terms of gender to which we try to contribute with this research.

### **The activity on patronage and religious sponsorship as a traveling family**

Around 1757, the family transferred to Andalusian lands. The return journey is said to have taken place between October and December of that year. Until that date, it has been possible to document the activity of Mora y Mori in America. At the end of the year, the couple surely resided there, and María Manuela clarifies it in a document issued in the town of Lebrija years later.

A few months after his return, José signs a deed of obligation by means of which the couple begins their artistic promotion activities in the town. Although, these will not be their first sponsoring actions. During María Manuela's stay in the Indies, her husband carried out the aforementioned

foundation in Lebrija. Two more foundations followed this: at least one patronage of laymen or Legos in Yanguitlán by Manuela — which her husband initially managed; another foundation in Sanlúcar de Barrameda by José, in addition to some memories of masses founded in the establishments conventual nebricenses. The same line will continue throughout his life, including in his testamentary dispositions.

Among the reasons for settling in the land of Mora, there was the fact that José had already achieved the economic objectives of being head of the family through his activity as a merchant. This is probably related to the sale of grana cochineal or its dye, whose production and transaction established well-known ties between the Oaxacan population and merchants of Spanish origin. For Maria Manuela, this new situation must have meant a significant cultural shock at first, but what could have been a hostile place for a newcomer undoubtedly became a space where social and institutional relationships were frequent and fluid.

The year 1795 marks the end of Maria Manuela's life. Her death certificate indicates that in January she would be buried in the Parish Santa María de la Oliva. Although it does not contain the reasons for her death, which we understand was due to her advanced age, it offers us particular information about her last wishes.

The burial of the Indian, as indicated, would be "of all greatness", taking place "in her own grave at the foot of the Capilla del Sagrario" , which was arranged for this purpose by her husband, José de Mora, years before her death. In 1760, Cardinal Solís granted the burial vault right.

If we look at the dates of the pious works and artistic promotion carried out by María Manuela de Mori, it is possible to determine that she appears as the protagonist after the death of her husband in 1764. This is due to her new circumstance, widowhood, by which she acquired autonomy and legal capacity that allowed her to operate as an owner from now on. In this sense, as a woman, the religious and artistic promotion undertaken during the marriage places her in the background, since the husband appears as the only agent of the foundations.

Already residing in Lebrija, María Manuela founded a pious legacy in life, which she projected toward her homeland. Years later, specifically in 1762, José de Mora ordered the founding of three Lego Patronages, also in the Indies and in the name of his wife.

The year 1755 marks an important turning point in carrying out different works in religious establishments in the town of Lebrija, due to the material damage caused by the Lisbon earthquake. Among the buildings affected, there was the parish of Santa María de la Oliva.

Destined for its Sacramental Chapel, in 1758, the concert of a major altarpiece takes place between José de Mora and Matías José Navarro, head of a well-known sculpture and altarpiece workshop established in Lebrija. The signing would take place between the benefactor and the artist's brother, as well as the sculptor Juan Navarro, in November, determining the cost of the works at 15,000 reales de vellón. Likewise, the payer established a series of conditions that show their involvement with the iconographic line to be developed in the altarpiece.

The intervention of Mora in the chapel is not limited to paying for the erection of the altarpiece. It designates the chapel as a burial place for himself and his family. In March 1760, they would have obtained the concession of the aforementioned ecclesiastical authority and the parish's commitment.

José de Mora died in 1764, buried in the vault, dressed in Dominican habit. This issue, we think would come as a consequence of the intense activity of the order in the town of Yanhuitlán and the devotional relationship that the marriage would establish with the community during its Mexican stage. Manuela de Mori would also be buried there.

After her husband's death, the first actions for the support of the ecclesiastical institution that Maria Manuela carried out in her widowhood took place that same year, specifically in June.

Andrés Ceballos attested o the foundation of memory of masses, vigils, and funerals by the convent of San Francisco in Lebrija. As in the foundations analyzed, it was common to commend in prayers. After referring to the costs of the said foundation, the benefactor undertook to finance the gilding of the main altarpiece of the convent temple.

The second Franciscan convent in Lebrija, called Convent of Santa María de Jesús, was another establishment that benefited from Manuela de Mori. There, she allocated part of her money for artistic promotion. As in the previous case, we refer to the gold of its main altarpiece.

It was also in the year of 1764, after the death of her husband, when the payer suggested to the community the execution of the activity at her expense. The religious transfer of the offer to the Father Provincial by a letter was approved. The agreement was celebrated in July between the convent and Manuela de Mori, who, by writing, found a memory of masses, specifying that a series of honors should be celebrated annually, every March, in the date of José de Mora's death, in addition to many other masses in honor of the patron saint, with the exhibition of the Blessed Sacrament. At the same time, it was obliged to finance the gilding of the aforementioned piece of art.

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# Global Relationships: Five Nippo-Brazilian Artists

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## **ABSTRACT**

The article researches five Nikkei or Nippo-Brazilian artists who are Japanese immigrants and their descendants. Displacement involves assimilation, adaptation, translation, and transcreation. The logic of circulation and encounter of cultures engenders hybridization and transculturality in the artworks producing other engagement forms and creative processes. The investigation involves pre-war immigrants Manabu Mabe (1924-1997), post-war immigrant Kazuo Wakabayashi (1931-2021), and three Brazilians with Japanese ancestry, born and raised in Brazil but chose other countries to live in: Erika Kaminishi (b.1979), Yukie Hori (b.1979), and Kenzi Shiokava (1938-2021). This research intends to examine the place of this migration process in the history of art.

## **KEYWORDS**

History of Art, Nikkei, Nippo-Brazilian Artists, Transculturality, Transcreation.

People's migration constantly provokes assimilation, adaptation, translation, and transcreation. Transcreation is a concept developed by the Brazilian poet, academic, and Japanologist Haroldo de Campos (1929-2003), based on the thinking that translation is never the same as the original. Campos proposed an idea of translation mixed with creation, engendering the hybrid and new sign to the translation process, especially in poetry. According to Campos: "In a translation of this nature, not only the meaning is translated, but also the translation of *the sign itself*, that is, its physicality, its materiality itself (sound properties, of imagery visual, everything that forms, according to Charles Morris, the iconicity of the aesthetic sign, understood by an iconic signal, that is in some way similar to that which it denotes".<sup>1</sup> It is the creative translation, a form of aesthetic hybridism through appropriation and transformation engendering unknown signals in the sense that in the semiotics view, every sign is always bound to grow. Although the concept is related to the field of literature, especially poetry, it is possible to expand it to the creative process of Japanese-Brazilian artists, which, in a way, transits between the two cultures, establishing connections and some kind of translations.

Moreover, the circulation of people brings the constitution of a Third Space, Homi Bhabha's concept, which refers to the interstices between colliding cultures, including a forceful break and changes of art view perspectives, where hybridization occurs. The cultural anthropologist Néstor G. Canclini points out that hybridization: "is not a simple mixture of discrete, pure social structures or practices that existed separately and, when combined, generate new structures and new practices" but "it can happen in an unplanned way, or is the unexpected result of migratory processes [...]"<sup>2</sup>, that is our case. It is relevant to know, according to Canclini, how the process of this hybridization occurs, and it is what we tried in the research of the five artists.

Every immigrant who came to Brazil would face a phase of destabilization, transition, and transformation, giving rise to new housing and other social and cultural habits. The official immigration started in 1908 when the vessel *Kasato-maru* brought 781 people to Brazil. They went to the countryside to work on coffee farms. However, the labor conditions of

Japanese immigrants were poor; it was not as they had expected. Although they intended to work temporarily in Brazil, get rich and return to Japan, this dream was impossible to accomplish for the majority of immigrants who ended up settling in Brazil. They and their descendants are called Nikkei<sup>3</sup> or Nippo-Brazilian. The transcreation occurred even in everyday cooking: the pickled vegetables such as cucumber, turnip, or eggplant that they used to eat had to be substituted by chayote or even watermelon's rind.

About Nikkei Artists, there are four groups: the pre-war, the post-war, and the recent immigrants, besides Brazilians with Japanese ancestry. This article selected the following artists to research: the pre-war immigrant Manabu Mabe (1924-1997), the post-war immigrant Kazuo Wakabayashi (1931-2021), and three Brazilians with Japanese ancestry, born and raised in Brazil but chose other countries to live: Erika Kaminishi (b.1979), Yukie Hori (b.1979), and Kenzi Shiokava (1938-2021). The relationalities engendered by mobility are significant aspects to analyze in these artists.

**Japanese immigrant artists:  
Manabu Mabe and Kazuo Wakabayashi**

Manabu Mabe arrived in Brazil in 1934 at the age of 10 in the LaPlata-maru vessel and worked on a coffee farm. In Lins, Mabe had art lessons with the photographer Teisuke Kumasaka. Despite being the eldest son, who, according to Japanese tradition, should inherit his father's work and, therefore, the coffee plantation, he decided to sell the coffee farm in 1957, moved to the city and dedicating himself to art. Although being a huge risk to make a living in São Paulo city, at that time, the selection of his artworks for the *II and III International Biennial of São Paulo* (1951 and 1953) had already come to happen, which certainly must have been a great encouragement for him. Mabe's consecration came in 1959, when he won the Best National Painter Award at the *V International São Paulo Biennial*. Moreover, he won the Scholarship Award and Braun Award at the *Paris Youth Biennial* in the same year, and Mabe got a Special Room to show his works in the *VII International São Paulo Biennial* (1963).



**Fig. 1.** Manabu Mabe, *Sonho do meio-dia* (Midday dream), 1969, oil on canvas, 200x240cm. Photograph by Sergio Guerini. Mabe Family.

It is interesting to see the change in Mabe's painting style over the years: from figurative one (*Maternity*, 1952) to geometric abstractionism (*Coffee Harvest*, 1956) and informal abstractionism (*Victorious*, 1958), which he painted while he was thrilled with the goal scored by the Brazilian soccer player Pelé at the World Cup in Czechoslovakia. He says in his writing that he was tired of geometric paintings, and after a few tries, the brush handling became similar to *shodō* (Japanese calligraphy)<sup>4</sup>. That was one of his first informal abstractionist paintings. On the other hand, he was conscious of the Western artists' movement performed by Pollock or Franz Kline and the development of vanguard *shodō* (*Zen'ei-sho*) in Japan<sup>5</sup>. Mabe is one of the best-known national and international Nikkei artists, and Japanese critics

consider remarkable his blending of bright, tropical colors. A Japanese view of Mabe's art is predominant among Brazilian art critics, especially concerning the gesturing related to Japanese calligraphy. The characteristics of other people's cultures always seem to catch the eyes of specialists. Even so, it shows that Mabe possesses both, or rather, he represents the artist who is in the third space, the intermedial zone between Brazil and Japan.

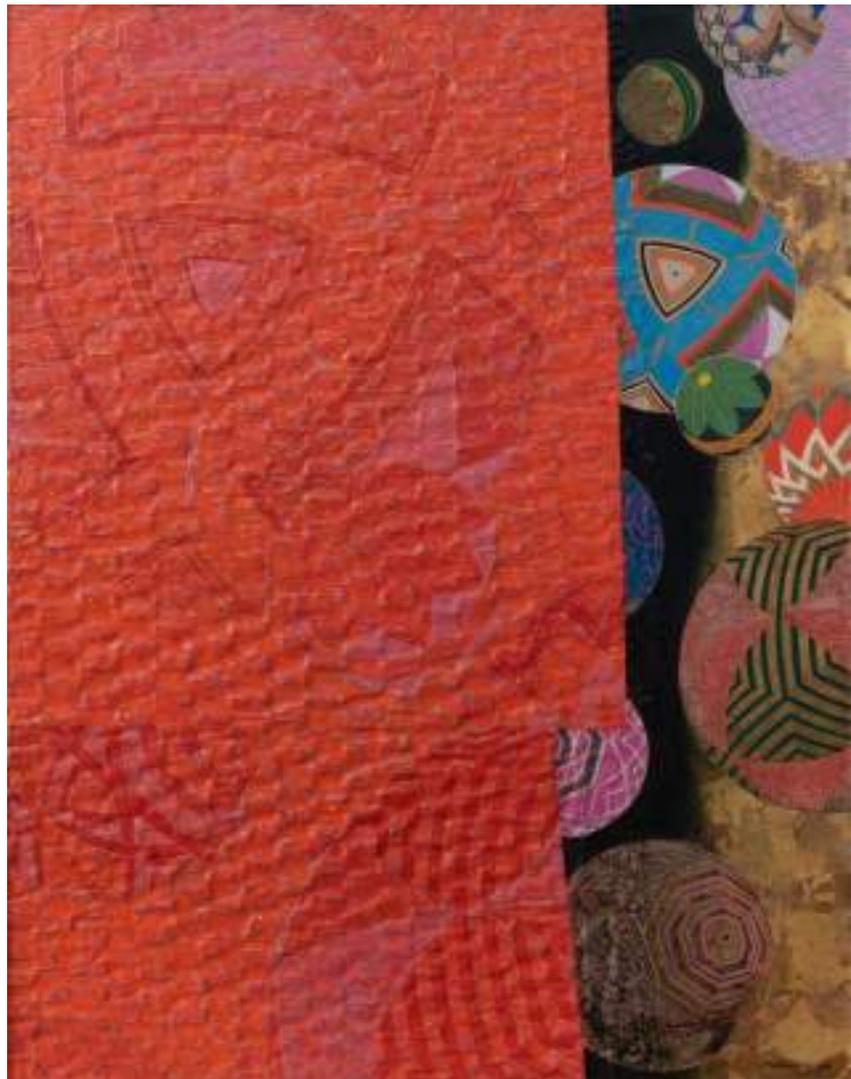
Kazuo Wakabayashi was born in Kobe, Japan, in 1931, and at the age of 11, his father passed away. He was deprived of his house due to the American bombings at 12 and lived part of his adolescence in a small village community (*mura*), where the social laws and prejudice against fatherless boys were fierce. For instance, Wakabayashi was obliged to do funeral services that no one would like to do. Revolt against that Japanese social system was probably one of the reasons that made Wakabayashi leave Japan.

He began to study oil painting at 15 years old, and from 1947 to 1950, he attended the Niki Academy and the School of Fine Arts. After that, he worked at the Shinko Press while dedicating himself to the paintings. Working in the press gave him a critical way of viewing and acting in the world. In 1961, he emigrated to Brazil after having undergone solid artistic experiences in Japan: he was already a member of Babel, Seiki, and Delta Group.

Therefore, it did not take much time for Wakabayashi to have artistic recognition in the new country. Three years after arriving, he won the Great Gold Medal at *Salão Nacional de Arte Moderna* (National Modern Art Saloon). Seven years after, Wakabayashi won the Itamarati Acquisition Award at the *VIII International Biennial of São Paulo*. He held many shows in various countries all over the world.

In the 1980s, Wakabayashi began to use Japanese traditional Edo period woodblock prints *Ukiyo-e* images: samurai, geisha, kabuki actors, fans, toys, or kimono's flower patterns, presented in such a way that shows them only partially, covered by the large area of layers of thick paint. There are some similarities with the traditional Japanese Yamato-e paintings: the gold clouds hide some elements of the depiction. Such delicately textured space made by the plastic base and many levels of the acrylic painting was identified curiously as the cuneiform pattern by art critic Jaime Maurício<sup>6</sup>.

Wakabayashi explains that he began to use Japanese images when he realized the importance of his identity when participating as a judge of other artworks. However, known as one of the Nikkei artists who did not have any difficulties selling his paintings, some people interpret this style as one of his commercial strategies, even though he rejected the idea of painting for profitable purposes.



**Fig. 2.** Kazuo Wakabayashi, *Temari* (Japanese traditional ball), 2001, mixed media on canvas, 146x116cm. Photograph by Caio Tinoco. Wakabayashi family.

The sociologist Kusun Yun (2018) analyzed the role of exoticism in Japanese, Korean and Chinese artists in 1445 articles in four international art magazines (Art in America, Artforum, Flash Art, Artpress) during the 40-year timeframe (1971-2010). Yun concluded that exoticism is an aesthetic criterion for these artists for the visibility on the international art scene.<sup>7</sup> He says that “peripheral artists often create and invent a kind of communication strategy designed specifically for the West’s tastes [...]”<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the art historian Monica Juneja explains that “‘traditional’ concerns easily recognizable and consumable as authentic ethnic markers”<sup>9</sup>.

However, from another point of view, the researcher Maria Fusako Tomimatsu<sup>10</sup> points out that this usage of Japanese elements was a signal of acceptance of Wakabayashi’s own identity, which until that time would be associated with the worst and dark memories of his life: his father’s death, the responsibility to be the older man of the family, the confrontation of the old village system, and the horrific scenes of the war. Independent of the process of the creation of Wakabayashi, the audience’s concern may be associated with the aspect of the logic of art circulation indicated by Yun and Juneja.

There is another dialogue with Japanese characteristics in his thick layer of acrylic painting and delicate texture surface that is possible to recognize as an affluent artisan technique. Before Japan’s westernization, there was no distinction between fine arts and crafts. *Kōgei* is a word that means crafts. There is no equivalence due to their particular and different historical contexts: *kōgei* is something so valued in Japan that they make tribute to selected artisans as Living Cultural Heritage.

The transcultural processes differ much in comparing the immigrants from the pre- and post-war periods. The former faced many difficulties due to their coffee plantation work background. The latter experienced the horrors of the war, leaving the country searching for freedom from the Japanese social system. Wakabayashi commented that the ingenuity presented in the pre-war Nikkei arts had been impossible for those who experienced the war.<sup>11</sup> However, we can verify that after some decades in Brazil, Wakabayashi had his colors influenced by the tropical atmosphere and the usage of the Japanese elements after living outside Japan.

**The Brazilian artists with Japanese ancestry: Érica Kaminishi, Yukie Hori, and Kenzi Shiokava**

We studied Brazilians of Japanese ancestry living outside the country of birth. Érica Kaminishi (1979- ), of the third generation, lives in Paris; Yukie Hori (b.1979) and Kenzi Shiokava (1938-2021) of the second generation, the first residing in Tokyo, and Shiokava living in Los Angeles until last year.

Érica Kaminishi was born in Rondonópolis, Mato Grosso, in 1979, as the third generation Japanese-Brazilian. Kaminishi attended Fine Arts at the Paraná Arts College in Curitiba, Paraná State, and her life experience in Japan was double, totalizing almost ten years: first, three years as *dekasegi* (manual labor) when she was a teenager and worked at a telephone factory, and after, at the age of twenty-six, she attended a master's degree in Visual Arts and Cinema at Nihon University. In the interval period of two adjournments in Japan, Kaminishi went to England. She has worked as an artist in Japan, Brazil, and France. The artist has been living and working in Paris since 2011.

Her artworks make references to Japan. Some of them bring a critical view, reflecting the ambiguity of her identity and the prejudices she suffered in her experiences in Japan, whose map is a frequent image in her artworks as if territoriality and nationality are of greater importance to her. Japanese artist Hōitsu Sakai (1761-1829) of Rinpa School, who has delicate paintings with soft chromatic tonalities, is her favorite artist.<sup>12</sup>

The verbal language is also recurrent in her artwork, whether as interactive work or through poems of Portuguese poet Fernando de Pessoa (1888-1935), especially those that refer to identity. It is not easily visible; it even looks to be a pattern. We can perhaps associate this with the traditional Japanese conjunction of image and verbal code in art.

*Garden* (2011) is an interactive installation exhibited at Funarte, São Paulo, when she received the Funarte Contemporary Art Award. It evokes traditional Japanese rock and sand Zen Garden combined with graffiti as she transforms the stone for the public to write and draw on. The graffiti that is very present in São Paulo's urban scenes are not factual in Tokyo, where they are prohibited. In some ways, she deconstructs the sacredness of the

traditional Japanese cultural symbol. One more interactive artwork is *Mi Casa, Su casa* (2010), presented at *Aichi Triennale 2010*. Viewers can write a desire on each of the jigsaw puzzle pieces surrounding the map of Nagoya city. “The public is invited to fill in one white peace of the jigsaw-puzzle with their wishes in the tradition of *ema* 絵馬“ (éricakaminishi).<sup>13</sup> *Ema*, literally horse pictures,<sup>14</sup> are small wooden planks commonly installed in Japanese Shinto sanctuaries, where worshipers write their wishes and thanks.



**Fig. 3.** Erica Kaminishi, *Cnidarian Poiesis 2*, 2020, mixed media, 30 x 30 x 4 cm (acrylic box). Photography by Florian Formanek.

The *Prunusplastus* (2017/2018) is a mixed media installation with 3000 cherry blossom flowers hanging from the high ceiling of the Japanese American National Museum, Los Angeles, at the exhibition *Transpacific Borderlands: the art of Japanese Diaspora in Lima, Los Angeles, Mexico City, and São Paulo*, of which the author of the text was the curator of the last city.

Kaminishi shows the cherry blossom, the national symbol of Japan, using Chinese flowers, the image of ephemerality by artificial petals and all of them inserted in Petri dishes as if she was scientifically analyzing this Japanese stereotype. One can verify a subtle critique of the stereotyped and exotic Japanese symbol.

Her recent work, *Cnidarian Poiesis* (2018-2020), is a multicellular marine species representation made by overlapping layers of paper, with the poem of Fernando de Pessoa written on the surface. In the center, we can find a collage of a small Japanese map, which is possible to see in many other of her works. She selected the cnidarians due to their capacity to adapt to the shape according to the environment. Another reason is their power of regeneration. These characteristics of the mollusk are very close to those of people who lived through the pandemic isolation period caused by Covid 19.

Yukie Hori, was born in São Bernardo, São Paulo in 1979. After finishing her master's degree at São Paulo University in 2015, she went to Japan to try applying for a Ph.D. at Tokyo University of Fine Arts in 2016. Hori engaged in artists' residences in Mexico (2009), Ireland, Japan (both in 2010), and Australia (2011). The artist also participated in many international exhibitions and won prizes.

Photography is her main artwork, and various of the works she produced in Brazil paid homage to Japanese artists and used their traditional materials. *Cultivating Pines [For Tōhaku Hasegawa]* (2008-2014) from the *Dedications* series is a photography work printed on Japanese paper in the form of *emakimono*<sup>15</sup> (the illustrated handscroll) and dedicated to the famous Edo Period (1603-1868) artist Tōhaku Hasegawa (1539-1610) paintings. Placed in wooden boxes are the *emakimono*, exposed with an interval space between the two, and the *yohaku* (the void) is structural to her work, conceived as *Ma*<sup>16</sup> the intermedial space that emphasizes and gives life to the figures, considered the base of Japanese aesthetics.

By changing spaces, modifications appeared in her artworks theme. After going to Japan in 2016, she began to bring references to Brazilians like the famous Neo-concrete artist Hélio Oiticica. There were site-specific installations to create a new landscape and new relations between space,

artwork, audience, and life in Japanese cities, based on Oiticica's works: such as *Parangolés* and *Penetráveis [ou um Jardim para Hélio Oiticica]* (Penetrable [or a garden for Hélio Oiticica] (2016-2020), produced at *Art in Farm 2016*.

Other artworks, based on the exchange and dialogue between Brazil and Japan, one of which, entitled *Brazilian Reminiscences of Yukio Mishima*, are still in progress, which is the joint work with fellow photographer Nikkei, Aline Nakamura (b. 1982). Together they went to Lins in 2019. They took photographs of the Tarama Farm, where the famous writer Yukio Mishima stayed during his trip to São Paulo in 1952. In that artwork, we can see the juxtaposition of verbal codes – the writings of Mishima – and images of the abandoned house, the jaboticaba tree of the garden, and the fertile red land of the region.



**Fig. 4.** Yukie Hori, *Brazilian Reminiscences of Yukio Mishima*, 2019, Digital photography, printing (mineral pigment on paper), B5 format book, double-page. Photograph by artist.

Another work named "*At night I think about the day, by day I think about the night*" (2018- ), made with another fellow Brazilian photographer

Ines Bonduki (b. 1984), is also in progress and dialogical work between Brazil and Japan. While in Japan, Hori would take photos for part of the night. In Brazil, Bonduki would do the same during the corresponding period. Vertically arranged were all the photographs on eight scrolls printed in Japanese artisanal paper *washi* in exhibitions she did at Paço Imperial, Rio de Janeiro, in 2020. There is another version of the book.

Comparing two Nikkei Japanese descendant artists of the same age, Kaminishi, and Hori, we observe different Japanese cultural and aesthetic approaches. Kaminishi's principal theme is identity and has strong ties to her memories of Japan that can be correlated to the critical view of Japan, generally subtly and ambiguously. The artist does not fit either in counter-Orientalism, the active self-representation of the Orient in challenging Orientalist discourses, converting them into positive evaluations, or in self-Orientalism: "the wilful (re-)action of non-Western individuals and institutions to 'play the Other' – that is, to use Western portrayals of the non-West – to strategically gain recognition, and position themselves within the Western-dominated global economy, system and order".<sup>17</sup> She is in the position of the other Other, who is in the intermedial space, looking at the Orient not as foreign but neither as native. How to determine the place of the artist? One who neither belongs to Japan nor Brazil, but who from a different perspective correlates to both?

Differently from Kaminishi, Yukie Hori declares that she does not have any problem with identity. The artist does not feel like a foreigner in Japan or Brazil<sup>18</sup>. She refers to Japanese art in Brazil and Brazilian art in Japan, and there are dialogical pieces. She clarifies that "if I have something in common that unifies my work, it is the question of process and space"<sup>19</sup>. However, the space she bears in mind is the Other, referring to the place she lives, according to the artist, "to introduce the Other to the space." In her case, seeking the local of Other, where she has some approach, might be a recourse of authenticity to differentiate from local artists. Hori has recently engaged in interesting dialogical and transnational projects that overpass the duality between Japan and Brazil.

Artists of Japanese descent, born and raised in Brazil, generally study art there, such as Kaminishi and Hori, but it was not the case for Nikkei artist Kenzi Shiokava. Son of an immigrant father, he was born in a small agricultural town named Santa Cruz do Rio Pardo, São Paulo State, in 1928 and passed away last year (2021) in Los Angeles at the age of 93. Shiokava applied for medical school three times, but he failed on those occasions. Winning a free seat on military aircraft, he went to Los Angeles, USA, in 1964, where his older sister had been living, and, at that time, he knew what he wanted for his life: to be an artist.

The artist found wood his best material to work in the last years of his undergraduate studies when he began to collect discarded materials such as railroad ties, deactivated poles, and elements from destroyed buildings. The materials, gathered from downtown Los Angeles, were used to produce assemblages and totems.

The assemblages<sup>20</sup> known as the Los Angeles art style in the mid-1960s, were made by many artists, especially by influential African-Americans who were Shiokava's friends, such as John Outterbridge (1933-2020) and Noah Purifoy (1917-2004) who lived in his neighborhood. From different materials, such as stones, dried plants, broken toys, ceramic heads, anime heroes' helmets, Mickey Mouse, and daruma, was his assemblage produced.<sup>21</sup>

Shiokava developed artworks with a close relationship with nature which was associated with his work as a gardener in the house of Hollywood actor Marlon Brando for twenty years. We can associate his proximity to nature with Japanese culture, where animistic thinking still survives.

The sociologist Shoko Yoneyama<sup>22</sup> specifies that “the strong animistic underpinnings of the indigenous/folk Shinto belief system and Buddhism (...) have permeated everyday life perceptions of nature” in Japanese culture. The adaptation to nature or animistic thinking as an ensemble of complementary aspects between humans and nature is a possible understanding for the Japanese. Indeed, nowadays, in a global view, the nature-culture dichotomy demands rethinking and denotes the end of the episteme of the

Enlightenment that separated nature from culture, society, and human beings.

The artist declares himself proud of being Brazilian, but he asserts that his spirit is Japanese. Shiokava read Daisetsu Suzuki's books about Zen Buddhism, which "inspired him even as they seemed to confirm beliefs and sensibilities he already possessed".<sup>23</sup> In fact, some small works resemble the *ikebana*, the Japanese flower arrangement.



**Fig. 5.** Kenzi Shiokava, *Totems*. Dates, dimensions and materials varied. Exhibition Transpacific Borderlands (2017 - Japanese American National Museum, Los Angeles). Photography by author.

The representative of Shiokava's totem works is *Marga Yuriko* (Warrior Poet, 1991), dedicated to his sister Margarida Yuriko, who was a poet misunderstood by her family and society, for whom he had great respect and admiration. Another name given is *Mulher Cangaceira* (Cangaceira woman),

referring to the northeastern Brazilian legend of the 19th and mid-20 centuries.

Another artwork named *L.A. Kachina* shows Shiokava's attachment to the place he lived. Kachina is associated with the native American tribe and correlated to the cosmos life force, which surrounds the Hopis on either plane, living or dead, which dialogues with animistic thinking.

Shiokava was a very passionate man about life, nature, and art, but only recently has he been recognized. In the exhibition *Made in L.A. 2016* at the Hammer Museum, he received Mohn Public Recognition Award. He participated in *Transpacific Borderlands: the art of Japanese Diaspora in Lima, Los Angeles, Mexico City, and São Paulo*, Japanese American Museum (2017/2018), and 6th edition of *Ateliers de Rennes – Biennale d'art Contemporain, 2018*. Transcultural experiences cross and harmonize his art well three cultures: the Brazilian part, where he was born and raised; the Japanese one, the country of his ancestors; and, finally, the American aspect, where he lived for 57 years until his death.

### **Final Considerations**

Nippo-Brazilian or Nikkei arts we have analyzed show us the hybridity of themes, materials, techniques, and aesthetics of their countries of birth, their ancestors, and displacement. To semiotician Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), the process of self-generation and continuous growth of signs constitutes the genuine character of the signal or the semiosis. Therefore, this "sign" cultivated by Nikkei artists is affluent: associating and even merging different cultural elements, engendering the new original signs, the result of the interrelationship and transcreation occurring in in-between spaces named by Homi Bhabha as Third Space or *Ma* in Japanese culture.

This research tried to investigate how notions of place, in our case, Brazil, Japan, and other countries where the artists lived or are living, are associated with their artworks through negotiations of new relationalities. It was relevant to observe how the process of hybridization and transcreation occurred in their creative processes and their artworks, engendered by mobility and encounter with other cultures of their birthplace. We observed

that some concepts, for instance, Orientalism, do not fit the case of the artists we studied. According to Juneja, the “[...] transformative potential of circulation can show the way to rethinking existing frameworks” and “it becomes an important source of reflexivity for investigations through art history as a whole”<sup>24</sup>.

This article hopes that Nikkei art can be recognized and valued worldwide, even in Japan, since they are considered neither Japanese nor Brazilian, marginalized, with little visibility, except for a few of them. Analyzing these artists made us think about: the challenge of overpassing the dualistic point of view – the dichotomy between the West and the Japan –, recognizing the plurality of artistic forms, the diversity of artistic productions, looking at processes arising through cultural encounters, reviewing other paradigms of transnational configurations, and claiming for a more inclusive history of art.

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### Endnotes

1. Haroldo de Campos, *Haroldo de Campos – Transcrição*, org. Marcelo Tapiá, and Thelma Médici Nóbrega (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2015), 5, own translation.
2. Néstor García Canclini, “Culturas híbridas y estrategias comunicacionales,” *Estudios sobre las Culturas Contemporâneas*, Época II. vol.III. no.5, Colima, (June 1997):112, own translation.
3. The term Nikkei is very complex as it has different meanings depending on the point of view. In Japan, Nikkei encompasses Japanese and their descendants, but in Latin America, its connotation is limited to descendants only. Nonetheless, when we say Nikkei artists, it includes both.
4. Manabu Mabe, *Mabe - chove no cafezal: uma auto-biografia de Manabu Mabe* (São Paulo: Nihon Keizai Shimbun, 1994). No page numbers.
5. Shinji Tanaka, *História da arte nipo-brasileira* (São Paulo: Hucitec, 2019),192.
6. Jayme Maurício, “Apresentação,” In *Wakabayashi, Kazuo Wakabayashi*, (São Paulo: Companhia Melhoramentos, 1992), 15.
7. Kujuk Yun, “The role of exoticism in international contemporary art in the era of globalization – an empirical study of international art magazines from 1971 to 2010,” *Revista do Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros*, no.69 (April 2018): 362-388.  
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8. Yun, “The role of exoticism,” 384.

9. Monica Juneja, "Global Art History and the 'Burden of Representation,'" In *Global Studies: Mapping Contemporary Art and Culture*, ed. Hans Belting et al. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011), 277.
10. Maria F. Tomimatsu, *Kazuo Wakabayashi: um artista imigrante* (São Paulo: Porto das idéias, 2017), 122.
11. Interview with the artist by the author, on September 3, 2013.
12. Interview with the artist by the author, on May 3, 2015.
13. Erica Kaminashi. "Mi Casa, Su Casa", Ericakaminishi. April 2, 2022. <https://www.ericakaminishi.com/gallery/mi-casa-su-casa/>.
14. Ema 絵馬 (Picture + Horse) primarily offered horses to the divine as a sign of gratitude for fulfilling a wish.
15. *Emakimono* 絵巻物 (絵= painting 巻= scroll 物=thing) is a Japanese illustrated horizontal narration handscroll, generally composed of text and image, produced mainly during the Kamakura periods (1185-1333). Read sitting on the tatami with the scroll placed on the floor or in hand. In both cases, the reader unwinds with one hand while rewinding it with the other hand, from right to left.
16. *Ma*: present in many Japanese cultural aspects (architecture, cinema, painting, way of speaking, and acting of Japanese people), considered in the author's book as a pre-signal, a possibility or potentiality that when manifested in the reign of existence, appears as void or intermedial space/ interval/ in between-space.
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# **Ships, Heroes and New Frontiers, Myth of Travel and Migration**

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## **ABSTRACT**

All cultures are based on a few master narratives which merge into certain moral demands of societies, building the foundations of religious beliefs to make human coexistence work. They differ slightly in different cultures but they evolve along very similar golden threads. One of them seems to be the Quest for the Holy Grail, respectively the much older Quest for the Golden Fleece or Odysseus's Journey.

The ancient narrative of the Argonauts, with their most expeditious ship Argo, finds its equivalent in the Starship Enterprise and its fearless crew. The Compañeros at King Arthur's Round Table or even the Disciples gathering for the Last Supper strike the same transcultural collective memories as the intercultural assembly on Captain Kirk's bridge.

The Austrian artist Christian Ruschitzka envisions migrants fleeing from unbearable conditions across the mediterranean sea as the descendants of the Argonauts. The Swiss artist Milo Rau with his International Institute of Political Murder rehearsed and filmed *The New Gospel according to Matthew* with some rightful allusions to Pasolini in the European Cultural Capital Matera 2019. From the immediate vicinity, he chose his Jesus, a black activist from the tomato fields.

In my presentation, I question the differences between the travel images of modernity, the longevity of enduring myths which might define our transcultural affinities, and if emphatic artistic participation is ever possible.

## **KEYWORDS**

Gospel; Argonauts; Myth; Golden Fleece; Star Trek.

Using the example of two European artists. I would like to raise two questions in my presentation. One is the longevity of enduring myths that might define our transcultural affinities, and the other is the difference between the travel images of modernity. And, of course, if emphatic artistic participation is ever possible and may result in high-quality art. I have witnessed the development of both works personally, which I find a very valuable potential.

Christian Ruschitzka, born 1962 in Styria and Milo Rau born 1977 in Bern, both come from very small stable, not to say rich countries in the European Union which had quite an impact on the events on our planet in history. Switzerland with its exceptional banking situation as well as the quite old and very direct, small-scale democracy, and Austria with its long imperial history, its colonial past, and the spawning of the most horrible dictator ever and two World Wars.

Both artists had a profound education in several fields with interesting teachers like Pierre Bourdieu and Bruno Gironcoli and in sturdy handcraft like Filmmaking and Blacksmithing. See the biographical data on [Milo Rau](#), [Christian Ruschitzka](#) websites.

Nowadays those two countries are confronted with increasing immigration and while both like to accept high-score scientists or overrated film stars they are not ready to just help people who are looking for asylum. We know that from the thirties, and we know that from the present. Although both their populations consist of a very mixed set of people.

What distinguishes Christian Ruschitzka's work is his deep understanding of materials and merging it into his artistic concepts.

His occupation with the surface, with the exterior of things, is an old one. His approach has always been concerned with the essence of things. He begins with the skinning and ends up with the coring. He pitchforks us with a surface that makes up an object and contrasts it with the condensed nucleus, respectively its volume. The discarded, abandoned usefulness of things is the starting point of his artistic investigations and his physical research journeys. Objects which do not have a purpose anymore are his targets, like a hunter who sets the prey and to complete his quest peels off the skin.

The required furniture of a simple room is measured, stripped of its paint, cut again into precisely measured pieces, and laid into an accurate cube without any gaps in between, the *Lodging Cube* (1998). And just like in a clean room you can put the chair on the table and the table on the bed.<sup>1</sup>

Preliminary to this work series was the exploration of the base for a sculpture. He deformed things into *Handluggage* (1992), milkcan, chair, table, wheelbarrow, bicycle just the things you need for travel. Here the base becomes the repository. The everyday items are safely stored and displaced at the same time and have an exactly fitting lid.<sup>2</sup>

Another of Ruschitzka's objects, the single parts of a chair also only laid together, is presented on its cast volume beneath. It might be a slight allusion to the oeuvre of Rachel Whiteread, who takes the volume of invisible space as the center of her work.<sup>3</sup>

I also have to mention his mechanical Landscapes because the movable or mobile intervention was the next step from his early compaction. For example in Switzerland, he let Laurel trees wave for you if you put money in the machine. Or in Iceland, he made one stroke with the oar on an ice floe to test the Butterfly effect.<sup>4</sup>

Or in his 'My Private Ocean', 2008, where the water-filled plastic gloves seem to represent the backbone of a huge fish.<sup>5</sup>

One of his last pieces displayed in the Gallery Gougy/Vienna, in January 2022, fits the headline of this convention as well. A mountain in motion, everybody is entitled to have her own pet-mountain,<sup>6</sup> in times when mountains break down and glaciers disappear.

So the base layer of his artistic research is the external skin which defines the object and the inner volume, the appearance, and the content or sometimes not the content but the invisible volume.

When people started to drown in the Mediterranean Sea in increasing numbers and noble escape agents, Heroes like in Tibet or the DDR, became mere people smugglers, Ruschitzka was inevitably reminiscent of the Argonauts.

Even before the great refugee crisis in 2015 which of course was not such a sudden surprise as politics let us believe, Ruschitzka's thoughts

cruised around the Golden Fleece. The highly charged meaning and history of this ram's skin as a symbol of riches, beliefs, quests, and so forth is not only the idol of antique worship but strangely enough became the greatest honor for the defenders of the catholic world; The Order of the Golden Fleece and besides the lamb being conceivable as the resurrection of Christ, the knights of the order, not more than thirty are allowed, like to be seen as a sworn in Gang similar to King Arthur's round table.

But actually what intrigued Ruschitzka the most, was just what it was, the skin of an Aries. The most famous Aries in human history, Chrysomallos, could talk as well as fly. He carried two endangered kids, Hella and Phrixos from Europe to Asia.

Of course, the female Hella had to fall off into the sea thus creating the strait of Hellespont (the Dardanelles today). Phrixos was safely conveyed to the King of Kolchis, Aietes. To thank for his rescue poor Chrysomallos was sacrificed and his golden fur hung in a holy grove dedicated to Ares, the God of War. And there it became the object of desire and greed.

Jason the antique hero was granted his rightful legacy if he brought back the fleece. After a complicated and adventurous journey, he arrived in Kolchis where he fell in love with Medea. She helped him to gain all his aims and leave the area alive. After an even more dangerous adventures travel back. He betrayed Medea and all ended but not well.

Besides the world's most famous ram, there was the ship Argo which helped Jason to achieve his goals. The Argo was built from Aleppo Pines from Pelion and the bow from a prophesying oak of Dodona, Epirus the oldest Oracle in antique Greece. That's why the Argo could see and speak like Chrysomallos and warned Jason and his crew several times of catastrophes. She gave the whole bunch the Name, the Argonauts. And the power of such mystic Idols highly loaded with meaning can once again be seen in the felling of an oak by Christian fundamentalists at Epirus 392 ac..<sup>2</sup>

The antique sagas are endless stories of flight and seeking asylum, betrayal, slaughter, and even insidious assassination. Nevertheless, they shaped our Idea of Heroes since the beginning of storytelling.

And Ruschitzka works around the four most emblematic concepts of this old story, the hero, the flight, the ship as means of transport, and the Idol as the goal. By investigating some of these mythical journeys, he chose his materials carefully. He selected marble from specific areas in Austria and Switzerland which were created in the Tethys Primordial Sea at the equator, a plutonic rock migrating beneath the African continent towards the European plate. Just like the migrating flow of humans today, the marble took the same way millions of years ago. And it characterizes the noble antiquity, the cradle of our civilization. That's why Ludwig the XIV overdid it a bit in Versailles.

Like a ship in pieces, Ruschitzka will carve single parts out of the marble and uses them as the carrier for the skinned Argo. The processed surface is very soft like the foils, he used in his former peelings, but the actual material is hard.



**Fig. 1** Christian Ruschitzka, Argo, Gouache, 2019

On the southern coast of Sicily there exists a ship boneyard where hundreds of boats have to be stored to clear the ownership and to be destroyed afterwards. Those vessels have become only temporary memorials for the thousands of drowned refugees. Many of the boats are covered with lettering and signs, they speak like the Argo and were battered by storms like she was and had to overcome dangers like Scylla and Charybdis, Sea monsters Odysseus had to fight or the Plankten, moving rocks not even Zeus's pigeons would pass unharmed but cunning Jason did. But these ships here in the harbour of Pozzalo didn't make it, and neither did their passengers.



**Fig. 2.** Preparations for “Paradise in Transit”, Pozzalo, 2019.

The lacquer of the boat, its outermost skin, refers to the current tragic reality directly back to the legendary events that had shaped our understanding of heroism for centuries but deny the honors to those who have to endure similar situations nowadays.

In his drawings, Ruschitzka develops his interest in the duality of Greek mythology and our reality and takes us on a journey in the footsteps of the mythology on which our culture is built. Like the Argonauts, the artist sets off into the unknown, embarking on a search for a contemporary 'Golden Fleece'.

His work is constantly and very much in progress, the headline title at the moment is „Paradise in Transit“ and he will present several chapters of work cycles. Some titles are; The Peelings, The RAM'S Skin, and Horripilation. An interesting observation is that the Ram is not only the animal, it is also the acronym of Radar-Absorbant-Material, to make something invisible and Random-Access-Memory, the working memory of a computer.

So Ram's Skin denotes the skin of the Aries, the golden Fleece, the purpose of the Argonauts' travel.

And an artificial dermis that makes it invisible, the pipe dream of the boat fugitives.

And the user interface is imprinted with memory.

Many of the sketchers are quite sinister like the dead men in Kolchis who were buried sewn into leather skins hung in trees which Jason saw while arriving from the sea, thus referring to the makeshift body bags on the beaches of the Mediterranean nowadays. (The women of Kolchis were burned, and the ashes were scattered in the fields to fertilize the earth, which is quite a soothing thought.)



**Fig. 3.** Christian Ruschitzka, *The Dead Man at Kolchis*, Gouache, 2019

The chapter which occupies Ruschitzka at the moment the most is, what I call, horripilation or goosebumps. A phenomenon which accompanies humankind since the beginning and even the old heroes had to endure it, and he also sets the furry golden fleece in this context.

Those heroes did not want to bring a message, they were the message themselves. Their adventures are firmly anchored in our collective memory and Ruschitzka just wants us not to forget that their noble dangers and fights are no different from those of fugitives of today, and he determines the motive and the parallels as the starting point of his research trip. He circles the motifs of his studies to work out the essence of his materials. The finished cycle will be displayed in the holy halls of the present, the neoclassic Parliament in Vienna where the marble of decorative antiquity presenting our performance of democracy will meet the marble of the condensed splintered shipwrecks and with them the drowned dreams of a better life in a better world.

A bit different is the approach of Milo Rau with his *International Institute of Political Murder*. He works with the persons who brought the message, but it seems not so many can hear it, Jesus and his Disciples.<sup>8</sup>

But again there is the motif of a journey or more a quest with a leader and his companions sitting around a table like King Arthur or almost detained in orbit in which the ship must move like Starship Enterprise.

And that maybe is a similarity or the connecting metaphor between the two artists. They both take stories frozen in time and ever so valid throughout the ages. The acting characters become types who do not change and thus give people support, something one can rely on, like on the Enterprise in a cosmic pursuit that never finds the way home but goes through all kinds of human experiences and evolutions. Of course, I don't want to compare everything so boldly to Star Trek. It is not an Art piece, but it obviously shows how ideas transcend, change their appearance, and have a strong hold on us whatever disguise they may take.

That is what Milo Rau and Christian Ruschitzka show us, but in transforming the time capsule into the presence, the whole matter gets an intensive twist. Milo Rau is famous for acting out real events like the Congo Tribunal in which real participants re-enact court proceedings. It brings into focus one of the most horrible massacres and still ongoing bloodiest economic wars in human history under the confused participation of global economic interests in high-tech commodities, mainly gold, and coltan. And there we see another shift in history. Thanks to some presentations here at CIHA about silver mining and the migration of precious objects, I realized that gold took on a completely different meaning. It is not material for the most exquisite jewelry, religious veneration, or just money, but mainly a fabric for mobile phone and computer production, quite profane. And like it ever used to be it is still a reason for war.

Furthermore, I want to mention Rau's European Trilogy, Orest in Mossul, the New Gospel, and Antigone in the Amazon. You might know about the project on Amazon which had to be canceled and reorganized because of the pandemic and is surely of more concern here in Brasil.

The Golden Fleece is a master narrative that builds the base of a certain development of civilization, and so is the New Gospel. Orest and Antigone also deal with basic human needs and troubles but they are Theatre plays and not so internalized or common knowledge. I want to concentrate on the New Gospel performed in Matera in the very south of Italy.

Matera, which was once the poor house of Europe and still is in a region of Italy that doesn't bloom with riches, is today a beautifully picturesque little city that was the cultural capital of Europe 2019, half baroque and half medieval where Milo Rau lays the scene.

The region is agricultural, and rather poor and because of the location, refugees mainly from Africa are stranded there, not knowing where they are and without any perspective except working on the tomato fields of big industrialized landowners.



**Fig. 4.** Rehearsal, Milo Rau's New Gospel, Matera 2019

Some of those outcasts, Rau took on as actors to re-enact Jesus' ordeal. And Jesus is Yvan Sagnet from Camerun who came to Italy for studying

engineering in Turin. Because he lost his scholarship, he went to Nardo to earn money on a local farm as a tomato picker. After five days he was so horrified with the working conditions that he started a riot and could actually achieve improvements so that the completely lawless state of the agricultural workers was at least put on some contractual basis with the local farmers. Milo Rau made use of this circumstance and casted him as Jesus.

Everything is intervened and woven together. Matera, the ex-poorhouse, the area where Pasolini and Mel Gibson filmed their legendary Gospels. Pasolini's Jesus Enrique Irazoqui gives Josef the Baptist, but also, or in another earlier version a High priest. Maia Morgenstern plays Maria like in Gibson's adaption. Some extras from Matera appeared already in Pasolini's Milestone. The actual activist Sagnet tries to fish for comrades in the existing slums around Matera and pursues a tangible campaign for more justice and dignity. And this activism is reflected in the images of the gospel that have been imprinted insight our skull caps for 2000 years.

Rau refers to the powerful role models but even more to the actual situation of the people, to the illegal agricultural workers and their 'revolt for dignity'. By swapping the images, by superimposing two transparent films, he gives each of them a more intense, more tangible actuality. And dignity is the keyword.

Both artists want to give the dignity which is so easily accepted by mythological rascals and humbly doubters back to real suffering human beings. They do not press the lachrymose but create something completely new through careful analysis and transformation. Milo Rau the fusion of fiction and documentary film by shaking and reversing the familiar and the traditional. Ruschitzka by exfoliating the outer visibility and driving out the heart of things ideally and physically, fragment and reassemble in the widest sculptural sense. They explore, expand, and trespass.

And here in this inserted snapshot, we have everything, the golden fleece in the mobile phone, the exploited worker on the cross, the mixture of enthusiasm and despair, the perfect overlaying of past and present.



**Fig. 5.** Rehearsalbreak, Milo Rau's New Gospel, Matera 2019

The heroes from our sagas are also mainly fugitives who had to flee for various reasons, clad in golden fleece.

The concept of the companions who travel abroad and try to win the golden fleece which is thought to stand for freedom, security, wealth, and actually at the end of every journey knowledge. And that's the link connecting everything. Travel, sacrifice, and heroism resulted in enlightenment.

And we see of course similarities to important sagas and beliefs in the Eastern-centered world, but that would be another presentation.

I am very glad that I came across another piece of art during our visits to the Pinacoteca in Sao Paulo which very much catches the significance of the old myths and narratives. The work 'Travessia' by Leandro Lima. To me, it definitely depicts the Argo full of fleeing Heroes rowing into the presence.

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# Latin American-ness: Their Shared African and Black Diasporic Histories into Art

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## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this paper is to outline the influence of African heritage on Latin American Art. Latin American culture has been strongly influenced by African culture and traditions due to the encounter of Africans with the American continent during the colonial period; when slave trade displaced thousands of Africans from their original lands and forced them to work in the new world. This circumstance has contributed to the spread of African traditions and customs, and art, in various parts of Latin America. Understanding this cultural diversity is crucial to the multiplicity of Latino culture, as well as the forces behind the new ideas that are reshaping Latin American art.

Afro-Latin American artists work with their African roots to mesh elements of black consciousness, political activism, resistance, memory, and inequality into their work. Producing under the “umbrella” of African roots, they fight for the rights of black identity. The significance of the impact of African roots in Latin American Art and its hybridism needs to be investigated further. In order to understand Afro-Latin American Art, colonization and the theory of post-colonialism and global art must be deeply explored.

## **KEYWORDS**

Afro-Latin America; Cuban Artists; Women Artists; Religion; Santeria.

The aim of this paper is to outline the influence of African heritage on Latin American art. Latin American culture has been strongly influenced by African culture and traditions due to the encounter between the peoples of Africa and the Americas during the colonial period, when slave trade displaced thousands of Africans from original lands and forced them to work in the New World. Such historical circumstances contributed to the spread of African traditions, customs, religions, and art in various parts of Latin America. Due to the syncretism and the diversity of Latin America, a variety of African symbols, artifacts, objects, and traditions are found in contemporary artwork. Some traditions represented in the art reflect specific aspects of African heritage and culture. Religions such as Santería, Abakuá, Arara, Palo, and Vodou in Cuba, Candomblé, and Umbanda as well as Jurema in Brazil and Voodoo in Haiti celebrate African religious traditions from transcultural perspectives by combining them with Catholic and Indigenous beliefs. These creeds, which stem from the African diaspora, have been represented by contemporary Cuban Latin American artists such as Belkis Ayón, Lili Bernard, Maria Campos-Pons, and Harmonia Rosales. These women artists have incorporated elements of African religions, deities, gods, goddesses, dance, ritual symbols, images, and even colonial imaginaries in their oeuvre.

### **Afro-Latin America**

Latin America has the highest density of people of African descent outside Africa. The total population of Latin America is 652 million, of which around 150 million people are of African descent. In countries such as Brazil, 56 percent of the population is Black. During colonial times, people from the African continent were captured, enslaved, and brought in subhuman conditions aboard Spanish, French, and Portuguese ships to the Latin American colonies to work on the plantations, in the mines, or as domestic help. The colonies of Latin America brought the most number of slaves from Africa and continued to keep them in bondage for a long period of time. Today, the Afro-Latino population is extremely diverse and spread across several countries and regions and in both urban and rural areas; those along

the sea coasts have specific cultural, artistic, and religious manifestations. Contemporary Afro-Latino artists are interested in portraying these cultures, beliefs, ancestral history, rites, cults, and customs in their oeuvre using different media.

### **Contemporary Afro-Cuban women artists**

In Cuba, 62 percent of the population is Black; consequently, the country has an increased output of Black artistic production. “African elements in the development of Cuban culture have historically been manifested in the development of Cuban religions, in particular the Congolese and Bantu derived *Regla Conga (Palo Monte)*, the Yoruba derived *Regla Ocha (Santería)*, the Benin derived *Regla Arara* and *Voodoo*, and the *Sociedad Secreta Abakuá* whose origins are Old Calabar and southwestern Cameroon.”<sup>1</sup>

The Cuban artist Belkis Ayón Manso (1967–1999) studied at San Alejandro Academy, Instituto Superior de Arte in Havana. She was a printmaker who specialized in collography<sup>2</sup> and researched African and Afro-Cuban cultures and religions. Her work was inspired by the *Abakuá*, an Afro-Cuban secret society that was brought to Cuba in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the enslaved Africans from southeastern Nigeria and southwestern Cameroon. The *Abakuá* Society was established in Cuba around 1836, and it has been active ever since in the cities of Havana, Matanzas, and Cárdenas and, strange as it may seem, nowhere else outside of Cuba”<sup>3</sup>. The practice of *Abakuá* is restricted to men. According to Orlando Hernandez, “It was probably in Cuba that *Abakuá* acquired its mutual aid and protection functions, which were also exercised by the *cabildos de nación* in response to the prevailing conditions of slavery.”

Ayón used the *Abakuá*s symbology in her painting *La Cena (Supper)*. She created “a contemporary artistic version”<sup>4</sup> of the *Abakuá* Mythos. In this painting she portrayed the secret society *Abakuá* on the dinner table in the iconography of da Vinci’s *Last Supper* using Africa elements reflected in *Abakuá* ceremonies<sup>5</sup>; for instance, the snake around the neck of the *Abakuá*n princess *Sikán*<sup>6</sup> of the *Efut* in the center of the painting;<sup>7</sup> and the leopard skin. The figures are also portrayed blindfolded, which is used in the *Abakuá*

initiation ritual. Ayón used Catholic iconography from the New Testament and juxtaposed the image of Jesus against the Sikán image, while also replacing the male Abakuá figures who performed the Abukuán sacred ceremonies.



**Fig. 1.** Belkis Ayón Manso, *La Cena (The Supper)*, 1991, Colografía sobre papel 141×301,5 cm.

According to the Abakuán mythos, when Sikán went to the river to collect water with a vessel, she accidentally trapped a magic fish named Tanze, who is believed to bless prosperity upon those who collected it. The fish embodied the ancestor king Obón Tanze. Sikán could hear the fish's voice, and she was the first woman to know its secret; however, she shared it with her boyfriend, and in order to preserve the secret, she was sacrificed. According to Frank, "Like the princess, Ayón tests the limits of secrecy enshrouding the Abakuá, saturating her prints with graphic symbols and visual riddles — sacred fish, roosters, goats, medallions, and snakes. The foreboding presence of silence bleeds through Ayón's artistic style, in which

humans appear as flattened figures in greyscale hues, endowed with large, expressive eyes and no mouths.”<sup>8</sup>

Ayón’s portrayal of the Supper differs from the traditional *Last Supper* iconography as it comprises mostly women, with the exception of two men. The artist replaces da Vinci’s central figure of Jesus Christ with the figure of a woman, reflecting the feminist struggle toward women’s empowerment by placing them in societies led exclusively by men. According to Ivor L. Miller, “Nevertheless for many Abakuá members and their communities, Abakuá is a symbol of the Cuban nation itself, being founded much earlier than the nation (1902), and being a deep psychological marker for Cuban resistance to enslavement and subjugation.”<sup>9</sup> This work embodies Ayón’s interest in the ancient Afro-Cuban religion and its rituals, traditions, and identity as well as the feminism of the post-Cuban Revolution era.

Another important Cuban artist with African roots is Magdalena Campos Pons (1959). She is a multi-disciplinary artist of Nigerian and Chinese descent. Her great-grandfather was captured, enslaved, and brought to Matanzas to work in the plantations. Pons studied art at *Escuela Nacional de Arte* and *the Instituto Superior de Arte* in Cuba. In 1988 she went to the USA and studied at the Massachusetts College of Art. She worked with Cuban history, memory, religions, race, and gender. Her work makes references to slavery, slave trade during the sugarcane planting period, and Santeria rituals. Santeria is an Afro-Cuban religion developed in Cuba between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is derived from the Yoruba belief of Western Africa and Catholicism. Santeria believes in multiple deities; for instance, they believe in the Orisha, identified as Yoruba gods, as well as the Catholic saints.

Pons’ installation *The Seven Powers Come by the Sea* (1992) is a direct reference to the period of slavery and the displacement of people from West Africa to work as slaves on the plantations in the Caribbean. The installation portrays seven wooden boards leaning against the wall, shaped like a ship’s board; each of the boards has an Orisha, an African god: Ogum, Oxum, Iemanjá, Obatalá, Xangô, Oxóssi e Oyá. On the floor of the installation are photographs of the artist’s ancestors, with the words “Let us never forget” (“Prohibido Olvidar”). The artist, by consciously using this phrase and making

references to the period of slavery, erects a memorial to all those people who were deprived of their freedom and were killed either during the sea voyage or as a consequence of the deplorable work and health conditions they were subjected to. Pons' placement of the photographs in the installation reflects the Santeria Cuban altar. She appropriated Santeria symbols in her work while simultaneously acknowledging her Cuban identity.

In her series *When I Am Not Here/Estoy Allá Untitled Blue* (1994) Pons' performance is documented using Polaroid photography. Pons painted her nude body in blue with white streaks, and she holds a wooden boat in her hands. Hanging from her neck, over her breast, are two baby bottles with milk, which drips onto the boat she holds. *When I Am Not Here* is an analogy to her own experience of not living in Cuba but the United States. It is also a reference to the Yoruba and Santeria religions and a representation of Yemanjá deities. The blue color on Pons' body and the boat she holds are offerings to the Yemanjá in Afro-Latin religions. It is also yet another reference to slavery, which brought millions of Africans aboard boats to the Americas. This boat represents an offering to the Oshun deities in the Santeria ritual.



**Fig. 2.** Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, *When I Am Not Here/Estoy Allá / Untitled Blue* (1994), Polaroid photograph. Overall: 20 × 24 in. (50.8 × 61 cm). Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth.

According to González-Mandri, Pons'

painted body symbolizes not only the Atlantic Ocean and the Atlantic Passage but also the Caribbean Sea and the Pre-Columbian cultures (the boat is canoe). This Polaroid reinforces the survival of African women living in the Caribbean despite their historic function as the bearers of future slaves and the nurturers of children not their own. In Cuban vocabulary, a criollera (one who takes care of children) is a black woman who nurses white children as her own. In this respect, black women become "mothers" of the Cuban nation. In most instances, because these women were separated from their offspring, they were seldom able to nurse their own. Slave women's bodies, because they were sold and raped by their masters, became vessels for public consumption rather than private bodies who could choose to reproduce and nurture children" (González-Mandri 2006: 12).<sup>10</sup>

Another photograph of the series *When I Am Not Here/Estoy Allá Untitled Blue* portrays Pons with her torso naked and her skin painted in yellow and blue. She holds a boat supported on top of wooden shelves with oranges. This photograph refers to the goddess Oshun of the river; in Nigeria, Oshun is the Yoruba goddess of fertility, sensuality, and prosperity. In the second photograph of the series, Pons is portrayed with her fingers full of honey taken from the boat she holds. Honey is also an offering to the deity in Santeria rituals. In this photograph, Pons shows her body as associated with the elements and the attributes of the Santeria deities. According to Pons,

In that particular series, I was thinking mostly about translation and what I call negotiating distance—of all sorts, distance of time, space, geography—and cultural distance. (...) what was there before me, or what belonged to the ancestors, the people who came before me. How do they touch me now? (...) then I decided to do a piece that was a kind of a tautological idea, speaking to traverse, which means crossing. Cultural body of information and knowledge that let them be a community, keep together, to overcome all the horror and the humiliation of the process that was going on. They had something that was private, that only they know ...<sup>11</sup>

...Pons, through her works, shows the horrors of slave trade; she also works with the diaspora and engages in the construction of an Afro-Cuban identity.

Another very important Cuban artist is Lili Bernard. She studied at Cornell University and received her master's degree from Otis College of Art and Design. Bernard explored the legacy of colonization, race and gender, trauma, and sexism, incorporating Santeria symbolism inherited from the Yoruba in her oeuvre. She foregrounds the visibility of Blacks, who, for centuries, were not represented in European paintings. Bernard's series *Antebellum Appropriations* reports the stories of slavery and Black Cuban revolts in classic paintings, such as *Liberty Guiding the People* by Delacroix<sup>42</sup>, which she reconfigures as telling the story of Carlota Lucumí.



**Fig. 3.** Lili Bernard, *Carlota Leading the People* (after Eugene Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*, 1830). Oil on Canvas, 72"x60", 2011.

In the painting *Carlota Leading the People, 2011* (based on Eugene Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People, 1830*), the Liberty allegory is replaced with the Carlota character in yellow clothes. Carlota was a Yoruba slave who led a revolt against slavery on the Triunvirato farm, Matanzas, Cuba, in 1843. According to Cuban history, Carlota fought to the death and was then drawn and quartered; little is known about her life, and what historians know are from the testimonies given by the slaves after the revolt. According to Bernard, horses, as portrayed in the background of the painting, "they dragged and quartered her to death."<sup>13</sup>

Carlota is portrayed as bare-chested, wearing a yellow dress and carrying a rifle and a machete covered in blood, marching at the head of the battalion over white corpses. Bernard wanted to show that Black women played an important role in leading slave revolts during the colonial period. Another interesting point in Bernard's work is the reinterpretation of classical artworks into Afro-Cuban people's narratives. Some characters have the names of Santeria Orisha deities, such as Babalu Aye, Eleguá, Yansa, and Oxóssi. The drums in Bernard's paintings highlight the sounds of battle; drums were also used in Cuban sacred rituals. "The need to preserve their traditions in a cultural environment led the enslaved in Cuba to fuse their customs with aspects of Catholicism, especially from the year 1515."<sup>14</sup>

Black characters were inserted in the work *Carlota Leading the People*, with references to Cuban history and slave revolts. Carlota and Firmina were two women who led the slave rebellion. Firmina is portrayed in a blue dress with a thin white border, and her breasts are exposed. Blue and white are the colors that represent the Yemanjá, the spirit of water and fertility. Next to Firmina, a Black man is portrayed as kneeling at Carlota's feet. He has a halo over his head on which is written the name 'Sao Lazaro/Babalu-Aye.' It is a reference to the Cuban saint San Lazaro represented in Santeria as Orisha Babalu-Aye. In order to practice the religions in secret, the Afro-Cubans chose a Catholic saint, San Lazaro, who most represents the African god of cure. Babalu Aye, known among the Catholic saints as San Lazaro, is one of the most popular Cuban saints; thousands of devotees are brought to Cuba,

attracted to his miracles. In Santeria, San Lazaro is portrayed as the poor Lazarus of the Bible, with sores and dogs.

The other prominent Orisha that Bernard makes reference to in this painting is Eleguá. The deity Eleguá, “depicted as half-black, half-red,”<sup>15</sup> is represented as a child or an old man. The Bernard painting portrays him as a Black child with a vest, a red hat, and a drum. Elegua was represented in the place of the children in the painting by Delacroix, with weapons in his hands and the drum hanging from his body. Dressed in red clothes, with his name written on his halo, Eleguá is represented on Carlota’s right. In Santeria, Elegua is the protector of Yoruba deities and is celebrated in Cuba. He is the messenger between humans and deities and one of the most important Orishas. Elegua is perceived as an impish boy trickster.

Toward the left of the painting, a young and robust man wearing a hat and holding a drum in his hand represents Orisha Oshosi. He is associated with the forest spirit. Behind Carlota is another woman in red clothes with a raised sword and a halo on which is written ‘Oya Yansa.’ The orisha Yansa is a warrior who fights the strongest battles. The red and black colors are associated with Yansa. In the legend, she is also represented as a buffalo, which is painted on the right of the painting, next to Elegua. The Yansa legend tells the history of Ogun and the Yansa deity. One day, Ogun went hunting and saw a buffalo. Just as he was preparing to kill the buffalo, he saw it turn into a beautiful woman, Yansa. After a few moments, Yansa took off the buffalo’s fur, horns, and skin; she hid the buffalo skin and horns in an anthill in the forest. Ogun saw all this. He approached Yansa and asked her to marry him, but she refused him. So when Yansa left, Ogun hid her buffalo skin and horns. Yansa came back, looking for her things; she asked Ogun whether he knew where they were, but he denied. Now left without the buffalo skin and horns, Yansa agreed to marry Ogun. She went to live in his house with his other wives, and they had nine children together. One day, one of Ogun’s wives, who was jealous of the beautiful Yansa, got Ogun drunk and found out that Yansa was a Buffalo. The wives repudiated Yansa and told her they knew she was an animal and that her horns were hidden in Ogun’s barn. One day, when the wives left the house, Yansa went to the barn, where she found the

skin and horns. Immediately she put them on and transformed into a buffalo. When the other wives came back, Yansa killed them all. She returned to the forest and left her horns with her children; she would know if they needed her help.

In the background of her painting, Bernard portrays a Ceiba tree. “In Cuba, as well as in parts of Africa, Asia, and other parts of Latin America, the Ceiba tree is considered to be a sacred tree.”<sup>16</sup> The sacred Ceiba tree with flowers is used in Santeria rituals. Bernard notes that her work “exposes the post-colonial paradigm of suffering and resilience, through a collision of cruelty against compassion.”<sup>17</sup> She adds, “Since my artwork is heavily codified with Afro-Cuban religious iconography and folklore, I infuse my paintings, sculptures, photography and video art with images of the Ceiba tree and her flowers.”

With reference to *Carlota Leading the People*, Bernard comments on what’s missing in art history:

They're very beautiful, very serene, but what's omitted from that narrative is the institution that sustained that life, which is slavery (...) Even if they were in Europe, the Kings and Queens were still being sustained by the slavery that was going on in the New World. (...) I thought that by appropriating these European paintings into slave stories, I was kind of owning the story and positioning myself, or positioning the story of my ancestors into the halls of art history.<sup>18</sup>

Yet, another important artist who worked with Afro-religious symbolism is Harmonia Rosales (1984). She was born in Chicago to Cuban parents and studied at Glenville State College. Throughout the course of her career, she attended to issues of women's empowerment and Black culture. In her paintings, Rosales seeks to ensure visibility to Black women characters who were made invisible throughout the artistic classical tradition. Her work *The Birth of Oshun* is inspired by classical art, especially *The Birth of Venus* by Sandro Botticelli (1485), which portrays a nude White woman on top of a shell, hiding her private parts and breast with her hands. In the Rosales painting the White characters are replaced by the figures of Yoruba deities;

Venus is replaced by “Oshun,” a Black woman worshiped in Afro-Latin American religions. Oshun “is an Orixá that reigns over fresh waters, her name comes from the river Oshun in Nigeria. She is the goddess of divinity, femininity, fertility, beauty and love.”<sup>19</sup>



**Fig. 4.** Harmonia Rosales, *Birth of Oshun*, 2017, Oil on Linen, 55”x 67”. Private Collection.

In Rosales’ work, Oshun is depicted as an elegant African woman adorned with gold. Rosales remarks on the representation of the Black woman in reinterpretations of classical paintings: “traditionally, we see Venus as this beautiful woman with flowing hair. My hair never flowed, so I’m wondering why this is supposed to be a painting of the most beautiful woman in the world.”<sup>20</sup> For centuries, artists as well as the history of art have neglected the representation of Blacks and the studies of African cultures.

According to Walter D. Mignolo, this erasure and dispossession of Blacks is the consequence of “An aesthetic hierarchy (art, literature, theater, opera) that through respective institutions (museums, school of beaux arts, opera houses, glossy paper magazines with splendid reproductions of paintings) manages the senses and shapes sensibilities by establishing norms of the beautiful and the sublime, of what art is and what it is not, what shall be included and what shall be excluded, what shall be awarded and what shall be ignored.”<sup>21</sup> The European institutions defined and set the standards for art based on their own tastes and judgments; the beautiful and the ugly were already established as categories by ignoring the cultures outside European aesthetic standards.

The central figure in Rosales’ painting is of Oshun in a shell on the sea. She is surrounded by Black angels. The two angels on her left are floating amidst peacock feathers in the air, while the female angel wears a blue dress, representing Yemanjá. The blue dress is inspired by Renaissance clothes; the waist and the left sleeve of the dress are adorned with cowrie shells, which are part of Afro-Latin cults. The angel holds a golden textile blanket, one of the goddess's colors. Some parts of Venus’ skin are covered with flecks of gold. The peacock feathers represent Oshun. In Santeria mythology, the Orisha must obey Olodumare. One day, the Orixá rebelled against Olodumare, who decided to punish them. He stopped sending rain to earth so that the earth would dry up. The Orishas tried to get to him, but they were unable to travel. So Oshun asked if she could try it; the Orishas mocked her, but Oshun turned into a peacock and traveled to Olodumare’s home. During her journey, the sun burned her feathers, and her head turned into that of a vulture. When she arrived, Olodumare saw all her burned feathers, and he put Oshun inside his home, gave her water and food, and asked her why she had done it. She responded that it was to save humanity. Olodumare, impressed by her bravery, told her that he will send rain to earth; thus, the vulture became the messenger of the Olodumare house.

In another painting *Yemaja Meets Erinle*, Rosales shows a naked Black woman, Yemanjá, coming out of the water and hugging a man, Erinle, who is covered with a golden cloth and holding a harpoon with a fish. Yemaja is a

Yoruba deity and a tributary of the river Oshun. Erinle is the son of Aina, an orixa hunter, fisherman, and medicine man. In the story, Yemanja was living alone at sea, when one day as she was swimming, she saw a very handsome, strong man, Erinle, who was fishing. While he was focused on his work, he was surprised by a mermaid who told him that she was the queen of the sea where he was fishing. Yemanja told Erinle she was lonely, and he offered to keep her company.

In her painting, Rosales depicts Erinle as a strong young fisherman, sitting with one of his feet on a stone and the other in the water; his gaze is on Yemanja, the queen of the sea, and she has her arms around Erinle's neck. A glossy superimposition on her hips and thighs suggests the scales of the mermaid. The couple gazes at each other with a loving look. Rosales, in her paintings, rescues the Cuban Santeria culture and religion, opening up spaces for the representation and empowerment of Afro-Latin American people and their voices, primarily those of women.

In summary, contemporary Afro-Latin American artists work with their African roots, Afro-Latina religions, and diasporic identities to integrate elements of Black consciousness, activism, resistance, memory, and inequality into their work. The significance of the impact of African roots and religions on Latin American art and its hybridism is very important to sustain the memory and the relationship between Africa and Latin America. Understanding Afro-Cuban art and cultural diversity is crucial to truly grasp the multiplicity of Latino culture and the forces behind the new ideas reshaping Latin American art. The aforementioned Cuban artists have contributed immensely to contemporary Cuban art, and their work highlight their relationship with Afro-Cuban religions, their symbols, and cultures. These artists are of paramount importance in the struggle for the visibility of Blacks and their recognition in contemporary art spaces. The importance of studying Afro-Cuban art, as mentioned by Madaglena Campos Pons, is *to not forget* the past, the Afro-Black presence in Latin America, and all its enormous contribution to the Americas.

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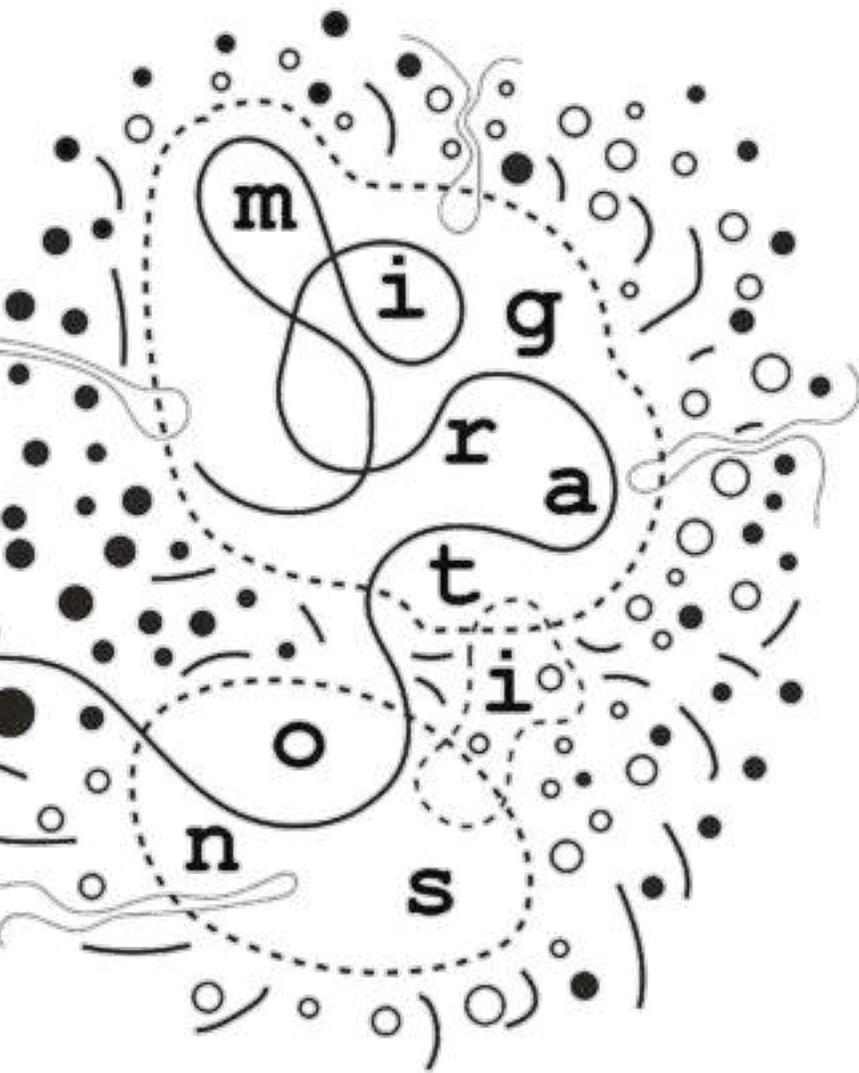
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# Migration of Ideas

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## Session 10



## Session 10

# Migration of Ideas. Artistic Theories On The Move

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Not only people and objects migrate, but ideas are on the move as well. Theories roam, spread, and disseminate into new and unknown fields of discourse. Artistic theories that evolved under specific political, social, and cultural conditions can get wider attention and gain impact under very diverse political circumstances and in different cultural atmospheres.

For instance, David Graeber has argued that there never was a West at all and that the idea of democracy, a supposed staple of “Western civilization”, was neither invented nor inherited from ancient Greece, but rather emerged from the “spaces in between” where different societies (involuntarily) came into contact. Such observations can be applied to the history of art and – to be more general – to the history of visual and material culture. There are many examples that the migration of artistic theories caused unpredictable reactions: new artistic paradigms could be embraced or fiercely resisted (e. g. Romanticism), novel practices could be seen as inspiring or refused as subversive and dangerous (e. g. Pop Art). Artistic theories were an important factor in transforming cultural terrain in very different ways, and they helped to shape social and political spheres in earlier centuries.

In our contemporary world, art seems to emerge “between cultures.” Migrating ideas dispersed into “uncertain terrains” (Inge Boer) create discussions and spark conflicts that often challenge the conditions of present-day societies.

The session explores the place and the impact of the migration of artistic theories throughout history and in a global context. It examines the

repercussions that entail the dissemination of artistic ideas in discussing questions regarding

- I. the circulation of artistic treatises within a global network;
- II. the appropriation and rewriting of artistic theories produced in different geographical zones;
- III. the valuation and devaluation of artistic paradigms;
- IV. the creation and popularization of artistic canons; among other aspects of the geographical and chronological transit of artistic theories.

Mieke Bal's idea of "traveling concepts" was a constant presence on the debates, setting a view on theoretical migrations in terms of circulation and assemblage rather than one-way fluxes from one instance to another. The journey of theories and treatises is not only a movement in geography, as in Jesse Lockard's research on the dynamics of local and global architectural languages through the emergence of the postwar concept of "habitat", but also migrations of physical support and aesthetic languages, (for example Sugghanda Tandon's paper on the crossings between political posters and academic art in Maoist China, and migrations through time (Camilla Froio's investigation on the echoes of Lessing's Laokoon at the United States). These excursions often touched debates on national or regional identity, as in Sofia Vindas Solano's study of the role of OAS in forging and promoting a Central American and Caribbean Art.

A theme that connected several contributions was the conceptualization of modernist canons and their circulation outside Europe, present in Annabel Ruckdeschel, Victor Murari, Marcos Pedro Magalhães Rosa's papers. They all discuss how these Eurocentric conceptualizations were received and negotiated in different cultures. We can see a similar approach in Carolina Vieira Filippini Curi's study of South American Pop Art by women artists: local inflections and negotiations with a foreign model.

The early modern world was also a privileged space of investigation for theory migrations and colonial dynamics, with papers by Marco Silvestri, Clara Habib, Ana Paula dos Santos Salvat and Wenjie Su showing the complex and often the tense character of cultural encounters.

Another key aspect debated during the session was migrations across disciplinary borders, such as Annabelle Priestley's analysis of typology as a concept transposed from science philosophy to art, or Ianick Takaes's reflections on neurology and aesthetics to discuss the phenomenon known as Stendhal syndrome.

The session debates, therefore, highlighted the various modes of theory migration and the richness of the cultural networks that circulate ideas and theories through interactions, translations, reappraisals, adaptations, impositions and resistances.

# From Mexico to Spain: The Constitution of the Plazas Mayores and the Amerindian Roots

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Mexico City main square, officially named the Constitution Square, popularly known as Zócalo, is a potent political and urban cultural space delimited by a representative power architecture. It is also a stage for artistic performances and socio-political demonstrations. However, its configuration is based on Mesoamerican and Iberian urban traditions, which became a unique transcultural experience. Thus, the monumental colonial Mexican Plaza Mayor, a power center constituted in the first half of the 16th century, anticipated, in material and symbolic aspects, the Modern Spanish Plazas Mayores, formed from the second half of the 16th century as an iconic monument of imperial order. This article aims to demonstrate the Mexico City Plaza Mayor's transcultural aspects and connections with the Modern Spanish Plazas Mayores project, focusing on the Amerindian contributions to Western culture.

## **KEYWORDS**

Plaza Mayor; Mexico City; Mesoamerican Urbanism; Iberian Urbanism; Transculturality.

## Introduction

This article intends to present, initially, connections between Mexico City's central area in the 16th century with Mesoamerican and Iberian urban traditions, relating their materiality and social aspects. Since this transcultural American square was formed, elements and concepts circulated between the two sides of the Atlantic, indicating that some of them were in the Mexican square before the constitution of the so-called first Spanish Plaza Mayor in Valladolid city. Such ideas are significant in the visual aesthetics of power centers, which materialize and make structures of unequal social relations of strength visible, which demonstrate that certain groups are dominant over others<sup>1</sup>.

Based on the Swedish sociologist Göran Therborn, who points out that “cities are shaped by power”<sup>2</sup>, which defines social relations and identity, this research analyzes the urban space and the elements of its composition, especially concerning the main square area as a center of power. We also take into consideration the reflections of the Bolivian sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, who supports a study of the image in all its scope and representation practices, including “the structure of the urban space and the historical traces that become visible in it.”<sup>3</sup> In this way, we establish a relationship between the city's visuality and power, consider space as an image, and contemplate the city's layout, and buildings' placement as expressions of multiple cosmovision.

The main object of my research is Mexico City's power center understood as a transcultural construction from the perspective of the Uruguayan writer Angel Rama<sup>4</sup>. The scholar adapted the concept coined by the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz<sup>5</sup> to consider as creative and original experiences and products of the intersection of different cultures. However, it does not mean the absence of conflicts or power relations. Mexico City's Constitution Square (Figure 1), popularly known as Zócalo is a place characterized by the monumental square with more than 200 meters on each side, bordered by buildings of power, such as the Cathedral, to the north; the National Palace, to the east; the seat of the Federal District Government, to the south; and, to the west, the remaining Portal of Merchants. Moreover,

since late 1970s, the ruins of Templo Mayor (or Great Temple), the main power building of the predecessor Mexica city of Tenochtitlan, have come to light. By comparing a city to a palimpsest, we could argue that ancient writings have come to the surface, and dispute a space of affirmation of their identity with the newest text.



**Fig. 1.** Mexico City Zocalo and Metropolitan Cathedral [*Zócalo de la Ciudad de México y Catedral Metropolitana*], 1959, Oblique Aerophotographic Fund / Fondo Aerofotográfico, (FAO\_01\_015484), Historic Collection ICA Foundation / Acervo Histórico Fundación ICA, Mexico City, Mexico.

We will verify both Mesoamerican and Iberian urban traditions in the formation of Plaza Mayor in Mexico City in the early 16th century. Furthermore, we will inspect the characterization of the Spanish Early Modern Plazas Mayores from Valladolid's and Madrid's squares. Contrasting their main characteristics, we will verify the circulation of cultural practices

in materiality and concepts between the two sides of the Atlantic, especially concerning the main squares and the buildings' placements, without focusing on architecture at this point.

### **The center of power in Mesoamerican cities and Mexico-Tenochtitlan**

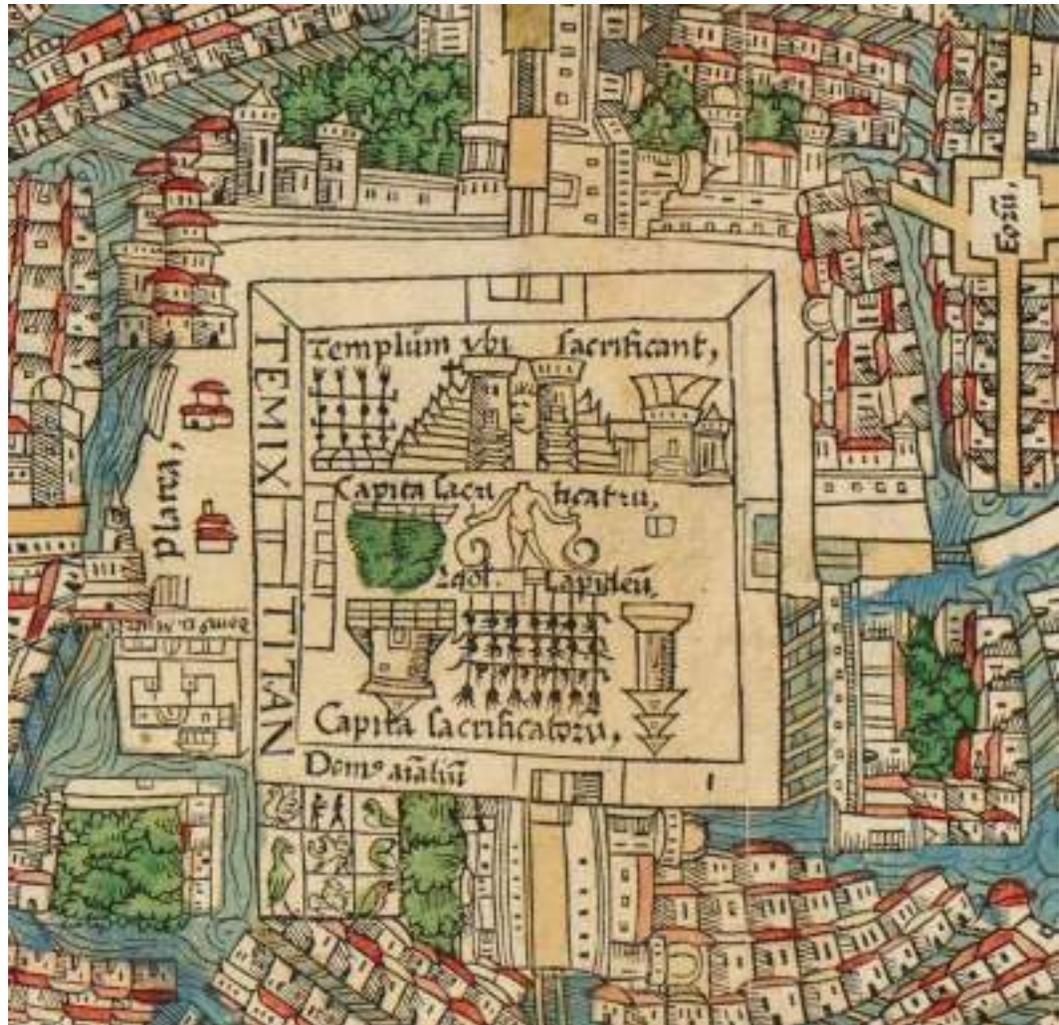
The square is one of the main urban Mesoamerican elements, which, together with buildings such as royal palaces, pyramidal temples, and ballcourts<sup>6</sup>, constituted, according to the American archaeologist Michael Smith, "the Mesoamerican planning principles"<sup>7</sup>, formed since the Pre-Classic Period (a periodization applied to Mesoamerica from 2.500 B.C. to 400 A.D.). The markets on the square, or in adjacent buildings, indicated the city's economic power and promoted social relations.

In the central area, urban elements were positioned in a way that reflecting the order of the universe, in a cosmography that put together space and time. In the Mesoamerican cosmovision, space was conceived on different levels as inhabited by all living and non-living beings. The vertical levels were: the celestial (Omeyocan), the terrestrial (Tlalpan), and the underworld (Mictlan), while the horizontal ones were the division of the terrestrial level into a center and four parts. The Great Temple of a city was the *Axis Mundi* and connected all levels, being a symbol of the concentration of political-religious power and cosmology, and was commonly placed to the east of a large square.

Researchers Alanna Ossa, Michael Smith, and José Lobo, all based in the United States, identify five main activities carried out in Mesoamerican squares: "private rituals, periodic markets, mass spectator ceremonies, participatory public ceremonies, and feasts and other popular celebrations."<sup>8</sup> The large squares were generally urban epicenters, so they became fundamental political-religious stages and manifestations of memory and identity.

Although this structure was the basis of the urban tradition of cities in Mesoamerica, some had innovative characteristics. Tenochtitlan, for instance, innovated by moving its epicenter from the square to a sacred precinct. The

city was founded circa 1325 by the Mexica people on an island in Lake Texcoco. Its configuration followed the Mesoamerican cosmivision, designed with a center, which was a large ceremonial area with more than 300 meters on each side and four large divisions demarcated by long causeways.



**Fig. 2.** Map of Tenochtitlan (detail), 1524, Courtesy of the Newberry Library (Ayer 655-51.C8), Chicago, USA.

Although the cosmographic center of the city was the sacred precinct, there was a square to the south of it with a significant extension (over 200 meters on each side). It was delimited by the Palace of Moctezuma – the

Mexica leader when the Spaniards arrived in 1519 – the former palace of Moctezuma’s father, Palace of Axayacatl, where the Spaniards stayed as guests -, the sacred precinct to the north, and the Royal Canal to the South. Other buildings pertaining to the nobility surrounded the central region since this spatiality also identified the social hierarchy.

The courts for the ballgame, a ceremonial activity, were within the sacred precinct. According to the Mexican archaeologist Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, it is likely that, in its initial stages, the Great Temple had a square and a market in its surroundings<sup>9</sup>. With the growth of the city and the Temple itself, and the configuration of the sacred precinct as a separate place, the market may have been transferred to a square outside the ceremonial center. Presumably, it was located in the buildings that we can see on the detail of the Map of Tenochtitlan (Figure 2), which is oriented to West, in the area identified as *Platea* (on the left), due to its location close to the Royal Canal through which boats circulated with products.

### **Mexico City's Plaza Mayor: A new epicenter**

After the fall of the twin cities Tenochtitlan and Tlatelolco, in 1521, Cortés commissioned Alonso García Bravo to carry out a project on the Spanish part of the city in the center of ancient Tenochtitlan, which had a regular layout with streets, navigable canals, and a square with administrative buildings. The most significant change was the destruction of the sacred precinct for ideological and religious reasons and the replacement of the square as an epicenter and political stage. Without the sacred precinct, the square was immense, about 240 by 350 meters<sup>10</sup>, including the area where the Main Church was built. The colonial aspect of the new city’s central area can be observed on the detail of the West-oriented map made by the middle of 16<sup>th</sup> century (Figure 3).



**Fig. 3.** Alonso de Santa Cruz (assigned). *Map of Mexico City* (detail), c. 1550, parchment, 75 x 114 cm. Courtesy of Uppsala University Library, Sweden.

The spatial distribution of residences around the central area favored groups of so-called conquerors and other elites, such as Spanish government officials. In the first documents of the municipality, there was a determination for the owners of buildings around the square to have their land expanded by 6.5 meters via the construction of portals that ennoble the place, as justified by law, but which also created order and defined pathways<sup>4</sup>.

In 1524, the municipal administration was installed in the former Palace of Axayacatl, which also became the residence of Cortés and seat of the Viceroyalty of New Spain from 1535 to 1562. In 1527, the City Hall began to name the large square as the "Plaza Mayor of this city,"<sup>12</sup> a space that went beyond the Spanish medieval plazas mayores, which had the function to accommodate the market. In Mexico City, the Plaza Mayor concentrated the buildings and performances of different powers. In 1532, the City Hall moved to the south of the square. In 1551, the first university in Mexico was created

and opened two years later in a building northeast of the square. In 1562, the seat of the Viceroyalty was moved to the building on the east side, over the former Moctezuma Palace, now the National Palace. The Main Church, to the north, was built between 1525 and 1532, and in 1573, the construction of the current Cathedral began, which was completed in 1813. Commercial activities extended to practically the entire square: to the southwest, at the Merchants' Portal (on which the building of the colonial official Rodrigo de Albornoz was located); to the southeast, on the Flores' Portal (on which the residence of Marina Flores Gutierrez de la Caballería and treasurer Alonso de Estrada was located). Shopkeepers' tents were also installed in Plaza Mayor and Volador Square.

The square presented religious celebrations, bullfights, parties, official announcements, protocol parades, royal celebrations, markets, theaters, executions of sentences on the roll and the gallows, installed next to the water fountain, thus demarcating the space as a place of communication for a new order, its justice, and its way of life. There was also an aesthetic concern with the appearance of the square with municipal determinations that valued cleanliness, the alignment of buildings, and, as already mentioned, the construction of portals on the ground floor of the buildings of those who had residences facing the square.

The enormous open space in the city center as the main political, religious, and social stage, was non-existent in Europe but recurrent in Mesoamerica. In the Iberian context, the main square was derived from other trajectories and cosmovision.

### **The square in the medieval Iberian context**

Orderly cities with a central square with government and religious buildings and markets around it were not unknown to the Spaniards. The religious motivation of this ordered urban design in the Christian context would be the image of the heavenly Jerusalem described in the book of Revelation and the Hippodamian model of Patmos, the Greek island where John, the evangelist, would have written the biblical text<sup>13</sup>.

In Iberia, some of the central squares were built when the region was occupied by the Romans, who applied a reticular model mainly to their colonies, in which a square (forum) was usually formed at the intersection of the main roads. From the 11th century onwards, new urban configurations emerged in the north of the Peninsula that resumed an orderly spatial organization to populate territories reconquered by Christians from the Islamic occupation. The news of the discovery of the apostle James' relics in the ninth century created a pilgrim route to Santiago de Compostela that collaborated to boost the development of the northern region<sup>14</sup>.

In the 13th century, the square had become the guiding element of urban design, located at the orthogonal intersection of the two main axes originating from the four doors opened in the wall. The main medieval Iberian squares usually had a mainly commercial, but also an administrative vocation, and the surrounding buildings had portals on the ground floor to house commercial activities. It could be of regular format, including the church building or religious activities, but not necessarily. Among the other squares in the city, it became the largest, the Plaza Mayor, a denomination that would have another meaning from the 16th century onwards.

### **The Spanish Early Modern Plaza Mayor**

Since the second half of the 16th century, the Spanish Plaza Mayor is defined as a square with a regular quadrangular plan delimited by buildings with ordered façades and portals<sup>15</sup>, which may also be of a closed model, in which the architectures are mirrored. In addition to commercial and social functions, these squares were also places of stage and scenery for popular and official performances such as religious and union proceedings, entrances and royal weddings, proclamations, tournaments, games of reeds, comedies, sacramental *autos*, and bullfights, as much as a place of punishment and executions, with the roller and the pillory<sup>16</sup>. The buildings of power were partially present or nonexistent, making the performances a symbolic indicator of power.

The Plaza Mayor of Valladolid is considered the first Plaza Mayor in Spain to have this formal concern and this concept of multiple functions.

According to the Spanish art historian Alejandro Rebollo Matías, it served as a model for all of Spain, making the term Plaza Mayor "be confused with the notion of an urban and uniform square, with the idea of the center, that becomes the very symbol of the city."<sup>12</sup>

Since the 13th century, an intense commercial activity had been developing in a square that had earned relevance by forming a merchant district in Valladolid. In the 15th century, the Court decided to transfer the seat of the municipal council from Santa Maria Square (now University Square) to the then Market Square, also attributing political functions to that place with the irregular layout that became the city's political center.



**Fig. 4.** Bentura Seco. *Valladolid* (detail), 1738, ink on paper, 110 x 80 cm. Courtesy of the Municipal Archive of Valladolid / Archivo Municipal de Valladolid – Ayuntamiento de Valladolid (sig. 20.01 – PL 90), Spain.

In 1561, a fire of significant proportions reached a part of the city, including Market Square. Francisco de Salamanca carried out the

reconstruction project and the new Plaza Mayor was only finished in 1592 by Juan Herrera. The renovation enlarged the square, making it, approximately, 85.5 by 128 meters<sup>48</sup>, and the buildings and the portals around it were standardized, highlighting the new building for the city council to the north. The nearby streets were enlarged and converged to the square as far as possible. Valladolid's Cathedral of Our Lady of the Holy Assumption, designed by Herrera and inaugurated in 1585, was built 400 meters away from Plaza Mayor. The detail of the 18<sup>th</sup> century map shows the regular square standing out amidst the city of winding streets (Figure 4).



**Fig. 5.** Tomás López de Vargas Machuca. *Geometric plan of Madrid dedicated and presented to the king, our lord Carlos III, by the hands of the honorable lord Count of Floridablanca [Plano geométrico de Madrid dedicado y presentado al Rey Nuestro Señor Don Carlos III por mano del excellentissimo Señor Conde de Floridablanca]* (detail), 1785, ink on paper, 68 x 98 cm. Courtesy of the National Library of France, department of Maps and Plans / Bibliothèque Nationale de France, département Cartes et plans (GEC-9301).

Valladolid's project is credited to the Renaissance ideals concerning geometry, order, proportion, symmetry, and uniformity values which, in the second half of the 16th century, had already found echoes in the Iberian Peninsula.

In Madrid, which became the royal capital in 1561, the Plaza Mayor was built in the place of an old medieval market square outside the city walls, with an irregular layout, the former Arrabal Square. It began to be built in the 1560s and was only completed in 1622, when it reached 94 by 129 meters<sup>19</sup>, a Juan Gomez de Mora's project, as can be seen on the detail of the 18<sup>th</sup> century map (Figure 5). Due to its configuration, entirely enclosed by an uniform architecture, it became a large courtyard of the city, a place that served as a stage for the Court, where official, civil, commercial, and religious activities took place<sup>20</sup>.

However, Madrid's square did not contain any royal, government, or religious buildings in its perimeter, accentuating the space's symbolic and scenographic character. It is considered the outcome of experiences that took place in Valladolid, even though it had Plaza Mayor of Mexico City as a predecessor, which was constituted even before the Renaissance had crossed the Atlantic.

### Final Considerations

Regarding the characteristics of the main square and its surroundings as a center of power in the examples discussed, we can summarize them in the table below:

**Table: comparative features of the Main Square in Mesoamerican and Iberian traditions**

Features of the Main Square	Mesoamerican Tradition	Mexico-Tenochtitlan	Mexico City Plaza Mayor	Medieval Iberian Plazas Mayores	Valladolid Plaza	Madrid Plaza
Urban epicenter	X		X	X	X	X
Geographic center	X	X	X	ocasionally		
Monumental space	X	X	X		the largest in town	the largest in town
Rectangle shape	X	X	X	ocasionally	X	X

Commercial area	X	X	X	X	X	X
Main religious building	X		X	ocasionally		
Political building	X	X	X	Local	local	
Diversified activities	X	X	X	X	X	X
Monumental architecture	X	X	X			
Uniform façades					X	X
Portals			partially	X	X	X

Thus, based on the data above, we can verify that:

- the Plaza Mayor in Mexico City brought together the elements of Mesoamerican tradition, even those that disappeared in Tenochtitlan, such as the presence of the main religious building in the large square and its constitution as the urban epicenter;
- the presence of seats of political power, such as local administration, also appeared in the Mesoamerican tradition, in Tenochtitlan, and in the Spanish medieval Plazas Mayores. They were common in early modern Plazas, but non-existent in Madrid, where official ceremonies made political power present through performances;
- the main building of the spiritual power of the city can be occasionally found in the Iberian Plazas Mayores perimeters, but it is always present in the Mesoamerica and majestic in Mexico City;
- the portals on the ground floor of the buildings around the square, a typical commercial element of the Spanish medieval and early modern Plazas Mayores, are partially found in Mexico City;
- in terms of the monumentality of open spaces, Iberian cities no longer had space for immense squares, but was preserved in Mexico City as a Mesoamerican heritage;
- in the Iberian Plazas Mayores, commercial activities were the starting point for the main squares' configuration. However, in the Mesoamerican and Mexican contexts, the square has been the meeting place of power since the beginning.

If the characteristics that define Plaza Mayor in conceptual and symbolic terms are related to its functionality as a stage and scenery for manifestations of political, religious, and economic powers that make it a place that goes beyond its merely commercial and social attributes, the Mexican square was already configured that way, but with dimensions which highlighted the importance of the square's monumentality for the visuality of the space of power.

Given this dimension that does not exist in Europe, Mexican architect José Angél Campos Salgado points out that "the Plazas Mayores, as such, were not created until after the design of New Spain."<sup>21</sup> Mexico City demonstrated the importance of these wide-open spaces in the configuration of a grandiose power visuality with tremendous socio-political potential. This transcultural formation is no longer just Mexica or European but a place of constant social and cultural confrontation.

Going a little further, the Argentine architects Daniela Moreno and Ana Lia Chiarello define the monumental scale, the infinity as a concept, the total urban project, and the conception of public space as a scenery, found in Tenochtitlan and other cities in Mesoamerica, became essential traces to European Baroque by the 17th-century<sup>22</sup>.

In addition to the Plaza Mayor in Mexico City bringing together in advance many existing and desirable elements in early modern Plazas Mayores – as well as in the scenographic projects of future European Baroque cities – it demonstrates the participation of Mesoamerican urbanism in concepts and projects in American and Western cities. Often, the contribution of America and its native peoples to Western culture is presented from the local materials and labor that collaborated in the construction of colonial buildings and artworks. However, we are constituted by different cultures, knowledge, and practices, and they must be approached on equal terms with European collaborations. Therefore, we reinforce contributions, which impacted the circulation of ideas, projects, and achievements in art history, architecture, and urbanism in the past and the present.

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### Endnotes

1. Cf. Michael Foucault, *Microfísica do poder*, trans. Roberto Machado, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Graal, 1989).
2. Göran Therborn, *Cities of power: the urban, the national, the popular, the global* (New York: Verso, 2017), 12.
3. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *Sociología de la imagen: ensayos* (Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón, 2015), p. 22. Original text: *la estructura del espacio urbano y las huellas históricas que se hacen visibles en él* (translated by the author of this paper).
4. Angel Rama, *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Buenos Aires: Ediciones El Andariego, 2008), 40-41.
5. Fernando Ortiz Fernández, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1978), 86.
6. Jorge Enrique Hardoy, *Urban planning in Pre-Columbian America* (London: Studio Vista, 1968), 32. Pedro Carrasco, "América indígena" in *Historia de América Latina I*, Pedro Carrasco y Guillermo Céspedes de Castillo (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1985), 74.
7. Michael E. Smith, "The Teotihuacan anomaly: the historical trajectory of urban design in Ancient Central Mexico," *Open Archeology* 3, no. 1 (January 2017): 177.
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11. Cabildo de la Ciudad de México, *Actas de Cabildo I - mar. 1524 - sep. 1532* (México: Edición del Municipio Libre, Ignacio Bejarano, 1889), 8.
12. Ciudad de México, *Actas*, 129. Original text: *plaza mayor de esta Cibdad* (sic, translated by the author of this paper).
13. Vicente Bielza de Ory, "El Fuero de Jaca, el Camino de Santiago y el urbanismo ortogonal" in *El Fuero de Jaca*, Vol. II, ed. Mauricio Molho (Zaragoza: El Justicia de Aragón, 2003), 279.
14. Cf. Vicente Bielza de Ory, "La ciudad ortogonal aragonesa del camino de Santiago y su influencia en el urbanismo regular posterior," *Aragón en la Edad Media*, no. 16 (2000): 25-44.
15. Pedro Navascués Carrasco, *La Plaza Mayor en España* (Ávila: Fundación Cultural Santa Teresa, 2002), 3.
16. Navascués Carrasco, *La Plaza Mayor*, 10.

17. Alejandro Rebollo Matias, *La plaza y mercado mayor de Valladolid 1561-1595* (Valladolid: Secretariado de Publicaciones Universidad de Valladolid, Caja de Ahorros y Monte de Piedad de Salamanca, 1989), 7-8. Original text: *se confunda con la noción de plaza urbana e uniforme, com la idea de centro, y que ella venga a ser el símbolo mismo de la ciudad* (translated by the author of this paper).
18. Alejandro Rebollo Matias, *Valladolid*, 298.
19. Ángel Del Río López, *Plaza Mayor de Madrid, cuatrocientos años de historia* (Madrid: La Librería, 2016), 16.
20. Cf. Jesús Escobar, *The Plaza Mayor and the shaping of Baroque* (Madrid. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
21. José A. Campos Salgado, "Traza y morfología de la Ciudad de México en el virreinato" in *Investigación y Diseño 7*, ed. Luis Fernando Guerrero Baca (Mexico: UAM-X, 2011), 159. Original text: *las plazas mayores como tales no se crearon hasta después del trazo de la Nueva España* (translated by the author of this paper).
22. Daniela Moreno and Ana Lía Chiarello "Rasgos barrocos en la génesis de los espacios públicos americanos", *Actas del III Congreso Internacional del Barroco Iberoamericano* (Sevilla: Departamento de Humanidades, Universidad Pablo de Olavide, 2004), 1071.

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# Typology in the Visual Arts: A Traveling Concept Exemplified in Laylah Ali's Typology Series

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## **ABSTRACT**

Genre painting is commonly defined as depicting everyday human life, offering an inventory of social classes, events, and human types. Nevertheless, I will demonstrate that genre painting does not describe everyday life. Instead, I assert that genre painting, and genre scenes in general, are visual languages that create their own reality. Focusing on human types from a racial perspective, I demonstrate how these types are constructed through a differential process between a group of reference and people outside this group. In the first part of my presentation, I introduce Laylah Ali's practice. I posit that the various interactions of black and white characters in Ali's drawings are genre scenes whose meaning needs to be decoded. I approach Ali's drawings as I would any genre scene, observing the types, costumes, and setting as categories of signs that coalesce to create meaning. Taking one example from Ali's Typology Series, I will demonstrate that the artist's technique reveals that the cohesion of a group or a type is constructed from diacritical differences from others rather than a fixed definition of a type. In the second part of my presentation, I analyze *Farmers Noonning* (1836) by William Sidney Mount, which exemplifies genre painting in the United States and illustrates how the racial typing process at work in Ali's contemporary drawings can be applied to Mount's antebellum paintings. I conclude that racial typing and stereotypes are enduring strategies that do not rely on context and, therefore, can travel through time.

## **KEYWORDS**

Types; Stereotypes; Race; Semiotics; Genre Painting.

In the seventeenth century, enlightenment thinkers in Europe introduced the idea that the human condition could be enhanced by reason, resulting in drastic changes in politics, philosophy, science, and communications. At the height of the Age of Reason, French philosopher Denis Diderot published the *Encyclopédie* (1751–77), an extensive compilation of human knowledge. This seminal publication brought to the fore the idea that the universe could be rationally interpreted and cataloged.

This social and scientific revolution is reflected in the arts with the development of genre painting. This new art form is commonly defined as depicting everyday human life, offering an inventory of social classes, events, and human types. Nevertheless, in my paper presentation, I will demonstrate that genre painting does not in fact describe everyday life. Instead, paraphrasing Ferdinand de Saussure and his view on language, I assert that genre painting, and genre scenes in general, are visual languages that create their own reality.

Focusing on human types from a racial perspective, I demonstrate how these types are constructed through a differential process between a group of reference and people outside this group. In the first part of my presentation, I introduce Laylah Ali's work. I posit that the various interactions of black and white characters in Ali's drawings are genre scenes whose meaning needs to be decoded. I approach Ali's drawings as I would any genre scene, observing the types, costumes, and setting as categories of signs that coalesce to create meaning. Taking examples from the artist's *Typology Series*, I will demonstrate that Ali's technique reveals that the cohesion of a group or a type is constructed on diacritical differences from others rather than a fixed definition of a type. In the second part of my presentation, I share examples from William Sidney Mount's nineteenth-century genre scenes in the United States to illustrate that the racial typing process at work in Ali's contemporary drawings can be applied to Mount's antebellum paintings. I conclude that racial typing and stereotypes are enduring strategies that do not rely on context and, therefore, can travel through time.

From a methodological perspective, I will use minimal references to the historical context. As Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson demonstrated in their paper titled “Semiotics and Art History,” the concept of context must be used cautiously when applied to visual arts. As they mentioned, “Context, in other words, is text itself, and it thus consists of signs that require interpretation. What we take to be positive knowledge is the product of interpretative choices. The art historian is always present in the construction she or he produces.”<sup>1</sup> Additionally, art historians can spend time in contextual research without ever exhausting the possibilities and therefore lose sight of the essential object of study in the visual arts, which is, in this case, the work itself. Thus, in the rest of this paper, I will replace “context” with “contextual elements” or “framing,” as per Jonathan Culler’s approach.<sup>2</sup> It is also notable that archival material from the early nineteenth-century United States is in written form. Several states enacted literacy laws during that period that prohibited African Americans from learning to read and write. Therefore, basing an analysis on written material from the time would be biased from the start, as the writings collected would be dominated by white men’s production. A large part of the population would be de facto silenced. Thus, in my paper, I argue that signs in visual arts result from discursive practices, institutional rules, and various value systems, but without losing sight of the sign function within the painting itself.

Laylah Ali was born in 1968 in Buffalo, New York. She is currently the Francis Christopher Oakley Third Century Professor of Art at Williams College in Massachusetts. Ali’s series of drawings depict dystopian worlds that she uses to comment on contemporary times. Her first series was *Brown Heads*. Her style came to maturity with *Greenheads*, a series of over eighty small gouache paintings she produced between 1996 and 2005. These small-scale tableaux with a uniform light-blue background are populated by restless, skinny characters with round green heads and brown bodies. The successive vignettes show them performing ambiguous acts on one another. The interactions conjure both violence and rescue.

With the title of her next series of black and white drawings, the *Typology Series*, the artist introduced the deceitful idea that the meaning of her scenes would finally be resolved by a scientific, anthropologic, or social classification. I found this title and the drawings to be compelling examples to initiate a discussion about the typing process in the visual arts. Starting with a contemporary artist based in the United States was essential to ensure that I did not assign anachronistic values to my initial observations.

In genre scenes, the title is a crucial element to confirm what is depicted. For example, in Mount's *Farmers Nooning*, the title indicates that the scene refers to a group of farmers resting after their midday meal. In contrast, all Ali's drawings from the *Typology Series* are untitled (see 1). The title of the series itself is a combination of two words derived from the Greek, "type" and "logy." The Oxford English Dictionary defines "logy" as an ending for two classes of words, those with the sense of "saying or speaking" and the names of sciences or departments of study. "Type" has multiple meanings related to religion, pathology, numismatics, natural history, mathematics, chemistry, and semiotics, to name a few. Some of these definitions are still used nowadays, while others are obsolete. Interestingly, the artist used a polysemic term whose meaning has changed over time to title this series. Hence in Ali's drawing, there is no straightforward subject matter disclosed, indicating what the viewer should be looking for in the drawing. Instead, one must carefully observe the scene to figure out what is happening. At first glance, the pictures show characters interacting with one another. Therefore, according to this observation and the various possible meanings, we can assume that in Ali's work, "typology" refers to the scientific classification of groups with common characteristics, specifically, the sorting of humans according to shared specificities. Hence, the attention is directed to the drawings as the source of meaning.

Ali's characters stand against a white background. The only identifying information comes to us through their costumes, which reflect a syncretism that blurs their function as identity and social class markers. Instead of revealing information, the clothing conceals physical traits, turning the characters that wear them into exotic yet familiar subjects that resist

categorization. However, the lack of framing does not prevent signification. Looking long enough at the work, a viewer or an art historian can make sense of what they are seeing. The process here focuses on the gaze as a survival function, as defined by J. J. Gibson.<sup>3</sup> Namely, that the gaze is of primary importance to know or interpret visual objects, reducing them to an object already known or resembling a thing we have experienced before. This behavior results from survival needs and becomes automatic.



**Fig. 1.** Laylah Ali, *Untitled from the Typology Series*, 2005. Ink and graphite on paper, 20 ¼ × 17 ¼ in. (framed). The Princeton University Art Museum.

If framing, or the lack of framing, does not help in understanding Ali's system, maybe analyzing the style of the drawing can unfold the rules governing the artist's visual language. Ali does not try to achieve resemblance with real persons. On the contrary, she emphasizes the constructed character of these figures. Their shapes are flat, the contours well delineated with black lines, and the shadows or contouring using colors are nonexistent. But despite the inexistence of depth or any optical illusionistic technique, it would be inaccurate to say that the forms are simplified. A complex network of lines finely decorates the clothing's patterns and shape, and the thickness of the ink plays with the whiteness of the paper support to produce various tonalities of black. Although the oblong headdress, the cloth covering the head, the band that runs across the face, and the tube-like dress seem similar from a distance, they are actually quite different when we take the time to look at them more precisely. Ali uses the same precision in using negative space and the figure's position on the paper. For this drawing, she cut the figures and pasted them onto another paper support to heighten the shapes between them and increase the tension between them.

However, pursuing further the artist's intention would be irrelevant. To paraphrase Roland Barthes this time, once the drawing is completed, the artist, the author of this visual language, dies. Each artwork requires an interpretation, which is achieved once it triggers a reaction from the viewer. In this case, the art historian is not a mere link applying words to images to render them understandable to a larger audience. Any attempt to interpret Ali's artwork engages the author's responsibility in creating a narrative that will reveal the author's interests and assumptions. The same can be said of a viewer experiencing an unmediated interaction with the work. To fulfill the biological need to reduce objects presented to us to known objects, the viewer will build a system in which each sign acquires a meaning that is not universal but specific to their own past experiences and beliefs. When signs reach a similar sense among a linguistic or cultural group, we refer to them as conventions. Using an empirical method, creating typologies and other categorizations derives from this primary impulse.

Intellectual and personal interests nurture my particular interest in looking at the works from a racial perspective. I am French, born in France to Portuguese parents. In 2010, I relocated to the United States with my partner, who is African American. Therefore, I acknowledge that my personal view of the world and my life experiences might influence the elements of the works that I identify as signs.



**Fig. 2.** Fulani artist, *Man's blanket (landaka khasa)*, before 1924. Wool and dye, 92 1/8 x 55 1/8 in. The Princeton University Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Donald B. Doyle, 1953.

One of the conventions that might be directly readable in this drawing is that these two forms might refer to humans. Shapes refer to eyes, mouths, heads, and potentially bodies, even if the arms and legs are not visible. Nevertheless, what prevails in the interpretation is not our potential shared humanity with these characters, but our differences from them. A process disabling a complete reconciliation creates this alienation. The clothing patterns might refer to African cloth. There might be various potential African sources of inspiration for textiles with geometric patterns: Kuba cloth

in the contemporary Democratic Republic of Congo, Ashanti kente cloth in modern Ghana, or Yoruba omolangidi in Nigeria. Sometimes cloth resists geographic localization, such as Fulani cloth produced by nomadic peoples living mainly in the Sahel and Western Africa. But if an element of the dressing bears similarities with Fulani patterns (see 2), another, such as the elongated headdress, contradicts this assumption.

Interwoven threads produce the colorful motifs of Ashanti kente cloth, but the beardlike extension hanging under the chin is foreign to Ashanti dress codes. A small Ethiopian amulet at the Princeton University Art Museum represents two figures wearing similar elongated headdresses (see 3). Therefore, Ali's figures could represent Ethiopian Catholic Church figures, but the band running across the eyes is not compatible with the attire of people living in this region.



**Fig. 3.** Ethiopian amulet, undated. Wood, 2 13/16 x 1 11/16 x 5/16 in. The Princeton University Art Museum.

Some cloths are gendered. Some can be worn by everyday people. Some belong to royal regalia. Some, like the Ashanti kente cloth, a traditional attribute of royalty, evolved to become the national cloth of the entire country, worn by locals and commercialized for exportation. Some patterns have meaning; others are decorative. Some textiles are worn during rituals or ceremonials; others can be worn every day. Tall headdresses are, in various cultures, a symbol of religious or political power. We might think of a king's crown or a bishop's miter. In Ali's drawing, both characters might belong to a high social class. Nevertheless, one can wonder which is the most powerful of the two. This question remains unanswered, as the headdress continues outside the frame. Another assumption could be that they are of the same rank but from different cultures according to the differences in the patterns of their clothing. The information is unavailable to the viewer, and no contextual element is available to confirm assumptions. No landscape or architectural structure in the background could place the scene in a specific geographic and temporal space. Therefore, Ali constructs her characters as visual mosaics composed of signs indexical of different cultures and resisting geographical and temporal localization. This characteristic prevents the viewer's complete reconciliation process between the indexical cultural signs and their own experience of the world. Hence, instead of merging to create an identifiable culture or human being, the various signs coalesce to signify the fundamental difference from the audience.

Similarly, the visible differences between both characters are erased to create a unified signifier of otherness. What surfaces is that their referential diversity is superseded to create a type that owes its cohesion to its fundamental difference from the viewer. The viewer becomes the only stable point of reference. This arbitrary binary contention is crucial to understanding the construction of the self in opposition to others. And the strength of Ali's work resides in showing the observer's responsibility in creating this otherness. After all, the artist inserted signifiers in her work, but she never attributed a positive meaning to them. Nevertheless, Ali does not use the Western conventions of a realistic genre scene, thereby preventing the viewer from identifying with the characters.

Next let us look at Mount's painting, which exemplifies American genre scenes using recognized conventions. If typing is independent of context, and specifically from historical context, the primary conclusions derived from the observation of Ali's drawing should still be relevant when applied to nineteenth-century antebellum genre painting. The differential process to create otherness is verified in Mount's *Farmers Noonning*. Even if contextual elements might explain the dispersion of types and stereotypes in time and space, the observer's interpretation is crucial to keeping types and stereotypes alive.

William Sidney Mount was born in 1807 in Setauket, New York, and spent most of his life in the region until his death in 1868. He had great commercial success with his paintings inspired by everyday life in New York. Contrary to Ali's drawings, Mount's paintings can be framed, and here is my framing proposal: Mount was active from the 1820s to the 1860s, a critical period for constructing the American nation. Racial equality was a subject of much discussion. At stake was the termination of slavery, a significant factor of wealth production in the Southern states. With improvements in printing technology and lower production costs, newspapers became cheaper and available to a large audience in the 1830s. As a result, the number of newspapers and other printed materials such as lithographs, increased tremendously, offering a platform to widely disseminate information, ideas, and ideologies. It was also around that time that minstrel shows gained in popularity. White actors with painted black faces ridiculed African Americans, depicting them as grotesque beings with beaming smiles, irresponsible but talented as musicians and entertainers. While we need to keep this framing in mind when looking at the signs in the painting, especially racial signifiers, we must focus on how racial differences are signaled in the artwork.

*Farmers Noonning* is a five-figure composition showing men resting in a field (see 4). Various signs coalesce to indicate that the black figure symbolizes otherness. Not only is he the sole African American among four white men, but he is also the only one asleep. While all of them are resting, the white men still seem more active. One is honing his scythe; two others are

looking at young male tickling the black man's ear during his sleep. The gazes of the four white men converge on the African American figure.



**Fig. 4.** William Sidney Mount, *Farmers Nooning*, 1836. Oil on canvas, 20 ¼ x 24 ½ in. (unframed). The Long Island Museum of American Art, History, & Carriages. Gift of Frederick Sturges, Jr. 1954.

From a composition perspective, the African American is at the center of the painting, the midday sun shining on his body and enhancing by the contrast between his white shirt and the color of his skin. The three white men rest in the shade of a tree. The body positions imprint oppositional directions as well. A diagonal line could be traced from the lower right corner of the painting to the upper left, following the placement of the three white figures. In contrast, the positioning of the African American and the child imprint a movement outwards. On the left side of the diagonal, we have the

three white men in the shade. On the right side are the boy and the African American man. A container is placed within reach of the black figure.

Once the black figure is identified as the other compared to the group of reference, which is, in this case, the white group, the process of stereotyping can unfold. This black type is similar enough to a real human being to refer to African Americans, but he is not identified positively. Therefore, this black figure becomes a symbol whose meaning is agreed upon by the community and is arbitrary. While the white figure is not a symbol or a racial type, it is the norm, the point of reference. It would be misleading to understand the creation of racial stereotypes as a black versus white binary. Instead, it is an opposition between a normative group and types not belonging to that arbitrary norm, whatever the norm might be at a point in time. Indeed, as Nell Irvin Painter established in her book *The History of White People*, the definition of white has evolved in history, and the black versus white binary is more complex than a simple reference to skin color. It also includes religious differences, for example. As Painter notes, Catholics were not considered whites in the early nineteenth century United States.<sup>4</sup> Since the norm does not have a positive definition, types and stereotypes endure as long as an arbitrary opposition between a norm and anything outside of that norm exists, and the referential group agrees upon the meaning. In *Farmers Noonning*, for example, the white group is composed of various types: the industrious one honing his scythe, the indolent one resting on his stomach, the childish one playing tricks, and the rational one who prefers resting in the shade rather than getting sunburned. But none of these types, taken separately, could become the symbol of whites' identity in general. Such nuance is not granted to the black figure. Using the framing I described earlier, I can attempt to interpret these signs. Pairing the black man with the child might symbolize his childish behavior; his nap could be seen as laziness, and the container as his tendency to drink alcohol and preference for the indulgence of the senses rather than the use of reason. Perched on the pile of hay, the child and the black man seem to perform a scene for the entertainment of the other white males, a reminder of minstrel shows. The interaction between these two figures constitutes a vignette that encapsulates

the visual codes constructing this stereotype. This scene within the painting needn't be seen in relation to any other elements in the painting to create meaning.

Stereotypes are in constant flux to adjust to the norm, and migrations and technical innovations facilitate their dissemination. The visual codes that Mount used in his work existed before him. He adapted them to his visual language. Guy McElroy mentioned John Lewis Krimmel as an inspiration for Mount's characters. Krimmel was himself a German immigrant who had settled in Philadelphia in 1810.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, these same stereotypes potentially existed on the European continent as well, which would mean that types and stereotypes follow human migration and exchanges, transcending the language barrier. Mount himself inspired other artists. James Goodwyn Clonney painted *Waking Up* in 1851, directly inspired by Mount's vignette (see 5). In 1868, Currier and Ives published an adaptation of this scene.

Image dispersion was also facilitated by the production of lithographs made after paintings. These reproductions were very popular in the early nineteenth century United States. Jonathan Sturges, a businessman from New York City, commissioned *Farmers Noonning* in 1836. The following year Sturges lent the painting for an exhibition at the National Academy of Design in New York, and in 1843 the Apollo Association published lithographs of the work that became extremely popular.<sup>6</sup> Mount also collaborated with William Schaus from Goupil, Vibert & Company, a French publisher, who introduced Mount's visual vocabulary to a European audience. Therefore, these arbitrary types were in constant flux between Europe and North America, and re-appropriated by other artists.

Through repetition, a visual sign ceases to be perceived as arbitrary and becomes accepted as natural and unquestioned. And because genre painting uses visual codes commonly accepted as referring to objects or people in the real world, the image itself might be interpreted as delivering positive information. Consequently, naturalized types and stereotypes become invisible as they appear like natural elements of the scene. Nevertheless, like Ali's drawings, Mount's painting is a construct rooted in an association of various signs.



**Fig. 5.** James Goodwyn Clonney, *Waking up*, 1851. Oil on canvas, 27 1/8 x 22 in. The Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Gift of Martha C. Karolik.

The responsibility of scholars and educators cannot be ignored in the dissemination of stereotypes. The example of *Farmers Noonning* demonstrates that signs are not enough to denote or represent what images

stand for. Language and interpretation are required to fill in the gaps. Depending on their interests, scholars select contextual elements to create a framing that will justify their analysis, leading to diverse meanings. According to their perspective, they choose elements in the artworks that they identify as signs to decipher, while other features will be ignored or erased. The black figure is among the most discussed signs in *Farmers Noonning*. Starting with Deborah Johnson's book *William Sidney Mount: Painter of American Life*, we can analyze how scholars enable the perpetuation of stereotypes. In Johnson's perspective, the black recumbent man symbolized Mount's interest in formal exploration and an attempt to emulate eighteenth-century European masters.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, Johnson does not entirely erase the racial component of the painting, but dilutes the artist's responsibility. For her, the picture is inspired by "the visual vocabulary of his contemporary social environment," and she minimizes Mount's responsibility in disseminating such a stereotype by explaining that "these interpretations of African Americans were oversimplified and demeaning, but in general, they were accepted without questioning."<sup>8</sup> Therefore, Johnson's interpretation implies that this stereotype of a black person was acceptable because the hegemonic social group co-opted it. Johnson's analysis engages the scholar's responsibility in disseminating and naturalizing stereotypes, especially when she undermines other scholars' interpretations. Albert Boime is among the art historians who Johnson cited briefly before moving on to "a more ambitious interpretation."<sup>9</sup> Boime's analysis points out that "Black people were common victims of practical jokes in early nineteenth-century imagery, emphasizing their humiliating social position and powerlessness."<sup>10</sup> Boime based his reflection on primary sources, i.e., Mount's diary entries. Therefore, Johnson dismissed Boime's interpretation primarily on ideological grounds. Johnson also reformats Elizabeth Johns's writing to fit her perspective. Johns sees the tam-o'-shanter, the Scottish woolen cap worn by the child, as a critical sign in the painting. According to Johns, the tam-o'-shanter constitutes a vital sign that symbolizes a criticism of antislavery speakers:

"The tam-o'-shanter became a transparent reference to abolitionism. Because English and Scottish emancipation societies aided American reformers, such editors as New Yorker James Watson Webb in the *Courier and Enquirer* routinely referred to even local abolitionists as "foreign agitators" who were financed by a "bevy of old maids at Glasgow." Graphic artists adopted the tam-o'-shanter, shorthand for Presbyterian, Scottish, and thus foreign-influenced opinions about emancipation, as a derisive visual symbol of the movement, and virulent political caricatures showed blacks wearing Scotch caps talking about "bobolition"... Ear tickling, the activity of the young boy in Mount's picture, meant filling a naive listener's mind with promises. Indicting antislavery speakers as childlike and irresponsible, Mount couched his critical construction in a deceptively low key."<sup>11</sup>

Johnson redirected selected quotes from Johns's text to fit her ideology. She then concluded that the picture showed that Mount refused "to specify the ideal course of action."<sup>12</sup>

This example shows a few strategies emanating from the academy that perpetuate stereotypes. It includes identifying critical signs worth interpreting while erasing or undermining others, trivializing dissident interpretations even when they are grounded in serious research, and redirecting peers' analysis to fit one's perspective.

In this paper, I demonstrated that the process of constructing types relies not on contextual elements, but rather on identified signs of difference between a specific group and another group of reference, creating simplified binaries. Nevertheless, the determination of signs of difference and their interpretation goes through the interpreter's ideology filter, which is also socially constructed. I did not expand on this point in this paper because I focused on producing and disseminating types and stereotypes instead of their ontological characteristic. As Ali's drawing highlighted, signs are not sufficient to create meaning. Viewers need to identify the signs and proceed to a mental reconciliation involving their perspective and lived experiences to make sense of what they see. Despite being often described as depicting everyday life, the analysis of Mount's painting demonstrated that genre

painting, are constructed realities based on visual conventions. Their idealized vision of the world facilitates the dissemination of stereotypes when the visual codes are socially accepted, reproduced, and circulated with the help of human migration and technological innovations. Nevertheless, the role of scholars and educators should not be minimized in this process of stereotype dissemination. As the small study of Johnson's essay showed, narratives are indexical of the author's ideology. Stereotypes can be reinforced when their importance is minimized, or the space for diverse interpretation is negated. This research could further investigate the relationship between the concept of ideology as a social construct and the evolution of stereotypes, which are also social constructs. Finally, Ali's drawings question the need to categorize everything, including human beings, and the associated risk of objectification, probably appealing to what Édouard Glissant called the "right to opacity."

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# Notes on the Critical Reception of G.E. Lessing's *Laokoon* in 19th and Early 20th-century America

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## **ABSTRACT**

When Clement Greenberg wrote his essay, "Towards a Newer Laocoon," a homage to G.E. Lessing's *Laokoon* (1766), he was not fully aware of the complex cultural constructs he was dealing with. His general perception of the treatise resulted from a long and complicated phenomenon of cultural appropriation and negotiation. Around the second half of the 19th century, an intense migration of symbols and paradigms from Germany to America took place, and Lessing's *Laokoon* was an important part of it. This mobility of ideas was favored by the migration of scholars, who played the role of physical vehicles of new paradigms and cultural values. Most important were the intersections and negotiation processes: during this age, Lessing's theories conformed to American cultural needs and expectations. This phenomenon paved the way to the canonization of a precise mythology, as the treatise gradually became the symbol for the strict logic for the separation of the arts. At the beginning of the 20th century, this tradition was canonized by Irving Babbitt's *The New Laokoon: An Essay on the Confusion of the Arts* (1910): here, the author revised and reshaped Lessing's ideas in order to adapt them to the case of modern art.

## **KEYWORDS**

Clement Greenberg; Irving Babbitt; Gotthold Ephraim Lessing; *Laokoon*; John Ruskin.

**Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Irving Babbitt, and Clement Greenberg:  
A Common Narrative**

In the summer of 1940, Clement Greenberg wrote one of his most emblematic essays on the condition of modern culture, particularly the state of the arts, namely his well-known essay “Towards a Newer Laocoon,” published in the pages of the *Partisan Review*.<sup>1</sup> Greenberg reappraised the original German treatise written by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laokoon oder über die Grenzen der Malerey und Poesie* (1766): following Lessing’s main argumentation, the critic noted that modern times were witnessing a debilitating tendency towards the confusion of the arts, a noxious effect of the Romantic revolution, and called for a more strict and rigid separation of each artistic media. As the title of Greenberg’s article highlights, the critic implicitly agreed with one of the most controversial reappraisals of Lessing’s late *Laokoon*, that is the long essay published under the title of *The New Laokoon: An Essay on the Confusion of the Arts* (1910), written by Irving Babbitt, the leader of the ultra-conservative literary movement known as New Humanism. Babbitt advocated the separation between the arts as an antidote to what he felt as a state of cultural chaos originated by the so-called impressionist literature and, of course, by the avant-garde.<sup>2</sup>

Compared to other essays written by Greenberg, the critics have always found the “Laocoon” the most difficult to decipher: the author’s argumentations around the necessity to set rigid boundaries between literature and the visual arts, are articulated and clear, but the effective meaning of Greenberg’s reference to his sources (Lessing and Babbitt), has always appeared hard to interpret and to understand in its entirety. As Michael Leja pointed out in his well-known study *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s* (1993), Greenberg’s references to Lessing as well as to Babbitt are almost absent, even though the title of the essay suggests a close relation to both authors and a direct comparison with their respective treatises.<sup>3</sup> As I articulated in a recent contribution published in the *Getty Research Journal*,<sup>4</sup> Greenberg’s “Laocoon” should be reconsidered in light of the existence of three drafts of the essay,

which reveal that originally Greenberg's ideas and argumentations were quite different in their scope as well as in their content. Following my research and analysis of Greenberg's personal papers, held by the Getty Research Institute,<sup>5</sup> the "Laocoon" has to be regarded as the result of a series of endless revisions demanded by the editorial board of the *Partisan Review*. According to the editors' opinion, the text, as Greenberg originally outlined it, could not fit for the purposes of the magazine, a politically engaged publication addressed to a Marxist-oriented reading public. As a matter of fact, Greenberg formerly intended to trace back the historical and cultural origins of the confusion of the arts, epitomized by Horace's simile *Ut pictura poësis*, which eventually led to Lessing's treatise and, two centuries later, to Babbitt's argumentations. In his personal correspondence with his friend and confidant, Harold Lazarus, Greenberg lamented the radical changes demanded by the editor, Dwight Macdonald, who found the essay too involved in matters concerning aesthetic theory and literature, hence not in line with the journal's political agenda;<sup>6</sup> therefore, the young author was forced to abandon his initial plans and to reconfigure the structure and the conceptual framework of the essay, gradually giving form to the definitive version of his new "Laocoon."

The original drafts of Greenberg's essay, as well as other annotations, proved that the origins of the critic's ultra-conservative position, on one hand, has to be related to Babbitt's argumentations around Lessing's original statements, and, on the other, should be traced back to the literary culture of the second half of the Nineteenth century, when an intense migration of symbols and paradigms from Germany to America took place.<sup>7</sup> Across the century, American culture turned its gaze outward, and the creation of a native artistic and literary canon was actively mediated by the valuation and appropriation of the European heritage. This mobility of ideas was favored by the migration of scholars, who played the role of physical vehicles of new paradigms and cultural values. Most important for the present context, was the processes of intersections and negotiations: during this age, Lessing's theories on the relation between visual and verbal arts were conformed to American cultural needs and expectations. The present paper intends to demonstrate that Greenberg's peculiar choice to reappraise the German

classic at the end of the 1930s was partly due to Lessing's traditional and enduring popularity in America during the second half of the Nineteenth century and the beginning of the Twentieth. Moreover, assuming a wider perspective, I would like to underline a peculiar aspect of the critical reception of Lessing's *Laokoon*, that is the role played by politics and related contextual interests which actually oriented the interpretation of the text: the *Laokoon* then, as we will see, had always been perceived rather as a *tool*, adaptable to the partisan argumentations and ideological orientations of its American commentators, including Babbitt and Greenberg, who effectively legitimized their positions by referring to Lessing's unquestionable and established authority.

As stated at the very beginning, the transcultural mobility of ideas should be firstly regarded as a material process of migration: in the case of the critical reception of Lessing's *Laokoon*, and its further consequences and effects on the future development of American literary and art criticism, the phenomenon should be considered against the backdrop of the migration of young American scholars to Germany in the first half of the Nineteenth century. Men such as George Ticknor, Edward Everett, and George Bancroft formed the earliest group of American-born intellectuals who completed their education at the University of Gottingen, Germany, becoming not only the most competent critics of German literature overseas but also, and foremost, the pioneers in the introduction of German thought in the United States. Their journey abroad was guided by a strong passion for German history and culture, and mostly derived by the reading of a monumental publication of the time, namely Madame de Staël's *On Germany (De l'Allemagne)*, Paris 1813), which held an exceptionally privileged position in the wide framework of the reception of German literature in America.<sup>8</sup> After the return of the first group of American scholars from Europe, a progressively growing number of reviews, essays, and translations of the most prominent German authors, gradually appeared in the pages of notable American magazines, especially the *American Quarterly Review* and *The New York Review*, reaching the peak in the 1840s and 1850s, with the birth of the first mass circulation press. At the beginning of the century, the passion of the

American scholars for German culture was partly mirroring the political climate originated by the end of the so-called War of 1812: as Merle Curti underlined in *The Growth of American Thought*, ‘the enthusiasm for German culture’ was to be primarily interpreted as the effect of a collective reaction against Great Britain’s politics and, by extension, against its culture.<sup>9</sup> Born as a form of fascination for a ‘non-British culture’ and as an answer to a sudden ‘cultural void,’ the interest in German culture gradually took the shape of a genuine and shared admiration for the enchanted ground that gave birth to such men as Johann Wolfgang Goethe and Lessing.

The unique openness to the European cultural models and the birth of a mass market of magazines and books are strictly entwined: shared optimism, intellectual curiosity, and openness mostly characterized this *époque*, soon to be disillusioned by the brutality of the Civil War (1861-1865). What defines the Fifties was the effort to actively reach European standards, a collective attitude evidenced by the enthusiastic promotion, for example, of itinerant and comprehensive exhibitions of European art. In this regard, two landmark exhibitions were inaugurated at the end of the decade: the major exhibit of European Art hosted by the National Academy of Design of New York (1859), anticipated by an exhibition of English paintings that toured the major American cities and which included notable Pre-Raphaelite artworks, such as Holman Hunt’s *Light of the World* (1851-1853) and Ford Madox Brown’s *An English Autumn Afternoon* (1852-1853). In addition, these years were marked by the publication of the first American treatise devoted to the visual and verbal arts, *Lectures on Art, And Poems* (1850), written by the painter Washington Allston. This decade witnessed an unparalleled interest in the *Laokoon*: a canon for the reading and of interpreting Lessing’s statements was soon to be established, and a better knowledge of the treatise, its sources and contents, was gradually spreading among the American reading public. Two magazines in particular, *The American Whig Review* and *The Crayon*, attempted to provide a new and accessible synthesis of the *Laokoon*, whose main argumentations were interpreted, as we will see, according to the magazines’ respective cultural and political agendas.

### **Lessing's *Laokoon* According to *The American Whig Review***

The first one is an article published in the pages of the *American Whig Review* under the title of “Lessing’s *Laocoon*: the Secret of Classic Composition in Poetry, Painting and Statuary,” written by one of the editors, James Davenport Whelpley, in 1851.<sup>10</sup> The *American Whig Review*, the official organ of the conservative Whig party, was originally founded in 1845 and run without interruption until 1852, the year of the Whig’s political defeat, immediately followed by the disbandment of the party.

As James E. Mulqueen highlighted, ‘Political conservatism was a determining factor in Whig literary criticism,’

The Whigs stressed unity and harmony in politics and in art, espousing the organic theory for both society and literature. The true center of moral, intellectual, and social life was held to be religion, an opinion which influenced much of their literary criticism. Stability and reverence for the past involved literary critics in the problem of imitation versus originality.<sup>11</sup>

Values such as wisdom, steadiness, and obedience to the rules represented a common ground for the critics, while unity, harmony and imagination, were regarded as the leading virtues of artistic creation. The American painter Henry Inman, for instance, was strongly praised in the magazine's pages, being the perfect embodiment of these exact values in art as in life.

The clear echo of the organic theory of art, espoused by the Whig critics, is found in the review of Lessing’s *Laokoon*: Whelpley spelled out precisely the German moral and social function of the German treatise, eventually portraying the German author as the true emblem of Whig values. Every aspect of the *Laokoon*, with its declared reverence for Homer and Virgil, was interpreted as the mirroring of the character of its author, who was guided by a unique sense for morality and clarity. ‘Lessing was neither a mystic nor a transcendentalist – Whelpley asserted – His characteristics are perspicuity and judgment, and an understanding very free of prejudice.’<sup>12</sup> As we immediately perceive from these words, Whelpley, being a true

representative of the Whig party, strongly rejected every aspect that could be related to the Transcendentalist movement: the German writer was depicted as a champion of balance and judgment, and a potential guide for all the young artists and poets who sought success and collective praise by devoting themselves to discipline. Moreover, an additional feature characterizes Whelpley's essay, namely its recognizable pragmatic attitude: the critic actually translated the treatise into a handbook addressed to the painter who was looking for a rule of thumb on how to represent figuratively the words of two of the most popular American poets of the period: William Cullen Bryant and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

**A Highly Romanticized Interpretation of Lessing's Treatise: The Case of *The Crayon***

The second article devoted to Lessing's *Laocoon* was published in 1856 by a journal devoted to art and literature, *The Crayon*; even though anonymous, it was quite possibly written by John Durand, the son of the landscape painter Asher B. Durand and one of the magazine's editors.<sup>13</sup> Originally founded in 1855, *The Crayon* was addressed to readers interested in the visual arts and art criticism in general, and particularly to readers of John Ruskin and to those sympathetic with the sentimental vein of the Pre-Raphaelite art movement.<sup>14</sup> Both Durand and his colleague, the photographer William J. Stillman, were devoted advocates of Ruskin's thought overseas during a time when the ideas of the English writer gained unprecedented success among the American reading public: as a matter of fact, *The Crayon* was profoundly committed to the popularization of Ruskin's most notable writings through the publication of selected excerpts from, for instance, *Modern Painters* and *The Stones of Venice*, which were enthusiastically received by the readers.<sup>15</sup>

Since its beginnings, *The Crayon* was strongly influenced by the main tenets of New England Transcendentalism on one side, and by the Unitarian doctrine on the other, which went hand in hand with a profound, almost pantheistic, sensibility for nature. Both editors, especially Durand, fell under the sway of the highly romantic and religious atmosphere that permeated the middle of the Nineteenth century: a spiritual thread run through the essays

and reviews published by Durand and Stillman, which often tended to emphasize the sacred bond between God, man, and nature.<sup>16</sup> In this regard, the journal fully absorbed the new tendencies in American art and literature, which saw nature as a gate that opened upon a transcendental and invisible reality.

A section of the journal was dedicated to German philosophers and poets, and hosted a remarkable review of Lessing's *Laocoon*, introduced by the following encomiastic words:

We do not apologize to our readers for introducing another man of letters into our literary temple devoted to the Fine Arts. The more the influence of Literature upon Art is understood, the better will it be both for poets and artists. Lessing in his *Laocoon* – the same *Laocoon* from which Ruskin quotes so copiously – alludes to the saying of Simonides, that ‘Painting is silent poetry, and poetry is a living picture’, but, at the same time, he demolishes the brilliant commonplace of the versatile Greek, that, like Voltaire in his days, and Macaulay in ours, loved a dazzling antithesis much better than he loved truth.<sup>17</sup>

The comparison between Lessing and Ruskin is fully characteristic of Durand's rhetoric: the writer portrayed the German author as a poet guided by an indefinite mystical sentiment, which inspired him to recognize and to celebrate the existence of an inner fellowship between the arts. As commonly known, the *Laocoon* was, on the contrary, a treatise that theorized the necessary separation between the visual and the verbal arts; Durand, instead, read the treatise as a Romantic-infused work of literature, both evocative and poetic, which emphasized the sisterhood between the arts, to be interpreted, still according to Durand, as a metaphor of the necessary unity among men.

Moreover, the author advocated the existence of a spiritual affinity between Lessing and Ruskin: as he declared, ‘Lessing was of the Ruskin stamp of mind. *Immensely suggestive*,<sup>18</sup> and he seized the opportunity to address those critics of Ruskin who were unable to understand the existence of a

common, spiritual thread that united men such as Ruskin and Lessing. As written by Durand,

The Ruskins and Lessings are the pioneers of Art and Literature. But the labor of our own backwoodsmen in Kentucky, compared to the labor of Ruskin in the Anglo-Saxon land, and of Lessing in the Rhine and Elbe land, is mere child's play. They stood only in danger of a neat little Indian narrow, but they stood upon a virgin soil. But look at Ruskin, with the clumsy, savage, myriad arrows of ignorance darted against his ideal aspirations, and standing upon a soil polluted by prejudice, and vitiated by time-brassened stolidity.<sup>19</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The conditions surrounding the formation of a collective opinion on the *Laokoon* in America in the middle of the Nineteenth century are quite contradictory: on one hand we find a deeply rooted ultra-conservative account, voiced by the *American Whig Review*, while on the other, an alternative key of interpretation is provided by a completely opposite type of journal, a strong advocate of John Ruskin's thought, mostly inspired by the main tenets of Transcendentalism. The essential fact is the simultaneous emergence of two antithetical views of the *Laokoon*, brought forth by two groups of individuals committed to engaging and extending their respective cultural agendas, and who saw Lessing as the emblem of their political, cultural, and aesthetic values. The formation and promotion of a distinct image of the *Laokoon* tended to be, as I tried to demonstrate, as one process.

At the conclusion of my presentation, I would like to make clear that my intent was not to imply that Greenberg, when he conceptualized his new, American "Laocoon" at the end of the 1930s, was actively influenced by the two essays I just illustrated: quite possibly, he was not even aware of their existence. My reflection here is more of a methodological nature: every act of cultural motion and every step of migration of ideas from one continent to the other, should always be questioned and reconsidered as an act of transmission but, most of all, as an act of cultural negotiation. If Greenberg's

early criticism's most controversial and conservative aspects are viewed against this background, these elements might appear with greater clarity, even though they may remain questionable.

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## Endnotes

1. Clement Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoon," *Partisan Review* 7, no. 4 (July-August 1940): 296-310.
2. Irving Babbitt, *The New Laocoon: An Essay on the Confusion of the Arts* (Boston-New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1910). About the sources of Babbitt's treatise and for an analysis of its contents, see: Camilla Froio, *Verso un Laocoonte modernista: temi, immagini e contesti del Laocoonte di Clement Greenberg* (Florence: Angelo Pontecorboli Editore, 2020): 19-91. Apropos of Babbitt and the New Humanist movement, see also Thomas R. Nevin, *Irving Babbitt: An Intellectual Study* (Chapel Hill: the University of North Carolina Press, 1984); George A. Panichas, *The Critical Legacy of Irving Babbitt: An Appreciation* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 1999).
3. See Michael Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993): 222-225.
4. Camilla Froio, "An Unreleased Laocoon: The First Draft of Clement Greenberg's Towards a Newer Laocoon," *Getty Research Journal* 13, no. 1 (January 2021): 203-217.
5. See Clement Greenberg Papers, 1928-1995, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Accession no. 950085.
6. Froio, "An Unreleased Laocoon," 203-204.
7. For a detailed analysis of the reception of Lessing's treatise in America during the Nineteenth century, see Camilla Froio, "La cultura nord-americana e il Laocoon di Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: premesse di una fortunata ricezione critica (1840-1874)," *Studi di Memofonte* 24 (2020): 23-60.
8. Madame de Staël's *On Germany* gained recognition in America mostly thanks to the reviews published on prestigious literary reviews of the time, such as the *Quarterly Review* of New York and the *Analectic Magazine* of Philadelphia. See Froio, "La cultura nord-americana e il Laocoon di Gotthold Ephraim Lessing," 25.
9. See Merle Curti, *The Growth of American Thought* (New Brunswick-London: Transaction Publishers, 2006): 233-234.
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13. John Durand, "Lessing," *The Crayon* 11 (1856): 325-330.
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15. For a thorough study of Durand's article on Lessing and the context that surrounded its publication, see Froio, "La cultura nord-americana e il Laocoon di Gotthold Ephraim Lessing," 33-37.
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17. Durand, “Lessing,” 325.

18. *Ibid.*

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# Pop Art in South America: Differences and Dissent

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## **ABSTRACT**

Pop Art was one of the most important artistic movements of the late twentieth century, being widely studied and theorized. The movement had different inflections, related to the political, economic and social conditions of the geographical spaces where it emerged.

Through the analysis of works by women artists who explored Pop visuality in Brazil, Argentina and Peru (Marta Minujín, Teresinha Soares and Teresa Burga), this paper aims to discuss how Pop Art developed in South American countries, which dealt with issues very different from those of the United States and England. In addition, the work discusses the formation and transformation of the Pop Canon in the past years.

This paper is an integral part of a more comprehensive, ongoing doctoral research project aimed at investigating women artists in Brazil, Argentina and Peru who worked with Pop visuality during the sixties and seventies, with special focus on the circulation, contact networks and professional circuits that supported their productions at the time.

## **KEYWORDS**

South American Art; Women Artists; Pop Art; Nova Figuração; Pop Canon.

The Pop Art phenomenon and the discussions about the circulation of Pop ideas and the formation of its canon gained prominence in recent years. Several publications and exhibitions focused on women artists associated to Pop Art and their marginalization, as well as on the so-called Global Pop, which sought to present Pop as a global category. These recent researches aimed at expanding the understanding of Pop by including works that had been excluded from the formal history of the movement. Despite the inclusion of women artists and artists from South American countries in these studies, there is still much to investigate and discuss about South American women artists associated with Pop Art and Nova Figuração. In this paper, I will discuss the creation and reinterpretation of the Pop canon through the inclusion of women artists and artists from South America in an expanded canon of Pop Art. I will also discuss the reception of the Pop Art movement in Argentina and Brazil. Finally, I will analyze the works of three South American women artists to better understand how Pop Art and Nova Figuração developed in the region in a unique way. .

From the mid-1980s and early 1990s, the Pop phenomenon started to be reviewed by authors such as Marco Livingstone and Hal Foster, who proposed new ways of conceptualizing the phenomenon and started to expand the geographical limits of the movement beyond the United States and England. However, this expansion only incorporated Western European and male artists. The exhibition entitled *Pop Art*, organized by Livingstone in 1991 at the Royal Academy of Arts in London, for example, included only French and German artworks in addition to the already well-known North-American and English ones. Moreover, as highlighted by Kalliopi Minioudaki (2009), the exhibition included the work of only one woman, the French Niki de Saint Phalle, among 202 works on display.

In her dissertation entitled “Women in Pop: Difference and Marginality”, Minioudaki shows how the main publications on Pop Art published in the first decade of the 2000s also remained focused mostly on male artists production. In his 2001 book entitled *Pop Art*, David McCarthy argues that “a survey of Pop artists on both sides of the Atlantic will turn up no major women within the movement.” (MCCARTHY APUD MINILOUDAKI,

2009, p.12). The book *Pop*, by Mark Francis and Hal Foster, published in 2005, also focused on the production of male artists, mentioning a few women in only two footnotes<sup>1</sup>. It was only after the 2010s, when a renewed interest in the movement took place, that a greater number of publications and exhibitions started to discuss the art of women associated with Pop, and that works by South American artists started to be included in major international exhibitions and publications about the movement.

The exhibitions *Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists 1958-1968*<sup>2</sup> and *Power Up – Female Pop Art*<sup>3</sup>, both from 2010, are considered the two first major exhibitions dedicated to examining the role of women artists in Pop. They did not include artists from South America. Nonetheless, they were important, as Sue Tate points out, to show that:

The history of interaction between popular culture and modern art, and *Pop Art* itself, is an important aspect of our time and the abandonment of the pop arena to a monocular, male vision and the occlusion of women's affective experience of mass culture is symptomatic of a deep and damaging gender imbalance in our culture that needs addressing. (TATE, 2010, p. 200).

As Kalliopi Minioudaki highlights, despite the obstacles encountered at their time, some women artists had visibility, “though partially and inconsistently” (MINIOUDAKI, 2009, p.30), within the Pop Art scene. Therefore, it was in the construction and consolidation of the Pop canon that the exclusion of women artists really asserted itself, causing them to be forgotten in subsequent decades.

In 2015, two major exhibitions presented Pop Art as a global category: *The World Goes Pop* and *International Pop*<sup>4</sup>. Both displayed works by women artists and by South American artists. *The World Goes Pop* included fourteen artists from Brazil and twelve from Argentina. Among the fourteen Brazilians in the exhibition, only two were women<sup>5</sup>, and among the twelve Argentinian, only three were women<sup>6</sup>. But in *International Pop* the numbers were different. Although among the nine artists from Brazil included in the exhibition only three were women<sup>7</sup>, the other South American countries

contemplated (Argentina, Peru and Colombia) were represented only by women artists<sup>8</sup>.

It's important to look at these numbers to reflect on who was and who was not included in Pop reinterpretations, and how new research and exhibitions have redesigned the canon. Recent studies have revealed the need for a deeper investigation of the works and trajectories of South-American women artists. Furthermore, it alerts us to the necessity of looking for other women associated with Pop Art and Nova Figuração that were not yet acknowledged. The problem of replacing an old canon by a new one is that artists are still left out as we standardize the analyses. That is why it is important, as pointed out by feminist art historians such as Griselda Pollock, not only to expand the canons, but also to question the formations of the canons, and to take the local contexts of the productions into consideration.

To discuss Pop artworks from Brazil and Argentina, for example, we must consider how Pop Art as a term and as an artistic concept was received in these spaces, and the specificities of these works. As Rodrigo Alonso (2012) points out, Pop and Nova Figuração artists from South American countries dealt with very different contexts, when compared with those of North America and England. He observes that the very notion “popular”, which gives its name to the pop phenomenon, was different in these spaces. In the United States and England, the word “popular” became related to capitalist mass culture of production and consumption, and no longer to tradition and popular culture. In South American countries, however, that had a different economic reality and industrialization process from those of the United States and Europe, the transformation of this notion of the “popular” is incomplete.

(...) it is clear that the meaning of popular implicit in the acronym “pop” resonates in different ways in the north and south of the planet. If in England and the United States it is identified almost without conflict with the imaginary of the thriving mass cultural industry, in South America the gap between the exaggeration of the consumer media and the political and socioeconomic realities of its inhabitants gives rise to a phenomena of

displacement that promotes from parodic deviations to critical resistance (ALONSO, 2012, s/n).

Alonso also emphasizes that the cultural and political contexts of Brazil and Argentina, which were dealing with dictatorships and severe control of public information, recent expansion of television, and high rates of illiteracy, created artworks that were different from those of the canonical pop. In Brazil, for example, the artworks from the 1960s that are usually associated with Pop Art were known in the country as part of the movement Nova Figuração. There was a resistance on the part of Brazilian artists and critics to use the term Pop to characterize the works made in the country. As Claudia Calirman points out, artists such as Rubens Gerchman and Antonio Dias, while recognizing the importance of the output of some Pop artists, tried to make it clear that they had different motivations:

It is time to put an end to this nonsensical perception that we have been influenced by U.S. Pop art. A few U.S. Pop artists such as Larry Rivers, Jasper Johns, and Oldenburg are important for us, indeed, in the sense that they revealed the potential use of new materials and new subject matters; however, their influence has been exerted individually, not as a group or school (GERCHMAN APUD CALIRMAN, 2015, p. 120).

The artist Anna Maria Maiolino also addressed the subject, stating that the desire of the artists at that time was “to develop an autonomous national art, far removed from external patterns and models. Unlike American Pop art, in Brazil the incorporation of the popular was linked to an interest in everything political and social. We dreamt of a free and autonomous Latin America” (MAIOLINO APUD CALIRMAN, 2015, p. 120).

In Argentina, however, the situation was somewhat different. While in Brazil the effort in general was to create concepts and theories that distanced themselves from Pop, in Argentina critics, curators and even the media focused on defining Pop Art. Oscar Masotta and Jorge Romero Brest were among the main intellectuals to theorize Pop Art in the country. Masotta gave

lectures on Pop Art at the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, and published in 1967 the book *El Pop Art*. As Maria Fernanda Pinta points out, Massota “studied pop as an exemplary reflective and critical art from in which it is possible to see the mediations of languages and the social structures in the relationship between man and the world and, at the same time, as a catalyst for the historical change in taste” (PINTA, 2015, p.01). Masotta, however, will make some distinctions between Pop produced in the US and Argentine works, and will define the production of some Argentine artists such as Juan Stopanni as *Camp*, or *Imajineros*. Romero Brest, on the other hand, incorporated the term “Argentine Pop Art” to describe the works of several artists from Argentina, pointing out differences between these works and those made in other spaces:

in Argentina, pop art was at first more similar to pop in Europe than in the United States, but the consequences were different. In any case, the Americans and the others have allowed the freest creations of the present time, liberating us from the hydra called rhetoric and bringing art closer to life. (BREST, 2007, p.14)

Among the artists working with Pop Art and Nova Figuração in South American countries, several were women. Some of them, like the Peruvian Teresa Burga and the Brazilian Teresinha Soares, saw their works marginalized for decades. When they received attention, it was from an individual perspective. There are few studies that approach these works as a collective, considering the particular conjunctures derived from their gender condition. By adopting this perspective, it is possible to note that Pop and Nova Figuração works by women artists from South America were frequently discussing female subjectivity and sexuality, as well as denouncing the objectification of women by the media and by society. Another commonality were artworks that violated the canvas boundaries, encouraging the public to participate, a remarkable characteristic of the South American productions of the period. Such characteristics can be seen in works of the Argentinian Marta Minujín, the Brazilian Teresinha Soares and the Peruvian Teresa Burga. The work *¡Revuélquese y viva!* (Wallow and live!), was created by Marta

Minujín in 1964. The artist, who lives and works in Argentina, was born in Buenos Aires in 1943. She is one of the most important Pop artists in Argentina and has achieved international recognition. *¡Revuélquese y viva!* was built in fabric filled with foam and painted in strong colors that formed the stripes that were very common in mattresses of that time.



**Fig. 1.** Marta Minujín, *¡Revuélquese y viva!*, 1964. Mixed media. Dimensions variable. Private collection.

The artwork *Ela me deu bola (Camas)* (She hit on me (Beds)), from 1970, was created by Teresinha Soares, a Brazilian artist born in Minas Gerais, who worked actively in the 1960s and 1970s. She quit her career in the visual arts in 1976, and her works have circulated very little in these forty years that separate the end of her career and its resuming in the last years. Three wooden beds put side by side composed the work *Ela me deu bola (Camas)*. The bedframes have flaps that move and, when closed, form naked female

silhouettes in provocative poses. In the lower part of the flaps there are images of Brazilian football idols, such as Pelé.

Teresa Burga, a Peruvian artist also active in the 60s and 70s, created *Untitled*. She quit her career in the visual arts in 1981 due to “the difficulty in obtaining financial support for her initiatives, as well as the lack of institutional interest in her experimental methodologies” (LÓPEZ, 2014, p. 48). Her works were not exhibited from from 1981 to the beginning of the 2000s, when Latin American curators reassessed them. In her 1967 solo exhibition *Objetos* (Objects) organized at the *Cultura y Libertad Gallery*, she presented an environment that represented a bedroom. The room was assembled with a bed placed in the center of the space, with a half-naked woman painted on the bedhead, pillows and sheet.



**Fig. 2.** Teresinha Soares, *Ela me deu bola (Camas)*, 1970. Painted wooden bed frames, wooden panels and mattresses. Dimensions variable/Destroyed work. ©Teresinha Soares.



**Fig. 3.** Teresa Burga, Untitled, 1967. Mixed media. Dimensions variable. Work restored in 2007. Photo: Lorenzo Pusterla.  
©Teresa Burga and Galerie Barbara Thumm.

The work presented bright colors and simplified, flattened figures, focusing on corporality and encouraging the participation of the public. Cacilda Teixeira da Costa and Maria José Herrera defined these characteristics as typical for Pop art productions from Brazil, Argentina and Peru. The three works use beds and mattresses as support for the representation of the body, and as pretext for public participation. As Maria José Herrera observes:

the invitation to participate aimed at expanding the traditional concept of contemplation of the work of art. To participate meant, in a way, to retrace the artist's experience and thus extend the experiential field of the contemplator, who became an active participant (HERRERA, 2015, p.12).

It is important to emphasize that the body was not being investigated only by women artists or South American artists. In the 1960s, as Andrea Giunta (2018) observes, new ways of representing the body emerged and, along with them, "a radical iconographic turn away from established traditions" (GIUNTA, 2018, 29). In the context of discussions on sexuality and on the different systems body control addressed, for example, by Michel Foucault and psychoanalysis, the body "affected by stereotypes, or even by taboos linked to patriarchal structures of heterosexual and normative modernism, came to be intensely questioned and investigated" (GIUNTA, 2018, 29). Although artists from different countries investigated the body, in the work of South American artists it appeared as a means of showcasing censorship, torture and repression by military dictatorships. For many women artists the body frequently stands for female sexuality and for the objectification of women by the mass media.

Although in *¡Revuélquese y viva!*, Minujín avoids a direct representation of the body as we see in Burga's and Soares' beds, the volumes coming out of the mattresses refer to body members and could allude, according to Maria José Herrera, to "bodies during a sexual act". Furthermore, the red entrance of the installation alluded to the shape of a vagina. Through this opening, the public penetrated the installation, and could lie down and interact in a space of intimacy. They were invited, as the title of the work suggests, to wallow and have fun. The installation also had background music, which contributed to the atmosphere of intimacy and seduction. The work was created as a space for the affirmation of sexual freedom, advocating a blameless exploration of desire, eroticism, and sexuality.

In Burga's work, the woman lying on the bed with her arms touching the floor seems to be dead. She is not being simply represented on the bed, she is herself the bed, the pillow, the sheet. She appears dissolved in the furniture and in the architecture, as a decorative object and a fetish to be used to satisfy the man's desire. The woman's half-naked body stretched out on the bed does not appear as an image of affirmation of female sexuality and pleasure, as in Minujín's work, but as a passive and subjected body, in a criticism of the invisibilization of women and their imprisonment to the

domestic sphere. The house is not represented as a space of protection and pleasure, but of repression and submission. The house “as a place where material goods were put on display, sanctioning the status of the owner” (FRIGERI, 2018, p. 97), including the woman's body among these goods.

Teresinha Soares also used the bed and the female body as a tool to discuss the objectification of women and accepted notions of femininity. In the work *Ela me deu bola (Camas)*, the bedframes with flaps represent the world of soccer on one side, considered at that time as an exclusively male sport, with its idols celebrated as national heroes. The other side of the flaps shows the hyper sexualized and objectified female body, in sensual poses. This representation of sport and the female body relates to the image of Brazil sold abroad: Brazilian football, with its famous players, and the stereotyped image of erotic Brazilian woman, with her advertised and commercialized body. The work invited the public to lie down on the bed and make contact with the other, taking part themselves in the seduction game.

Works by Marta Minujín, Teresa Burga and Teresinha Soares were extremely important in the context of the avant-garde at that time, blurring the borders between high and low culture and discussing the impact of mass communication on individual, mainly women's, lives. Working in a political context marked by repression and conservatism, these artists produced extremely powerful works that are still relevant. They help us think about society, politics and the struggle of women not only in the 60s but also in the present. By proposing an investigation of South American artists associated with Pop art poorly recognized until the present, this paper reaffirms the constant need to expand the art historic canon and question the mechanisms through which several productions were marginalized.

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## Endnotes

1. C.f. MINIOUDAKI, Kalliopi. *Women in Pop: Difference and Marginality*. New York: New York University, 2009.
2. The exhibition *Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists 1958-1968* was curated by Sid Sachs at the *Rosenwald-Wolf Gallery* of the *University of the Arts* of Philadelphia. It was also exhibited at the *Brooklyn Museum* (New York) and at the *Tufts University Art Galleries* (Medford, Massachusetts).
3. The exhibition *Power Up – Female Pop Art* was curated by Angela Stief at the *Kunsthalle Wien* (Vienna). It was also exhibited at the *Phoenix Art/Stiftung Falckenberg* (Hamburg) and at the *Städtische Galerie* (Bietigheim-Bissingen, Germany).
4. The exhibition *The World Goes Pop* was curated by Jessica Morgan and Flavia Frigeri at the Tate Modern, in 2015. *International Pop* was curated by Darsie Alexander and Bartholomew Ryan at the *Walker Art Center, Minneapolis*, in 2015. It was also exhibited at the *Dallas Museum of Art* and the *Philadelphia Museum of Art*.
5. Wanda Pimentel and Anna Maria Maiolino.
6. Marta Mijunín, Delia Cancela and Dalila Puzzovio.
7. Anna Maria Maiolino, Teresinha Soares and Romanita Disconzi.
8. The Argentines Marta Minujín and Delia Cancela, the Peruvian Teresa Burga and the Colombian Beatriz González.

# Norms in Motion: Migration of Ideas Between the Italic and Iberian Peninsula Through the Treatises of Gabriele Paleotti and Francisco Pacheco

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## **ABSTRACT**

The debates about Christian images were intensified by the 16th-century Schism, which split the Church of the East into the Roman Catholic Church and Protestantism in its various forms. The Roman Church needed to affirm the legitimacy of the use of images. The question of image was the subject of discussion only during the last session of the Council of Trent in December 1563. In this scenario we highlight the work of Gabriele Paleotti, Cardinal and Archbishop of Bologna who had actively participated in the sessions of the Council. In 1582, Paleotti published the first version of his treatise *Discourse intorno alle immagini sacre e profane*. The art theory produced from the Council has migrated to other regions of Europe, having great assimilation in the Iberian Peninsula. The treatise tradition in Spain took a severe character of attempted iconographic control through the *Arte de la Pintura* by the painter and writer Francisco Pacheco published in 1649. This essay seeks to present the relations between *Discourse intorno alle immagini sacre and profane* (1582) by Italian Gabriele Paleotti and *Arte de la Pintura* (1649) by Spanish Francisco Pacheco in the context of the migration of ideas in Europe marked by religious reforms.

## **KEYWORDS**

Council of Trent; Sacred Images; Treatises; Gabriele Paleotti; Francisco Pacheco.

The debates about Christian images were intensified by the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Schism, which split the Church of the East into the Roman Catholic Church and Protestantism in its various forms. In 1517, Martin Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses* were affixed to the doors of Wittenberg Abbey, questioning above all the practices regarding plenary indulgencies by the Roman Church. Other motivations that resulted in the Reformation include important debates about the Eucharist and about ecclesiastical celibacy, but also the condemnation of the cult of images, which is the subject of this paper. After the Protestant Reformation, religious art and church decorations were therefore generally condemned in officially protestant regions, to the point of causing outbreaks of iconoclastic acts, such as those of Wittenberg in 1520.

The Roman Church responded to this new scenario with the convocation of the Council of Trent in 1545, which would last until 1563, due to its many interruptions. It was imperative for the Church to defend its dogmas, undertake an internal reformation, fight so called 'protestant heresy', and reaffirm the legitimacy of its religious use of images.

Since Italy had not been as severely hit by waves of iconoclasm as other European regions, religious art was not, at first, of the greatest concern for the Roman Church. As a result, it was not until the last session of the Council in December 1563 that religious images were debated. The decree approved by that session reaffirmed the legitimacy of the production and use of Christian images against the recent accusations by the Protestants, as long as certain criteria were observed. The Council of Trent, however, did not propose a great many changes in relation to what had been previously established by the Second Council of Nicaea in 787.

One of the most important topics of the Tridentine debates about images was reaffirming their legitimacy and clarifying that they ought not to be the object of adoration or superstitious uses. According to the Council's decrees:

[...] the images of Christ, of the Virgin Mother of God, and of the other saints, are to be had and retained particularly in temples, and that due honour and veneration are to be given them; not that any divinity, or virtue, is believed to be in them,

on account of which they are to be worshipped; or that anything is to be asked of them; or, that trust is to be reposed in images, as was of old done by the Gentiles who placed their hope in idols; but because the honour which is shown them is referred to the prototypes which those images represent.<sup>1</sup>

Within the Tridentine Church, images served the purposes of inciting faith and piety, remembering the life of Jesus and the saints, and teaching the Scriptures. This takes us to a crucial point of the internal reformation of the Church: the pedagogical function of images.

The Tridentine Church rescued the pedagogical function of images as a means of legitimising them, looking back at the authoritative concept by Pope Gregory I of the image as the *Bible of the illiterate*. This meant that, in order to effectively teach Christian stories, their representations should be clear, decorous, and free of elements that could lead to wrong interpretations of the Scriptures. The Church could thus protect itself from the accusations made by the Protestants regarding the adequacy of its images. As per the decrees of the Council:

[...] if any abuses have crept in amongst these holy and salutary observances, the holy Synod ardently desires that they be utterly abolished; in such wise that no images, (suggestive) of false doctrine, and furnishing occasion of dangerous error to the uneducated, be set up. And if at times, when expedient for the unlettered people; it happen that the facts and narratives of sacred Scripture are portrayed and represented; the people shall be taught, that not thereby is the Divinity represented, as though it could be seen by the eyes of the body, or be portrayed by colours or figures.<sup>2</sup>

As we can observe, their deliberations regarding images were objective and generalised, mostly repeating those of the Second Council of Nicaea. While they reaffirm the presence of images in the church, establishing their functions and preventing possible abuses, the decrees do not specify which heresies and abuses could come out of the improper use of images or the incorrect iconography.

With the exception of some more extreme cases, Rome did not enforce specific regulations for the arts as it had done for literary production with its *Index librorum prohibitorum*, but left to the bishops the responsibility of controlling and guiding the use of images in their dioceses. According to Paolo Prodi, this resulted in different regulations for the images in each region:

The responsibility assigned by the Council of Trent to the bishops, the absence of any norms emanating subsequently from Rome for them to implement, and the lack of any ecclesiastical jurisdiction at all regulating the figurative arts (in contrast to the regulation of books and publishing through the *Index librorum prohibitorum* and the establishment at Rome of a cardinalatial congregation to run it) compel us at this point to narrow our focus to individual dioceses. The way the bishops applied the Tridentine decree could vary widely from place to place.<sup>3</sup>

As a result, clerics, theologians, and other intellectuals took charge of expanding the Tridentine deliberations in treatises that were, in practice, true manuals for the figurative arts after the Council of Trent. As stated by Ruth Noyes,

Attesting to the anxiety and consequence that religious and artistic constituencies attached to image-related issues left unresolved by Trent is a veritable explosion of treatises on art theory and reform published during the years that followed the council.<sup>4</sup>

Works of this kind are numerous in artistic literature, and their most paradigmatic examples are perhaps *Dialogo degli errori della pittura*, written by Giovanni Andrea Gillio and published the year after the conclusion of the Council of Trent; *De Picturis et Imaginibus Sacris*, by Johannes Molanus; *Instructionum fabricate et suppelletilis ecclesiasticis*, by the archbishop of Milan, Carlo Borromeo; *Discorso intorno alle immagini sacre e profane*, by the archbishop of Bologna, Gabriele Paleotii; and *De Pictura Sacra*, by Federico Borromeo. In the Iberian Peninsula, it is also worth mentioning *Arte*

*de la Pintura*, by Francisco Pacheco, and *El pintor Cristiano y erudito*, by Juan Interián de Ayala.

For David Freedberg, the decrees of the Council of Trent were “*taken up by most of the writers in the later half of the sixteenth century, including non-ecclesiastical theorists such as Lomazzo*”<sup>5</sup>. I would like to add to this that the reverberation of conciliar decrees also sprawled beyond the sixteenth century, especially in the Spanish context.

In the case of Italy, I mentioned the role of Gabriele Paleotti, for he was the archbishop of Bologna and a cardinal, who had actively taken part in the sessions of the Council of Trent. It is notable that in 1579 he recounted in a letter to the archbishop of Milan and treatise author Carlo Borromeo that he had read Molanus’s treatise and wanted to be aware of the situation in Milan<sup>6</sup>. This account testifies not only to Paleotti’s own awareness of the debate about images in different European regions, but also to how those ideas were circulating between them.

A first version of his treatise *Discorso intorno alle immagini sacre e profane* was published in 1582, consisting of two volumes in vernacular language and an index for three following ones, which he was writing but were later destroyed in a fire before they could be published. In 1594, the circulation of this work in Europe was made possible by its publication in Latin in Ingolstadt.

The first volume paves the ground for the treatise as a whole, by addressing more general topics in relation to images, such as their origin and legitimacy, or the difference between sacred and profane images. The second volume expatiates on the different abuses commonly found in sacred and profane figurative arts, such as scandalous, heretical, or apocryphal images. According to Paolo Prodi, the underlying concept of this book is that ‘all images are a divine expression, whereas evil arises only out of how they are used’. The unpublished third volume was meant to be about lascivious and indecent images, while the fourth one would have contained guidance on how to depict various subjects. The final volume would have consisted of instructions and advice for clerics, commissioners, and artists, so as to

stimulate the production of art in accordance with Catholic sensibilities during the Reformation.

Some points of Paleotti's treatise are particularly useful for our debate. In the very first chapter of Book One, where its intentions are explained, his defence of images is in line with the Tridentine precepts. From the premise that images are originally sacred but potentially corruptible through their misuse, he concludes that the Catholic stance on them could avoid what he considered to be two extremes: the pagan adoration of images and their denial by the Jewish, Muslim and Protestant religions.

[...] we can perceive a spectrum with two extremes and a middle. At one extreme stands the pagan, attributing more to image than he ought, adoring them as God. At the other extreme stands the heretic and other like him, suppressing images to excess, indeed getting rid of them altogether. At the midpoint stands the Catholic Christian, who does not banish images but does not adore them as divine things either. Gazing at an image, the mere resemblance of the prototype, the Catholic moderates his veneration to a suitable standard and to the prescriptions of the sacred canons and councils.<sup>2</sup>

These considerations are followed by Paleotti's acknowledgment that Catholic images had nevertheless been frequently abused, compelling him to propose a reformation of images and their uses in his treatise.

Such a reformation should be supported by a reflection on the importance and functions of images in the heart of Tridentine Catholicism. Grounded on humanistic knowledge and on the authoritative arguments of John of Damascus and Saint Gregory, Paleotti's argument emphasises the didactic function of images, based on the idea that, like rhetoric and written text, they should have the triple purpose of teaching, delighting, and moving. Images, however, could reach a larger audience, as they could also be understood by the illiterate and the ignorant. In the fifth paragraph of Book One, Paleotti says:

Let us add, however, that although the end may appear to be the same for both, the effect that issues from this end turns out to be much broader, and to propagate much more rapidly, with pictures than with books, at any rate when pictures can express what books contain, for the reason that books are read only by the intelligent, who are a minority, whereas pictures speak universally to persons of every sort.<sup>8</sup>

The Catholic painter had, in consequence, a greater responsibility, for their works would be 'read' by a wider variety of people.

This may serve for now as a reminder to Christian painters to remember that they are composing books for the people, to read in public for everyone's salvation, and to struggle and strive all the more to form images that correspond to such a lofty and glorious goal.<sup>9</sup>

This helps us understand the importance given by Paleotti to an intensive reformation of images, which he then judged to be widely abused and misused.

Paleotti starts his second volume by blaming the Demon for the abuses that permeated the figurative arts of his time. Uncapable of eliminating sacred images, the Demon would have befouled the arts so that they would serve Evil rather than Goodness, taking advantage of their powerful teaching capabilities to pervert its effects in Christianity. In Paleotti's own words, "*He cannot make images cease to exist, but at least he injects into them so many abuses that images can do more harm than good, if steps are not taken.*"<sup>10</sup> The author ends the first chapter wishing that painters could perceive the Demon's strategies and redirect their work to the original, pure state in which the arts had been conceived. This reinforces what he had discussed in the first volume, where he affirms that images are originally sacred, but corruptible. It is clear that Paleotti believed in the effectiveness of his treatise as an instrument for the restoration of the purity of images.

Supported by the homology between written text and image – extensively evoked by painting theory – Paleotti's treatise defended that what was appropriate for a book could also be appropriately depicted in an image.

Consequently, it proposed that the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, created by the Council of Trent to control written production, could also be used as a guideline to produce images. Like books, some images should be condemned by Christian law, whereas others should be tolerated despite their inadequacy.

When reading Paleotti's treatise, one notices how he was trying to create the grounds for the regulation of both the production and use of images. It is important to bear in mind, however, that he did not initially intend those regulations to be applied universally, in every European city, but only in Bologna or, at most, as a model for other clerics who wished to develop their own regulations for their dioceses. To quote Paleotti's own words:

Let us recall that this treatise, by order of monsignor our illustrious bishop, has been composed for use by the people of his city and diocese. Hence, just as he cannot prescribe regulations for other places, he correspondingly has no intention of taxing their customs or playing the censor of usages they may have that differ from those of Bologna. Nor indeed is it his intention to ascribe everything that may be reprehended in this book to mortal sin on the part of his people. He means to leave everything under the same prohibitions and the same penalties of mortal sin, or venial sin, or simple imperfection, already imposed on them by the sacred canons, in the knowledge that, just as there are degrees of human error, which can be graver or lighter, the defects in painting and sculpture range from major to minor.<sup>11</sup>

In spite of Paleotti's diplomacy and his zeal to avoid imposing his theories outside his own diocese, he displayed some pessimism at the end of his life, when little had been done thirty years after the Council of Trent to truly reform the arts and prevent the abuses regarding the production and use of images. According to Prodi, not long before his death, Paleotti issued a request to the ecclesiastical authorities that universal precepts should be established to control the use of images or even that an *Index* should be created at the example of *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*<sup>12</sup>.

Several elements of his treatise were assimilated in the Spanish context, notably through the treatise written by Francisco Pacheco, testifying to a true migration of ideas between different European regions.

We cannot deny that, even before the Council of Trent, there was indeed a higher concern in Spain about the decorum of sacred images. According to Juan González García, the establishment of the Tribunal of the Holy Office in 1478 had created the ‘veedor’, a person who was in charge of ‘[...] *inspecting and approving religious works destined to public display and removing or correcting the dishonest, heterodoxic, uncommon or poor-quality ones*’.<sup>13</sup>

With the Council of Trent, the attention given to religious images in Spain naturally increased. According to González García,

In the end, it was the bishoprics and not the republics that, following the pastoral normative from Trent, enforced the inquisitorial censorship with the ecclesiastical *visitadores*. The role of such surveyors was not only that of inspecting the quality and themes of images – by modifying costumes, reverting inappropriate restorations and changes, expurgating figures and inscriptions, and rethinking their display in the temple – but also that of listing and categorising objects belonging to the diocese, in order to ascertain their existence, their loan, or in the worst case, their loss. The opportune moment for this task was usually the pastoral visit, an inspection of the spiritual and material state of the towns that depended on the prelate, which had to be undertaken by the bishop himself or by an assigned *visitador*, should he not be able to do it. The pastoral consisted in accessing each church, hermitage, or chapel, one by one, and reviewing their altars.<sup>14</sup>

The resolutions of the Council of Trent about sacred images were thus reaffirmed in Spanish territories through a series of regional Councils and Synods, whose decisions were put into practice by *visitadores*, as has been observed by González García. However, the detailing of such precepts was, to the example of Italy, developed by writers in treatises of art. Indeed, the Spanish treatise tradition after the Council of Trent is marked by attempts at

a severe iconographic control, notably in the case of the painter and treatise author Francisco Pacheco.

Pacheco is known for having been the master and father-in-law of Diego Velázquez, and for having conducted a supposed art ‘Academy’ in Sevilla. His ‘Academy’, in fact, consisted of more informal reunions of clerics, artists, and scholars of his circle who contributed to his work, rather than an institutionalised school. In this case, the contribution of members of the clergy, especially the Jesuits, to Pacheco’s writings is certainly the most notable. According to Cañedo-Argüelles, ‘*Pacheco is the prototype of the post-conciliar Catholic painter who accepts and seeks the collaboration of theologians in his work*<sup>15</sup>. For this paper, we should look with a particular interest at his treatise *Arte de la Pintura*, written in 1638 and published posthumously in 1649.

In *Arte de la Pintura*, his knowledge of texts of the classical era is displayed mainly through second-hand quotations from ecclesiastical writers and Italian treatises from the fifteenth century onwards, with a clear affiliation with the image theory of the Counter-Reformation. According to Bonaventura Bassegoda i Hugas, ‘*Pacheco knew very well everything that could be read about painting up to January 1638*<sup>16</sup>. We should highlight his knowledge of the treatises written by Dolce, Molanus and Paleotti, whom he quotes numerous times. One of the most remarkable traits of his writings is therefore his observance of the directives stipulated by the church since the Council of Trent and a desire to put them into practice in painting.

The treatise is divided into three volumes. *Book I* is devoted to the definition of painting as a liberal art, its origin, and its antiquity; the superiority of painting in relation to sculpture; the uses and functions of painting in the Catholic church. *Book II* is devoted to the parts that compose painting, namely decorum, drawing, proportion, and colour. Lastly, *Book III* addresses the material, formal and iconographic practices of painting, with an important section, called ‘*Adiciones a algunas imágenes*’, consisting of iconographic recommendations. I would like to highlight some points of the book which are of particular interest to this paper.

In the ninth chapter of *Book I*, Pacheco attests to the functions of painting and its use by the Church in accordance with the ideals of the Counter-Reformation, quoting a word-to-word translation of Paleotti's treatise. For Pacheco, the supreme purpose of painting was to serve the worship of God, teaching and remembering divine things. One of the most important roles of the painter would be that of guiding the people to religion, through his painting, for an image could more efficiently move and touch the spirit than speech. Pacheco ensured in this manner the importance of the use of images by the Church, supported by the discourse of priests, theologians and treatise writers. He translates into Spanish a passage of Paleotti's *Discorso* that says:

[...] painting, which had the original purpose of resembling what it imitates, now takes, as an act of virtue, a new and rich surcoat; besides resembling, it ascends to a supreme purpose, gazing at the eternal glory; and, endeavouring to remove men from vice, it compels them to the true worship of Our Lord.<sup>17</sup>

Regarding the iconography, in *Book III* Pacheco seems to have taken further what Paleotti never managed to achieve in his unfinished works. According to Bonaventura Bassegoda I Hugas:

This enunciated but non-written treatise by Paleotti is the only possible model for Pacheco's discourse, which derives from the epistolary manner as a justification for a concrete painting – like an erudite ekphrasis – to reach the *Tractatus*.<sup>18</sup>

Since the eleventh chapter of *Book III*, Pacheco devotes himself to detailed recommendations for an appropriate and decorous pictorial depiction of important passages of the Scriptures, the life of the Virgin and of Christ, and the iconography of the saints. These precepts are significantly more detailed than the general recommendations of Paleotti, perhaps because Pacheco was motivated by his practical experience as a painter.

There is, however, no concrete evidence of the assimilation of the iconographic recommendations from *Arte de la Pintura* in Spanish or even

Sevillian workshops. The iconographic instructions of the treatise should not be taken as orthodox norms which were to be severely applied through control or censorship of the images, even if Pacheco's desire to approach the Inquisition is considered. It is known that on the seventh of March 1618, the Inquisition conceded him a commission to '*view and visit paintings of sacred things that were in tents and public places*'<sup>19</sup>, but according to Bassegoda i Hugas little is known about the activities that effectively took place when he occupied that position:

[...] nothing is known of the so called 'commission', nor are any prosecutions or reprimands to painters known in relation to iconography. We can deduce, consequently, that this title was simply an honorific title without any concrete repercussions in Sevillian painting at the time. We do not have any concrete data to suppose that the orthodoxy of the production of images was threatened, or that a singular vigilance had been necessary.<sup>20</sup>

We can conclude, especially after the comparison between the treatises of Gabrielle Paleotti and Francisco Pacheco, that the normative for the image production in the Tridentine context was in movement. Even if the Council of Trent itself had not defined any unified directives for the production of images, the principal treatises circulated and were assimilated in different regions of Catholic Europe.

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# “Heart Mysteries There” — Notes on the Stendhal Syndrome

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## **ABSTRACT**

A recent cardiovascular event at the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence in December 2018 involving an elderly Tuscan male gathered significant media attention, being promptly reported as another case of the so-called Stendhal syndrome. The victim was in the Botticelli room when he lost consciousness, purportedly gazing at the *Birth of Venus*. Medical support was made immediately available, assuring the patient’s survival. Taking the 2018 incident as a case study, this paper addresses the emergence of the Stendhal syndrome (as defined by the Florentine psychiatrist Graziella Magherini from the 1970s onwards) and similar worldwide syndromes, such as the Jerusalem, Paris, India, and Washington syndromes. Their congeniality and coevality favor their understanding as a set of interconnected phenomena made possible partly by the rise of global tourism and associated aesthetic-religious anxieties, partly by the migration of ideas concerning artistic experience in extremis. While media coverage and most art historical writings have discussed the Stendhal syndrome as a quizzical phenomenon (one which serves more or less to justify the belief in the “power of art”), my purpose in this paper is to question the etiological specificity of the Stendhal syndrome and, therefore, its appellation as such; and raise questions about the fraught connection between health-related events caused by artworks and the aesthetic experience.

## **KEYWORDS**

Stendhal Syndrome; Stendhal; Art Appreciation; Embodied Aesthetics; Art Theory.

In December 2018, an elderly Florentine man suffered a sudden cardiac arrest in front of Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* at the Uffizi, and everyone was ready to cry wolf. Fast-paced news coverage, amped up by social media, quickly settled on the cause of the incident: clearly, it must have been another case of the Stendhal syndrome, that quizzical psychosomatic condition triggered by intense exposure to exceptional art<sup>4</sup>. What else, if not the vague notion that artworks of great beauty and value have some elusive power over their beholders, could have broken the man's heart?



**Fig. 1.** Sandro Botticelli, *Birth of Venus*, ca. 1485, tempera on canvas, 185.5 x 285.5 cm, Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi.

When asked for his thoughts regarding the incident, the director of the Uffizi, Eike Schmidt, replied somewhat circumspectly. He began equivocating, stating that he was not a doctor and therefore unqualified to opine on the matter; but then he added that, to the best of his knowledge, “visiting a museum like [the Uffizi], which is so full of

masterpieces, can certainly cause emotional, psychological, and even physical stress.” As a matter of fact, remarked Schmidt, such incidents were not that unusual at his institution—not so long ago, for instance, someone had fainted in front of Caravaggio’s *Medusa*<sup>2</sup>. Perhaps a warning sign to visitors to the Uffizi is in order as a marketing tool? Jests aside, the gist of what the art expert is saying correlates with the other two appellations for the Stendhal syndrome, that of Florence syndrome and hyperkulturemia<sup>3</sup>. By referring to the Tuscan capital, the former resounds with Schmidt’s assumption that a highly charged artistic environment can have a disturbing effect on visitors. The latter, hyperkulturemia, roughly translatable as “excess of culture in the blood,” implies that cases of extreme psychosomatic reactions to aesthetic experience have something to do with the twin notions of measure and intemperance. Too much art and culture, the experience of a room “so full of masterpieces,” and the unwary museumgoer can go kaput.

The begged question here may well be: “if so, why?” If indeed the direct experience of powerful artistic environments can send the human sensorium into overdrive and wreak havoc on the beholder’s psychosomatic structure, how does that occur in neuroscientific terms, and under what conditions? A verdict here is difficult to come by<sup>4</sup>. And mainly beyond the pale of this paper. What is perhaps of greater interest to us—“us” in the humanistic side of the equation—is the extent to which the Uffizi cardiac arrest seems to have exhumed a widespread soteriological hope in contemporary aesthetics: the faith that in an increasingly digitalized visual culture, in which sensory dissociation has become the unspoken norm, there is still room for heartfelt sympathy between the situated observer and the analog artwork. After all, is it not possible that the acute psychotic attacks attributed to the Stendhal syndrome result from

late-twentieth-century desiderata for self-revelation rooted in early nineteenth-century extreme sentimentalism?

This condition, let us not forget, is named after the French writer who purportedly experienced dramatic dizziness and extreme pleasure when visiting Volterrano's *Sybils* in the Santa Croce during a brief visit to Florence. Stendhal's is a fascinating, performative account, intertwining vision and discourse like a double helix spinning around his body. As such, it demands a close reading.



**Fig. 2.** Baldassare Franceschini (Il Volterrano), *Incoronazione della Vergine e Sibille*, 1680-1683, fresco, Florence, Santa Croce (Niccolini Chapel).

### Magherini's Stendhal Syndrome

Says Stendhal in the revised edition of *Rome, Naples et Florence*, the memoir of his Italian travels published in 1826, that Volterrano's frescos gave him "the most vivid pleasure that he had ever felt with painting." Admittedly, the very idea of being in Florence, close to the great men whose tomb he had come to visit, had already put him in a "sort of ecstasy." Nevertheless, "absorbed by the contemplation of sublime beauty, [he] could see [Volterrano's *Sybils*] up close, [he] could touch it, so to say. [He] had arrived at that emotional moment where one encounters the celestial sensations offered by the fine arts and passionate sentiments." Leaving Santa Croce, Stendhal felt that his heart was beating way too fast, that his vitality had deserted him, that he trod around afraid of falling. It was only by sitting on a bench in Piazza Santa Croce and re-reading some verses by Ugo Foscolo that the Frenchman was able to recover his bearings. Two days later, a fully recovered Stendhal reminisced about the incident in a sassy fashion. One is happier, he wrote, to have a heart like his than to be a member of the upper classes—"il vaut mieux, pour le bonheur, me disais-je, avoir le cœur ainsi fait que le cordon bleu."<sup>5</sup>

What I find immediately striking in Stendhal's account is a certain disregard for the source of the experience. We are informed that what set off the disturbing psychosomatic chain reaction are the Santa Croce's *Sibyls*, but there is not much in terms of ekphrastic excitement. (As a matter of fact, the reader is left unsure of what exactly in the artworks caused such aesthetic rapture in him.) The object of the gaze, the gazee, is merely a spur, almost an afterthought. It can be argued that this interest in the embodied effects of the artistic experience is itself part of the ekphrastic tradition: from Pseudo-Lucian's fictional account of the rape of Praxiteles' Cnidian Aphrodite in the early third century BCE, to Master Gregory's

enthralment by a statue of Venus in mid-twelfth-century Rome, up to Vasari's telling of lascivious reactions to a Saint Sebastian by Fra Bartolommeo in the 16th century, there has been in art literature an undercurrent of quasi-scandalous types of reaction to artworks<sup>6</sup>. They are all, just like Stendhal's, much more focused on the gaze's aftermath than on the gazee itself (and, more often than not, also concerned with whatever kind of moral sanctions have been imposed on the transgressive gazer). But Stendhal differentiates himself from his predecessors in at least two significant aspects: he tones down the libidinal, agalmatophilic features in favor of self-transcendent parlance and he also transvalues embodied reactions from a moralizing anecdote into something that can be visualized and exemplified.

By giving precedence to Stendhal's fascinating account, I have been forestalling a proper introduction to the syndrome and its theoretician for way too long. In her 1989 book *La sindrome di Stendhal*, the Italian psychiatrist Graziella Magherini took the French novelist to be the patient zero of a series of psychosomatic attacks ostensibly caused by artistic experiences in Florence from 1977 to 1986. The documented cases present a panoply of psychopathologies whose symptoms include thought imbalances, affect disorders, and somatized anxiety; stronger cases have also presented odder disturbances, such as euphoria, hallucinations, remembrance of past lives, autoscopy, vertigo, immobility, feelings of atemporality, iconoclastic impulses and cardiac arrest. Supported by her clinical experience with 106 patients, Magherini developed her pioneering diagnosis: the combined effect of sentimental journeys—nearly all her patients were tourists visiting Central Italy for self-edifying reasons—and the intense artistic experiences offered by Florence could, somehow, engender an uprush of repressed instinctual energies with disturbing psychosomatic effects. According to Magherini, this

occurred because the experience of traveling through a foreign land such as Italy, populated with paramount instances of sublimated libidinal energies (i.e., Freudian artworks), could abruptly lead to what Pierre Janet dubbed *l'abaissement du niveau mental*. That is, a reduced state of ego control over the psychic whole and the overruling of super-egotistic constraints, thus allowing for the violent uprush of a-symbolic conflicts. Based on such a theoretical framework, Magherini has argued for the therapeutic potential of the Stendhal syndrome: If the patient can consciously process the unconscious content brought to the fore during the psychosomatic crisis, then they will have successfully integrated negative instinctual energies that were up to that moment harmfully latent in the id portion of the psyche. Consequently, such a disturbing experience can be an outstanding opportunity for the afflicted individual to mature—that is, to replace the psychic mechanisms ruled by the childish pleasure principle with those governed by the mature reality principle<sup>8</sup>.

Following the book's publication, the term caught media and public attention worldwide. Enthused by the reading of Magherini's book, the Italian master of *giallo* cinema, Dario Argento, made a homonymous thriller in 1996 that captures the odd mixture of morbidity, allure, and high culture that seems to undergird the syndrome's public appeal. Gradually, the Stendhal syndrome became a buzzword to describe every abnormal reaction to a piece of art. Notwithstanding the popularity of the term and the fragility of Magherini's conceptual armature, the criticisms leveled against this psychopathological classification over the decades have been few—and yet highly effective.

### **Criticisms to the Stendhal Syndrome**

One of the most incisive critical remarks came from a security guard at the Uffizi. When asked in 1986 what he thought of the Stendhal syndrome, he replied that “sure, a few people faint every year and we have to call an ambulance, but how do I know whether it’s the paintings that do it? They don’t shout ‘it’s the art, it’s the art’ as they go down.”<sup>9</sup> More than thirty years later, in 2014, such kind of skepticism was substantiated by a group of Italian neuroscientists, who denounced the Stendhal syndrome for its lack of psychopathological specificity, meaning that the wide range of causes and symptoms associated with the condition should invalidate its appellation as a syndrome. For instance, contrary to Magherini’s jingoistic aesthetics—who claimed that most cases of the Stendhal syndrome took place in Florence due to the sheer concentration of Renaissance art in the city—they noticed that similar cases abound worldwide with minor etiological and symptomatologic variations<sup>10</sup>. This very fact bespeaks a much broader problem, which is both globally spread and context-based—and yet to be studied in-depth as a set of interrelated phenomena.

Indeed, we seem to live in the age of the city syndromes. A cursory list includes psychopathological conditions named after Jerusalem (characterized by religious delusion while visiting the Holy City), Washington (delusions, this time political, by visitors to the US-American capital), Paris (psychosomatic disorders caused by a disappointment with the City of Lights, which chiefly affects Japanese tourists), and Venice (foreigners, mostly Germans, decide to off themselves in La Serenissima—too much Thomas Mann may be to blame here)<sup>11</sup>. The common denominator to these conditions seems to be the experience of depersonalization and derealization provoked by

the stress and anxiety caused by intense tourism—and not necessarily the self-disturbing experience of that radical Other, the artwork.

As a matter of fact, were we to take a cynical view of Magherini's postulations, we could say that they contain *ab ovo* a penchant for tourism marketing. If you have the means, the subtext says, do go to Florence. Who knows? Maybe the contact with the city's many masterpieces can discharge repressed emotional content, and, once the psychosomatic crisis has been overcome, the whole ordeal will have made a better person out of you (not to say a more polished one). A 2015 article titled "Le emozioni e la città: dalla Sindrome di Stendhal all'emotional *city marketing*" lays bare such thorny, profit-oriented overtones: emotions spurring from the contact with a sumptuous material culture are themselves a sort of immaterial heritage to be monetized by the tourism industry and real estate market<sup>12</sup>. The trick being played here is that the Stendhalian framework renders the emotional life, the life of the spirit, visible by mapping it into embodied reactions—a bit like stigmata. The artistic experience thus becomes a corporeal fact. And a commodity as well.

The previous fault-finding notwithstanding, perhaps the most incisive objection to the Stendhal syndrome comes from literary quarters. In his 2008 memoir, *Nothing to Be Frightened Of*, the British writer Julian Barnes unearths a valuable piece of information. Following a visit to Grenoble's municipal library, Barnes found out that there is a discrepancy between Marie-Henri Beyle's diary entry of his 1817 visit to Florence and the published account in 1826 of that same experience under the pen name of Stendhal. While the famed version by the *nom de plume* highlights the dramatic dizziness and extreme artistic pleasure after seeing Volterrano's *Sybils*, the unknown scribbles of the traveling writer mention nothing of the sort. After stating that through such comparison, "all reliable evidence for Stendhal's

Syndrome effectively dissolves before our eyes,” Barnes tries to salvage the Beyle *contra* Stendhal debacle. According to the British writer, sharp divisions between memory and memoir ignore the emotional increase and change of focus brought about by time. Both the man and the author are being truthful in their own manner.<sup>13</sup> To a certain extent, I reckon Barnes is right. For Stendhal did fictionalize himself, some fifteen-odd years after the fact, as the patient zero of the syndrome that would be named after him more than a century and a half later.

Perhaps that is precisely the central issue. Perhaps it is far more productive to understand Stendhal’s account and syndrome as an archive of post-nineteenth-century approaches to artistic reception. Perhaps, by resisting an overdetermined reading of Stendhal’s reaction, a more complex picture of its clinical appropriation by Magherini begins to take shape. For several questions here accrue: Is it possible to historicize the museum visitor as a subject inflected by literary history? What has been expected of the artistic experience as a pedagogical and self-forming project? Moreover, how can we conceptualize the interaction between observer, artwork, and the mediating experience of our embodied reactions?

#### **After Stendhal’s Heart**

Since I began with matters of the heart, let us take a closer look into Stendhal’s own. In the account of his encounter with Volterrano’s *Sybils*, the novelist refers to his heart, his *coeur*, twice. The connotations differ, certainly: first, he mentions the tachycardia resulting from the artistic experience; later, the worth of that same arrhythmic organ, privileged seat of passions, in contrast to an external sign of the French aristocracy, the *cordons bleus*<sup>14</sup>. But we should not be fooled here by a facile opposition between an anatomic and metaphoric sense. The clinical visceroreception is the spectacle and

proof of an underlying rhetorical apparatus that surfaces, wily, as an afterthought. For the strong contours of the beating heart envelop a discourse that seeks to supplant established social hierarchies by extolling subjective development. Stendhal thus transvalues his organ into a refinable seismograph of self-cultivation. In doing so, he also offers an aesthetic speech unmoored to the elitist chains of the ekphrastic and philosophical traditions.

The connection between the novelist's account and the syndrome named after him is not merely onomastic and pathological. Stendhal's published experience is rather both an event and a discourse that helped form, alongside other subsequent discourse-events, the observing subject that would be afflicted by the syndrome named after him from the mid-twentieth century onward. To this end, the European intelligentsia has contributed plenty. From Robert Vischer onward, empathy-based theories of artistic reception have emphasized pre-cognitive, embodied reaction to aesthetic stimuli. Meanwhile, psycho-analytical art theory has generally posited some level of catharsis through sustained engagement with the sublimated artwork. Broadly applied, both trends lionized subjective approaches to the artistic experience. On the literary front, luminaries such as Proust and Dostoyevsky have adopted Stendhal's blueprint: their accounts of their own odd artistic reaction, ranging from dizziness and tachycardia to severe paralysis, have helped define a morbid model for high aesthetes, whose suffering in front of the artwork serves as an index of their heightened sensibility<sup>45</sup>. When observed in the larger public, these weird phenomena have oft been medicalized and the object of media fascination. For instance, the intense frenzy for Frans Liszt's music in the 1840s led Heinrich Heine, in one of his musical reviews, to coin the term "Lisztomania"; later, the German writer would argue that the causes for such fan hysteria were

beyond the pale of aesthetics and should rather be sought in “the domains of pathology.”<sup>16</sup> The same suffix, “-mania,” was applied more than one century later to the craze for Picasso’s art in Britain. Following the massive success of the artist’s first retrospective in the U.K. in 1960, journalists coined terms such as “art blockbuster” and “Picassomania” to describe the intermingling of British society that flocked to see the exhibition<sup>17</sup>. Notably, the term “mania” had a much stronger medical connotation in the 1840s than in the 1960s, when it became synonymous with “strong fad,” but in both cases, it marks out abnormal social events and imbues them with a pathological subtext: an excess of art can, somehow, drive you mad<sup>18</sup>.

Epitomized by the Stendhal syndrome, what these processes of psycho-pathologization have also done is to cordon off acute psychosomatic reactions to artworks as either para-aesthetic events or artistic epiphenomena. As with instances of iconoclasm, they are thus stripped of their power to challenge theoretical frameworks still based on some sort of immanence in the artwork and normative modes of artistic engagement, which emphasize physical immobility and emotional detachment in tailor-made environments (such as museums and galleries). Moreover, by treating such acute reactions as essentially pathological or overly idiosyncratic means ignoring social attitudes to these very events, which are part and parcel of the history of artistic reception. Say, to what extent do contemporary museumgoers expect embodied evidence of their refined sensibility? As with the purportedly pure clinical gaze, undergirded by an a priori conceptual armature, the contemporary artistic gaze might well contain a troubled genealogy and an elided set of expectations.

### Two Wild Hypotheses

As I have hinted at the beginning, one of these elisions lies in the fact that the digital Anthropocene seems to have made a norm of the post-historical, disembodied eye, whose primary source of stimulus is the circulation of products and not their inherent value. The backlash to this process, a kind of nostalgia for embodied affects, is evident in a series of events that falsely reassure contemporary subjectivity of its inherent corporeality and somatic splendor in an age of mass communication, global surveillance, and the onslaught of luminous information.

Hence the marginal yet exciting appeal of the Stendhal syndrome to the newsfeed and social media. Most newspaper articles reporting on the 2018 sudden cardiac arrest express a wistful tone, as if, despite all of our civilizational *malaises*, Botticelli and *bella compagnia* can still strike a man down. As one of the articles reporting on the Uffizi cardiac arrest states, the Florentine geniuses of the Italian Renaissance have “left an afterglow you can still feel despite the tour guides and overpriced cafes.”<sup>19</sup> So be it.

To conclude, a word of caution. I may have been exceedingly skeptical thus far (not to say too cynical). While a critique of the Stendhal syndrome might dent its credibility as a nosological fact, it is hard to explain away the incidents themselves. There seems to be a hardcore of truth in the clinical records that none of my scholarly parlor tricks can do much to spoil. Patients who have been diagnosed with the Stendhal syndrome have experienced hallucinations with angels and demons at the Convento di San Marco, suffered from paralyzing euphoria in the Boboli Gardens, experienced inexplicable sexual urges against their sexual orientation when faced with Caravaggio's *Adolescent Bacchus*, felt themselves dissolving to the point of collapsing onto the floor after seeing the Massacios in the

Cappella Brancacci, and had their gazes somehow reciprocated by Donatello's *David* in the Bargello<sup>20</sup>. Here, one might bear in mind William James' admonition regarding odd phenomena. Remarking on the pioneering results brought about by the founding fathers of psychotherapy, the US-American pragmatist noted that while their "clinical records sound like fairy tales when one first reads them, yet it is impossible to doubt their accuracy." He concludes: "They throw [...] a wholly new light upon our natural constitution."<sup>21</sup> Perhaps these exact words of caution apply to the cases reported by Magherini in *La sindrome di Stendhal*. The question is how to integrate such disturbing reports into the fold of our theories of artistic reception.

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## Endnotes

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# Japanese-Brazilian Painting in São Paulo in 1950: Intergenerational Shift and a New Confluence of Forms and Foreign Ideas

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## **ABSTRACT**

Created in São Paulo during the 1930s, the Seibi-kai group was comprised of artists immigrants from Japan who aimed to potentialize their training within modernists parameters. It worked as a route for international references and techniques, linking the art worlds of Rio de Janeiro, Tokyo, São Paulo, and Paris. The Seibi-kai gained a new generation of artists in the 1940s, formed by the students of the group's elder members. The first half of this paper describes the interrelation between these two generations, the interchange of international references, and how their balance was disrupted with the emergence of São Paulo's Biennial and the abstract art scene in the 1950s. The second half of this text follows Manabu Mabe's trajectory: initially a member of this second generation, he would later make experimentations with abstract forms presented in the Biennials. Mabe was awarded in the V Biennial and was considered one of the greatest Brazilian painters of the period. That was the first time a member of the Seibi was consecrated, which made him a new master to be followed by the other painters of the group.

## **KEYWORDS**

Seibi-Kai; Manabu Mabe; Japanese Brazilian paint; Brazilian modernism; São Paulo Biennial.

Although the canonical narratives about Brazilian modernism do not take immigration into account, the characters selected by then invite the researcher to analyze the movements and experiences of foreigners in our country.<sup>1</sup> From Anita Malfatti, whose parents were Italian and North-American, to the heralds of concretism such as Franz Weissman and Waldemar Cordeiro, the pantheon is full of immigrants or sons of immigrants, like Lasar Segall, Victor Brecheret, Cândido Portinari, José Pancetti, and Alfredo Volpi. Even among the patronage, their presence was remarkable, like that of Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, creator and president of the Museum of Modern Art and the Biennials of São Paulo.

For this subject, the 1930s was a remarkable period: it was when the young artists started to organize themselves into associations aiming for training in modernist art<sup>2</sup>. The Bernadelli Nucleus was founded in Rio de Janeiro, then the federal capital, in the National School of Fine Arts basements<sup>3</sup>. In São Paulo, an association composed mostly of Italians and Italian descendants was entitled Grupo Santa Helena and the Japanese immigrants created the Seibi-kai<sup>4</sup>.

The Seibi was strongly active during the 1940s and 1950s and sustained a periodic Salon during the 1960s<sup>5</sup>. As recorded in their founding minutes, it aimed, among other things, the art education of its members and subsidize their contact with non-Japanese intellectual groups<sup>6</sup>. As a network, it linked Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Paris, New York, Tokyo, and Mexico City among other places. It featured at least 3 generations of artists, who supported each other and who had in their elders the masters with whom they should learn and whom they had to surpass. This paper focuses on the dynamic between the first and the second generation of this group, their international links, and the impact caused by the Biennial and the abstract art on the internal balance of the group. I argue that the dynamics of this group marked by immigration, sustained reception, and implementation of modernist ideas and forms in São Paulo.

The first generation was trained in vocational Schools in São Paulo, such as Escola Profissional Masculina do Brás, but also in São Paulo's School of Fine Arts, which was inaugurated in 1932 in the neighborhood of Liberdade.

Tomoo Handa was the first Japanese-born student of this art school, where also studied Shigeto Tanaka, Hajime Higaki, Yoshiya Takaoka, and Yuji Tamaki<sup>7</sup>.

According to Handa, members of Seibi discussed, in the 1930s and 1940s, the works of painters associated with the history of Parisian art, such as Van Gogh, Cézanne, Picasso, Matisse, and the style they used to practice would be impressionism<sup>8</sup>. Indeed, the group and the impressionists shared an interest in the same topic, especially Tomoo Handa, who painted landscapes aimed to represent the urban peripheries and rural spaces of São Paulo state, especially the capital and the town of Lins, which held one of the largest Japanese community at the time. Both cities were connected by the Railboard Noroeste do Brasil<sup>9</sup>. Cecília França Lourenço also identified the Vangoghian formula of the parallel strokes in Takaoka's painting, specialty in his autoportrait<sup>10</sup>.

Takaoka and Tamaji lived in Rio de Janeiro when the SEIBI was founded. They took part in Bernadelli Nucleo. Their network went beyond the Brazilian borders, reaching Japanese painters living in Paris, who later eventually resided in Rio. Two of them were Tsguharu Fujita, who lived in Portinari's apartment, and also Tadashi Kaminagai, a painter with sympathy for the fauvism, who arrived in Rio in 1941, with a recommendation letter from Fujita, especially addressed to Portinari<sup>11</sup>.

When Kaminagai arrived in Brazil, World War II made his return to Japan impossible. He lived in Rio for 14 years and founded a Frame Shop in Santa Tereza neighborhood, where he usually received young painters eager for training<sup>12</sup>. Handa, Kaminagai, and specially Takaoka will be the masters followed by the second generation of the Seibi Group.

The number of racist aggressions against the Japanese grew exponentially in Brazil during the war. Their language was forbidden and their freedom of assembly was banned. That made it impossible for Seibi to continue with its public activities. With the end of the war, the members of the group created parallel associations, which aimed to approximate themselves to the Brazilian community, including non-Japanese among their members. One of these associations, The Guanabara Group outstands. It was

settled in Fukushima's house, who returned to São Paulo after studying with the Bernadelli Nucleo and with Kaminagai in Rio. It worked between 1950 and 1959 and congregated some of the Seibi's members and other young artists eager for training in arts, such as Wega Nery, Manabu Mabe, Flávio Tanaka, Arcangelo Ianelli, Alizira Pecorary, and Ismênia Coaraci<sup>13</sup>. All those painters would be later recognized for their contribution to the development of abstract art in São Paulo. The Japanese would be regarded as part of Seibi's second generation.

If the carrier of the first generation was developed with the Paulista Salon of fine arts, founded in 1933, the second generation would be deeply shaped by the São Paulo Biennial, inaugurated in 1951.

One of the main architects of the Biennials, Lourival Gomes Machado considered the Salon's system hostile to the new artists, who were supposedly forced to follow the taste and the guidelines of the elders. Lourival considered the Salons consequently inadequate to modern art, which was supposedly marked by the constant changes in styles and by the free experimentation by the artists<sup>14</sup>. The Biennials were created, therefore, as an intervention in the Brazilian arts. It aimed to bring an upgrade to local production following international standards. As a new system, it shared prizes of the best Brazilian artworks, following the decisions of a Juri composed of nationals and foreign persons, mostly art critics. As it is obvious, a considerable part of these judges was ignorant of the Brazilian art context and the trajectory of the artists. A lot of times, their only resources for establishing the national values were the one offered by the Biennial itself - the expographic narrative, renewed every two years, which created, by one side, a Brazilian art panorama, and by another, the international parameters, inferred in the way the artworks were launched, or as a new experience or as a modernist canon. In this new system, Brazilian artists competed against each other. Firstly in the admission process, which selected the artworks to be exposed. Secondly, within the chosen group, during the exhibition, having the international panorama as a background. Firstly in the admission process, which selected the artworks to be exposed. Secondly, within the chosen group, during the exhibition, having the international panorama as a background. As Brazilian

artists sought to gain international recognition; making works that blended with Biennial international oeuvres was a goal for a lot of the artists of the period. As a strategy, they didn't want to produce artworks considered outdated or qualitatively worse than the international ones.

The Brazilian exhibition in the first Biennial, in 1951, presented a universe of still-lives, landscapes, and portraits marked by more or less evident deformations. The international background was also characterized by eclecticism, with different styles equally exhibited, and included the abstract painting as a real and valuable possible experience. Gradually, during the 1950's Biennials, this new style predominated and became a synonym of modern art for part of the Brazilian artists.



**Fig. 1.** Manabu Mabe. *Composição B* (1956). 120 x 120 cm. Oil on canvas. Lost artwork.

This development became completely evident in the IV Biennial, in which abstract art dominated the Brazilian artwork selections, almost all geometrical. Lourival Gomes Machado, a member of the admission jury of that edition, said that the figurative artists roughly applied for the competition<sup>15</sup>. In the same year, the reglementary primes for Brazilian art were given, for the first time, just for abstract artworks made by artists without projection before the beginning of the Biennial. That is, for the younger artists, for whom Lourival wished the Biennial were directed.



**Fig. 2.** Alberto Texeira, member of Ateliê Abstração. Intensidade (1954). 72,6 x 72,6 cm. Oil on Canvas. Houston: Museum of Fine Arts.

The first generation's masters of the Seibi made figurative artworks and nourished the social concerns that were common in the Brazilian production of the 1930s and 1940s. Their works were refused in the second Biennial and they gave up on applying for the following competitions<sup>46</sup>.



**Fig. 3.** Manabu Mabe. *Vitorioso* (1958). 130 x 162 cm. Oil on canvas. Lost artwork.

The new generation sought to renew their work according to the new parameters. At this moment, a group of artists joined the Ateliê Abstração for training in abstract art with Samson Flexor, a West-Europe-born artist, naturalized French, who resided in São Paulo since the 1940s. In a testimonial, Wega Nery said that her proximity with Fléxor happened because she wanted to be up to date with the Biennial parameters<sup>47</sup>. Manabu Mabe lived in Lins during this period and never was officially a student in the Ateliê Abstração, but some of his paintings resemble the works of the atelier's

members. A clipping of a local newspaper from Lins, in Mabe's possessions, dated August 25 of 1957, informs about Mabe's moving to São Paulo following a Fléxor invitation<sup>18</sup>.

Mabe began his experiments with abstraction in 1955 but will be nationally and internationally recognized by a specific style developed after 1957, in which we can recognize an appropriation of the foreign styles highlighted in the IV São Paulo Biennial.

His works, from 1958 and 1959, are characterized by large, decisive, dark, and intercrossed brushstrokes detached from the background. The composition resembles Japanese ideograms: an association highlighted by the press and critics of the period and common until today.



**Fig. 4.** Manabu Mabe. Profeta (1959). 110 x 130 cm. Oil on canvas. Lost artwork.

Mabe, in turn, operated against this interpretation in his interviews for the newspapers. He also declared his dislike for Japanese painting, which he considered excessively technical and without emotion<sup>19</sup>. He refused the label of a tachist painter and associated his work with “abstract expressionism”<sup>20</sup>.

Abstract expressionism was exhibited by the United States of America in the latest Biennial, in 1957, next to Jackson Pollock’s retrospective, which was settled in a Special Room, the type of place usually reserved for the canonical styles or artists. It was the first time that a non-geometrical abstraction received this status in the São Paulo Biennials. Thus, this kind of painting represented a novelty for the Brazilian artists, whose impact was yet to be evaluated. The United States organized his exhibition, which Pollock in a Special room and just the abstract expressionism in the main exhibition, in such a way signaling that it was not merely a historical style, but a consolidated tendency for contemporary art, headed to the future of modern art. This message was also reaffirmed by the reglementary primes distributed among the Brazilian artists in that edition: all addressed to abstract artists, three non-geometrical, in a total of five.

On this same occasion, three international jury members were interviewed by a Brazilian newspaper; one was reticent against the geometric abstraction, and the other two were frankly hostile. Alfred Barr Jr, one of them, said that Frans Krajcberg was awarded the best Brazilian painter because he refused geometry<sup>21</sup>. Therefore, the change in Mabe’s styles was towards the direction pointed as the most promissory tendency among that presented by the Biennial.

Franz Kline seems to be the main reference for these works of Mabe, who also makes experiences with the black and white palette which is characteristic of the North American painter. In some of their works, it is also possible to recognize the use of drippings, an obvious reference to Jackson Pollock. Mabe used it to make more dynamic the use of the texture and the material of the background.



**Fig. 5.** Manabu Mabe. *It Oriental* (1958). Oil/canvas. 122 x 150 cm. Private Collection.

With these artworks, Mabe won the Leirner Prize in 1958, the São Paulo Biennial of 1959, and was awarded in the Biennials of Paris and Venice. His success led him to a distinguished position among immigrant artists. The Japanese painter Kazuo Wakabayashi moved to Brazil in 1961 and asked for Mabe's help. Mabe received the new painter in his own home and introduced him to his local network<sup>22</sup>. The same attitude was taken by the first generation of the *Seibi* when the second emerged.

### **Conclusion**

The carrier of the Japanese painters of São Paulo was conditioned by a solidarity network, which gave them (i) transit in the art world and access to

non-Japanese groups; (2) Artistic training for those who wanted to be part of the art world; (3) Access to foreign ideas and forms.

The internal balance of this network was profoundly changed by the development of the São Paulo Biennial. The system in which the masters of the first generation were trained became outdated. Those artists did not have the disposition or the necessary knowledge to make the paint valued by the Biennial.

This network resisted, despite the changes brought by the Biennial. Mostly due to the second generation, which quickly adapted to the new parameters and expectations, by finding new masters and by metabolizing the international references launched by those seasonal exhibitions. Manabu Mabe was consecrated at this moment, raising the Japanese-Brazilian paint to the national and international pantheon of recognition.

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## Endnotes

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# **Cities Made of Silver. The Impact of Migration Processes and Architectural Theory on the Urban Planning of Early Modern Mining Towns**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In the wake of the silver boom in the 16th century, countless silver towns sprang up in Europe and Latin America. An analysis of different migration processes involving individual actors, as well as media, shows that distinct urban spaces emerged in silver mining regions across the globe. In contrast to the prevailing view that these were unplanned settlements, this paper demonstrates how early modern concepts based on the interconnection of architectural theory and regulatory policy found their way into urban design of mining towns and merged with traditional and local forms.

## **KEYWORDS**

Mining City; Urban Planning; Urban Design; Potosí; Annaberg.

The early modern world was characterized by profound changes in the socioeconomic structure. This included the expansion and consolidation of ever more complex global trade relations, an influx of silver from Latin America, and the steady expansion of urbanization.<sup>1</sup> The European occupation of the Americas led to an increasing interconnection of different markets. Transatlantic and transpacific trade activities based on the monetary economy grew. The period between 1450 and 1600 is also referred to as “[t]he great age of silver”.<sup>2</sup> Silver formed the basis for strong economies and served as currency money to stabilize economic cycles.<sup>3</sup> The most important sources of silver, existing and new, were mines in Tyrol and Croatia, renewed mining in the Ore Mountains of Saxony and Harz mountains, and the silver deposits exploited by the Spanish in the two viceroyalties of New Spain and Peru. Mining developed a reputation as the non-agricultural industry par excellence and was the most urbanized of all the economic sectors of the 16th century.<sup>4</sup> As a result, mining towns sprang up all over the world, but especially in Spanish-influenced areas, Saxony and in the Harz.

Research into urban history has focused on mining towns as a distinctive type of town that emerged in Europe in the 12th century. The word *Bergstadt*, however, is not a recently coined term; early New High German dictionaries cite evidence of its use as far back as in the 14th century.<sup>5</sup> In Spanish, the terms *ciudad minera*, *real de minas* and especially *asiento de minas* are used extensively in contemporary sources.<sup>6</sup> Pierre Levadan, for example, spoke of the *ville montaigne*. He emphasized that the complex topographical situation of mining towns made it difficult to apply geometrical layouts.<sup>7</sup> In German-language research, the classification of the mining town as a distinctive type went hand in hand with a narrowly defined focus on its function.<sup>8</sup> Studies of Latin American towns usually resulted in a one-dimensional assessment of urban design. Mining towns were basically considered unplanned settlements in the so-called *modo irregular*. Their layout was subordinate to their function as well as the institutions and business activities of the mining industry.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, the focus was predominantly on the technical, legal and social history of these towns. Issues

related to urbanism and architecture were usually only dealt with in monographs.

In this paper, I will show how in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, newly founded silver mining towns on both sides of the Atlantic were, as population magnets, integrated into a far-reaching trade network and equipped with the necessary financial means to participate in innovations in urban planning and architecture — innovations that could be applied here largely due to the fact of the towns being newly established. The diffusion of architectural theory and the vocabulary and development of architectural forms is complex since both were rarely documented and many of the buildings have since been lost. In the 16th century, architectural theory and forms spread either by means of architectural treatises<sup>10</sup> and engravings or through individual traveling agents. Here, connections across the Atlantic occurred on a meta-level, for example, through tendencies in regulatory policy or architectural theory, which were based on the same early modern political principles and architectural models. The activities examined here are the subject of heterogeneous migration processes, like the ones of the early modern period described, for example, by Casallila.<sup>11</sup> These will be analyzed with a focus on the chains of processes that shaped the urban planning of the mining towns under examination. How did rule-based urban planning unfold on the basis of writings on the theory of architecture and in interaction with sovereign regulatory policy? Did it merge with local urban planning traditions? What was the influence of the agents involved? As a result of examining these questions, a more differentiated picture of the 16th-century mining town emerges, contributing to an updated global assessment.

Schneeberg, in the Ore Mountains, is thought to be one of the earliest large mining settlements of the “long 16<sup>th</sup> century.” When the discovery of silver was first reported around 1470, miners began settling on the spot. In 1477, the landholders issued the first mining regulations, and that same year, parts of the area were enclosed by barriers. Fifty-six mines were located within this zone, and in 1481, the settlement was granted town privileges and mining rights. It was not until 1492 that attempts were made to put a stop to the haphazard building activities and introduce measures to structure the

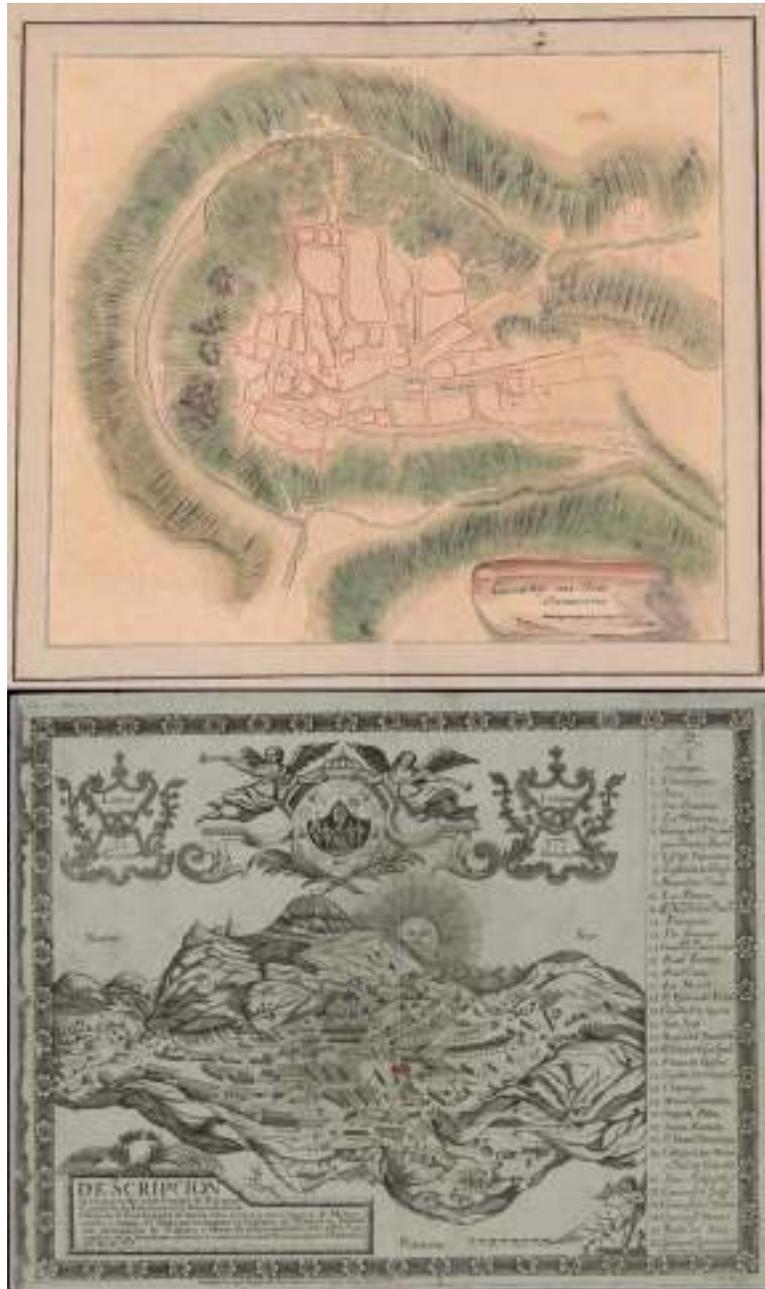
development. Space was cleared for a central marketplace, but it was not until 1527, when the town hall was built, that a more defined square was created.<sup>12</sup>

A similar development occurred in one of the oldest mining towns on the other side of the Atlantic. Zacatecas was founded in 1546 in what is now Mexico but was, back then, the viceroyalty of New Spain. By 1551, 409 houses had already been built, but there were no municipal institutions.<sup>13</sup> Only gradually did a main church, convents of the religious orders active in New Spain, a hospital, and a town hall appear on the *plaza mayor*. In the center, we can make out the rudiments of a city structure. Here, two large inner-city squares were created around the main church, with the church-oriented towards the iconic Cerro de la Bufa and its mines. Overall, however, the city fits the “classic” image of a mining town created through uncontrolled growth.<sup>14</sup> Comparable developments can be seen in the mining towns of Guanajuato, New Spain, Clausthal and Zellerfeld in the Harz, and Joachimsthal in the Ore Mountains. A challenging topography, a potential that was difficult to predict, legal disputes, and cautious territorial or local administrations resulted in fast-growing settlements for which subsequent replanning was near impossible.

Annaberg in the Ore Mountains and Potosí in Bolivia marks a transition to the development of a new type of mining town. Annaberg was founded in 1497 by Georg Wettin, the Duke of Saxony, and was immediately granted town privileges. This included instructions to create orderly urban structures and build “fine” houses.<sup>15</sup> The planning process was supported by well-educated and well-connected officials, miners, and the duke himself.<sup>16</sup>

The design was based on both local traditions and early modern principles of town planning. An almost circular layout was created, featuring an elaborate, medieval-looking wall and a central marketplace with a town hall. The residence of the territorial lord was located at the edge of the settlement, and the church was placed away from the market on the most important transport route. At the same time, the grid-like layout of the streets, the rectangular marketplace, the elevated positioning of the church, and the location of the hospital and cemetery outside the gates show an

awareness of concepts of early modern urban planning. The placement of the cemetery and the hospital, both problematic in terms of hygiene, prevented the prevailing westerlies from carrying harmful vapors into the city. The orientation of the streets was designed to minimize exposure to the winds, as had been recommended by Vitruvius, for example.<sup>17</sup>



**Fig. 1.** Anonymus, Plan of Schneeberg, circa 1750, drawing (above) ©Dresden, Sächsische Landesbibliothek - Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Dresden (SLUB), Adelung, Johann Christoph, Kartensammlung, Signatur/ Inventar-Nr.: SLUB/KS A14540. Bernardo Portugal (drawing), Jose Simon de Larrea (engraving), Descripción de la muy noble, y leal Ciudad de Zacatecas, 1799, engraving (below). Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, John Carter Brown Map Collection, 4960-000



**Fig. 2.** Annaberg, city plan, about 1592, in: Paulus Jenisius, *Annaebergae Misniae Oppidi Historia*, Annaberg 1592, ink on paper ©Bibliothek Städtische Museen Annaberg-Buchholz, Erzgebirgsmuseum

Potosí, on the other hand, like Schneeberg, was founded spontaneously in 1545 on the slopes of the Cerro Rico in the immediate vicinity of an Indigenous settlement. Within a very short time, the silver deposits turned out to be extremely profitable, so that the *asiento de minas* grew quickly. The initial focal point was the *qato*, a huge inner-city marketplace based on the Indigenous Andine model.<sup>18</sup> But by 1559, after the rich upper class of miners had petitioned the Crown for elevation to the status of town, the inner city had been restructured extensively.<sup>19</sup> This led to the implementation of a grid plan based on what was the convention of Spanish-colonial urban planning.<sup>20</sup> In Potosí, the new main square consisted

of the *iglesia mayor*, the *casas reales* and the town hall. The monasteries of the main orders were built along the main roads near the nucleus of the city. But distinct remnants of the earlier Indigenous settlement can still be identified in the remaining large inner-city marketplaces — now clearly defined — and in the areas populated by Indigenous people that surrounded the grid-like nucleus of the city.



**Fig. 3.** Planta general de la Villa Ymperial de Potosí, around 1600, ink and watercolor on paper. © Library of the Hispanic Society of America, New York

Toribio de Alcaraz, a well-traveled and experienced stonemason, had likely been responsible for planning this transformation. We know that he was involved in other building projects throughout the town.<sup>21</sup> He came from an influential family of stonemasons in Alcaraz in the Albacete region<sup>22</sup> and had traveled to Potosí via Seville, Lima, Arequipa, and La Plata (now Sucre, Bolivia). There, he had been in charge of the restructuring of the central

square and for constructing almost all of the surrounding houses that were furnished with imposing facades.<sup>23</sup>

From 1559 onwards, conventions of urban planning were codified in the ordinances introduced by the viceroys Andrés Hurtado de Mendoza, Marqués de Cañete and Diego López de Zúñiga y Velasco, conde de Nieva. These determined the placement of the different institutions in the city (the town hall, *casas reales* and the main church were to be located on the central, rectangular square) and the distribution of the different convents. They also prescribed the construction of uniform streets and rectangular blocks modeled on Lima.<sup>24</sup> In 1567, Juan de Matienzo, an influential judge in the administration of the Potosís region, completed his book *Gobierno del Peru*. It included a city plan that, for the first time, illustrated this codified form of urban planning.<sup>25</sup> Both the written territorial regulations and the built architecture drew on Spanish tradition as well as on early modern architectural theory that had been disseminated in Spain since the beginning of the 15th century through Diego de Sagredo's *Medidas del Romano* and various editions of Vitruvius.<sup>26</sup>

The next phase saw new towns being established based on consolidated planning specifications. In 1519, silver had also been discovered in the vicinity of Annaberg. Numerous miners and fortune seekers flocked to the region. The area was under the control of Duke Heinrich von Wettin, the brother of the founder of Annaberg. In 1521, he instigated the planning, surveying, and building a uniformly structured, square city. The city was aligned around a square marketplace featuring a mining office and town hall, with four streets dividing the layout into uniform quarters of rectangular blocks. The mastermind behind the plan was Ulrich Rühle, one of the region's most important humanists who had made a name for himself as a mathematician, doctor, and mining expert and had written one of the first mining guides north of the Alps.<sup>27</sup> During the planning, he drew on this knowledge and, most likely, on Fra Giovanni Giocondo's first illustrated edition of Vitruvius from 1511. Like urban planning, mining was based on the exact and skilled measurement of tunnels and calculations of the drift as well as of ownership rights. Rühle had included this knowledge in his guidebook

and was now able to apply it to surveying the city. That he knew of and adopted Vitruvius's ideas is shown by his designs for a sundial<sup>28</sup> which pick up on Vitruvius's division into the cardinal points.<sup>29</sup> If we compare the urban structure of Marienberg — streets arranged in the form of a grid divided into blocks and turned on a corner so as to protect the city from the prevailing winds — with Giocondo's illustrations of the layout and orientation of the Vitruvian city,<sup>30</sup> we can see several similarities.



**Fig. 4.** Adam Schneider, *Ichonografia Maribergensis*, Marienberg, detail of the city center, 1689, ink on paper. ©Sächsisches Staatsarchiv, 40044 Generalrisse, Nr. 1-E18460

The tendency towards formalization is now also found in Mexico and Peru. After extensive preparatory work, Philip II issued the famous *Ordenanzas de Descubrimiento nueva población y pacificación de las Indias* for the colonies in 1573. The *Ordenanzas* contained the most detailed town planning regulations of the time.<sup>31</sup> It quoted whole passages of Vitruvius, such as specifications for the structure of the central square, which should consider the city's expected growth and be equipped with arcades or the general alignment in accordance with the main winds. At the same time, the *Ordenanzas* integrated forms of the medieval Spanish city that incorporated knowledge from antiquity and had been handed down since the Middle Ages.<sup>32</sup> The *Ordenanzas* transformed into norms generally accepted principles to be applied across the empire. An urban planning system had now been introduced and written into law that made it possible to establish settlements and cities almost anywhere in a simple and uncomplicated way by implementing rational and orderly concepts, creating uniformity while still allowing for flexibility.

In 1583, capitán Miguel Caldera, of Spanish and Indigenous descent, and Juan de Oñate, from Zacatecas, established a Guachichiles settlement in New Spain called San Luis.<sup>33</sup> In 1592, rich silver and gold deposits were discovered at Cerro de San Pedro close-by and subsequently the pueblo de San Luis Minas de Potosí was founded. It featured a hybrid layout that combined an earlier Indigenous settlement — consisting of large squares — with a New Spanish city. Since there were no decrees on urban planning, it must be assumed that the planners were in part guided by the *Ordenanzas* of 1573. The oldest known city plan from 1593 shows 19 blocks and an open square — a structure that basically follows the specifications of the *Ordenanzas*.<sup>34</sup> The *casas reales* and the granary, as well as the prison and a simple parish church were placed on the eastern side of the square. The convents of the main ecclesiastical orders were situated at the corners of the city nucleus.<sup>35</sup> A more recent plan from 1794 shows two inner-city squares of different sizes and blocks of different dimensions. It illustrates a combination of two concepts of urban design: the agriculturally dominated, larger blocks

that originated from the Indigenous settlement and those of the Spaniards that were smaller and intended for commercial use.<sup>36</sup>

San Felipe de los Austrias, founded in 1606 in the viceroyalty of Peru north of Potosí, also complied with many of the requirements of the *Ordenanzas*. After more and more reports that silver had been found in the region were received by the regional administration authority of Oruro, the *Audiencia* in La Plata (today's Sucre) sent *licenciado* Manuel Castro y Padilla to the region. His task was to find a place near the recently rediscovered mines that met the necessary conditions for the founding of a town: a good climate, good air and soil, timber and pasture. Padilla had studied at the Colegio San Bartolomé in Salamanca and knew the legal ordinances of the Crown very well. At the site, he analyzed the location of the miners' simple huts. The miners had taken advantage of the shelter provided by the two mountains that enclosed the site in a crescent shape and protected it from the winds of the altiplano. There was a good source of drinking water and since all the necessary conditions for a town were met, he chose this location. He then commissioned Alvaro de Moya and Pedro Maletto to design the layout. The miners' huts were removed, and plots were dissolved in order to redistribute the land. The city of Villa de San Felipe de Austria y Asiento de Minas de Oruro was founded on November 1.<sup>37</sup> The block to the north of the main square remained in possession of the city for municipal building projects. As was customary, plots of land were distributed on the condition that possession was taken by December 8 and that they were built on within two years. Otherwise, ownership would revert to the city. The founding act basically provided for the construction of all the institutions required by the *Ordenanzas* of 1573. As was often the case, the Indigenous people were left with only the *rancherías* or the option of returning to their *repartimientos*.<sup>38</sup>



**Fig. 5.** La Noble y Leal Ciudad de S[an] Luis Potosí, dividida en Cuarteles de Orden Superior del Excelentísimo Señor Virrey Marqués de Branciforte, 1794. (above) ©España, Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte, AGI, MP-MEXICO,456BIS Oruro, city plan, 1781, ink and watercolor on paper, (below) ©unknown

Subsequently, several such *reales de minas* were founded throughout the Zacatecas region,<sup>39</sup> their architecture based on the principles mentioned above. In the Ore Mountains, too, we can find tendencies towards standardization with the founding of Elterlein and Scheibenberg,<sup>40</sup> and with the systematically planned mining towns of St. Andreasberg (founded in 1537) and Zellerfeld (built in 1672 after a devastating fire in Clausthal) in the Harz mountains.<sup>41</sup>

In relation to the planning of the newly founded mining towns, I would like to propose a three-stage process. To start with, the improvised boomtowns postulated in the history of research predominated. Then, territorial lords and the viceroys countered these developments by imposing stronger planning regulations and incorporating new concepts. In the last stage, these concepts can be considered as established and found expression, among other things, in a tendency towards standardization. Reducing these towns to their mining function and simply characterizing them as provisional “mining camps” falls well short. Vitruvian architectural theory and humanist thinking were introduced by town planners and mediated by the regulatory policy of the territorial lords. As a result, considerations such as choosing the ideal settlement site and observing hygienic preconditions and climatic factors became more and more important. Chessboard-shaped inner cities emerged. This process resulted from the knowledge of well-trained humanists and experienced architects and the distribution of texts. Architectural treatises and legal ordinances became the vehicles for consolidating ideas around urban design.

Local traditions, however, continued to play an important role in structuring towns and found their way into the planning process. In this way, the new cities met early modern hygiene requirements and complied with European principles of order, and at the same time, took into account local or traditional designs for a town square or the placement of individual buildings. I suggest that further research be undertaken into the interplay between territorial and municipal efforts to regulate urban planning and the continual integration of theoretical architectural concepts. Moreover, researchers are only now approaching the question of the role played by Indigenous people

in the urban planning process. The migration of ideas and concepts, carried and received by agents who were attracted by the opportunities offered by the fast-growing cities, expressed itself in a complex architectural hybrid. As Peter Burke proposes, we can here draw on an approach that has emerged within Renaissance studies and is largely based on the assumption of a “mixing” of different components.<sup>42</sup> Such a “mixing” occurred mainly in contact zones like cities, the court and border regions.<sup>43</sup> As far as Latin America is concerned, we should also not forget the problematic colonial context of hybridity in general<sup>44</sup> and the urban strategy of the conquest in particular.<sup>45</sup> We have to surpass the notion of the architecture of conquest,<sup>46</sup> as has already been suggested by Dean and Leibsohn with their concept of the invisibility of hybridity.<sup>47</sup> In European mining cities, new or foreign models were implemented and merged with traditional planning and architecture. Locally trained craftsmen still played a big part in the cities’ realization and their designs were reflected, for example, in the materials and building techniques used. The same applies to the examples discussed from Latin America. In Potosí<sup>48</sup> and San Luis de Potosí,<sup>49</sup> Indigenous masters and officials executed the architectural work and, in both cities, Indigenous and European urban concepts were merged. Further research in this field is needed to better understand the movements, changes and amalgamations of architecture and urban design beyond the universally known and much-studied cultural centers. This will allow us to include less familiar but nonetheless influential members of the building industry in the still rather hermetic art historical canon, and to further analyze migration movements and their effects in accordance with the requirements of the methodological discussion.

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# The Evolution of Socialist Realist Style in Chinese Political Propaganda Posters (1949-1976)

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper reassesses the artworks produced during Mao's era (1949-1976) from the perspective of complexity in their creation and collection practices. Although the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), foregrounding the term "culture", was of great significance, there is a dearth of research on this aspect. Existing works contextualize the significant shifts and changes of the Maoist years. Studies dealing with propaganda posters are rare, and their analysis as a sociological phenomenon is more so. Therefore, the artworks are ubiquitously seen as just propaganda, with complete condensation of the artist's position, accompanying practices or institutional spaces. This paper attempts to fill that lacuna by providing a constellation of the given epoch's diverse social, cultural, and aesthetic assemblage. It follows the trajectories of academic artists in China who worked with Konstantin M. Maksimov, the Soviet Art Educator. This academic training in socialist realism transgresses the contours of painting as a medium with foundational continuity visible in posters. Therefore, posters produced during this time are incredibly diverse in themes, and some are easily mistaken for paintings. This study examines the transition of art style from "importism" to developing a unique vocabulary separate from the Soviet model. A close analysis of these collections reveals the departures from earlier Soviet influences to a more contextual language specific to China.

## **KEYWORDS**

Chinese Propaganda Posters; Socialist Realism; Cultural Revolution; Visual Studies; Chinese Art.

### Introduction

Was Socialist Realism a quaint art theory during the twentieth century, or was it a way to disseminate political ideology? Did it follow the same framework in countries outside the Soviet Union regardless of the time period? Or was it more of a local phenomenon, moulded by the country's specific cultural setting and time period?

In *Art and Illusion*, Gombrich (1984, 148) states that art is closely entwined with its tradition, whether accepted, rejected, or modified. The question of an artist's adoption or rejection of an alien form or theory entirely depends on fulfilling their essential needs. Said (1983, 243), in the theorization of 'travelling theory', points out that theories are assigned meanings according to "where, when and how they are deployed". He categorises the whole process of movement of ideas into four stages. First, the circulation of theory leads to a break from the place of origin, thereby leading him to question further whether, after transmission from one place and point of time to the other, the theory serves the same vigour for which it was created. Second, a theory is constantly subjected to modification; hence, it is a perpetual work in progress. Third, the new historical and political ethos, local axioms, and taboos influence this modification or adaptation. Fourth, this theory now acquires a new ethos, thereby becoming a tool to interpret the local social reality.

However, there is a dearth of critical studies on Socialist Realism in China. Most of the existing research focuses on Socialist Realism in the Soviet. Totalitarian Art explores the commonalities between the art policies of the Soviet and Germany. PRC is seen as an extension of Soviet style Socialist Realism. Galikowski (1990) does a focused study on PRC. Still, the overarching theme is similar to the totalitarian perspective, where the focus point is the ideological and hierarchical control the party exerted on art institutions in PRC. *Socialist Realism Without Shores* offers a fresh perspective on the theory as it combines analysis from a myriad of authors covering different nations like China, France, the United States, and Hungary. In the book, both Groys' essay "A Style and a Half: Socialist Realism between Modernism and Postmodernism" and Zhang's essay "The Power of Rewriting:

Postrevolutionary Discourse on Chinese Socialist Realism” reiterate a similar argument that socialist realism is a form of modernism. Although the last couple of decades has enabled the sinologists to view the complicated relationship between politics and art and view socialist realist art within modernity, Chinese propaganda system is still seen as extension of Leninist rhetoric. Andrews and Shen (2012) in their book, only deals with general stylistic elements of Soviet Socialist Realism incorporated by Chinese artists.

This paper evaluates the paradigm shift, accelerated by escalation and later a decline of specific stylistic aspects, which led to the creation of new artistic canons, characteristic of making national formations in art. This shift is studied by employing the methodology of John Clark (2014, 70) where artworks are seen as an interaction of exogenous (external) phenomenon with endogenous (internal) forces. It further attempts to map the complex internal or endogenous forces that played an imperative role in developing the theory of Realism to Socialist Realism to Mao's Revolutionary Realism. Xudong (1997, 290) attributes PRC's complex political, revolutionary, and cultural histories as a prelude to Socialist Realism's theory. This could be one of the reasons why some scholars refer to Socialist Realism in the PRC as a "Cultural folklore."

The formulations of the Soviet Writers Congress only served as a relevant historical guide for Chinese Socialist cultural policy. There is no denying that in the beginning, the Soviet was treated as an archetype for modernization and Soviet aesthetics worked as a framework to provide validity to achieve world progress. In the early 1950s, the Soviets functioned as the epitome of progress and modernity not only for the CCP but also for the people. Therefore, Soviet values and aesthetics worked as ideological frameworks to achieve massive industrialization. However, the political and social mobilizations<sup>4</sup> paved another way for the Socialist Realist style. The Socialist Realist style after that was steeped with "revolutionary romanticism whose function was to register the ongoing revolutionary fervour which included the local cultural and symbolic imagery. Thus, "revolutionary romanticism" is a point of departure in the Chinese variant of Socialist Realism. This "revolutionary romanticism", when combined with

"revolutionary realism", resulted in a utopian space where the historical telos is manifested by displaying the completion of ongoing socioeconomic and ideological construction. This space is where Mao's idea of "continuous revolution" is merged with socialist realism's principle of depicting reality as timeless spatialization.

### Types of Siting of Artist

Other than the Soviet Writers Congress and Yanan Talks, the Socialist Realist style owes its escalation to decline to certain artistic styles. This deconstruction is imperative to pave the way for imaginative renewal. Based on the empirical model of John Clark (2014, 70-73), a comprehensive mapping of art cohorts with their artworks and epochs is done by forming chronological categories which are interlaced with their stylistic trajectories. These are:

Categories	Type one	Type two
	The ones who went abroad to learn the techniques.	Artists have not visited outside and are in contact with the alien style through foreign teachers in educational institutions. (Students of Maximov)
<b>Foreign influence and realism</b>	USSR: Li Tianxiang, Chen Zunsan, Lin Gang, Quan Shanshi, Xiao Feng, DengShu (nianhua artist), and Li Jun France : Xu Beihong, Yen Wen-liang, Hsu Pei-hung, Pang Xunqin, Liu Haisu and Lin Feng-mien	
<b>Socialist Realism</b>	USSR:Yan Han Jiang Feng and Cai Ruohong	Hou Yimin Jin Shangyi Zhan Jianjun Wu Dezu
<b>Transformation into Maoist revolutionary Realism</b>	Vietnam: Dong Xiwen	Hou Yimin Jin Shangyi Zhan Jianjun Wu Dezu

### Foreign Influence and Realism

Among the plethora of isms introduced to China in the twentieth century, Realism garnered the most attention from reformist artists and intellectual circles. Thinkers like Hu Shi, Ch'en Tu-hsiu and Li Dazhao were against the traditional culture and referred to it as *jing* (passive). (Li 1993, xi) Chen Duxiu, and Lu Xun, favoured reforming the traditional literati painting. Other than that, Kang Youwei, Chen Duxiu, Xu Beihong, and Cai Yuanpei, one of the most influential figures in the intellectual circle, agreed that art had stagnated. They delineated the reasons behind the fall of literati painting as its inability to depict the objective reality. In *Far Eastern Art*, Sherman Lee notes the repetitiveness of painting in China since 1800. "Although interesting work surfaced from time to time.... these add nothing to a general survey of the field". The May Fourth Movement played a pivotal role in activating the *dong* (active) aspect of the western model of art, which had a physical engagement with reality.

Huang Binhong hoped for the development of traditional literati art as a process where its classical language would be transformed into a modern one. However, with an urge toward development, a cultural debate emerged between artists who wanted to modernize the language and those who wanted to replace it altogether. Xu Beihong, an artist who studied in France, was part of the latter group advocating replacing "disengaged" literati painting aesthetic with Realism.

Beihong cannot be credited for introducing European art forms to PRC. Western stylistic aspects are seen in artworks of the seventeenth century, possibly transmitted through the ports in Shanghai and Canton. However, when it comes to formal education, from 1906 to 1909, a western art department began to operate in Nanking Normal School. (Clunas 1989, 100) This is also the period for Chinese students<sup>2</sup> visiting the Tokyo School of Fine Arts to learn the art. Nevertheless, the art scene of Japan was itself a result of Japanese artists introducing European style after returning from France. In 1919, due to the rise of anti-Japanese sentiments, the young Chinese painters preferred Europe over Japan.

Therefore, France became the most favoured destination for Chinese students. Many artists chose to relocate themselves in order to acquire knowledge first-hand. Realism was not the only style that engaged the intelligentsia and the artists. Artists who went abroad were also exposed to Surrealism and Impressionism. Sullivan (1973, 167) elaborately documents the Chinese artists in France and their career trajectory on returning to China. Chou Ling, founder of *the Association des Artistes Chinois en France*, was one of the artists who went to France to learn the art. Among those who returned and taught on similar lines in China were Yen Wen-Liang, Hsu Pei-hung, Pang Xunqin, Liu Haisu and Lin Feng-mien. (Sullivan 1973, 167)

These artists, on returning, set up art schools<sup>3</sup> on the École des Beaux-Arts model, emphasizing on drawing, sculpture and oil painting and introducing new trends in the art world. They, therefore, stressed primarily western art styles. This curriculum, widely implemented in Lin Feng-mien's school (currently called as Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts) was met by opposition and hostility. The opposing views were discussed in The First National Art Exhibition of 1929, which played an indispensable role in this discourse on modernization. The exhibition consisted of artists who had studied from both Tokyo and Paris. It opened up a debate about the structure of modernity in China. Artists like Xu and Li Yishi, ardent supporters of Realism, were met by fierce resistance by champions of artistic freedom like Xu Zhimo, Lin Fengmien and Liu Haisu, who supported a plethora of styles from Impressionism to Cubism. Goodman (2012,171) labels the latter as supporters of Modernism or avant-garde. The debate later ended with the undisputed supremacy of Realism.

Parallel to Realism and debates of Modernism was Lu Xun's "Woodcut Movement" in 1930. The style depicts people's suffering and is characterized by a strong fighting spirit. In contrast to Modernism, Woodcut Movement was full of a "spirit of engagement with the world". This movement introduced German Expressionism and Soviet Socialist Realism, paving the way for Expressionist aesthetics.

### **Socialist Realism**

In the following decades, the influence of Soviet art increased dramatically. It was also the time when art leaders, primarily from the East China campus of CAFA, visited Moscow. Among them was Yan Han with his cohorts, Jiang Feng and Cai Ruohong, who spent considerable time in the USSR during 1954. During the same time, many academically trained artists<sup>4</sup> were chosen to enrol in the six-year course at Repin Art Academy in Leningrad. These artists were mainly from the families of soldiers, workers and peasants and had an impeccable record of allegiance to the party. (Andrews 1994, 151)

The training of these Chinese artists in the USSR transformed the Chinese oil painting scene of the 1950s. The administrators of the art field, on returning back, produced extensive reports on things learnt in the host nation. The first batch included professors from CAFA like Luo Gongliu and his colleague, Wu Biduan. On completing a special three years in Repin Academy, they returned with books that served as a repository for students eager to adopt the western style. These imported books included realist works of the Tsarist era, too like *Peredvizhniki* or “The Wanderers”<sup>5</sup>. (Sullivan 1996, 135) Amongst them, Ilya Repin and Vasili Surikov were among the most endorsed artists in PRC. Repin was applauded for being “people's artist”, and Surikov was referred to as an artistic genius in the realm of Realism. (Hung 2007, 788) For the depiction of the revolutionary aspect of work, neoclassical painter, Jacques David, achieved wide acclaim for the portrayal of political events of the French Revolution.

This avid recognition of the Socialist Realist style led to the invitation of the Soviet art educator Konstantin M. Maksimov to teach oil painting at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, in 1955. The students selected for this course, around twenty in number, were chosen to bear in mind the geographical diversity and academic and vocational balance. It was an amalgamation of artists from national art academies<sup>6</sup> to those having a background in publishing houses<sup>7</sup>. Apart from this, cohorts from the People's Liberation Army<sup>8</sup> were selected as well. The course, organized by the Ministry of Culture in collaboration with CAFA, lasted two years and provided a postgraduate degree.

The study of artworks was not limited to Russian artists in the class. (Carroll 2016, 132) This was perhaps why the focus areas in teaching methods had glaring similarities with the European academic oil painting training. These areas produced myriad compositional styles by exploring the interaction of light with space and form, with European verisimilitude in draughtsmanship and techniques. The subject matter should be based on real-life events only.



**Fig. 1.** Hou Yimin, *Underground Worker*, 1957. Oil on canvas. Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing.

These qualities are clearly observed in *Underground Worker* (fig 1), 1957 and *Chairman Mao with Auyuan Mine Workers*, (fig 2) date unknown, by Hou Yimin. *Underground Worker* depicts a group of young people printing propaganda work before the liberation. The central figure (young Hou himself) is seen instructing a lady in front of him in the background whereas the figure in the background is writing matter for the posters and the figure in front (Zhou Sicong) is printing them. This incident is based on his early life (1948), when Hou the head of an underground party at Beijing Art School, was responsible for organizing a group for academy teachers and students and producing handbills. These propaganda posters were printed in *Xinminbao* and were distributed after the nationalists surrendered. (Andrews 1994, 88) This painting served as a precedent for the series of historical paintings, including *Auyuan Mine*, which he painted during his later years. *Auyuan Mine Workers* is based on a trade union launched by CCP to fight against unjust working conditions. Mao visited to investigate conditions at the Anyuan coal mine. This painting is interesting because of many reasons. First is the portrayal, which is so starkly different from the painting of Liu Chunhua, titled *Chairman Mao goes to Anyuan*, 1968. In Chunhua's painting, Mao is dressed in a scholarly mandarin collar gown, carrying an umbrella under his right arm. However, in the painting by Yimin, we see Mao dressed in a pair of trousers<sup>9</sup>, which seem more suitable for forays in mining pits. I use the word foray because there is a figure of an amputee in front of him. This figure, combined with the frail bodies of workers, could also be an indication of poor working conditions in the mine. Another difference is the color scheme. Chunhua's painting has cool colors whereas Yimin's artwork employs more of warm undertones. There is, however, one common aspect in both paintings. Mao has a clenched fist in both artworks, which might be employed to show determination.



**Fig.2.** Hou Yimin, Chairman Mao with Auyuan Mine Workers. Oil on canvas. The National Art Museum of China.

Coming to the artworks of Hou Yimin, in both the paintings, *Underground Worker* and *Chairman Mao with Auyuan Mine Workers*, the central figure, highlighted through the interplay of light and shade, is in a seated position and engaged in action, which is a new characteristic of a painting of PRC. In addition to this, Mao is highlighted in the painting by his posture and the aura around him, where people in the foreground are looking up to him, and workers in front of him are listening intently to what he has to say. Both the compositions have a similar depiction of the central figure, where the figure is situated in the middle ground. The mathematical spatial mapping is evident in the depiction of Mao, who is placed on the left side of the painting. The illuminated face of the central figures and the dullness of edges towards the painting leads the painting to be perceived as a square format work instead of the rectangular frame it occupies. A high level of draughtsmanship is visible in Hou's depiction of workers in *Chairman Mao*

*with Auyuan Mine Workers*. Contrasted to his earlier painting, the spontaneous brushstrokes, a characteristic of traditional Chinese painting, have been replaced by a realistic portrayal of the naked, frail and bent bodies of the workers. This aspect shown in multiple ways is also brought forth by the amputated arm of a worker in front of Mao, with the arm resting on an agricultural tool.

The color palette is limited to warm colors in the above two paintings due to the light source. However, diverse exploration of the interaction of light with space can be seen in the artworks of other students like Jianjun Zhan. Zhan's graduation painting, *Starting Out*, 1957, effectively handles outdoor lighting. This painting is too backed by personal experience. Zhan, moved by the heroic spirit of these workers spent time with them in Beijing Youth Wasteland Reclamation Base. The painting depicts a group of young workers in the Great Northern Wasteland preparing the land for cultivation despite the harsh weather conditions. It is painted mostly in warm colors; however, the occasional use of cool color is equitably distributed throughout the painting, be it the foreground, middle-ground or background.



**Fig. 3.** Zhan Jianjun. *Starting Out*. 1957. Oil on canvas. 140 x 348 cm. Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing.

This soviet influence in oil painting is visible in the paintings between the late 1950s to the mid-1960s where the Central Academy of Fine Arts served as a laboratory for experimentation with this art form. The career

trajectory of these students, on completion of the course, remained similar to the artists who returned to PRC after travelling extensively to Europe, predominately, France. On returning back, they assumed relevant positions to disseminate the teachings of class. Notes taken during the class and the progress of the students were published by the Party in Central Academy's journal, *Meishu yanjiu* and the national art journal, *Meishu*. (Andrews 152) Their works were displayed in prominent national exhibitions and some of the paintings were reproduced extensively in the form of posters.

### **Transformation into Mao's "revolutionary realism"**

The iconography changed during the Cultural Revolution when Mao's wife Jiang Qing dictated the guidelines for artworks. Although rendered with the same realist draughtsmanship, the subject matter was altered to the depiction of the heroism of the army and farmers, accompanied, by Jiang's "red, bright, and shining" aesthetics, meant to induce revolutionary fervour in the masses. This led to borrowing stylistic elements from the New Year paintings (*nianhua*). Since *nianhua* paintings were festive in nature, it was argued that incorporating them could help extol the triumph of the Revolution. "Maoist sublime" comes into play at this juncture where the works of art exude an overwhelming intensity and power of life-crushing nature". (Wang 2004, 238) This further leads to emotional transformations in viewers and purification in artists, quintessential for political idealism achieved during this Revolution. PRC favoured this nationalist fervor after the decline of Sino-Soviet relations, and it separates this style from the earlier discussed Soviet model. CCP majorly commissioned revolutionary themes and artworks of historical importance.

Dong Xiwen's *The Grand Ceremony of the Founding of the People's Republic of China*, 1953, (fig 4) demonstrates the above-mentioned qualities in vivid style. Depicting the establishment of the PRC in Tiananmen square, the central figure (Mao) stands on a raised stage, surrounded by party officials on the left and cheering crowds with flags, at a distance, on the right. The space between the central figure and officials enhances the aura of Mao. The banality of the lantern flying in his direction adds to the visual trope. On a

symbolic level, his authority is illustrated by making him face the Zhengyang Gate, which functioned as a main entry point for the imperial palace.



**Fig. 4.** Dong Xiwen. *The Founding Ceremony of the Nation*. ca. 1967. Oil on canvas. 230 × 405 cm. National Museum of China, Beijing.

The sublimity is exhibited by the color red used in lanterns, carpets, and columns. In the background, the city walls are too painted red, adding to the festive atmosphere. The blue color of the sky, in sharp contrast with the warm colors, is a characteristic borrowed from the folk-art terminology. Dong explains his selection of colors in 1953 "The Chinese people like bright, intense colors. This convention is in line with the theme of *The Founding Ceremony of the Nation*. In my choice of colors I did not hesitate to put aside the complex colors commonly adopted in Western painting as well as the conventional rules for oil painting. If this painting is rich in national styles," he continued, "it is largely because I adopted these [native] approaches." (Hung 2007, 809)

A vast expanse of the sky is represented in the background, uninterrupted by the red columns on the right of Mao, which, if compared to

the original photograph of Tiananmen square, is missing in the painting, depicting the creative liberty exercised by the artist.



**Fig. 5.** Reproduction by Jin Shangyi, Zhao Yu, and Yan Zhenduo of Dong Xiwen. *The Founding Ceremony of the Nation*. ca. 1979. Oil on canvas. 230 × 405 cm. National Museum of China (formerly Museum of the Chinese Revolution), Beijing.

Although labelled as "pure propaganda" by scholars, Zhang Shaoxia and Li Xiaoshan were the only art historians who appreciated the composition and the color palette of the painting. (Andrews 1994, 80) Xu, however, categorized the color scheme, under the subheading of a poster, not a painting. Nevertheless, the painting was a mammoth success, as Mao personally endorsed it. The success can partially be attributed to its sponsorship too since a nationalized museum commissioned it. It resulted in becoming a template for the new nationalized form of art. A million copies were produced by the Fine Art Publishing House, alone, in addition to it being published in school textbooks. However, it was seen as more of a development in *nianhua*, as subsequently, it functioned as one of the interior essentials sanctioned by the party. (Andrews 1994, 80)

This painting became ubiquitous in the PRC, which led to a series of changes according to changing demands from the party. First, the artist was

asked to eliminate Gao Gang, the figure in a blue suit on the extreme right, which was occupied by the surrounding background, flowers and cityscape. Later, in 1972, it was decided that Liu Shaoqi's presence would be erased as well for what was perceived as his “right wing” views. Since Liu’s figure was in the middle of a horde of party officials, his face was replaced with the person behind him. Fairly nearing the exhibition, another change was ordered, for Lin Boqu, the secretary-general, depicted on the far left of the group, had been removed from his position. With the deteriorating health of the artist, his student, Jin Shangyi, took over and offered to make a replica of the painting with the suggested changes (fig. 5). Both the paintings form a part of the permanent collection in the National Museum of China.

### **Conclusion**

The aesthetics and concepts employed in this paper are primarily derived from 20<sup>th</sup> century Modernism and Post Modernism. This period was also when postcolonial, global and transnational were binding concepts for art practice. The paper employs ‘worlding’ as a phenomenon that applies interpretive frames to global art discourse, occluded by the Euromericans perspective. Therefore, instead of seeing art styles employed in Chinese propaganda posters as something completely dependent on external, this study oversees the development of style as a collaboration of exogenous with endogenous discourses. This collaboration enables us to find an intermediate zone where a local repositioning of these discourses occurs. It is in these intermediate zones that we observe massive cultural and aesthetic transitions visible by the rejection of the existing system and adoption or adaptation of a new one. These transitions have engendered a unique form of Chinese art embroiled with its cultural dialect. Therefore, Chinese propaganda art during the given epoch, which is often viewed as an extension of Soviet style art, is actually an attempt to develop their own national art form.

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#### **Endnotes**

1. Korean War, 1950-53, The First Five-Year Plan (1953-57) and Great Leap Forward, also known as Second Five-Year Plan (1958-62)
  2. Gao Jianfu, Li Shutong, Chen Baoyi, He Xiangning. The names are taken from the website CAFA named CAFA ART INFO. <http://www.cafa.com.cn/en/opinions/reviews/details/8325814>
  3. Yen Wen-liang in Soochow, Hsu Pei-hung in Nanking and later Peking, Lin Feng-mien in Hangchow. Lin Feng-mien's school later became, with that in Peking, one of the two national art academies and the centre of the most progressive art movements in China.
  4. Among the students who were sent to the Repin Art Academy were, in the first group, Li Tianxiang, a 1950 graduate of CAFA, and Chen Zunsan, of Liaoning. The 1954 group included Lin Gang, a young professor at CAFA, and two artists from CAFA's East China campus, Quan Shanshi and Xiao Feng. In 1955 Deng Shu, who had attained considerable recognition for her nianhua in the early 1950s, was dispatched. Li Jun, a young teacher at Beijing Normal University, went to Leningrad as part of the last group in 1956.
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5. In 1870, a group of artists formed The Society for Traveling Exhibitions (Obshchestvo peredvizhnykh vystavok), and became known as the Peredvizhniki (The Wanderers or Itinerants in English). This society had as its goals not only to create art that presented an accurate representation of contemporary life in Russia, but also to bring art out of the capitals and into the countryside—to the people—to create an art for the nation.
6. The list is taken from the book by Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the PRC*, 416. JinShangyi, Hou Yimin, Feng Fasi, Zhang Wenxin, and Shang Husheng were selected from CAFA. Others included Ren Mengzhang from the Lu Xun Academy of Arts in Shenyang; Wang Xuzhu and Yuan Hao from the academy in Wuhan; Wei Chuanyi from the academy in Sichuan; Zhan Beixin, from the academy in Xi'an; Lu Guoying, from the Nanjing College of Arts.
7. Wu Dezu, from the People's Art Press Creation Studio in Beijing; and Qin Zheng, from Tianjin. Yu Yunjie, who worked at a publishing firm in Shanghai, was added as a special student in 1956, the only representative of his city. For more information, read Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the PRC*, 152.
8. Gao Hong and He Kongde belonged to PLA according to Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the PRC*, 416.

# Giorgio Morandi between Italy and Brazil: Proposals to Modern Art

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper aims to address the way through which the artist Giorgio Morandi contributed, even if indirectly, to the consolidation of two proposals for modern art. The first one concerns the Italian attempt to overcome a political regime in search of proposing new dialogues with the centers of modern art worldwide. The second one, which concerns Brazil, focuses on efforts trying to assert itself as one of the relevant centers of modern art. For this, we will consider the bienals of São Paulo and Venice, as well as the position of art critics such as Mário Pedrosa and Lionello Venturi and the art historian Roberto Longhi.

## **KEYWORDS**

Giorgio Morandi; Bienal de São Paulo; Bienalle di Venezia; Italian Criticism; Brazilian Criticism.

The arguments presented in this paper derived from parallel research to the doctoral thesis “Between the criticism and the form: reflections on the works of Giorgio Morandi in the MAC-USP collection”, presented to the Aesthetics and Art History graduate program at the Museum of Contemporary Art of the University of São Paulo (MAC-USP), in 2022. During this period, the research focused on systematizing the relationship between two still life paintings by the artist Giorgio Morandi, and the collection of Italian paintings owned by that museum. In the course of the research, some information regarding the circulation of the artworks of the Italian painter in Brazil began to take on relevant proportions, which, for reasons related to the structure of the research, should be explored outside the *corpus* of the thesis. With that in mind, this paper is the result of that second effort.

The 1940s and 1950s meant a period of great political, social, and cultural transformations to both Brazil and Italy. If, on the one hand, the European country, which had just emerged from the war, was striving to regain its position of reference in the world art circuit, the South American country sought to reach a place never previously occupied. The Bolognese painter Giorgio Morandi certainly participated in both projects, and despite having never left Italy, enabled the two countries to engage with other great centers of modern art.

Before investigating the particularities of such matter, it is worth noting that Giorgio Morandi was not the only agent of this process, much less the only artist to be part of this endeavor. However, what we propose here is an accurate cut that takes into consideration the leading role of the Bolognese artist in Brazilian and Italian environments between 1945 and 1957, as well as the performance of agents involved in the production of the Venice and São Paulo Biennials. For this, in addition to the contextualization of the artist himself, we will focus on some events, such as the Venice and São Paulo Biennials, as well as the intellectual production of critics and art historians, more specifically with regard to the figures of Roberto Longhi, Lionello Venturi and Mario Pedrosa.

Regardless of how clear the post-war historical context is to many readers, given the international character of this publication, it is essential to

point out some of the issues that guided the political and social life of that period. Being aware of such factors may help in the process of understanding motivations, concerns, reactions etc. In relation to Italy, both the economy and politics faced moments of crisis. Inflation reached very high figures and the country's infrastructure, such as roads, ports and railways, had been hit hard by the war. In matters pertaining to politics, King Vittorio Emanuele III, deemed to be among the ones responsible for the ills of recent years, is replaced by his son Umberto II who, in turn, is deposed by a popular vote that opted for a republican political regime, just after two months of reign. As far as culture is concerned, Italian cinema got to know one of two major expressions, the New Realism, or Neorealism. Filmmakers like Rossellini, in the film *Roma, Città Aperta*, or de Sica, with *Ladri di Biciclette*, showed the public the hardships of a country struggling to rebuild itself. In the field of diplomacy, the United States instituted the Marshall Plan, which provided assistance for the economic recovery of the countries involved in World War II, without neglecting, of course, the massive propaganda against the USSR and the communist parties in Italy.<sup>1</sup>

Brazil, on the other hand, remained neutral throughout practically the entire war. Only in 1942, after the visit of the US president to Rio de Janeiro for the Inter-American Conference, did the country take the side of the allies and broke trading relations with Italy and Germany. During this period, Brazil was engaged in a modernization project proposed by what was known as *Estado Novo*, or the third republic, whose central figure was Getúlio Vargas. This regime lasted from 1937 to 1946, when Vargas was deposed by a military coup. With the end of *Estado Novo*, the country's modernization project continued at an accelerated pace, culminating in the construction of the country's capital in Brasília in 1960. This modernizing project even affects the Brazilian cultural and artistic environment, especially with regard to the creation of cultural institutions, such as the São Paulo Museum of Art (MASP), in 1947, and the São Paulo Museum of Modern Art (MAM-SP), in 1948. Another example of a relevant cultural institution is the *Bienal de São Paulo*, which will be explored more closely in the lines below.

As far as Giorgio Morandi is concerned, the 1940s and 1950s represent a strong internationalization of his name. The North American art historian Janet Abramowicz,<sup>2</sup> for instance, mentions that in the 1950s it was practically impossible to see Morandi in Italy except for works that belonged to private collections. This statement is relevant if we take into account the historical context in which it was inserted. So, as previously mentioned, Morandi, who was seen by critics and art history as a withdrawn, isolated artist, oblivious to political conditions, has his name internationalized precisely at the moment when Italy needs to detach its image from the fascist regime.

The position alien to the fascist regime can be seen on the occasion of the third edition of the *Quadriennale di Roma*, in 1939. By then, Morandi was already an artist of great circulation in Italy, therefore, that year he was invited to exhibit in a *Special Room*, which contained sixty works, including paintings, drawings, and engravings. Still, regarding the historical context of that period, the year 1939 is marked by the beginning of World War II. With the invasions of Poland by Germany and Albania by Italy, the war atmosphere takes over the Italian intellectual environment thoroughly. As a result, ultranationalist militants begin to demand that artists take part in this discussion in support of the fascist policy. At the very beginning of the *Quadriennale*, Giuseppe Bottai, who then held the position of Minister of Education, to which the *Quadriennale* was subordinate, says:

There must be a reciprocal connection between political facts and artistic ones... artists must participate in the history of our time... (Abramowicz 2005, 158)

It seems that, because of the criteria adopted by the jury, the selection of artists and the award itself followed very specific standards regarding the political positions of those involved. This issue stood out even with respect to technical criteria. At the end of the event, being considered as one of the possible winners, Morandi was forced to take a stand against the accusations of being a bourgeois artist. Romano Romanelli, a sculptor and alleged friend of Morandi's, wrote a letter to Bottai warning the minister about giving the grand prize to Giorgio Morandi. Part of the letter says:

In certain moments of history, we must describe the essential themes of our times in a masculine manner. It would be a terrible misfortune for Italian art if we were to allow the opinions of those dregs [quisquillie brandiane o longhiane], of critics such as Brandi and Longhi to prevail... if they do prevail, our art will end up more tragically than French art did after impressionism, when every form of decadence was let loose in the name of feelings. [...] “action be taken by the Minister’s office to put the brakes on [those] thoughtless young men [Brandi and Longhi] and stop them, for they don’t know where their exaltation of the decadence will take them. (Abramowicz 2005, 160)

Romanelli ends the letter by saying that Morandi was not a real painter. As it is already known, the Bolognese artist did not win that *Quadriennale*, however, the support received by the artist was quite important in the following years, mainly by names such Roberto Longhi, Cesare Brandi and Lionello Venturi. Furthermore, his attitude towards the event ensured that critics and art historians could rely on his name, as one of the artists who had made it through the fascist regime unharmed.

More important than Giorgio Morandi's biography is how his image circulated in the artistic and intellectual environment of that period. Seen as an isolated artist, alien to the artistic avant-gardes, Morandi was considered by many to be the best living Italian artist. In addition to the fact that he was considered an artist of excellence, and unlike most Italian artists of that period, the Bolognese artist assumed his French influences, mainly Cézanne’s and Chardin’s. Furthermore, his proposals for art were completely devoid of any poetic or metaphorical sense. For this reason, some points in his biography started to become attractive to those who sought to argue about the pertinence of the engagement of Italian art with the most modern art being produced.

In order to clarify the extent to which the position of critics and art historians contributed to the consolidation of the image of Giorgio Morandi and given the Italian action in the sense of proposing a dialogue with the centers of modern art, two figures, art history professor Roberto Longhi and

art critic Lionello Venturi, stand out. Certainly, other names acted to promote the name of the Bolognese artist in international contests. However, Longhi and Venturi, by adopting completely different positions in the understanding of the role of art, represent a good alternative to what we propose to discuss in this paper.

Roberto Longhi taught art history in the city of Bologna, the same city where Morandi was born and lived throughout his whole life. In his first lecture, when he assumed the chair of art history at the university, Longhi uttered the following words:

And I end up not finding it entirely accidental that, even today, one of the best living painters in Italy, Giorgio Morandi, while navigating the most dangerous shoals of modern painting, always knew how to direct his journey with a meditated slowness, with a studied affection, typical of those pioneering a new path. (Longhi 1935, 3-4)

Like other art critics, such as Cesare Brandi, for example, Longhi avoided associating Morandi with 20th-century painting. For Longhi, Morandi was the artist capable of re-establishing ties with the tradition of academic painting, even if he broke it, out of his own free will. Despite having dedicated few texts exclusively to Morandi, Longhi was able to construct a historical narrative favorable to humanist conceptions, which he was so fond of, avoiding any kind of relationship with abstraction. The conclusion of this work can be seen in the publication of the volume *Da Cimabue a Morandi*.

Lionello Venturi, on the other hand, in his 1945 book *Pittura Contemporanea*, attributes to Giorgio Morandi a very different role from what Italian art critics had been doing until then. According to Venturi, Morandi would have contributed decisively to Italian abstract painting. The importance that Venturi acquires in Morandian art criticism goes far beyond his interpretation, it is, as it should be, a creation of its own time. In other words, that means that thanks to Venturi's critique, Morandi extrapolates the first half of the 20th century and, even looking at the Italian classical tradition, manages to influence a whole new range of abstract artists. From

Venturi's standpoint, Morandi approaches abstraction because he is keen on composition rather than representation. Even though his roots lie in the art of the previous century, it is still modern. In the book *Pittori di Ieri e di Oggi*, Venturi says:

Regardless of the roots in the 19th-century Italian tradition, oblivious to any presumptuous cultural reference to the ancient art - his connections with them are all about nature and blood - Morandi's painting is, by instinct and will, absolutely modern; and it seems that, at birth, he breathed such modernity lingering in the air, so, indirectly, as already mentioned, were the influences he suffered, as already been mentioned: the more sensitive one, of Cézanne, who is moreover at the origin of Morandi as that of the broader currents of contemporary painting. (Venturi 1949, 91-92)

Therefore, in short, we find two antagonistic figures. However, in one way or another they converge to crown Giorgio Morandi as one of the protagonists of 20th century Italian art. All this convergence becomes even clearer when we take into account the XXIV *Biennale di Venezia*, from 1948, known as the reopening biennial. On that occasion, Lionello Venturi, Roberto Longhi, Giorgio Morandi, Pio Semeghini, Felice Casorati, Nino Barbantini, Antonio Gnan, Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, Carlo Carrà, Domenico Varagnolo, Rodolfo Pallucchini and Marino Marini took part in the organizing committee of the event which, among other things, presupposed a greater influence from the United States, mainly in the figure of the collector Peggy Guggenheim.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, a lot of international attention was directed to the event, as world-famous names would be present. In line with the questions raised by the jury, the Italian collegiate crowned Giorgio Morandi the winner of the award for the best Italian artist. In other words, Giorgio Morandi's choice as the best national artist is not fortuitous, since, in addition to the technical aspects, the Bolognese artist was able to synthesize the tradition of the Italian classical painting, approach abstract painting, as well as keep himself away from the political narratives so costly to the history of Italian art.

It is not possible to conceive the creation of the *Bienal de São Paulo* without thinking about the *Bienalle di Venezia*. Far from trying to distance itself from this relationship, the *Bienal de São Paulo* insisted on reinforcing it. Thus, the first fact that we must take into account is precisely the nature of the creation of such event. To do so, we must go back to 1948, when the couple Ciccillo Matarazzo and Yolanda Penteado celebrated their wedding going on a trip to Europe. On the occasion, the consorts visited the XXIV *Biennale di Venezia*. The visit to the Venetian Biennial inspired the couple to create a Brazilian version of the event. In the catalogue for the *I Bienal de São Paulo*, art critic Lourival Gomes Machado writes:

By its very definition, the Bienal should fulfill two main tasks: to place the modern art of Brazil, not in a simple confrontation, but in a live contact [sic] with the art of the rest of the world; as for São Paulo it would seek to conquer the position of world artistic center. The reference to Venice was inevitable; far from escaping from it, we tried to have it as a lesson worthy of study and, also, as an encouraging stimulus. At that moment it was necessary to put the Museum of Modern Art to a hard test because, if it did not assert its reputation abroad, it would be better to abandon its daring project. (Machado 1951, 14)

In the same catalogue, a few pages ahead, Giovanni Ponti, president of the *Bienalle di Venezia* at that time, responds:

The Venice Biennale, which celebrated half a century of existence six years ago, welcomes the I Bienal de São Paulo, Brazil, which was inaugurated on the initiative of the Museum of Modern Art, with purposes and characteristics similar to those that inspired the activity of the Venetian entity. Just like Venice presents a vast panorama of the world's art to a mostly European public, we hope that the Bienal de São Paulo can do the same to South America, where a life rich in talents and multiple and fruitful achievements is eager to conquer its role in the field of culture, in which defined and appreciated testimonies have already been distinguished. (Ponti 1951, 124)

The international recognition of Brazilian efforts was not limited to Italy. The United States, especially with regard to the MoMA curator, Alfred Barr, were also present in the editions of the *Bienal de São Paulo*. In the fourth edition of the Biennale, in 1957, Barr, who at the time was a member of the international jury, said:

The Bienal de São Paulo is as important as the one in Venice and it seems to me to be better proportioned. The various foreign delegations are better represented here than there – with rare exceptions – and in a fairer proportion. I just think there should be more Brazilian art. (Barr 1957, 17)

Giorgio Morandi, in turn, exhibited in five editions of the Brazilian biennials, being the *IV Bienal de São Paulo*, in 1957, considered by art historians as the most representative one<sup>4</sup>. This representativeness results not only from the fact that it had won the Grand Prize for Painting with a *Special Room*, but also because it was a reference for a series of other exhibitions that took place after that edition. At the time, there was a strong controversy involving the grand prize, given that a significant part of the public, composed of Brazilian intellectuals and even the artists themselves, considered that Marc Chagall should be the winner. The argument sustained by the ones who defended Morandi was related to the modern aspects of the Bolognese artist's painting. The idea of modern painting should be highlighted, as the Brazilian artistic environment would rely on it to deal with the works of the Italian painter. In other words, the idea that Morandi is a representative of the modern values of art will be present in the arguments used by both art critics as well as curators who, even nowadays, deem the artist's work to be a suitable example to propose transitory relationships. Such relationships are often more visible than the formal matters regarding painting.

An example of art criticism based on the idea of modernity is that of Mário Pedrosa. Far beyond the sheer exercise of criticism, Pedrosa maintained a cordial friendship with Morandi, whom he affectionately called

the Bolognese master. For the critic, Morandi managed to be simultaneously a modern artist and the most archaic of them. In other words, according to the Brazilian intellectual, to understand the works of the Italian artist, one should be able to understand the process of recreating objects of daily use, while maintaining the tranquility necessary for a discoverer.

Furthermore, Pedrosa understood the history of art from a process that began in the Renaissance and culminated in abstraction. This process would favor the dismantling of naturalism or, as the critic described, of the “illusion of matter and the absolute color of the object”, towards an anti-naturalist and tectonic vocation of art.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, in the essay *Panorama da Pintura Moderna*, Pedrosa establishes a careful analysis in which the modern project would be accomplished by means of abstract art.

In one of his most ambitious essays, “*Panorama da Pintura Moderna*”, Pedrosa concluded, in a judicious immanent analysis of the history of art ever since the Renaissance, that the modern project would be carried out by means of abstract art: “A program of indirect and gigantic preparation to reshape, through moving vision, manners of perception and feeling, and to lead to new ways of living.” With its liberation from the structures of representation, in Modernism time is no longer a decisive point: “The crux of the matter is now space.” (Arantes 2000, 13)

Given what was said in the previous paragraph, Giorgio Morandi seems to clearly be the type of artist who contributes to the perception of the exhaustion of figurative art, since he was free from the structures of representations, circumvented time and dealt with space-related issues. Such conception was never bluntly stated in Pedrosa's critical essays, however, when we observe the relationship established between the Bologna painter and Cézanne, the place Morandi should occupy both in the scale of values and in the history of art idealized by the critic becomes evident. According to Pedrosa, Cézanne's 'primitive' experiments were somehow accomplished in Morandi's objects. Said another way:

None of his contemporaries broke with the pictorial tradition of his country more bravely than he did. Being, however, the purest of modern artists, he is, at the same time, the most archaic of them, because his artisanal soul, entirely devoted to the daily recreation of flasks and bottles, requires, however, the gifts, wisdom, and patience of the discoverers. (Pedrosa 1947, 11)

The attentive reader must have noticed that Mário Pedrosa's positions are quite similar to Roberto Longhi's, regarding the classic Italian tradition, but, at the same time, they are also close to Lionello Venturi's when it comes to the rupture with the illusion of matter and liberation from the structures of representation in search of reflections on space. This position was fundamental, especially when Pedrosa justified the grand prize at the IV Bienal de São Paulo. According to the critic:

[...] the prize awarded to the Bolognese painter marks a turning point in the behaviour of the international jury, putting the Bienal de São Paulo in the place of an institution that 'now, between poetry and plastic, the international jury opted for the last one: Chagall, the very incarnation of imagination, of dreams, of poetic values par excellence, was passed over by Morandi, the artist who, alone and in obscurity, never subordinated the pure plastic values or any other, because for him just the values are valid on paintings, including poetic ones, that result from the pictorial work, that is, are products of the specific means of painting itself. (Pedrosa 1957, 11)

And still:

If one thing can be said about the prizes awarded this year by the Bienal de São Paulo, it is that the grand prize awarded to Giorgio Morandi marked the work of the international jury. Of all the awards granted, among national and foreign ones, this was the most important. [...] One can state that the consecration of Morandi was in fact a courageous act. The jury might not have been aware of what it was doing: the truth, however, is that with this the jury opened the way to a

revision in the scale of the values of the world great painting. Preferring the modest painter from Bologna to Chagall's brilliant name, the jury projected him among the greatest, and somehow, placed him in the front row, comprised of world-famous names. Up until then he had lived, acted, and improved apart from the great international current, and on the margins of the decisive axis Berlin -Paris - New York. (Pedrosa 1957, 6)

In short, the *Bienal* Grand Prize presents itself as a kind of consecration of Mário Pedrosa's art history project. If the path that art must follow is the “liberation of the structures of representation”, towards an anti-naturalist, tectonic and abstract vocation of art, then the “courageous” award to Morandi: “[...] opened the way to a revision in the scale of the values of the world great painting.” In this sense, Mário Pedrosa's prerogatives even contributed to the institutionalization of Morandi's works. Such evidence can be found in the exhibitions held at MAC-USP<sup>6</sup>, at the Reina Sofia Museum<sup>7</sup>, in Spain, or in the publication Mário Pedrosa: Primary Documents, by MoMA.

To conclude, it must be clear that the intense exchange of ideas between Italy and Brazil during the transition from the first to the second half of the twentieth century contributed decisively to the reinsertion of Italy and the insertion of Brazil into the international artistic environment. If on the one hand, Giorgio Morandi was an artist capable of rescuing classical values, on the other hand, he proposed a dialogue with the new abstract art. It should be borne in mind that, while Brazil contributed to the acceptance of Italy by the great centers of the world art, Italy likewise strived for the success of the Brazilian initiative.

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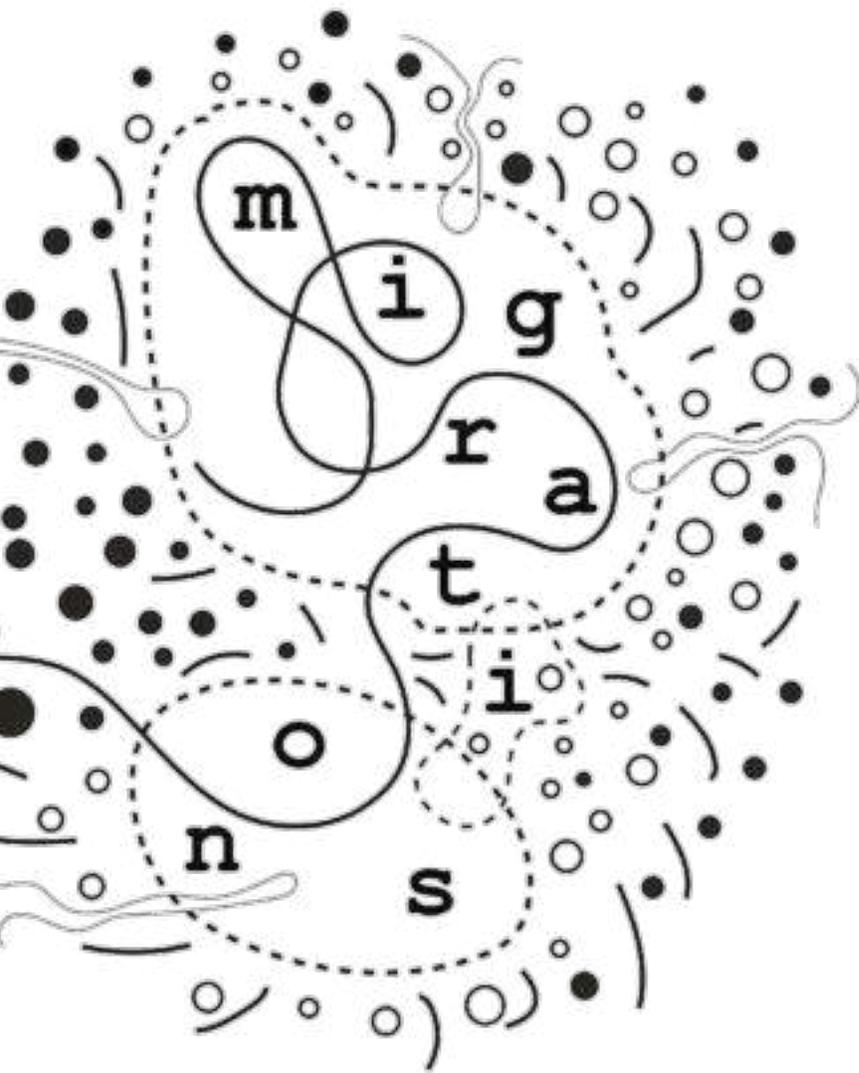
### Endnotes

1. The United States played a decisive role in recognizing the Italian effort to overcome the closure imposed by the fascist regime. Proof of that is the exhibition Twentieth-Century Italian Art, organized by MoMA in 1949. The episode was detailed in: Raffaele Bedarida. *Operation Renaissance: Italian Art at MoMA, 1940 – 1949* (Oxford: Oxford Art Journal, 2012), 147-169.
2. “In the 1950s it was almost impossible to view his paintings in Italy except in private collections, because few museums owned any of his work; discriminating collectors in Milan, such as Vitali and Gianni Mattioli, often opened their homes to allow others to see their collection.” Janet Abramowicz, *The Art of Silence*. (Yale: Yale University Press, 2005, 194.
3. The North American collector presented to the Biennale a pavilion composed only of pieces from her private collection. Among them were names like Dalí, Picasso, Rothko, Pollock, the latter making his debut in Italian exhibitions. Out of curiosity, the Guggenheim Museum in the city of Venice was built from this collection exhibited at the Biennale.
4. I Bienal, 1951; II Bienal, 1953; IV Bienal, 1957; XV Bienal, 1979; and, finally, at the XXXIV Bienal, 2021.
5. His critical activity would start from there to understand the History of Art in a great process in which, at least since the 19th century, art would move towards abstraction (which means a path to freedom), privileging the moments in which the progressive dismantling of naturalism, of the “finished detail”, of the “illusion of matter and the absolute color of objects is presented”. A critique, in short, that was guided by “a clearly anti-naturalist vocation, therefore tectonic and abstract”. Otilia Arantes, *Modernidade Cá e Lá, Textos Escolhidos IV*. (São Paulo: Edusp, 2000), 13.
6. Unfortunately, the exhibition Homage to Mário Pedrosa: Commented Artists left no records. However, it is assumed that the two MAC-USP paintings were exhibited.
7. The exhibition The Affective Nature of Form, was on display at the Reina Sofia Museum between April 28 and October 16, 2017.

# Migration of Media

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## Session 11



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## The Flight of "Yellow Macaw"

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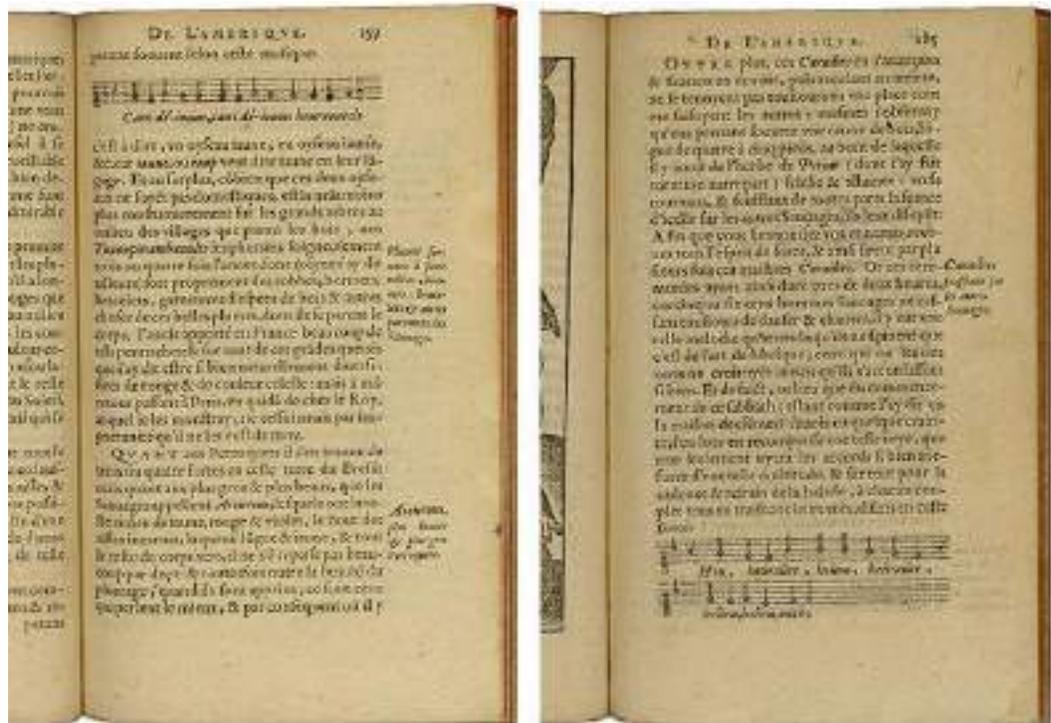
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In March 1557, Jean de Léry arrived in Brazil. He was part of a Genevan Calvinist mission to Antarctic France, a French settlement on an island in Rio de Janeiro's Guanabara Bay. The settlement did not last long. Léry headed back across the Atlantic ten months later, in January 1558. Two years after that, Antarctic France fell to the Portuguese.<sup>1</sup>

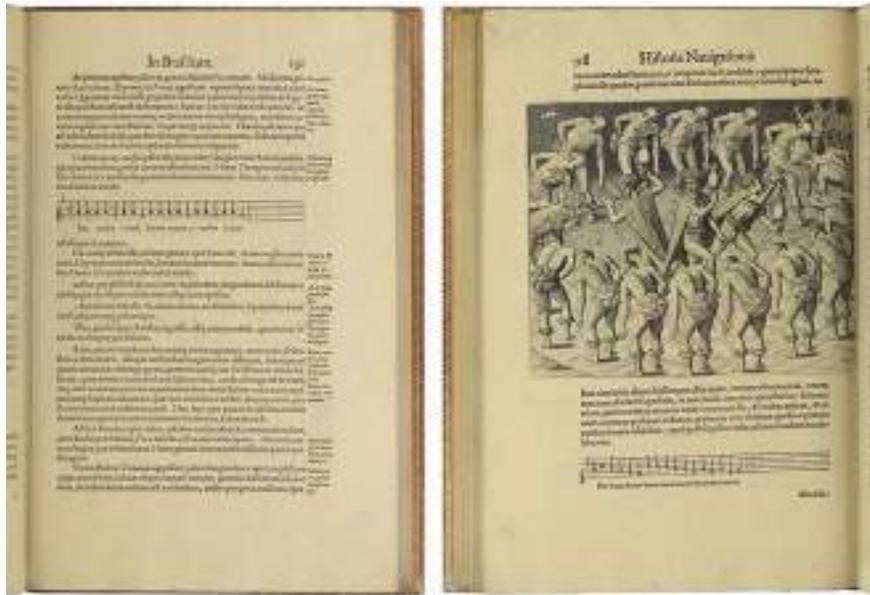
The would-be settlers returned to a Europe bloodsoaked by the first decades of what would become over a century of religious warfare—violence between Catholics and Protestants, of course, but also among rival Protestant groups. Léry was caught up in these conflicts and the horrors they unleashed. Perhaps because he witnessed French-on-French cannibalism during the Catholic siege of Protestant Sancerre in 1573 (an account of which he published in 1574), Léry returned to his memories of Brazil and the Tupi people he encountered there two decades before.<sup>2</sup> In 1578, in Geneva, he published the first edition of his *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Bresil, autrement dite Amerique*. Famously, its pages recall the haunting music that Léry had heard on the other side of the Atlantic: "Whenever I remember it, my heart trembles, and it seems their voices are still in my ears."<sup>3</sup>

The *Histoire* sold well: its publisher brought out a second Geneva edition in 1580, and a third edition in 1585. Crucially, in that third edition the music Léry remembered was not simply evoked. Léry included musical notations and lyrics for five of the songs he supposedly heard: "Canidé louue" (Yellow Macaw), "Camouroupouy-ouassou" (Large Sardine), and three chants from a Tupi ceremony Léry curiously describes as a witches' sabbath.<sup>4</sup>

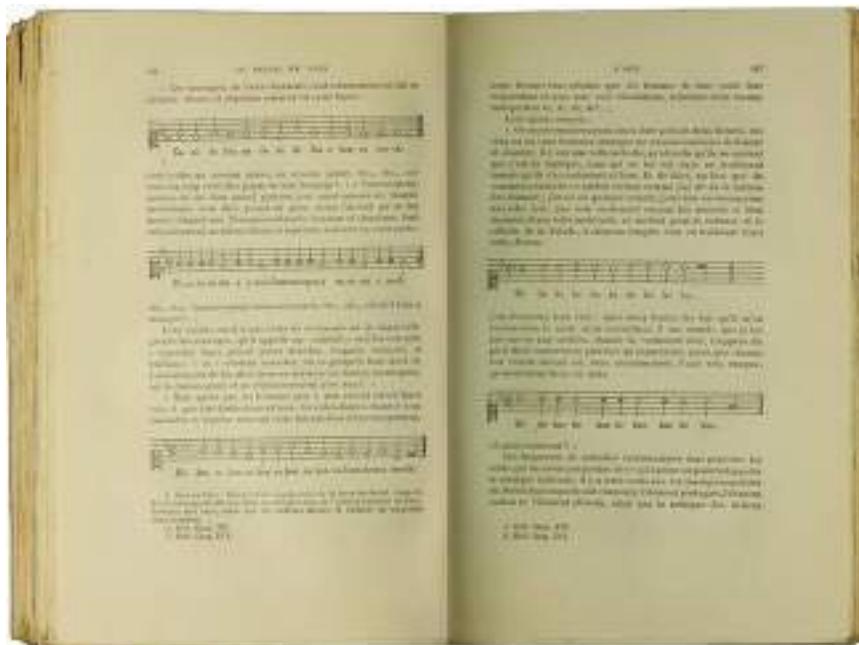


**Fig. 1.** Words and music for "Canidé louue" and one of the supposed-sabbath chants as published in the 1585 edition of Jean de Léry's *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Bresil* (pages 159 and 285). Image courtesy of the Bibliothèque de Genève.

These songs were republished in further editions (as well as Latin translations) over the next two decades.<sup>5</sup> Most important for our story is the richly-illustrated 1592 Latin translation printed in Frankfurt by Theodor de Bry. There, the thirteen notes of Léry's "Canidé louue" were increased to fourteen (a penultimate note was added at the end), and the fourteen notes of Léry's second "sabbath" song were increased to sixteen—and its lyrics were expanded as well.<sup>6</sup>



**Fig. 2.** Words and music for "Canidé louue" and one of the supposed-sabbath chants as published in Theodor de Bry's 1592 *Americae tertia pars* (pages 186 and 228). Image courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.



**Fig. 3.** Words and music for Jean de Léry's five Tupinamba songs, as published in *Le Brésil en 1889* (pages 546–547). Image courtesy of the University of Toronto Library.

Four hundred years later, de Bry's transformations served as sources for reprinting the songs again (in Paris this time) for a book that was part of Brazil's contribution to the Eiffel Tower-inaugurating 1889 Exposition Universelle: *Le Brésil en 1889*. Therein, Eduardo Paulo da Silva Prado's chapter about "L'Art" included all five of Léry's songs, based on de Bry's versions—but, once again, transformed. Some notes have different values than in de Bry, and the Tupi words were broken up so that one syllable corresponded to each note (a correspondence left ambiguous in the earlier publications).<sup>7</sup>

Nearly forty years after that, in 1927 (and once again in Paris), Brazilian composer Heitor Villa-Lobos (a *Carioca* who lived in the French capital from 1923–24 and 1927–30) performed his just-written *Tres poémas indigenas*. The first movement was based on two of Léry's Tupi songs...as they had been transformed and published by da Silva Prado.

The image shows a page of a musical score. At the top, it reads "TRES POÉMAS INDIGENAS (TRES POÉMAS INDIGENAS) N. 1" and "à Heitor VILLO". The title "CANIDE IOUNE-SABATH" is prominently displayed. Below the title, it says "AVE ANABELLA" and "CANCÃO-ILDOUAS". The composer's name "H. VILLO-LOBOS" is at the bottom right. The score is for voice and piano, with staves for voice, piano, and piano accompaniment. The music is in a key with one flat and a 2/4 time signature. The lyrics are written below the voice staff.

**Fig. 4.** The opening "Canidé loune" section of Heitor Villa-Lobos' *Tres poémas indigenas* (published in Paris by Éditions Max Eschig in 1929). Image courtesy of Harvard University's Loeb Music Library.



**Fig. 5.** Pages 2 and 3 of Heitor Villa-Lobos' *Tres poêmas indígenas* (published in Paris by Éditions Max Eschig in 1929), alternating between the "Canidé loune" and "Sabath" themes. Image courtesy of Harvard University's Loeb Music Library.

Tupi songs turned to memories later written down on paper in France, then printed by hand in Geneva, then copied and transformed and printed again in Frankfurt, then copied and transformed and printed again in Paris four centuries later, then copied and recomposed and performed as songs four decades after that...This is, of course, a story of (repeated) transatlantic human travel. But it is also a story of media migrations: from song to memory to manuscript to print to manuscript to print to manuscript to print to score to song...and to audio recording in 1940, and then to online video (its soundtrack illustrated with woodcuts from Léry's *Histoire* as well as engravings from de Bry's *Americae*)—which is how we first heard Villa-Lobos' haunting modernist work.<sup>8</sup>

This centuries-spanning narrative is one of many we could use to illustrate a basic point: migrations of media always encompass other migrations as well: of people, objects, ideas, concepts, archives, functions, and so on. The aim of this session was to examine the migration of artistic

mediums across time and space, with a comparative perspective and a critical approach to cultural processes in the visual arts. The use of theories from media archaeology and the analyses of experiences and reflections already published in this field provided points of departure, offering the possibility to reframe classic art historical concerns related to movement and transfer.<sup>9</sup> Media studies have revealed hybridizations of forms and contents in the visual arts to be processes in constant movement—such as from local to global or eternal to ephemeral (and vice-versa)—processes that illuminate not only a multiplicity of vocabularies, supports, uses, and reuses, but also attendant prejudices, exclusions, and destitutions that are not always so evident. The political dimensions of media and its migrations across time and space, as well as the aesthetic possibilities and cultural implications of these processes in our contemporary world, were topics of particular interest for this session.

In our call for papers, a number of epistemological questions were proposed to inspire discussions of media migrations. What happens when an object created and cared for in one time and place is transferred to an entirely different environment? How are specific artistic media transformed when taken to places (and times) different from the ones in which they originated? What happens when artworks, performances, and/or practitioners from a specific time and place are turned into *records* (visual and alphabetic descriptions, in various media), which are themselves then transported for consumption to other sites? What happens when an older image is used to make a newer image, in a different time and place or in a different medium? How do these migrations of media relate to other forms of migration?

Overall, the essays of this session created broad dialogues across space and time, exploring the deep genealogies (both continuous and disjunctive) of practices involving the transfer and transformation of ideas, objects, and images. Over the course of two days, through presentations given both in-person and online, our conversations ranged from prehistoric wheels to modernist dust to 70s Super 8 to contemporary algorithmic photography; from Zacatecas circa 1706 to Beijing in the 1920s to a world tour in the 1930s to New Delhi in the 2020s; and from medieval Bominaco to Renaissance Rome to postwar Brazil and Italy to early third-millennium Rio.

Read together, what conceptual-theoretical unities can be drawn from these various studies?

One emergent theme considers the infrastructural-medial conditions of possibility that generated specific artifacts and their descendants, from the clash between modernist urban planning and the environment of Brasilia's dry plateau (Heeren); to the now-vanished roadways that would have made wheeled transport possible in the ancient valley of the Danube (Vukovic); to the steamships that enabled a round-the-world photo-documentation of the effects of the 1929 crash (Paiva de Toledo); to the role of UNESCO and high-quality reproductive image technologies in galvanizing theories (as well as mobile practices) of midcentury "museums without walls" based on good reproductions (Vitali, Pozzoli).

Another thread reveals how newer media technologies can call into question the assumptions formed by older media technologies: from eyeball-determined versus algorithm-determined photographic images (Rossi); to performer versus audience perspectives on live performances of theatrical texts versus their video-recorded incarnations (Bathwal); to emergent artistic and theoretical practices that muddy older constraints presumed by the problematic binary of white cube versus black box (Hosni); to how the trauma of occupation and iconoclasm could push artists to consider the advantages (and difficulties) of painting on stone as opposed to the traditional but more fragile supports of plaster and canvas (Kobo); to the challenges of ephemeral performance art for standard museological assumptions about archive and exhibition—challenges now being met in innovative ways (Horta).

Finally, a third (possible) strand interrogates the deep history of transcontinental circulations and transformations of media formats, looking at how books printed in Victorian Britain might inspire a magazine article and then a painted pavilion in Republican China (Teng); or how mystical visions of transatlantic travel from Spain to New Spain inspired a mimetic flow of texts and images east to west across the Atlantic, a flow that in turn generated new kinds of images and devotions (Saylor; keyword: bilocation!); or how Sasanian textual sources were used in the 1930s to propose an iconographic nomination which may (or may not!) actually connect to a widespread and well-documented pan-Eurasian circulation (indeed,

returning to our opening example, migration!) of various wingèd hybrid beasts in artworks from Sasanian Persia to medieval Gerona to nineteenth-century Bulgaria (Trudu).

Many other connective itineraries could be generated across these rich and fascinating studies. We hope you will imagine your own!

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## Endnotes

1. Whatley, "Translator's Introduction"; Barbara, "Catholic and Protestant Martyrdoms."
2. Léry, *Histoire memorable*, 291–292; Porras, "Copies, Cannibals, and Conquerors," 262, 269n28.
3. Quoted and discussed in Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, 16.
4. Léry, *Histoire d'un voyage*, 159, 173, 279, 285, 286. Our starting point for tracking the following musical history was Chelsea Burns' excellent "*Musique cannibale*," a just-published study of Villa-Lobos' use of Léry (and other sources) in his *Tres poemas indígenas*. Burns notes that it was unclear how Villa-Lobos "accessed the two scores he used for this song ["Canidé Ioune - Sabath"] or which versions of them he saw" (95). We hope our essay provides a useful appendix to Burns by clarifying this history of transmission. All of the pieces to that puzzle were provided by Corrêa de Azevedo in his classic (and still impressive) article on "Tupynambá Melodies" from 1941; thanks to archive.org, we had a much easier time tracking down (and comparing) books and scores published across four centuries than he did eighty years ago. For a broader look at Villa-Lobos' "indigenous style," see parts 1 and 2 of Ferrão Moreira, "O Estilo indígena." In terms of Léry's song titles, on the *canidé* as a kind of macaw (Portuguese *arara*), and the *camurupy* as a fish from the Clupeidae family (of which the Brazilian sardine, *Sardinella brasiliensis*, seems to be the most important in the waters off the southeast coast of Brazil), see see Caldas Tibiriçá, *Dicionário*, 80, 79; as well as Moreira, Paschoal, Dias Cezar, and Luque, "Occurrence," 616.
5. The key study of this history of publications and transformations is Corrêa de Azevedo, "Tupynambá Melodies."
6. de Bry, *Americae tertia pars*, 186, 191, 226, 228, 229.
7. Silva Prado, "L'Art," 546–547.
8. Not incidentally for our project overall, this recording was made in 1940 onboard the SS Uruguay, part of a larger South American musical documentation project organized by Leopold Stokowski (part of which was released on a shellac gramophone disk as *Native Brazilian Music* in 1942): Quarteto do Coral Orfeão Villa-Lobos - Canidé Ioune: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oXqUnvtVYNc&list=PL878DD79A14280741&index=24>. See also <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/native-brazilian-music-80th-anniversary-museum-villa-lobos/WgXB2-gLJSxsJQ?hl=en>
9. We can hardly provide a complete overview of works in media archaeology here, but key points of reference for proposing this session and its theme include McLuhan and Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage*; Clanchy, "Tenacious Letters"; Crary, "Techniques of the Observer"; Clanchy, "Reading the Signs"; Latour, "Drawing Things Together"; Hutchins, *Cognition in the*

*Wild*; Turazzi, Rio de Janeiro 'panorámico'; Gruzinski, *Mestizo Mind*; Stallybrass, Chartier, Mowery, and Wolfe. "Hamlet's Tables"; Roberts, "Copley's Cargo"; Harwood, *The Interface*; Otero-Pailos, "Ambivalence of Smoke"; Kittler, "Rock Music"; Mosco, *To the Cloud*; Siegert, *Cultural Techniques*; Peters, *Marvelous Clouds*; Hamann, *Translations of Nebrija*; Hamann, "Counterfeit Money"; Russell and Vinsel, "After Innovation"; and Turazzi, *The Oriental-Hydrographe and Photography*.

# Moving Images in Exhibition Design: Questions About the Passage of the Black Box to the White Cube

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## **ABSTRACT**

Audiovisual works in the exhibition design require special attention regarding the means of production of the original media and how it is shown to the contemporary art public. For the viewer, who sees a projected work in a secluded room, the image brings greater immersion in the large dimension of the screen. But if the exact artwork is presented on a monitor with headphones, it is clear that the image size is more familiar, similar to the television, the well-known apparatus in our house. Considering the different ways an artwork could be exhibited in contemporary art events, we aim to assess the tension of the relations between the moving image in the exhibition design, bringing to light aspects of the audiovisual media. Finally, the concept of Gray Zone is suggested instead of the "passage of the White Cube to the Black Box," a term used at the beginning of the 2000s.

## **KEYWORDS**

Audiovisual; Exhibition design; Contemporary Art; Installation; Video Art.

Audiovisual works, included in the wide range of time-based media artworks, are known for having certain specificities regarding the exhibition. Among them are luminosity, sound, and issues about the original format of the work and its consequent transposition to other formats. These are essential aspects that can influence the fruition of the spectator in the exhibition space. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the expression "passage from the White Cube to the Black Box" became widely known in contemporary art, referring to many works with moving images in museums, galleries, and biennials. However, despite the validity of its use at that moment, today, we can bring other references to the debate, proposing new reflections to think about the audiovisual in exhibitions. The concept of the White Cube has been widely referenced since the famous text of Brian O'Doherty, in 1976. As it is known, the White Cube addresses the seek for neutrality concerning any external interference. Although the term is wrongly associated with the white walls of the exhibition design, it is essential to highlight that the concept problematizes a way of exhibition related to the modernist values of the 20th Century. It is a concept that emerged in the 1970s, questioning some foundations of modernism. O'Doherty mentioned that the White Cube isolates the work of art in its own time and space, thus making it a timeless and sacred piece. In this temple, the exhibition, he says, any mundane external aspect is secluded, such as the presence of architecture and the spectator's body.

The term Black Box has several meanings, depending on the field. One reference to the Black Box mentions the experimental theater. It was introduced during the 1960s, with black walls and simple scenic lights bringing a sense of proximity between the actors and the audience, making the play - usually small productions - more intimate.

A second reference to the Black Box has a technical aspect, alluding to aircraft boxes that carry input/output information that can only be accessed under certain circumstances. The use of this device is the basis for *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, written by the philosopher Vilém Flusser. In this book, widely known in communication programs, he reflects on the

photographic industry, but the ideas are vast and associated with image production.

The third Black Box reference, which interests us the most, concerns its use in the exhibition design. It is typically represented as a closed room, usually painted in black to avoid refraction of light, with only one way to enter and exit. The construction is temporal and is a well-controlled space for light and sound. The projector is on the ceiling, and the environment has specific isolation from other works in the exhibition. It is worth mentioning that in all three references, the Black Box is a dark place, like a cave that allows the spectator to be immersed, whether through a narrative artwork or not. The apparatus avoids possible distractions from the surroundings, controlling the light so that the spectator's attention focuses on the screen.

The dichotomy White Cube, Black Box, brings certain subjects: attention and distraction, mobility, and immobility, usually mentioned in theories of dispositive. They seem to be antonyms when placed next to each other. However, when it comes to the relationship between the spectator, the moving image artwork, and the exhibition design, a fine line demonstrates any definition's fragility.

In the early 2000s, the expression "passage from the White Cube to the Black Box" was used by critics and curators to talk about exhibitions flooded with dark rooms, filled with the artificial light of the projectors, which sure caused discomfort among the spectators. On the one hand, there were defenders to the entry of this technological device, bringing more moving image artworks into the exhibition space. Still, on the other hand, there was some resistance (is it cinema or not?), and there were also cases of opinions that changed over time. When we talk about image, it is crucial to consider the exhibition design and how the spectator perceives the work based on the artist's intention. How the artwork is displayed considers several questions. The projected image in the museum is heterogeneous by nature, converging, in the exhibition environment, different trajectories of artists and filmmakers.

Regarding how the work is displayed to the spectator, the consensus is that both models, the White Cube and the Black Box, seek a way of control by

indicating a particular perception for the viewer. Claire Bishop argues that both modes correspond to the bourgeois disciplining model of monitoring and controlling the spectator's body (2018, 30). In exhibition places, the body or the interaction between the spectators becomes a possible measure of discomfort in the space. If in the modernist gallery, any conversation or noise could interrupt the sublime moment in front of art, the same occurs in the cinema, with a popcorn noise, in the dark coming from someone sitting in the next chair.

In exhibitions that concentrate on a large number of audiovisual works, the leaking of the sound component is one of the elements that worry the most both the artists, the curatorial team, and the spectators. Although it refers to the characteristics of cinema – the darkroom with its beam of light projected on a wall or other surface, like a suspended screen – the exhibition space does not have the same technical competence as the cinema device.

### **Different media, different technological needs**

Considering the exhibition design, moving image artworks have special needs regarding how they will be shown. It involves how the artwork is produced, if in film, telecined video, or digital; what is the original format, and how is the best way to exhibit it. For example, viewing artwork on television sets in old-school cathode-ray tubes brings particular attention to the history of video art.

From the 1960s onwards, the artworks exhibited on televisions became a regular practice in contemporary art. The mass communication medium as a tool of expression, rooted in domestic furniture, brings the video art to the center of a debate about how the spectator perceives the moving image during the time. In Brazil, for instance, in the 1970s, critics and the public viewed this new medium in exhibitions with suspicion, as seen in some events like the São Paulo Biennial.



**Fig. 1.** Video Art Center. 16ª Bienal de São Paulo (1981).  
Arquivo Histórico Wanda Svevo - AHWS

The work of Brazilian visual artists who, since the 1970s, have done investigations in the video is widely known in Brazil as the so-called “pioneer video art generation” (Machado, 2007). Despite all difficulties in getting access to technology, groups of artists from São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro as well as institutions like MAC-USP (Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo) and MAM/RJ (Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro) promoted essential initiatives, especially considering the context of curtailed individual liberties by the civil-military dictatorship then in power. For the critics, videoart was seen with skepticism since the new media was not yet established in the realm of the arts. Walter Zanini remarks that critics saw video art as an “imported” and “colonized” art. He states that “the critic, almost always conventional in attitude, generally welcomed these investigations with disinformation or coldness, assimilating little or nothing or already offering a dazzled epitaph” (2010, 90).

Frederico Morais noticed that public reception was generally prejudicial: “They consider it monotonous due to the exhaustive repetition of

the same image, to its static feature (opposing the dynamism of conventional broadcast TV), and, at last, to the discomfort, which is actually more psychological than real, in face of the relaxed and easy way we watch TV at home” (2010, 74).

Neither the public seemed favorable to the use of the new media: “Avoid the North American section because it is all just television, ok?”, (Folha de São Paulo, 1975) was the comment by a spectator that made the news on the occasion of the 13th São Paulo Biennial.

In the 1980s, video art had a more familiar scenario for artists, spectators, and critics. It was common to present video works in special rooms, like a living room, showing one artwork after another, linearly, in a previously defined schedule. It was economical and, in a way, presented video artworks with a sense of temporality similar to that of movies. However, the content was completely different. Video artworks could also be exhibited freely in the exhibition space. This media has the advantage of being a source of light that can be shown in constant flux with the lights on. It doesn't need a dark room, as they can be arranged alone - in totems, with a base or pedestal, individually - or in videowalls, or even arranged with other elements.

On the one hand, works in a video presented on television have the luminosity needed to be free in the exhibition space, but, on the other hand, they lose in scale. Compared to a projection on a wall, the television seems like a small square in a sea of images.

If in the 1970s, projectors such as Advent, used by artists like Peter Campus, had certain limitations, such as the lack of definition; in the 1990s-2000s, the use of digital projectors in the exhibition space became frequent. Consequently, for many works, the famous black boxes were a solution. The secluded room also favored better soundproofing.

One factor favoring the growth of moving image installations is undoubtedly the improvement in digital technology since the 1990s, which, as a consequence, allowed artists to create more efficiently, through video and non-linear montage, and within the scope of the exhibition, with the use of projectors in the exhibition spaces. The miniaturization of electronic devices and the increased data storage capacity made equipment lighter and more

portable. Video is one of the tools that, due to the ease of transposing time and space and enabling the spectator's immersion, helps the process of audiovisual consolidation.



**Fig. 2.** *In-Out* (Antropofagia). Video Room, Museu de arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (2019)

Works projected in dark rooms indeed attract greater attention from the spectator due to the visual-sound isolation from other exhibition aspects. Artworks such as *In-Out (Antropofagia)*, by the Brazilian artist Anna Maria Maiolino, filmed in Super-8 and later telecined, revealed significant differences whether the work is projected in a dark room or displayed on an LCD monitor. In Maiolino's 1973/1974 film, the camera focuses on different mouths moving on the screen, performing actions such as exhaling smoke, pulling in, and chewing colored wires. For the viewer, who sees the projected work, it is clear that the larger the screen, the greater the immersion, as if the repetitive movement of the mouths turned into something else, an

anthropophagic internal/external channel, as mentioned by the title of the work.

In contrast, if the same work is presented on a monitor with headphones, the image size is more familiar, similar to the apparatus in our houses. The immersion of the darkroom is displaced, but the video gains in dialogue with the exhibition design and other surrounding works of art.

As every media has pros and cons, deciding to show a video in a cathode ray tube, an LCD television, or a projection room depends on the occasion, artwork, and curatorial proposal. Despite that, a space in-between the White Cube and the Black Box can offer a more accessible way to see moving image artworks. As Giuliana Bruno mentioned, there is something between spatial perception and bodily motion. For this plurality of readings in the exhibition design, a Gray Zone is suggested instead of the “passage of the White Cube to the Black Box.”

#### **Gray Zone, a space in-between the White Cube and the Black Box**

The idea of a Gray Zone emerged as a way to think about audiovisual exhibitions, crossing fields such as architecture, film studies, and visual arts (Hosni, 2021). Seeking the fluidity between spaces, allowing a plurality of readings between the artworks, the Gray Zone avoids forms of isolation, especially in large-format exhibitions, such as biennials. Inspired by the ideas of Paul Klee and Claire Bishop, the color gray is located in the middle of the chromatic scale, avoiding opposition. What interests us, above all, is this point of contact, friction, which is mobile, flexible, and raised by different agents. Thus, the Gray Zone is where conflict happened, for instance, in the Venice Biennale, in 2001. In the event, many moving image installations were located in the Arsenale. The lack of budget, time, and tiredness of the curator, Harald Szeemann, created a remembrance of this problematic exhibition.

In this way, the Gray Zone considers the exhibition's architecture and the dialogue between the artist and the curator as all equal parts searching for better audiovisual solutions. After 2010, other ways, different from the Black Box, appeared, for instance, in the 32nd São Paulo Biennial, in 2016. This edition, curated by Jochen Volz, was named Live Uncertainty. On the

pavilion's top floor was the moving image artwork *Everything and More*, by Rachel Rose. In the video, a training center for an astronaut appeared, as well as hyper-realistic details of organic forms that overlapped, approached, and distanced themselves in a sensory montage journey. The image was projected on a large translucent screen that occupied the entire height of the wall. In the background, the spectator could see Ibirapuera's Park. Depending on the brightness of the day, the foliage of the trees could be seen - the background blending with the images captured by Rose. The experience of watching it in the morning, at night, or on a cloudy day differs significantly with this permeable screen. Rachel Rose, who prefers to work with natural light rather than indoors, achieved significant impact in uniting the moving image's characteristics with the Biennial Pavillion's architecture.



**Fig. 3.** *Everything and More*, 32<sup>o</sup> Bienal de São Paulo (2016)  
Arquivo Histórico Wanda Svevo - AHWS

From this perspective, regardless of when the viewer arrived on the installation, he was hooked by the images, sitting on the gray carpet of the room. In addition, there was a recurrent presence of people watching the video lying down, using their cell phones, in a kind of attention/distraction very close to the relationship with television. This room, a carpeted area next

to an access ramp, also offered a break for those who would walk through the pavilion.



**Fig. 4** *Wind*, 33ª Bienal de São Paulo (2020)

Another example relevant to our reflections occurred at the end of 2020, in the exhibition *Wind*, shown in the pavilion that integrated the 34th edition of the Biennial. Among the 21 works spread out in the exhibition space, *Wind*, from 1968, by Joan Jonas stood out, occupying the central span, thus being visible from afar. The dancing and walking of people facing the wind gained a new dimension due to the wide projection. The exhibition appears to indicate a move towards recent large-format exhibitions, choosing a few works that establish a dialogue with each other and resonate with the spectator – valuing, above all, the experience of being in the place. A smaller amount of works, but with a better audiovisual perception of the environment, could direct the sensitivity of the spectators to the moment.

After the pandemic restrictions, an exhibition will hardly insist on a closed room, having no control of the public or circulation of air. Moreover, in the contemporary sanitary perspective, artworks that are exposed in dialogue with other works, with the architecture, like porous structures, are valued. Thus, in the current scenario, it is possible to glimpse the future of the Gray Zone when moving image installations can be viewed in other exhibition contexts.

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# Media Migration to the Digital: The Case of Algorithmic Photography

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## **ABSTRACT**

The paper discusses migration of photography into the digital as one of many examples of media migration through the means of language, an object and an art medium.

Language is a living entity. It can act as an interface in a continuous process of translation and transcoding through a metamorphic shift from the physical to the virtual space. Under this perspective, to consider the language of photography means to address the old medium (photography) embedded into the new one (algorithmic language).

Algorithmic photography has a specific linguistic dimension. It is language because it is generated by software, or more precisely, by the language of software that generates the “space” of photography and affects its internal dynamics. Algorithmic photography also leads to a paradox: the fact that photography, as means of reproduction, is produced by language, which can only be related to ‘production’, assuming that it lives in ‘a continuous state of re-configuration and re-mediation’.

Algorithmic photography, and the linguistic play that enables the migrating of photography into the digital, is the starting point of a journey that guides us along the migration of media and culture in the digital world. Works by Marco Cadioli, Peter Ashton, Luigi Pagliarini, John Rafman, Joanna Zilinska, Clement Valla, as well as images of the Black Hole, will help demonstrate the various ways in which code migrate reality into the digital realm, with a particular focus on photography.

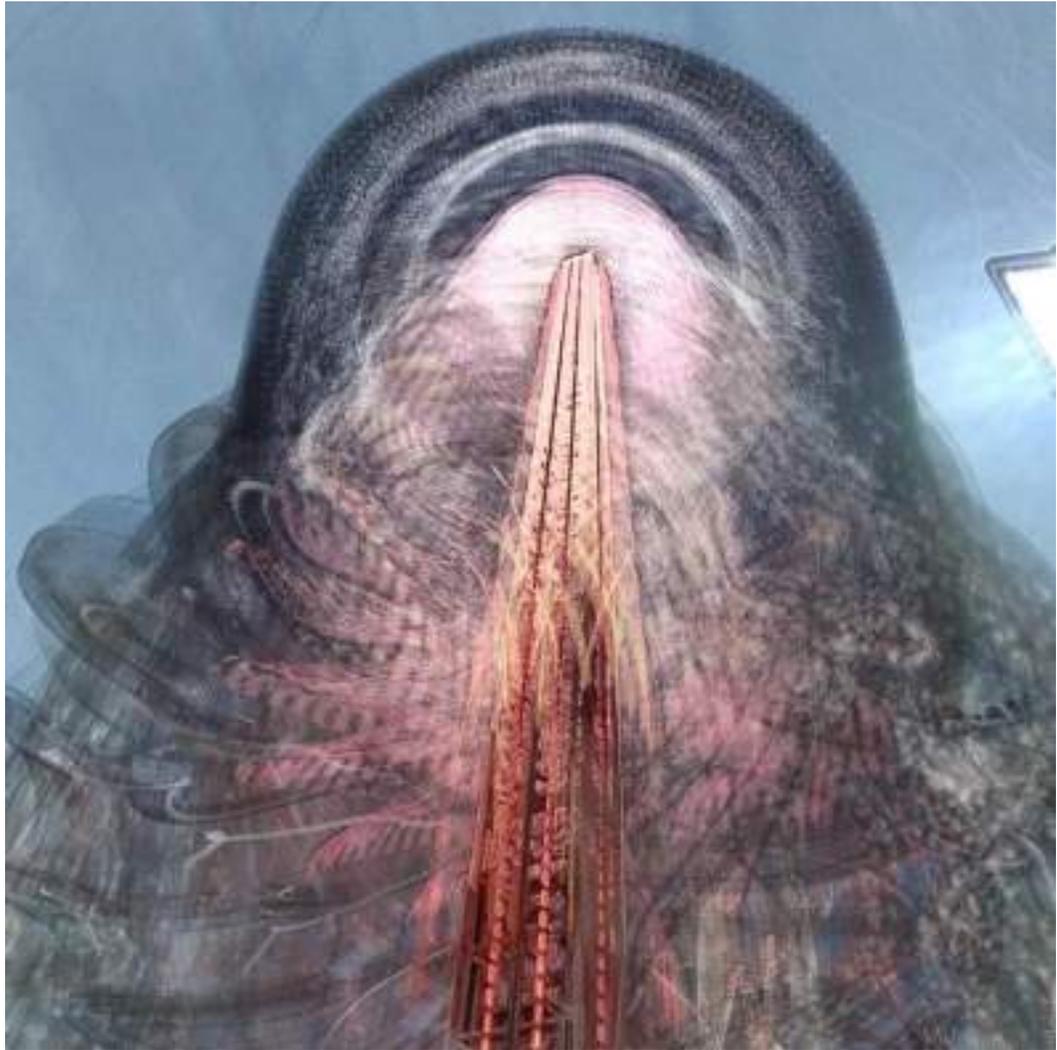
## **KEYWORDS**

Photography; Language; Software; Transcoding; Remediation

When considering the migration of photography into the digital realm we need to consider many aspects, on the first place: shots as a product of an algorithmic process on the first place, the production of a digital image that shapes from the newborn (digital) matter, and the many spaces that separate our eye from the portrayed subject.<sup>1</sup>

Images are generated by the language of code “they exist as mathematical data which can be displayed in a variety of modes - sacrificing colour, spatial or temporal resolution.” This was put forward by Lev Manovich in the early Nineties in an essay dedicated to the ‘paradoxes of digital photography’, when digital use did not greatly separate the lens from its subject but indeed set up a process of scanning the image which trans-codified it into the world of the screen, triggering the “annihilation of photography and the solidifying and glorifying of the photographic.”<sup>2</sup>

The migration of photography into the digital takes another step with the work by British artist Alex May. The image is not simply scanned. Instead, the portrayed subject crosses the screen through a process that combines traditional photographic techniques with algorithms. The migration of the image into the digital is achieved using Fugio, a software written by May in 2014 and released in 2016 as open-source that enables to compress the time of events preceding and following the event into one single frame that contains thousands of frames. The pinhole camera that belongs to the traditional chemical photography is replaced by a viewfinder-less GoPro, and photographic film is substituted by an algorithm. It is possible to view the image develop in its ‘dark room’ software. Each algorithm is designed to capture specific information, from bold swathes of colour as people travel through the shot, or subtle movements in nature that are too slow or small to be perceived by the human eye, such as the movement of clouds, raindrops, and insects. His algorithmic photographs migrate the captured subject into the digital while unfolding the event in time.



**Fig. 1.** Alex May, *Their screams of laughter burnt bright trails into the evening sky (detail)*, 2019, algorithmic photography. Courtesy the Artist

**Photography, media migration and the eye. Non human Vision:  
Joanna Zilinska, Jon Rafman, Marco Cadioli, Clement Valla**

In investigating what it means to photograph in an age in which ‘technical reproducibility’ flows into ubiquitous distribution, the task of further relocating the author’s role is added to that of redefining the landscape. The question of the eye separated from the camera, already widely discussed in analogue photography, becomes more complex at the instant in which the eye is

transferred into the body of the machine.

Non-human vision becomes a point of observation from where to turn our perspective perception upside down toward all its nonhuman entanglements. “The concept of ‘non human photography can help us see and understand, in a new way, both the photographic medium and ourselves as partly constituted by this medium”. And still “Most of the historically important functions of the human eyes are being supplanted by practices in which visual images no longer have any reference to the position of an observer in a “real”, optically perceived world. If these images can be said to refer to anything, it is to millions of bits of electronic mathematical data.”<sup>3</sup>

In a series of her work, part of the series *Active Perceptual Systems*, images were captured by an automated intelligent wearable camera (*Autographer*), conceived as a mnemonic device to aid Alzheimer’s affected people. She wore the camera in various everyday situations: on a city walk, in a holiday resort, in an art gallery, in lecture theatre. Her decision to open the camera was coupled by the one of the camera on what to photograph and when. The machinic behavior was anyway influenced by her body movement (for instance, by stopping in an immersive gaze and so encouraging the camera to become active in that moment).

Jon Rafman, an artist who explores the contemporary technological through a variety of means, has been capturing images from *Google Street Views* when this tool was just emerging on the market (he started in 2008 and *Google Street View* was introduced as a feature of *Google Maps* in 2007 when there were only a selection of streets in the United States). Rafman was interested in the automatic eye of the camera and in its relationship with the content revealed in certain situations. He frames unaware subjects who happened to enter Street Views field of vision, highlighting and indulging in the unsettling ethical implications of making images of individual people’s lives accessible and useful to all users. By placing the images in art contexts, Rafman called into question the role of artists in relation to the rise of automated forms of cultural production.

Marco Cadioli brought himself beyond the screen as a net-photographer since the early 2000s, when he published the “Net

Photography Manifesto”. He has been producing reports from online war games, Second Life, as an “embedded” photographer and has published reports from virtual worlds on various mainstream international magazines. “I am using a software whose icon is a camera.”, states Cadioli in his *Net Photography Manifesto* in 2003, *I can capture screen slices. They are web page snapshots. The Cut&Paste operation is allowed in the new media, it is the natural development of photography into digital spaces.*<sup>4</sup>

As part of the series *Living in a Computer Simulation* (2015), his photographs of Edolo, in the region of Val Camonica in Northern Italy, were taken from Google Earth and manipulated on smart phone through filters that were employed in order to bring back the shots in time, to artificially reproduce the nostalgic feeling of the film with its imperfections.



**Fig. 2** Marco Cadioli, *Living in a Computer Simulation*, 2015.  
Courtesy of the Artist

In his works there are many other media migration that would deserve attention into another session as he, as an artist, is very careful on how to translate these works back into the physical space. It is the case of his *Abstract Journeys*, a screen capture series from Google Earth that explores the different surfaces and forms which have been transformed by man's work in an abstract geometric composition that he printed on metal, or simulated polaroid format offered by online services (as in the aforementioned series *Living in a Computer Simulation*) or others.

Snapshots are also the ones that belongs to *Postcards from Google Earth* by Clement Valla, a collection of stills extrapolated from his navigation on Google Earth, the software for geographical reproduction of the globe. The artist's curiosity was captured by the encounter with images of the Earth's surface which were incongruous with regard to what we expect from the idea of a representation of the physical world, supposed as hyper-realistic: to upside-down buildings, liquefied bridges and roads. On closer analysis Valla realized that it wasn't a case of glitches but rather the logical outcome of the image production process in the software used by Google, *The Universal Texture*. They are an edge condition – an anomaly within the system, a nonstandard, an outlier, even, but not an error”, notes Clement Valla, “These jarring moments expose how Google Earth works, focusing our attention on the software. They are seams which reveal a new model of seeing and of representing our world – as dynamic, ever-changing data from a myriad of different sources – endlessly combined, constantly updated, creating a seamless illusion.”<sup>5</sup>

Valla's snapshots are moments in a space-time process that lives within the image and manifests itself in its function of interface. So it is not a question of a 'fragment of landscape' but rather the existence thereof within a processual [therefore interfacial] dimension that lives in the screen and takes form in its continuous updating. Another time, the eye that guides the lens of the camera is governed by the Google Earth algorithm, which is also the author of the qualitative criteria that dictate the adoption or otherwise of an archive document image (criteria that favor, for example, images free from climatic interferences that might penalize sharpness).

All this involves a revolution in the very concept of reality. First and foremost we have to consider all those invisible strata of information (including those of the social networks) that structure (in physical and concrete terms) this new landscape, delineated in its very mutability and coincident with the image. Landscape and image are alive, they are born and they evolve in their interfacial nature and function, “processes that effect a result of whatever kind”<sup>6</sup>. This means muffling the certainty that the object portrayed “was certainly, indisputably present...”<sup>7</sup>

“Since the organism’s technological extensions in the broader sense are expanding and transforming the very concept of reality,” as Adam Berg expresses this revolution, “then is inevitable that our ontology is not grounded in either math or perception but in how the two are mutually transformed throughout a shared ‘logic’ of transcoding.”<sup>8</sup> This logic of constant trans-codification from one state to another (format or whatever) is root and condition of the landscape for how we are framing it with our lens. This means that digital photographic (re)production coincides with the ‘production’ of images that take form in their algorithmic mutability, the same as the landscape photographed.

The passage from the real to the liquid world, beyond the screen, is dissolved in the coexistence of image and landscape on a selfsame spatial-temporal plane. The dimension we inhabit is no longer ‘impressed’ but ‘expressed’ as interface, at the crossroads of visible and invisible. “Interfaces themselves are effects,” explains artist and theoretician Alexander Galloway, “in that they bring about transformation in material states. But at the same time interfaces are themselves the effects of other things, and thus tell the story of the larger forces that engender them.”<sup>9</sup>

The correspondence of structural and processual logics between universal and particular is by now well known and has also been encountered recently in the study of quantum physics; micro- and macro-world therefore find themselves in a play of correspondences. Thus, we can imagine landscape repeated also within the photographic instrument. Everything is contained in the whole that lives in its very same continuous change, the one that shapes a kaleidoscopic world.

**Photography, media migration and digital matter: Peter Ashton, Luigi Pagliarini**

In the liquid world matter has its own consistency and it follows its own behaviors and dynamics. Peter Ashton reveals digital matter setting out from the [inevitable] processes of trans - codification to which the images are subjected, multiplied and accelerated in the practices of sharing on the social networks. His work *Sitting in Stagram* is a portrait of the composer Alvin Lucier and of what happens when his image is compressed and decompressed to be reposted ninety times on Instagram. The portrait of Alvin Lucier and its title – *Sitting in Stagram* – evoke *I am sitting in a room*, Lucier's 1969 experiment in which, closed in a room, he recorded his own voice and subsequently rerecorded it on tape a great number of times until all that remained of his words was an indecipherable noise. Its magnitude, intensity and compass were dictated by the reverberation of frequencies in the room. Spatial characteristics (large, small, full, empty), thus, found their sonar translation and correspondence. In the case of Ashton's work, Instagram applications subject images to a series of format conversions aimed at optimizing them to favor circulation on the web. The repeated action renders visible the inevitable process of deterioration of the image. The degenerative process of the portrait in Ashton's work made Instagram visible as a room built 'for' and 'in' the sharing of images. It also made evidence the existence of matter in digital space.

Luigi Pagliarini visualizes the behavior of digital matter through his *Energies Visualiser*, a software developed in 2004, based on the dynamics of Artificial Intelligence of which Pagliarini was a pioneer supported by a background in neuro-psychology. Photographs, as well as any other images, paintings, screenshots, are transformed into an algorithmic video or infinite painting. Each pixel is treated as an atom and behaves as such. By adopting the *principle of proximity* as model of the flux of energy, which establishes that any pixel can only influence the one next to it, Pagliarini and his team could establish how to measure forces within the pixel and how to activate them toward a perpetual motion that moves the image from abstraction to

figuration. Everything that exists within an image, any fixed image, is returned to the idea of 'perpetual motion', a creative approach that Pagliarini developed even before 2004. This work and research conceived with an Eventualistic approach in order to focus on the "existing relations amongst conceptual and figurative art in a perspective that involves several aspects of Art Psychology"<sup>10</sup>, reveals media migration under other important perspectives, the ones related to the energies of (digital) matter.



**Fig. 3.** Luigi-Pagliarini, *Energies, Visualiser*, 2004. Courtesy of the Artist

### **Revealing the Black Hole in one 'shot'.**

Moving away from art, we make a brief step on the image of the Black Hole revealed in 2019 and from most of the media (including scientific media) was celebrated as a photograph or a shot.

This image was the result of a combination of data and other sources, most of which belonged to a translation of spatial frequencies into pixels, a process that took years of work, years of gathering and elaborating different data. Whereas many sources of the media call it 'shot' or 'photograph', we cannot really talk about them as such. It is, in fact, the result of a long process of collaborative, interdisciplinary work. Not only do data belong to different sources, but also the visual result is the translation of wave frequencies in pixels.

Katie Bouman, a young researcher at the Harvard Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, has been working for six years to the algorithm that allowed to visualise the black hole. On the occasion of her talk at TED in 2017, two years before the release of the image, titled 'how take a picture of a black hole', she forecasted at the time that it would have taken two years (added to the other four she was working on the project) in order for the image of the black hole to be proven and revealed.

The image of the Black Hole represents, at the best, the power of image in current times, a power that manifests in its nature of evidence, of proof of existence of something that no human eye is able to see: what we see is the translation, in pixels, of wave frequencies, little dowels that are recomposed by algorithms into an image that much likely corresponds to the 'object' as it is really is.

### **Conclusions**

Alex May has shown possible ways of migrating photography into the digital, while compressing the time before and after the event into one single frame. Marco Cadioli, Jon Rafman and Clement Valla, as artists, enter the landscape shaped by algorithmic language and extrapolate images as shots or *ready mades*, embodying the eye of the software. The fact that they are received as photographs and postcards is the result of the language used. Joanna Zylinska's theories and works have guided us in this direction. Photography is non human, vision is non human. Nevertheless, language combined with imagination and perception is still a *magma* which shapes reality.

Peter Ashton opens our gaze to the consistency of digital matter by using time, specifically by accelerating transcoding processes, witnessing the process of obsolescence. In contrast, Luigi Pagliarini visualises the energies that regulate matter.

These works prove the need to adjust our gaze to an extra-perspective vision - possibly a non-human one - that, right now, is shaped by a combination of many different views and perspectives belonging to this multifaceted and fragmented nature of time-space dimension. The world of Walter Benjamin's 'reproduction' has shifted towards one of 'algorithmic

production'. *Ways of Seeing*, to quote John Berger and his popular program from the Seventies where he showed viewers (through television) the way media and reproduction can give meaning and substance to reality, has moved to another phase. It is all a matter of migration from one state to another, one that is referred to by the word 'transcoding'.

This leads to a further conclusion, involving the start of a new multi-faceted discourse. If it is understood that algorithmic photography materializes in the digital realm through language, the language of code, this concept can be applied to the larger field of reality. If this is true when algorithmic photography is treated as a case study for talking about the migration of media into digital space, then the migration of culture at large can also be considered in the same way, homologated into a common language. We should probably consider the migration of culture into the digital as it returns to the physical dimension and all the resulting circular exchanges between worlds, through the means of Artificial Intelligence.

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# The Image of Senmurv Between Orient and Occident

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Senmurv is a fantastic animal from Iranian mythology. Its image, resulting from head's dog, bird's wings, clawed paws and peacock's tail, originated in Iran during Sasanian dynasty (III-VII s. A.D), related to Zoroastrian faith. It holds a protective and positive value, being related to good luck and prosperity. It is a cosmological symbol, representing the union between sky and earth, and is related to the life of tree. It can be found in numerous mediums: architecture, sculpture, metals, coins, ceramics, fabrics. It became a royal symbol, adopted from Sasanian dynasty.

From Iran, the iconography is spread in Islamic and Christian arts, in a territory expanded from Asia to Middle East to Europe.

In Iranian and Islamic cultures, the Senmurv is related to the power, being represented in Sasanian and Omayyad dynasties' rock sculptures and palaces. In Christian world the iconography of Senmurv is related to the sacred sphere, being mainly represented in churches. It can also present a fish's tail. The assimilation of the iconography in Christian art was probably favoured by the presence of composed animals in classical Greek art, in particular a hybrid animal, similar to hippocampus. Senmurv is assimilated with the aquatic animal of Jonas' story. It is adopted in Christian art in the frame of Jonas' story, symbol of redemption and salvation, going through a process of acquisition of a new meaning. It gains a bigger expansion, being found in Caucasus, in Byzantine, Mozarabic, Longobardian and Romanesque arts, knowing diffusion in most European countries.

## **KEYWORDS**

Persian art; Islamic art; Christian art; Cross-cultural assimilation; Resignification

The image of Senmurv is assumed to have originated during Sasanian dynasty, that ruled Iran from 224, year of foundation by Ardashir, to 642-651, period of the end of the dynasty due to Islamic invasion of Iran.

The Sassanid Empire extended over the entire Iranian plateau, corresponding to the present-day states of Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, west part of Pakistan and northern part of Mesopotamia. It was a very large area, extended from the Caspius sea to the Persian gulf. At his greatest extent the Empire stretched from Mediterranean regions to China and Far East.

Besides that, there were also different regions, such as Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, constantly disputed with the Byzantine Empire, that were subjected to its influence.

The Sasanian Empire did not have fixed borders, but they were constantly changing depending on different times and war events. It is important to notice the ability of expansion of Iranic culture, the fact that Sasanian empire was able to exert an influence also on other areas, such as for example Sogdiana, that corresponds to modern southern Uzbekistan and west Tajikistan. This ability to exert an influence and radiate and spread its own culture is particularly evident in the artistic field: we can see the influence of Sasanian art in Asia and in Far East as well as in European medieval art.<sup>1</sup>

Our knowledge of Iran during Sasanian dynasty and, in particular, our knowledge of Sasanian art are very limited and fragmentary due to the presence of few written sources, first of all inside Iran. The vast majority of written sources are Byzantine and Arabic: this fact poses problems concerning their reliability.

On the other side, there are also problems concerning material culture. Although it is abundant in certain fields, such as toreutics and fabrics, the majority of objects came from casual findings or clandestine excavations, that means out of the context of scientific archaeological excavation. This creates a lot of problems in order to determine a precise chronological framework and place of origin of material culture. This is also the case when we study the iconography of Senmurv and the material culture related to it.

The name Senmurv referred to the composite animal that we can find in archaeological documentation was imposed in literature since the thirties of XX century, following the research of Camila Trever, Russian scholar who proposed the identification of Senmurv, as it is mentioned in iranic written sources, with the animal that we can see in material documentation. The scholar considered some written sources of Pahlavic or middle-persian literature, the *Dādistān-i Menog-i Xrad* and *Bundahišn*, two texts related to Zoroastrism, in which the name of Senmurv is referred to an animal, a bat of triple nature, composed of dog, bird and mouse parts. Then, she proposed the identification between the animal known in material culture and the name of Senmurv.

Since that, this identification has been accepted, until recent times, when this hypothesis has been discussed, because written sources are ambiguous: in certain sentences Senmurv is indicated as animal of triple nature, while in other passages it is indicated as a bird, and the *Bundahišn* contains texts dated to Islamic Abbaside dynasty (IX-X). It is a literature created by Zoroastrian communities that were resisting the Islamization in order to preserve their traditions and culture, so it is a literature created after the first images of the animal.

More recent studies consider the name Senmurv as referred to a bird.

However, Senmurv is the name that continues to be used in literature, in some cases preceded by the indication of “so-called”.

Besides the complex relationship with written sources and the most recent disquisitions about the name, on the base of the iconographical analysis we can see that Senmurv, or so-called Senmurv, presents the union between the terrestrial element of the dog and the aerie part of the bird, configuring itself as an animal of cosmological meaning, representing the union between earth and sky.

If we consider the meaning of the image, at the base of its iconography there are probably the funeral costumes of Iran. Dogs and birds were sacred animals, playing the role of psychopomp animals, related to afterlife and immortality. Because the bodies of deceased were not buried or cremated but deposited on *dakhma* or silence towers, funeral costumes contemplated

exposition to dogs and birds. The peacock, whose image originated in India, is also attested as psychopomp animal.

Other hypothesis concerning the meaning of Senmurv can be found in cosmological and astronomical conception and it is related to the written sources in which Senmurv is told to be seated on the tree of many seeds, that is the tree that contains the seeds of all plants, an idea related to the concept of the tree of life. Senmurv plays a role in the process of dispersion of the seeds in the world: it makes them fall from the tree, helped by Tistar, who disperses them, through the rain water. Senmurv should correspond to Aquila constellation, while Tistar should correspond to Sirio, the brighter star of Canis Mayor constellation. The rise of Tistar-Sirio is related to the season of rain in Iran: the process should be related to rain and fertility.

It is also worth considering that in the process of the creation of the image the influence of composite animals very common in east culture, such as the Lion-griffin, the snake dragon and the Greek hippocampus, probably played a role.

The composite animal known as Senmurv should be also the symbol of *xvarnah*, the concept of Iranian glory and good luck. *Xvarnah* is a term in ancient iranic (*farr* is the name in middle and neo-persian) related etymologically to *xvar/n*, sun, with the meaning of glory, brightness, splendor and good luck and prosperity.

This is the most likely hypothesis concerning the meaning of the Senmurv, and seems to be supported by the association in some Arab-Sasanian coins (coins created during the first phase of Islamic occupation of Iran, from 636 to the beginning of VIII century, by Islamic authority, perpetuating the same images and inscriptions of Sasanian coins) of the image of the animal with the written PRN, sogdian term that means *farr-xvarnah*.

The Senmurv, then, as animal related to the idea of good luck and prosperity, apotropaic symbol, beneficial and with protective status.

This association can be seen on a copper coin, dated to 671-742, from Fars or Kuzestan, preserved at the American Numismatic Society, New York,<sup>2</sup>

and also on other silver coins, preserved in private European collections, in Germany and France.<sup>3</sup>

The Senmurv is employed as royal symbol, related to Sasanian dynasty, as we can see in the rock sculptures of Taq-i Bustan. The monument is located in the north-west of Iran, near the city of Kermanshah, and it is one of the most known triumphal monuments of all the country.

Taq-i Bustan is very important for the study of Senmurv because it is considered a chronological landmark. Almost all of the images of Senmurv cannot be dated with certainty. Although there are hypothesis that relate Taq-i Bustan to the end of V century, it is generally and likely dated to the end of VI and the beginning of VII century.

Inside the cave, different scenes related to Sasanian royalty are represented. On the left, there is the scene of boar hunting. The king, represented two times, is wearing the caftan with images of Senmurvs.

Other example with a fairly accurate date can be found in Sogdiana, outside the borders of Sasanian empire, in Afrasiab, the most ancient core of Samarkand.

In the Ambassador Hall, whose name derives from the 42 figures, interpreted as ambassadors, depicted on its walls, we can see in particular three figures, interpreted as ambassador-dignitaries of Iran: one of them is wearing a caftan decorated with Senmurvs. The most plausible date is 660.

Among the objects presenting the image of Senmurv, there are some showing the particular relationship of the fantastic animal with the tree of life.

An ewer, whose proposed datation is VI-VII century A.D., from Pavlovk, Ukraine, preserved at Hermitage Museum, is decorated with the lotus flower,<sup>4</sup> other representation of the tree of life. An analogue decoration is in a silver cup from North Caucasus and in a silver plate from India. In the plate, the Senmurv presents Iranian palms in the tail and the tongue that seems to transform itself in a plant stem.

In another Sasanian vase we can also see the relation with a female figure; the face of a woman, surrounded by vegetal patterns, probably Ameretat, goddess of vegetation.

The image of Senmurv is adopted in Islamic art. We can see it in the Desert Castles, buildings related to the Umayyad dynasty, the first Islamic dynasty, that ruled from 661 to 750. They are located in Syria, Palestine, Jordan and Iraq and dated to VIII century. In particular the image of Senmurv can be found in the palaces of Khirbat al-Mafjar, Qasr al Hair-al Gharbi and Mshatta.

At Khirbat al-Mafjar, in Palestine, the Senmurv is found in a niche-head in the bathroom, represented again with a woman, and in some pictorial fragments.

At Mshatta, in Jordan, the Semurv is represented in one of the triangles of the decorative band, that encircles the exterior of the building, nowadays preserved at the Pergamon Museum in Berlin.

In this case Senmurv is represented together with the griffin; the association between the two animals can be also noticed in other contexts, such as a bronze plaque.<sup>5</sup> The Senmurv and the griffin share some symbolic aspects; they are cosmological animals, related to the tree of life.

In the first Islamic art, produced at the time of the Umayyad dynasty, and characterized by a continuity with the art of precedent periods, there are not iconographical changes.

A first change in iconography can be remarked in Abbasid era (751-1258), as we can see on the octagonal plate from Iran, preserved at the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin, dated to IX-X century.<sup>6</sup>

Here we can notice a geometrization, stylization and simplification of the image. The animals along the edge do not present the peacock's tail anymore, as it was a misrepresentation of the image; there is a continuous repetition of the subject, that could suggest an ornamental and decorative use of the image, perhaps a loss of the original meaning.

Another change in Islamic art can be seen from XIII century, when Senmurv transforms itself in Simurgh, a fabulous bird of long multicolour feathers, through the contact with Chinese phoenix, an iconography arrived in Iran as a result of Mongol invasion.

The Simurgh, whose name is the neopersian version of Senmurv, is the fabulous bird of *Shâh-nâme* or book of Kings, Iranian epic poem written by Firdousi at the beginning of XI century, that tells the history of Iran from the creation of the world until Islamic conquer. First miniatures are dated to XIII century. It is important to notice that Simurg is the tutelar genius of the heroes of the Iranian poem, Zal and Rostam; it holds a beneficial and apotropaic value, likewise the Senmurv.

In Islamic art Senmurv knows a limited spread and it is essentially related to secular art. It can be seen on buildings related to the Umayyad dynasty, but there is also a more general presence in society, as demonstrated by copper coins.

In Christian world Senmurv knows a wider diffusion, spreading in Byzantine, Longobardian, Mozarabic and Romanesque art in all Europe and it is essentially related to the sacred sphere. In fact, we can find the image primarily in churches, on pluteus and ambos.

Furthermore, in Christian art we can notice a transformation of the iconography, as we can see on the southern wall of the Church of Holy Cross, in Aghtmar, in Armenia. The church is a central plan building, realized between 915 and 921 on a small island in the middle of the lake Van, in south Armenia, in an area that is today part of Turkey's state.

On the southern wall we can find the representation of the history of Jonah, with several scenes.

According to the Biblical story, Jonah had not obeyed the divine order to go and preach in Niniveh and he instead embarked for Tarsis. During the crossing, a sudden storm broke out, Jonah understood to be guilty for having unleashed the divine anger. He is then thrown overboard by his comrades and swallowed by a whale.

In the following scene, Jonah is rejected from the animal after three days spent in its belly, after which he has rejoint salvation and wisdom. In this scene the animal is not represented as a whale anymore, but instead as iranic Senmurv: the only difference is that it does not show the peacock's tail, but at this place we can see a fish's tail.

The anterior part of the body is then identical to iranic Senmurv, while the tail is that of a fish.

This double iconographic configuration, whale and Senmurv, holds a correspondance in literature, because the Armenian version of the Bible distinguishes two animals: fish and vishap-fish.

The history of Jonah is one of the most represented themes in Christian art as symbol of salvation and resurrection.

Here the Senmurv is configured preminently as saving creature. It is inside the animal that the process of salvation of the prophet takes place: the fact of resting inside the animal for three days makes possible the salvation of the prophet.

Christianism adopts and employs the image of Senmurv, in particularly in the frame of the Biblical story of Jonah, adapting and fitting it to the peculiar exigences of its own faith, carrying out a process of resignification, but at the same time preserving the positive value the Senmurv has always had since its origin in Iranic world.

The reception of Iranic Senmurv in Christian world in the frame of history of Jonah was probably favoured and facilitated by the existence of another hybrid animal similar to hippocampus, that presents a fish's tail, analogous to the tail adopted by Senmurv in Christian world, and that was already represented in the history of Jonah in late antiquity (an example is on an ivory panel at the National Museum in Ravenna, Italy, dated V-VI century<sup>2</sup>.)

This hybrid animal probably functioned as substrate for iranic Senmurv.

The transformation of the iconography seems to have happened in Armenia, area continuously disputed between East and West: between Byzantine Empire and Sasanid Empire before, and between Byzantium and Islam afterwards; an area of cross-cultural encounter and contamination. At the time of construction of the church of Agth'amar, Armenia was a subordinate state of Muslim caliphate; but at the same time there was a certain degree of freedom and the preservation of the Christian faith was permitted. Armenia was, therefore, a place of encounter between Christian culture and Sasanid-Islamic cultures.

The iconography of Senmurv with fish's tail in the frame of the history of Jonah can be also found in Southern Italy, in Romanesque sculpture. There are numerous examples, particularly in the region of Campania: on the ambo of the Cathedral of Ravello, on the fragment of the panel from Capua at Museum of Campania (also considered as Pre-Romanesque), on the slab attributed to the ancient Cathedral of Sorrento.

In these examples the entire history of Jonah, depicted in several scenes in Aghtmar, has been reduced to the only scene where the animal throws out Jonah, the rest of the history being omitted.

A further synthesis of the iconography is found in Central Italy, in the region of Abruzzo, in a pluteus inside the church of San Pellegrino in Bominaco (the proposed datation is XI century, although an earlier production cannot be excluded).

Here Jonah is not represented anymore; the Senmurv with fish's tail appears as extrapolated from the context of Jonah's history and it is represented isolated, recovering in this way the ancient mode of representation of Senmurv in Iranic world.

In this case, it is meaningful that Senmurv is represented again with the griffin, as well as in Islamic art. In Bominaco the animals are represented, facing each other in a symmetrical pose, on the pluteus forming the iconostasis, the architectural structure that marks the boundary between the nave and the sanctuary, showing the access and make possible the access to the presbiterial area, the most sacred space inside the church.

The diffusion of the iconography of Senmurv with fish's tail goes on in XII century and beyond; there are numerous examples in Italy, France, United Kingdom.

Different examples of Senmurv can be seen in civil European architecture and its image has been used until recent times. There are examples on churches' portals in some villages in Bulgaria in XIX and XX centuries and on the portals of civil buildings, in Spain and Sardinia (Italy).

This use on the portals of the buildings, on a medium between inside and outside (that in the case of churches defines also the boundary between

secular and sacred space) can be probably explained as referred to a protective and apotropaic value, confirming once again the continuity of positive meaning of the iconography in different culture and times.

Coming back to medieval times, the church of Aghtmar does not explain all the examples of Senmurv with fish's tail found in west contexts.

The pluteus in Pavia, ancient capital of Longobardia Major, in Northern Italy, from the church of the Monastery of Santa Maria Teodote, is dated to VIII century.<sup>8</sup>

The pluteus was part of the presbyterial enclosure of the church. Two Senmurv with fish's tail are shown facing a tree of life in the shape of *wak wak*, the talking tree, whose branches end with animals heads, a tree that originated in the East and especially popular in Arabic traditions.

The pluteus should belong to a period of time preceding the realization of the church of Aghtmar. As a consequence, not all the examples of Senmurv with fish's tail can be explained through the reference and mediation of Aghtmar, but the situation is more complexed, and we have probably to think to different and multiple paths and ways of transmission through which the iconography of Senmurv with fish's tail could form and spread.

Besides the transformation of Senmurv with fish's tail, in Christian world it is also attested the iranic Senmurv with peacock's tail.

There are two examples in Northern Italy, on two floors: in Cividale del Friuli (VIII) and on the mosaic from the Abbey of St. Hilary in Venice (IX).

Senmurv is also found in Mozarabic miniatures, the miniatures realized between X and XI century in Christian kingdoms of Northern Spain and characterized by Islamic influences.

We can see it in two Beatos, illuminated manuscripts with the text of the Commentary on the book of Revelation: Beatus of Girona and Beatus of Facundus.

It is interesting to notice that iranic Senmurv and Senmurv with fish's tail are equally represented.

Beatus of Girona, from the monastery of S.Salvatore of Tabara, León, preserved in Girona and dated to 975, presents a stronger oriental influence.

Iranic Senmurv is depicted staying above one of the small trees; on the right side we can see an eagle that holds between its paths a gazelle.

It is the transposition of the same subjects and of an identical scene, that we can see on a Sasanian vessel preserved at the Hermitage Museum and dated to VI century.

It is an image with astronomical meaning: the eagle as symbol of the sky and of the sun that wins over horned animal, symbol of the moon.

The transposition of this image shows the strong influence of Sasanid culture on the art of Iberian peninsula. (The same image, apart from the Senmurv, can be also seen on the lid of two ivory vessels from Cordoba).

In Beatus of Girona the image is accompanied by the latin inscription “Coreus et aquila in venatione”: “Coreus (corvus-crow? - referred to the Senmurv-) and eagle to the hunting.”

In Beatus of Facundus, from the kingdom of León, preserved at the National Library in Madrid and dated to 1047, Senmurv is instead represented with fish's tail, together to other fantastic animals, and it is one of the animals of Noah's Ark. It is portrayed among the animals saved from the Great flood, a probably evidence of the importance attributed to it.

The Senmurv is a subject particularly represented in fabrics, that are considered the principal medium through wich the iconography of the animal could be spread over a so large area, from East to West.

It is also interesting to notice that a lot of fabrics with Senmurv were found in European churches. They were probably used as bargaining chip, a gift among princes, but they were also brought in Europe by pilgrims coming back from holy places in the East: they were used to envelop holy relics or to line boxes that preserved holy relics.

As a consequence, the fabrics are a very interesting material to study the diffusion of the iconography and the relations among different cultures.

I will consider some examples of fabrics with Senmurv.

A first example is a fabric from the church of San Leu and Saint Gilles, Paris. It has been the object of different hypothesis of datation spanning from

VI to IX century, but it is generally considered as realized in Iran in late Sasanian era because of the duotone and the motifs of *rotae*, crescent moon, small palm above the animal and for the presence of vegetal elements, representation of the tree of life, all typical of Sasanian art.

In another fabric from the Cathedral of Verdun, France, it is possible to notice the geometrization and absence of duotone, proof of a probably post-sassanide Byzantine production.

In the Reliquarius of St.Pelagius, from the church of St. Isidore, León, generally considered as a product of Al-Andalous, the Muslim-ruled area in the Iberian peninsula, and consequently post-sassanid-Islamic (XI century), we remark further changes: Senmurv is represented with other animals and the dimension of the parts of the body are different from Sasanian shapes. It is an interesting example highlighting the relations among different cultures: an Iranian subject on a fabric realized in Islamic area and used and found in Christian area.

The Cushion of St.Remi (France), used for the relics of St.Remi, is the only example with a certain date of production, 852, as reported on an inscription on the fabric, that is monochrome, analogue to that of the so-called chasuble of St. Mark Pope. In this case a fabric with Senmurv has been used to produce the chasuble, the liturgic vestment the catholic celebrant wears during religious functions, masses and processions.

According to the tradition, the chasuble belonged to St. Mark Pope, who lived in IV century. According to an inscription on the vestment, and because of the analogy with other fabrics, it should really have belonged to Pope John VIII (872-882), who had crowned Charles the Bald, emperor of Carolingian Empire.

This fabric with Senmurv was then used to produce the liturgic vestment of the highest religious authority in Christian sphere. We can infer the importance attributed to the Senmurv in the Christian world. Considered that the vestment was seen by the faithfuls, it should have been attributed a particular meaning to it, likely a beneficial one.

Finally, another image of Senmurv can be also seen on a belt buckle from unknown place from the island of Sardinia, Italy, preserved in Colonia.<sup>9</sup>

It is an *unicum*: for the iconography, because among others presenting animals, it is the only one with the Senmurv, and for the material, because it is the only one realized in gold, a precious material, while the others are in bronze or brass.

In addition, it is also singular for the shape and for the tecnic of realization.

The gold material, that expresses a greater value and prestige, should suggest that the object belonged to an individual related to a higher social class.

The plate of the belt buckle belongs to Syracuse typology, widespread in Mediterranean and in Northern Europe, and dated between the end of VI and the middle of VII century.

It is a datation based on the typology of the medallion because we do not have elements referred to archaeological excavations.

According to the datation based on the typology, the belt buckle from Sardinia is the oldest evidence with the image of Senmurv in West area.

In conclusion, we can probably individuate different ways and paths of the transmission of the iconography from East to West, realized through Islam and Byzantium mediations.

The expansion of the iconography and its adoption from other cultures besides that of its origin is emblematic of the interactions among different cultural systems, showing how they are engaged in a continuous dialogue.

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# Performances and Archive: Márcia X, Mabe Bethônico and Marina Abramović in Migration

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper presents three case studies on performances that operate under the concepts of displacement and migration: *A Cadeira Careca* (The Bald Chair, 2004), by Márcia X; Marina Abramović's *Rhythm O* (1975, printed in 1994) and Mabe Bethônico's *museumuseu* (2006).

*A Cadeira Careca* by Márcia X (1959-2001) was donated to the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (MAM/RJ), on the occasion of her death. The passage between Márcia X's performance and its exhibition allows us to reflect on the ruptures that are created when an ephemeral work of art becomes a vestige. In *Rhythm O*, Marina Abramović invited visitors to Studio Morra, in Naples, to interact with her body for 6 hours, using 72 objects, which included a pen, a hammer, a chain, knives and even a loaded gun. Mabe Bethônico's *museumuseu* articulates collections, activities, texts and images, constituted by the continuous practice of research, accumulation and classification of objects and documents shifted from their original context. In 2006, the project was transported for exhibition at the 27th São Paulo Biennial, thus migrating its archives to a physically accessible presentation.

The migrations in space and time identified in these case studies are presented as instruments for reflection on the transformation of ideas, objects and images that occurred during the transit of these works from their creation until their exhibition to the public.

## **KEYWORDS**

Performance art; Mabe Bethonico; Marcia X; Marina Abramovic; Rhythm O.

### **Introduction**

To understand why we still don't collect performance art in Brazil as much as we produce them is the main goal of my doctoral research. Therefore, I have been trying to identify how some performance art migrates from reality to a static, imagetic support, visible by the public at any time. In this trajectory, the way performance artists work the concepts of displacement and migration seem to emerge more and more.

In this article, I will present how three artists - Marcia X., Mabe Bethônico and Marina Abramović - work the concept of migration in their work. I will try to demonstrate how this concept relates to the transfer between the individual performing the action and the work, to a displacement that seeks to bring visibility to a place or a subject, and to the attempt to archive and exhibit the performance. Above all, we will discover how the concept of migration in these cases maintains a curious relationship with the spectator.

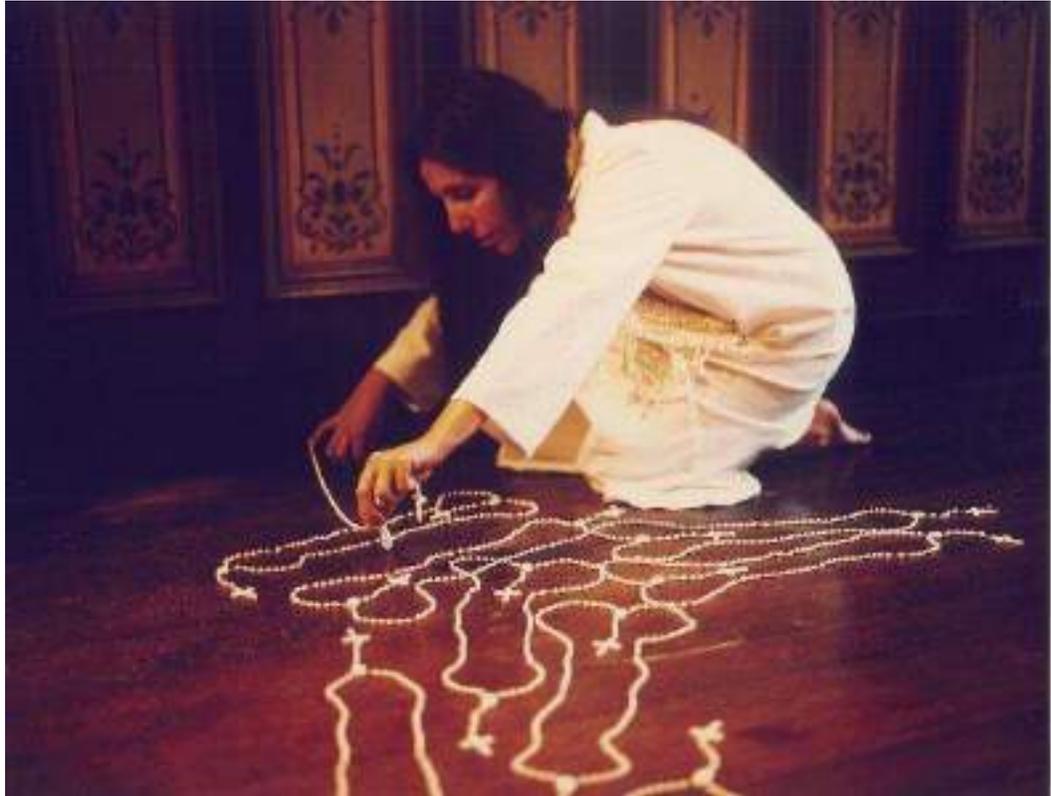
### **Márcia X**

Márcia X was an artist from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, who worked from the 1980's on on the themes of sexuality, childhood, and religion. This was a combination that, in many moments, shocked the public. She worked especially with assemblages and performance art. Here, we will address this second category.

In the period between 2000 and 2003, Marcia carried out several times the performance *Drawing with Rosaries* where, wearing a white nightgown, she used rosaries to draw penis shapes on the floor.

It is notable how the artist was concerned with assuring the permanence of her works, even if for a short period of time. Several of her performances had the classification "performance/installation", given by the artist herself, which indicated that the residues of a performance should remain in place, on display, for a period after the action. In this aspect, we can also highlight the way writing was involved in her work. Márcia used to write instructions about her performances, as well as keep thorough records and documentation about the whole process of conception of her works. In

addition, she was known to debate in printed media vehicles, through letters that dealt - generally - with her own artistic production.



**Fig. 1.** Márcia X. *Desenhando com terços*  
Performance/installation, 2000-2003.

As one of the results of this performance, the artist created the work *Drawing on rosaries*, which was a photograph in which two rosaries are used to draw the phallic shape over a black background. In 2006, after the artist's death, this work was included in *Erotica - the Senses in Art*, an exhibition held by the Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Brasília.

In Rio, it was the target of several complaints, including the filing of a criminal notice by a congressman who declared that it was an "outrage to the Catholic Church". All this resulted in its censorship and removal from the exhibition, under the bank's claim of "respect for freedom of speech"

(Figueiredo 2006). The decision was even taken in the absence of the curator, Maria Ignez Mantovani.



**Fig. 2.** Márcia X. - “A Cadeira Careca”  
Performance, 2004.

The work *The Bald Chair* was Marcia's last performance, and was held in November 2004. With the participation of her husband, the artist Ricardo Ventura, and Aimberê César, the proposal linked the Gustavo Capanema Building, former headquarters of the Ministry of Education and Health, in the early capital of Brazil, Rio de Janeiro, and the *chaise longue*. Both had Le Corbusier's participation in their projects - the chair had the architect's design and the project for one of the first public buildings of modernist architecture in Brazil had his consulting services. Both conferred to the work of the Franco-Swiss architect a sense of permanence. The permanence so longed for the artist in her "instructions" and performances/installations.

During the performance, Ricardo Ventura, wearing a white lab coat, shaved the fur off the chair around Marcia, who was wearing black - the artist was facing lung cancer - dying three months later. Tired, she left the performance in an ambulance. Brazilian art critic Lauro Cavalcanti, in his essay "The bald chair or the artist was wearing black" refers to the "celebration of the permanence of ideas and the impermanence of people and objects" (Cavalcanti 2005).

*The Bald Chair* was donated, along with her entire collection, to the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro after Márcia X's death. The migration between Márcia X's living performance and her exhibition allows us to reflect on the ruptures created in imagination and visuality when an ephemeral work of art becomes a remaining.

At this point, I would like to propose that we reflect on how it was exhibited after the moment of action. Was it accessible to the general public?

As I mentioned before, *The Bald Chair* was the artist's last performance, and it was presented by a Marcia X. already exhausted by a long treatment against lung cancer. Perhaps because of this, and because it has her body engraved on its surface, the "Chair" has become both a reminder of her presence and a strong souvenir of her absence.

An example is this photograph that illustrates the article in "O Globo" newspaper of November 10th, 2005, about the exhibition "Márcia X. Revista", which opened nine months after her death, at Paço Imperial, Rio de Janeiro. We can see the curator Claudia Saldanha, the artist's widower, Ricardo Ventura, and other artists and employees posing for a portrait with the chair, as if it were there to somehow stand in for Márcia just for a moment.

In some pictures it is possible to grasp a part of the display of "Márcia X. Revista" exhibition. There, we can see that the "Chair" welcomed the visitor who walked into the exhibition. I believe that they also make us think about how Márcia, in a very sensitive and poetic way, appropriated her own destiny to inaugurate, still in life, the first chapter of her memories.

The concept of migration in *Drawing with rosaries* and *The Bald Chair* can be identified when we think that her performances immediately became installations when the artist left the scene. When she created a photograph to

register and to make available to the public a record of her phallic drawings, in a new support, Márcia X. puts migration at the request of the permanence so desired in her work. This is exactly the goal she achieves when she finally transfers her silhouette to her own work, in the last months of her life. Just like the creator of the chair and the building, Le Corbusier, Márcia X. made her mark in history.

Soon after, the work was featured in the exhibition "Constellations: the portrait in the Museum of Modern Art of Rio collections", which took place between 2018 and 2019, curated by Fernando Cocchiarale and Fernanda Lopes.

In this exhibition, photos and a video were presented along with the chair, which also had more complete information. A relevant point is that the subtitle of the show itself, "portrait in the MAM collections" is already useful information in the task of unraveling its layers, especially if we think that, after her death, the work was in fact exhibited almost as a portrait of the artist.

### **Mabe Bethônico**

Brazilian artist Mabe Bethônico approaches performance through speech and works with the concept of research-based art. In this sense, her "conferences" or "performed narratives", records of episodes and negotiations that take place in the course of her research, and which are enunciated personally during her exhibitions, eventually become ephemeral, in the face of an immense archive of processes that dismember into exhibitions, publications, and objects sold in the gallery that represents the artist - and that end up financing the survival of her work.

Born in the state of Minas Gerais, which can be translated into English as "general mines", a state marked by the action of mining companies, and which is currently experiencing yet another tragedy resulting from this exploitation, Bethônico seeks, in her work, to discuss this and other themes in a political way. Therefore, as a result of a vast research carried out from Switzerland, where she currently lives, she has created the exhibition "Extraordinary Mineral Stories" which, through tales that seem to mix reality

and fiction, explores many different angles of a theme which interest is based on the artist's origins.

With the work *The Collector*, started in 1996, Mabe Bethônico creates a character who establishes a logic for his collection and follows a very detailed "acquisition policy". Even after being acquired by the collection of the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo in 2014, this character, created and embodied by the artist, keeps collecting and assembling newspaper clippings on four themes (destruction, corrosion, construction and flowers). So as he did during his stay in exhibitions in many institutions, where an employee was always assigned to collect images in local newspapers and to add them to the collection.

The creation of this institutional dialogue dictates the survival of this character, the continuity of the process, and the permanence of the artist's performance as the character who compulsively collects newspaper clippings on subjects that also outline his peculiar personality.

It is worth noting the artist's concern with the methods of organizing, documenting, and exhibiting this collection, which, according to her, migrated to an institutional collection as a way of ensuring the integrity and promotion of this work, which became more accessible to researchers and other institutions that might want to include it in some sort of exhibition.

One of the platforms for publicizing this character's collection is the newspaper "museumuseu", a project printed and distributed by the artist. In "museumuseu", Mabe Bethônico creates a network of connected works that together constitute her "museumuseu" - a collection of collections that assumes different formats at all times. Furthermore, Mabe incorporates his processes into works and exhibitions through his performative lectures, talks through which she shares with the attending viewers fictions that taint visible objects with multiple hidden meanings. "The Collector", begun in 1996, is one of his many collections.

Launched by Mabe Bethônico in 2000, "museumuseu" is characterized as a structure that articulates collections, activities, texts and images, consisting on the ongoing practice of research, accumulation, collection, categorization and creation of new systems from objects and documents

displaced from their original context. The project deals with the boundaries between fiction and reality, documentation and construction, questioning the transformation of factual information into selected narratives.

In 2006, the project was transported for exhibition at the 27th São Paulo Biennial, thereby migrating her archives to a physically accessible presentation. By including an issue of the "museumuseu" newspaper in her Biennial module, entitled "Arquivo Wanda Svevo Campaign", the artist once again underlines her intention to give access and bring to the center of the discussion matters and agents sometimes made invisible.



**Fig. 3.** Mabe Bethônico - Campanha Wanda Svevo installation at the 27th São Paulo Biennial, 2006

The Wanda Svevo archive is the place where the memory of São Paulo Biennial is kept, and it is located in the same building where the Biennial takes place. Active since 1955, the archive holds photographs, correspondence with artists and curators, promotional documents, and published catalogs, in addition to a library specialized in contemporary art.

Within the *museumuseu* project, the artist proposes an interface between art and memory, transforming the small but extremely relevant Archive into part of the Biennial exhibition circuit, by presenting a fiction of her own authorship. The artist pushes the boundaries between the Archive and the Biennial Pavilion, taking to the exhibition space schematic drawings that show the organization of the documents that make up its collection, seeking to present the space to the general viewers.

The struggles and peculiarities faced in the negotiation process with the Archive in order to execute this work were portrayed by Mabe Bethônico in performative lectures. These narratives made it clear how the archival practices still reflect today the relationship between private interests and public patrimony in Brazil. In a intersection between History and Bethônico's work, the São Paulo Biennial itself suffered, during the nineteen sixties and seventies, strong repression and censorship by the military dictatorship instated in the country.

Mabe Bethônico's initiative of migrating the Wanda Svevo Archive to the 27th São Paulo Biennial, through the imagetic representation of the Archive in the Pavilion, through mediated visits and lectures by her, brings a hint of challenge to the rules and the silence imposed during the period of repression in Brazil that, by interfering in the way the archives were constituted and consulted, intended that the history of an entire country be told through its lenses.

Mabe Bethônico uses a periodical as a way to circulate her works, projects and collections among the public. By migrating her works from her private collection to institutional collections, as well as to the Wanda Svevo Archive for the São Paulo Biennial, she intends to transform the private into the public, granting access to her work.

### **Marina Abramović**

Marina Abramović is a Serbian performer who lives and works in New York and is probably one of the world's most recognizable artists in activity. She believes that performance exists only when in a live situation. According to her, even when we think about the permanence of performance beyond the original action, we must be able to create an environment for that project to be unfolded by individuals, not photographs or videos.

The artist works with the concept of reperformance - a staging that seeks to make available to a new audience the live experience of a performative action that has already taken place. Usually in contexts, locations, and with performers other than the original ones. In her Institute - the itinerant Marina Abramovic Institute - she coaches young artists to participate in and to re-enact performances. She claims that there are many institutes to teach actors, and many artists who use actors in their performances. However, there was not, until then, a school for performers. She says that nowadays an artist can contact her and ask for a performer, and she will find, among her students, the ideal one. Her works reperfomed in "The artist is present", her 2010 retrospective at MoMA, included these "students" in her "cast".

Another motto widely promoted by the artist is that "Performance is a time-based art." In other words, one must have time to attend a performance and one must endure time to present it.

I will need to go back and forth in time to build my argument. Let's start with the performance "Imponderabilia," which Abramovic presented in 1977.

Marina Abramović and her then-partner, Ulay, performed "Imponderabilia" at the Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna in Bologna, Italy. The action consisted of the two individuals, naked, standing facing each other, with a distance of approximately 30 cm (or 1 ft.) between them. Any visitor interested in entering the Galleria could only do so by squeezing between these two bodies. Each individual found his or her own way to perform this action, in order to find the least awkward way out. Marina and Ulay remained in silence, without making any eye contact with the public.

Only after choosing which of the two to face during the passage through the door, the visitors, already on the second floor of the museum, found themselves observed, as they came across two monitors that displayed the entrance door live.

At the time, Abramović stated that: "If there were no artists, there would be no museums, so we are living doors."

An hour and a half after the start of the performance, two officers arrived at the Galleria, passing through the entrance facing Marina, and returning with two Museum employees who informed Abramovic and Ulay that the performance should be stopped because it had been considered obscene by the police.

Marina Abramović thinks of performance as an artistic manifestation that only makes sense while alive. So, for the retrospectives "The artist is present", at MoMA, in 2010, and "The cleaner", at Palazzo Strozzi, in Firenze, in 2018, she made sure that some of her students would stand, naked, in a doorway, taking turns from time to time. However, in these cases, the visitor could choose whether or not to pass through the door in question, unlike in the initial proposal. We can also think that, knowing the proposal of the work and how it originally unfolded, the audience could have other ideas of how to behave in the situation, which would not have occurred to the unaware ones who came across it by surprise, in 1977. However, it is an undeniable fact: the performance happened again, live.

That exhibition presented also a huge photograph of the performance, and a text about it, which, besides going against Abramović's speech, can lead us to question again the somewhat theatrical content of a performance re-enactment in this context.



**Fig. 4.** Marina Abramović and Ulay - *Imponderabilia* Original performance from 1977, as it was presented at *The Cleaner* exhibition Palazzo Strozzi, Firenze, 2018

Since *Seven Easy Pieces*, an event in which, for seven hours of each of seven consecutive days, Marina Abramović has re-enacted performances by five artists, concluding with a reperformance of her work "Lips of Thomas" (1975) and an original performance ("Entering the other side"), Abramović reports that several other artists have requested her authorization to re-enact some of her performances.

One of those performances authorized by Abramović was Eva and Franco Mattes' *Imponderabilia*, in the virtual environment Second Life. According to her, Second Life is a completely different medium, it is something that does not compete with live art.

In the iconic performance that gave the title to Marina Abramović's 2010 MoMA retrospective, "The artist is present," she sat in a chair, in silence, for eight hours a day, throughout the three-month exhibition, face to face with over a thousand visitors, for as long as each of them wanted.

She also authorized the display of "The artist is present" in the exhibition "Marina Abramović: The Cleaner", in Italy. On that occasion, the exhibition had a scenario that showed video footage of the original performance and the furniture used at MoMA. In addition to having central focus in the room, we can observe that there is also a spotlight on the chairs and the table, which gives an almost sacred atmosphere to the furniture.

But the main object of this analysis is the famous performance "Rhythm 0", which took place in 1974 at the Studio Morra gallery in Naples, Italy. At that time, Marina thought that artists who worked with performance were often over the top and decided to create a situation that would let the public go as far as they could go when the artist herself was doing nothing. So she created a performance in which she was exposed, as a mixture of mannequin and puppet, to the action of everyone present, who could use a total of 72 items laid out on a table to interact with her body. Among them were everything from a knife to a rose - to a gun loaded with a bullet.

Throughout the work period, the artist lost her clothes - which were cut off with a knife -, had a lit cigarette placed in her mouth and a loaded gun placed on her hand and pointed to her head, with her finger on the trigger. Through the entire time, she looked at a fixed point, so that facing the individuals would not turn her, too, into an individual. At the end of the six-hour performance, when the gallery owner announced that it was over, Marina left the condition of an object and walked towards the public, who immediately left the place. According to the artist, when she stopped being a puppet and became an individual, people no longer knew how to act in her presence.

*Rhythm 0* was then presented at the retrospective "The artist is present", which took place in 2010, at MoMA, in New York. On that occasion, the artist, together with the gallerist Sean Kelly, chose to exhibit photographs of the action and a table with the 72 objects available at the time. However, by her choice, these were not the original objects used in 1974. It was more important that the public could see the potential of each one of them in the presented action than to cover them with a fetish aura for having been used during the original action.



**Fig. 5.** Marina Abramović - *Rhythm O*. Original performance from 1974, as it was presented at “The artist is present” exhibition MoMA, New York, 2010

So, although she is a strong advocate for reperformance, Abramović believed that it would not be possible to re-enact that work, even with artists trained by her, given the emotional charge and violence involved in that action. In addition to holding a loaded gun pointed at herself, the artist claimed she was not a rape victim just because it was a performance attended by a large audience.

Thus, the most effective way to communicate to the public the extremes reached with the inclusion of certain objects in the action was to use photographs of moments in which the integrity of the body and the individual were compromised. Although Marina states that, in the absence of the possibility of reperformance, video works better than photos because it can "capture the time and energy of life", there are no videos of this performance, only photographs, commissioned by the artist herself.

Together with photographs projected on the wall, the presence of the table with the arranged objects allowed the MoMA public to suddenly find itself involved in that event and to imagine for a moment what it would do if it were, on that day in 1974, in the Galleria Studio Morra in Naples.

Marina Abramović's early performances were recorded only in black and white photographs and descriptive texts. In this image we see a photograph of a specific moment of the performance "Rhythm 0", when Abramović has her breasts exposed, still holding a rose. A man is standing in front of her, with one hand on her arm, and it is not possible to identify what action is about to unfold. Below this framed photograph is a listing of the objects used in the performance. To the left, in another frame, is the text in which Abramović presented the instructions for the performance.

In 1994, Marina Abramović selected and edited a series of photographs among the most representative of her work, one of which became part of the collection of the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 1998, also under the title "Rhythm 0." MoMA also owns this work.

As we have seen, the artist is constantly involved in discussions about the commercialization of ephemeral works and is responsible for the term "reperformance", which includes both the reinterpretation of other artists' performance works and the presentation of their performances by her or other artists, duly prepared to do so at her institute. Both the image editing process and the reperformance promote the displacement of her work.

The point here is not to unmask how certain statements and principles of Marina Abramović contradict each other when it comes to the circulation of her works. What we wanted to expose is how attempts to displace their bodies or a subject into the medium of their work, attempts to archive and record performances, and the seek of making them accessible to the general public often result in controversy, for artists, gallerists, curators... There is no standard for dealing with these works, and ultimately the most that can and has been done is to always seek the best alternative available, in a given context, to make these works accessible to those who were not there at the time of their original presentation.

Throughout the course of my doctoral research on the subject, which has already lasted a few years, I could only have contact with the vast majority of the performances I researched through images and textual reports. I believe that this has not diminished the meaning or the pleasure of getting in touch with these artistic proposals.

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# Colour Reproductions for Modern Art. Venturi and the Print Exhibitions in Post-war Italy

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## **ABSTRACT**

In the spring of 1946, the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in Rome opened the exhibition “Mostra didattica di riproduzioni di pittura moderna”, a display made by colour reproductions of modern paintings supported by the Ministry of Education and conceived by the museum direction under the guide of the art historian Lionello Venturi, who came back after the exile years during Fascism spent between France and the United States, where he published his crucial researches on Cézanne and the history of Impressionism.

On the background of the Postwar cultural climate, the initiative reflected a reference horizon that included it within a wide network of coeval events aimed at experimenting similar strategies of art narratives, thus consecrating the international arise of an exhibition paradigm, alongside the diffusion of Malraux’s concept of “musée imaginaire”.

Focusing on the investigation of Venturi’s operation from such unprecedented historiographical perspective, this paper aims to explore the migration of new models of dissemination through images in a crucial moment for the international historicization of modern art. The growing calls for bringing people closer to art languages – successfully evoked in the slogan “art for everyone” – contributed to redesign the status of photo-reproduction, its forms and consumption practices. A revolution made possible through the material and symbolic features of colour.

## **KEYWORDS**

Art reproduction; Colour; Modern art; Travelling print exhibition; Lionello Venturi.

### **Context and protagonists**

In 1946 the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in Rome (GNAM) opened a colour print exhibition titled “Mostra didattica di riproduzioni di pittura moderna”, one of the first projects dedicated to the spread of European modern artistic culture in the Postwar Italy<sup>1</sup>. The climate was that of the Reconstruction, a background still marked by the suffering of the war and the occupation years but facing the future and crossed by great intellectual fervor, by the reopening of institutions, diplomatic relations and places of culture, including public and private art venues<sup>2</sup>.

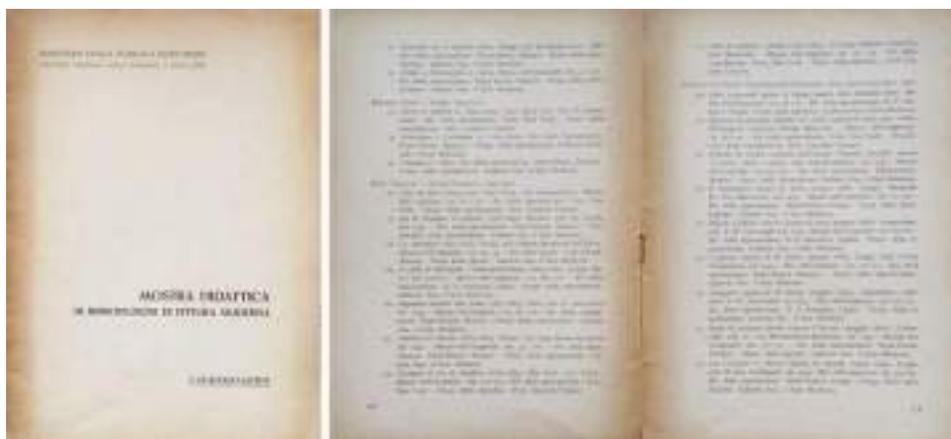
The GNAM, the most important public museum dedicated to modern art in Italy, had reopened in December 1944 after dramatic years dedicated to an intense activity of defense and rescue of the works of art<sup>3</sup>. The reopening was accompanied by the decision to update the museum set-up and functions, the activity of the gallery according to modern criteria, with the desire to overcome the backwardness of the Italian artistic situation<sup>4</sup>. Its director Palma Bucarelli led the process by creating an eminent network of interlocutors. Among these, the most influential was Lionello Venturi, who took on the role of a mentor.

The art historian had returned to Italy from political exile in 1945 and resumed the teaching of art history by moving to the chair at the University of Rome<sup>5</sup>. Bucarelli promptly contacted him a few weeks after his arrival. A letter of March 1945, in which she asks for advice and support in the complex work of reorganizing the museum, gave rise to a long and fruitful collaboration that would have led, among the first and most experimental projects, to the print exhibition of modern painting<sup>6</sup>.

Venturi was indeed received with deference and great participation by the Italian cultural circles. The intellectual authority of the scholar went hand in hand with the moral one of the man who rejected Fascism. The art historian engaged in an intense dissemination activity, among the most progressive and incisive manifestations of the European culture of the time, thus contributing to the rebirth of the country. Through interviews, conferences, newspaper articles he devoted himself to the diffusion of topics such as the education to modern art, the role of artistic institutions and the

social function of museums, in line with a vision mindful of pragmatism and Deweyane pedagogical theories on the democratic vocation of art achieved during his stay in the United States<sup>7</sup>. These issues were welcomed by Bucarelli, who was inspired to imagine the GNAM to become a living institution, a place of openness, updating and education to modern art values. For them, in the name of an advanced museology conception, knowing how to shift the attention from the work of art to the man, the public was intended to be the great protagonist. A public not only of aficionados or insiders, nor mainly of students from art schools and academies – who nevertheless Bucarelli personally worked to involve<sup>8</sup>–, but the mass audience facing to the new democratic society: it was such enlarged public, above all, that the 1946 exhibition addressed. Evidence of this is the strong media battage orchestrated through press, of which the countless newspaper and magazine clippings kept in the GNAM’s archives are traces<sup>9</sup>.

### The exhibition



**Fig. 1.** “Mostra didattica di riproduzioni di pittura moderna”, exhibition catalogue

The “Mostra didattica di riproduzioni di pittura moderna” inaugurated on April 9, 1946. It was set up in the central hall of the GNAM and remained open about a month, every day from 10:00 to 18:00, with free admission<sup>10</sup>. It brought together 81 large-format colour reproductions of masterpieces by modern masters, from Manet to Picasso, and 5 original works loaned by

Lionello Venturi<sup>11</sup>, from whose collection also came part of the printed images.

At the exhibition closing, on May 8, the art historian held a lecture titled *The origins of contemporary painting*. Quoting his words, it investigated not so much the sources, which “are lost over the centuries”, but the historical origins of contemporary painting by isolating two crucial moments defined as revolutions: the crisis of impressionism (from 1880 to 1890) and the avant-garde (from 1905 to 1914). The conference was a great public success and a version of it was published in newspapers in the following weeks<sup>12</sup>.

The art reproductions on display, all of them in colour and in large format, were presented as follows: about half in facsimile were framed and set up on the walls, the others were arranged in special display cases, depending on the importance, the quality and the dimensions of the printed materials<sup>13</sup>. Reproductions were accompanied by captions, short biographical notes of the artists and, in some cases, also by commentaries on single works, as for those of Vincent van Gogh which were depicted by excerpts from his letters<sup>14</sup>.

**Fig. 2.** Frames from “Roma: alla Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna i capolavori della pittura straniera”, Notiziario Nuova LUCE / NL011, 1946, courtesy Archivio



LUCE

The exhibition was organized in economy of means. The living costs for the GNAM were only 27.000 lire, that is to say less than 10.000 dollars, if we rely on current monetary revaluation tables<sup>15</sup>. This can be deduced from the documents preserved up to now, which unfortunately are few, and it is

not only true about administrative and organisational materials or correspondence, since the visual documentation is practically absent.

A significant exception is represented by a short video taken from a newsreel of the time that have been traced in the archives of the Istituto LUCE<sup>16</sup>. The frames give us an idea of the environment, the set-up solutions, the relationship between the reproduced artworks and the visitors. Regrettably, the key element of the project is missing. It is colour, a feature on which instead the reviews widely insisted by speaking of “admirable”, “perfect reproductions” made with “special graphic processes” by the best foreign companies<sup>17</sup>.

In parallel, by crossing press and archival informations with the catalogue-guide<sup>18</sup>, it is possible to get a more precise idea of the exhibition contents, choices and occurrences. As already mentioned, part of the reproductions were loaned by Venturi: it was essentially one-third of the framed facsimile, while the other two-thirds came directly from the GNAM's collections<sup>19</sup>. Their publishers were international: the German Piper and the American Twin were the most frequent, followed by the Swiss Stehli and the Parisians Braun and Quatre Chemins<sup>20</sup>. The reviews agreed that the American prints – all from Venturi's own archive – appear clearly superior, technically enviable<sup>21</sup>.

About the artworks, most of them were in the hands of private collectors or dealers from Europe and the United States, whereas a smaller percentage belonged to public collections, especially American museums, MoMA in the lead<sup>22</sup>. The artists represented were 20 for 81 reproductions. The most reproduced were Matisse with 13 paintings, Picasso with 10, Bonnard and Van Gogh with 9 each and finally Cézanne with 8. The other names were, in order of catalogue, Manet, Monet, Pissarro, Sisley, Renoir, Degas, Gauguin, Seurat, Dufy, Derain, Braque, Rouault, Chagall, Mondrian, Miro<sup>23</sup>.



**Fig. 3.** One of the reproductions on display: Edgar Degas, *Jockeys*, Piper-Druck no. 39, courtesy GNAM

The exhibition presented a synthesis of modern art tendencies respondent to the in the course of canonization scheme Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Avant-garde. If the Impressionists counted on about 15 reproductions dedicated and the Post-Impressionists, starting from Cézanne, about 20, the leading role was entrusted by the exponents of the Avant-garde, including the artists of the École de Paris, with more than half of the occurrences. But going beyond these arbitrary definitions, it should be considered the dating of the artworks for decades, which is a really interesting matter. In fact, despite the massive preponderance of artists from the Avant-garde ranks, it wasn't the first and second decades of 20th century to rule it, but the '40s, or rather the present, represented by almost half of the total reproductions. The other decade to have a weight was the '80s, that of

the crisis of Impressionism, with a quarter of the pieces, while the years from 1900 to 1930 showed irrelevant numbers<sup>24</sup>.

Matisse paintings, for instance, like *Odalisque. Harmonie bleu*, 1937 or the seated women of the early '40s, were almost entirely recent<sup>25</sup> and so those of Picasso, who was exclusively represented by female portraits and still lifes of the biennium 1941-42: 10 reproductions of pieces from parisian leading galleries of the war years, Jeanne Boucher and Louise Leiris, that were particularly attentive to the world of art publishing and print images<sup>26</sup>.

From a historical point of view, there was not a rigorous proposal behind the choices. The reproductions on display didn't provide an exhaustive picture of the developments of modern painting. The gaps appeared numerous and so the asymmetries, with a sort of polarization around the great starting premises – the pioneers of modernity – and some very recent events.

After all, the selection of the works probably depended, alongside Venturi's choices, on contingent reasons dictated by the not guaranteed adequate availability of printed reproductions. At the same time, it is correct to suppose that the organizers' intentions were not aimed at completeness, or to give an exhaustive and rigorous panorama of modern art, but rather to make public familiarize with its expressions.

The reviews highlighted this aspect by welcoming the exhibition<sup>27</sup>. There was no lack of criticism by the most conservative observers, who expressed a skepticism largely related to the opportunity of using photomechanical reproductions instead of originals, with resulting accusations of demagoguery and populism<sup>28</sup>, but except for these voices the consensus was practically unanimous. The exhibition aroused great interest and was hailed as a success, so much to be repeated, after the closure, in other Italian cities.



**Fig. 4.** The exhibition's travelling edition in Cagliari, 1948, installation view, courtesy Archivio Bioiconografico GNAM

The “Mostra didattica di riproduzioni di pittura moderna” thus became a travelling exhibition circulating throughout Italy to symbolically restitch the country after the wounds of the war. The show touched the big cities but also and especially the smaller centers, with pedagogical dedication, by giving shape to a non-stop tour of 3 years accompanied by many events: guided tours, conferences, debates, concerts<sup>29</sup>. And the audience didn't fail to answer in large numbers. Documentary reports prove a large attendance: in a peripheral city like Cagliari, for instance, there were more than 14.000 visitors and 2.000 catalogues sold in only 3 weeks of opening<sup>30</sup>.

The success of the initiative led the GNAM to organize a permanent educational structure producing travelling vocation projects. The turning point took place in 1949, with the starting of an avant-garde activity that would become a school for decades to come<sup>31</sup>.

In 1950 the UNESCO magazine *Museum* published a contribution titled “Circulating and educational exhibitions in Italian museums” by Giulio Carlo Argan, where the art historian – whose interest for such topics would in parallel find a synthesis in the translation of Herbert Read’s *Education through art* for the Italian public<sup>32</sup> – presented the most recent experiences and made a first assessment<sup>33</sup>.

### **Networks and models**

That of 1946 represented a pioneering experience being the first travelling print exhibition in Italy. The press did not fail to note this unprecedented aspect when speaking of a “new genre” exhibition<sup>34</sup>. It was in fact an unknown concept, introduced for the first time by Lionello Venturi himself few months earlier in an article of September 1945 where he cited the example of the traveling exhibitions held in the United States, which – he argued – “were helping to solve the problematic relationship between public and modern artists”<sup>35</sup>.

After all, among the possible models of the Italian project, the American one certainly had a weight. Suffice it to recall the experience of the New York Museum of Modern Art, with its extraordinary influence on the construction of an international narrative of modern art. Since the early 1930s, MoMA had started designing print exhibitions and inaugurated a special department dedicated to circulating shows that made of them a leading sector by launching a long and successful series of projects<sup>36</sup>, starting from “A brief survey of modern painting” (1934), strictly in colour<sup>37</sup>.

MoMA was also publisher of art reproductions made with advanced photomechanical processes and put on sale<sup>38</sup>. It wasn’t something unusual for the time, but a widespread practice shared by the major international museums, especially in France, birthplace not only of the so-called pioneers of modern art but also of a glorious print publishing tradition related to the reproduction of works of art with a strong role of the institutions. In 1940, on the occasion of the Triennale International Exhibition in Milan, in Italy, for its national section France chose to present a display of modern art

masterpieces colour prints released in facsimile format by the Chalcography of the Louvre<sup>39</sup>.

Similar experiences led the progressive spread of such exhibition trend into the Postwar years. To give just an example, in 1947 the Museu de Arte de São Paulo inaugurated with a print exhibition. It was the first of a series of educational projects – having different subjects and graphics – conceived under the guide of the museum director, Pietro Maria Bardi, who had arrived to Brazil from Italy in the October of the previous year, a few months after the opening of the Venturi exhibition, which he certainly had occasion to visit<sup>40</sup>.

Aggregator of these practices was a key player of the Postwar cultural's dynamics, UNESCO, that since the early years of its foundation worked on the creation of an archive of colour photomechanical prints of world's chefs-d'oeuvre<sup>41</sup> – sort of ideal museum – to promote, in turn, shows of reproductions such as the famous “From Impressionism till today”, held in Paris in 1949<sup>42</sup>. A few years later, in 1953, UNESCO would publish the *Manual of travelling exhibitions* for the use by all artistic institutions of the world<sup>43</sup>, thus definitively institutionalizing this exhibition paradigm of increasing popularity recognized as a powerful tool of cultural dissemination, education and soft power propaganda<sup>44</sup>.

### **The centrality of colour**

These events can be read as an expression of the growing interest for reproduced images and facsimile. UNESCO counted on an acquired understanding of the value of art reproduction in relation to the expansion of visual culture, its potential of diffusion in the game of migration among the media. And it openly identified the centrality of colour in the process: “we are returning to a civilization full of colour”, was one of the slogans of its project<sup>45</sup>.

For the latter, since 1947 the organisation set up a special committee of experts, the so called “Colour Commission”, which included, among others, Jean Cassou, director of the Museum of Modern Art in Paris, René d'Harnoncourt, director of the MoMA, and Lionello Venturi<sup>46</sup>. In 1952 the

Italian art historian signed the introduction to the second edition of the *Catalogue of colour reproductions of painting* dedicated to modern art by highlighting not only the continuous technical improvements of photomechanical colour reproduction – the quality of the images available on the market, their fidelity to the originals – but the value of colour, that was presented as “the only way to entirely return the artwork”<sup>47</sup>.

The introduction of colour photographic film in the second half of the '30s had in fact made possible for the first time direct shooting in color (or rather without the mediation of filters, as was previously the case, for instance, of the trichromatic process), thus obtaining at last natural intensity and chromatic resolutions<sup>48</sup>. In addition, it offered many advantages, particularly the absence of grain allowing high enlargements without losing detail, even during the photomechanical translation of the images. The quality, the fidelity ensured by colour film promised to give an unprecedented answer to the crucial issue of the reproduction of works of art, which until then to the imbalances and saturation of the three-colour process had preferred the reassuring black and white strictness tending, by definition, to enhance plastic and linear values. This subverted the problem of color by presenting it as a great modern possibility, a form of realism. The progressive achievements in the application to different printing processes did the rest by experimenting unprecedented ways of representing art able to modify the very identity of reproduction through the materiality of the images, and consequently perception and consumption practices.

The communicative potential of colour played a crucial role in popularization, in bringing the public – a more and more wide public – closer to art. And art, through reproduction, gained a new place in society. The images reproduced were preparing to become an important consumption object in the rising cultural industry of mass society, in parallel to the increasing expansion of the art publishing sector, its products and market. In this regard, it should be emphasized that there was a sort of natural mutual identification between colour and the modern languages, as also noticed in the debate<sup>49</sup>. Briefly, modern art was the uncontested protagonist of this process, in the name of a common modernist utopia. And it remains to be

asked how much, and how, colour influenced the development of a canon of modern art in a period considered a pivotal historiographical laboratory.

Returning to the “Mostra didattica di riproduzioni di pittura moderna”, it could be interesting to mention a review focusing on the importance of photomechanical processes’ technical issues in relation to the perceptual aspects of printed images and, finally, to the relationship between reproductions and public. The author, Gino Visentini, wrote: “in front of some facsimiles of Cézanne, I must say, I experienced the same optical and tactile sensations that the thickness and the texture of the painting had raised me many years ago at the Louvre. In front of the reproductions of Van Gogh, one can count the dense and minute brushstrokes and feel where the material is greasy or glazed and inflated by solvent and where it is dry. [...] In front of the three Degas one feels the velvet and soft powder of the pastel under the fingertips. Of those three reproductions I also own one, and I assure you that sometimes I wonder if there really is a difference with the original”<sup>50</sup>. It’s a crucial point in understanding the event, since it considers the topic of reproduction fruition, its value as an experience.

It would suffice to think of the Italy of 1946, the still present rubble of bombings, their greyness emblem of the wounds of war and 20 years of Fascist dictatorship. Let’s imagine the significance of an exhibition of color reproductions of the great works of the European modernity for a wide audience, for everyone, also as an element of civil participation in a country undergoing reconstruction<sup>51</sup>. After the ruins, the light, the colours, the pleasure of painting: the *joie de vivre* of the Impressionists – with the suggestions recalling the coeval French cinema, such as that of Jean Renoir, son of the painter – and besides the formal experimentations of the contemporary masters. A huge symbolic charge, which disrupted perception refounding modernity in chromatic memory, defining its figurative sources looking at the painting of the second half of the 19th century and not at the ancients, as in the past. The one conveyed by reproductions wanted to be a collective imagination metaphor of freedom, of belonging to a common European culture.

As mentioned, the reviews confirmed the euphoria of the public, its participation, and spoke of a popular initiative. No different, however, were the intellectual expectations evoked in contemporary artists by the confrontation with the visual documents of the great modern painting. Years later, the young Piero Dorazio will remember: “In 1946 Lionello Venturi came back to Italy and set up at the Galleria d’Arte Moderna an exhibition of colour reproductions of the most representative works of the century, from the Impressionists to Chagall. It was the elixir for modern art in Italy because it was visited and discussed by all artists, from Palermo to Milan, and presented works and plastic problems of which no one had ever known the existence”<sup>52</sup>.

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#### Archives:

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Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna's Historical Archive, Rome

Istituto LUCE's Historical Archive, Rome

Lionello Venturi's Archive, Sapienza University, Rome

Museum of Modern Art's Administrative Records and Papers Archive, New York

Palma Bucarelli's Archive, Central State Archive, Rome

#### Endnotes

1. The exhibition is widely cited in art historical literature. Among the most pertinent studies are those dedicated to museology and the educational activity of GNAM, which, however, have never addressed a critical reconstruction of the event. See, in particular, Laura Fanti, "La didattica alla GNAM negli anni di Palma Bucarelli," *Nuova museologia* 15 (November 2006): 16-20; Rita Camerlingo, "'Non ho mai lavorato per gli artisti o per i critici, ma solo per il pubblico'. Storia della didattica in Galleria (1945-1975)," in *Palma Bucarelli. Il museo come avanguardia*, ed. Mariastella Margozzi (Milan: Electa: 2009), 64-71; Stefano Marson, "Su alcuni musei d'arte moderna in Italia aperti e rinnovati," in Maria Cecilia Mazzi, *Musei anni '50: spazio, forma, funzione* (Florence: Edifir, 2009), 157-79.
2. On the Roman art scene see the coeval chronicles: Marcello Venturoli, *Interviste di frodo* (Rome: Sandron, 1945); Libero De Libero, *Roma 1935* (Rome: Edizioni della Cometa, 1981); Palma Bucarelli, *Cronache indipendenti. Arte a Roma fra 1945 e 1946*, ed. Luigi Cantatore (Rome: De Luca, 2010).
3. The related documentation is held in the GNAM's Historical Archive (GNAM-HA), Depositi temporanei fuori sede per cause belliche, Ricoveri, Protezione antiaerea 1932-1952. See also Palma Bucarelli, "Opere d'arte alla macchia," *Mercurio*, December 1944, 148-151.
4. See Margozzi, *Palma Bucarelli*.
5. See Laura Iamurri, "Lionello Venturi in esilio," *Ricerche di storia dell'arte* 67 (1999): 59-68; Stefano Valeri, "Lionello Venturi antifascista 'pericoloso' durante l'esilio (1931- 1945)," *Storia dell'arte* 101 (2002): 15-27.
6. Palma Bucarelli to Lionello Venturi, March 1, 1945, published in Bucarelli, *Cronache indipendenti*, 9. On their partnership see also Ercole Maselli to Palma Bucarelli, May 9, 1946, Central State Archive, Rome, Palma Bucarelli's Archive, folder 7.
7. See, for instance, Lionello Venturi, "Il museo-scuola," *La Nuova Europa*, September 9, 1945, 7.
8. See GNAM-HA, folder 1, file 7 "Attività didattica. Mostre 1946".

9. The press review gathered about 129 articles. See GNAM's Bio-Iconographic Archive (GNAM-BIA), "Attività didattica", folder 51.
10. As indicated in the Press release, GNAM-HA, folder 1, file 7 "Attività didattica. Mostre 1946".
11. The original pieces were a watercolor by Cézanne, one by the northamerican artist John Marin, a painting by Chagall (*Abraham*, 1931) and two by Rouault (*Bust of a woman* and *Sea of Galilee*, 1939).
12. See Lionello Venturi, "Le origini della pittura contemporanea," *L'Indipendente*, May 21, 1946,
13. The quotation above is taken from the article. In this paper, all the translations from Italian are by the author.
14. The list of the pieces on display reports the subdivision and related set-up instructions. See GNAM-HA, folder 1, file 7 "Attività didattica. Mostre 1946".
15. See Palma Bucarelli, "Le manifestazioni didattiche nella Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna," *Bollettino d'arte* 2 (April-June 1952): 185-189.
16. See GNAM-HA, folder 1, file 7 "Attività didattica. Mostre 1946"; Palma Bucarelli to the Ministry of Education, April 10, 1946.
17. "Roma: alla Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna i capolavori della pittura straniera", from *Notiziario Nuova LUCE / NLon*, 1946, Istituto LUCE's Historical Archive, Rome.
18. See, in particular, Fortunato Bellonzi, "Mostra di riproduzioni artistiche alla Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna," *Domenica*, April 14, 1946; Guglielmo Peirce, "Mostra didattica di arte moderna," *L'Unità*, April 14, 1946; Gino Visentini, "Alla Galleria d'Arte Moderna: pitture francesi riprodotte," *Fiera Letteraria*, April 25, 1945.
19. See the list of the pieces on display in GNAM-HA, folder 1, file 7 "Attività didattica. Mostre 1946". It corresponds with the one in the catalogue-guide, *Mostra didattica di riproduzioni di pittura moderna: catalogo-guida* (Rome: Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, 1948), that was published years later, on the occasion of the exhibition travelling edition, with an introduction by Corrado Maltese.
20. A small group of reproductions from GNAM's collections on display during the exhibition has been found in the museum storages: Alfred Sisley, *Les bords du Loing à Moret* (inventory no. 4288); Vincent van Gogh, *Portrait of an old farmer* (inventory no. 4289); André Derain, *Landscape* (inventory no. 4290); Edgar Degas, *Jockeys* (inventory no. 4296).
21. Alongside Seemann (Leipzig) and Graphic Society (New York). See *Mostra didattica*.
22. See, for instance, Bellonzi, "Mostra di riproduzioni"; N.O., "Fotografie di quadri moderni," *Espresso*, April 23, 1946.
23. See *Mostra didattica*.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. With the exception of *The blue window*, 1913, from MoMA's collections.
27. Except for *Seated woman*, 1941 and *Woman with a hat*, 1942, from the painter's collection, and the 1941 destroyed *Still life*. On Jeanne Boucher and Louise Leiris galleries during the war years see *L'art en guerre. France 1938-1947* (Paris: Paris-Musées, 2012): 161-82, 353, 408-9.
28. See the press review in GNAM-BIA, "Attività didattica", folder 51.
29. For a summary, see Bucarelli's answers published in *Fiera letteraria*, May 2, 1946 and the later testimony Bucarelli, "Le manifestazioni didattiche".
30. L'aquila, July 1946; Naples, August-September 1946; Bari, October 1946; Cosenza, November 1946; Reggio Calabria, December 1946; Catania, February 1947; Palermo, April 1947; Messina, July 1947; Cagliari, January 1948; Sassari, February 1948; Genoa, April 1948; Turin, May-June 1948; Milan, July 1948; Mantua, November 1948; Verona, December 1948-January 1949. For the related documentation see GNAM-HA, folder 1, file 7 "Attività didattica. Mostre 1946"; for press review and public program materials see GNAM-BIA, "Attività didattica", folder 51. After the first tournée, a second one was undertaken towards smaller cities from 1950. The few documents on the subject do not allow a reconstruction.

30. See GNAM-BIA, "Attività didattica", folder 51, "Relazione sulle edizioni di Cagliari e Sassari della Mostra didattica di pittura francese moderna".
31. See Bucarelli's testimony: Bucarelli, "Le manifestazioni didattiche" and Palma Bucarelli, "Funzione didattica del museo d'arte moderna," in *Il museo come esperienza sociale*, ed. Pietro Romanelli (Rome: De Luca, 1972): 85-90.
32. Herbert Read, *Educare con l'arte*, trans. Giulio Carlo Argan (Milan: Edizioni di Comunità, 1954).
33. Giulio Carlo Argan, "Expositions itinérantes et éducatives dans les musées d'Italie," *Museum* 4, no. 3 (1950): 3.
34. Ercole Maselli, "Una mostra (utilissima) di nuovo genere," *Avanti!*, May 5, 1946.
35. Venturi, "Il museo-scuola".
36. See "Circulating exhibitions," *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 7, no. 5 (September 1940): 2-14.
37. Alfred H. Barr, ed., *A brief survey of modern painting* (New York: MoMA, 1934).
38. See "Museum color reproductions on view" in the press release no. 45306-10 "New Technique of Multiple Circulating Exhibitions on Display at the Museum of Modern Art", March 6, 1935, New York, MoMA's Administrative Records and Papers Archive.
39. See *VII Triennale di Milano. Guida* (Milan: SAME, 1941).
40. In the same years, exhibitions of art reproductions were staged by the Art Section of the Biblioteca Municipal de São Paulo too. See Helouise Costa, "Educating About the Modern: Between the Library and the Museum," in *MAM 70: 1948-2018* (São Paulo: Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, 2018): 257-63.
41. See "Art treasures to be put within reach of all," *UNESCO Courier* 1, no. 8 (September 1948): 6. The first archive's catalogue was published in 1949. See *Catalogue of colour reproductions of paintings from 1860 to 1949* (Paris: UNESCO, 1949).
42. See the catalogue *UNESCO Travelling Print Exhibition: From Impressionism Till Today* (Paris: UNESCO, 1949), with an introduction by René Huyghe. See also the article "Colour reproduction: UNESCO's first travelling exhibition," *UNESCO Courier* 2, no. 7 (August 1949): 12.
43. Elodie Courter Osborn, *Manual of travelling exhibitions* (UNESCO, 1953).
44. On the project and the UNESCO visual policies see Rachel E. Perry, "Immutable Mobiles: UNESCO's Archives of Colour Reproductions," *The Art Bulletin* 99, no. 2 (August 2017): 166-85.
45. See Jean Leymarie, "Introduction," in *Catalogue of colour reproductions of paintings from 1860 to 1955* (Paris: UNESCO, 1955): 12-16.
46. Venturi's activity for UNESCO is documented in his archive at Sapienza University in Rome. For the writings see folder 152, dossier 16; for the correspondence, folder 296, dossier 11; for other documents, like reports, folder 294, dossier 13.
47. See Lionello Venturi, "Introduction," in *Catalogue of colour reproductions of paintings from 1860 to 1952* (Paris: UNESCO, 1952): 11-14.
48. For an overview on the colour reproduction processes see the standard contribution by Antony Hamber, "Communicating colour: advances in reprographic technology 1840-1967," *Visual Resources* 15, no. 3 (1990): 355-370.
49. See, for instance, the interesting article by Jean Leymarie, "Masterpieces you can now buy," *UNESCO Courier* 8, no. 7 (1955): 21-26.
50. Visentini, "Alla Galleria".
51. In the same years, a parallel rhetoric was used for the promotion of contemporary Italian art abroad. See Raffaele Bedarida, "Operation Renaissance: Italian Art at MoMA 1940-1949," *Oxford Journal* 35, no. 2 (June 2012): 147-69.
52. Piero Dorazio, *La fantasia dell'arte nella vita moderna* (Rome: Polveroni e Quinti, 1955), 142-43.

# Titian and the Circulation of the Oil Painting on Stone: Beyond Sebastiano del Piombo's Slate Painting Technique

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper analyzes the slate oil painting *Ecce Homo* and the marble oil painting *Mater Dolorosa* (both in the Museo del Prado, Figs. 3 and 4) that Titian created for the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V in 1547 and 1555, respectively, examining the historical role of Titian's pendants in the spread of the new medium of oil on stone in Europe during the late 16th century. In addition to mural paintings, the technique of painting directly on stone slabs cut flat and thin for tableaux is said to have been newly developed by Sebastiano del Piombo, who was active in Rome around 1530. Why did Titian choose to use Sebastiano's slate oil technique for *Ecce Homo* instead of the more common wood panel and canvas? And why did he choose marble, an even more unusual medium, instead of slate for the *Mater Dolorosa* eight years later? In this article, I will examine the significance of stone slab painting in the Renaissance, compare the techniques Titian used in his pendants with those of his contemporaries, and discuss the historical significance of the two works in the diffusion of the new medium of oil on stone slab painting.

## **KEYWORDS**

Oil on Slate Painting; Oil on Marble Painting; Titian; Sebastiano del Piombo; Habsburg Court.

### **Slate Oil Painting by Sebastiano del Piombo and *Ecce Homo* by Titian**

The pioneer of the technique of oil painting on thin stone slabs (polished until they become flat) is Sebastiano del Piombo who experimented with this technique around 1530<sup>1</sup>. Although he had already gained experience in oil painting murals in churches such as San Pietro in Montorio in Rome, it is said that his exploration of oil painting on stone slabs was directly motivated by the Sack of Rome in 1527<sup>2</sup>. Shocked by the destruction of so many works of art, he searched for a more durable support for paintings than wood or canvas and ended up with stone slabs<sup>3</sup>. In 1530, Vittore Soranzo, who was like Sebastiano at the service of Pope Clement VII, sent the following letter to the humanist Pietro Bembo, informing him of the technique of oil on stone slabs developed by Sebastiano:

You should know that our Sebastiano Veneziano has found the secret to using the most beautiful oil pigments to paint on marble, which will make painting nothing less than eternal. As soon as the colors are dried, they are united to the marble in such a way that they are almost petrified; he has tested it in every way, and it is durable. He made an image of Christ and showed it to Our Lord<sup>4</sup>.

Soranzo wrote that Sebastiano had developed the "secret" of marble oil painting: in fact, it was not marble, but thinly cut slate that the artist later used to create portraits of popes and tragic religious paintings of the Passion of Christ. Marble, which was widely used for sculpture and architecture (especially Carrara white marble) was a high-grade stone suitable for works of art, and would have made an excellent support for paintings for those painters who were aware of the "paragone" with sculptural art. However, as Giorgio Vasari later noted in his "Introduction to the Three Arts of Designs" in his *Lives* (1568), slate from the Lavagna coast near Genoa was generally considered the ideal support for oil paintings on stone slabs at the time<sup>5</sup>. Slate, which is made of mudstone or shale that undergoes consolidation and cleaves into thin sheets, has excellent waterproofing properties, so it is still used today as a building material for roofs and floors. During the Renaissance, slate was also often used for oil jars. The slate's fine stone

composition allowed it to absorb pigments well, with relatively little risk of flaking, and its cleavage characteristics made it suitable to be cut into tableau-shaped pieces and be polished flat. According to Vasari, Renaissance painters also experimented with other fine-grained stones such as marble, serpentine, and porphyry, but the less shiny and moderately dry stones such as slate were better suited for adhering oil pigments<sup>6</sup>. Sebastiano was probably attracted by these practical advantages to begin exploring the technique of oil painting on slate instead of marble.

The rough texture of black slate from Lavagna reflected light diffusely, enabling a new style of pictorial expression with a unique dull black background<sup>7</sup>. It was an ideal support for Sebastiano, who often painted portraits against a black background. The study for a head (c. 1531) in the Museo Capodimonte, Naples, is an example of Sebastiano's use of slate as an expressive medium, a technique that was firmly established from the beginning. The head of Pope Clement VII emerges from the darkness, with the frontal part illuminated and deep shading around the sunken eyes and from the right side of the head to the neck. The depth of the shading and the minute changes in the gradation show that the artist's brush was more careful and meticulous than when he was working on the canvas. The deep wrinkles superimposed on the dark shadows around the eyes seem to emphasize the pope's exhaustion and sense of helplessness in the face of the Sack of Rome. In the finished work in the Getty Museum (Fig. 1), the artist did not pursue the same thorough shading as in the study, but he beautifully realized the bright crimson and furry texture of the pope's zucchetto and mozzetta instead. The natural drooping of the white alb and the detailed decoration of the ring and red chair were also carefully rendered, showing that the artist's expressive ability was greatly deepened from the oil on canvas from the Capodimonte Museum (1526), depicting the same subject.



**Fig. 1.** Sebastiano del Piombo, *Portrait of Clement VII* (c. 1531); Getty Museum, Los Angeles. Oil on Slate, 105.4 x 87.6 cm.

Sebastiano preferred slate oil paintings, which lend themselves to shading and miniature expression, even for tragic subjects related to the Passion of the Christ. In the *Christ Bearing the Cross* (1532-35) from the Museo del

Prado, Sebastiano used the rough texture of black slate to create a detailed depiction of Christ walking alone in the darkness, his face contorted as he struggles with the weight of the cross. The light hitting the front of Christ's head, the gradation of shading on the left side of the head, and the wood tones of the cross show that the expression practiced in the portrait of the Pope was effectively transferred to religious paintings as well. Sebastiano created several variation paintings of the *Christ Bearing the Cross* in oil on slate, but as he progressed into later years, the backgrounds became more complex and varied. Instead of applying a uniform undercoat to the black slate, he set up a light source and painted gradations of light and shade on the slate<sup>8</sup>. In the *Christ Bearing the Cross* (c. 1535-40, Fig. 2), in the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, Christ's anguish is rendered more naturally by the light surrounding Him and by the somewhat rougher yet more vigorous brushwork.



**Fig. 2.** Sebastiano del Piombo, *Christ Bearing the Cross* (c. 1535-40); Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest. Oil on Slate, 157 x 118 cm.



**Fig. 3.** Titian, *Ecce Homo* (1547); Museo del Prado. Oil on Slate, 69 x 56 cm.

Sebastiano was known for his generosity in teaching the technique of slate oil painting to the artists around him, and many of them, including Francesco Salviati, followed his examples in the 1540s. Although there is no record of it, Titian, who painted *Ecce Homo* in slate oil in 1547 in the Prado Museum (Fig.

3), probably learned the technique from his old acquaintance Sebastiano when he visited Rome between 1545-46. Vasari recalled that during his stay in Rome, he had presented *Ecce Homo* to Pope Paul III, but had been severely criticized by the Roman artists, which may have motivated him to create the Prado version:

And after Titian had rested for several days, he was given quarters in the Belvedere so that he could set his hand once again to doing a full-length portrait of Pope Paul along with those of Cardinal Farnese and Duke Ottavio, all admirably executed to the great satisfaction of those lords, who persuaded Titian to paint, as a gift for the pope, a half-length picture of Christ in the form of an *Ecce Homo*, but this work, either because it suffered in comparison to the works of Michelangelo, Raphael, or Caravaggio or for some other reason, did not seem to other painters (although it was certainly a good painting) to possess the excellence typical of many of his other works, especially the portraits<sup>9</sup>.

The *Ecce Homo* presented to Paul III at this time is not believed to be extant, so we cannot be certain what kind of work it was. Given that there is no specific reference to the support, it is assumed that it was an ordinary oil on canvas. Being aware of the unfavorable publicity for the Roman version of *Ecce Homo*, however, Titian may have sought revenge for the unfair publicity by creating another work on the same subject for Emperor Charles V<sup>10</sup>. In doing so, in addition to the novelty of the support, he was attracted to the deep shadows developed by Sebastiano for which he decided to re-paint *Ecce Homo* in slate oil. Like Sebastiano's later works, *Ecce Homo* in the Museo del Prado depicts Christ with a light source in his front and the darkness of the background weighing down his shoulders. Interestingly, the brown lines on Christ's right shoulder, which represent the marks of a whipping wound, seem to blend into the darkness of the background. Also, on the left breast and right neck, blood dripping from the head covered with a crown of thorns is clearly but casually depicted. As Pietro Aretino commented, the artist did not pursue the external effect of painfully expressing Christ's wounds in this

work, but rather, he infused the entire painting with an atmosphere of resignation, so that the viewer's attention would be focused on the somber expression of Christ's face<sup>11</sup>. This is precisely the kind of expression that Sebastiano pursued in his slate oil paintings and, with this work, Titian became a faithful successor of Sebastiano<sup>12</sup>.

When Titian left for Augsburg at the invitation of Charles V in December 1547, he presented Aretino with a copy of *Ecce Homo* and brought the original slate oil painting to the emperor himself. The masterpiece, an oil on an usual support, was immediately well received at the Habsburg court, prompting orders for copies from the emperor's chief advisors, including Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle<sup>13</sup>. Thus, Titian's *Ecce Homo* is historically recognized as an example of how the new medium of slate oil painting, which had been stayed around Sebastiano in Rome, was brought across the Alps, and made popular on an European scale.

#### **Diversification of Oil on Stone and Titian's Marble Oil Painting *Mater Dolorosa***

Sebastiano died of illness in Rome in 1547, and the slate oil paintings he initiated began to diversify when he was still alive or shortly after his death. For example, *David and Goliath* by Daniele da Volterra (around 1550 now in the Louvre), is a rare example of oil painting on both sides of a slate panel. As is well known, during the Renaissance, there was a great deal of debate in Italy about the superiority between painting and sculpture (*paragone*). Those who argued for the superiority of sculpture over painting claimed that sculpture could be viewed from various angles and in three dimensions, and that its solid stone material made it durable and suitable for representing human figures with a sense of substance<sup>14</sup>. In the letter by Vittore Soranzo quoted above, the emphasis on the eternity and durability of marble paintings reflected not only the fresh memory of the Sack of Rome, but also such Renaissance "*paragone*" discussions. Daniele da Volterra's double-sided slate oil painting is an example of the attempt to challenge sculptural art from the viewpoint of three-dimensionality. The David attacking Goliath is

flipped left and right on both sides, each with its thorax and abdomen and back facing forward in opposite directions. Thus, by switching back and forth between the front and back, the viewer can grasp the scene of the fierce battle in three dimensions. While double-sided canvas paintings were also created during the same period, as for instance Bronzino's *Nano Morgante* (Palazzo Pitti, Florence, 1552), which was intended to be three-dimensional, Daniele da Volterra used the slate stone material to ensure the solidity of the work and the realism of the figures, which means he was certainly aware of the rivalry with sculptural art. Thus, from the period that preceded and followed Sebastiano's death, the practice of attempting to create stone slab oil paintings, out of a different interest than his exploration of shading, began to emerge in various parts of Italy.



**Fig. 4** Titian, *Mater Dolorosa* (1555); Museo del Prado. Oil on Marble, 68 x 53 cm.

Titian's 1555 marble oil painting *Mater Dolorosa* (Fig. 4) is another example of the diversification of oil on stone slabs that was occurring. In 1553, as a pendant to the slate oil painting *Ecce Homo*, he proposed to Charles V an oil on panel painting, *Mater Dolorosa* (Museo del Prado), which he completed the following year<sup>45</sup>. However, upon receiving the oil on panel, the emperor, through his ambassador to Venice Francisco de Vargas, ordered the artist to create a stone slab painting of the same subject, so that it would be a suitable pendant to the *Ecce Homo*. There is no record of whether the emperor specified the material for the support, but according to a letter from the ambassador to the emperor in March 1555, Titian replied that it would be difficult to find a suitable stone<sup>46</sup>. The stone was eventually obtained in the same month, although it was not slate, as in the *Ecce Homo*, but white marble, commonly known as "imperial marble," which was probably quarried from a pedestal in an ancient Roman residence<sup>47</sup>.

The reason why Titian or Charles V chose white marble as a support in this case is the subject of much speculation. First, there are few, if any, examples of oil marble paintings from the same period, and the possibility that these works may have been the inspiration for the artist's choice is worth considering. For example, *Portrait of Banker Bindo Altoviti* (Fig. 5) in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, is a marble oil painting that has recently been attributed to Girolamo da Carpi rather than Francesco Salviati, and it was executed around 1550-53<sup>48</sup>. The background is entirely painted black, and the lighting and composition of the work is well calculated to illuminate the dignified face of the banker, who was renowned for his artistic patronage. Girolamo, shortly after his return to Ferrara from Rome, was intent on applying to marble the same style of portrayal of the figure in Sebastiano's slate oil paintings. The green curtains in the background and the gloss of the red cushions are highlighted by the glossy surface of the marble, but the artist's brushwork is restrained throughout, perhaps wary of the slippery nature of the surface, which is particularly evident in the depiction of the banker's furs. However, in contrast with Girolamo, Titian's marble oil painting *Mater Dolorosa* relies on a brisk brushstroke, and considering the stylistic differences between the two works, it seems likely that Titian was

working from the beginning to establish his own style of painting, independent of any previous examples on marble.



**Fig. 5.** Girolamo da Carpi, *Portrait of Banker Bindo Altoviti* (c. 1550-53), Private Collection. Oil on Marble, 88 x 73 cm.

In the oil on panel painting of the same subject completed the previous year, Titian depicted the Virgin with her hands clasped tightly, staring sternly into

the void, and holding still in grief over the loss of Christ, full of a sense of tension. In contrast, the Virgin in the marble oil painting seems to express the motherhood of a living woman who is not shy about expressing her raw emotions, with tears streaming down her cheeks and her whole body weakened by grief over the loss of her beloved child. It has been speculated that this new marble version of the Madonna with open arms may have been inspired by drawings of Netherlandish painters or Greek icons sent by Charles V<sup>19</sup>. However, even if Charles V gave specific instructions regarding the iconography, the receptive expression of the Virgin with open hands, as if about to welcome the suffering Christ of the pendant *Ecce Homo*, is supported by the natural touch of the brush, which is rough and less forceful, obtained by the moderate gliding of the brush on the marble surface. It is also interesting to note that the blue mantle of the Virgin in lapis lazuli, so impressive in the previous oil on slate, was recreated in the marble version without losing its luster. In general, it was difficult to preserve the blue color of lapis lazuli well on black slate, and because of such color issues, Titian seems to have been reluctant to create the *Mater Dolorosa* in oil on slate. This may be why, when asked by the ambassador to create a stone slab oil painting, he replied that it would be difficult to find suitable stone material.

As has been pointed out several times in this paper, marble was originally considered a more ideal support for oil paintings than slate by Renaissance painters, who were aware of the rivalry with sculptural art. However, because shiny marble was more technically difficult than slate in terms of oil's adherence to it, few artists, except for Girolamo da Carpi, attempted marble oil paintings before Titian. In response to a challenge from Charles V, Titian turned again to marble, the once largely neglected support for oil paintings, and asked to cut out a portion of a pedestal left over from an ancient Roman villa. Cutting stone from ancient monuments was not necessarily unusual at the time, and it was probably the only solution to quickly complete the paintings ordered by the emperor, but Titian may also have intended to stimulate the archaeological interest of Charles V<sup>20</sup>. In addition to sculpture, Titian, considering the rivalry with ancient art, chose white marble as the support for *Mater Dolorosa* and, with his skillful

brushwork, he created a new style of expression in oil on stone that differed from Sebastiano's.

As mentioned above, Sebastiano del Piombo generously taught the technique to his friends, and Giorgio Vasari recommended the use of Lavagna slate for oil painting in his *Lives*. Thus, Lavagna slate became the basic support for oil on stone slabs and was widely used in Rome, Verona, Prague, and other European cities. Titian's *Ecce Homo* is known to have remained in the collection of the Spanish court even after the death of Charles V, fascinating artists who visited the Spanish court in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, and possibly stimulating their creativity. For example, Sofonisba Anguissola, a female painter from Cremona who was invited to the court of Madrid in 1559-73, painted one male portrait in slate oil, probably after her return to Italy. This highly finished portrait depicts a young man looking somewhat melancholic and lost in thoughts against a brownish-black monotone background, reminiscent of Sebastiano and Titian's slate oil paintings. Although she may have had the opportunity to view slate oil paintings in Sicily and Genoa after her return to Italy, it is also probable that she came across Titian's *Ecce Homo* during her 14-year stay in Madrid, and Titian's work may have been one of her sources of inspiration. Also, in the late 16th century Venice, several painters created masterpieces in slate oil painting, including Simone Peterzano, who claimed to be Titian's pupil, and Leandro Bassano, who was under Tintoretto's influence. The memory of Titian's slate oil paintings may have long passed down through the generations of Venetian artists.

On the other hand, Titian's richly colored white marble oil painting with free and vigorous brushwork in his *Mater Dolorosa* was not necessarily followed by everyone, resulting in fewer successors than the slate oil paintings. However, in 1564, Federico Zuccari painted a masterpiece of marble altarpiece, the *Adoration of the Magi*, in the Grimani Chapel in the Church of San Francesco della Vigna in Venice. Although the oil paint has peeled off in some points, like Titian's *Mater Dolorosa*, the blue of the Virgin's cloak and the sky painted with lapis lazuli are brilliant and striking, making it an impressive grand altar piece. It is possible that Titian, who was still alive,

was consulted for the creation of this piece.

The technique of oil on stone slabs was then carried on throughout Europe until the 18th century, and oil painting was practiced on a variety of stone materials in addition to slate, marble, serpentine, and porphyry<sup>21</sup>. For example, Giuseppe Cesari's *Perseus Rescuing Andromeda* (St. Louis Art Museum), oil painted directly on a small piece of lapis lazuli, has fascinated art lovers both for the rarity of its support and the brilliance of the blue background. In the 17th century, more and more works in stone with unique stripes, such as marble, alabaster and onyx, were used to depict supernatural phenomena in religious subjects, leaving the patterns as they were. These works, in which it is difficult to determine where the paint is applied and where the original stone pattern begins, are typical examples of the development of stone slab oil paintings toward the acquisition of playfulness in the Baroque period. Looking back to the subsequent history of the diversification of oil painting supports, Titian's pendants *Ecce Homo* and *Mater Dolorosa*, show respectively the path of inheritance of Sebastiano's technique and the path of new attempts to overcome it, as if they were at a turning point in art history when the new media became widespread on a European scale.

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## Endnotes

1. The technique of oil painting spread from the Netherlands to Italy in the 15th century, but even before that, there are traces of attempts at tempera painting on tableau-shaped stone slabs that occurred sporadically. For example, in Santa Maria in Via in Rome, there is a slate tempera painting of the Virgin, also known as the *Madonna of the Well*, which dates to the late 14th century. Cennino Cennini's *Libro dell'arte*, written around 1390, introduced the technique of oil painting, which was then becoming popular in the Netherlands, and stated that it was possible to paint with oil on iron and stone. Cennini, *Libro dell'Arte*, 97-98, 102-103.
2. After the introduction of oil painting in the 15th century, for example, Domenico Veneziano, Andrea del Castagno, and the Pollaiuolo brothers attempted to create oil on wall paintings in Florence. However, according to Giorgio Vasari, their works had constant problems such as darkening and fading soon after completion. It was Sebastiano del Piombo who solved these problems by devising and practicing a unique technique for producing high-quality oil paintings. Vasari, *Vite*, V, 97-99.
3. According to Giorgio Vasari, Sebastiano del Piombo established the technique of oil on copper plate in addition to stone slab, but slate oil paintings are by far the most numerous extant examples of his work on supports other than wood plate or canvas. Vasari, *Vite*, V, 97-99. See the following monographs on Sebastiano. Baker-Bates, *Sebastiano del Piombo*; Barbieri, *Sebastiano del Piombo*; Bertling Biaggini, *Sebastiano del Piombo*; Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo*.
4. Bembo, *Lettere da diversi Re*, 110.
5. Vasari, *Vite*, I, 137-39. Although Vasari did not mention Sebastiano's name in the "Introduction," as Angela Cerasuolo pointed out, the slate oil painting technique described in the "Introduction" is clearly consistent with that invented by Sebastiano del Piombo. Cerasuolo, "Un nuovo metodo", 153-55.
6. Vasari, *Vite*, I, 137-39. Although oil paint adhered better to slate than to other stone materials, slate was also a support material that was not immune to the risk of paint loss over time. To ensure the adherence of the paint, Sebastiano scored the surface of the slate to create minute irregularities. For more information on Sebastiano's scoring technique, see the following. Reifsnnyder, "Preparation Techniques", 80-81.
7. Slate's ability to diffuse light and prevent illumination also made it suitable as a support for large altar pieces. There are many examples of large slate altar pieces in Roman churches, such as the *Nativity of the Virgin* (Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome), completed by Francesco Salviati, who took over the conception of Sebastiano del Piombo in his last years; the *Martyrdom of St. Lawrence* by Federico Zuccari (c. 1580, Santa Lorenzo in Damaso, Rome); the *Assumption of the Virgin* by Scipione Pulzone (1585, San Silvestro al Quirinale, Rome).
8. Even the backgrounds of slate oil paintings, which at first glance appear to have been painted uniformly in solid colors, are known to have been painstakingly primed by Sebastiano. For example, it is known that in the *Portrait of Ippolito de' Medici* (private collection), first a vermilion and then a white layer were applied under the plain gray background, which was painted uniformly. The texture of the vermilion undercoat, which appears in places, gives a subtle change to the gray background. Ballarin, "Un nuovo ritratto", 71-80; Cerasuolo, "Osservazioni sulla tecnica", 81-86.
9. Vasari, *Vite*, VI, 163-164.
10. Upon his arrival in Augsburg in early 1548, Titian presented Charles V with a slate oil

painting *Ecce Homo* and an unidentified "Venus," the latter being announced to the emperor by the artist on December 8, 1545, while in Rome. Therefore, both *Ecce Homo* and "Venus" were probably conceived during Titian's stay in Rome in 1545. As to whether the *Ecce Homo*, which was so criticized in Rome, was in fact a poor work, there is a completely different record, with Carlo Ridolfi, in his *Maraviglie dell'arte*, describing it as a masterpiece that "drew tears from eyes and commiseration from hearts". Titian's visit to Rome was a great threat to the artists who were working for the Pope at the time, such as Perino del Vaga, who was hostile to Titian during his stay in Rome. It is quite possible that the Roman version of *Ecce Homo* was subjected to more criticism than necessary. Tiziano, *L'epistolario*, 124-25; Vasari, *Vite*, V, 156 (Perino del Vaga); Ridolfi, *Maraviglie dell'arte*, I, 178.

11. Letter of thanks from Pietro Aretino for the copy of the *Ecce Homo*, received from Titian at the end of 1547. Tiziano, *L'epistolario*, 140.

12. The following article and book discuss Titian's *Ecce Homo*, focusing on the history of the development of oil on stone slabs and the inspiration for the "Ecce Homo" iconography. Nygren, "Titian's Ecce Homo", 33-36; Nygren, *Titian's Icons*.

13. As for the copy ordered by Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle, although the correspondence between the artist and the client makes it certain that the work was completed, there is no entry for the work in the Granvelle family inventory, and it is unclear whether it is still extant. Tiziano, *L'epistolario*, 155-57, 163-64, 167-68, 174-77.

14. The 1546 Lectures by Benedetto Valchi, a treatise that attempts to find a settlement of the "paragone" controversy in fairness to both painting and sculpture, argues that where the superiority of sculpture is emphasized, it is closer to recreating the "essence" rather than the "appearance" of the human figure than painting. Varchi, "Maggioranza delle Arti", 5-58.

15. Between 1553 and 1555, there were various exchanges between Charles V and his ambassador in Venice Francesco de Vargas, concerning the two *Mater Dolorosa* by Titian, including reports on their production status, and letters urging the artist to complete them. It is thought that the first painting mentioned in 1553-54 is the oil on panel version in the Museo del Prado. Titian asked the emperor through his ambassador to send him the dimensions of the slate oil painting so that it could serve as a suitable pendant to the *Ecce Homo*. Mancini, *Tiziano e le corti d'Asburgo*, 223, 227-30, 232-33.

16. Mancini, *Tiziano e le corti d'Asburgo*, 236.

17. Mancini, *Tiziano e le corti d'Asburgo*, 237. The following article analyzes the white marble used for the support of the *Mater Dolorosa*, which was probably cut from the pedestal of an ancient Roman villa. González Mozo, "Materiales y Técnicas", 47-101.

18. Falciani et al. *Vasari per/for Bindo Altoviti*, 22-23.

19. Many scholars, including Charles Hope, have previously claimed that the marble oil painting of the Virgin with open arms was based on a drawing by Rogier van der Weyden, sent by Charles V. However, no similar examples have been found in Rogier's drawings. Recently, Ana González Mozo has suggested that a Greek icon may have been Titian's inspiration. Hope, *Titian*, 122; González Mozo, "Materiales y Técnicas", 47-101.

20. The 2018 exhibition on Italian stone slab paintings at the Museo del Prado also revealed the reverse sides of Titian's *Ecce Homo* and *Mater Dolorosa*, of particular interest because, in *Mater Dolorosa*, Titian had painted the reverse side red brown to resemble red marble. The reasons for this choice were perhaps that he thought red marble would be appropriate for the emperor as well as to disguise the thick, uneven white marble surface cut from an ancient Roman pedestal. González Mozo, *In Lapide Depictum*.

21. In 2022, the Saint Louis Art Museum held an exhibition that presented a voluminous study on the 170-year history of the development of oil on stone slabs in Europe, from the attempts of Sebastiano del Piombo around 1530 to the end of the 18th century. For the catalog, see the following. Mann, *Paintings on Stone*.

# Media Transformation in a Transcultural Perspective: A Portrait of Muhammad in a Chinese Public Park in the 1920s

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper presents a case study about an anonymous engraving of the Prophet Muhammad, transferred from the Western world to China at the beginning of the 20th century. It was transformed into a poster for nationalist and patriotic education. The whole process of image migration across time and space involved shifts of multiple media including engravings, books, magazines, illustrated newspapers, posters and photographs. Its significance changed, while different media also brought complex messages for re-narrating Muhammad in the Chinese context. This paper traces back all versions of the image and its derivatives, analyzes the changings of various media as well as the political stances based on the historical and cultural background of the transfer. It emphasizes how the media carried travelling images from the West to China, and how the Western depiction of Muhammad was adapted to a Chinese context, subsequently becoming part of the political strategy of China's own modern identity. The study offers a distinct case to discuss the theory of "image vehicles", "Bilderfahrzeuge" (Aby Warburg), migrating in the modern global network. Moreover, methodologies of "political iconography" and "archaeology of media" are crucial for the analysis of this case study.

## **KEYWORDS**

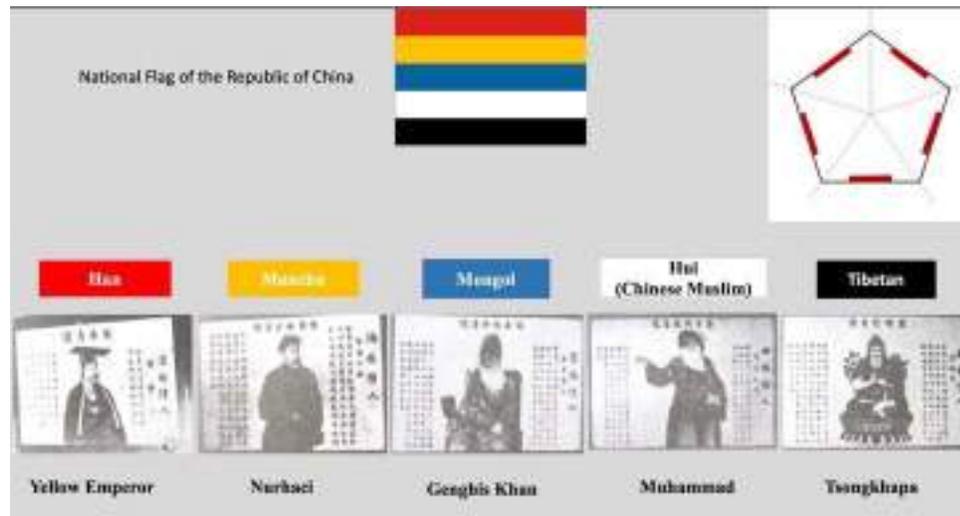
Early 20th-century China; Muhammad; Nationalism; Bilderfahrzeuge, Political Iconography

In 1925, thirteen years after the Republic of China (1912-1949) overturned the last imperial dynasty and established itself, a public park opened in Beijing. The park was named “Jingzhao Park” (京兆公园), after the Capital District of the Republic of China, which served as the administrative unit including the capital city of Beijing and the surrounding region from 1912 to 1928. It was the result of the modern urban renewal movement, which transformed an imperial temple (the Temple of Earth). Many experimental measures were used in the design of this park to construct a meaningful place for patriotic education. The park only existed for three years under the name Jingzhao (the capital region) before being renamed. Due to its short existence, few records remained, with the exception of the only book, the *Report on Jingzhao Park* (京兆公园纪实) which gave a systematic introduction to the place.<sup>4</sup> The book was compiled at the request of the Prefect of Jingzhao District, Xue Dubi (薛笃弼, 1892 - 1973), to document his accomplishment of transforming the Temple of Earth into a public park before he left his job. A special facility, a pentagonal pavilion called the “Gonghe Pavilion” (共和亭), was set on the new center of the park in order to replace the status of the imperial altar. Gonghe Pavilion embodied the national policy of “*wuzu gonghe*” (五族共和, Five Nationalities United in the Republic), which was the main principle that the park tried to convey. The five sides of the pavilion were each painted with a different color to represent the five official ethnic groups of the Republic, and the five colors correspond to those on the national flag: red for the Han, yellow for the Manchu, blue for the Mongol, white for the Hui (Chinese Muslim) and black for the Tibetan. Inside the pavilion, five portraits were hung on beams, one on each side. The portraits presented five “great men” who were famous historical heroes to symbolize their relevant nationalities, including the Yellow Emperor (Han), Nurhaci (Manchu), Genghis Khan (Mongol), Muhammad (Chinese Muslim), and Tsongkhapa (Tibetan). The modern statement of “five nationalities” was a political creation, and it was one of the most popular themes of propaganda, frequently appearing in the form of images in all kinds of media. An example is a banknote on which portraits of five women in distinguishable dresses acted as observables to represent different nationalities; yet their identities could not be used to

identify their nationalities from a political perspective.<sup>2</sup> On the contrary, the five male figures in the park were emperors of old dynasties or religious leaders, and they were bracketed together as “great men”, comparable to the Italian tradition of the *uomini famosi*. The concept also aligned with Thomas Carlyle’s “Great Man theory” which was well-known in China since the late Qing dynasty.<sup>3</sup> Among the five great men, the Prophet Muhammad, who was used as the representation of the Hui nationality, appears a little weird, because the founder of Islam, who was unquestionably a non-Chinese, was fabricated as the symbol of a Chinese ethnic group (Chinese Muslims). Obviously, this statement here confounded the two concepts of *Huizu* (回族, the Hui nationality) and *Huijiao* (回教, the religion of Hui, that is Islam, although the term “Islam” was rarely mentioned during its development in ancient China). In the park, the figure of Muhammad was involved into the narrative framework produced by the republican China under the slogan of “Five Nationalities United in the Republic”, and it helped to construct the identity of the modern nation-state.



**Fig. 1.** Venice Gonghe Pavilion, from Xue, Dubi, ed., *Report on Jingzhao Park* (京兆公园纪实, *Jingzhao Gongyuan Jishi*), Beijing, 1925. photo no.44.



**Fig.2.** A sketch by the author: The five sides of the pentagonal pavilion were each painted with a different color to represent the five official ethnic groups of the Republic, and the five colors correspond to those on the national flag. Portraits presented five “great men” of five nationalities were hung on the beams inside the pavilion, one on each side. All the photos are from Xue Dubi, 1925, photo no.48-52.



**Fig. 3.** The portrait of Muhammad in the Gonghe Pavilion, from Xue Dubi, 1925, photo no.51.

Why was Muhammad chosen to represent the Hui? It must be explained via the evolution of the Hui in China. For a long time in Chinese history, the term “Hui” or “Huihui” referred to all Chinese-speaking communities with Muslim ancestries who were of various origins, but lived far from the Muslim world. They are always thought to be culturally closer to the Han majority than other minorities in China. Sun Yat-sen, the founder of the Republic of China, defined the Hui people as one of the Chinese nationalities. It was a political creation as well as a revolutionary tool for uniting the people. Sun Yat-sen announced in his *Inaugural Address of the Provisional President*:

The root of the nation lies with the people. The land of the Han, Manchus, Mongols, Muslims, and Tibetans is one country; and thus, the Han, Manchus, Mongols, Muslims, and Tibetan nations are one people. This is a united “race”.<sup>4</sup>

Sun also made an announcement:

All ethnic groups in the Republic of China are equal. The Hui people have suffered the most from China’s dynasties. The more the suffering, the greater the possibility for revolution. As a result, it is important to rouse the Hui people and enlist them in the national liberation effort. Around the world, the Hui faith is widely recognized for its bravery and willingness to sacrifice. The awakening and involvement of the Hui people must be a solid guarantee of the revolution’s triumph. [...] In a word, China’s national revolution cannot achieve ultimate success without the participation of the Hui; the aim of destroying imperialism cannot be realized without the cooperation of the Hui.<sup>5</sup>

This doctrine goes far beyond ethnic issues but concerns the territory and borders of China: the Han inhabited the central part, while other four non-Han communities took up four frontier regions. The Hui are prevalent in Northwestern China, but communities may be found across the country.

Through a dialogical process of governmental recognition and self-examination, the Hui officially became a nationality, playing a role in the discourse of a Chinese “nation”.<sup>6</sup> In the example of the Gonghe Pavilion, the symbol of the entire Chinese Muslim community was chosen by the park designer, who was the Prefect of the capital area and also a representative of the Han government’s perspective, to narrate how the Hui was defined. Due to a lack of publications in Chinese, knowledge of Islam was not disseminated to the non-Muslim circle in China. Chinese Muslim intellectuals, on the other hand, interpreted and localized the knowledge by integrating their identities into both mainstream Chinese culture and Islam. They also converted the prophet into the Chinese concept of a sage. Muhammad was referred to as *zhisheng* (至圣, most sagely), and some Chinese scholars attempted to link him to Confucius in order to validate his sagehood.<sup>7</sup> Even if Muhammad’s legend had reached the non-Muslim social environment, ordinary people had little opportunity to view Muslim-themed imagery in their lives, let alone portraits of Muhammad. According to Islamic doctrine, the *Quran* castigates the worship of idols. Muhammad’s portraits were likewise few in number, although the *Quran* and *Hadith* do not really ban portraits.<sup>8</sup>

In China, people’s curiosity about the appearance of the figure can be felt in folklore. They described Muhammad’s portraits as “un-seen”:

P. Dabry de Thiersant quoted a story from the *Daogu Tang Anthology* (道古堂文集) which was composed in the 18th century by a Han scholar, *Hang Shijun* (杭世骏, 1695-1773). It says in the year of 587, the Tang Emperor dispatched an envoy to invite Muhammad to China, Muhammad didn’t come but gave his portrait as a gift to the Emperor. The portrait was drawn with some special material, and it completely faded once the Emperor saw the Prophet’s looks.<sup>9</sup>

The story reflected that the common perception of Muhammad’s appearance was “un-seen”. In another story, Muhammad was imagined to have typical features associated with men from “the Western Regions” (西域).

People had a general idea that Muhammad should not look like the Chinese of the Central Plains. According to a tale in *Huihui yuanlai* (Origins of the Hui), Tang dynasty emperor Tai Zong (626–49) dreamt about Muhammad and described his appearance: “The man wore a green robe, and a white turban was wound around his head. He had a towel draped over his shoulder and a water kettle in his left hand. He had deep eye sockets, a high nose bridge, and a brown face.”<sup>10</sup> To this point, the Chinese discourse is similar to Euro-American discourses which have been all too keen to focus on Islam’s “differential” character—that is, what makes it “other”.<sup>11</sup> Chinese people tried to interpret the figure within their own cultural context. There is an example in the Chinese encyclopedia *Sancai Tuhui*:

This is the very place where the local god *Maxia* (麻霞, i.e., Muhammad) was born. In that country, they call the gods (神) as buddhas (佛), and every year all the people go there and worship. Behind the temple lies the god’s tomb which emits light from day to night, and no one dares to approach it.<sup>12</sup>

The image used to illustrate this entry of Mecca depicts a balding man with curly hair and a significant amount of hair on his chest and feet; he is dressed in an ample robe and is walking barefoot. The figure in the illustration functions as a depiction of the Prophet rather than an ordinary pilgrim of Mecca. This curly hair and body hair, together with the robe, were stereotypical markers in China and Japan denoting men from India, the Middle East, and Central Asia. This figure also shares similar facial features and robes with portraits of *Buddha Śākyamuni* and the Zen patriarch *Bodhidharma*. Furthermore, this image also influenced illustrations in a Japanese encyclopedia *Wakan sansai zue* published around 1712. Images depicting a man from Mecca, whether in Chinese or Japanese versions, are strongly influenced by contemporaneous East Asian iconographical codes of sainthood.

### **The Image of Muhammad in the Gonghe Pavilion**

Given the historical background and previous visual tradition, the Gonghe Pavilion offers a rather remarkable and unique example of a public display of Muhammad's picture as the symbol of the Hui nationality. Both the words and image on the billboard presenting the great man reflect the mainstream understanding of Muhammad, Islam, and Hui history. The figure was depicted with a distinct exotic appearance, far from the Chinese iconographical tradition, in contrast to the style of Buddha or Chinese sage. There must be some extrinsic model from which the poster-painter learned how to create the image. It begs the issue of where the visual style originates from or what the original image looks like. An engraving (lithograph?) of Muhammad's full-length portrait resembles the one in the park. The picture initially appeared as the frontispiece of *The History of the Saracens*, published in London in 1847.<sup>13</sup> The book was written by Simon Ockley (1678-1720), a British Orientalist at Cambridge University. On the page below the picture, two names, "Duflos" and "Hinchliff", are written, referring to the designer Pierre Duflos (1742-1816) and the engraver John James Hinchliff (1805-1875). Ockley's book, for a long time, was regarded as the standard history of Muhammad and his eventful period. The only illustration in the book, like other pictorializations of Muhammad motifs, was more expressive than the texts themselves.<sup>14</sup> It's not farfetched to think that the Chinese poster has relevance to the European engraving. Many aspects of both pictures are strikingly similar, such as the outline, dress, gesture, and even the wrinkles in the clothes (e.g., each figure is painted with a thin white line on the part of the right sleeve near the elbow). However, it is almost impossible that the painter learned the image directly from Ockley's book since it was not translated into Chinese and was not widely circulated in the society of China. Even if the book was taken into China by missionaries or merchants, the probability of a local painter reproducing an illustration from an English book is quite unlikely. Thus, other sources should be used as references, such as the illustrated paper.



**Fig.4** The portrait of Muhammad in Simon Ockley, *The History of the Saracens: comprising the Lives of Mohammed and his Successors, to the Death of Abdalmelik, the Eleventh Caliph. With an account of their most remarkable battles, sieges, revolts, etc. Collected from authentic sources, especially Arabic mss.* London, 1847.

The earliest illustrated papers in China had a tradition of reproducing pieces from foreign materials. According to this clue, one illustration from a Chinese newspaper was found, which might be a bridge connecting images in the British book and the Chinese park. It was published in one of the most influential comprehensive publications in China in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The picture of Muhammad is one of the three illustrations of the 1914 article (*The Observation of Today's Islamic Countries*), which was translated from the Japanese newspaper *Tokyo Daily News*.<sup>15</sup> This fact also serves as a reminder that Japan was instrumental in introducing new learning to China. The 1914 illustration is clearly based on the 1847 engraving in every detail, including not only the main figure, but also the building and armed people in the background. The copy was not created using photographic techniques, but it should be reprinted with a new plate made by some local engraver. When the three pictures are juxtaposed, it is reasonable to speculate that the poster-painter may have borrowed the method of drawing from the 1914 illustration, but not the original one from 1847, based on the proportion, outline, shading, and color. The comparison of the three images demonstrates how the image evolved from 1847 to 1925, as well as from the British publication to the Chinese poster. The basic features have been preserved, but some parts have been distorted. Despite the fact that many other pictures were being replicated at the time, the one from the 1847 book appeared more frequently than others and was picked to be displayed in the park. This figure must precisely correspond to the propagandistic aim of the park, thus, it was chosen. But why? First, the 1847 engraving carried on the eighteenth-century tradition of depicting Muhammad as a great man, portraying him as a hero and a revolutionary who shaped history with his extraordinary leadership abilities. Learning from the building, the Kaaba in Mecca, the most sacred Muslim pilgrim shrine, the scene in the picture depicts “Muhammad leading his people to capture Mecca and take power.” This topic may allude to the Republican China’s path to revolutionary victory. Thus, the image, along with the introduction, gives the audience a clear and direct impression of the figure of a leader. Secondly, the figure also corresponds to the general public’s imagination of Muhammad, which is the

stereotypical image of him “holding the Quran in his left hand, but a sword in his right” (左经右剑). This is a misunderstanding in which Muhammad used violence to accomplish missionary work, but the incorrect saying has spread extensively, even in China.<sup>16</sup> In this picture, the gesture of Muhammad “holding the Quran and sword” had acquired a widespread consensus in society, allowing people to recognize the figure.



**Fig.5** The illustration titled “The Hui Hierarch Muhammad” (回教教主摩訶末) comes from “The Observation of Today’s Islamic Countries (translated from *Tokyo Daily News*)” (回教國現勢之探察[譯日本東京日日新聞]), *Dongfang Zazhi* (东方杂志), vol.10, no.11, 1914.

Apart from image appropriation, the figure of Muhammad was also modified to resemble a Chinese man, most likely to avoid deviating too far from Chinese visual tradition, because using an exact foreigner's portrait to represent a Chinese nationality may confuse the targeted visitors. The portrait on the poster is painted in a typical Chinese painting style, combining image and text. This pictorial composition can be traced back to the visual conventions of Chinese memorial portraits, such as eulogies of portraits, pictorial biographies, and cyclopedias of pictures. Moreover, the figure of Muhammad in the 1925 poster resembles a Chinese person rather than a foreigner because of his beard. His beard is not curly, but it appears to be more manageable. In traditional Chinese art, beards are used to distinguish between Chinese and outsiders. For example, in Yan Liben's (阎立本, 601-673) famous painting, *Emperor in a Sedan Chair Receiving a Tibetan Envoy* (步辇图), the beard is one of the key features on the face that differentiates the Chinese Emperor from the foreign envoy. The 1925 poster also resembles the typical profile with *changran* (长髯, long beard) in Chinese art, which is a conventional iconographic code depicting the elderly wise man, such as Confucius, or the brave warrior, such as the God of Gate, which always appears in woodcuts. Artificial beards are also used by actors in traditional Chinese operas, and the gesture of holding the long beard with one hand, which shapes the beard to shrink at the tail, is a stylized position on the stage. It can be guessed that the poster-painter mimicked the convention of the beard from the visual tradition and employed the Chinese-style beard to depict Muhammad, making him appear like a Chinese sage.

### **Brief Summary**

The poster at the Gonghe Pavilion in Jingzhao Park reflects a complicated background in which the Hui were defined as a nationality belonging to the Chinese nation under Republican China's modern nationalist building. Meanwhile, Muhammad, the prophet and founder of Islam, was selected as the symbol of the newly formed Hui nationality. The figure was not chosen by the Hui people, but was re-narrated by the Han (majority nationality)

government as a hero and revolutionary in the modern perspective of nation and state construction. The image in the poster was adapted from a British engraving but modified for the Asian context to assist in the introduction of knowledge about the Hui origins and Muhammad's accomplishments. It underwent Sinicization and became a new figure that was readily accepted by the local Chinese. This case proves the existence of a transformed image of the 1847 engraving that spread throughout China. The example shows how, around the turn of the twentieth century, illustrated papers served as a medium for transferring Western images to China (perhaps via Japan), enhancing Muhammad's popularity in China. It also demonstrates that image transmission was a prominent trend at the time, with knowledge and information diffusing across cultures through the migration of images and their carries. The whole process of image migration through time and space involves various media shifts, including engravings, books, magazines/illustrated newspapers, posters, and, eventually, photographs. The printing technique facilitated the image's global dissemination. When the image was expressed via different media, the form was adjusted for new functions and the significance changed, while various media also provided complex meanings for re-narrating Muhammad in the Chinese context.

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# The First European Wheel: A Prehistoric Instrument of Indo-European Migrations and its Reflections in Croatian Contemporary Design

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## **ABSTRACT**

The first Indo-European migrations and occupation of the territory of modern Croatia occurred on the banks of the second largest European river, Danube. Innovation that occurred in the Danube valley was the first wheeled vehicles - wagons and carts. Its appearance marked the landscape and caused the transition from the traditional agricultural economy to the animal husbandry, as well as the first appearance of the social stratification.

The impact of the first Indo-European migrations and the occupation in the territory of Croatia can be studied through the wheels in its material and symbolic aspects. Moreover, the remains of the wagons and carts and the finds of its clay models open the perspective of comparison with the contiguous cultures on the same technological stage of development.

It is fascinating that more than 5000-year-old migration still has an impact on contemporary creativity. The purpose of this paper is to point out the persistence of the idea that has been transferred from archeological remains and preserved through the timeline until the modern days.

## **KEYWORDS**

Indo-European Migrations; Vučedol Culture; Wheeled Vehicles; Prehistoric Design; Contemporary Jewelry

Wheels emerge around 3500 BC almost simultaneously in different areas of the world.<sup>1</sup> The evidence can be divided into direct and indirect indicators for the knowledge and usage of the wheel; direct being represented by actual wheel or axle finds and indirect evidence being derived from models, petroglyphs, pictograms, etc.<sup>2</sup>, with a third distinction to make: Vehicles with four wheels are called wagons, vehicles with two wheels carts. Belongings of the Baden Culture can be divided into two phases. The first wagon models from the Budakalász phase of the Baden Culture are rectangular vessels with fish bone decoration and loops for wheels or lugs.<sup>3</sup> Some of them show protome that broke off in old times but probably depicted the draught animals. In the second, classical phase of the Baden Culture highly decorated wagon cups are found in graves.<sup>4</sup> Also, present are paired burials of bovids which might be symbolic for the burial in a wagon.<sup>5</sup>



**Fig. 1.** Wheeled wagon model from Vučedol

J. Maran has emphasized the connections between Baden culture and the earliest wheeled vehicles.<sup>6</sup> The perhaps two most significant innovations of the Late Copper Age (3600/3500–3000/2800 BC) were the invention of the wheel and of wheeled vehicles, which sparked further major inventions in this early period.<sup>7</sup>

Croatia is situated in the southeastern part of the European continent, having maritime border with Italy on the Adriatic Sea and eastern border on the banks of the long and wide river Danube.

The river Danube is the second-longest river in Europe, after the Volga in Russia. It flows through much of Central and Southeastern Europe, from the Black Forest in Germany into the Black Sea. Since ancient times, the Danube has always been a traditional trade route in Europe. The Danube River basin is home to many fish species and as such, it has always been an important source for a food and water supply.

Once a long-standing frontier of the Roman Empire, the river passes through or touches the borders of 10 countries, including Croatia. Just here in the Croatian Danube valley in the third millennium BC was established one prehistoric culture.

The bearers of that culture were the people of one Indo-European tribe for which homeland was proposed to be the area of south Ukrainian and south Russian steppes. It was supposed that one branch of Indo-European tribes, migrating from its homeland to west passed the Danube and settled in today's eastern Croatia, assimilating the indigenous population living on the crop and animal husbandry. Gradually, this area became the center of a flourishing culture, named after Vučedol, eponymous archeological site near modern town of Vukovar.<sup>8</sup>

Indo-European herders, moving in that migration, were using wagons with wheels. In the Museum of Vučedol culture there is ideal reconstruction of one of such wagons, made after the clay wagon model, possibly a children's' toy. Testifying the importance of such artefact there is one wheel from Vučedol now kept in Vienna's Naturhistorisches museum.<sup>9</sup>

When they finally came and inhabited Croatian Danube valley, they gradually developed their culture and moved their borders. Maximal area of

distribution of Vučedol culture was from Adriatic Sea and Mediterranean world on the south to far to the north all the way to the Czech capital Prague. It is obvious that in the third millennium BC it occupied a much larger area, encompassing the territories of many of today's Central European countries, than the area of today's Croatia.<sup>10</sup>

The former prehistoric settlement of Vučedol has occupied the area of today's vineyards and cornfields, of which archaeologists have excavated just over 10%. Thanks to its excellent position on the banks of the river Danube and fertile soil, it was possible to draw resources. The life and economy of culture flourished, and the situation in that area is similar today. The migrations were carried out not only by wheeled wagons, but also by water. In the museum there is an ideal reconstruction of an oval-shaped Vučedol house, divided into a living room and a bedroom, with a fireplace and lamp-vessels.<sup>11</sup>

Because of the importance of the site and culture, in 2014 a brand-new museum of Vučedol culture was built and opened to the public. The authors are the architects of the architectural bureau Architecture Workshop, headed by the architect Goran Rako. The museum building connects the valley along the Danube riverbank and the archeological site of Vučedol, which is located on the top of a hill. That is why the Museum is in the shape of a serpentine. Climbing these "serpentes", which are placed on a slight slope, which according to the standards allows people in wheelchairs to move around the space, visitors get familiar with everything that is of importance for the rich Vučedol culture. And finally, at the end of the museum exhibition, they exit in the authentic location of Vučedol, the origin of Vučedol culture. Outside, the museum is lined with natural material - brick, and together with the grass roof is perfectly integrated into the natural environment.<sup>12</sup>

In the immediate vicinity of Vučedol, the town of Vukovar has been developed from the Middle Ages, and it also gravitated towards the Danube River. In 1991, very soon after Croatia declared the independence and left the Yugoslavian socialist federal state, the town was attacked by its eastern neighbor Serbia. The town was severely devastated and occupied, and the population fled.

Nowadays, on the anniversary of the fall of the city of Vukovar, November 18<sup>th</sup>, every year it's held a commemoration dedicated to the victims of the Vukovar tragedy. The town of Vukovar became a symbol of that war. It took years and years for the city to recover. The symbol of the city, Eltz Castle, has been restored. The sufferings of war belong to the past today, the industry is rising and with it the need to strengthen the identity, given that the Danube is still the border with the state that attacked the city 30 years ago.

The identity is sought in the Vučedol culture famous for its ornamented ceramics. Two examples, one vessel with the presentation of the constellations, considered to be the oldest Indo-European calendar, what was important because this culture was depending on agriculture. And second, the cult vessel, a bottle in the shape of the bird. There are objects that became two symbols and let's say trademarks of the Vučedol culture, but also an inspiration to the Croatian contemporary design.<sup>13</sup>

Vučedol vessel with solar motifs served the young Croatian designer Goran Raukar to develop the visual identity of the Vučedol Culture Museum.<sup>14</sup> Julijana Rodić Ozimec, jewelry designer, known as JoR, was inspired by that motif for her necklace.



**Fig. 2.** Vučedol museum visual identity by Goran Raukar

The JoR pseudo name stands for distinctive art jewelry made by Julijana Rodić Ozimec, a jeweler. Every piece she makes is characterized by a

specific synergy of shapes, materials, applied jewelry making techniques and inspiration. JoR's artistry is visible in shapes and selection of specific materials as well as in technically and artistically demanding surface treatment (polishing, sandblasting, engraving). The magical synergy they create is a material, non - verbal manifestation of the transcendental, powerful and unique. JoR's openness to the world of nature, to the abundance of the human heritage, intimate experiences, and civilization values is reflected in her inimitable artistic expression.<sup>15</sup>

The shape of triangle of this logo of the Museum of Vučedol culture does not exist in the material remains of the culture. It is a brand-new design of young designer Goran Raukar. But he filled it with the ornaments inspired by the similar ornaments in Vučedol culture vessels. On the other hand, the triangular logo itself was the inspiration for an original souvenir – guitar pick.

The clay vessel from Vinkovci site is the calendar, particularly its symbols representing constellations on the winter sky in the norther hemisphere, like Orion, Swan, Pleiades, Sun, Gemini, Pisces-Pegasus and Cassiopeia were furthermore inspiration for the artistic jewelry shaped and developed by the JoR designer.<sup>16</sup>

The shoe factory Borovo in the village Borovo in Vukovar neighborhood, founded 1931 and demolished during War for the Yugoslav succession during 90s', when it was closed, found new strength and investment most recently, becoming one of the engines of the new prosperity of the whole region. Designers of the factory were inspired by the symbols of the constellations which were put as a pattern in one of the most popular Borovos' sneakers among the young people. That is how the old symbol become part of new national identity.<sup>17</sup>

When talking about shoes, it should be mentioned that according to the material remains, the people of Vučedol culture were making and wearing leather shoes. They developed very sophisticated and advanced technology – the shape of shoes was different for both left and for right foot. On the examples of the clay shoe model, possible children's toy, we can see the traces of incrustation representing rich ornamentation.<sup>18</sup> There is the sawn

ideal reconstruction that is exhibited for the museum exposition, and again, the model itself was inspiration for the pendant jewelry by JoR.

One clay figurine from the Vučedol culture excavation in the town of Vinkovci is modelled like it was dressed.<sup>19</sup> M. Milićević proposed the possible look of the clothes of the Vučedol women, and T. Karavidović sewed it, which is now exposed in the new museum of Vučedol culture.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, applied artist and designer J. Kosanović puts the symbols and ornaments on her unique women bags.



**Fig. 3.** JoR pendant inspired by the Vučedol dove

Vučedol culture knew how to extract a metal from the ore, producing axes of so-called arsenic bronze, even using mold for a serial production.

Despite of being recognized as a stereotype male weapon, one fan-shaped axe became an inspiration for this unique earrings and necklaces by JoR design. the clay vessel in the shape of bird dove or partridge is the most iconic symbol and famous artefact of the whole Vučedol culture. Excavated between two world wars, now is kept in the Archeological Museum in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia. On her neck we can see motif of clepsydra, or labris, double axe, possibly connected with the Minoan Crete.<sup>21</sup> It was also an inspiration in JoR jewelry for pendants and bracelets.

The designers of Vupik, an important Croatian agricultural company for food and wine, found the inspiration for their trademark in the Vučedol Dove as well as the style ornaments from the wings.<sup>22</sup>



**Fig. 4.** Vupik company visual design

The project #dovetales was the successful idea of archeologist Ana Solter for an interactive souvenir. Little colorful plastic doves are produced in the three-dimensional printer device, and they travel around the world with their owners that take photos with it and upload it to the concrete social media pages, promoting the culture itself as well as symbolically sharing peace among the people.<sup>23</sup>



**Fig. 5.** An example of the #dovetales project at final stage

At the end of the third millennium BC, Vučedol culture was replaced by another culture, and slowly disappeared and been forgotten for centuries,

until almost one hundred years ago hardworking archaeologists revealed it on the light. Most recently, it became the source of inspiration for the artists and designers for making something new, fresh, and attractive. And that is how it is reborn again through its ornaments and symbols.

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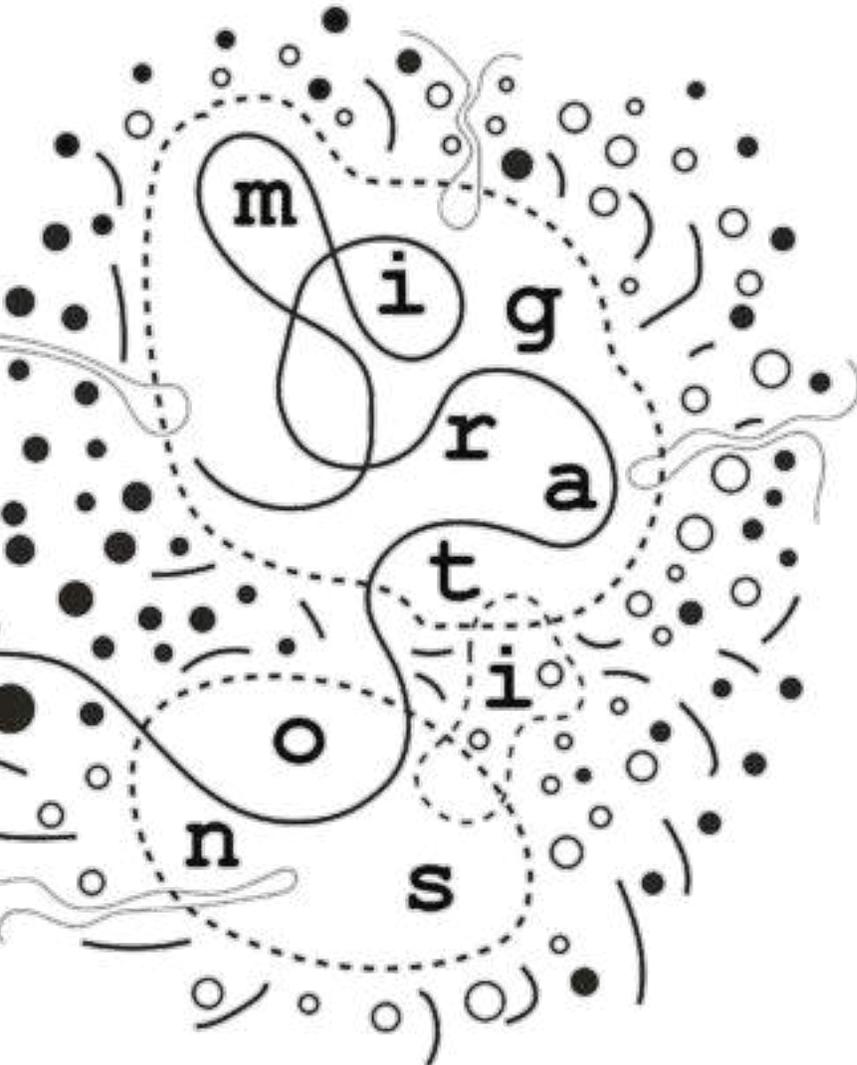
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# Migration of Objects

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## Session 12



# Session 12

## Migrations of Objects

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This session focused on the material base of art, and on its real or symbolic transformation within the multiple processes of migration through time and space. Artistic processes create and charge objects with symbolic meaning, but also with political, social, and economic significance. Academics have proposed many approaches in the last decades through this perspective. History of Things has become a common field encompassing Art History, Archaeology, Anthropology, History and Geography. Benefited by such interdisciplinary views, it now requires a redefinition inside our discipline. This session understood the historic-artistic object as three-dimensional artifacts filled with meaning/s from aesthetical tools, being those visual, acoustic, any other sensorial or mixed. From the political rhetoric of a diplomatic gift to the religious meaning of African cabanas, through Mandarin stones, devotional figures or maps, all were charged with an intention, by the patrons, the artists, the owners or even those who finally wrote about them. Even more recent proposals rejecting the role of art as a communication tool can be analyzed from this point of view. This panel sought to address this wide problem from specific questions, closely linked with the general aim of the conference and CIHA:

1. Propose an analytical framework for the migration of objects. Alterable features of objects allow us to analyze them as an inbetween case. After being exported some changed their meaning or characteristics, such as the Asian fans, screens or silks, devotions such as the Santo Niño in the Philippines, the Virgin of Guadalupe, or the Central Asian Buddhism along China, Korea or Japan, just to cite some examples. Others changed their meaning

after a chronological migration, such as the copies of antiquities that can be found both in Asia and Europe, or the current artistic tendency of appropriations.

2. Define the possibilities of contribution from Art History to the object, compared with other historical current approaches. Is there a clear difference between the concept of artefact and artistic objects nowadays? Is there a conflict between the historical material turn and the social art history? How can digital art history help to obtain sharper responses from the part of our discipline?

3. Propose a new paradigm to better understand how the migration of objects allowed the diffusion of artistic techniques or models. From oil painting to Asian silver filigree through different attempts to obtain porcelain secrets, all show a cultural dialogue in different artistic cases that must be explained from the theoretical framework of the discipline, and not mainly from cultural history.

# Image and Presence: Circulation and Reemployment of Objects in the Cult of Teresa de Ávila's Relics

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## **ABSTRACT**

In July of 1583, nine months after her death, Teresa de Ávila's body was disinterred, and deemed miraculously preserved. The scattering of her relics in Europe and the Americas was part of several historical dynamics: the defense and increased control of the cult of saints' relics during the Catholic Reformation, the fight of the Discalced Carmelites for the beatification of their founder and their expansion out of the Spanish peninsula, and the colonization of America by the Hispanic Monarchy. We propose to study three of Teresa de Ávila's relics which migrated, at the turn of the XVIIth century, to the royal convent of Las Descalzas Reales in Madrid and to the Discalced Carmelite convent of San José in Puebla de los Ángeles. We will focus on their circulation through aristocratic and religious networks, and their reemployment in various geographical, social, and institutional contexts, to try and understand how legitimacy and presence travel through those objects.

## **KEYWORDS**

Relics; Hispanic Monarchy; Mysticism; Teresa de Ávila; Catholic Reformation.

### Introduction

When Teresa de Ávila's body was taken out of her grave in the convent of Alba de Tormes in July of 1583, nine months after her death, its scent and state of preservation were deemed miraculous. So much so that in 1585 it was secretly taken to Ávila, her native town, with the approbation of the Carmelite Council and of the archbishop; meanwhile, the left arm was illegally cut for the nuns of Alba de Tormes to keep, and the left hand taken by a Carmelite father to Lisboa. The body was displayed in Avila in 1586 and examined by physicians and religious. The duke of Alba, one of Spain's most powerful noblemen subsequently wrote a letter to the Pope, asking for the return of the body to the convent of his town: the pope complied and forbade any further moving of the body. The fame of Teresa's relics and the miracles they accomplished were a key argument in favor of starting a procedure of beatification in 1591, when a second examination of the body was performed, and the heart was removed to be studied as well<sup>1</sup>.

Her canonization and the subsequent recognition of her relics was mainly sponsored by the Discalced Carmelites, founded by Teresa de Ávila, who needed to support their expansion in Europe and America, and to assert their orthodoxy and relevance as a new order in a time of suspicion<sup>2</sup>. The Hispanic Monarchy also had interest in the sanctification of Teresa de Ávila and of her relics, as she had become a national symbol in a context of colonization of America and war in the Netherlands, both presented as holy initiatives to defend Roman Catholicism in a time of crisis<sup>3</sup>. Indeed, the process of canonization and the early circulation of Teresa de Ávila's relics took place during the Catholic Reformation, only decades after the Council of Trent, whose last session (in 1563) was dedicated to "the invocation, veneration and relics of saints, and the sacred images"<sup>4</sup>. The Catholic Reformation aimed to reassert the role of saints as intercessors, the veneration due to their relics, and the importance of sacred images; but it also sought to supervise and control very tightly the making of these saints, relics and images, and the associated devotional practices. That led to the creation of new saints, contemporary figures who embodied the ideals of the Roman Catholic Church. Consequently, Teresa de Avila was beatified in 1614

and canonized in 1622 alongside three other saints, two of them XVI<sup>th</sup> century founders of religious orders, and two of them Spanish<sup>5</sup>: her canonization and the official recognition of her relics was a political decision beneficial to the Catholic Reformation, the rise of the Discalced Carmelites and the imperialism of the Hispanic Monarchy. Bearing in mind this complex political and religious context, I will try and understand the way the migration of relics allowed for a migration of the saint's legitimacy and presence, through the case of two relics kept in the royal convent of Discalced Franciscans of *Las Descalzas Reales*, and of a relic kept in the first Discalced Carmelite convent of America, the convent of San José in Puebla de los Ángeles.

### **Multiplication and migration of presence**

A cloth soaked with Teresa's blood arrived to *Las Descalzas Reales* in 1599, with a letter from María de San Jerónimo, prioress of the convent San José de Ávila, where the body stayed for two years<sup>6</sup>. The letter relates the miraculous episode in which this cloth became a relic: when Teresa's body was disinterred, a cloth that had been applied to stop her bleeding at the time of her death was found half rotten, only intact in the part where it had been soaked by Teresa's blood. The piece of fabric, which remained in Avila's convent when the body was brought back to Alba, stayed wet, and María de San Jerónimo writes that fourteen years later, in 1599, another cloth was pressed against the original one, and soaked with blood as well: the relic seems to have a power of magical duplication that allows the miraculous presence to travel even as the body stays in the same place.

Generally, a distinction is made between relics that are part of a saint's body and secondary relics, or contact relics, which are objects touched by it before or after death. However, in one of the saint's first hagiographies by Jusepe de Ribera, the author classified the miracles accomplished by her relics in three chapters: first the body and cloths, then the pieces of clothing she wore while alive, and finally, the portraits and letters<sup>7</sup>. Thus, in Ribera's classification, the cloths soaked with Teresa's blood seemed to be relics in their own right, and not only contact relics: because they carried Teresa's blood, they became an extension of her body.

The transmission of Teresa's holy presence from one cloth to the other was not only theoretical: the new relic gained the same powers, and even the same sensory characteristics as the original one. Numerous witnesses mention the scent emanating from all of Teresa de Ávila's relics<sup>8</sup>, and in *Las Descalzas*, the cloth was used to cure illnesses by applying it onto the part of the body causing pain, as it was thought to carry the same healing qualities as the body of the saint.

The letter of María de San Jerónimo gives the impression that this multiplication of relics was a rare and special occurrence. In fact, there was a very large number of cloths that had been touched to Teresa's arm for instance, which was also said to produce continuously a kind of liquid halfway between blood and oil<sup>9</sup>. The cloths are even the most cited relics in the process of beatification, because they were the most common, the ones that travelled most freely all over the Hispanic Monarchy and beyond, helping spread the fame of her sanctity.

#### **Mutual legitimization of aristocratic and religious networks**

Another relic of Teresa de Ávila arrived in *Las Descalzas* before her canonization: the sleeve of the habit she wore while sick, accompanied by a certificate of authenticity dated of 1618<sup>10</sup>. This type of official document was made compulsory by the new tridentine policy on relics. It states that the relic was sent by Carmelite father José de Santa María to Margarita de Austria, a nun of *Las Descalzas* who was the daughter of emperor Maximilian II and empress Mary of Habsburg. It was a way for the House of Habsburg to associate themselves with a popular Spanish saint; but it was also for the Discalced Carmelites who gifted the relic a way to guarantee the prestige of their founder's relics. Indeed, various witnesses in the process of beatification allude to the quality of the relics' owners as an argument that proves Teresa's holiness, such as Isabel de Santo Domingo:

the relics of the blessed virgin Teresa are and have always been regarded and venerated as relics of great holiness by many prominent people, especially the archduke of Austria Alberto, who, when he was governor of the kingdom of Portugal and

paying a visit to the Netherlands, went through Zaragoza, [...] and while staying in the home of the viceroy, who was the duke of Albuquerque, said Archduke said to the viceroy that he was travelling with a great certainty that Our Lord would give him a propitious journey, because he was carrying with him a relic which he regarded very highly, and in which he had great faith, which was a hand of the saint mother Teresa de Jesús, that the nuns of her Order from the convent of Lisboa had lent him to take with him on the way.<sup>11</sup>

Mentioning the archduke and the viceroy in a testimony was not casual, just as it was not casual to mention José de Santa María and Margarita de Austria in a certificate of authenticity: the aristocratic and religious networks through which the relics travelled were part of their relevance. The object didn't only migrate because of its power, it gained power from its migration. In a way, the piece of clothing, by contact, retained not only the presence of the holy woman, but that of its owners.

### **Relics in court culture**

The relics also took different meanings and had different functions depending on the type of place they were sent to. In *Las Descalzas*, home to many women of the royal family and central space of the Spanish court, the relics participated in court culture, which was not in contradiction with their devotional use<sup>12</sup>. The room where the relics are stored resembles a Renaissance *Wunderkammer*, with relics and reliquaries brought by nuns or sent to the convent from a variety of places: it is a typical example of the court practice of collection. In fact, the chest in which the two relics under study are stored is a nambam chest (fig.1), probably given by the empress María when she entered the convent<sup>13</sup>. The nambam style, literally meaning “southern barbarian” in Japanese, is a style designed for Portuguese and Spanish exportation in XVI<sup>th</sup> century Japan, using traditional lacquer technique, and a combination of Japanese and European iconographies. This is not an isolated case: in another royal convent of Madrid, *La Encarnación*, two of Teresa's relics are stored in nambam chests, and one in a case made of tortoise shell, typical of the workshops of New Spain<sup>14</sup>. Those reliquaries

underwent migration from one continent to another, but also from a lay to a religious space: this type of cases could be used as reliquaries from the start, but also as travel or jewelry boxes for young noblewomen. When they entered the convent, they brought with them those aristocratic objects, which were then reemployed in a religious context.



**Fig. 1.** Arqueta nambam, late XVI<sup>th</sup> – early XVII<sup>th</sup> century, Las Descalzas Reales, Madrid. Published in García Sanz, “*Via Orientalis*”, 26.

### **Legitimacy of a new convent**

In the case of the Discalced Carmelite Convent of San José in Puebla, relics take yet another significance. A small fragment of Teresa’s body was brought to the convent in 1618, four years after her beatification, by the General Father of the order, Juan de Jesús María, as a way to show that the order supported the young community<sup>15</sup>. The relic also served as protection and comfort for

the nuns in a place thought of as hostile: as Rosalva Loreto López points out<sup>6</sup>, at the time the convent was relatively isolated from the center of Puebla. Moreover, the relic, bearer of a sacred presence, was a way to sanctify a new land that the Christ hadn't touched, just like Europe was sanctified by the relics brought back from the Crusades during the Middle Ages. In a relation of the miraculous apparitions the nuns of the convent witnessed on the surface of the relic early after its arrival, their frustration about their geographical situation is obvious:

Our Holy Mother had never done in this house one of the wonders that she does in Spain. Thinking it was due to their lack of merit, since they were not her true daughters, some of them said to look at the saint's relic to see if by chance Our Lord would do her the same grace as in Spain.<sup>7</sup>

Interestingly, a XVIII<sup>th</sup> century chronicle dedicated to the convent interprets the apparitions which occurred in Puebla as a sign that the migration of the relic was Teresa's will, and that the General father was merely an instrument in a divine plan for the convent: "I have reasons to think that the angelic mother sent this holy relic to this convent through the General Father, as a show of her kindness and love to these, her beloved daughters."<sup>8</sup> The miraculous nature of the relic bestows on the community a celestial legitimacy that goes beyond the earthly legitimacy granted by the order.

### **Relics as a space of exchanges between two worlds**

The relic's miracles are also a way to materialize the presence of Teresa de Ávila among her daughters: indeed, the first apparition witnessed on the relic is that of Teresa's portrait<sup>9</sup>. It is important to point out that Teresa's printed and painted images, widely distributed from the end of the XVI<sup>th</sup> century, were copied from an original portrait painted from life: the *vera effigies*. Because it was painted in the presence of the living saint, it was in itself a kind of relic by contact. As we have pointed out, Ribera devotes a chapter to the miracles accomplished by Teresa's portraits, most of them prints, and

many testimonies from the trial for beatification report that these images were considered as relics<sup>20</sup>.

But the relic didn't simply carry the presence of Teresa; it also allowed the nuns to see the holy beings with whom Teresa communicated. To identify the beings from their visions, the nuns of Puebla widely resort to artistic references. For instance, Magdalena de San Pedro has a vision of Juan de la Cruz, and the report written in 1618 by sub-prioress Melchora de la Asunción states that "she knows it to be this saint because it is very true to those that they bring nowadays pictured in prints from Spain"<sup>21</sup>. This way of focusing on likeness, recognition, more than representation, is very characteristic of the tridentine conception of image, as historians like Pierre-Antoine Fabre have pointed out<sup>22</sup>.

However, the relic itself is not a neutral support for apparitions: the shape, size and nature of this fragment of body are crucial to understand the way it produced images in the minds of the nuns. The first chronicle of the Discalced Carmelites in Mexico, written between 1646 and 1653 by Agustín de la Madre de Dios, draws from the 1618 report of Melchora de la Asunción, with some changes: interestingly, while the subprioress suggests the relic was part of Teresa's arm, Agustín de la Madre de Dios presents it as a fragment of her heart, and it was rebranded as such by the later tradition<sup>23</sup>. This change may seem trivial, but it must be understood within the baroque and mystical conception of the heart. Indeed, it was thought to be the source of will, the seat of the soul, and the place where Christ went to visit mystics. Agustín de la Madre de Dios plays strongly into the mystical tradition and baroque imagery by assimilating Teresa's heart, and by metonymy, this relic, to a surface where the image of Christ appears, as well as a space in which he stays: "In her pure heart Teresa saw the Lord when she was alive, and now the Lord wants others to see him in it so that the world knows how good he found himself in this heart, since he left his figure painted there as in a mirror"<sup>24</sup>. Teresa's relic is assimilated to her heart because both are an interface, a threshold that allows the mundane and celestial worlds to communicate – without it being clear if they are spaces or surfaces.

**Artistic metaphors and living images**

Moreover, in the case of Teresa de Ávila, the heart was not only a symbolic, theoretical area: her actual heart became a prestigious relic after it was examined in 1591 and said to present physical scars of the *Transverberación* – one of her most important mystical experience, mentioned in the papal edict of her canonization, when an angel pierced her heart with an arrow<sup>25</sup>. Indeed, a XVII<sup>th</sup> century print of Teresa’s heart (fig.2) highlights the scar, captioned both in Latin and Spanish. It is inhabited by a figure of the Infant Jesus reciting verses from the Song of Songs in his sleep, and prolonged by two lines or arteries towards the coat-of arms of the male and female branches of the Discalced Carmelites, evidencing a complex anatomical-mystical conception of the heart.



**Fig. 2.** *Medida del corazón de Teresa*, XVII<sup>th</sup> century, Teresianum, Rome. Published in Moreno Cuadro, “Medida del corazón teresiano”, 234.

To complicate further the relation between reliquaries, relics and the divine presence they enclose, Teresa herself compares Christ's presence in the soul (thus in the heart) to "a gem enclosed in a gold reliquary"<sup>26</sup>, while the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century chronicle of San José de Puebla describes a heart-shaped reliquary made of pearls which "serves as an amorous shell for a spine from Christ's crown"<sup>27</sup>. In fact, the relation between Teresa's heart and the divine presence it holds is often described in artistic terms by the nuns of Puebla, just like in other contemporary sources<sup>28</sup>. As the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century chronicle points out, the figures presented themselves: "sometimes in the same way as in the wax of the Agnus, other times as if they were painted with a brush, so that the colors were distinct"<sup>29</sup>. The artistic technique of wax, just like print which was also a common metaphor for mystic visions and memory<sup>30</sup>, is a way of producing an image by contact, the same way the sacred presence travels by contact through the relics. But the chronicle continues with another comparison:

sometimes they saw the holy relic grow, expanding in the way that bread leavens in the oven, seeing other times that the blood was liquefied like when something frozen melts, seeing it boil, so that one time the crack that runs up and down the relic merged, and the image of Christ, our Lord, appeared, with his face full of blood, and his lips so swollen that his mouth was opening<sup>31</sup>

When witnessing this phenomenon, the nun Francisca de la Natividad, "her heart pierced with grief, lost her sight"<sup>32</sup> – an obvious reference to the *Transverberación*. The description of the relic leavening like bread, taken directly from the 1618 report, also shows that the nuns believed this object to be capable of metamorphosis, and that the metamorphosis of the object was no more than a sign of the metamorphosis it operated in the one who looked at it. Just like a Host – which is, on the contrary, bread that hasn't leavened –, the relic is made of a sacred substance which retains a presence greater than itself, and which has the power to transform what it touches. The images printed on the relic, on Teresa's heart, are then printed in the nuns' hearts: the nuns themselves, by their visionary experience, become more like Teresa,

truer to her image. Still in the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century chronicle, a chapter is devoted to one of the first nuns of the convent born in New Spain, who was called, like the saint, Teresa de Jesús. She was one of those who experienced visions, and after her death, according to this text, her own possessions became relics<sup>33</sup>.

Luis de León introduced the first edition of Teresa's writings this way: "I didn't meet, nor saw, mother Theresa of Jesus while she was on earth, but now that she lives in the sky I meet her and see her almost constantly in the two living images she left us of herself, which are her daughters and her books."<sup>34</sup> The perfect image is a living image, capable of bleeding and changing like the face of Christ that appeared on Teresa's relic – it is, therefore, an image that can multiple, migrate and change. Teresa de Ávila's presence and image migrated through the relics we have studied: those performative objects reshaped themselves according to the place where they arrived, and reshaped the souls of the people devoted to it in the likeness of the saint.

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## Endnotes

1. Chronology based on Sánchez Reyes, “La santidad fragmentada”, 93–95.
2. Bataillon, *Erasme et l’Espagne*, 793. The mental form of prayer promoted by Teresa de Ávila was considered a risk, especially for women, because of its proximity to the practices of the *alumbrados*, Spanish illuminates accused of spreading reformist ideas.

3. Teresa de Ávila was briefly declared co-patron of Spain in 1626, and there was a conflict between Rome and the Hispanic Monarchy to control the order she had founded. See Rowe, *Saint and nation*.
4. “De invocatione, veneratione, et reliquiis sanctorum, et sacris imaginibus”. Latin text and French translation in Fabre, *Décréter l’image*.
5. Ignacio de Loyola, Felipe Neri and Isidro Labrador.
6. García Sanz, “Arte y religiosidad en los conventos reales”. Jiménez Pablo, “Cultura material en ‘clausura’”, 622.
7. Ribera, *La vida de la Madre Teresa*, 456-477 (Book 5, chapter 5-7).
8. See for instance Silverio de Santa Teresa, *Procesos*, v.I, 3, 89, 118...
9. *Ibid.*, 78, 142, 361...
10. García Sanz, “Arte y religiosidad en los conventos reales”.
11. Silverio de Santa Teresa, *Procesos*, v.2, 517. “Y asimismo sabe que las reliquias de la bienaventurada virgen Teresa- son y han sido siempre estimadas y veneradas, como reliquias de grande santidad de muchas personas graves, en especial del Archiduque de Austria, Alberto, el cual siendo gobernador del reino de Portugal y ofreciéndosele una jornada a Flandes, pasó por Zaragoza [...] y aposentándose el dicho Archiduque en casa del Virrey de aquel reino y ciudad, que era el Duque de Albuquerque, dijo el dicho Archiduque al Virrey, que iba con gran seguridad de que Nuestro Señor le había de dar muy próspero viaje, porque llevaba consigo una reliquia que estimaba mucho, con quien tenía grande fe, que era una mano de la santa madre Teresa de Jesús, que las monjas de su Orden del convento de Lisboa le habían prestado para llevar consigo en aquel camino”
12. Checa, *La otra corte*.
13. García Sanz, “*Via Orientalis*”, 27-28. See also Kawamura, “Las lacas Namban y el cristianismo”.
14. Sánchez Hernández, *El relicario del Real Monasterio de la Encarnación de Madrid*, 121.
15. Loreto López, “Del tamaño de una uña”, 48–52.
16. *Ibid.*, 86.
17. Quoted by Loreto López, *Ibid.*, 53. “Nunca su Santa Madre había en esta casa obrado algunas de las maravillas que [hace] en España. Atribuyendo esto a sus deméritos ya que no eran verdaderas hijas suyas. Hubo algunas que dijeron que mirasen la reliquia de la santa para ver si por ventura les hacía Nuestro Señor la [misma] merced que en España.”
18. Gómez de la Parra, *Fundación y primero siglo*, 156. “tengo fundamento para pensar que la envió la seráfica madre a este convento por medio del Reverendísimo padre General, para crédito de su fineza y amor a éstas, sus queridas hijas”
19. *Ibid.*, 157.
20. On the *vera efigies*, see Moreno Cuadro, *Iconografía de Santa Teresa de Jesús*, 301-326. On healing prints, see Portús, *La estampa religiosa*.
21. Quoted by Loreto López, “Del tamaño de una uña”, 63. “Conoce que es este santo porque es muy conforme a los que traen ahora pintados en estampas de España”
22. Fabre, *Décréter l’image*.
23. Agustín de la Madre de Dios, *Tesoro escondido*, 316.
24. *Ibid.* “En su puro corazón le veía santa Teresa cuando estaba en esta vida y agora quiere el Señor que en él le vean otros para que conozca el mundo cuán bien se hallaba en este corazón, pues dejó retratada su figura en él como en espejo”
25. Teresa de Ávila, *Los libros de la Madre Teresa*, 355. Her heart was carried in procession on the last day of her beatification’s celebration in Alba de Tormes: *Compendio*, 26. The relevance of her heart is studied by Moreno Cuadro, “Medida del corazón teresiano”.
26. Teresa de Ávila, *Morada sexta*, 9-2. “como una piedra preciosa encerrada en un relicario de oro”
27. Agustín de la Madre de Dios, *Tesoro escondido*, 82. “sirve de amorosa concha a una espina de la corona de Cristo”

28. See for instance *Compendio*, 35.

29. The *Agnus dei* were wax medals taken from Saint Peter's basilic's pascual candles, stamped with the symbol of Christ as a lamb, and blessed by the pope in Rome. Gómez de la Parra, *Fundación y primero siglo*, 155. "unas veces al modo que en la cera de Agnus, y otras veces como pintados de pincel, distinguiéndose los colores"

30. MacGregor, "The Authority of Print".

31. Gómez de la Parra, *Fundación y primero siglo*, 155. "algunas veces veían que crecía la santa reliquia, esponjándose al modo que se levanta el pan en el horno, viendo otras veces que se licuaba la sangre como cuando se derrite lo que está helado, viéndola hervir, de calidad que en una ocasión se llegó a unir y soldarse una partidura que tiene de alto a bajo esta reliquia, representándose entonces la imagen de Cristo, Señor nuestro, con el rostro lleno de sangre, con los labios tan hinchados que se le abría la boca" Another miraculous episode in XVII<sup>th</sup> century Puebla links the relic to bread: see Tenorio, *De Panes y Sermones*.

32. *Ibid.* "atravesado su corazón con el sentimiento, perdió la vista"

33. Gómez de la Parra, *Fundación y primero siglo*, 193. See also Lavrin, "Santa Teresa en los conventos de monjas de Nueva España."

34. Teresa de Ávila, *Los libros de la Madre Teresa*, 1. "Yo no conocí, ni vi, a la madre Teresa de Iesus mientras estuvo en la tierra, mas agora que vive en el cielo la conozco y veo cas siempre en dos imagenes vivas que nos dexo de sí, que son sus hijas, y sus libros"

# **Begum alias Madonna: A Study of the Trans-continental Monument Commissioned by the Anglo-Indian ‘Lunatic’ Heir of Sardhana**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper discusses the transcontinental, grand Carrara Marble tableau commissioned by David Ochterlony Dyce Sombre—in memory of his late benefactress, Begum Samru of Sardhana—in 1839. He was an Anglo-Indian, adopted heir of the converted Catholic Begum, who had had an intriguing professional trajectory—from being a teenage courtesan in Delhi to a major power broker in the Indian subcontinent with her formidable army of European mercenaries and the prosperous principality of Sardhana (in the North-Indian Doab). The multi-figural, theatrical marble tableau sits in a church built by the Begum in Sardhana in 1822, serving as a cenotaph over her grave. The paper begins from the intentional value inscribed to the marble tableau by its ‘Makers’; a category which encompasses the immediate patron Dyce Sombre and the Roman sculptor, Adamo Tadolini (a student of Antonio Canova) who portray a commercial relationship of client and studio-sculptor. It sits in sharp contrast to the patron-artist relationship that the memorialized Begum Samru shared with her chief Architect, Anton Reghelini, an Italian who joined the Begum’s military service in 1810. In addition, this paper interrogates how one marble tableau interacts with ‘Indian’ histories of art through reproduction of paintings in its bas relief panels.

## **KEYWORDS**

Neoclassical Sculpture; Transculturality; Allegory; Intermediality.

### Introduction

The 19<sup>th</sup>-century Neoclassical grand Carrara marble tableau, was made in Rome, but intended for and installed in ‘Sardhana’, a small principality of North India where it stands till date. It was commissioned by David Ochterlony Dyce Sombre (b.1808 – d.1851), an Anglo-Indian, adopted heir<sup>1</sup> of Begum Samru (b. 1750 – d. 1836), the 18<sup>th</sup> century enigmatic powerbroker with humble beginnings as a teenage courtesan in the lanes of Old Delhi. She was the ruler of a small North-Indian principality, Sardhana after the death of her husband, the mercenary Austrian Walter Reinhardt ‘Sombre’ (b. 1725 – d. 1778). She had converted to Catholicism (ca. 1781) a few years after his death (Keay, 2013). Her conversion, and mediation between European officers, the East India Company, and the Mughal King in Delhi, made her a key player in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century Indian subcontinent. After the death of Begum Samru in 1836, Dyce Sombre inherited a vast fortune of money, jewels, objects and built property.

Dyce Sombre lost political control over Sardhana, the *pargana* of Badshahpur-Jharsa, and the ammunition of the army defected to the British East India Company. He approached the courts in Calcutta, travelled around Awadh, Bengal, and East Asia, after which he emigrated to England in 1838. He left behind the Begum's loyal officers and his two brothers-in-law and sisters to manage the property in Sardhana. In England, David married the Honourable Mary Anne Jervis (b. 1812–d. 1893), the daughter of Viscount, St. Vincent, in 1840. In 1841, Dyce Sombre bribed his way to become an M.P. from Sudbury in the British Parliament, making him the first Asian and second non-white member to hold that office. After investigations provoked by disgruntled opposers, Sudbury as a constituency was disenfranchised, and their elections controverted, making Dyce Sombre lose office. In 1843, Dyce Sombre was certified a "lunatic" following extremely erratic behaviour in public. It included accusations against his wife of repeated adultery and incest, challenging other men to duels, public indecency, amongst others. He escaped confinement and travelled to Paris, from where he kept collecting evidence and testimonials of his sanity. However, due to a suppurated

blistered foot infection, he died on 01st July 1851 in London, waiting to present his defence (Fisher, 2010).

### **The Commission**

While he was still engaged in 1839, Dyce Sombre travelled to Rome to commemorate the third death anniversary of Begum Samru. The event ended with a Funeral Oration delivered by Rev. N. Wiseman, Rector of the English College in Rome. He then commissioned Adamo Tadolini, a student of Antonio Canova, to build a large marble monument as a memorial for the late Begum (Fig. 1). Dyce Sombre furnished the design and reproductions of all the key portraits and paintings reproduced in the final monument. He even provided the writings inscribed on the memorial—in Latin, Persian and English. The memorial is housed in a Church in Sardhana, where it has stood since 1848. The Begum's remains were interred under it, followed by Dyce Sombre's remains after his death in 1851<sup>2</sup>.



**Fig. 1.** Adamo Tadolini, *Monument to Begum Samru*, 1839–42, Sardhana, Author's Photograph

The intentional values imbibed in the tableau are added to it by its patron, who attempts to build upon and break away from the Neoclassical architectural patronage of his benefactress, Begum Samru of Sardhana. Her architectural projects rested on the shoulders of her Vicenza-born architect, Anton Reghelini who joined the Begum's military service in 1810. For her, he built her mansion or 'kothi' in Delhi around 1820, her palatial residence in Sardhana in 1834, and the Church to Mother Mary in 1822. The site of the church is where the monument from Rome was installed in 1848. One explores the possibilities of interpretation of an intended narrative, that comes with the employment of Neoclassical sculptural vocabulary, an inferred principle of Neoclassical ideal and what purpose the creation of the 'ideal' might serve for the patron. There is a double-commemoration and a doubled 'ideal' veneration for the person being remembered, and the patron who also wishes to be remembered. In the *monument*, decisive paintings commissioned by Begum Samru were reproduced and reconfigured for stone, firmly tethering the foreign *monument* to its current space and the person it commemorates. The sculptural idealization of Begum Samru, David Dyce Sombre, and others differ from the naturalistic turn seen in the painted portraits of the aged Begum. Such portraits of a regally dressed, aged woman in public, alone in the company of men as a ruler, were a novelty and symbolic of a unique life and a particular form of self-fashioning.

The change in physical features and the Neoclassical assimilation of "Indian" bodies align with the aims of Neoclassical funerary art. The *monument* can be perceived as an extension of Begum Samru's patronage legacy, which was already taking a Neoclassical turn in her building projects. However, it is more appropriate to see it as a breaking point from the earlier patronage of the "Samru" family. It attempts to transform the *body* of its patron into that of an aristocrat of European stock. The social aspiration comes not just in the monument's colour but also in the idealization of the bodies and their juxtaposition with several icons of Neoclassical allegory. The tableau is also an architectural tower, a cenotaph that charges the church at Sardhana like a tomb. The tableau vivant displays a theatricality in its environs, adjacent to the altar.

Sculpture was important as an object of posterity, and the two most important materials of this longevity were decidedly bronze and marble. The importance of marble in the making of sculptures is tied to the Neoclassical's relation to historicity and the uniformity of colour — in its several shades of white. The sculpture studios of Rome, in particular, provided the ability to the young aristocratic tourist to commission and possess a piece of Classical ideals of beauty and intellect. Art that looked back to the Classical standards was favoured and perpetuated by the elite of the entire continent. This demand of the Neoclassical was fulfilled by the competitive studios and sculptors who were making art by the commission of travellers and not solely dependent on the court and royal patronage. Neoclassicism in the late 18<sup>th</sup>-century split into two currents: severe or moralist and pleasant or symbolist. While both drew upon Winckelmann's archaeological and art historical work, the moralistic strand tied itself to the glory of Rome, and the rhythmic, more elegant strand flowed towards the beauty of Athens. The digs at Pompeii and Herculaneum were defining moments of the century and Europe's obsession with the ancient Greeks and Romans (Rheims, 1972).

Mercenary soldiers in India came to be part of the continually warring armies of Indian princes and Dutch, French and English colonies in India. For many, this was a way to gain riches quickly. Many travellers and artists also came along because India's landscape and people provided a scale of incomparable subjects and what the market at the time was poised to receive. Great patrons of Anglo-Indian art were the Nawabs of Arcot and Awadh before the East India Company wholly annexed their territories (Archer 1979, 1980). But the attractions of riches and adventure were tied up with novelty and the lure of the New. Travels to Italy as part of the Grand Tour were, in contrast, an appeal of the Classical in the Neoclassical form. The Classical temples and Palladian architecture were famous amongst the Grand Tourists, who perpetuated that style even in Britain. They collected antiques, copies of famous statues, and paintings (Lord, 2010).

In India, the sculptures of Neoclassical Britain (and Europe) were primarily found in Presidencies of Madras, Bombay and Calcutta. The funerary monuments were often associated with newly erected churches.

Barbara Groseclose's work on sculpture in Presidency towns until 1858 demonstrates how iconography in these monuments was molded by imperial ideology. Some monuments further advertised the legitimacy of the colonial enterprise by presenting the "riches of the east" as a welcome gift for European traders. Others suggested the Englishmen as the rightful, moralistic and superior rulers on a civilizing mission. Statues also contained images of natives of India, however as allegories, such as the ones made for Charles Cornwallis by Charles Felix Rossi in 1807–1811 (Groseclose, 1995). Images of natives were usually represented as subjugated and benign, while the Englishmen were presented as paternalistic statesmen. The *monument* to Begum Samru marks a shift by turning representational convention on its head. With a native ruler at the apex position in a Neoclassical monument, that too a woman, the *monument* challenges the notion of belatedness in natives and the patriarchal and paternal myth of the English colonial rule. It also makes the audience see the adaptability of the cosmopolitan Begum's memorialization.

### **The Neoclassical Sarcophagus**

The market for sculpture expanded to Europe and beyond Europe to the Americas and various colonies. Competing sculptors bid for commissions. Colonial commissions came with a particular set of problems, especially the inability to exhibit. Sculptors had to find new ways of circulation and preservation, which led to reproductions in different media and scales. In the later 19<sup>th</sup> century, photographs, drawings, medallions, and statuettes were used to preserve a constructed model<sup>3</sup>. Tadolini prepared an illustration of the *monument* to Begum Samru (Fig. 2) which was different from the object itself, with places of some figures laterally exchanged and drawn physiognomies following separate European and 'Indian' conventions of illustration.



**Fig. 2.** Sketch of the Monument to Begum Samru. Photograph in the Sardhana Church

Dyce Sombre, the primary patron of this *monument* had a personal utility in the commission. It was a memorial for Begum Samru, but it was also his portrait in marble and, after his untimely death in 1851, his shared commemoration with the Begum. The ostentatious dress of Dyce Sombre with military dress, a cloak and a feathered helmet added grandeur to his individual sculpture. It is also uncharacteristically lean, following the Neoclassical convention of idealization of the body. It also gives a glimpse into the possibility of what Maurice Rheims described as a fear of revealing the "scrawny or pudgy" natural body behind the ideal prince, general or other wealthy sitters.

Since sculptors, especially someone as famous as Adamo Tadolini, were well-versed in canons of the ideal naturalistic form, a change of body type was available to patrons to transcend any physical traits or 'flaws' — like costumes. The *monument* to Begum Samru walks a fine line between veneration and agnostic taste of the Neoclassical era. As a funerary monument, it indeed fell into the conventions of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century where symbolism (such as the allegorical figures at the bottom tier of the *monument*) substituted a subtle divinity or enigma. The monument composed of 12 life-size statues placed strategically at three different levels around a marble trunk. The first or top-level is for the solitary seated statue of Begum Samru, the figure of memorialization. She is separated from the 'realm of the living' or the middle level by a pedestal of sienna marble. The intermediate level consists of a cylindrical trunk with a white marble square slab on top. The three visible sides of the cylindrical trunk possess inscriptions in 3 languages. Persian for the front, English on the side behind the statue of Dyce Sombre (viewer's left) and Latin for the side adjacent to the Bishop Fr. Julius Caesar Scotti (Viewer's Right).

Persian is in the frontal view. This helps us understand the intended audience of the *monument*. It ties itself to the location of its installation and viewing not just by the statue of the Begum but also through language and script carved into the body of the Italian marble. The other two figures around the trunk, are statues of Diwan Rae Singh, the Prime Minister of Begum Samru and the Priest, Fr. Julius Caesar Scotti. The statue behind that of Dyce Sombre on the left side is that of Inayatullah Khan, the general of Begum's armies at the time of her death. The bottom level or the 'Realm of Allegory' is composed of 11 life-size statues of allegories placed around a cuboidal marble block, with three bas reliefs carved onto each visible side. Going from left (English inscription side) to the right (Latin inscription side), they are Young Woman with a Club and her foot over a submissive lion, Shrouded Figure holding a snake, Angel of Time holding up an hourglass, Forlorn Old Man or *Vecchio*, *Abundantia* with an ever-flowing *Cornucopia*, Small Child kneeling and offering up a fruit, Breastfeeding Woman with infant.

The allegorical figures are borrowed from existing sculptures and illustrations and have socially accepted meanings attached. A collage of such symbols with historical sculptures presents a diffused image between two geographical regions, separated not just by land and sea but by all kinds of cultural markers—especially art. Within this diffused logic, iconology presents a way to confront the dissonance between these images. Devotees, the priests and caretakers of the Sardhana Church have their own understanding of the tableau of figures placed around the central block of the monument. They associate the figures as persons dwelling in the kingdom of heaven. In other cases, the female figures of the fierce protector and the nurturing mother are personifications of the Begum's different qualities, while the angel, old man, shrouded figure are messengers of death and an ending. Allegorization is a constant, cognitive process of structuring or constituting a representation of ideas that can happen with or without access to detailed knowledge about the history of icons and iconography.

### **Molding an Aristocratic Body in Neoclassical Sculpture**

According to Hans Belting, the *medium* is the agent by which images are transmitted, and the *body* is the performing or perceiving body on which images depend. He points out that any present iconology must represent the unity and diversion between the image and its medium. Any image cannot be perceived without its media. The visibility of the image rests on its particular mediality, and while physical images are perceived, they cannot be perceived without the physicality of their medium (Belting, 2005). Even material and form possess within them an ideology of the medium. In the case of white marble used in Neoclassical sculptures, there is a clear preference indicated to identify at the level of colour and texture, a civilizational ideal of the body. Its antecedents lie in Greek sculpture, re-reinscribed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as an "Ideal", fueled by developments in dated scientific conceptions of race and the ongoing colonial enterprise. Materiality forms an integral component of the idea of the *medium*.

Media — here, sculpture — then becomes a symbolic substitute of the body itself. Then what happens when the body changes from historically

'accurate' form to conform to the Western Ideal, by the active desire and agency of the subject and patron, however conditioned? An important function of the monument was to construct an identity of the racial and cultural difference of the patron from the subject of commemoration. By commissioning this memorial, Dyce Sombre memorialized himself as belonging to a European gentility in garb and grace. His sentimental posture, ostentatious military costume and graceful refinement as a sensitive and grateful gentleman were ways to ensure his place in English society. In the homogeneity of white marble lay an opportunity to declare what could not be declared in painting—his claim to a complete European ancestry that was often denied to him with terms such as "Copper-coloured", "Othello", etc (Fisher, 2010).

In Neoclassical sculpture, it was rare for racialized bodies to appear as subjects of veneration. Within the colonial logic of trans-Atlantic slavery, black bodies were often shown with chains, shackles, in kneeling and subservient positions. In British sculpture, which had representations of "Indian" people, the sculptures were of subservient or stereotypical "mystical" bodies such as those of ascetics and distressed women, which were brought together in harmony under the paternalistic leadership of the British statesman. Perhaps such an attempt is possible for Dyce Sombre also because of his gender. Sartorially speaking, his dress is ostentatiously European. The sculpture fits within the idiom of Neoclassical memorialization. On the other hand, Begum Samru is immediately recognizable because of her garb — because of her turban, overhead shawl, tunic and *pyjamas*.

It becomes necessary to discuss sculpture at the level of the *body*. This is where medium requires unpacking and unveiling at the level of its visibility. In intentionality of racial and social aspirations, Dyce Sombre, through sculpture, ushered himself into a substitutive process of physically *becoming* a Eurasian aristocrat— as a Knight, Gentleman, or even a non-"oriental" Prince. Identity construction is a tedious negotiation in which representation plays a key role. In representation of his *self* in a certain vocabulary of the Neoclassical, Dyce Sombre's *ideal* and *aspirational* identity are made possible

for posterity. His Eurasian identity *occurs* in the fiction of the sculpture and the entirety of the monument, as it could not happen in his lifetime.

Begum Samru's face and posture attempt to assimilate her legacy within the Neoclassical, which improvises to create the dress typical to Begum's portraits. Dyce Sombre, on the other hand, is left unrecognizable if compared with any of his surviving portraits. His ostentatious clothing did not distract from a lean physique and smooth face. The dissonance between Dyce Sombre's sculpture, paintings, and descriptions further make us aware that the image of Dyce Sombre was a social, political and cultural investment in the construction of his identity that could not be neatly assigned. Such differences between the 'real' and 'represented' bodies were not uncommon. Dyce Sombre's mixed-race identity did not qualify him to be part of English gentile society. Such exclusion did not depend on how he looked but on the genealogical history of racial and sexual 'transgression' in his family. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, several racial terminologies existed to quantify race within a body. It did not matter even if a person was 'dominantly' of white ancestry. They were automatically rejected from racial identification of whiteness because of a history of sexual transgression across race that their ancestors 'committed'.

Sculpture in India has been studied in the coastal epicentres of Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras. The grand monument's import to Sardhana points to a more kinetic exchange of aesthetics. Locating transculturality<sup>4</sup> within this object allows us to see a direction to this process of transculturation. The flow of colonialism and colonizing agents were also responsible for a flow of aesthetics—Neoclassicism in this case—that had traces of an interface. Still, they ultimately fell short of changing or challenging the power imbalance behind the return to the Western Classical. Any "counterflows" or transcultural aberrations were carefully subsumed and absorbed within the vocabulary of colonial society. Back in the Indian subcontinent, travelling artists such as Johann Zoffany, the Daniells, John Smart, Tilly Kettle etc., were producing sights of India at a scale that did not go unnoticed. The intrigue of Indian society gave rise to the Company School's paintings, wherein painters made portraits and studies of Indian

people, occupations, and dress. The Begum Samru was an enigmatic figure, eventually becoming the inspiration behind Jules Verne's *The Begum's Millions*. This interest in India was maintained by literary journals, especially in Calcutta, where the news and stories around the Begum, her husband (known as the "Butcher of Patna") and Dyce Sombre's lunacy trial were given coverage.

### **Intermediality in the Monument**

In the monument, the relief panels are intermediaries between the monument's local context in Sardhana and its place in the history of grand Neoclassical funerary monuments. Their presence mimics Neoclassical sculpture's preference for historical reminiscing, but it replaces the historicity of Greek and Roman myths and persons with the historicity of the place of Sardhana, tied to its deceased Begum. Begum Samru then becomes the object of veneration by the charged intermediality of the panels (Figs. 3 and 4). In these reproductions, Dyce Sombre is also carefully represented in the central locations of the monument and panels. Tadolini, in his *Autobiografici*, mentions that he modelled the Begum Samru *monument* after a model he made for the monument of Count Demidoff, the Russian ambassador who was also a Florentine philanthropist (Tadolini, 1900) <sup>5</sup>. The monument to Begum Samru, because of the political potential of its historicity and the person being commemorated, problematizes the carefully constructed exclusivity of the Neoclassical. If the essence of Neoclassical is to reminisce historical greatness of the "Classical period" in order to aesthetically attribute a contemporaneous identity, the Begum Samru monument achieves exactly this. Dyce Sombre manages to use the logic of the Neoclassical but replaces the greatness of Greece, Rome, Britannia or even his aspirational European self with the legacy of Begum Samru — a Catholic, a woman, a native ruler of a cosmopolitan oasis in North India. The monumentality of the marble tableau at once demonstrates the instability of colonial power and shows the permeability of its aesthetics in the larger South Asian political environment.



**Fig. 3.** Adamo Tadolini, *Monument*, 1839–42, Detail



**Fig. 4.** Adamo Tadolini, *Monument*, 1839–42, Detail

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## Endnotes

1. David Ochterlony Dyce Sombre (b. 1808 – d. 1851) was born to Colonel George Alexander Dyce and Julia Anne, the granddaughter of Zafaryab Khan or Louis Balthazar, the son of Walter Reinhardt. For a detailed biography, See: Michael Fisher, *The Inordinately Strange Life of Dyce Sombre: Victorian Anglo-Indian MP and “Chancery Lunatic”*, 2010.
2. The facts of Dyce Sombre’s life have been researched and written about extensively by Michael H. Fisher in his 2010 book *The Inordinately Strange Life of Dyce Sombre: Victorian Anglo-Indian and Chancery Lunatic*, New York: Columbia University Press. Sources on Begum Samru are many, but I have mainly used Julia Keay’s 2013 book *Farzana: The Tempestuous Life and Times of Begum Samru*; John Lall’s 1997 book *Begum Samru: Fading Portrait in a Gilded Frame*, and Nicholas Shreeve’s extensively researched 1996 book *Dark Legacy* for their detailed use of archival sources; in addition to articles and books quoted otherwise.
3. This need for preservation, advertising, circulation and creating a ‘record’ has been emphasized in several works such as those of Sarah Burnage (2010), ‘Commemorating Cornwallis: Sculpture in India’, *Visual Culture in Britain*, 11: 173–94; Jason Edwards (2010), ‘From the East India Company to the West Indies and Beyond: The World of British Sculpture’, c.

1757–1947’, *Visual Culture in Britain*, 11: 147–72; Barbara Groseclose (1995), *British Sculpture and the Company Raj: Church Monuments and Public Statuary in Madras, Calcutta, and Bombay to 1858*, Newark: University of Delaware Press; Partha Mitter (1994), *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850–1922*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

4. “Transculturality – or transculturation (as it was termed in 1941 by the anthropologist Fernando Ortiz) denotes in our understanding a process of transformation that unfolds through extended contacts and relationships between cultures. The concept can be used to refer both to a concrete object of investigation as well as an analytical method. The discursive category of “culture”, as it emerged in the social sciences in tandem with the modern nation, was premised on the notion that life worlds of identifiable groups were ethnically bounded, internally cohesive and linguistically homogeneous spheres...The terms “transculture / transculturality” are an explicit critique of this notion, for the prefix “trans-” enables emancipation from the concept. Transculturality is about spatial mobility, circulation or flows but is neither synonymous with nor reducible to these.” Monica Juneja in an interview. <https://trafo.hypotheses.org/567>

5. That particular commission was attempted by another Italian sculptor named Lorenzo Bartolini (b. 1777 – d. 1850), which was also left unrealized until the 1870s, two decades after the sculptor’s death. Source: Maurice Rheims (1972), *19<sup>th</sup> Century Sculpture*: 335

# The Migration of Benin Artefacts and the Quest for Restitution

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## **ABSTRACT**

Over the years, the Ancient City of Benin, Nigeria and its people have been known for their unique works of art which require luxurious materials and quite laborious efforts to put together. In 1897 when the British soldiers invaded the Ancient Kingdom, there was a forceful migration of the work of arts by the British soldiers. This paper feels the pulse of the people of the Ancient Benin Kingdom to empirically ascertain what and how the people feel about the migration of the Artefacts and their quest for restitution. The paper adopts primary and secondary data and explanatory and descriptive designs, using the mixed research method. Data were sourced via semi-structured interviews and structured questionnaires. While the qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques of percentages and frequencies. Secondary data were sourced from relevant literature. Among others, findings show that the Binis have so much attachment with the migrated artifacts so much so that they now feel a part of them, their wealth and culture had been taken when the artifacts were migrated; that the Binis feel cheated over the migration and they still feel that legal actions should be taken against Britain to facilitate the return of the artifacts. The study concludes that the Binis' quest for restitution is still very much on course and that even after several decades, they still feel aggrieved over the forcefully migrated Artefacts.

## **KEYWORDS**

Migration; Artefacts; Benin; Benin Artefact; Restitution.

### **Introduction**

This paper feels the pulse of the Binis (the people of the ancient Benin kingdom in present day Nigeria) over the forceful migration of the Benin artefacts by British soldiers in 1897. The Benin artefact is associated with the people of the ancient Benin kingdom which existed long before colonial exploits in the West African state of present day Nigeria. In what had begun as a siege on the ancient Benin kingdom in 1897, the British soldiers who had invaded the kingdom found the Benin artefacts in the Oba's (king) palace as highly enticing. Like the biblical precedents of victors carting away able bodied men and other treasures, the British soldiers took the treasures of the Binis in their artefacts.

The Benin art makers were highly gifted in the art, so much so that the Benin artefacts were treasures to behold, and they drew the admiration of neighbouring states and beyond. Little wonder then that as far back as 1983, Geary had posited that among other African arts and traditions, the Benin arts arguably held the most and widest popular appeal for America and Europe. The Benin artefacts had thus, made the Benin kingdom popular in the world (Irabor 2019; Jones 2003). The Binis had prided in their artefacts for years because of its uniqueness, and how it symbolizes and help to preserve their cultural heritage and traditions – they were an important part of their ceremonies and rituals (Irabor 2019). In fact, Irabor (2019, 951) emphasized that “To the Binis, the art was Benin and Benin was the art.” Oba Ewuare II (in Channels Television December 13, 2021) also noted that the Benin works of arts hold “religious, spiritual and aesthetic significance to Benin.” These had therefore made the looting of the artefacts a tragic event in the history of the Binis.

According to Ananwa (2014), the Benin arts have been in existence since 500 BCE, even though they only became popular during and after the 1897 invasion by British soldiers. Since that invasion, Benin artefacts are being used to decorate British and American museums, including others around Europe (Ananwa 2014; Gundu 2020; Irabor 2019). Over 4000 of the Benin artefacts were reportedly migrated to Europe during the period (Layiwola 2010). Recently, there has been calls on the UK and indeed, others in

possession of the artefacts to do a restitution of the artefacts. This call has yielded some positive results, as some museums in the UK and others have begun the process of restitution, while some of the artefacts are already being returned.

While previous studies have dwelt more on the looted artefacts, and the situation surrounding the event, others have merely documented the quantity of artefacts that were looted. There has not been any study known to the author, which empirically feels the pulse of the Benin people on how they feel about the looting of their prized artefacts in 1897. Furthermore, it has been decades since the artefacts were migrated from Benin Kingdom, while the general assumption is that the Binis want restitution of the artefacts, the opinions, feelings and expectations of the Binis remain to be empirically examined in this regard. This is why this paper is important, and novel. What is the impression of the Binis over the migrated artefacts? What is the position of the Binis concerning the quest for the restitution of the migrated artefacts? These are some of the questions that the paper provides answers. Following this introduction, the next section presents a literature review on migrated artefacts; while section three is on the theoretical framework upon which the study is built. Sections four and five are on the research methods adopted, and data presentation and analysis respectively. The last two sections present the discussion of findings and conclusion.

### **Literature Review**

Migration refers to the movement of people and objects across national borders, while an artefact refers to a piece of art work made of bronze, clay, wood, or metal, which is usually symbolic and representative. According to Friendman (2007, 6), the word artefacts originated from the two Latin words ‘arte’ (which means skill), and ‘factum’ (which means to do or to make). Artefacts are artificial products or anything made by human art and labor (Oxford English Dictionary 1993, 129). Ananwa (2014, 42) defines artefacts as “An object made by human being especially one with archaeological, historical and or cultural values.”

The Benin artefacts were art works made through intense human labor by the Binis in the ancient Benin kingdom in present day Nigeria, usually from wood, clay, brass, bronze, leather, and coral. The Benin artefacts symbolizes their history, religion, customs, traditions, and rituals. The Benin arts was referred to as the 'Royal Court Art of Benin' because the Oba (king) of Benin was the only one who has authority and right of ownership over the arts (Ananwa 2014, 43). While the Benin artisans were previously prohibited from producing the artefacts for commercial purposes, but to produce strictly for the Oba, Ananwa (2014) posits that Oba Eweka II lifted this restriction in 1914, allowing the sales of the artefacts to the general public who so desired to own the art work. The Benin artefacts historicized the Binis, and served as their archives.

The literature is replete with the migration of artefacts from Africa and Asia, to Europe and America, which was part of colonial expansionist agenda during the colonial periods, nonetheless, records of the restitution of these artefacts to date has been few (Lunden 2016). What appears to be rampant is a transfer between Europe and America, rather than a return to Third world countries, most of who are the legal owners of the art works. Lunden (2016) however cites some notable returns made to Africa from British museums. According to her, Britain had in 1873 returned a manuscript to Ethiopia, and some plaques to Benin in the 1950s.

With respect to Africa, a notable name in the plundering of Africa's art works is Leo Frobenius, who had between 1904 and 1993, led expeditions and plundered Congo and Kassai, Egypt, South Africa, Morocco, Libya, Central Sahara, and Sudan, among others (Kohl 2010, 11; Kuba 2010). Most of the art works had been taken into German museums. Using tactics such as unfair purchase, threats, altered translations, and bribes, when Leo Frobenius got to Nigeria, he made away with over 5,670 treasures (Kuba 2010). Given the large scale of plundering of African cultural materials by the West, African culture was by so doing, commonized, insulted, weakened, and decontextualized, opening up the space for European doctrines to spread rapidly (Ogbechie 2016). To date, there has been a continuous push for the repatriation and restitution of African artefacts which are spread across Europe, America, and

elsewhere, while only a little progress and successes have been recorded thus far (Gundu 2020).

In his study, Gundu (2020) explored the magnitude of plundering and forceful migration of art works across Nigeria by Western powers. Most of the art works remain in the West. Among these art works are the Benin Corpus, the Nok and baked clay sculptures of Sokoto, Ife, Katsina, Funtua, Zaria, Kwatarkwashi (Gundu 2020; Jemkur 1992). Also, Agbedeh (2011) asserts that ancestral drums, Ife sculptures, masks, traditional door posts, and Igbo Ukwu materials were also among those art works carted from Nigeria. The monetary estimates of these art works are humongous; and according to the estimates given by Appiah (2012), they amount to the tune of over several hundreds of millions of the United States dollars. In the 1990s alone, Gundu (2020) posits that the looted artefacts from Nigeria were estimated at 429 across various museums and institutions in the country. For the fact that most Nigerian heritage resources, including the Benin artefacts were plundered, stolen, and collected by force and violence, Gundu (2020) is of the opinion that the migration of these resources outside the borders of Nigeria is unjust and illegal.

In terms of attempts made to repatriate and push for the restitution of looted artefacts from Nigeria, the 1979 National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) Decree No.77, the 1970 UNESCO Convention, the 1995 UNIDRIOT Convention, and other such efforts have been used to pursue the repatriation of Nigerian artefacts, many of which have not been quite successful (Gundu 2020, 56). Albeit, some successes include the return of ten terracotta statues in 2010 (ICE 2012); the return of two terracotta heads by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Dokolo 2018); and the return of five terracotta statues in 2010 by France (BBC 2013). Recently, there has been quite some positive signs over the repatriation of the forcefully migrated Benin artefacts from France and the UK, as pacts have been signed to seal the return of some, while some are already being returned to Benin kingdom (Amadi 2021; Are 2021; Enoghlease & Aliu 2021).

The great potentials which the African continent holds when it comes to art work and love for aesthetic has never been disputed, as it is found in

the everyday living and existence of the people (Meryer 1995, 8). Among the African art works, the Benin art takes a distinctive appeal among foreigners and locales alike (Geary 1983; Nevadomsky 2005). The Benin arts was a reflection of one of the greatest kingdoms in the entire West African sub-region (Nevadomsky 2005). Compared to its counterparts, the Benin art represents what the Pyramids of Egypt is to the sub-region – it was Africa’s highest cultural achievements at the time (Irabor 2019). According to Nevadomsky (2005), the Benin art became an African achievement that could be compared to the best casting traditions of Europe.

While the Benin artefacts had been in existence as far back as 500 BCE, Europeans only came to discover the treasures after the 1879 invasion of the kingdom by the British Empire. Jones (2003) avers that that 1879 looting actually brought the Benin arts into limelight, as the looted artefacts were sold to museums and private individuals in Europe, America, and elsewhere. According to Nevadomsky (2005), the Benin artefacts were sold off to offset the costs expended on the punitive expedition of Benin kingdom by the British Empire. The greater parts of the Benin artefacts went into British and German museums. As a result of the forceful migration of the Benin artefacts, Irabor (2019, 955) avers that “everything of value had been carted off, Benin’s technology eviscerated, its artistic inspiration anesthetized. The exercise undoubtedly destroyed the dreams and aspirations of a people later admired for their artistic creativity, originality and ingenuity.”

The table 1 below shows the magnitude of loots and illegal migration of the Benin artefacts, and their spread across museums in Europe and America.

**Table 1: Magnitude of Loots and Illegal Migration of Benin Artefacts and their Spread across Europe and America**

<b>/N</b>	<b>Holding Country</b>	<b>Museum Name</b>	<b>City of Museum</b>	<b>Number of Benin Artefacts Held</b>
.	Britain	British Museum	London	700
.	Britain	Pitt Rivers Museum	Oxford	327
.	Britain	Museum of Religious Life	Glasgow	22

.	Germany	Museum of Ethnology	Berlin	580
.	Germany	Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum	Cologne	73
.	Germany	Museum fur Volkerkunde	Hamburg	196
.	Germany	Museum fur Volkerkunde	Leipzig	87
.	Germany	Staatliches Museum fur Volkerkunde	Dresden	182
.	Germany	Linden Museum Staatliches fur Volkerkunde	Stuttgart	80
0.	Netherlands	Rijks Museum voor Volkerkunde	Leiden	98
1.	Austria	Museum of Ethnology	Vienna	167
2.	United States	Art Institute	Chicago	20
3.	United States	Field Museum	Chicago	400
4.	United States	Metropolitan Museum of Fine Arts	New York	163
5.	United States	Museum of Fine Arts	Boston	32
6.	United States	University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology	Philadelphia	100

Source: Opoku (2009)

### **Theoretical framework**

There has been different postulations, debates and laws as touching restitution – the act of returning what was previously taken illegally, or stolen. With respect to the looted treasures from African states, and indeed Benin kingdom, there has been several calls for restitution. Kiwara-Wilson (2013) argues that the sort of restitution that African states seek goes beyond the mere return of the looted treasures, rather it is a call to reclaim their culture that has been bastardized by European domination.

There has been two prominent schools of thought over the subject matter of restitution, namely; the cultural internationalists, and the cultural nationalists (Kiwara-Wilson 2013). According to the cultural nationalists, cultural properties such as artefacts should belong to the people of the culture from which they originated. This implies that where cultural properties are found in a place where they did not originate, they must be

returned to their root of origin. Merryman (2007), one of the main proponents of cultural nationalism, posits that culture is very important, and a people deprived of their cultural property are pauperized. Therefore, the looting of the Benin artefacts resulted in cultural disintegration and degradation for the Binis. This accounts for the continuous quest for the restitution of the looted artefacts (Agorsah 1977), so that the Benin cultural heritage and pride could be restored. For the cultural nationalists therefore, cultural properties equate the cultural pride of the people – when taken from them, it dents their culture. Furthermore, cultural properties looted do not belong in that destination where it is taken, rather, it belongs to the people from where they originated, hence the need for restitution. This school of thought rests on morality, legality and nationality (Merryman 2010), all of which provide justification for restitution of looted or illegally migrated cultural properties.

On the contrary, the cultural internationalists present the idea that “everyone has an interest in the preservation and enjoyment of cultural property wherever it is situated, from whatever cultural or geographic source it derives” (Merryman 2010, 12). This simply suggests that irrespective of where cultural properties such as artefacts are found, the most important thing is that they are preserved wherever they may be taken. The cultural internationalists therefore, do not buttress restitution, provided the cultural properties are well taken care of, and preserved wherever they find themselves. This school of thought buttresses truth, preservation and access, rather than restitution (Merryman 2010, 12). In a nutshell, the cultural internationalists strongly advocate that cultural objects and artefacts are “better protected and preserved in Western museums” (Kiwara-Wilson 2013, 398). Thus, MacGregor (2012, 44) avers that the location of African cultural properties is irrelevant, provided they are reposit in international museums. MacGregor (2012) and his cultural internationalist counterparts thus, play down the cultural significance of cultural properties, and provide justification for the loot and illegal migration of cultural artefacts of Benin kingdom. They oppose any quest for restitution, as according to them, the cultural properties are able to reach wider audience, are better preserved and protected in the West – as long as this was case, the location of origin was immaterial.

### Methodology

The paper adopts primary and secondary data and the explanatory and descriptive designs, using the mixed (qualitative and quantitative) methods. Qualitative data were sourced via semi-structured interviews with six (6) purposively selected key informants, while quantitative data were sourced via the distribution of structured questionnaire among 362 randomly selected indigenes of Benin Kingdom. The Research Advisors Sample Size Table (2006) was used to determine the sample size for the over 1.4 million population of Benin City, using a confidence level of 95 percent, and a margin of error of 5 percent. A sample size of 384 was derived, and questionnaire administered to them, while 362 responses representing 94.3 percent of the actual sample size, was retrieved for onward analysis.

While the qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques of percentages and frequencies. Secondary data were sourced from relevant literature.

### Data presentation and analysis

The table 2 below shows the biographic information of respondents to the quantitative questionnaire.

**Table 2: Biographic Information of Respondents**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>What is your gender?</b>		
Male	225	62.2
Female	137	37.8
Total	362	100
<b>What best describes your engagement?</b>		
Student	49	13.5
Civil servant	111	30.7
Self employed	111	30.7
Employed with a private firm	64	17.7
Unemployed	27	7.5
Total	362	100

<b>What is your highest level of qualification?</b>		
Secondary education or lower	20	5.5
Certificate/Diploma	69	19.1
B.Sc./BA	184	50.8
Masters	75	20.7
PhD	14	3.9
<b>Total</b>	362	100

Source: Field Work, 2021

The table 3 below shows the profile of key informant interviewees who responded to the semi-structured interviews.

**Table 3: Profile of Interviewees**

<b>/N</b>	<b>Profession of Key Informant Interviewee</b>	<b>Date of Interview</b>
1.	Medical Doctor	July 20, 2021
2.	Artisan	July 21, 2021
3.	Trader	July 27, 2021
4.	Benin Chief	July 27, 2021
5.	Benin Chief	July 27, 2021
6.	Benin Art maker	July 30, 2021

Source: Field Work, 2021

The table 4 below shows the responses of the sampled respondents to the structured questionnaire designed to feel the pulse of the Binis concerning the forcefully migrated Bini artefacts.

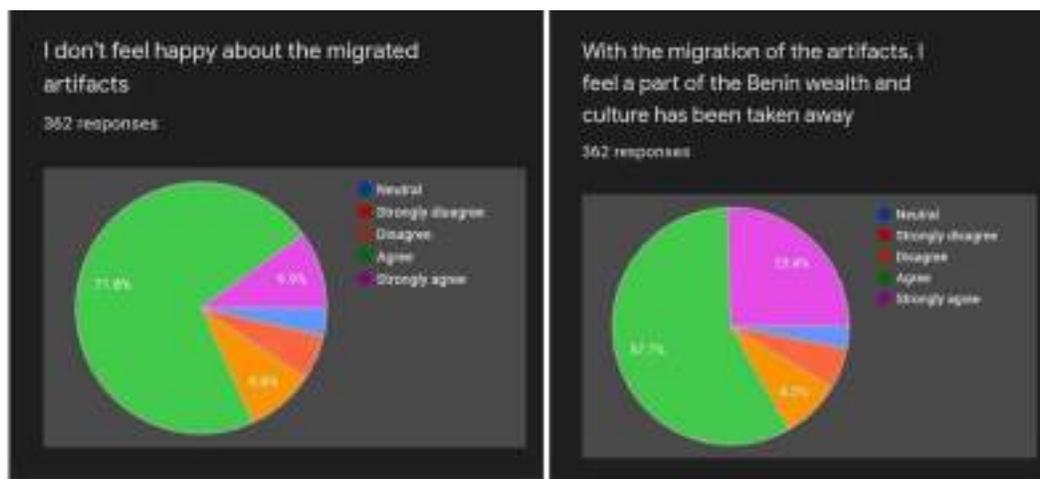
**Table 4: The Pulse of the Binis over the Forcefully Migrated Artefacts**

<b>Pulse of the Binis</b>					
Indices	Neutral n(%)	Strongly disagree n(%)	Disagree n(%)	Agree N(%)	Strongly agree N(%)
I do not feel happy about the migrated artefacts	12(3.5)	22(6)	32(8.8)	260(71.8)	36(9.9)
With the migration of the artefacts, I feel a part of the Bini wealth and culture has been taken away	7(2)	24(6.6)	30(8.3)	209(57.7)	92(25.4)

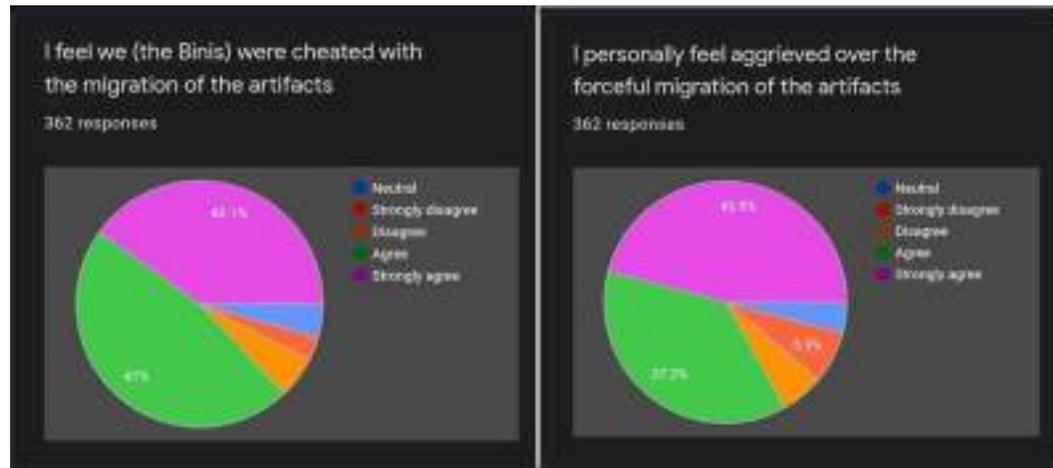
I feel we (the Binis) were cheated with the migration of the artefacts	20(5.4)	7(2)	20(5.5)	170(47)	145(40.1)
I personally feel aggrieved over the forceful migration of the artefacts	15(4)	25(6.9)	21(5.9)	135(37.3)	166(45.9)
I am very keen to see the complete return/restitution of all the migrated artefacts	26(7.2)	4(1)	16(4.5)	176(48.6)	140(38.7)
Legal action should be taken against Britain to facilitate the quick return of the artefacts	22(6.1)	4(1)	18(5)	183(50.6)	135(37.3)

Source: Field Work, 2021

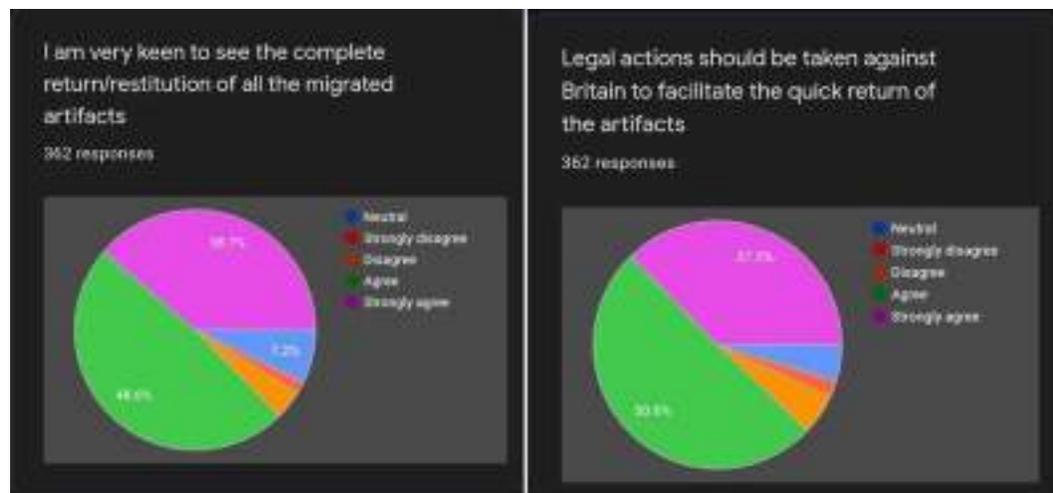
The figure 1 below shows that most Binis are very unhappy with the forcefully migrated artefacts, and that they feel a part of their wealth and culture has been taken away with the migrated artefacts.



The figure 2 below shows that most Binis feel cheated with the migration of the artefacts, and that they feel personally aggrieved over the forceful migration.



The figure 3 below shows that most Binis are very keen to see the complete return/restitution of the forcefully migrated artefacts, and that they feel that legal actions be taken against Britain in order to facilitate the quick return of the artefacts.



From the interviews conducted with key informant interviewees, the views and opinion of all the interviewees align significantly with those of the questionnaire respondents. With respect to how they feel concerning the forcefully migrated artefacts, all the respondents feel very unhappy with the

incident. For instance, while describing his feeling over the incident, a Benin traditional chief averred “That incident [the forceful migration of the artefacts] has left not only me, but the entire [Benin] kingdom in a mourning mood, as such, there is no way that we can be happy.”<sup>1</sup> Similarly, some of the interviewees alluded that they feel very sad over the forceful migration because those artefacts were the hard labor of their forefathers, as such, they feel a part of their wealth and culture has been forcefully migrated to an alien country.<sup>2</sup>

The respondents also alluded that the Binis were cheated by Britain when it forcefully migrated the Bini artefacts. A trader who was interviewed on this asserted that “It was cheating, the type [of cheating] that I have never seen all my life...for some people to labor so hard to earn such honor and prestige, and then for some persons who knew nothing about this labor to come from nowhere and forcefully take them away, it is the highest level of cheating.”<sup>3</sup> Also responding, some interviewees agreed that if cheating is taking what does not belong to one, then the British invasion and forcefully carting away the Bini artefacts was cheating on the Binis.<sup>4</sup> Also, responses from the interviewees show that the Binis are generally aggrieved over the forceful migration of the artefacts. According to a respondent, “I feel very aggrieved, and in fact, that is an understatement.”<sup>5</sup> A Benin art maker interviewed averred that he is so aggrieved that if he was opportune to avenge the forceful migration of the artefacts, he will take the chance.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, all of the interviewees are very keen to see the complete return/restitution of all the migrated artefacts as soon as possible. Interviewees asserted that except the Benin artefacts were completely returned, the Binis will not forgive Britain for the forceful migration.<sup>7</sup> As touching whether or not legal actions be taken against Britain to facilitate the quick return of the artefacts, interviewees alluded that that will be a welcome development. According to some interviewees, only legal actions can facilitate the quick return of the forcefully migrated Benin artefacts, therefore, as a matter of exigency, legal actions must be taken against Britain in order to see to the quick and unconditional return of the artefacts.<sup>8</sup>

### **Discussion of findings**

The study finds that the Binis are still very unhappy with the forceful migration of the Benin artefacts decades of years ago. This is, as larger percentage of the respondents to the questionnaire alluded to being unhappy with the incident, while all the interviewees also showed their displeasure over the incident. It also reveals that with the migration of the artefacts, the Binis feel that a part of their wealth and culture had been taken away. The Binis particularly feel cheated over the forceful migration of the artefacts by the British invaders in 1897. Larger percentage of those who responded to the questionnaire, and the interviewees hold this perception of feeling being cheated. The paper also shows that the Binis are still aggrieved over the forceful migration of the Benin artefacts by Britain.

No doubt that since the looting/illegal migration of the Benin artefacts in 1897, efforts have been, and are being made to see to the return of the looted artefacts. While some of them have been returned in the past, recent moves and efforts have yielded, or at least appear to portray positive omen for the quest for restitution by the Binis. The positive omen follows the recent commitments and promises made by the likes of the UK and Germany to begin the repatriation of the Benin artefacts beginning from 2022 (Are 2021). Also, on December 13, 2021, the Oba of Benin, Omo N’Oba N’Edo Uku Akpolokpolo, Ewuare II, signed the necessary documents for the return of a cockerel (Okpa) and Uhunwun Elao artefacts among those looted over 124 years ago (Enoghlease & Aliu 2021). During the event to sign the return of the artefacts, the Oba emphasized the importance of the restitution. He stated that “As our treasures are returned, our youths will be able to establish a new relationship with the heritage bequeathed by their forefathers. The return of all the treasures taken away will begin a new era of Benin history and civilization (Channels Television December 13, 2021; Enoghlease & Aliu 2021). The cockerel (Okpa) and Uhunwun Elao artefacts have been returned in 2022.

Despite this positive omen as touching the restitution of the Benin artefacts, the disunity and disagreement over the legal and rightful ownership of the artefacts between the Oba of Benin and the Edo State government

within which the Benin kingdom is located, is presenting a draw back for the restitution. While the governor of the state insists the artefacts belongs to the state, the Oba believes the artefacts belong in the palace (Are 2021; Enoghlease & Aliu 2021). According to the governor, “A transformational museum is to be built in Benin City, to house the artefacts upon their return, as part of a new cultural district in the city”, whereas the Oba argues that Benin kingdom is the “only legitimate destination for the artefacts” (Are 2021).

The controversy over ownership has sparked protest among members of the Igun Bronze Casters Guild, those who are traditionally recognized as the makers of the Benin artefacts. On their part, they assert that they work to beautify the palace to keep the history of the kingdom using various art works. They also declared that all the artefacts which they, and their forefathers have made over the years were done for the palace (Olaniyi 2021). This position suggests that the legal owner of the Benin artefacts is the palace of the Oba of Benin kingdom, from where the treasures were looted 124 years ago.

On its part, the Federal Government of Nigeria has wielded into the issue to resolve the ownership crisis between the Benin palace and the governor of the state, currently rocking the Benin artefacts. In order to quell the crisis, the federal government had earlier decided it would be in custody of the returned artefacts, and all others that will be returned in the future, in the mean time before it will transfer them to Benin palace where it believes the treasures belong (Amadi 2021). The federal government however also lays partial claims to the artefacts because according to it, relevant international conventions on antiquities ascribe them as properties belonging to sovereign states, and not sub-national entities, or individuals (Amadi 2021). In statement by the Minister of Culture, “The 1970 UNESCO Convention, in article 1, defines cultural property as property specifically designed by that nation. This allows individual nations to determine what it regards as its cultural property...in essence,...the federal government will take possession of these antiquities, because is its duty to do so, in line with the extant laws.” By this statement, it therefore implies that the federal government is ready to take

possession of the returned artefacts, and thereafter decide to do with them what it deems fit.

This controversy over ownership has been described as a clog in the wheels of the smooth returns of the artefacts. For instance, a director of one of the European museums housing the Benin artefacts posits that “Our policy is that if claimants are in dispute amongst themselves, we wait until they resolve it” (Are 2021). In like manner, director of the University of Aberdeen in Scotland Museum, one of the museums also ready to restitute the Benin artefacts in their possession, Neil Curtis is of the opinion that he will be “very uncomfortable” returning the artefacts when the relevant parties are in disagreement over the ownership of the treasures (Are 2021). Nevertheless, this controversy has now been laid to rest, as the Federal government has decided that all returned artefacts be reposit with the Oba of Benin Palace from where they were originally taken. This indeed portends a positive sign for the complete restitution of the migrated Benin artefacts.

### **Conclusion**

The paper feels the pulse of the Binis over the illegal migration of the Benin artefacts by the British Empire in 1897. It is observed that the Binis have so much attachment with the migrated artefacts so much so that they now feel a part of them, their wealth and culture had been taken when the artefacts were migrated. Over a century after, the Binis are still very much interested in the restitution of the artifacts. The study also reveals that the Binis feel cheated over the migration and they still feel that legal actions should be taken against Britain to facilitate the return of the artefacts. The Binis are very united in seeing the restitution of the artefacts. In recent time, there has been some progress and successes in terms of securing the restitution of the Benin treasures, as the UK, France and Germany are already making the moves to return the artefacts, while some have actually been returned. While these successes are being recorded, the disagreement between the palace of the Oba of Benin kingdom and the governor of Edo State over the rightful owners of the artefacts could constitute a draw back to the progress already being made in the quest for restitution. The Binis’ quest for restitution is still very

much on course, and even after several decades, they still feel aggrieved over the forcefully and illegally migrated Artefacts. The Binis (including the State government and the palace) must therefore work harmoniously to see to the swift restitution of the artefacts.

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## **Endnotes**

1. Interview with a Benin Chief on July 27, 2021
2. Interviews with a Benin Medical Doctor on July 20, 2021; Interview with a Benin artisan on July 21, 2021; and Interview with a Benin Art maker on July 30, 2021
3. Interview with a Benin trader on July 27, 2021
4. Interview with a Benin chief on July 27, 2021; Interview with a Benin artisan on July 21, 2021; and Interview with a Benin trader on July 27, 2021.
5. Interview with a Benin chief on July 27, 2021
6. Interview with a Benin art maker on July 30, 2021
7. Interview with two Benin chiefs on July 27, 2021; Interview with a Benin medical doctor on July 20, 2021; and Interview with a Benin artisan, July 21, 2021
8. Interview with a Benin medical doctor on July 20, 2021; Interview with a Benin chief, July 27, 2021; and Interview with a Benin art maker on July 30, 2021

# Analyzing the *Robe en Chemise* in the Late Eighteenth Century

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper underscores some concepts and hypotheses currently being developed in my PhD research. It focuses on the *robe en chemise* — a paradigmatic dress that disclosed the utmost, fastest and deepest transformation in the women's attire before the end of the Belle Époque. It completely altered fashion and challenged the usual explanation of a unique French origin.

Moreover, it analyzes new perspectives that surfaced in recent articles and studies, including a British approach that is connected with Middle Eastern and Antillean influences, providing further understandings of this singular and radical revolution in the Western costume during the late eighteenth century.

## **KEYWORDS**

Fashion History, Dress, Costume, Robe en Chemise, Colonial.

At the 1783 *Salon de l'Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture*, opened as usual on August 25<sup>th</sup>, the onomastic day of the King, the newly admitted academician Élisabeth Vigée-Le Brun exhibited, among a large number of paintings, including in this group her *morceau de réception*, a portrait of the Queen Marie-Antoinette wearing a simple dress in white cotton muslin girded with an ochre striped *façonné* silk gauze sash, picturing in a daring way the French monarch, who was considered the first female figure of the kingdom, with decidedly unadorned clothes, complemented by a large straw hat with clear peasant reminiscences [fig. 1], similar to the one used by the painter in her self-portrait presented in the same salon.<sup>1</sup>



**Fig. 1.** Portrait de Marie-Antoinette en chemise, Élisabeth Vigée-Le Brun, 1783 óleo sobre tela, 90 × 72 cm. Hesse-Darmstadt, Hessische Hausstiftung, Kronberg im Taunus.

The portrait of the Queen initially received favorable reviews, such as the one on the *Mercure de France*, which praised the “*beautiful shades of color, and the merit of the likeness*”, but soon severe considerations abounded, especially regarding the dress worn by Marie-Antoinette, and the painting had to be replaced by another, where the monarch was now shown in an attire considered more suitable, a fact that various critical texts of the time reported. The *Mémoires Secrets*, for example, described that “*Many people thought it inappropriate that these august personages [Marie-Antoinette and her sister-in-law, the Countess of Provence, wife of the future Louis XVIII] should be offered in public in a garment reserved for the interior of their palaces; it must be assumed that the author was authorized to do so and would not have taken such liberty on her own*”, adding in a footnote that “*Since this was written, the indecency of this costume has apparently been felt, particularly for the Queen, and higher orders have come to remove the painting*”, a comment that highlighted an association with intimacy regarding the dress. The substitution was corroborated by the *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique*, which indicated that “[...] *as the public seemed to disapprove of this unworthy attire of Her Majesty, they hastened to replace it with one with clothes more similar to the dignity of the throne*”.<sup>2</sup>

So due to the polemic in regard to the dress, Vigée-Le Brun was forced to replace the first portrait by a new painting, which became known as the *Portrait of Marie-Antoinette “à la rose”*, where the Queen is presented, in a complete opposition, wearing a *robe à l’anglaise*, a simplification of the *robe à la française* in vogue since the 1770’s in the French fashion, considerably more informal than the solemn and structured *robes de cour* of the time, then often used in official majestic portraits, but still a far more pompous attire than the white garment that caused such a scandal.<sup>3</sup>

Despite all that controversy about such garment, soon after named *robe en chemise*, symptomatically relating the dress to the *chemise*, the usual undergarment worn by both man and woman from the Late Middle Ages to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it’s remarkably conventional in the History

of Costume to use the controversial Marie-Antoinette's portrait as a proof of a prevailing fashion going on in France at that time.

But, if the *robe en chemise* was of common use at this moment in the French society, why would it have caused such a shudder?

In this way, the virulence and intensity of the attacks directed against the dress worn by Marie-Antoinette does not indicate an evidence of a fashion, but rather points out to an isolated and particular occurrence, causing great aversion and, therefore, in dissonance with the dressing habits current in most of the French context at the time, given the scandal and commotion it caused, and the irrepressible upsurging of the *robe en chemise* in France can only be verified during the very final years of the *Ancien Régime*.

### **Trianon**

The second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century saw a growing appreciation for simplicity, disaffection, and unpretentiousness, in which the role of Voltaire, Rousseau and other philosophers and writers was absolutely crucial in their promotion of naturalism and simplicity, and Marie-Antoinette, like most of the French society, will incur in this sometimes excessive search for the intimate related to an utopian deference to Nature.<sup>4</sup>

Inattentive with the risk and threat that such ideas and concepts could, and will, completely transform the society, and alter the established codes that particularly ensured the privileges of her social stratum, Marie-Antoinette will gradually and progressively alter her mode of behavior, transforming aesthetically her surroundings and changing her way of dressing, in a process that will take place completely outside the royal court and the Parisian society, in a course of isolation that, in addition to a reaction to such ideological and theoretic changes, it is certainly connected to a safeguard on her part in relation to the repudiation she has felt with the repeated condemnations and criticisms the Queen suffered since her arrival at Versailles.

In this process, Marie-Antoinette gradually moved away from the court in her castle of the Petit Trianon, presented to her by Louis XVI when

they ascended the throne in 1774, and in this environment full of eminent exclusivity and supposed authenticity, the young Queen gave vent to a gradual fascination with nature and simplicity, complementing her new property, from 1777 onwards, with a *jardin à l'anglaise* and a Temple de l'Amour, commissioned to the neoclassical architect Richard Mique, a disciple of Ange-Jacques Gabriel and his successor as *Premier architecte du Roi* since 1775, in absolute consonance with the irrepressible vogue of bucolism and gentleness, as advocated by Rousseau, for example.

The Queen's isolation conduct will then be negatively perceived and repeatedly commented on by the court and the public opinion, and her popularity will be reduced in proportion as she further isolated herself more and more. In consequence, her inner circle of trusted friends and a few members of her family-in-law became the envy of all the court, and this group became known as the « *société de Trianon* ». This « *société* », absolutely restricted and intimate, was essentially composed of a group of only 14 courtiers and 5 *princes de sang*, according to contemporary descriptions.<sup>5</sup>

And as several of her close friends reported and declared on this specific context of the Petit Trianon, the ladies of this group, and only them<sup>6</sup>, sometimes got rid of the heavy and structured clothes of the time in favor of simple dresses in percale or muslin, thus indicating this attire as exclusive and contextualized much more with the simulacrum of peasant life that was set on the the so-called Hameau de la Reine, the collection of replicas of pastoral buildings, a series of follies built between 1783 and 1787 next to her castle, where she took refuge from the court and society's comments in a supposed rustic nostalgia.

Therefore, more than a fashion occurrence, the series of female portraits that Vigée-Le Brun produced of some of Marie-Antoinette's close relationships<sup>7</sup> in the same period as the controversial portrait of the 1783 *Salon*, seemingly indicate a custom originated from this rural idyllic isolation, as well as an aspect conditioned much more to a particular portrait resource of the painter herself than a fashion that could be identified in a broader scope in the French context on this immediate pre-revolutionary period.<sup>8</sup>

### English portraiture

In almost the same moment across the Channel, in the 15<sup>th</sup> Exhibition of the Royal Academy, a mature and already firmly established Thomas Gainsborough exhibited a full-length, almost life-size portrait of a “*Lady of quality*”, numbered 78, whose apparent anonymity did not fool any of the visitors of the exhibition, given her fame and celebrity among both gentry and commoners in this early 1780s – it was the portrait of Georgiana Cavendish, *née* Spencer, the utterly famous Duchess of Devonshire [fig. 2].



**Fig. 2.** Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, Thomas Gainsborough, 1783  
Oil on canvas, 235,6 x 146,5 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington

The reactions after the Royal Academy Exhibition opening – which always preceded the French by a trimester –, to the portrait of the, to a certain extent, main female character in English society at the time wearing a simple white muslin dress, girdled by a delicate sash in a similar fabric with iridescent reflections and a graceful powder blue shawl encircling her arms, were somehow usual and formal: the *St. James's Chronicle* stated that the portrait was “a very elegant picture of the Duchess of Devonshire, [...]”, the *Morning Herald* praised that “The portrait of the Duchess of Devonshire is after Mr. Gainsborough's best manner; [...]” and The Public Advertiser just cited that “[...] Gainsborough's other Portraits – Lady Horatia Waldergrave and the Duchess of Devonshire, and Mrs. Sheridan; all of whom we have seen painted by the President [Joshua Reynolds at the time]”, reactions quite the opposite to the French polemics with the Marie-Antoinette's portrait four months later.

The custom of portraying “ladies of quality” in a simple and undecorated attire, usually referred as *artistic dresses*, was extremely prevalent in English portraiture throughout the eighteenth century, as the examples are counted in hundreds, and this fashion could have played a role in the simplification of the everyday female garments of the period, even though those specific portrayals usually had an intentional allegoric sense, praised and detailed several times by Joshua Reynolds in his *Discourses*.<sup>10</sup>

Those dresses, especially the ones with a cross-over bodice like the one worn by the Duchess of Devonshire in the Gainsborough portrait, were largely common as a recurrent practice amid almost every English portrait painter of the eighteenth century, an aesthetic definitely reminiscent to the ancient classical costumes, as well as closely related to the celebrated simplicity in the informal styles of fashion in the 1770s and 1780s, when the adoption of plain fabrics such as cottons, and the prevailing use of colors such as white and blue, influenced by fashionable country pursuits and by the growing taste for sports and outdoor activities, expressed a marked change away from the previous predominant utilization of silk and the extensive use of intricate brocades and damasks in rich tones characteristic of the first half of the century.<sup>11</sup>

The cotton, a fiber that until this point was by no means popular, was usually reserved for very informal wear, among the contemporary classification of *undress* or *negligee*, but no pictorial representations have survived, even though since as early as the late 1740s some narratives and accounts indicate that such fashion existed and was in all regards used.<sup>12</sup>

Despite that lack of depictions, and the current allegorical manner characteristic in the female portraiture of the period, occasionally we can identify occurrences of fashionable dresses amid the vastness of female portraits produced at the time. Some of this precedents can be perceived, for example, in the 1780 Romney double portrait of Mrs. Richard Pryce Corbet and her daughter Mary (Cincinnati Art Museum) [fig. 3], or in the 1781 Reynolds portrait of Lady Elizabeth Seymour-Conway (Wallace Collection) and the 1782 Romney portrait of The Hon. Rebecca Clive, Mrs. John Robinson (Powis Castle)<sup>13</sup>, where all adult sitters are wearing what clearly seem to be early *robes en chemise*, then predating by a few years, in the English context, the Marie-Antoinette's portrait.



**Fig. 3.** Mrs. Richard Pryce Corbet and her daughter Mary, George Romney, 1780, finished in 1783  
Oil on canvas, 148 × 120,7 cm  
Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati

The intense aesthetic exchanges between England and France throughout the Age of Enlightenment, even though the countries were at war most of the era, reflects the complexity of those relations. The examples are abundant, in many different spheres, and the fashion perspective is certainly one of the most prolific in those contacts. Aileen Ribeiro, for example, has shown several times in many of her studies those multiple and intricate connections, untangling approximations and oppositions.<sup>14</sup> A particular exemplification is highlighted by Kendra van Cleave, that argues for an English origin of the French *robe à l'anglaise*, and this through the mantua, or night-gown, an eighteenth-century informal dress of the time paradoxically reserved for morning use<sup>15</sup>, and therefore not related to the modern outfit. Van Cleave also indicates the primary origin of late related to Middle Eastern-inspired dressing gowns, adding even more layers on the origins of the *robe en chemise* during that period.<sup>16</sup>

### **Turquerie**

The Middle East has always emanated a broad attraction on the European, especially regarding its esthetics and, above all, textile related elements such as fabrics, colors, materials, decorations and construction of garments.

The publication in 1763 of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's reflections on her travels with her *Turkish Embassy Letters*, although this collection of letters and manuscripts intensely circulated among her friends since her stay at the Sublime Porte as the wife of the British ambassador, between 1716 and 1718, launched a habit of wearing Turkish inspired costumes by the whole of the *beau monde*, and the vogue for masquerades and fancy dress balls during the Georgian era found in this custom its perfect congruence.

Montagu herself was portrayed several times in such attire, from the first, by Jean-Baptiste Vanmour in an Ottoman garb (National Portrait Gallery), produced while she was in Istanbul, and all the others, painted after her return, by such different names as George Knapton (private collection), Jonathan Richardson the Elder (Graves Gallery), Jonathan Richardson the Younger (private collection) and finally Jean-Étienne Liotard (Palac

Lazienkowski), the Swiss painter mostly responsible for the vast intensification of the Turkish fashion in Europe during the 1740s and 1750s.

From the 1770s the influence of the *turqueries* induced the emergence of some outfits whose denominations leave no doubts about this repercussion and origin – the *robe à la circassienne*, *robe à la lévite*, *robe à la levantine* and the more generally known *robe à la turque* were prevalent European fashions that arise from this period, paring with the *robe à la française* and *robe à l'anglaise*, and disputing the preference of the female upper class of the time.

A wide range of studies have been published on the specific facets of these aspects, almost all of them deeply analyzing those orientally named dresses<sup>12</sup>, but rarely relating the idea of comfort and looseness associated with the Middle Eastern silhouette to the popularization of the *robe en chemise* in the late 1780s, therefore requiring further attempts on showing and establishing those relations.

But an even more unexpected connection of the *robe en chemise* could have come from a place far further than the Ottoman Empire.

### **West Indies**

Throughout most of the eighteenth century the territories known as British West Indies referred to the various English colonies spread within the Caribbean Sea, where sugar and coffee were grown as commodity crops to be shipped to Europe, in plantations ruled by European but labored by enslaved black people captured in the African coast. In the same region, different French colonies were grouped as two entities at the time – *Saint-Domingue*, the actual Haiti, and the *Isles du Vent*, grouping the Lesser Antilles –, and in all these colonies a white elite was formed, where not rarely free people of color, which consisted of individuals of mixed African, European, and Native American descent who were not enslaved, were considered part of the upper class.

Despite the usual importation of the European conventions such as manners, styles and fashion, an interesting prevalence of white garments and dresses produced in plain or delicate small printed cottons can be traced in

the rare visual representations in the colonial scope during that period. One of the very few examples consists in Agostino Brunias, a painter of Italian origin who moved to England in 1758 accompanying the seminal Scottish architect Robert Adam. At the end of 1764, Brunias went to the British West Indies under the employ of Sir William Young, the newly-appointed president of a commission in charge to rule the islands of Dominica, Grenada, Saint Vincent and Tobago, seized from France as a result of the 1763 Peace of Paris. Brunias accompanied his patron on his travels throughout the islands, returning to Britain around 1775 in order to promote and sell his work, in which engravings played an important role on the circulation of these colonial society depictions, then returning to Dominica in 1784 and finally dying there in 1796.

Brunias made the evolving Creole culture incorporated with the colonial everyday life and the particular aspects of the local society the preeminent subjects of his production, today dispersed around the globe but mainly located in the Yale Center for British Art, the Brooklyn Museum and within the Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection.



**Fig. 4.** West Indian landscape with figures promenading before a stream, Agostino Brunias, s/d. Oil on canvas, 28 x 81 cm. Colección Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza

In the above painting [fig. 4], Brunias staged a group of women, two men and two children, all in various attitudes, where the delineation of the

women's status based on the subtleties of their skin and dress colors stands out, being the lady at the center of the composition the whiter colored skin person but also the whiter dressed one, a codification that reflects the social and racial hierarchies of the colonial society.<sup>18</sup>

The white color and the cotton fiber were not particularly associated with the privileged in Europe before the late eighteenth century, on the contrary, white and cotton were mostly connected with servants' clothes and informal dress. Thus, this colonial fashion may consist in a particular occurrence, circumscribed in the New World and probably originated without any European affinity or inspiration.

As pointed out by Jane Ashelford, the dresses worn by the free women of color in the French West Indies were not coming from the metropolitan fashion, but they were mostly a "refashioning" of the regional dress worn by the *petits blancs*, as it was named the group formed by the workers and tradesmen in the French colonies, who grouped with the *grand blancs*, the plantation owners and rich merchants, the insular elites.<sup>19</sup>

During the final years of the monarchy in France, some episodes can attest the circumstance of an influence with an unprecedented direction, in this way unusually coming from the colonies towards the metropole – from a « *Vêtement dit à la Créole* » and a « *coëffure à la Créole* », two engravings published in 1779 in the popular *Galerie des Modes et Costumes Français*, the first illustrated set of plates published in France exclusively devoted to fashion<sup>20</sup>, to *Mirza et Lindor*, a ballet staged in front of the King and the Queen at Versailles in March 1779 and performed again at the theater of the *Académie royale de musique* in November and December 1779, where the main dancer, Mlle Guimard was dressed « *en créole* »<sup>21</sup>, all signs of a noteworthy and unparalleled ascendancy.

Ashelford calls attention to the fact that the contemporary synonym of the *robe en chemise*, *gaulle*, would be a French translation of the Creole word "gole", an informal garment worn by the white colonial elite in the French West Indies.<sup>22</sup>

But the occasion of mostly white dresses within the privileged stratum related to the eighteenth century colonial world was not restricted to the

Antilles – in Brazil an even more particular painter, Carlos Julião, a Luso-Italian artist and engineer of the Portuguese colonial army, significant for his watercolors portraying the diverse racial and social types inhabiting the Portuguese colony, will produce what appears to be the only group of visual registrations of the Brazilian society before the arrival of the royal family in 1808.



**Fig. 5.** [Female costumes - 01], drawing 20 from *Riscos iluminados de figurinhos de brancos e negros dos uzos do Rio de Janeiro e Serro do Frio*, Carlos Julião, ca.1776/99 watercolor on paper, 45.5 x 35 cm  
National Library Foundation, Rio de Janeiro

Here, Julião presents three ladies, all elegantly dressed in white cotton ensembles printed in small floral patterns, a motif that won't be in fashion in Europe until the very end of the century, and noticeable is the woman on the left, wearing a peculiar headwear composition of a kind of a turban topped by a really flat wide-brimmed hat worn at the side, with a very narrow crown, a hat shape perhaps reminiscent of the Catholic *cappello romano*, or the

Mexican *sombrero de charro*, and surprisingly quite similar to the head arrangement of the lady in the center on Brunias' composition [fig. 4]. Also noteworthy are the loose sleeves, widely opened on the edges in both representations, making the two resemblances a possible indication of common fashion habits among the colonies in all the American continent, and a conceivable development of local, autochthonous and genuine fashion statements.

### **Considerations**

The analysis of Fashion History and its intricate and concomitant changes and alterations is a difficult task, as multiple vectors of influences and consequences, sometimes even paradoxical and contradictory, play a crucial part in all the transformations of the garments.

The nuances and subtext of dress in the late eighteenth century society were essential in an era where, as it has always been and always will be, choose what to wear incurred in telling, depicting, praising, or even censuring all sorts of messages and expressions, but also in caring on decisions of personal taste, issues of class, features of age, contexts of decorum, aspects of culture, and countenances of philosophy and politics.

The *robe en chemise* presents even more complex peculiarities, due to its possible, probable and presumable diversified origins, but additionally because its appearance marks a pivotal moment in fashion where the women abandoned the stiffed and corseted structures, but also the rich and abundant decorations, that has been going on in the female Western costume since the Early Renaissance.

This piece of clothing with seemingly both Creole and oriental origins, with its characteristic component being a natural fiber cultivated at that time in colonial America, fabricated in the pre-industrial British Isles and adopted in pre-revolutionary France, may consists in one of the very first *métissages* of the late modern period, to use here the neoteric term coined by Serge Gruzinski.<sup>23</sup>

## Endnotes

1. A signed copy by Vigée-Le Brun of her *Self-portrait in a straw hat*, part of the London National Gallery collection, can be seen at: <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/elisabeth-louise-vigee-le-brun-self-portrait-in-a-straw-hat>.
2. *Mercur de France* (Paris) September 6, 1783, <https://books.google.fr/books?id=sORR5wQ3OTUC>; *Mémoires Secrets [...]* (London: John Adamson, 1777-89), vol. 24, 9, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k65369555>; Friedrich Melchior, Baron von Grimm, et al., *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique par Grimm, Diderot, Raynal, Meister, Etc [...]* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1877-82), vol. 13, 441-442, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5781395q?rk=236052;4>. Nolhac, in his biography of the painter, supposes that the order to remove the painting would have come from the Queen herself. Pierre de Nolhac, *Madame Vigée-Le Brun, peintre de Marie-Antoinette* (Paris: Goupil & C<sup>ie</sup> and Manzi, Joyant & C<sup>ie</sup>, 1912), 71.
3. A replica of the now lost original *Portrait of Marie-Antoinette "à la rose"* belongs to the collections of the Château de Versailles and can be seen at: <http://collections.chateauversailles.fr/#14ede615-413e-48ff-829f-9440b169cc96>. As soon as September 1783 the then director of the French Academy, the painter Jean-Baptiste-Marie Pierre, will mention and comment on this exchange on a report. Fernand Engerrand, *Inventaire des tableaux commandés et achetés par la direction des Bâtiments du roi (1709-1792)* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1900), 274.
4. Obviously, the French philosophers' colossal and complex production and its gigantic and profound effect on all Western conceptions cannot be sufficiently addressed in this paper. However, among some of the authors that approach more specifically the great changes that the philosophers specifically engendered on the Nature's appreciation in the 18<sup>th</sup> century are Charles Porset, *Voltaire humaniste* (Paris: Edimaf, 2003), Éliane Martin-Haag, *Voltaire : du Cartésianisme aux Lumières* (Paris: Vrin, 2002), André Charak, *Raison et perception : fonder l'harmonie au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Vrin, 2002) and Arthur Metzler, *Rousseau : La bonté naturelle de l'homme* (Paris: Belin, 1998).
5. Pierre-Victor, Baron of Besenval, *Mémoires de M. le baron de Besenval [...]*, (Paris: F. Buisson, 1805-07), vol. 3, 251.
6. Jeanne-Louise-Henriette Campan, *Mémoires sur la vie privée de Marie-Antoinette, [...]* (Paris: Baudouin Frères, 1822), vol. 1, 227-228 and Gustave-Armand-Henri, Count of Reiset, *Lettres inédites de Marie-Antoinette et de Marie-Clotilde de France (sœur de Louis XVI), reine de Sardaigne. Deuxième Édition* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1877), 151.
7. Images of this portraits can be found in <http://collections.chateauversailles.fr/#e14e9a28-c145-448f-8645-5925a5ba0772>, <https://www.pop.culture.gouv.fr/notice/joconde/000PE008952>, <https://www.invaluable.com/auction-lot/louise-elisabeth-vigee-lebrun-paris-1755-1842-97-c-s2-g712be6q>, <http://collections.chateauversailles.fr/#06c2c2e3-4fcf-4fc1-8b7b-64cc931d8031>, <https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/martine-gabrielle-yoland-de-polastron-17451793-duchesse-de-polignac-229479>, <https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/elisabeth-de-bourbon-17641794-princess-of-france-madame-elisabeth-218170>, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Elisabeth\\_Louise\\_Vig%C3%Age-LeBrun\\_-\\_Portrait\\_de\\_Madame\\_de\\_Moreton,\\_La\\_Comtesse\\_de\\_Moreton\\_de\\_Chabrilan.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Elisabeth_Louise_Vig%C3%Age-LeBrun_-_Portrait_de_Madame_de_Moreton,_La_Comtesse_de_Moreton_de_Chabrilan.jpg).
8. The chief curator of 18<sup>th</sup> century fashion at the Musée de la mode de la Ville de Paris/ Palais Galliera, Pascale Gorguet Ballesteros, emphasizes that *robes en chemise* were not predominant at that time, unlike the *robes à l'anglaise*, the *robes à la polonaise* and the *caracos*, and that it is it was not until 1785/86 that the former were recommended by fashion publications. Pascale Gorguet Ballesteros, "Entre réalité et fiction, les choix vestimentaires de Mme Vigée Le Brun", in *Élisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun*, directed by Joseph Baillio and Xavier Salomon (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2015), 49. Ballesteros also emphasizes that Vigée-Le Brun's

- clothing choices sometimes collide with the “real existence” of the costumes portrayed by the painter. *Ibid.*, 47.
9. *St. James's Chronicle; Or, British Evening-Post*, 1<sup>st</sup> to 3 May 1783, N° 3455, 3, *Morning Herald, and Daily Advertiser*, 29 de abril de 1783, N° 780, 3 and *The Public Advertiser*, 2 May 1783, N° 15267, 2.
  10. Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on the fine arts delivered to the students of the Royal Academy* (Edinburgh: William and Robert Chambers, 1840), 13, 17, 20, 29, 31, 32, 41, 42 and 61.
  11. Aileen Ribeiro, *The Dress Worn at Masquerades in England, 1730 to 1790, and Its Relation to Fancy Dress in Portraiture* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1984), 104, 127 and 130.
  12. *Ibid.*, 127.
  13. Images of the last two paintings can be found at: <https://wallacelive.wallacecollection.org/eMP/eMuseumPlus?service=ExternalInterface&module=collection&objectId=64921&viewType=detailView> and <https://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/1181063>.
  14. Aileen Ribeiro, *The Art of Dress: Fashion in England and France 1750 to 1820* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995) and “Fashion in the eighteenth century: some Anglo-French comparisons” in *The Fashion History Reader: Global Perspectives*, ed. by Giorgio Riello and Peter McNeil (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).
  15. Aileen Ribeiro, *The Dress Worn*, 104 and 122.
  16. Kendra van Cleave, “The Lévite Dress: Untangling the Cultural Influences of Eighteenth-Century French Fashion”, *Textile Society of America 16<sup>th</sup> Biennial Symposium Proceedings*, Vancouver, 2018, 8.
  17. More recent studies that somehow approach this aspect consist in Adam Geczy, *Fashion and Orientalism: Dress, Textiles and Culture from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), Charlotte Jirousek, *Ottoman Dress and Design in the West: A Visual History of Cultural Exchange* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019) and Johannes Pietsch, “On Different Types of Women’s Dresses in France in the Louis XVI Period”, *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture*, London, vol. 17, n° 4, 2013, 397-416.
  18. For further references and informations regarding Brunias see Mia Bagneris, *Colouring the Caribbean. Race and the Art of Agostino Brunias* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017); Beth Fowkes Tobin, *Picturing Imperial Power* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1999), 139-174 and Robert S. DuPlessis, *The Material Atlantic: Clothing, Commerce, and Colonization in the Atlantic World, 1650–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 188-191.
  19. Jane Ashelford, “‘Colonial livery’ and the chemise à la reine, 1779-1784”, *Costume*, Edinburgh, vol. 52, n° 2, sept. 2018, 220 and 222.
  20. The engravings can be seen at: <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/349408/gallerie-des-modes-et-costumes-francais-27e-cahier-de-costu?ctx=5ab30d36-5f43-4ee0-bb94-5a2465d282d5&idx=206> and <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/312648/gallerie-des-modes-et-costumes-francais-17e-cahier-des-cos?ctx=5ab30d36-5f43-4ee0-bb94-5a2465d282d5&idx=138>.
  21. Grimm, et al., *Correspondance littéraire*, vol. 12, 348.
  22. Ashelford, “‘Colonial livery’”, 218.
  23. Serge Gruzinski, *La Pensée Métisse* (Paris: Pluriel, 2012).

# The Shanpula Tapestry: Cultures Woven Together on the Silk Roads

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## **ABSTRACT**

Considering that the Silk Roads are the result of the amalgamation of different cultures, it is worthwhile to conduct a closer analysis of the artifacts created by travelers and locals along the route. The Shanpula Tapestry, which was excavated in Shanpula, illustrates this need well. Various questions have already been asked regarding this object, including its identity and the purpose of the tapestry itself, and such mysteries can only be resolved once further examination takes place.

The presented research goes beyond a description of the exploration at Shanpula, however. The approach herein attempts to identify the various components of the Shanpula Tapestry through iconographic and typological analysis in order to show a life story of this tapestry.

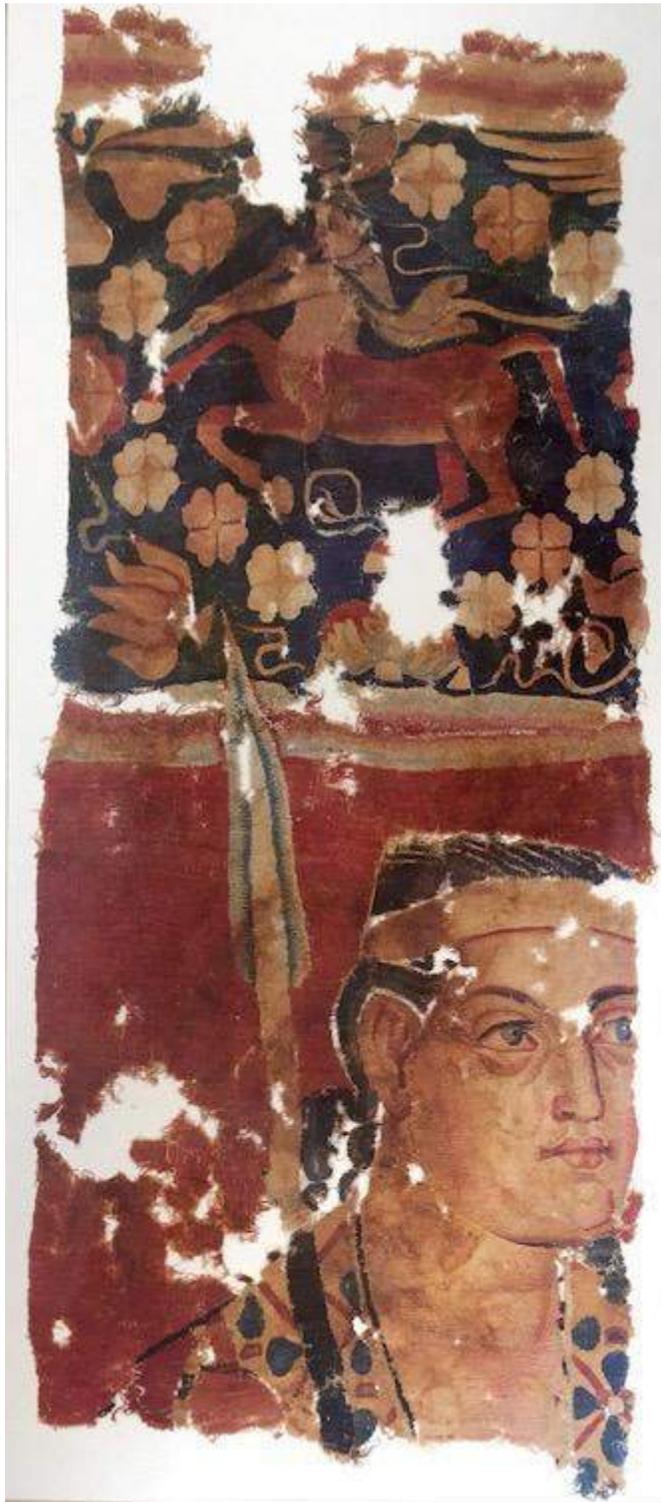
## **KEYWORDS**

Silk Roads; Shanpula; Sampula; Tapestry; Centaur.

### **Introduction**

The Silk Roads have brought various peoples and cultures of the world into contact for many thousands of years. This was based not only on the exchange of goods, but also on ideas and different cultural concepts that still shape our world today. The artistic depiction of the Silk Roads is not limited to relics of Buddhism and other major religions, as the involvement of additional individuals during that period expanded and diversified the trade pathway, as well. The nomads of Central Asia and Iran in addition to those who were part of the Greek civilization acquired the various cultural traditions of the Silk Roads, connected these customs to their own mythical traditions, and as a result diversified the existing conventions.<sup>1</sup>

Because the Silk Roads are sites of the amalgamation of various cultures, a closer study of the artifacts produced by the travelers and people living along the route is worth conducting. The Shanpula Tapestry, excavated in Shanpula, is a perfect example of this analytical need (Fig.1). Various questions have already been raised regarding this object, such as the identity of the imprinted figures and the purpose of the tapestry itself, and it is only upon further examination can mysteries such as these be resolved. An overview of this object and its excavation, which is available from an excavation report from 2001, contains a number of details about new discoveries, which are illustrated by numerous high-resolution photographs and are described in additional essays.<sup>2</sup> A history of the tapestry and an analysis of excavations at Shanpula are first elucidated in the essay by Mayke Wagner from an archeological point of view.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, Chinese scholars such as He Xiaoxue, Gong Yingyan and Wang Libo have contributed some valuable insights into art testimonies from Shanpula, which are now housed in the Museum of Urumchi (Capital of the Uighur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang).<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, in most scholarship this piece of tapestry was only mentioned in a haphazard manner.



**Fig. 1.** Centaur-Warrior Tapestry (Sampula 2001: 188)

The scope of my study goes beyond a simple overview of this tapestry and its excavations at Shanpula, however. The presented approach herein works to identify the various elements of the Shanpula tapestry through iconographic and typological analysis in order to show that the regions of China and Eurasia are culturally interrelated at that time. Utilizing this anthropological approach, a life history of this tapestry can be shown, which in turn expands the existing documentation of a more globalized world in early times.

### **Three States of The Shanpula Tapestry**

The present textiles (Fig. 1), which were excavated in the first Shanpula tomb in the Tarim Basin in 1984, may contribute to a better understanding of the history of the Silk Roads.<sup>5</sup> The textiles found their last use as trousers, as they still contained human leg bones during the excavation.<sup>6</sup> The earliest photographs (Fig. 2, Fig. 3) in the excavation report have shown that both trouser legs are made of patterned wool fabric. On each leg, the fabric was tied at the ankles with a narrow, greenish stripe.<sup>7</sup> The shape resembles that of bloomers, which are widely cut and gathered at the ankles.<sup>8</sup> The head of a spear-armed warrior is depicted on the left leg. When the illustration is displayed in a flattened manner, the following is visible: The warrior carries a spear in his right hand, which projects over his head into the upper field. The warrior's face is beardless in profile. The eyes, with their bluish color and dense, long eyelashes differ from the features of those people who inhabited the region. The bags under the eyes, the eyelids and the big nose are by no means true features for a typical Chinese individual, at least in particular a Han Chinese individual. With a wide belt, a yellowish headband, and combed back hair, the style of the warrior strikingly reflects the features common to Central Asia at the time. The excellent weaving technique creates a three-dimensional effect on the warrior's face through shading and brightness.



**Fig. 2** and **Fig. 3.** Representations on the pants legs (Sampula 2001: 188-189)

On the right side (Fig. 3), there is a magnificent display of a man-horse hybrid, or centaur, against a blue background. Surrounding him is a diamond-shaped floral ornament. Compared to other centaur depictions this centaur, which stands in the middle, was shown here with additional elements of an instrument, a cloak, and a hood. The diamond form is one of the unusual compositions in this picture. Furthermore, the 12 eight-petaled, crossed flowers also form a diamond composition. Each side of the diamond composition is made of three flowers which surround the centaur. In the corner, presumably, other flower forms and winged motifs are visible. By using a dark bluish color on the background, the figure stands out from the decor. The representations were limited above and below by a horizontal stripe pattern. Considering the eye-catching exotic figures on the pants, the tapestry is a product of more than one culture, showing that a transcultural story on the Silk Roads is probable.

During the conservation of the textile, the folded and piped parts were reopened, and the various patches were separated and readjusted to reconstruct the original image. As a result, the trouser form has been lost, but

the nature of the tapestry has been restored (Fig. 4).<sup>9</sup> The reconstructed tapestry measures 231cm in width and 48cm in height, which is actually larger than a life-size warrior. It is highly probable that the tailor who made the trousers had a large fragment in his hands, which he cut into four pieces.<sup>10</sup> The current state of this archaeological object (Fig. 1), which can now be seen by visitors to the museum, shows only part of the tapestry fragment, including new repairs.<sup>11</sup>



**Fig. 4.** Reconstructed situation (Sampula 2001: 188)

#### **Archaeological Context of Shanpula Tapestry**

Due to the dryness of the Tarim Basin, the textile and organic remains are well preserved.<sup>12</sup> In 1984, a pair of wool trousers with an expressive weave pattern were unearthed near the village of Shanpula, 25 km east of Kohtan (*Yutian*于阗), an ancient kingdom located on the southern branch of Silk Roads.<sup>13</sup> Shanpula is located in Luopu County, Xinjiang Province, south of the Taklamakan Desert and north of the Kunlun Mountains. The cemetery was

occupied from the time of the Han dynasty (202 BC - 220 AD) to the Jin dynasty (265 AD - 420 AD), which lasted from the 1st century BC until the end of the 4th century AD.<sup>14</sup> According to the sequence of the excavations at the Shanpula site, the large burial groups were divided into three groups and numbered 1, 2 and 3.<sup>15</sup> The trousers were found in the first cemetery group by the Xinjiang Archaeological Institute. The square burial room (5.95 x 5.0m and 2.60m high) contains remains of at least 133 adult males and females. These bodies were gradually added over the years or collected from earlier burials and relocated.<sup>16</sup> In winter, Shanpula's weather frequently is below freezing. Instead of clothing made of leather or fur, there was a large amount of woolen textiles, silk, gauze, knee-length trousers and short-sleeved shirts in many types and designs in all tombs.<sup>17</sup> This could indicate that these people died mainly during the hot summer.<sup>18</sup>

Information on the Khotan area can be found in the Chinese documentation starting in 126 BC, the year Zhang Qian (195 BC -114 BC) returned to the imperial court in Chang'an from his first voyage to the West.<sup>19</sup> A script was first adopted in the southern Tarim Basin through the dissemination and development of Buddhism, which is known as the Kharosthi script, one of the most important languages on the Silk Roads.<sup>20</sup> The oldest documentation was found in Kroraina (*Loulan*樓蘭), an ancient kingdom based on the northeastern edge of the Lop Desert, and the first mention of the Khotan king dates to about 300 AD. Records of the early history of ancient Khotan are mostly legendary rather than credible. Therefore, our knowledge of the early past in Xinjiang, which is located in the western part of modern China, is based solely on these archaeological finds.<sup>21</sup> For this reason, the following analysis mainly refers to the material appearances on the tapestry in different cultural spaces to show the identification of these figures on this object.

### **Identification of The Centaur**

The picture composition of the tapestry reflects the classical Greek traditions.<sup>22</sup> The upper part is dominated by a centaur framed by twelve crossed flowers. The flowers are similar to shamrocks, which could indicate a

sacred meaning to Christ. Representations of such flower forms are found throughout the Mediterranean and are occasionally associated with the Sassanid.<sup>23</sup> A four-leaf flower symbolizes the cross, the four gospels or the four cardinal virtues, depending on the context.<sup>24</sup> Twelve as a basic number is the sign of perfection. Three times four links the belief in Trinity with the four directions.<sup>25</sup>

The centaur is a hybrid of horse and human body in classical mythology. In most cases, these hybrid beings are depicted with the head, torso and arms of a man combined with the legs of a horse. Centaurs are often accompanied by a club, spear, shield, arrow, bow or sword as a weapon. In classical mythology, the centaurs are known as instinctual beings, which are normally associated with brutality, drunkenness, and eroticism.<sup>26</sup> A relatively early example of a centaur depiction is a statue from Greece around 900 BC. It is a standing person without feet, but with a hole at the hip, which is considered a female feature. The horse's legs and body are tied together at the buttock with the front person. The zigzag patterns on it are visible. The structure of this centaur is highly primitive and very different from those found later.

A frequent representation of a centaur is that of Nessos, who attacked Deianeira, the wife of Hercules, as she was crossing the river, whereupon Hercules killed Nessos.<sup>27</sup> In the 7th century BC a painter portrayed this mythological event on earthenware.<sup>28</sup> Hercules goes brandishing the sword as a weapon to the centaur Nessos. Nessos, on the left side, looks very anxious and begs the hero Heracles to forgive him. The representation of the centaur in this picture deserves high attention. First, his two front legs are the legs of a human. The horse's body is directly connected to the hips of the human, but the two bodies remain distinctly separated in their depiction. Second, Nessos has long and curly hair without a beard. There are also other representations from this period for the same motif. On a Grecian vessel from 7th century BC, Nessos was depicted with four horse feet. He also has a thick beard, long curly hair and wears a hat, which are typical Asian features.

With everything taken into account, in the evolution of centaur portrayals there are two types: The first is the "Front-Back" arrangement,

which consists of a standing human figure in the front and a horse in the back. The second is the “Top-Bottom” structure. In this composition, the human being sits on the horse and the human body is connected to the horse at the hip.<sup>29</sup>

As mentioned above, the history of the Centaur in Greek mythology is usually a negative story. Brutal, drunken, and lustful centaurs are known as half-animals because they have not yet completely abolished the habits of an animal. However, there is one exception. This extraordinary centaur is called “Chiron”; he is the only centaur not brutal and lustful, but skilled in medicine, wise and kind. Genetically, however, Chiron himself is of a different origin. He is the half-brother of Zeus. His origin is thus based on the properties of deities. Moreover, Chiron has raised and mentored many famous heroes.<sup>30</sup> In a fresco painting in the National Archaeological Museum he was documented as an educator with a beard. In this picture, Chiron teaches young Achilles how to play a string instrument. Chiron also has the “Top-bottom Composition” in this picture. He wears a cloak around his shoulders and a ring crown on his forehead.<sup>31</sup>

If we compare this figure with that from Shanpula, we can find two similarities. The two centaurs have a cloak. In addition, they both play an instrument.<sup>32</sup> What the Centaur from Shanpula plays is similar to the instrument *Salpinx*, a trumpet-shaped instrument from ancient Greece. However, the *Salpinx* is not often treated by scholars as ancient Greek music because it was mainly a military instrument.<sup>33</sup> The *salpinx* has always been used as a war trumpet, predominately as a sign of an attack at the beginning of games, sacrificial rituals and solemn processions.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, it is to be assumed that the centaur from Shanpula actually corresponds to the half deity half animal figure of Chiron, and at the same time he blows the instrument *Salpinx*.

### **Identification of The Warrior**

The face of the warrior is shown in three-quarter profile. His full cheeks, double chin, four-petalled mouth, straight nose and tear pockets under his large eyes are consistent with representations of Greco-Roman mosaics in the

Mediterranean or Central Asian regions, which were under the influence of Greece or the Roman Empire.<sup>35</sup> His headband could be a diadem, a symbol of kingship in the Hellenistic world, which is represented on Greek and Macedonian coins.

The clothing of this warrior is held together at the waist by a wide belt. The wide, V-shaped collar reveals the man's chest and is patterned by the yellow background with floral motifs.<sup>36</sup> Such a dress of the warrior does not resemble the Greek clothing. It resembles a Caftan with long sleeves and belt at the waist which spread in northern Eurasia in the middle of the first millennium BC.<sup>37</sup> Historian E. Knauer suggested a similarity with the Parthian clothing and called the Shanpula warrior a Parthian, which dated from 300 to 200 BC.<sup>38</sup> However, the physiognomic features here are different from the bearded faces from the Parthian Empire. Because of these contradictions, an alternative interpretation could be given as follows: The warrior is an immigrant to eastern Eurasia from the Greek territory and has adapted to the new environment.

Interestingly, the technical analysis of the textiles can be found in a Chinese article. The fibers of these pants were scanned by an electron microscope. The studies indicate that most of the pants are made of wool from the Xinjiang region and have a small proportion of wool from the Angora goat.<sup>39</sup> Scholars consider the Angora goat as an import from the Central Asian region, approximately from the area of today's Turkey.<sup>40</sup> In addition, this study has confirmed the relationship between Central Asia and Xinjiang. At that time, people could already get different materials for these textiles on the trade routes. With the immigration of nomads, this textile could have come through the Silk Roads and arrived in Xinjiang.

The former residents in Xinjiang may possibly have arrived and settled from the west. They may have come from the farming communities of the Oxus civilization in Bactria and Margiana, passed through the Pamir Mountains, moved along the Tianshan Mountains, and finally ended up in the Tarim Basin.<sup>41</sup> Alternatively, immigration may have taken place in different waves or periods, and the inhabitants of Xinjiang may have come from different geographical directions.

### Conclusion

The investigated “Centaur-Warrior Tapestry” is not only a relic with Greek characteristics but also a proof a mixing of the Central Asian artistic style and Hellenism. The figures on the tapestry suggest a site of production where not only nomads dwelled, but Hellenistic influences were also present. The Shanpula textile could probably have been made in one of the Greek colonial cities in Central Asia, which later became part of the Parthian Empire. Likewise, the textile may have been made in one of the Bactrian cities or the Seleucid Empire, which was under the influence of nomads and Greek immigrants at the time. Either way, the textile is a product of multiple cultures and influences, standing as an early sign of a more globalized world. For some unknown reason, the original tapestry was cut apart and used for various purposes. The textile finally reached Khotan via the Silk Roads. The person who wore the pants suddenly died on a hot summer day in the 1st century BC, probably in the wake of a nomadic attack. The origin of these Hellenistic images remains a mystery, but could point to a Western influence, which occurred earlier than has already been recorded in writing.

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## Endnotes

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9. Wagner, "Trousers", 1066.
10. Wieczorek, *Ursprünge der Seidenstraße*, 213-214.
11. Wagner, "Trousers", 1068.
12. Wang, *Xinjiang gushi*, 19.
13. He, "Luoma shenhua", 78. Khotan was the first of the Western kingdoms to acquire Chinese sericulture technology, a testament to the importance of this region on the Silk Roads. For a brief early history of Khotan Kingdom see Zhu and Rong, "Yutian", 2021, 12-23.
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24. Kretschmer, *Lexikon*, 60.
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31. For more information about this picture see Pier Giovanni Guzzo (Ed.): *Ercolano, Tre secoli di scoperte*. Milano: Mondadori Electa, 2008, 29.
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37. Wagner, "Trousers", 1070.
38. Knauer, *The Camel's Load*, 109.
39. Jia, "maozhipin", 20.
40. Jacob, "Hinweis", 67.
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# Plaster Casts and Originals' Travels in the Context of the Discovery of the *Winged Victory of Samothrace*

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## **ABSTRACT**

In 1863, a French archaeological mission lead by consul Charles Champoiseau dug out the *Winged Victory of Samothrace*. Currently, it is one of the most famous and reproduced artworks of the world, but its initial moment of coming to light was filled with institutional occurrences and political intrigues. The main aim of this proposal is to analyze the political agency of the plaster casts of the *Winged Victory* that travelled between France and the Ottoman Empire during its discovery. By looking into a series of epistolary exchanges and writings from Champoiseau I will examine a double migration. On the one hand, I will analyze the internal movements of the *Victory* inside the Musée du Louvre that lead to the conversion of the piece from anonymous discovery to one of Paris' leading ladies. On the other hand, in parallel, the Atelier de Moulage du Musée du Louvre started casting plaster copies of the *Victory* and some of them were used as diplomatic gifts for the Ottoman Empire. These traces account for a complex geopolitical scheme and how objects take on an active role within them. In this sense, this study case allows me to examine how circulations and transits of copies responded to an explicit political agenda, which ultimately reinforced and spread canonical artworks and their models.

## **KEYWORDS**

Copies; Plaster Casts; Archaeology; Diplomacy; Winged Victory of Samothrace.

Our story begins in the island of Samothrace, in 1863. The venue that was once characterized as “sterile and without port”, lacking of “any political or commercial importance”,<sup>1</sup> according to some sources of the time, was to become “one of the best-known islands of the archipelago”.<sup>2</sup> And such renown was due to the discovery of an antique marble: the *Nike or Winged Victory of Samothrace*.

French consul Charles Champoiseau (1830-1909) led the archaeological mission in Samothrace. In one of his publications, he recounted the initial encounter with the *Nike*:

...my eyes rested on a very beautiful fragment of white marble, barely emerging from the ground, (...), which I recognized, after having unearthed it myself, to be a breast of woman of the most admirable work.<sup>3</sup>

Already from the first impressions, Champoiseau expressed admiration and appreciation for the sculpture that he described as “...almost intact and treated with an artistry that I have never seen surpassed in any of the beautiful Greek works that I know of”.<sup>4</sup>

Currently, the *Nike of Samothrace* is one of the most famous and reproduced artworks of the world. However, its initial moment of coming to light was filled with institutional occurrences and political intrigues. The main aim of this chapter is to analyze a specific episode that delves into the political agency of plaster casts of the *Nike* that travelled between France and the Ottoman Empire since the discovery of the sculpture in 1863 until 1891, when a final mission by Champoiseau was culminated.

In this way, I will address a simultaneous migration: as the original and its fragments travelled from Ottoman territory to the Louvre, copies and fragments of casts inverted their route from the Louvre Museum –and more specifically, its Atelier de Moulage– to Constantinople. As I will argue, plaster copies of the *Winged Victory of Samothrace* were not mere complements of the original sculpture, but acted as key pieces within a complex scheme of negotiations that involved archaeology, politics and diplomacy, in an ultimate power dispute for the possession of Classical Antiquity.

### **From Samothrace to the Louvre**

Even though the *Winged Victory* was dug out in Ottoman territory, its fragments were quickly packed up alongside other findings and transported to France via Constantinople.<sup>5</sup> By 1863, the Ottoman Empire did not have a defined policy regarding the exit of antiquities, so, when Champoiseau had to deal with his newly discovered lady, no legal obstacles were faced regarding the export of Samothracian findings.

It is worth noting that, from the beginning, Champoiseau was explicit about the fact that the final destination of his discoveries was France and, more specifically, the Louvre. Some of these references aimed to obtain a reimbursement of 2,000 francs he had paid for location expenses during the mission,<sup>6</sup> whereas other statements sought future funding so as to continue excavations. A document addressed directly to Napoleon III expressed this question: exploring Ottoman land was essential to “enrich France” because other territories such as Greece were unavailable since their state legislation strongly restricted the exit of archaeological artifacts. However, much to French advantage, it was always possible to obtain a *firman* (decree or official Ottoman authorization) at the Embassy of Constantinople to export marbles, medals or other objects. Moreover, he continued to argue, besides the regulatory laxity of the Ottomans and a relatively low cost, this action was praised as noble and necessary because in those lands the precious antiques of the past were neither cared for nor appreciated:

... it would be sad to see it lost forever when nothing is easier than to save [this heritage]. For this it would be necessary to undertake this immediately and to finish in the least possible time the complete exploration of all the Greek ruins located on the Ottoman coast.<sup>7</sup>

In regards to the Louvre, the *Nike's* “natural destiny”, Champoiseau stated that thanks to this proposed archaeological policy, it was to become a “unique museum in the world” since it would lead in terms of owning the greatest collection of ancient Greek art –up to the point of surpassing fellow ones:

The Louvre Museum, so rich in all other respects, possesses, however, few Greek antiquities ... It would be easy, I believe, to collect almost everything that remains of this genre and thus endow, at little cost, France with a collection leaving far behind those as renowned as the British Museum.<sup>8</sup>

Now, within the Louvre, authorities such as Adrien Prévost de Longpérier (1816-1882), *Conservateur du Département des antiquités égyptiennes*, expressed “serious doubts about [Champoiseau’s] archaeological competence” in spite of his “good faith”, given that “travellers are quick to overstate the value of the ancient objects they discover”.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, after the arrival of the *Nike* in fragments, Champoiseau was endorsed and funding recommended. Overall, according to Longpérier, even though “the packaging has been done with deplorable negligence”, “this sculpture whose entire upper part is broken is extremely beautiful”.<sup>10</sup>

A few months after the sculpture’s arrival, it was mounted on a plinth to be rebuilt, assembled and restored. Afterwards, the original had a series of internal migrations inside the museum that have been well documented and studied by M. Hamiaux:<sup>11</sup> from 1866, it was placed in the Salle des Caryatides, where it remained for twelve years; around 1880, it was reported to be in the Salle du Tibre. Another key event in the history of the *Winged Victory* was the discovery of its base in the shape of a ship. The fragments of the galley had stayed in Samothrace and were transported by Champoiseau in a second mission to the island in 1879. Félix Ravaisson (1813-1900), supervised its great reconstruction and restoration between 1880 and 1883, period in which the sculpture was placed at the Cour du Sphinx. In the end, by 1883 the *Winged Victory of Samothrace* took its final form due to its positioning by the Daru stairs, built by Napoleon III, where the monument is placed until nowadays.

In parallel, the date on which the first mold of the *Nike* was taken is not entirely accurate. A first plaster cast of the sculpture before its restoration was produced around 1875 and copies were donated to Vienna and the École des Beaux-Arts.<sup>12</sup> Then, in the 1883 edition of the Atelier’s catalogue, this version of the *Winged Victory* made its first registered appearance with the catalogue number 134 for 300 francs, which also offered the fragments of the

sculpture sold separately for 100 francs and the galley for 600 francs.<sup>13</sup> So, it can be stated that as the original *Victory* transfigured from anonymous finding to one of the Louvre's leading masterpieces, copies from it started being produced so that institutions such as museums, universities and art academies from France and abroad could have their own *Victory* in plaster.

### **From the Louvre to Constantinople**

As the fame of the sculpture increased, the archaeological race in Samothrace did not stop. Champoiseau's missions in the years of 1879, 1883 and 1891 pursued as main aim finding new antiquities and completing the monument of the Nike, specially attempting to dig out its head and arms. Such constant need of returning to Ottoman territory entailed dealing with official authorities and creating steady and friendly bonds so as to guarantee access to the territory and, mainly, authorization to export findings.

During the period, the Ottoman Empire had a strong geopolitical position and between 1839 and 1876, its state had carried out a general process of reforms with a view to modernizing –and westernizing– its territory. Throughout Champoiseau's expeditions, there were no major conflicts related to the transit of the discoveries, for example the arrival of the galley to the Louvre in 1879 occurred without obstacle. Despite the fact that in 1874 a first antiquities law had been enacted that restricted the release of archaeological objects, the establishment of good relations with the Sultan allowed that, thanks to a personal directive, the discoveries would go to France as a gift from the Empire.<sup>14</sup> However, within Ottoman politics, there was a strong process of valuing their own heritage accompanied by an institutionalization thanks to the founding of the Müze-i Hümayun (Ottoman Imperial Museum) in 1869.<sup>15</sup> But, the key moment was the incorporation of painter and scholar Osman Hamdi Bey (1842-1910) in the direction of the museum in 1881. His management meant the definitive organization of the institution and the consolidation of archaeology as a local discipline accompanied by a regulatory framework, whose greatest achievement was the creation of the second antiquities law of 1884.<sup>16</sup> And with Hamdi Bey's administration, Champoiseau encountered his first obstacles and it was when

the exchange of copies emerged as a corollary and was subjected to political maneuvers.

In principle, in the absence of originals, the substitutes were plaster casts. Article 12 of the Ottoman law of 1884 established that although all archaeological objects belonged to the state, those who undertook the excavations could mold and make drawings of findings. Thus, the international financing of an excavation could at least legally obtain copies of the results. As W. Shaw argues about this matter: “plaster casts were but one of several modes of reproduction common to late-nineteenth-century archaeological practice”,<sup>17</sup> and Hamdi Bey was no stranger to making use of and profiting from the practice, for instance, within the promotion of local archaeology, he led the creation of courses that taught how to take molds from discoveries.

In the case of Champoiseau’s mission, despite the fact that the Louvre was fortunate enough to have the *Nike* and the galley in France, there were still exploration initiatives to find the head and others missing parts from the monument. For this reason, given the complications generated by the law to carry out excavations and the probable impossibility of owning their products, plaster casts began playing an essential role in the negotiations to obtain the necessary signatures and consolidate good relations with Hamdi Bey.

Around 1887, Champoiseau, together with Antoine Héron de Villefosse (1845-1919), another *conservateur* from the Louvre, began to plan a campaign to send him copy of the *Nike*. Far from being an innocent gift, this exchange took part of a diplomatic and political negotiation, in which each party played an active role and sought to gain leverage from it. Champoiseau’s perception about Hamdi Bey was not of a passive and indulgent character but of an opponent “who would never do anything for nothing” willing to exercise his power to the last consequences. In a letter the consul wrote about Hamdi Bey he expressed that: “this [suspicious] character does not want [illegible] the *firman* for the new excavations of Samothrace to be delivered to me, only after having acquired the certainty of sending the cast of the *Victory*”.<sup>18</sup>

Another epistle addressed to the Louvre evaluated the most appropriate way of making said shipment:

It seems to me that the plaster cast of the *Victory* and its wings is enough – The pedestal-galley is useless and no museum has it, I believe. We can send the detached wings and Hamdi Bey's workers [illegible] in Constantinople will put them in place. Perhaps it would be even easier to ship the body in two pieces and detach the floating portions of the garment.<sup>19</sup>

It is evident that what each party had to offer and demand established an inequality since, thanks to the copies of one, the other would obtain originals. In one of the few documents by Hamdi Bey from the archives of the Louvre, a response is recorded that accounted for these disadvantages and made use of them through certain ironies that established his position in the negotiation. His letter begun stating that:

...one should not believe that the Museum, of which I have been given the honor of the direction, would thus consent to relinquish the originals in order to procure casts for the Academy of Fine Arts.<sup>20</sup>

In this regard, it is interesting to note that the Ottoman did not intend to assign the plaster cast to the Imperial Museum. Shaw has pinpointed that the Imperial Museum's program did not aim to demonstrate evolutionary aspects of the artistic canon, which was a key guideline for understanding the exhibition of plaster copies in museums. Instead, its cultural legitimacy lay in building itself as a reservoir of originals,<sup>21</sup> so as to consolidate a position within an international map of exemplary institutions that exhibited antique art. For this reason, in the museum's scheme, there was no place for copies.<sup>22</sup>

So, why request plaster casts for the Academy as a means of negotiating *firmans*? Hamdi Bey had founded and directed the Academy of Fine Arts (Sanayi-i Nefise Mektebi) in 1882 as an annex of the Imperial Museum. And it was this institution the projected destiny of the plaster of the *Nike* because canonical models were needed there to educate local artists. Hamdi Bey's letter proceeded to recognize such lack of models:

...it is however certain that this school needs a large number of casts which would serve to respond among the many young people who attend it, to the feeling of beauty, to initiate them into the history of plastic art in antiquity.<sup>23</sup>

However, when it came to explaining this shortage, it was because of those museums that had enriched themselves at the expense of the Ottoman soil, and, at the very least, the provision of plaster casts was to be an automatic compensation:

The British Museum and the Berlin Museum have understood this so well that the first has already sent to the school all the casts of the Parthenon sculptures and the second those of the Gigantomachy and those of the sculptures discovered in Olympia. I could therefore hope, Monsieur, that the Louvre Museum, considering everything that comes to it from this country, would be [illegible] interested in those of its children who devote themselves to the fine arts and donate some casts to the nascent institution in question. But, since this is not your way of seeing, Monsieur, we will not talk about it anymore, moreover I have already bought the Discobolus, the Achilles, the Venus, the *écorché* of Houdon etc. etc.<sup>24</sup>

With this brief reply, it can be noted how Hamdi Bey displayed a subtle but strong tactic of negotiation that appealed to the international imbalance in terms of possession of antiquities. In sum, Hamdi Bey claimed that not only was he unwilling to 'relinquish the originals' but he also ironically demonstrated offence for the fact that he even had to buy other plaster casts. Moreover, his criticism was specifically directed at the Louvre as opposed to other museums that had already made donations of casts.

In the case of the plaster cast of the *Nike*, a series of difficulties arose that prevented the negotiations from taking effect. The production of the cast was delayed, around 1889 Champoiseau continued to request information about its execution and issuance,<sup>25</sup> and, before his appointment as plenipotentiary minister that year –which implied greater access to public funds to excavate–, the Louvre reaffirmed the need to get the copy to Constantinople. Héron de Villefosse expressed the situation in terms of a

need “to spare certain influences in Constantinople and in particular those of Hamdi Bey”, since that “would make it easier for him to obtain the necessary authorizations to carry out searches”,<sup>26</sup> to which Champoiseau endeavor to begin “his campaign after Hamdi Bey”.<sup>27</sup>

The official decree of donation to the Academy of Fine Arts was signed in July 1889, and included a copy of the *Winged Victory* and its galley.<sup>28</sup> Six boxes with the *Nike* arrived in Constantinople in the early 1890s. In the end, in 1891 the longed French mission occurred, after obtaining permits and a financing of 3,000 francs. The results of the exploration were partially successful: only some inscriptions were found, the head of *Nike* remained missing and it was confirmed that some recorded marbles had been mutilated and destroyed by the local inhabitants of the island.<sup>29</sup> In addition, tensions between Champoiseau and Ottoman authorities unfolded because the consul refused to wait for the local supervisor in charge of registering the excavation, which derived in the suspension of the whole mission.<sup>30</sup>

Now, it should be noted that this particular episode did not mean the establishment of bad relations between Hamdi Bey and the Louvre as an institution, but rather with Champoiseau. The consul himself when considering the transit of another type of antiquities acknowledged this matter:

...the Director of the Ottoman Museum will certainly be keen to satisfy France with regard to Chaldean antiquities, in order to prove that the measures [taken] against my mission did not take on the character of a systematic unwillingness bias towards all French archaeologists.<sup>31</sup>

In this regard, Z. Çelik establishes that beyond the disputes over the possession of cultural property, the Ottoman Imperial Museum, represented by Hamdi Bey, sought to establish good relations with other museums such as the Louvre in order to create a network of scholars and academics.<sup>32</sup> This was evidenced, for example, in the tone of the director at the time of thanking the shipment of the plaster of the *Nike*, in which he even specified that its final destination would be the museum instead of the Academy and that the institution planned on having a plaster casts collection:

I acknowledge receipt of this perfect reproduction of an admirable work. Please accept my warmest thanks. I am very happy to see the Imperial Museum of Constantinople in possession of such a masterpiece, which will be one of the most beautiful ornaments of its casts' rooms.<sup>33</sup>

The connection between the Imperial Museum and the Louvre continued on good terms over time, and the latter even decided to send a second copy of the *Winged Victory* as a gift to Hamdi Bey, in this occasion, a reduction of the work.<sup>34</sup> The justification for the shipment reaffirmed the cooperative bond between both parties and established that:

Hamdy Bey is in very frequent scientific relations with M.M. the Conservators of the Ancient Departments, and, as such, renders us services that I would be grateful if you would recognize by means of this gracious concession.<sup>35</sup>

However, the donation was also an excuse to follow up on a series of authorizations of excavations in the Ottoman city of Tille, which Hamdi Bey confirmed in his reply. The curious thing about this second plaster is that its receipt revealed that the first *Nike* had never been mounted, as revealed by Hamdi Bey's thanking note:

...the small model of the *Victory* arrived in very good condition and we placed it in our library room, which is quite large. This model is charming and not only will it give us directions for mounting the large cast; but it also decorates our library.<sup>36</sup>

To sum up, we can conclude that for Hamdi Bey the power of the cast of the *Winged Victory* did not rely in its potential of exhibition and in its final destination as a museum object, but in the exchange itself and its transit. Thereby, these plasters used within negotiations schemes can be thought as a corollary of the bids, tensions and ironies that Hamdi Bey himself plotted with the French.

The renown of the *Nike* and its progressive central positioning within the Louvre increased its fame, which allowed its copies to be used as

diplomatic gifts and political exchanges. The circulation of reproductions allowed both Champoiseau and Hamdi Bey to exercise an active political position of lobbying for influence. While the first obtained bureaucratic permits to keep on exploring Samothracian land –and finding almost nothing–, the other managed to question the arrogant French security about the Hellenic heritage and obtain plasters and the certainty that new originals remain in the Imperial Museum. Closer examination to Hamdi Bey's responses to French authorities demonstrate that this agency cannot be reduced to a logic of centre-periphery or dominant-dominated since the Ottoman official acted with a strategy of obtaining resources that would legitimate his own museum and the status of the Ottoman capital. In this way, both French and Ottoman parties gained leverage from the situation. The Ottoman Empire could no longer claim the original *Winged Victory*, but it could make use of its plasters, and, thus, obtain its victory.

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Musée National du Louvre, *Catalogue des Moulages en Vente au Palais du Louvre, Pavillon Daru*. Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1883.

O. R. "Archaeologische Untersuchungen auf Samothrake (Recherches Archéologiques à Samothrace, ouvrage publié, par MM. A. Conze, A. Hauser et G. Niemann. Vienne, Gerold, 1875. 1 vol. in-folio de 92 pages et 72 planches)." *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 266, no. 13 (April 1876): 589-92. Gallica.

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## Endnotes

1. O. R., "Archaeologische Untersuchungen auf Samothrake (Recherches Archéologiques à Samothrace, ouvrage publié, par MM. A. Conze, A. Hauser et G. Niemann. Vienne, Gerold, 1875. 1 vol. in-folio de 92 pages et 72 planches)," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 266, no. 13 (April 1876): 590, Gallica. "Stérile et sans ports, elle n'a jamais eu d'importance ni politique ni commerciale".
2. Salomon Reinach, "La Victoire de Samothrace," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 404, no. 5 (February 1881): 90, Gallica. "N'est plus qu'un nom sur les cartes. ... Aujourd'hui, Samothrace est une des îles les mieux connues de l'Archipel".
3. Charles Champoiseau, "La Victoire de Samothrace," *Revue Archéologique* 21, no. 39 (January 1880): 12. "Mes yeux s'arrêtèrent sur un très beau fragment de marbre blanc, émergeant à peine du sol, à cinquante mètres environ, sud-est, de la stoa, que je reconnus, après l'avoir déterré moi-même, être un sein de femme du plus admirable travail".
4. Quote from Marianne Hamiaux, "La Victoire de Samothrace: découverte et restauration," *Journal des savants* 1, no. 1 (2001): 155, <https://doi.org/10.3406/jds.2001.1643>. "Est presque intact et traité avec un art que je n'ai jamais vu surpassé dans aucune des belles œuvres grecques que je connais".
5. Transportation was in charge of the ship *L'Ajaccio*, which disembarked in Constantinople on 13 May 1863, there, the boxes were dispatched by the Maritime Services of Imperial Couriers to Piraeus and were finally transshipped to *La Gorgone*, which arrived in the French city of Toulon on 24 August 1863. Hamiaux, "La Victoire de Samothrace: découverte et restauration," 163.
6. Letter from Charles Champoiseau to Le Comte de Niewerkerque, 18 December 1863. Archives Nationales de France (ANF hereafter), Archives des Musées Nationaux (hereafter AMN), Département des Antiquités grecques et romaines du musée du Louvre (Série A), 20140044/7. "Je crois cependant que, puisque le Musée du Louvre profite de mes travaux il est juste qu'il m'indemnise de mes dépens".
7. Manuscript "Lire" from Charles Champoiseau to Sa Majesté l'Empereur Napoleon III, 26 December 1864. ANF, AMN, Département des Antiquités grecques et romaines du musée du

- Louvre (Série A), 20140044/7. “C'est une héritage [mince] et si précieux à la fois qu'il serait désolant de le voir se perdre à jamais lorsque rien n'est plus facile que de le sauver. Pour cela il faudrait entreprendre immédiatement et terminer dans le moins de temps possible l'exploration complète de toutes les ruines grecques situées sur le littoral ottoman”.
8. Manuscript “Lire” from Charles Champoiseau to Sa Majesté l'Empereur Napoleon III, 26 December 1864. ANF, AMN, Département des Antiquités grecques et romaines du musée du Louvre (Série A), 20140044/7. “Le Musée du Louvre, si riche sous tous les autres rapports, possédé cependant, peu d'antiquités grecques ... Il serait facile je crois, de rassembler presque tout ce qui reste en ce genre et de doter ainsi, à peu de frais, la France d'une collection laissant bien loin celle si renommée du British Museum”. It is not known whether these words reached Napoleon III or not.
9. Letter from Adrien de Longpérier to Monsieur le Surintendant, 29 December 1863. ANF, AMN, Département des Antiquités grecques et romaines du musée du Louvre (Série A), 20140044/7. “Les voyageurs sont prompts à s'exagérer la valeur des objets antiques qu'ils découvrent”.
10. Letter from Adrien de Longpérier to Monsieur le Surintendant, 11 May 1864. ANF, AMN, Département des Antiquités grecques et romaines du musée du Louvre (Série A), 20140044/7. “L'emballage a été fait avec une déplorable négligence” and “Cette statue dont toute la partie supérieure est brisée est extrêmement belle”.
11. See also: Marianne Hamiaux, “La Victoire de Samothrace: mode d'assemblage de la statue (information),” *Comptes-rendus des séances de l'année - Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres* 142, no. 2 (1998): 365-77, <https://doi.org/10.3406/crai.1998.15867>; Marianne Hamiaux, “La Victoire de Samothrace en restauration: gros plan sur la cuvette d'encastrement,” *Revue Archéologique* 2, no. 58 (2014): 297-302, Cairn; Marianne Hamiaux, Jean-Luc Martinez, and Ludovic Laugier, *La Victoire de Samothrace. Redécouvrir un chef-d'œuvre* (Paris: Musée du Louvre, 2014).
12. Hamiaux, “La Victoire de Samothrace: découverte et restauration,” 167. Hamiaux indicates that the plaster is in the collections of the Petite Ecurie du Roi in Versailles, which gathers the collections from the Louvre, École des Beaux-Arts and the Sorbonne.
13. Musée National du Louvre, *Catalogue des Moulages en Vente au Palais du Louvre, Pavillon Daru* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1883), 9.
14. Wendy M. K. Shaw, *Possessors and possessed: museums, archaeology, and the visualization of history in the late Ottoman Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 91.
15. For an analysis of the Ottoman Imperial Museum also see Wendy M. K. Shaw, “Museums and Narratives of Display from the Late Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic,” *Muqarnas* 24 (2007): 253-79.
16. It established a broad definition of what objects were considered antiques and defined that no individual could claim possession of an antique and it could not be exported without a government permit. Likewise, the Imperial Museum was attributed a monopoly on the authorization and supervision of any excavation in Ottoman territory.
17. Shaw, *Possessors and possessed*, 138.
18. Letter from Charles Champoiseau to Cher Monsieur, 9 November 1887. ANF, AMN, Département des Antiquités grecques et romaines du musée du Louvre (Série A), 20140044/7. “Ce [méfiant] personnage ne veut [illegible] me faire délivrer le firman pour les nouvelles fouilles de Samothrace qu'après avoir acquis la certitude de l'envoi du moulage de la «Victoire». Previous paraphrase: “Peut-être cela nous coûtera t'il encore quelque petit moulage, le Directeur des Musées Ottomans ne faisant jamais rien pour rien, malgré”.
19. Letter from Charles Champoiseau to Cher Monsieur, 23 September 1887. ANF, AMN, Département des Antiquités grecques et romaines du musée du Louvre (Série A), 20140044/7. “Il me semble que le moulage de la Victoire et de ses ailes suffit - La galère piédestal est inutile et aucun musée ne la possède, je crois. On pourra envoyer les ailes détachées et les ouvriers qui Hamdi Bey [illegible] à Constantinople les mettra en place. Peut-être même serait plus

facile d'expédier le corps même en deux morceaux et de détacher les portions flottantes du vêtement”.

20. Letter from Osman Hamdi Bey to Monsieur le Conservateur, 15 December 1887. ANF, AMN, Département des Antiquités grecques et romaines du musée du Louvre (Série A), 20140044/7. “Il ne faudrait pas croire que le Musée dont on m'a fait l'honneur de me confier la direction, consentirait ainsi à se dessaisir des originaux pour procurer des moulages à l'École des Beaux-Arts”.

21. In connection with this, Hamdi Bey's discovery of the Sarcophagus of Alexander at Sidon in 1887 was a key event that meant the provision of a masterpiece of its own to the Ottoman Imperial Museum.

22. Shaw, *Possessors and possessed*, 137.

23. Letter from Osman Hamdi Bey to Monsieur le Conservateur, 15 December 1887. ANF, AMN, Département des Antiquités grecques et romaines du musée du Louvre (Série A), 20140044/7. “Il est pourtant certain que cette école a besoin d'un grand nombre de moulages qui serviraient à répondre parmi les nombreux jeunes gens qui la fréquentent, le sentiment du beau, à les initier à l'histoire de l'art plastique dans l'antiquité”.

24. Letter from Osman Hamdi Bey to Monsieur le Conservateur, 15 December 1887. ANF, AMN, Département des Antiquités grecques et romaines du musée du Louvre (Série A), 20140044/7. “Le British Museum et le Musée de Berlin ont si bien compris cela que le premier a déjà envoyé à l'école tous les moulages des sculptures de Parthénon et le second ceux de la Gigantomachie et ceux des sculptures découvertes à Olympie. Je pouvais donc espérer Monsieur, que le Musée du Louvre considérant tout ce qui lui vient de ce pays, voudrait bien [illegible] s'intéresser à ceux de ses enfants qui s'adonnent aux beaux-arts et faire don de quelques moulages à l'institution naissante dont il s'agit. Mais, puisque telle n'est pas votre manière de voir, Monsieur, nous n'en parlerons plus, d'ailleurs j'ai déjà acheté le Discobole, l'Achille, la Venus, l'écorché de Houdon etc. etc. ”.

25. Letter from Charles Champoiseau to Cher Monsieur, 4 May 1889. ANF, AMN, Département des Antiquités grecques et romaines du musée du Louvre (Série A), 20140044/7.

26. Letter from Antoine Héron to Villefosse a Monsieur le Directeur, 12 June 1889. ANF, AMN, Atelier de moulages du Louvre (série Y), 20150043/4. “M. Champoiseau a besoin de se ménager à Constantinople certaines influences et en particulier celle de Hamdi Bey” and “..lui permettrait d'obtenir plus facilement les autorisations nécessaires pour exécuter des fouilles”.

27. Letter from Charles Champoiseau to Cher Monsieur, 12 July 1889. ANF, AMN, Atelier de moulages du Louvre (série Y), 20150043/4. “Je commencerai ma campagne auprès d' Hamdi Bey”.

28. Copy of decree from A. Fallières, 9 July 1889. ANF, AMN, Atelier de moulages du Louvre (série Y), 20150043/4.

29. See Charles Champoiseau, “Note sur des antiquités trouvées dans l'île de Samothrace: séance du 8 janvier 1892,” *Comptes-rendus des séances de l'année - Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres* 36, no. 1 (1892): 22-5, Persée and Antoine Héron de Villefosse, “Fouilles exécutées par M. Champoiseau à Samothrace,” *Comptes-rendus des séances de l'année - Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres* 35, no. 4 (1891): 269-71, Persée.

30. Hamiaux, “La Victoire de Samothrace: découverte et restauration,” 203-5.

31. Letter from Charles Champoiseau to Cher Directeur, 13 August 1891. ANF, AMN, Département des Antiquités grecques et romaines du musée du Louvre (Série A), 20140044/7. “Le Directeur du Musée Ottoman aura certainement a cœur de satisfaire la France en ce qui concerne les antiquités chaldéennes, afin de prouver que les mesures [prises] contre ma mission ne revêtaient point le caractère d'un parti pris de mauvais vouloir systématique envers tous les archéologues français”.

32. Zeynep Çelik, *About antiquities: politics of archaeology in the Ottoman Empire* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016), 61.

33. Letter from Osman Hamdi Bey to Monsieur Kaempfen, 6 March 1890. ANF, AMN, Atelier de moulages du Louvre (série Y), 20150043/4. “Je vous accusant réception de cette reproduction si parfaite d'un œuvre admirable, je vous prie d'en agréer mes plus vifs remerciements. Je suis bien heureux de voir le Musée Impérial de Constantinople en possession d'un pareil chef-d'œuvre, qui sera l'un des plus beaux ornements de ses salles de moulages”.
34. The production of reductions of the *Nike of Samothrace* is an interesting case because the Atelier de Moulage was not accustomed to selling them but decided to make an exception for this work. In 1887, French goldsmith Lucien Falize (1839-1936) from the firm Bapst & Falize offered a reduction of the sculpture to the Louvre, who took a Mould of it and incorporated into their offer of casts. See Milena Gallipoli, “La victoria de las copias. Dinámicas de circulación y exhibición de calcos escultóricos en la consolidación de un canon estético occidental entre el Louvre y América (1863-1945)” (PhD diss. Universidad Nacional de San Martín, 2021), 92-9.
35. Letter from Albert Kaempfen to Monsieur le Ministre de l'Instruction Publique des Cultes et des Beaux-Arts, 21 December 1892. ANF, Travaux d'art, musées et expositions, F/21/4467. “Hamdy Bey est en relations scientifiques très fréquentes avec M.M. Les Conservateurs des départements antiques, et nous rend, à ce titre, des services que je vous serais très obligé de vouloir bien reconnaître au moyen de cette gracieux concession”. The decree was signed on 9 January 1893.
36. Letter from Osman Hamdi Bey to Monsieur Kaempfen, 22 February 1892. AN, AMN, Atelier de moulages du Louvre (série Y), 20150043/4. “Le petit modèle de la Victoire est arrivé en très bon état et nous l'avons placée dans la salle de notre bibliothèque qui est assez grande. Ce modèle est charmant et non seulement il nous donne des indications pour monter le grand moulage; mais encore il orne notre bibliothèque”.

# The Power Bricolage: the Binondo Pagoda at the Manila Festivities (1825)

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper aims to examine the Binondo pagoda, an ephemeral architecture, part of the royal ceremonies in Manila in 1825. This ceremony celebrated king Ferdinand VII's donation of his portrait to The Philippines as a memento for faithful allegiance at the end of the Latin American independence wars (1810-1825). The Binondo pagoda combines elements that shared a western background but were designed for a Filipino audience. Its design is an overlapping of buildings between western elements like an arch of triumph with atop a three-level pagoda. At first glance, the ephemeral architecture endorses the Spanish throne. However, in a more cautious inquiry, Chinese and sangley symbols propose multi-layer analysis, where the project was interwoven with local elites and their visual traditions. This object proposes a better understanding in the model transits between different parts of the Hispanic world.

## **KEYWORDS**

Fidelity; King Fernando VII; Manila, 1825; Chinese diaspora.

### Introduction

Alonso Martín's engraving of the cover page of Bartolomé Leonardo de Argensola's *Conquest of the Moluccan Islands* in 1609 shows a territorial iconography on top of a crocodile and adorned with a feathered skirt and a cornucopia<sup>1</sup>.



**Fig. 1.** Alonso Martín (grab.) [Cover] in: Bartolomé Leonardo Argensola, *La conquista de las islas Malucas*, Madrid, Imprenta Alonso Martín, 1609

She is marveling at a Spanish coat of arms inscribed on the celestial vault between a scale and the sun. Before rushing into any iconographic reading, this territorial personification is identified with the name “Maluca”. However, the evident resemblance with the iconography of America, codified couple of years earlier by Cesare Ripa, is not accidental. The New World’s rhetorical figure from Ripa’s *Iconologia* begins with America’s description as a “naked woman, of dark color, mixed with yellow”<sup>2</sup>



**Fig. 2.** Cesare Ripa, “América”, *Iconologia*, second edition, 1603.

Probably, this iconography recalls the interest of the Spanish Crown to bring the Asian islands closer to their American dominions in order to have control of the mercantile routes, mainly those related to the trade of spices. Ricardo

Padrón has argued that the Spanish Crown tried to connect Asia and America in a variety of ways in the sixteenth century. The idea to keep America and Asia together was not a mere afterthought; rather, "it was the prevalent tradition at the time" (23)<sup>3</sup>.

In the same vein, it is worth noting that the iconographic image of Manila retains part of this belated notion because the jurisdiction of the Philippines was part of New Spain (which would later become Mexico) during the colonial period. The relationship between Asia and America was emphasized nearly three centuries later, during the Latin American Wars, another critical moment for the Spanish Crown. However, there was a significant difference: instead of serving as an ally to the Americas, Manila positioned itself as the truly faithful to the Crown in distinction to the emerging Latin American nations.

Spanish King Fernando VII's coronation was marked by a one-of-a-kind political scenario: Napoleon invaded Spain and imprisoned his father King Carlos IV and Fernando VII in 1808. This event triggered the Hispanic world's city councils to declare autonomic sovereignty over their vast territories and ultimately led to the Latin American wars of independence (1810–1825). As its final attempt to reclaim its continental empire, Spain participated in military battles of reconquest from 1827–1830.<sup>4</sup> In parallel, Fernando VII's political survival depended on the communicability of his image as a sign of stability.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, my study highlights an ideological campaign carried out via the visual vindication of the king's image through royal ceremonies, statues, ephemeral monuments, and urban plans, intending to resurrect a global empire.

This paper aims to examine part of the collection of twenty-five watercolors and panegyrics that narrates the King portrait entrance to Manila in 1825 in the aftermath of the Latin American independence. Among the watercolors that chronicles the entrance of the portrait, this image is central to the assembling of power performed in the ceremony. There is no doubt that Manila is symbolized in the same way as America.



**Fig. 3.** Tomás Cortés, "Perspectiva del carro del triunfo [...]", acuarela, Manila, 1825, Biblioteca Real de Madrid, España, DIG/ARCH3/CAJ/19 (1-26)

This watercolor presents an allegorical carriage, explicitly made to transport the image of His Majesty. The carriage contained columns with the motto *Non Plus Ultra* and two globes girded by a Crown. A matron symbolizing Manila pointed toward the portrait in the center, and farther ahead, there is a gold-lettered sign that reads, "Loyalty to your King." Manila was marketed as a loyal stronghold in comparison to insurgent viceroyalties, this was also reflected in the narration of the ceremonies named *Días Grandes en Filipinas* written by Antonio Chacón y Conde, he exclaimed:

Si hubiese sido posible elevar en brazos a la Capital Manila en sus Estramuros para ponerla a la presencia de V.M. en aquellos días de regocijos, de lucimiento y de entusiasmo, se presentaría a la vista V.M: la viva semejanza del Parayso del Asia, codiciada por todas la Naciones de las quatro partes del Mundo.<sup>6</sup>

The arrival of a portrait of Fernando VII in Manila occurred at a period of political turmoil; according to Patricio Noguera, a king's image had never garnered as much interest as the one transported in 1825.<sup>7</sup> During the Ancient Regime, the monarch's portrait replaced his physical presence during certain public acts, such as royal oaths. When a new king took the throne, his effigy was comparable to his presence in absence, and it was a mechanism by which people outside Madrid, and especially beyond the Peninsula, could recognize his face (Mínguez 2007; Rodríguez Moya 2003; Cañeque 2004). These festivities celebrated the king's donation of his portrait to the Philippines as a memento for faithful allegiance at the end of the Latin American independence wars. Fernando VII tried to solve the empire's crisis by abolishing the Spanish Constitution of 1812 and restoring absolutism by 1825. Ruth Llobet sheds additional light on the political climate that existed before to the portrait's arrival notably the second constitutional era (1820–1823), which was characterized by numerous conspiracies in Manila<sup>8</sup>. As this panorama shows, the Philippines' allegiance to the Crown had to be fabricated with these artifacts rather than being an indisputable reality. I consider the entry of the portrait of Fernando VII to be one of the most integral visual responses to the justification of the absolutist regime in its colonial domains.

The king's authority in the overseas territories was represented by events honoring significant milestones in the kingdom's history between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. The cities of the Hispanic world were lavishly decorated during those days, but the occasions were not frivolous; rather, the coronation and swearing-in of the monarchs underlined the dynasty's continuity while also symbolically confirming the city's annexation to the Spanish Empire.<sup>9</sup> The Spanish Crown shared a common ritual language that went across geographies and time periods<sup>10</sup>. New technologies of rule, representations of power, and venues for exercising that authority needed to be devised and implemented in order to shape political subjectivities and loyalties in colonial spheres.

Prior studies have demonstrated how the king's portraits served to naturalize remote power overseas, with his image functioning as a sovereign

surrogate.<sup>11</sup> Following the lead of these scholars, this study takes a slightly different approach: rather than focusing on images of the king or what is central to royal festivals, this research focuses on the descriptions and ornaments that appear to be on the margins but actually hold the ritual together. I use the term ornaments to refer to royal banners, luxurious carpets, candles, and other artifacts, which were prevalent in royal ceremonies. At first glance, these pieces appeared to be minor details, yet their operation was crucial to the persuasiveness of the royal apparatus.

Despite the fact that ornamentation is always present in ceremonial festivities commemorating kingdom milestones, only a few scholars have paid attention to meticulous ekphrastic descriptions of ornamentation and functionality within the ceremony. The *Relaciones*, a book that describes each city's festivities became the literary counterpart to these celebrations. The goal of the *Relaciones* was to increase the sense of belonging to a collectivity identified with a monarch by using rhetorical resources to promote a dazzling image of royalty. The *Relaciones* prioritized the meticulous and comprehensive description of the ornaments of ephemeral monuments because they embodied political discourse. The narrative's purpose in and of itself was to stylize the language in order to create a verbal monument comparable to festivities.<sup>12</sup> and emphasize certain elements, such as hyperbole and the detailed description of physical spaces.

In the past, these texts have been excluded from much academic scrutiny due to their elaborate tropological use and ekphrastic qualities. For example, Antonio Bonet Correa, a scholar of royal festivities claims that these texts are “concepts based on cliched formulas. They belong to a very specific genre of hyperbolic and elliptical phrases whose reading would be tiresome due to the monotonous and heavy repetition, without providing surprises. Whoever has read one relation can claim to have read them all”.<sup>13</sup> According to art historian Manuel Romero de Terreros, they “consist of indigestible descriptions in prose and verse [...] they are very tiring to read, lack literary value, and contain data of little historical interest”.<sup>14</sup>

As the above quotations show, ekphrasis on ornaments is widely regarded as a genre devoid of originality. I believe these criticisms have

neglected how the configuration of discourse and festivity function in a hyperbolic key and undervalued the political and social ramifications of using this approach. Christopher Johnson also points out how the entire Hispanic world, including its motto *Plus Ultra*, is built on the functionality of hyperbole. I contend that the royal ceremonies were envisioned as yet another gear in the machinery of symbolic culture.<sup>15</sup> Thus, hyperbole became central to all figurative thought, with its most complete representation of royal festivities, because the trope's goal was to expand the faculties of imagination and conception in such a way that it transformed, rather than recreated, the world as we perceive it in everyday experience.

I believe that excessively repeated patterns with rich ornamentation could be viewed as a strategy. This utterance has made ornaments to be perceived in the background positionality. This paradoxical feature of ornaments, according to Antoine Picon, has a deeper dimension that is indicated in the word's origins. In Latin, *ornamento*, *ornamentum*, has the same etymological root as the verb *ordino*, which means to organize or order. An ornament, in other words, expresses the underlying order of things. Picon observes that another pair of words, *cosmetics* and *cosmos*, confirm the kinship between ornament and order, as both derive from the Greek verb *kosmein*, which means both to adorn and to order.<sup>16</sup> This presentation will try to address the following questions: Why do textual accounts engage in such a meticulous and exhaustive examination of ornaments? What role do they play in the ceremony? Do they have socio-political ramifications?

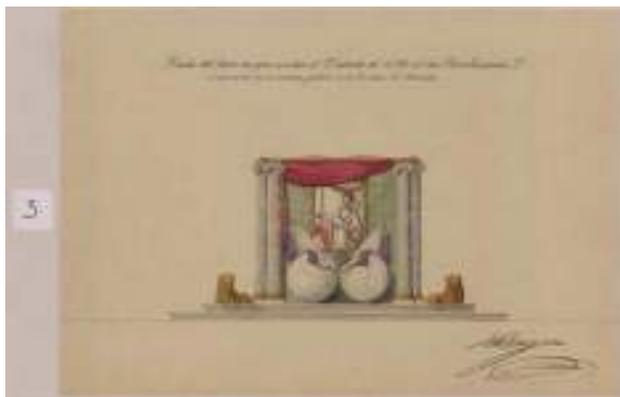
To address these questions, I will examine the plethora of texts and images that describe the Manila's ceremony. The best-known *relación*, *Días Grandes en Manila* was written by ceremonial planner Antonio Chacón y Conde. Also, the military engineering corps in Manila, which was made up of both Spaniards and native artists, painted twenty-five watercolors that recount the entrance of the King's portrait. The festivities, their ornamentation, and the watercolors and eulogies that illustrated them were intended to support the Spanish throne and portray this colonial city as a model of fidelity.

Santiago Salvador Arzinas, a professor at the Real Colegio de San José in Manila, produced one of these panegyric pamphlets defending absolutism's efficacy and divine right to govern for the portrait's entrance:

Y así en virtud de la regia autoridad que reside esencialmente en su persona, debemos respetar su trono como el de Dios, a quien representa; debemos mirarle como destello del poder divino y ministro del Altísimo”<sup>17</sup>

Ernst Kantorowicz has affirmed that the king reflected the duplication of natures that occurred in Christ and represented and imitated the living Christ.<sup>18</sup> Arzinas quoted De Solórzano Pereira—one of the most significant emblem authors of the seventeenth century— as stating that the king was God's vicar on earth. Thus, the return of absolutism was supported by the same mechanisms and emblem books of the past, which were adapted to the new circumstances.

In his speech, Arzinas intended to distance the Latin American events from the archipelago; thus, he began: “Señor. Cuando la Asia oriental escuchando de eco unas funestas noticias que agitaban el reyno español, reposaba amorosamente en el seno de una pacífica paz.”<sup>19</sup> In using the word *echo*, Arzinas referenced and emphasized the remoteness of those disturbances while underscoring the contrast between the “agitation” of the American colonies and the “peaceful peace” that meant belonging to the Crown. The extreme use of tautology in “peaceful peace” emphasized the entire discourse's hyperbolic intention.



**Fig. 4** Antonio Chacón y Conde. *Diseño del trono*, acuarela, Manila, 1825. Biblioteca Real de Madrid, España, DIG/ARCH3/CAJ/19 (1-26)\_

Now, let us examine how the watercolors depicting the 1825 event support similar Ancient Regime political ideologies to Divine Right based in Solominism. The proven mechanisms of symbolic culture aided the restoration of Fernando VII's absolutism.

The royal portrait in the Casa de Renta de Administración de Vino shows the painting resting on a throne made for the occasion, flanked by a double Ionic colonnade. The ceremonial planner Chacón y Conde described: "A los pies del Retrato Real, se colocaron los dos mundos, y más abajo, a los lados del Trono, en su base, dos Leones de una vara de altura, tan bien imitados que parecían naturales".<sup>20</sup>

With this description in mind, I will explain how these watercolors attempted a symbolic transfer of the Hebrew king's throne to Manila in order to confer superior and privileged colonial status on the Philippines. The watercolors used to depict the Manila ceremony evoke the claim of the Spanish Empire as the legitimate heir to Jerusalem's throne.<sup>21</sup> The political doctrine known as Solomonism encouraged the Spanish king to emulate King Solomon of Israel in his three essential virtues: wisdom, prudence, and justice. As Martha Fernández has expressed, Solomonism was also imitated in a material way in the Americas through both Solomon's throne and the architectonic revival of the temple, probably the most notable example in the Americas is the Basilic of Guadalupe in Mexico City <sup>22, 23</sup>. Although not an entirely idiosyncratic iconography, the artistic representation of Solomonism illustrates the new Crown's concerns that fueled the strengthening of its ties with the Pacific.

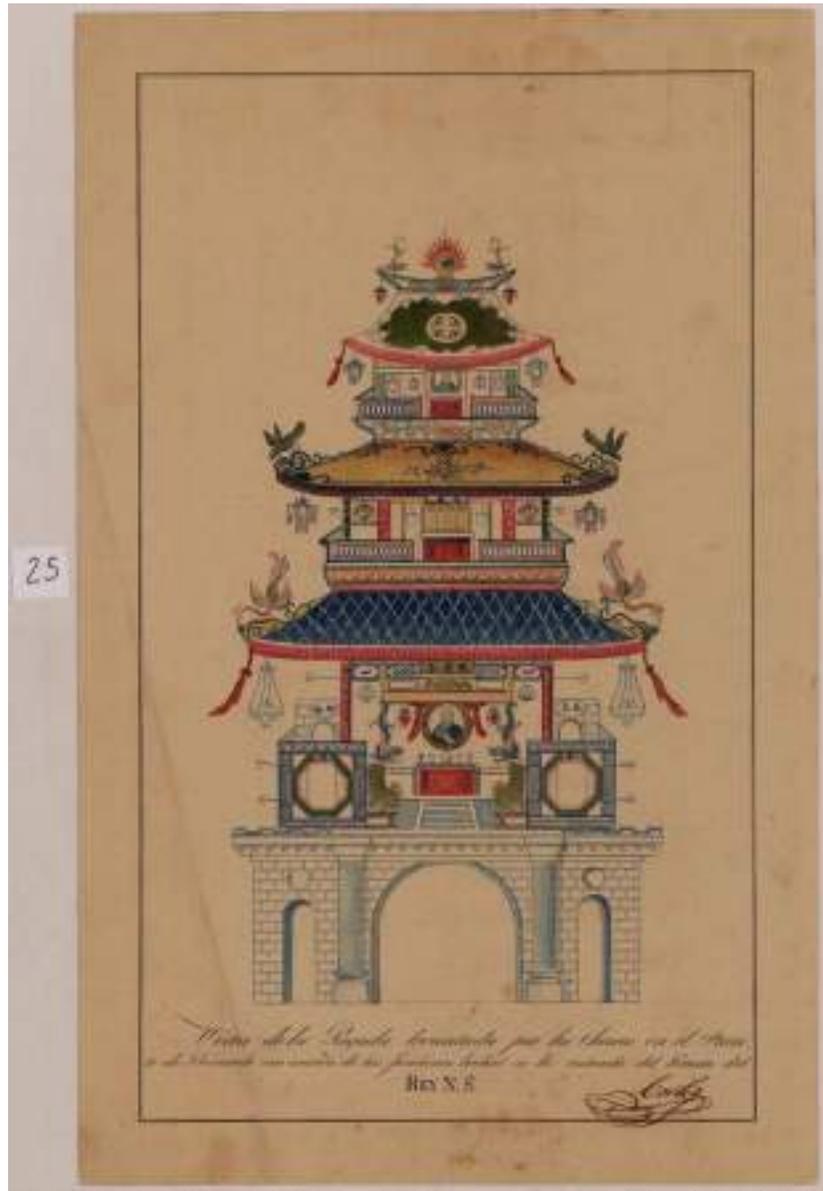
As Victor Mínguez has pointed out, the inheritance of the biblical chair was a recurrent theme in Spanish artwork in the 17th and 18th centuries. The Habsburg dynasty sought to recreate the Kingdom's symbolic legacy, seeking a visual similarity between the Hispanic and Solomonic thrones.<sup>24</sup> Filipino's watercolor composition of the traditional Spanish throne flanked by rampant lions, could be a simplified version of the throne of Solomon. Also, the portrait of Fernando VII included in this watercolor seated in throne recreated a representational apparatus with the claim of maintaining the image of the Global Empire. *The Book of Kings* describes how "the throne of

Solomon had six steps, and its back had a rounded top. On both sides of the seat there were armrests, with a lion standing beside each of them” (1:20). As mentioned above, the title of King of Jerusalem was transferred to the throne’s iconography, widely used by the Spanish Monarchy. Moreover, the standing lions and the Hebrew temple’s chandeliers on either side still remain operative symbolic devices of the Bourbon dynasty today in the Salón del Trono in Madrid.

**The return of the pactum subjectionis:  
Negotiating with the indigenous elites**

Following past practices in royal ceremonies, this strong advocacy for the restoration of absolutism and divine doctrine also sought to renew the colonial pacts with the indigenous elites. The Binondo pagodas were a crucial part of Manila’s royal ceremonies in 1825. Binondo is considered the oldest Chinatown in the world, created by Spanish captain Luis Pérez Dasmariñas in 1594. Binondo had developed into a commercial hub. Located near the Spanish settlement of Intramuros but across the Pasig River, the neighborhood was placed strategically for policing practices. A critical negotiation with a prominent Chinese community of Binondo was evident in the arrival of the King’s portrait. The Pagoda’s artists modernized the classic formulas on Solomon’s throne by including vernacular iconography, such as certain Buddhist themes on the pagodas used in the feast. This resurgence of the Habsburg *pactum subjectionis* was critical in the development of these ephemeral structures.

The two Chinese pagodas -bordering the Binondo neighborhood- were built to answer this call, the design of these pagodas melds Western and Eastern elements, such as a triumphal arch atop a three-level pagoda. At first glance, the ephemeral architecture endorses the Spanish throne: the base is reminiscent of the Castile emblem, and therefore, the pagoda resting on the Spanish state could allude to Spain’s geopolitical dominion over the archipelago.



**Fig. 5.** Tomás Cortés, *Vista del arco del triunfo y pagoda*, acuarela, Manila, 1825, Biblioteca Real de Palacio, España, DIG/ARCH3/CAJ/19 (1-26)\_

However, upon more careful inspection, reveals a multilayered analysis, as the imperial project was interwoven with local elites and their visual traditions. The placement of certain elements (such as Fu Lions, incense, and fruit) connects Buddhist teachings, Eastern representations of power, and their syncretism with the Spanish king. We also can recall the chandeliers as

being part of the *Salon del Trono* in Madrid. The first body of the pagoda is the central part, which is flanked by feline guardians reminiscent of Fu Lions, which were tasked with warding evil spirits away from the thresholds of Buddhist temples, palaces, and imperial tombs.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, these animals' position is reminiscent of the fierce lions that generally appear to be guarding the Hispanic throne.

The ritual of taking an oath before the royal banner and the unveiled portrait on display represents, as Mínguez has asserted, a gesture of blind loyalty to the ruling institution—the Crown surpassing the person of the king in power.<sup>26</sup> The unveiling of the Philippines' oil painting signified the surrogate of royal authority, which was highlighted with the placement of the image, exposed before a tabernacle. For this event, five vessels were organized as a Buddhist offering, and objects such as incense, fruit, and water were typically provided. In the Western tradition, the *Book of Kings* also recalls this feature: “Solomon also ordered all the items for the Lord’s temple: the gold altar and the table on which to place the candlesticks” (7:40-50). Juan Bautista de Villalpando, author of a text examining *El Escorial*, has expressed that the tabernacle’s role is to “immolate, sacrifice, offer in sacrifice,” as a reference to the altar used for burnt offerings.<sup>27</sup> In the image, the offerings are depicted below the portrait of Fernando VII, consequently, they acquire a multicultural dimension, in which both traditions underscore the importance of burning offerings; for example, the *Book of Exodus* refers to the need to build the temple altar to burn thymoma, a fragrant incense (3:35-40).

Additionally, it is significant that the Spanish monarch is placed on the altar, where the Buddha would typically appear, expressing the substitution of the traditional structure of a Buddhist temple<sup>28</sup>. This transposition was highlighted by the Chinese ideograms placed above the portrait, which referenced the honorific place that corresponded to kings. With Solomonic architecture as a reference, the Philippines' tabernacle was framed within the typical structure of a Buddhist temple; on the columns farthest from the portrait, there were inscriptions in Chinese; and on the nearest, there were two green dragons. It is important to note that, even in formal artistic terms, there is an intimate visual comparison between the undulating serpentine

mythical monsters viewed in the columns of the pagoda and the enunciation of the Solomonic column.

My interpretation of Chinese characters in this context painted on the pagoda offers a new understanding of this power interplay. These Chinese phrases are paired stanzas that are part of classical architectures that, depending on the context, can change their semantic meaning. The spring couplets read as follows: “天增歲月 [Although time flies], 春滿乾坤 [The spring comes, and the fortunes will enter the household].” These correspond to the first stanzas of classical extracts related to the arrival of spring. These couplets are typical decorations placed on both sides of a house’s door during the Chinese Lunar New Year. Yet here, these stanzas are related to the entry of the portrait in December 18, 1825. As already mentioned, this time was critical for the relationship between Spain and its colonies. The paired stanzas stressed the Philippines’ political stance as distancing themselves from the colonies in the Americas, underscoring the archipelago’s faithful status despite its remoteness.

The third couplet reads “風調雨順 [The wind and rain come in time],” which indicates the arrival of weather conducive to agricultural harvest, and the fourth couplet reads, “國泰民安 [The country is prosperous and the people are at peace].” The Latin American wars position Manila as the center of peace. Mariano Ricafort, the 61st Governor-General of the Philippines, also refers to this notion in his correspondence when he writes:

El Rey nuestro señor (que Dios le guarde), deseando expresar a estas islas su Real Gratitud por el constante amor con que en medio de las turbulencias y revoluciones que han sufrido sus otros Dominios de América, se han mantenido inalterablemente fieles a su soberanía, y que me puso al frente de estas provincias en este tiempo de necesidad, con la imposibilidad de viajar a ellas para mejor probar su amor y benevolencia, nombró a su primer pintor de cámara don Vicente López para que representara su Real Retrato.<sup>29</sup>

This atmosphere of peace corresponded with a poem that surrounded the Plaza Mayor. The Champs-de-Mars portion of the first stanza likely referred to the internal wars on the American continents. Hence, Manila recognized itself as a bastion of peace and a model for other nations. These stanzas summarized the celebration's detailed proposal:

Frente al Palacio Real: "Aunque en los Campos de Marte / Manila da pruebas de su lealtad / con más gloria y más arte / en los campos ondea hoy / el estandarte de la paz". Al otro lado, frente al Ayuntamiento, "Viva Fernando VII, objeto de nuestro tierno amor / Viva Manila, centro mundial / de lealtad y honor."<sup>30</sup>

The conflicts in Latin America emphasized that, unlike his predecessors, Fernando VII felt the need to flaunt a triumphant attitude, not only as part of a ceremony, but as a necessity. The approach behind these ephemeral architectural elements was to promote an imperial visual project that endorsed a loyal city's construction in the collective imaginary.

The archipelago's vernacular visual discourse merged with these rhetorical devices to emphasize that these colonies were the only ones loyal to the Monarchy underscore the epistemological concerns surrounding the nature of the Hispanic world's latent center-periphery division. The primary function of the visual language of the Pagodas and the other watercolors was to shift the colonial order and describe the borderlands of the Empire as essential to the survival of Hispanic world.

While the broader intellectual debate in nineteenth-century studies centers around Latin American identity and the ideological implications of providing an alternative locus of thinking few studies have investigated how the study of Manila in the same period adds a new dimension to Latin American scholarship by seeking to understand another side of the notion of Latin American Art through examining the artistic response of the Spanish empire borderlands during the Latin American independence and its aftermath. The examination of art objects produced in the Spanish empire borderlands can provide a new and different perspective on established

depictions of power and the “othering” of artistic creations. This perspective acknowledges Spain’ long history of colonialism in the Philippines and other colonial territories like Cuba and Puerto Rico, and assesses these nations’ respective historical and cultural trajectories with Latin America. It also compels us to acknowledge the borders implicit in the nation-state and regional narratives that form the bedrocks of Latin American studies, as well as to consider the structural limits inherent in the formation of area studies more broadly.

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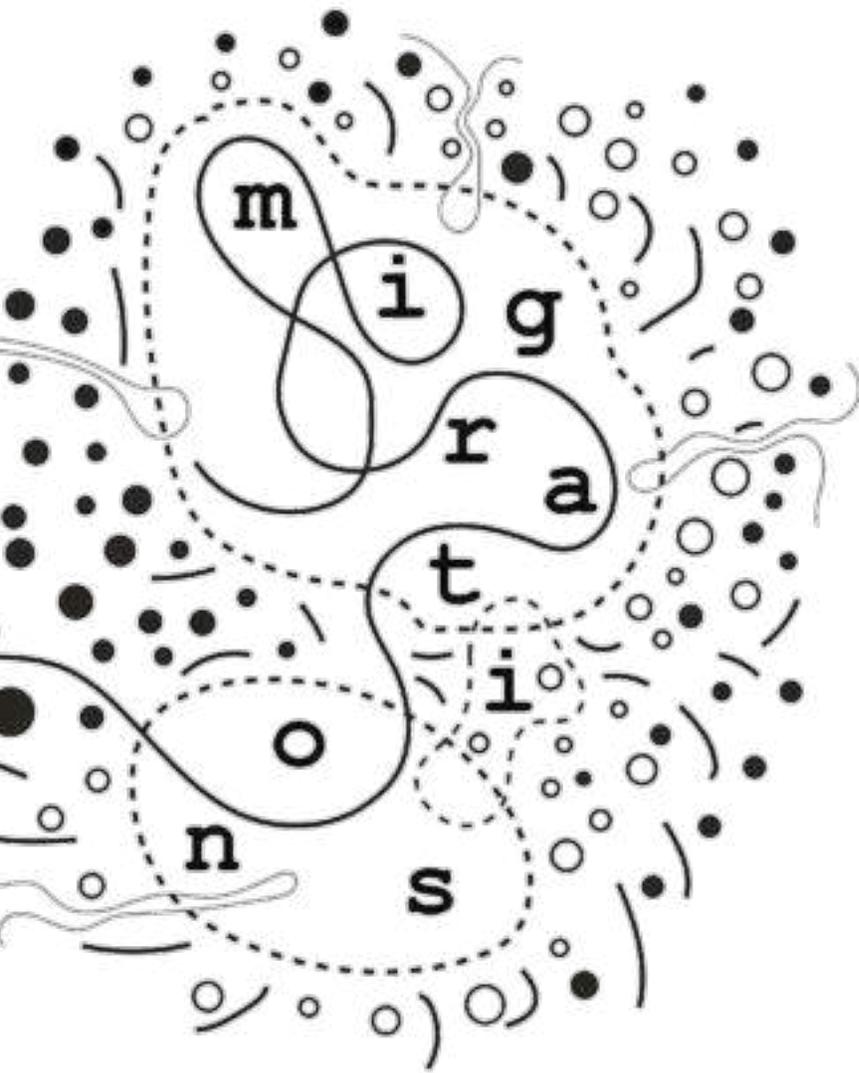
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18. Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's two bodies. A study in medieval political theory*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 35.
19. Arzinas, *Discurso gratulatorio*, 4.
20. Chacón, *Días grandes*, II.
21. The title of King of Jerusalem, still held by the current King of Spain, Felipe VI, is a medieval legacy that refers to the capture of this city by Godfrey of Bouillon after the First Crusade. As Ana de Zabala and María Cruz González comment: "Jerusalem was considered the umbilicus mundi, not only in a spiritual sense, but also geographically: it occupied within the ecumene, considered flat, the central place (199)". After the fall of Jerusalem, the title became an honorific rather than a territorial title, and its hereditary line was divided into several descendants. The Spanish kings inherited it when they added the territory of Naples to the Hispanic Empire. The chronology of the title of Kings of Jerusalem is significant because it was linked to the kings of Aragon, in particular to Fernando the Catholic in 1510 (Zabala and Cruz Gonzalez 207).
22. Martha Fernández, "El salomonismo en la Nueva España: soportes, espacio y urbanismo" in *Acervo Mexicano Legado de Culturas, Arte, Creación y Patrimonio Iberoamericano* ed. Erika Galicia Isasmendi, Fernando Quiles García, Zara Ruiz Romero (Puebla: Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 2017), 20-40.
23. Intellectuals such as Serlio and Guarini championed Solomonic revivals and other concrete architectural forms that attempted to reconstruct the Solomonic temple, such as the Dome of the Rock, the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, and the monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial-
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# Migration and Transculturalidad(e)

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## Session 13



## Session 13

# Migration and Transculturalidad(e): Agents of Transcultural Art and Art History

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**Fig. 1.** Adriana Varejão: Proposta para uma catequese: morte e esquarteramento / Proposal for a Catechesis: Death and Dismemberment, 1993, oil on canvas, 140 x 240 cm. Ph: Eduardo Ortega. Private collection, São Paulo, Brazil. Courtesy Fortes d'Aloia & Gabriel Gallery, São Paulo/Rio de Janeiro.



one 'tile' thus becomes a symbol, not only denoting colonialist domination at sea, but also of the Black Atlantic<sup>2</sup>, in which the 'Middle Passage', the slave trade as forced migration, becomes visible.

Both artists hence address migration and transculturality on three different levels:

Firstly, the violent "migration of forms"<sup>3</sup> marks both works, where baroque forms, the colonial, missionary imagery and *azulejos* are sewn together and display breaking points: the *sutures*<sup>4</sup>.

Secondly, the forcible migration is particularly evident in Rosana Paulino's work, where she places the naked Black body of a woman next to the ship.

Thirdly, the migration of concepts is central to both artists' work, and our examples literally incorporate concepts of cultural anthropophagy. Theodor de Bry's imaginations of the cannibalistic Other in Varejão's work, or the bones, skull and heart in Paulino's work refer directly to this, as does the incorporation of objects and forms introduced with the colonizers and intended to consolidate the cultural hegemony of Europe.

Through this inversion and subversion of "the locus of observation", a deterritorialisation of occidental thought takes place.<sup>5</sup> As we show here alongside the artworks discussed, processes of transculturation and migration can be seen as deeply connected to each other.

The terms migration and transculturality both originate in national and cultural boundaries – inherently unstable as they are – being permanently transgressed, and they register phenomena resulting from cultural contact as well as cultural processes of negotiation. Migration implies the movement of people on a global scale. Along with people, images and aesthetic concepts, artifacts and everyday practices also figure in such migration processes. Accordingly, on the one hand, migration, in particular, stimulates forms of transculturation. On the other hand, establishing a transcultural methodological and theoretical perspective beyond national boundaries allows a more differentiated understanding of culture associated with migrational movements.<sup>6</sup> Phenomena of cultural as well as artistic adoption and 'blending' (mestizaje, creolisation, métissage, hybridity, migration)<sup>7</sup> are dealt with globally and form a particular research area.

As early as the 1920s, and particularly at a time of increasing nationalistic and racist discourse in Europe, which resulted in global migration streams, Latin American theoreticians like Gilberto Freyre in Brazil, José Vasconcelos in Mexico and Fernando Ortiz in Cuba debated phenomena of a connection between migration and transculturation, reflected on them and developed a very early “history of transcultural thought”<sup>8</sup>. It represents counter-positions questioning ethnic as well as cultural fantasies of purity, because its authors understood hybridization and mestizaje precisely as genuinely Latin American and modern.<sup>9</sup> The current theoretical discourse around transculturality thus already has precursors hailing from the first half of the 20th century and developed in the discursive ‘peripheries’.

The Mexican minister of education, José Vasconcelos, imagined the emergence of a utopian *raza cósmica* (*The Cosmic Race*, 1925), in effect, through the successful overcoming of all differences in Mexican history: “La civilización conquistada por los blancos [...] ha puesto las bases materiales y morales para la unión de todos los hombres en una quinta raza universal, fruto de las anteriores y superación de todo lo pasado.”<sup>10</sup> Vasconcelos thus creates a universal ‘mestizo’ ideal based on racial mixture. However, this racialist utopia takes the ‘overcoming’ of independent cultures, which Vasconcelos always thinks of as ethnically determined and self-contained, as its foundation. His concept posits indigenous people as developing into ‘mestizos’ via a process of “latinization/latinización”.<sup>11</sup> The ‘mestizo’ ideal thus excludes racial diversity but creates a mixed, though homogenous, utopia, here conceived as something already achieved. The local context of post-revolutionary Mexico also plays an important role where Vasconcelos conceived of the ‘mestizo’ as embodying nationality in his ethnicity. Yet the ‘mestizo’ in his conception was always imagined as male, a figuration meant to embody Mexican national consciousness<sup>12</sup>. It functions as a cultural-political objective, and the arts were to play a preeminent role via the visualization and interpretation of Vasconcelos’ claims in the form of state-sponsored and state-promoted muralism, together with other visualizing media, such as photography or exhibition practices.<sup>13</sup>

On the one hand, then, Vasconcelos imagined a counterpoint to the U.S. policy of ethnic segregation, as well as to European tendencies already

embodied in the 1920s through ultra-conservative and emerging national-socialist beliefs in racial hierarchies.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, he starts from the idea of 'pure' cultures of origin, the 'mixture' of which at the same time means their overcoming. So, in the ethno-cultural *raza cósmica* envisaged, he imagines a new history-less, post-*tabula rasa* 'race', with no transcultural history of origin any longer perceptible. Hence, it should not be forgotten that José Vasconcelos increasingly sympathized with National Socialism with this line of thought,<sup>15</sup> just as he also espoused the totalitarian-socialist vision of the 'New Man'.

In Brazil, it was Gilberto Freyre's *Casa Grande e Senzala* (literal translation *Manor and Slave Cabin*, published *The Masters and the Slaves* 1933), in particular, that gave international research on transculturality its decisive impetus. Freyre founded the topos of a 'racial democracy' in 1933<sup>16</sup> – the year of the German National-Socialist “Machtergreifung” (assumption of power by the National Socialists) – by contrasting the latter's idea of European-white supremacy with the one of a mixture of European, African and indigenous components which had in fact been practiced in Brazil for centuries. Freyre argued that, among other things, the close relations between slave owners and slaves, even before the official abolition of slavery in Brazil in 1888, as well as their frequent 'intermingling' through interethnic children, prevented the emergence of strict racial categories. Rather, these practices of continued miscegenation have led to the emergence of a *metaraca* – a superordinate ethnic entity beyond categories of distinction.<sup>17</sup>

In the romanticizing tradition of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Marc-Antoine Laugier, he refers to a de-politicized vision of harmony between slave-owners, as social elites, and slaves, as deprived and excluded from society in the concept of the Vitruvian 'Primitive Hut'. He associates an architectural discourse on the 'primitive hut' as common origin of all architecture, as discussed by Laugier in his 1755 *Essai sur l'architecture* (Essay on Architecture), and applies it to harmonize the social reality of extreme contrast of hut and palace in the image of cultural *mestiçagem*.<sup>18</sup>



**Fig. 3.** Frans Post: Brazilian Landscape with a House under Construction, 1655-1660, oil on panel, 70 x 46 cm, Mauritshuis Den Haag.



**Fig. 4.** Indian workers harvesting the crop on a coffee plantation. Coloured lithograph by Deroi, c. 1850, after J. M. Rugendas, lithograph, with watercolour; 24.5 x 30.8 cm, Wellcome Collection.

In Freyre's case, a romantic view of a peaceful coexistence does predominate, however, it is one marking the imperialist claim of the manor house. Freyre begins his book by also referring to picturesque landscape painting and mentions the importance of artists in the construction of Brazil: "As to the iconography of slavery and patriarchal life, that has been masterfully executed by artists of the order of Franz [sic!] Post, Zacharias Wagner, Debret, Rugendas, not to speak of lesser and even untutored ones – draughtsmen, lithographers, engravers, watercolorists, and painters of ex-votos – who from the sixteenth century on (many of them being illustrators of travel books) have reproduced and preserved for us, with emotional power or realistic exactness, intimate household scenes, the life on the streets, and the work of the fields, the plantations and manor houses, and ladies, slaves, and mestizos of various types."<sup>19</sup>

Freyre himself clearly attaches a high documentary value to the pictures. However, the pictures rather emphasize – as illustrated above – an imperial claim to the Brazilian landscape. As Tanja Michalsky has shown through the example of Frans Post, those images are still today widely regarded as eyewitness documents of a given reality – not as pictorial constructions of a colonial imaginary –, because they hardly exaggerate the foreign into the fantastic or exotic, but rather demonstrate the political, social and cultural appropriation of the colonial landscape in a much more subtle and almost imperceptible way using a naturalist style.<sup>20</sup> Rugendas' pictures function in a similar way. Until nowadays various scenes of his *Picturesque Journey* were also used for panoramic wallpapers, so that a European elite could take home the idealized images of distant places in the wallpaper format which apparently extended the view from the interior to the outside.<sup>21</sup> These paintings and graphic works idealize plantation life, in order to defend and promote the system of slavery. In doing so, they negotiate the economic, political, and cultural issues that converged around the slavery question in the decades following the declaration of Brazilian independence in 1822.<sup>22</sup>

It is this, in part, strongly romanticising depiction of slavery and colonialism that also stimulates the main criticism of Freyre's work. The "mixture" of the races is neither unprejudiced nor democratic. Freyre's theoretical and elitist position was never implemented socially; on the

contrary, racially-motivated acts of violence took on genocidal features.<sup>23</sup> The sexual relations between slave owners and female slaves were determined by the existing power relations and more by violence than any racial-democratic impulse in this discourse. Nevertheless, as Christian Kravagna emphasizes, Freyre's positive assessment of the creativity within processes of "racial mixing" (*mestiçagem*) and cultural hybridization, especially in the 1930s, was highly attractive, not only in Brazil but also among Black civil rights activists in the USA.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, the Cuban anthropologist and politician Fernando Ortiz introduces the concept of transculturation (*transculturación*) into the debate: in *Contrapunteo Cubano del tabaco y del azúcar* (1940; *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, 1947), he tells the history of Cuba as a story of complexly interwoven transculturations.<sup>25</sup> Like Freyre, Fernando Ortiz also emphasizes the internal diversity of African, European, Asian and American cultures, so that each group of immigrants was already exposed to what Kravagna describes as a syncretism that influenced them, whilst they also contributed their part to it.<sup>26</sup>

Ortiz constructs an allegorical parallel between 'white' skin color and sweet sugar, while 'black' pairs with "bitter and aromatic"<sup>27</sup> tobacco. He chose the stimulants grown in Cuba as metaphors: "The result has been that this urgent agricultural-chemical nature of the sugar industry has been the fundamental factor in all the demogenic and social evolution of Cuba."<sup>28</sup> Tobacco and sugar are the two Cuban crops forming the cornerstone supporting the colonization of the Caribbean and the mercantilization and capitalization of the plantation economy based on the exploitation of indigenous and Black slaves.<sup>29</sup> Ortiz personifies the plants as agents and attributes character traits and attitudes to them. In his logic, tobacco thereby embodies everything masculine, spiritual, liberal and individual, but, above all, he racializes the two stimulants, e.g.: "Thus tobacco and sugar each have racial connections. Tobacco is an inheritance received from the Indian, which was immediately used and esteemed by the Negro, but cultivated and commercialized by the white man."<sup>30</sup> By contrast, sugar stands for everything feminine, physical, conservative and abstract-formless.<sup>31</sup> Ortiz used these moralizing characterizations to advocate the ethnic 'mixtures', which had made a specifically

Caribbean-Cuban identity formation possible in the first place. In 1940, he stated that cultural mixing processes had taken place in Cuba on so many levels at the same time that a term like *acculturation* was not able to grasp the phenomenon; he thus introduced *transculturación* into the discourse for the first time, both with reference to hybridization processes of cultures and also to describe the specifically Cuban experience.<sup>32</sup>

Ortiz describes not only the forced migration of the people exploited as slaves, and in addition he considers the various migration flows from Europe and how they displaced the indigenous population. He also connects thinking about transculturation and migration: “This is one of the strange social features of Cuba, that since the sixteenth century all its classes, races, and cultures, coming in by will or by force, have all been exogenous and have all been torn from their places of origin, suffering the shock of this first uprooting and harsh transplanting. [...] There was no more important human factor in the evolution of Cuba than these continuous, radical, contrasting geographic transmigrations, economic and social, of the first settlers, this perennial transitory nature of their objectives, and their unstable life in the land where they were living, in perpetual disharmony with the society from which they drew their living.”<sup>33</sup> He continues: “They [the N...] were of different regions, races, languages, cultures, classes, ages, sexes, thrown promiscuously into the slave ships, and socially equalized by the same system of slavery. [...] No other human element has had to suffer such a profound and repeated change of surroundings, cultures, class, and conscience.”<sup>34</sup>

These early theoretical premises on transculturation in Latin America did not remain uncriticized, precisely because they often worked with essentialist attributions and advanced the utopia of a homogenizing fusion of ethnic and cultural differences, thus defusing the violence of power relations nowadays still partly visible<sup>35</sup>. Nevertheless, they underpin a differentiated debate about transculturation and migration still underway in the Latin American region today.

Especially in times of nationalization of the former colonies, the latter were – and still are – particularly exposed to neo-colonial tendencies and had to deal with the consequences of colonialism. The fact of always existing and colonially conditioned 'racial mixtures' had to be positively

valorized in order to demarcate it from European racial discourses, such as the Spanish 'pureza de sangre'<sup>36</sup> and other Eurocentric ethnic purity fantasies, culminating in their scientific legitimization by National Socialism.

Thus, from the mid-1920s until the 1940s, 'contrapuntal' theoretical discourses emerged which understood precisely hybridization and *mestizaje* as genuinely Latin American and modern. By making these early debates on transculturation visible, the paradigm of the Western invention of modernity, with its binary oppositions such as center/periphery, nature/culture, progress/historicity, or modernity/backwardness, is thus brought into question.<sup>37</sup>

These early and mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century metaphorical images of cultural hybridizations are to be understood as consequences of (mainly forced) migrations in the colonial and neo-colonial contexts of the Americas as "arrival region".<sup>38</sup> In this sense, these assumptions of a praise of racial mixture are well capable of inspiring our understanding of transculturality as a concept fundamental to art historical research. To this end, we are here drawing on these assumptions for choosing *transculturalidad(e)* as our title, in both Spanish and Portuguese, in order to highlight the mentioned theoretical, though not un-situated references.

Néstor García Canclini in his seminal monograph from 1989, *Culturas Híbridas. Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad / Hybrid Cultures. Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* then proceeds far beyond such biologicistic conceptions of *mestizaje* to posit a state of hybridity as something always marking modern post-colonial societies, such as Mexico. This is the product of a long history of migration, both of people and of cultural assumptions, so that Canclini understands hybridization as a result of "sociocultural processes in which discrete structures or practices, previously existing in separate form, are combined to generate new structures, objects, and practices. In turn, it bears noting that the so-called discrete structures were a result of prior hybridizations and therefore cannot be considered pure points of origin."<sup>39</sup> Hence, his concept of hybridization transfers human migration and ethnic 'mixture' into the cultural sphere.

In this respect, newer theoretical discourses in and on Latin America borrow from such migrational processes as fundamental to the theoretical and epistemological conception of the subcontinent: Decolonial Theory

questions the primacy of Western epistemologies and unfolds its foundation in the concept of colonialism, in this context developing ‘Border Thinking’ or ‘pensamiento fronterizo’. This discourse theorizes coloniality as an all-encompassing dispositive as well as a paradigm intrinsically linked to conceptions of modernity as it – coloniality – represents “the darker side of modernity”<sup>40</sup>. However, it also displays re-essentializing tendencies which require critical evaluation. Following the radical, feminist writer and artist Gloria Anzaldúa, Border Thinking offers a way to change epistemological perspectives to re-think and re-combine binary contrasts, synthesizing notions of inside and outside of borderlines, and challenging the denial of ambiguity.<sup>41</sup>

Borders may be understood as sites where migration culminates with nationalisms. Borders do not necessarily have to be demarcated lines separating one territory from another; they can be contiguous regions connecting (forcefully) divided geographies, cultures and people, and they can also metaphorically denote the digital or artistic boundaries, as these are perpetually debated in the arts and via various cultural practices. Indeed, geography is intrinsically related to migration, and Latin America is historically a continent of immigration, emigration and internal or domestic migrations, the accelerated flux of people from one geography to another, crossing third and fourth geographies.

In the Latin-/American context, especially the *frontera*, the US-American-Mexican border, has become emblematic of contemporary migrant movements, and a source of both real politics and artistic positions concerning the mechanisms of inclusion or exclusion. The emblem of the *frontera* embodies differing, even antagonistic, meanings: on the one hand, the violence against migrants and the maintenance of unjust power relations as a means of social security and, on the other, internal freedom, homogeneity and liberty.

Estudio Teddy Cruz + Fonna Forman have called this borderline the “political equator”: “dividing the global South and North, the developing and developed worlds”,<sup>42</sup> a setting for the abrupt and often violent encounters of geographies, cultures, stereotypical ascriptions and wealth and poverty. The pictures conveyed by the media coverage of the migrants’ and border area residents’ struggles are contrasted and broadened by an increasing number

of artistic modes of expression addressing the subject both north and south of the “political equator”<sup>43</sup>. The visual arts play an important role in the construction of migration-related narratives that deviate from its conceptualization as a problem by, much rather, focussing on the diversity of the phenomenon. In this vein, migration-related art works visibilize realities and experiences often suppressed in the official and social media representations and often tend to even overlap with activist work. In this respect, artists gain special relevance in debating imageries and act as agents<sup>44</sup> in the field of transculturality and migration. They are tied to power structures, but artists can also create spaces for subversive empowerment structures: geographies, politics and aesthetics are thus intrinsically interwoven.

In this chapter, we approach the topic of migration, borders and transculturalidad(e) from an art historical point of view dealing with artistic and visual material. We reflect the CIHA panel 13 contributions and debates by asking: What do such transcultural approaches mean for art history? In effect, they concern the fundamentals of the discipline, given that the development of art per se received impulses in transcultural contexts. European art, for example, cannot be viewed in isolation from other parts of the world, but evolved in an exchange with them. The processes whereby cultures interact demonstrate how the so-called “Others” appear not only as the subject of European art, thus conforming to European perspectives, but also, in their turn, develop their own perspectives on that art, in part reflecting, yet also ironizing, European views. Viktoria Schmidt-Linsenhoff points out that the critical approaches taken by art history do not simply aim to include individual artifacts and works not yet been taken into consideration, such as “African masks or Chinese cloth painting[,] in the canon”; rather, it is “about reflecting on the criteria of their exclusion”.<sup>45</sup> Hence, it is not only a matter of “the material expansion of the subject areas of art history”, “but also the self-reflexive expansion of the perspective in which we perceive our cut-out”.<sup>46</sup>

Monica Juneja emphasizes how “a transcultural perspective postulates that concepts – such as modernity – do not necessarily hold on to their original interpretive frameworks during their global wanderings, but rather de-provincialize, as they always experience processes of translation

and reconfiguration in new contexts.”<sup>47</sup> Transculturality is thus also significant for our critical discourse in today's art history and is closely interwoven with questions of migration.

The contributions of this session connect concepts of transculturality and migration with artistic practice from a variety of perspectives:

Mrinalini Sil explores a set of 18<sup>th</sup>-century Bengal Ganjija cards in a British art collection and the meandering paths that led them into Robert Clive's house. The contribution shows how the collector functions as an active agent of transculturation. Starting from this, Sil develops her approach of a “courtly cosmopolitanism”, she also revalidates the notion of cosmopolitanism itself, to identify it as a non-hierarchical process of cultural exchange, in which forms and practices with diverse geographic origins met and therefore must be grasped simultaneously.

Hanna Büdenbender analyzes the US-Mexico borderlands in photography, beginning with the marking of the borderline after the US-Mexican war in mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century when photography was coming of age as a scientific tool as well as an artform. She compares the historical photography with contemporary artistic photography dealing with the border today, as the latter bears the potential to de-stabilize this demarcation line.

Aneliese Tietz traces the entangled realities of geographies, politics and aesthetics by focusing on displacement and forced migration in Latin America alongside the photographs and performances of Paulo Nazareth and Libia Posada. They deal with Othering practices in visual culture by making such strategies visible in an attempt to subvert them. Tietz reads the artists' actions as small transgressions performed by marginalized people, by those who have no hegemonic power. She argues that these actions deliberately represent displacement as an artistic tactic of micro-resistance.

The artist and art scholar Brandon Sward problematizes site-specificity and the “location of culture”, that is, the situatedness of modern and contemporary ‘global’ art where he minutely analyzes performances by the Asco art collective in the United States of the 1970s.

Both Lisa Andrew and Franciska Nowel Camino deal with textile practices and their transcultural entanglements. Lisa Andrew proceeds from her artistic research to elaborate the multi-cultural historical threads nowadays coming together in works using Philippino piña cloth and displays

her way of extending these threads, whilst also disentangling them. Pre-colonial knotting practices figure in Franciska Nowel Camino's analysis of their treatment by two artists: Jorge Eduardo Eielson and Cecilia Vicuña both relate their contemporary artistic knotting to the function of the ancient Andean *quipus* as communications media. Nowel Camino examines such work to theorize on the interaction of text and textile.

Joseph Hartman offers an art historical and theoretical perspective on hurricanes as Caribbean climate phenomena powerfully bringing together previously disparate elements. He advances the term "hurricane hybridity" to describe artistic phenomena reflecting transculturation and migration in that region.

Mona Schieren's approach demonstrates how transcultural thinking and perception influence not only art but also art history. She traces the construction of Asian-influenced aesthetic regimes in the West and shows how the artworks themselves are transculturally entangled by notions of 'East' and 'West', whilst critically engaging with the theories of Ernest Fallosa and Okakura Kakuzō. Using the example of the American artist Agnes Martin, she shows how her paintings deploy the specific aesthetic and modes of an Asianistic pictorial culture.

Liisa Kaljula brings together Soviet visual culture both east and west of the so-called Iron Curtain to demonstrate overlappings in the style and techniques of Pop Art and Sots Art. She refers to the Estonian cultural semiotician Yuri Lotman, who has described border cultures as transcultural blocks able to translate ideas from one culture into the other, and she specifically investigates the role of the two artists Andres Tolts and Leonhard Lapin within such a border culture.

The contributions to the session "Migration and Transculturalidad(e): Agents of Transcultural Art and Art History", negotiate the multi-layered forms of transcultural entanglements and migratory processes, as shown above with the example of Varejão and Paulino, in different ways and with different weighting.

In the context of theorising transculturality, we have shown how closely interwoven it is with the wanderings of people, concepts, aesthetics and artworks themselves. Such concepts of transculturalidad(e), a term that is itself hybrid, accordingly assume a permanent transgression of national

and cultural borders, with their inherent instability, and focus on phenomena of cultural contact and 'mixing' as well as cultural negotiation processes. The chapter thus aspires to elaborate entangled art histories concerning historical as well as geographical aspects, and socio-political or aesthetical issues.

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### Endnotes

1. Hans Staden [1548-1550], *Brasilien: die wahrhaftige Historie der wilden, nackten, grimmigen Menschenfresser-Leute*, ed. Gustav Faber (Stuttgart: Thienemann, 1984).
2. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic – Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993). See also Haus der Kulturen der Welt in cooperation with Tina Campt and Paul Gilroy (eds.), *Der Black Atlantic* (exh. cat. Berlin: Haus der Kulturen der Welt Berlin, 2004).
3. Roger Buerge, "The Migration of Form," *documenta 12 Kassel*, 2007, <https://www.documentar12.de/en/aktuelles/aktuelles-inhalte/the-migration-of-form.html> (20.05.2022).
4. The term *suture* comes from psychology and was applied to film theory by Kaja Silverman (*The Subject of Semiotics*, Oxford, London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1983). Silvia Eiblmayr applies the term to 20th century art (Silvia Eiblmayr, *Suture – Phantasmen der Vollkommenheit*, exh. cat., Salzburg: Salzburger Kunstverein, 1994, 3–16).
5. Silviano Santiago, "A ficção contemporânea e visionária de Adriana Varejão: Para uma poética da encenação." / "The Contemporary and Visionary Fiction of Adriana Varejão: Towards a Poetics of Mise-en-Scène", in *Adriana Varejão – Entre Carnes e Mares/Between Flesh and Oceans*, bilingual edition, ed. Isabel Diegues, trans. Stephen Berg (Rio de Janeiro: Cobogó, 2009), 73-83, 85-96. See also Irina Hiebert Grun, *Strategien der Einverleibung. Die Rezeption der Antropofagia in der zeitgenössischen brasilianischen Kunst* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2020), 124 (own translation).
6. See Cigdem Bözdog and Johanna Möller, "Transkulturalität, Migration und Diaspora," in *Handbuch Cultural Studies und Medienanalyse*, eds. Andreas Hepp et al. (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2015), 332-342, 336.
7. See Natascha Ueckmann, "Hybriditätskonzepte und Modernekritik in Lateinamerika," in *Dazwischen. Reisen – Metropolen – Avantgarden. Festschrift für Wolfgang Asholt*, eds. Wolfgang Klein, Walter Fähnders and Andrea Grewe (Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 2009), 507-529.
8. Christian Kravagna, *Transmoderne. Eine Kunstgeschichte des Kontakts* (Berlin: b\_books, 2017).
9. Cf. Ueckmann, "Hybriditätskonzepte und Modernekritik," 512ff. Cf. Mary Louise Pratt, "Modernity and Periphery. Toward a Global and Relational Analysis", in *Beyond Dichotomies. Histories, Identities, Culture, and the Challenge of Globalization*, ed. Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 21-47.
10. José Vasconcelos, *La Raza Cósmica* (Mexiko-City: Espasa-Calpe Mexicana, 1948), 16, engl.: "The civilization developed and organized in our times by the whites has set the moral and material basis for the union of all men into a fifth universal race, the fruit of all the previous ones and amelioration of everything past." José Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race*, bilingual edition (Baltimore/London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997, 9. See Thomas Benjamin, "Rebuilding the Nation," in *The Oxford History of Mexico*, eds. Michael C. Meyer and William

- H. Beezley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); William H. Beezley, "Creating a Revolutionary Culture: Vasconcelos, Indians, Anthropologists, and Calendar Girls," in *A Companion to Mexican History and Culture*, ed. William H. Beezley (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 420-438, 421-422.
11. Vasconcelos, *La Raza Cósmica*, 25: "Los mismos indios puros [...] están latinizados." engl.: "Even the pure Indians are Hispanized, they are latinized." Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race*, 16.
12. Desmond Rochfort, *Mexican Muralists. Orozco- Rivera- Siqueiros* (London: Laurence King, 1993), 83. See further Tace Hedrick, *Mestizo Modernism. Race, Nation and Identity in Latin American Culture, 1900-40* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003); Stacie Widdifield, *The Embodiment of the National in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexican Painting* (Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 1996).
13. See exemplary: Rochfort, *Mexican Muralists*; Matthew Affron, Mark A. Castro, Dafne Cruz Porchini and Renato González Mello, eds., *Paint the Revolution: Mexican Modernism, 1910-1950*, exh. cat. Philadelphia Museum of Art (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2016); Mary Coffey, *How a Revolutionary Art Became Official Culture: Murals, Museums, and the Mexican State* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2012); Tatiana Flores, *Mexico's Revolutionary Avant-gardes: From Estridentismo to ¡30-30!* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2013); Anna Indyk-López, *Muralism without Walls: Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros in the United States, 1927-1940* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009); Stephanie Lewthwaite, *A Contested Art: Modernism and Mestizaje in New Mexico* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015); Rick A. López, *Crafting Mexico. Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State after the Revolution* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2010); Harper Montgomery, *The Mobility of Modernism. Art and Criticism in 1920s Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017); Dafne Porchini, Claudia Garay Molina and Mireida Velázquez Torres, eds., *Recuperación de la memoria histórica de exposiciones de arte mexicano (1930-1950)* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2016); Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis, eds., *The Eagle and the Virgin. Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2006).
14. See also José-Antonio Orosco, "Jose Vasconcelos, White Supremacy and the Silence of American Pragmatism," *Inter-American Journal of Philosophy* 2, no. 2 (December 2011), 1-13, accessible online: [https://ijp.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/v2i2-Orosco-Jose\\_Vasconcelos\\_White\\_Supremacy\\_and\\_the\\_Silence\\_of\\_American\\_Pragmatism.pdf](https://ijp.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/v2i2-Orosco-Jose_Vasconcelos_White_Supremacy_and_the_Silence_of_American_Pragmatism.pdf)
15. See I. Bar-Lewaw, "La Revista Timón y la Colaboración Nazi de José Vasconcelos," in *Actas del Cuarto Congreso Internacional de Hispanistas*, vol. 1, ed. Eugenio Bustos Tovar (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1982), 151-156; Héctor Orestes Aguilar, "Ese olvidado nazi de nombre José Vasconcelos," *Istor, Revista de Historia Internacional*, año 8, núm. 30, (2007), 148-157, accessible online: [http://www.istor.cide.edu/archivos/num\\_30/coincidencias.pdf](http://www.istor.cide.edu/archivos/num_30/coincidencias.pdf); see also William H. Beezley, "Creating a Revolutionary Culture: Vasconcelos, Indians, Anthropologists, and Calendar Girls," in Beezley, *A Companion to Mexican History and Culture*, 420-438, 421-422.
16. Cf. Maria Lúcia Pallares-Burke, "Gilberto Freyre and Brazilian Self-Perception," in *Racism and Ethnic Relations in the Portuguese-speaking World*, eds. Francisco Bethencourt and Adrian Pearce (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 113-132.
17. Though he debated these standpoints much earlier, Freyre did not introduce the term, *além-raça*, until 1976: Gilberto Freyre, "Aspectos da influência africana no Brasil," *Cultura – MEC* 6,23 (out./dez. 1976), 6-19 [re-published online: Gilberto Freyre, "Aspectos da influência africana no Brasil," *Revista del CESLA* 7 (2005), 369-384, Redalyc, <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=243320976021>. Cf. Michael Hanchard, *Orpheus and Power: The Movimento Negro of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, Brazil, 1945-1988* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 44-47.

18. See Kirsten Wagner, "Raumordnung und Körperordnung. Zum historischen Verhältnis von Architektur und Anthropologie," in *Architektur in transdisziplinärer Perspektive: Von Philosophie bis Tanz. Aktuelle Zugänge und Positionen*, eds. Susanne Hauser and Julia Weber (Bielefeld: transcript, 2015), 223-256.
19. Gilberto Freyre, "Preface to the Second English-Language Edition of *The Masters and the Slaves*," in Gilberto Freyre, *The Masters and the Slaves* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press 1986), xviii-lxx, liii.
20. Tanja Michalsky, *Projektion und Imagination. Die niederländische Landschaft der Frühen Neuzeit im Diskurs von Geographie und Malerei* (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink 2011), 318.
21. See Jean Julien Deltil, *Les Vues du Brésil* (Zuber, Rixheim/Alsace), 1829, panoramic wallpaper, printed in colours and finished by hand, the complete set of thirty panels, unstretched, each panel 400 x 53cm. Extreme width of design 1590cm, after the illustrations by Johann Moritz Rugendas, in Zuber: Collection Décors Panoramiques imprimés la planche, <https://www.zuber.fr/fr/catalogues/decors-panoramiques-1> (last accessed May 4, 2022).
22. Erika Kohlen, *A Romanticism of Slavery and the Plantation Economy. Coffee Gatherers in Rio*, by Johann Moritz Rugendas, at: <https://library.brown.edu/create/modernlatinamerica/chapters/chapter-11-brazil/moments-in-brazilian-history-2/a-romanticism-of-slavery-and-the-plantation-economy/> (last accessed May 4, 2022).
23. Stefan Rinke and Frederik Schulze, *Kleine Geschichte Brasiliens* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2013). German settlers in particular also have played an essential part in the violent history of the widespread 'extermination' of indigenous groups.
24. Christian Kravagna, "Transkulturelle Anfänge: Dekolonisation, Transkulturalismus und die Überwindung der 'Rasse,'" in *Transmoderne*, 85-100, 88. Nevertheless, Freyre was broadly criticized, see: Thomas E. Skidmore, *Black into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974); Michael Hanchard, *Orpheus and Power: The Movimento Negro of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, Brazil, 1945-1988* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); France Winddance Twine, *Racism in a Racial Democracy: The Maintenance of White Supremacy in Brazil* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997); John F. Collins, *Revolt of the Saints: Memory and Redemption in the Twilight of Brazilian Racial Democracy* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2015).
25. Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint. Tobacco and Sugar* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 98ff.
26. Kravagna, "Transkulturelle Anfänge," 95.
27. Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, 6.
28. Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, 33f.
29. See Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, 56: "[T]he production of sugar was always a capitalistic venture because of its great territorial and industrial scope and the size of its long-term investments. Tobacco, child of the savage Indian and the virgin earth, is a free being, bowing its neck to no mechanical yoke, unlike sugar, which is ground to bits by the mill. This has occasioned profound economic and social consequences." Cf. Sven Beckert, "Das Barbados-Prinzip," *Die Zeit* (03/2021), 17; see further Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton. A Global History* (New York: Vintage Books, 2015); Gerald Horne, *The Apocalypse of Settler Colonialism: The Roots of Slavery, White Supremacy, and Capitalism in Seventeenth-Century North America and the Caribbean* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2017); Zach Sell, *Trouble of the World – Slavery and Empire in the Age of Capital* (Chapel Hill: The University of Carolina Press, 2021); Bernd Hausberger, ed., *Die Verknüpfung der Welt. Geschichte der frühen Globalisierung vom 16. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert* (Wien: Mandelbaum-Verlag, 2015). See also the older Manuel Moreno Fraginals, *The Sugarmill. The Socioeconomic Complex of Sugar in Cuba, 1760-1860* (New York et al.: Monthly Review Press, 1976).
30. Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, 57. See also in Spanish: Fernando Ortiz, *Contrapunteo Cubano del Tabaco y el Azúcar. Advertencia de sus Contrastes Agrarios, Económicos, Históricos y*

- Sociales, su Etnografía y su Transculturación*, ed. Enrico Mario Santí (Madrid: Cátedra, 2002 [1964]).
31. Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, 58ff.
32. As he claims himself: "I have chosen the word transculturation to express the highly varied phenomena that have come about in Cuba as a result of the extremely complex transmutations of culture that have taken place here, and without a knowledge of which it is impossible to understand the evolution of the Cuban folk, either in the economic or in the institutional, legal, ethical, religious, artistic, linguistic, psychological, sexual, or other aspects of its life." (Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, 97ff., 98).
33. Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, 100-101.
34. Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, 101-102.
35. See Paulo César Ramos and Siri Völker, "Police Violence Against Black People Is on the Rise in Brazil," *GIGA Focus Latin America* 5 (2020), <https://www.giga-hamburg.de/en/publications/giga-focus/police-violence-against-black-people-is-on-the-rise-in-brazil> (last accessed May 4, 2022); David Treece, "The Challenge for Anti-Racists in Bolsonaro's Brazil," *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies* 27, no. 2 (2021), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14701847.2021.1944030>; Reighan Gillam, *Visualizing Black Lives. Ownership and Control in Afro-Brazilian Media* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2022). Constance Malleret, "Outrage in Brazil as mentally ill Black man dies in police car 'gas chamber,'" *The Guardian* (May 26, 2022), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/26/brazil-mentally-ill-black-man-dies-gas-police-car> (last accessed June 1, 2022).
36. The concept of *limpieza de sangre* (blood purity) was a system of discrimination in early modern Spain and Portugal which was established during the Reconquista era in order to differentiate "Old Christians" from those with Jewish or Muslim ancestors: the categories of race and religion were paralleled in this conception which was also exported to the American colonies; cf. María Elena Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions. Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008); Nikolaus Böttcher, Bernd Hausberger and Max S. Hering Torres, eds. *El peso de la sangre: limpios, mestizos y nobles en el mundo hispánico*. (Mexico-City: El Colegio de México, 2011).
37. Cf. Santiago Castro-Gómez, "Teorías sin disciplina: Latinoamericanismo, modernidad, globalización. Prolegómenos a una crítica poscolonial de la razón," (1998), 1-21, <http://www.periodismo.uchile.cl/talleres/teoriacomunicacion/archivos/teoriassindisciplina.pdf> (last accessed May 4, 2022); Cornelia Sieber, *Die Gegenwart im Plural. Postmoderne/postkoloniale Strategien in neueren Lateinamerikadiskursen* (Frankfurt/M.: Vervuert, 2005), 111; Beatriz Sarlo, *Una modernidad periférica: Buenos Aires 1920 y 1930* (Buenos Aires: Nueva Visión, 1988).
38. See Burcu Dogramaci et al., eds., *Arrival Cities - Migrating Artists and New Metropolitan Topographies in the 20th Century* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2020).
39. Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures. Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 1995) [span. *Culturas Híbridas. Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad*, 1989], xxv.
40. Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2011).
41. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/ La Frontera •® The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lut e Books, 2012 [1987].
42. See Justin McGuirk, *Radical Cities. Across Latin America in Search of a New Architecture* (London: Verso, 2014), 434. On architect Teddy Cruz, see: <https://visarts.ucsd.edu/people/faculty/teddy-cruz.html> (last accessed May 4, 2022);
43. See for example the many art and design proposals dealing with the *frontera* in Ronald Rael, *Borderwall as Architecture. The Divided States of North America*, in *Borderwall as Architecture. A Manifesto for the U.S.-Mexico Boundary*, ed. Ronald Rael (Berkeley, CA:

University of California Press, 2017); or Katherine G. Morrissey and John-Michael H. Warner, eds., *Borderspaces. Visualizing the U.S.-Mexico Frontera*. (Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 2018).

44. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Talk. Interview with the Editors (29 OCTOBER 1993)," in *The Spivak Reader, Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, eds. Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean (New York: Routledge, 1996), 287-308; and Simone Bignall, *Postcolonial Agency: Critique and Constructivism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

45. Viktoria Schmidt-Linsenhoff, "Kunst und kulturelle Differenz oder: Warum hat die kritische Kunstgeschichte in Deutschland den postcolonial turn ausgelassen?" in *Schwerpunkt: Postkolonialismus. Kunst und Politik. Jahrbuch der Guernica-Gesellschaft* 4 (2002), 7-16, 11. (own translation to English)

46. *Ibid.*

47. German original: "Eine transkulturelle Perspektive postuliert, dass Begriffe – wie etwa Moderne – auf ihrer globalen Wanderschaft nicht unbedingt an ihren ursprünglichen Deutungsrahmen fest halten, sondern sich entprovialisieren, da sie in neuen Zusammenhängen stets Prozesse der Übersetzung und Neukonfigurierung erleben." (own translation to English) Monica Juneja, "Kunstgeschichte und kulturelle Differenz: Eine Einleitung," *Kritische Berichte* 40, 2 (2012), 6-12, 9, <https://journals.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/index.php/kb/article/view/10766> (last accessed May 4, 2022).

# Transits on the Margins: Art and Migrations in Latin America

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper intends to discuss productions of two artists: Libia Posada and Paulo Nazareth, in artistic practices that evoke the idea of displacement and migration in Latin America. In both artists, migration is related to a process of violence. Libia Posada (Cardinal signs, 2008) talks about the forced migrations of women in Colombia and tries to remember these invisible paths. The action of recording the paths of these immigrants brings us the image of people in a situation of absolute vulnerability. Thus, the artist's action makes visible an invisible path, with a strategy of producing testimonies. In Paulo Nazareth (America News, 2011-2012), the artist proposes to travel the route between Brazil and the United States only with hikes and occasional rides, because he understands that as a Latin American subject this is the only way to access the USA. In this action, there is also a relationship with the testimony, because along the way the artist makes a long photographic record and feeds a blog with his travel notes. From these artistic experiences, we propose to discuss the migratory movement in Latin America, which, in general, is linked to traumatic moments, such as dictatorships, violence, armed conflicts, and inequalities. Thus, talking about migration is a way of approaching an erased history of marginal people. It seems that in these actions, art becomes a possible space for elaborating boundary situations that escape the official narrative of Latin America.

## **KEYWORDS**

Latin American Art; Migration; Contemporary Art; Paulo Nazareth; Libia Posada.

The history of Latin America is intrinsically related to migratory movements, both those motivated by dreams and hopes, as well as forced movements. The arrival of Europeans to the Americas, the enslaved labor force brought from the African continent, and more recently, the outflows of political exiles from the numerous armed conflicts and military dictatorships in Latin America are some examples. Even today, migration in Latin America is an urgent issue, mainly motivated by political, economic, and natural issues. And in addition, the escalation of violence against Latin Americans who enter US territory after the adoption of a zero-tolerance policy against undocumented immigrants and the proposal to build a wall on the US-Mexico border. The idea of building a physical barrier between the two countries would only serve to reinforce an anti-immigration policy that has been in effect for a long time in US territory and that has forged an entire imagination about the Latino figure, as someone who needs to flee their country and find better opportunities.

It is always valid to reiterate that the issue of migration in Latin America is imbricated in a logic of power, as it is only a certain type of immigration that is not desired. It is also valid to say that the invention of Latin America' was forged with the use of force and violence, which imposed the weight of a European tradition, erased other traditions (indigenous and African), and in order to maintain itself as a hegemonic force it had to rely on in conservatism - in stagnation<sup>2</sup>, instead of the movement, even if it was the movement that built the territory of Latin America itself. It is an absolute paradox that even today the figure of the immigrant is strongly marked by stereotypes and that they face a situation of vulnerability within a territory that was built from migratory flows.

The Colombian artist Libia Posada presents us with yet another possibility for migratory flows in Latin America, forced migration within national boundaries. The exile or one who migrates for compelling reasons cannot be compared with one who travels freely. At this point, it would be important to emphasize that if there is any romanticism associated with discussions about the figure of the immigrant, who sees in it the ideal of the individual who seeks a better life, this idealization cannot be applied to the

type of migration that Libia Posada discusses. As the artist herself explains forced migration is not traveling.

When traveling, it is usual for the traveler to determine in advance a route to follow, which is marked both at the starting point, as well as the places of passage and the point of arrival. Traveling by force implies, however, opening paths or describing urgent routes, difficult to locate, recognize, understand, and see, not only in the memory of those who flee but in that representation of the territory, called a map, which - as we know - implies a series of prejudices and exclusions from places and experiences.<sup>3</sup>

In the photographic series *Cardinal signs*, from 2008, the artist decided to talk about the history of her own country, which has a sequence of armed conflicts that resulted in large internal migratory flows. Colombia has a significant number of citizens living outside its national boundaries, but there is also a large internal flow of forced migration. According to Karo Ramírez Duque (2016), we can define forced migration as one that occurs due to the incidence of violence in areas of a given country and that is distinguished from the refugee figure precisely because they seek to improve living conditions, but remain within national borders.

The period of Colombian history known as La Violencia took place between 1948 and 1964 and involved most of the Colombian territory. The political conflict intensified with the murder of liberal leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in Bogotá. In addition to the number of dead, what became evident were the practices of bodily mutilation used in the murders. In Colombian history, there was a pact for oblivion, which ended up repressing the memories of that time.

The print media of La Violencia's era were full of photos that are now hard to see, and so Colombia has become a heap of mutilated and dismembered bodies. The death toll was more than 200,000 people who were never considered victims, nor received any reparation or

recognition from the State. (...) This refusal by Colombians to know and digest the atrocious content of La Violencia will make it reappear years later in the practices of the paramilitaries with some innovations.<sup>4</sup>

In the 1980s, when drug trafficking emerged on the national scene, a new period of great violence was inaugurated in the country, as the same methods of combat were used, mainly with the action of paramilitary groups. A new flow of forced migration was also inaugurated. According to Duque (2016), the most recent and most numerous flow of forced migration was between 2000 and 2007, which also occurred due to the continuation of armed conflicts in the country. Also at this moment, there is a pact for oblivion, so that these events do not form part of the country's historical narrative. Migrants, although they survived, also experience a type of mourning, they lost their home, and their place of origin, and like the fatal victims, they were never identified as such. If the crimes committed were not prosecuted and were supposedly forgotten, how can the individual deal with grief?



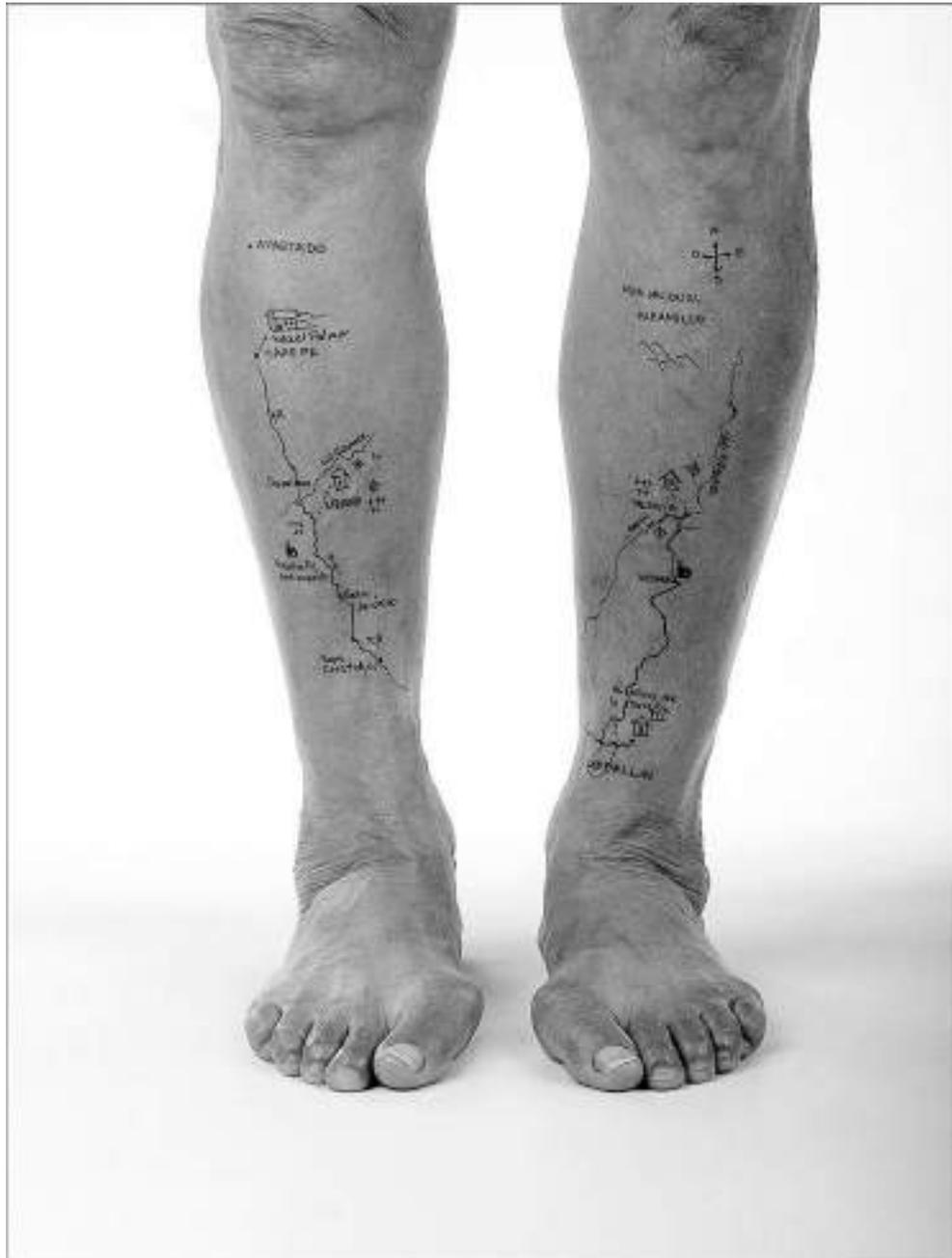
**Fig. 1.** Libia Posada, 2008, “Cardinals Signs”

Libia Posada proposed dealing with this forgetfulness through narratives of some forced displacements that took place in Colombia. The artist, upon meeting a group of people – mostly women – requested them to tell their stories. The face-to-face meetings were carried out with the help of traditional cartographies, in which the routes taken in their escapes were identified. From contact with this material, the artist built a small collection of stories and drew cartographies of the displacements narrated by the group of women. Subsequently, the cartographies were drawn directly on the skin of the ‘witness-narrators’ legs and photographed.

In the photographs, Posada used a repetitive and monotonous aesthetic: all the legs were photographed from the same angle and same position, and in black and white, approaching scientific cataloging. However, Libia Posada constructed her images by making visible what is not apparent at first. These images work as testimonies that tell a unique story, a path. The photographs seem to pay tribute to this journey, a tribute to the bodies that moved. The artist excludes the faces of these people from the photograph. The face can be considered the most knowable part of individuals. It is through face photographs that identification documents are made. However, the artist placed the legs as the central object. The choice to present only a part of the body in the photographs of *Cardinal signs* may also resemble other visual productions from Colombia. Uribe (2018) understands that this tendency to use human body parts could be understood as a kind of symptom of the years of brutal violence that involved the mutilations of the human body. In a way, Posada also performed a manipulation of the human body, first by drawing on the skin, and second, by presenting it only in fragments.

This symptom can also be elucidated in the installation *Rehabilitation Room*, exhibited at the 8th Havana Biennale, in 2003, in which Libia Posada had the participation of Cuban nurses who instructed the public to use crutches and wheelchairs. In this way, the public could experience transiting through space in a situation similar to someone who has suffered an amputation. In the series *Anatomy Lesson*, amputation is again discussed

through a puzzle with the image of two children, but without the pieces that would form the feet and legs of human figures.



**Fig. 2.** Libia Posada, 2008, "Cardinals Signs"

This kind of obsession with dealing with the image of the human body also occurred in other Latin American countries. Nelly Richard (1983) pointed out that Chilean artistic production during the Pinochet dictatorship also turned to the body, as it was exactly the body that was violated. Elías Adasme produced a series of photographs entitled *To Chile* (1979-1980), where the artist's body is placed alongside maps of Chile and in one of the images, the map is drawn on the artist's naked body.

In this specific image, there is a clear resemblance to Libia Posada who also draws on the bodies of migrant women. If Elías Adasme seems to want to appropriate the Chilean territory that was deprived of its citizens during the authoritarian regime, Posada seems to want these women to appropriate their own stories. In these two cases, drawing on the skin causes the sensation of something that makes itself emerge. The use of the body in art in periods of great violence against the human body could be understood as a symptom. There was a prohibition on reactions against those violations. There was no room for these victims to mourn - the individual could not react. The artistic production then becomes a possible space for reaction.

The Brazilian artist Paulo Nazareth uses his own body to discuss migration in Latin America. Upon being chosen to carry out the artistic residency for cultural exchange by the Residency Unlimited program at Harlem Biennale, the artist refused the proposal and chose to continue an old project. A few years before, Paulo Nazareth had the project of driving across Latin America and then crashing the car into the wall that separates Tijuana and San Diego. Years passed and the project became the walk to the United States. The artist chose to travel from Minas Gerais to New York mainly on foot. This walk took place between March and October 2011. In this journey, he developed several actions, which were grouped in the project entitled *America News* and posted on a blog, which functions as a testimony of his journey. If he accepted to participate in the international residency program, Paulo Nazareth would enter the United States recognized as an artist, possibly with easier access to the country. When making his trip on foot and occasionally taking rides, he managed to access the United States in a situation similar to undocumented immigrants who try to enter this territory.

The artist produced a series of photographs that reveal the situation of the immigrant from Latin America. On the posters that read *I take messages to the USA*, there is this tense communication between Latin Americans who managed to migrate and those who did not. On the sign that reads *I am an American also*, there is the tension of not being considered an American, or of being considered a second-class American, a Latin American. Several images show the presence of bananas, referring to a pejorative expression that indicates Latin American countries that have an underdeveloped economy. In several of these photographs, Paulo Nazareth resembles a lone protester.



**Fig. 3.** Paulo Nazareth, “America News”, 2011–2012.

In addition, Paulo Nazareth's journey had a series of determinations previously defined by the artist. The artist only wore slippers on his feet and

did not wash his feet during the entire journey, until his arrival on the Hudson River, in the state of New York, in which the artist washed his feet to take away all the dust from Latin America collected on his way. In the photographic records that make up the blog, there are several images of the artist's feet, as in the photographs where Paulo Nazareth appears lying on the ground with some element of the landscape covering his face.



**Fig. 4.** Paulo Nazareth, “America News”, 2011-2012

As in Libia Posada's photographs, his body appears fragmented, omitting the most knowable part of an individual - the face. In this series of photographs by Paulo Nazareth, the body seems to merge with the landscape. There is also a similarity to images of bodies dumped in desolate landscapes, indicating a possible situation of violence against the body. But as in Libia

Posada, the foot and legs occupy a central position. These bodily elements are capable of witnessing the path taken, as they are the ones who carry out the displacement.



**Fig. 5.** Paulo Nazareth, “America News”, 2011–2012

It is also important to point out that the artist has a heritage from the Krenak indigenous people, who also went through a process of forced migration. The krenak occupied extensive areas close to the Rio Doce, in the state of Minas Gerais, Bahia and Espírito Santo. During the colonial period, they suffered numerous attacks that resulted in the dispersion and the reduction of their territory. More recently they have suffered two large and violent forced movements. According to Brazilian researcher Daniela Araújo da Silva (2009), in the 1950s the first major relocation of this group was carried out due to territorial conflicts. After being transferred, the Krenak decided to return on foot to their territory on the banks of the Rio Doce, on a

walk that lasted three months<sup>5</sup>. In the 1970s, this action was repeated, the indigenous people were transferred, and sometime later, they decided to return on foot to their original territory. The memory of these walks is always remembered by Paulo Nazareth, who understands himself as a nomad due to his Krenak heritage<sup>6</sup>.

In his journey, Paulo Nazareth helps to build memory in dialogue with other Latin American countries, as this artist

explains its search for a memory that has been erased, and suggests the possibility of finding it in another territory, distinct but, perhaps, analogous, as it somehow shares common memories with its homeland (...) creating unsuspected ties to trying to reconstruct stories not told or deliberately erased is one of the most impressive features of his work.<sup>7</sup>

In the artistic practices that trigger discussions about immigration in Latin America, there seems to be a desire to contest the norms, a small momentary uprising against the rules that paralyze the movements. The uprising manifests itself in a small transgression, doing something that is not foreseen in the norms, in clear opposition to power. “The happiness of transgressing, therefore. The potency of transgression – a word that means the difficult passage through a closed border, the disobedience to a rule that limited our freedom of movement.”<sup>8</sup>. Finally, these images are guided by a desire for “freer movements”<sup>9</sup>.

At this point, we remember two actions by Paulo Nazareth, where the artist also talks about this desire for transgression and freer movements. Upon returning to Brazil, in two different situations, he brings in his body parasites of foreign origin, African lice in his hair on a trip to Africa<sup>10</sup>, and a parasite bug in his foot acquired on hikes in Latin America<sup>11</sup>. The videos that record these actions show the artist removing these parasites after “cheating” the rules of entry into the country that specify that no animal should enter the country illegally.

These artists start from traumatic experiences - forced migration, the immigrant's situation of vulnerability. According to Freud (2016), trauma

causes such a rupture within the individual that he needs to banish certain memories to the unconscious - the individual forgets them. The forced displacements of Colombian women and indigenous people from Brasil were supposedly forgotten. But in the understanding of psychoanalysis, nothing can be forgotten, as memory remains causing symptoms in the individual. All these stories of violence happened. Frantz Fanon (1968) used the term *atmospheric violence* to refer to colonial society. Fanon also emphasizes that being in this environment of brutality would be sickening for the individual.

The solution proposed by the artists is precisely to pierce the feeling of isolation and promote meetings. Posada summoned migration narratives to be told to us. These women lived through a grieving experience and are in the process of identifying and naming the traumas experienced. Going through their movements again, identifying the places they passed, the places that welcomed them, and identifying the danger zones is a way to elaborate on these memories and interrupt the feeling of helplessness. On the other hand, Paulo Nazareth's path was a dive into submerged memories. During the months of the journey, he developed the project entitled *Indigenous's Face*, in which Paulo Nazareth photographed himself alongside people with the indigenous heritage he met on his way, with the objective of "comparing the mestizo face to the face of the other". In this project, the artist manages to question the fixed categories of identity, imposed by colonial logic. But beyond that, the artist manages to pierce the feeling of isolation that colonialism imposes. If it is the not-knowing that prevents grief, Paulo Nazareth seems to give himself over to an experience to recover, at least in part, what was forgotten. In these cases, and many others, the helplessness did not produce a melancholy state, but, as Didi-Huberman (2017) would say, it did generate an uprising. For this author, the possibility of an uprising originates through loss, through grief. A loss that, instead of immobilizing us in a melancholy state that never ceases, would generate an inner movement.

Subverting norms for entry and exit from the country, recalling invisible migrations, talking about those who face a situation of absolute vulnerability when crossing borders, wouldn't these actions be small transgressions carried out by those who have no power at all? The migrant

and the exile seem to be condemned to belong to nowhere, to occupy an in-between place. These figures also walked around the *Tree of Oblivion*<sup>12</sup> from the moment they left their place of origin. It seems to us that art becomes a possible space to elaborate limit situations that immigrants and exiles often experience, but that escape the official narrative.

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### Endnotes

1. O'Gorman, *A Invenção da América*, 1992.
2. Bonfim, "Latin America—Evils of Origin (Summary)", 215-222.
3. Posada, "Signos Cardinales", 218; author's translation.
4. Uribe, "Los fantasmas no inquietan", 95-96; author's translation.
5. Reis, "Território sagrado exílio", 9.
6. Nazareth, "Direito ao Funeral".
7. Mazzucchelli, "Sobre marfins, dentes e ossos"; author's translation.
8. Didi-Huberman, *Levantes*, 322; author's translation.
9. Didi-Huberman, *Levantes*.
10. Paulo Nazareth, "African lice", 2013, <https://vimeo.com/106514870>.
11. Paulo Nazareth, "Footverm", 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JbKgKgGoEC0>.
12. Paulo Nazareth, "Tree of Oblivion", 2013, <https://vimeo.com/199736235>.

# Towards a Queer Catholicism: Religious Imagery in Asco's Whittier Boulevard Performances

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## **ABSTRACT**

Asco present us with the paradox of why a queer Chicano art collective would choose to make extensive use of Roman Catholic imagery, when the Catholic Church was generally associated with sexual and political conservatism. By situating four of Asco's performances along Whittier Boulevard within the geography of colonial California, I argue this choice wasn't despite, but rather because of the politics of these images. More specifically, I consider how Whittier Boulevard was laid over parts of el Camino Real, which linked the 21 Franciscan missions of New Spain. Through these references, Asco draws a parallel between the colonization of the Americas and the internal colonialism they experienced as marginalized racial minorities in East L.A. By drawing the queerness out of Catholicism, Asco emphasized the intersection of their views with Catholic social teachings while simultaneously calling out the hypocrisy of Catholic sexual teachings. While I begin with more overtly religious performances like Stations of the Cross and First Supper, I find similar tactics in more distantly related pieces like Walking Mural and Instant Mural. I conclude by calling for a reconsideration of the complex inheritance of Catholicism among queer Chicanos and the literature on Asco, which hasn't fully attended to this facet of their work.

## **KEYWORDS**

Performance; Art; Identity; Geography; Colonialism.

On August 26, Carmelites around the world celebrate the Feast of the Transverberation, which commemorates the “piercing” of St. Teresa of Ávila’s heart by an angel. In her autobiography, she writes how she “saw in his hand a long spear of gold,” which he thrust “at times into my heart and to pierce my very entrails” (Lewis 1916, 266). “The pain was so great,” she continues, “that it made me moan; and yet so surpassing was the sweetness of this excessive pain, that I could not wish to be rid of it” (Lewis 1916, 266–7). It is difficult to ignore the sexual undertones of St. Teresa’s description of this experience, famously immortalized in Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (1647–52). From its obsession with the Virgin Mary to its longstanding requirement for a celibate clergy, the Catholic Church has something of a fixation on sex, prompting Pope Francis to lament in 2013 that the Church had become obsessed with abortion, contraception, and same-sex marriage, to say nothing of the sex abuse scandal that rocked the Holy See for decades and involved approximately 3,000 priests. But throughout its history, the Catholicism has been associated with a sexual morality that elevates the “charmed circle” married heterosexual couples over all other forms of human intimacy (Rubin 2011, 152). Although its positions on sexuality may be the most visible manifestation of the Church’s politics, it is far from the only one.<sup>1</sup>

To be sure, Catholics have been a powerful conservative force across much of the globe, from opposition to the French Revolution to support of the Francoist dictatorship in Spain (Payne 2009; Shusterman 2013). Alongside this history, however, runs the countercurrent of Catholic social teaching, such as within the Catholic Worker Movement founded by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin in 1933 at the nadir of the Great Depression. These developments were especially pronounced in Latin America in the wake of the Second Vatican Council (1962–5), when theologians like Gustavo Gutiérrez, Leonardo Boff, Juan Segundo, and Jon Sobrino drew inspiration from the Sermon on the Mount to defend a “preferential option for the poor.” Liberation theology, as it came to be called, emphasized “integral mission,” stressing both evangelism and social responsibility (Gutiérrez 1973).<sup>2</sup>

These ambivalent political legacies of Catholicism help us to make sense of the use of religious imagery within Chicano art. In this article, I focus on Asco, a Chicano collective active in East Los Angeles from 1972 to '87.<sup>3</sup> Working primarily within performance, the members of Asco (Harry Gamboa, Jr., Glugio “Gronk” Nicandro, Willie F. Herrón III, and Patssi Valdez), grew up during the Vietnam War spanning from 1955 to 1975, which many Chicanos in the Los Angeles area believed was killing them at a disproportionate rate. Indeed, Gronk cites the Vietnam War as inspiring Asco’s name. In his words, “a lot of our friends were coming back in body bags and were dying, and we were seeing a whole generation come back that weren’t alive anymore. And in a sense that gave us nausea—or ‘nauseous.’ And that is Asco, in a way” (Smithsonian Institution Archives of American Art 1997). To protest Vietnam, Chicano activists banded together to form the Chicano Moratorium, which existed from 1969 to 1971. This group organized the National Chicano Moratorium March along Whittier Boulevard in 1970 to voice their disapproval of the Vietnam War and its effects on their community.<sup>4</sup>

A major commercial corridor in East Los Angeles, Whittier Boulevard runs about twenty miles from the Los Angeles River at its eastern end to Brea at its western end. Not only was Whittier Boulevard the location of much community activity but it also connected East Los Angeles to the heart of the Los Angeles metropolitan area (after the Los Angeles River, Whittier Boulevard becomes Sixth Avenue and continues downtown). Several of Asco’s performances over the years would occur on Whittier Boulevard. Regarding the street’s importance to Asco, Herrón reminisces,

At the time of the Moratorium, I was in high school. I remember the procession originating at Belvedere Park, protesting the Vietnam War and all the Chicanos that [*sic*] lost their lives. The police brutality was incredible. It affected me quite a bit and I think it affected all of us. So that’s why Whittier Boulevard became such an important street, and a place for us to conduct our performances and connect them to our community and

the way society viewed us at the time (Los Angeles County Museum of Art 2011).

We can see in this quote the double role Whittier Boulevard plays as simultaneously symbolizing the reality and reputation of East Los Angeles, as well bridging the *barrio* and the art world, between which Asco would continually navigate.<sup>5</sup>



Fig. 1. Asco, *Stations of the Cross*, 1971

But if we take a longer view of the history of this area of what is now the Southwestern US, we can see yet another dual role for Whittier Boulevard. The thoroughfare also carries a portion of *el Camino Real* (“Royal Road,” “King’s Highway”), which once connected twenty-one religious outposts in what was then *Alta California*, a province of New Spain.<sup>6</sup> We know Asco was aware of this fact because Gamboa once “used the phrase ‘el camino surreal’ (the surreal road/path), a play on El Camino Real, the historic highway of colonial California, to describe Whittier Boulevard as the setting where everyday reality could quickly devolve into absurdist, excessive action” (Chavoya and González 2011, 55). Hence, “el camino surreal” is both a pun on

*El Camino Real* and a gesture towards the surreality of Asco's performances. Indeed, the coloniality of the *Camino Real* is crucial to the success of these pieces, insofar as the tension between imposition and conversion is key to the acceptance and reproduction of national values (i.e., the whole apparatus of the state is ready to spring upon those who resist it, even as it's clear that strictly speaking belief cannot be forced).<sup>7</sup>



**Fig. 2.** Asco, *First Supper (After a Major Riot)*, 1974

By foregrounding Whittier Boulevard as the site for several Asco performances, we can see that rather than making simple “protest art,” Asco’s performance demonstrate a profound awareness of the historical forces excluding them from both the Latino communities of East L.A. and the Anglo art world downtown and on the Westside. In two performances, *Stations of the Cross* (1971) and *First Supper (After a Major Riot)* (1974), Asco used mimicry of Roman Catholic liturgical rites to compare their experiences as racial minorities with the history of Latin American colonialism, thus politicizing a religion that has, justifiably or unjustifiably, been blamed for the supposed

traditionalism of Mexican Americans; cf., “internal colonialism” (Blauner 1987). Two other performances, *Walking Mural* (1972) and *Instant Mural* (1974), poked fun at muralism, thus calling attention to the cultural expectations that ghettoize Chicano art as “folk art.” Indeed, Asco’s first piece, *Spray Paint LACMA/Project Pie in De/Face* (1972), involved tagging the entrance of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in protest against a curator who explained the museum didn’t acquire Chicano art because Chicanos were only capable of “making folk art and joining gangs.” Although ostensibly unrelated to Catholicism, I intend to show how indebted muralism is to Catholic iconography, and how we might thus read *Walking Mural* and *Instant Mural* as continuing this same interest.

Despite their differences, these performances all share similar strategies; namely, a process of defamiliarization the Situationist International famously dubbed *détournement*, which they define as follows:

The integration of present or past artistic productions into a superior construction of a milieu. In this sense there can be no situationist painting or music, but only a situationist use of those means. In a more elementary sense, *détournement* within the old cultural spheres is a method of propaganda, a method which reveals the wearing out and loss of importance of those spheres (Situationist International 1958).

By resignifying culturally loaded religious and muralist imagery, through performance Asco loosens up the meanings associated with such imagery so these meanings can be redeployed in more politically progressive ways. Although all art is strictly speaking unable to produce new meanings *ex nihilo*, by presenting the history of a people in a novel way Asco makes room for the potentially discordant multivocality of site.<sup>8</sup> Like all places, there is a historical residue here available for reactivation.<sup>9</sup> Through performances that bring the past into the present, Asco in other words provides us with a way of thinking about how to make site-specific art when sites themselves have histories.



**Fig. 3.** Asco, *Walking Mural*, 1972

More directly, it may be that performance as an artistic medium is uniquely equipped to support the play of multiple meanings of a site in a way that the more traditionally sculptural practices of artists like Richard Serra or Robert Smithson cannot.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps there's something about performance that allows it to preserve the multivocality of site. There is a way in which a performance can at once adopt and reject, affirm and deny, as is the case with regard to many of the artists we've come to associate with the work of José Muñoz (Muñoz 1999). Although disidentification is essentially the failure of the subject to fully inhabit hegemonic culture, within this failure lies a radical possibility. To disidentify is essentially to refuse to accept the world as it is, to imagine other possible worlds we might collectively bring into existence.<sup>11</sup> Failure, then, only becomes failure within the context of a world that cannot at the moment supply the conditions under which this failure wouldn't count as failure. In her reading of Asco in *Abject Performances*, Leticia Alvarado concludes, "we are invited, by dwelling on loss, absence, and failure, to imagine a form of collectivity that does not require consensus or

singularity, which was often achieved at the exclusion of some of its members” (Alvarado 2018, 87). In this way, we can connect Asco’s performances to a politically progressive agenda. Perhaps by drawing out the multivocality of site through their performances, Asco allows us to map possible paths forward from our pasts to our potential futures that might result in a more egalitarian world than the one we have today.



**Fig. 4.** Asco, *Instant Mural*, 1972

If you look up it up in the dictionary, you will find both lower- and upper-case definitions for the adjective “Catholic,” denoting the Roman Catholic Church in particular, and “catholic” meaning all-embracing. The reason for this discrepancy is that for the first several centuries of its existence, there was only one Christian church. It wasn’t until the Protestant Reformation that it became necessary to differentiate between different *kinds* of Christians, with Catholics being but one among them. Much of the history of this period involved various debates over “pagan” elements like bells, dancing, and animal sacrifice (MacMullen 1999). And even after the changes instituted during the Counter-Reformation, many of these practices persist to the current day (e.g., incense, candles, even the timing of the liturgical calendar itself). In short, Catholicism has long been a syncretic religion, one containing that which is outside of itself.

These clashing inheritances allow us to better make sense of the sexual politics of Catholicism, which valorizes chastity even as its exploration of the nude male form borders on prurience (Steinberg 1996). And far from being mere topics of antiquarian interest, these taken-for-granted assumptions about gender and sexuality seem to be very much still with us, especially in cultures whose histories are deeply entangled with those of the Roman Catholic Church. Consider, for example, how the virgin–whore dichotomy between Mary and Mary Magdalene resurfaces in the conflicted history of Doña Marina Malintzin, or *La Malinche*, a Nahuatl interpreter for Hernán Cortés who is alternately seen as a foundational figure of the Mexican nation or as a traitor, depending on sociopolitical climate (Cypess 1991). To this day, to call a Mexican a *malinchista* is to accuse them of denying their own culture in favor of foreign imports (Fortes De Leff 2002).

It is precisely these sorts of disconnects which are ripe for queer intervention. Indeed, Annamarie Jagose writes in her introduction to queer theory that queerness “focuses on mismatches between sex, gender and desire” (Jagose 1996, 3). By drawing out the performative—even campy—aspects of Roman Catholicism, Asco engages in a type of political resistance that doesn’t at all dwell outside of what it criticizes, but is deeply embedded within it, much like the mode of working with and against hegemonic forms we might associate with artists like Vaginal Davis (Muñoz 1999). Rather than evidencing a shying away from politics, this strategy seems one of the few avenues available to those who believe power has no constitutive “outside” (Foucault 1995). Part of what makes power so totalizing a force is how fields of knowledge are caught up with one another, congealed into the frames through which we make sense of our surroundings (Foucault 1994). Power branches out into the fabric of institutions, physical space, and even our own selves and identities. And in Asco we witness an artistic practice able to make such moves visible, the necessary first step in the process of remaking the world around us differently, and perhaps even better.

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## Endnotes

1. Indeed, some intellectual historians have attributed the rise of human rights discourse in the postwar period to Christian political discourse (Moyn 2015).
2. The movement did not, however, receive a warm reception in Rome, with Joseph Ratzinger calling it "a fundamental threat to the faith of the Church" (Ratzinger 1985, 175).
3. There are several manifestations of Asco, but I concentrate here in its first iteration.
4. In a turning point of the Chicano anti-war movement, a stray tear gas projectile killed *Los Angeles Times* reporter and columnist Ruben Salazar during the Moratorium March. Salazar was the first Chicano journalist to cover the ethnic group for a large general circulation publication.
5. This feeling of being caught between two worlds is expressed at multiple points in the journalistic accounts of and interview with members of Asco. Los Angeles art critic Linda Frye Burnham explains that Asco's name "was chosen because, as artists, the group got no respect, either in the conservative Latino environment of their home turf or in the Anglo art world" (Burnham 1987). In an interview with Burnham, Patssi Valdez laments, "We weren't Chicano enough for someone, too Mexican for others" (Burnham 1987).
6. *Real* can also mean "real" in the sense of "true."
7. Although scholars of Asco like art historian C. Ondine Chavoya are aware Asco knew portions of Whittier Boulevard were constructed over what was once *el Camino Real*, it doesn't play a significant interpretive role for them.
8. Multivocality is a crucial way that anthropologists, at least, have reconceptualized place as "a politicized social and cultural construct" (Rodman 1992, 640).
9. "The land as palimpsest" in the words of André Corboz (Corboz 1983).

10. It may be that Rosalind Krauss's "expanded field" of sculpture can now accommodate performance as well (e.g., "A performance is a sculpture made with the body"), but for present purposes I will use "performance" and "sculpture" with their conventional meanings (i.e., performances use the body, sculpture materials) (Krauss 1979).
11. In this we can make sense of Muñoz's ostensibly puzzling turn to futurity in his next major work: *Cruising Utopia*; our queer dissatisfaction with this world necessarily implies the possibility of a better future (Muñoz 2009).

# Disrupting Colonial Chronology. Quipus in the Artistic Practice of Jorge Eduardo Eielson and Cecilia Vicuña

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper is based on my talk *Transcultural Text(ile)-Knots. Quipus in the artistic practice of Jorge Eduardo Eielson and Cecilia Vicuña* at the 35th CIHA Conference. There, I demonstrated the intermedial adaption of quipus as an artistic strategy within postcolonial discourses and transcultural processes. In my paper, I shed new light on Jorge Eduardo Eielson's *Tornillo para Rafael* (1972) and Cecilia Vicuña's *Quipu desaparecido* (2018) and discuss their inherent temporalities. In their engagement with quipus, the artists not only succeed in adding a new tangible dimension to the textile medium; both also refer to the contemporary tendencies and cultural traditions of quipus. In comparison of both artists, the art historical development of artistic quipus as well as their diversity becomes clear. They combine the textile material as well as the knotting techniques with social, political and historical connotations, and process them affirmatively in their contemporary reception. Rather than simply emphasizing the cultural weight of their artistic quipus, my intent is to demonstrate the expressive potential of these textiles and their concepts regarding contemporaneity and transcultural processes.

## **KEYWORDS**

Quipu; Textile; Contemporaneity; Transculturality; Temporalities.

### **Living Quipus**

In April 2022, the Chilean artist Cecilia Vicuña received the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement of the 59th Biennale di Venezia.<sup>1</sup> In the curators' statement, Cecilia Alemani particularly appreciated the transdisciplinarity of the artist, which would form a "fragile equilibrium" between "a precarious art that is both intimate and powerful". Also mentioned in the statement are Vicuña's fascination and preoccupation with indigenous traditions and epistemologies of the South.<sup>2</sup> These include Vicuña's artistic engagement with the Américan<sup>3</sup> cultural tradition of the quipus<sup>4</sup>, which can be traced back to the 1960s.

Three-dimensional, textile quipus are based on a knotting system that is more than 5000 years old, used by various population groups in the coastal and Andean region of the Américas as a communication medium and to record information. The term 'quipu' comes from the Américan indigenous language Quechua and translates as 'knot' – both in its verb and noun form – and is both description and function (Urton 2003, 1). Consequently, quipus in their function as knots transmit, attach, secure and connect in different contexts, fulfilling this purpose simultaneously with the metaphorical transmission of memories, signs, symbols and knowledge.

Cecilia Vicuña's artistic approach to languages, word images and characters, as well as their visualization using natural materials such as wood, stone or (unspun) animal hair wool, runs through her œuvre and is always linked to contemporary social issues. Already as a young woman in the early 1960s she began to deal with the concept of quipus and their contemporary meaning. At that time, it was unusual in Chile to take an interest in indigenous cultures and precolonial history, especially since there was no school subject that neutrally addressed precolonial national history. Textbooks of the time also discussed indigenous cultures merely sporadically and a lot of them were only published in English. In addition, indigenous textiles or means of communication were not on public display in the Museo Chileno de Arte Precolombino until 1981 (Bryan-Wilson 2017, 111), which is why Vicuña's involvement with archaeological objects was initially motivated by her own private interests.<sup>5</sup> The artistic starting point of her work group of

quipus, which continues until today, can be traced back to *El Quipu que no recuerda nada* from 1966, which, as she states, only existed virtually in her mind until its two-dimensional realization four years later.<sup>6</sup> Art-historically, this quipu can be linked to concept art, which was emerging at that time. It stands exemplary for the idea, which itself becomes the material of art (Hoormann 1992, 591, 602). The inherent ambivalence and the already mentioned "fragile equilibrium" can thus be seen in the immateriality of the *Quipu que no recuerda nada*, which requires the thought of a thread – i. e. of material – in order to become visible (Bryan-Wilson 2017, 110). And even if reading about a virtual, materially inexistent artwork might seem random, it is especially the trust in the artists description, that makes the *Quipu que no recuerda nada*, as her first quipu, so significant in Vicuña's oeuvre. Therefore, as part of the unlearning process (cf. Spivak 2010; Azoulay 2019) of Western epistemologies Vicuña's first quipu is to be considered real and factual.

Similar to her current works, an emotional approach to historical quipus is as important as her studying the current research on this topic. In the art historical analysis of this history of rewriting, it is therefore necessary to take into account the artist's knowledge of the historical means of calculation and communication. Merely starting from the current state of research of archaeological finds and ethnological objects would not be sufficient, because some inherent information within the artworks would get lost. For example, some older sources referred to quipus as an administrative object or bureaucratic tool (Ascher [1981] 1997); other 18th century sources described the quipu somewhat more mystically as a magical object, subjective as a diary, or attested its literary components (Graffigny [1748] 2009). In addition, some sources from the 1960s and 1970s compared quipus to a code system as a protocompiler (Ascher [1981] 1997).

Furthermore, Vicuña has been familiar with the research of anthropologist Gery Urton (Vicuña/Urton, in Brooklyn Museum 2018, Min. 6:57-10:00), for example, since the 1980s, which also marks her commitment to the scientific decipherment of the historical quipus.<sup>7</sup> But, knowing his research, she contradicts him in his assumption that quipus are a closed communication system that is no longer used today. Vicuña states that

quipus still exist, not only as archaeological objects in museums, but everywhere where information is spun as virtual threads between people and their thoughts (Vicuña 2005, 11:20-12 min.). This concept is also incorporated in many of Vicuña's performances.<sup>8</sup> (cf. Nowel Camino 2022, 188 ff.) Vicuña formulates a further contradiction to the predominantly Western research situation in a conversation with Camila Marambio, in which she described the characteristics of the quipu systems as follows: “The information encoded in the quipu can be historical, mythical, poetical, musical, and the one that the Europeans understood was the statistical ones referring to tax accounting.” (Vicuña, in: Hughes 2019, 63-64) In her statement, she, on the one hand, romanticizes and mystifies the quipu. On the other hand, she criticizes the Western standards and makes the importance and contemporaneity of epistemologies of the South very clear.

The literature often describes the knots of quipus as “mnemonic codes” (Boone/Mignolo 1994, 284; Bryan-Wilson 2017, 110; Urton 2003, 3 a. 10 ff; Alcalá 2018, 24; Leone 2004, 88), which illustrates the multiple functions as well as the possibility of knotting cultural semantics (Gardner Clark 2012, 24). Vicuña, in contrast, argues that calling quipus a “mnemonic device” is only one aspect of the concept. According to her, in addition to the tactile physical quipu system, there is a virtual one (Vicuña, in: Hughes 2019, 64.). Thus, in her approach to the knots, she always includes epistemologies of the South and criticizes the Western ones, based only on academic written structures and on forms of knowledge imposed during colonization. For the implementation of the Latin alphabet in the Américas corresponded not only with a representation of power but also to an adaption of non-alphabetic signs and technologies for their own use (Rama 1998, 23-27). Subsequent measures of the conquest were the forcible christianization and forced introduction of the Spanish language and Latin alphabet (Rinke 2010, 32). On the one hand the colonizers tried to bann all other communication systems, so the quipus were systematically burned and their production forbidden under the Third Council of Lima in 1583 (Urton 2003, 22). Untying the knots and burning the textiles therefore supposedly solved the ownerships and laws that were stored in the quipus. On the other hand, the quipus offered the colonizers

important information concerning the political and social systems of the Incas. As a result, the cultural tradition of the quipus and other pre-colonial textile techniques are documented only in a few colonial sources; they were passed down mostly orally within indigenous populations, were increasingly forgotten, and their functions were replaced by European writing (cf. Salomon 2004; Urton 2017, 217). Here, however, it is quite important to note that the tradition of the quipus continued to be practiced in several regions, despite being banned by colonizers in the 16th century; rarely as a medium of communication, but nevertheless for administrative or private purposes (cf. Salomon 2004). Here I would like to refer especially to the exhibition shown from November 2020 to August 2021 at the MALI Museum in Lima, where a chronological overview and development to the present day was shown. The exhibition *Khipus. Nuestra historia en nudos* combined archaeological discoveries and the latest research results on historical quipus with contemporary artistic positions. Here, however, the exhibition took historical quipus as its main point of departure and led them through the colonial period to the present day, where the artists Jorge Eduardo Eielson and Alejandra Ortiz de Zevallos represented the contemporary component of the textile tradition.

It is therefore important to emphasize that quipus are not a purely pre-colonial concept, but that there were also colonial as well as post-colonial knot systems. Exact contents and statements of the historical quipus are not fully deciphered yet, but there are definitely some recent discoveries grounded in a statistical procedure that study the quipus from an “comparative, systematic, and typological” (Boone 2011, 386) approach, which helps to categorize the knotted information’s into buzzwords and into pre-versus post conquest content (cf. Medrano 2021).<sup>9</sup>

As in her physically inexistent *El Quipu que no recuerda nada*, Vicuña also takes up forgotten topics and virtual realities in her space-filling quipu installations. There she plays with the paradox “de recordar lo olvidado y preservar lo efímero” (Gardner Clark 2015, 213). Her *Quipu desaparecido*, installed from May to November in 2018 in New York at the Brooklyn Museum, provides a respective example.

### **Transtemporal Characteristic**

*Quipu desaparecido* is a site-specific installation for the Brooklyn Museum. It consisted of a multitude of strands of unspun sheep's wool in off-white tones that were hung down from the ceiling at regular intervals, framed by the columns of the museum architecture. Vicuña's handling of the material and her deliberate exploitation of its possibilities is revealed in the respective woolen strands, their structure, and their grade of opacity.

The ends of the woolen strands, draped on the floor, gave the installation a moment of grounding, which was condensed in these arranged and folded structures. The strands are provided by different knots twisted in Z or S direction and of different sizes. Between the quipu as a historical medium of communication and its materiality interstices open up. The properties of the textile, such as its texture or warming function as well as its fragility and transcendence are other important aspects to understand the social and contemporary significance of the artwork (cf. Nowel Camino 2022).

It can be concluded that the physical and also conceptual components as a result of the processed raw materials fulfill certain signs in the sense of a coded system and can thus be read, similar to a historical quipu. Nevertheless, a quipu is not a writing system with alphabetical and grammatical prerequisites or foundations, rather it is a three-dimensional aesthetic sign system that is "read" tactilely and visually, embodying knowledge and making it comprehensible, as we can also observe in Vicuña's performances and some installations. Vicuña's work with quipus can be described "as a form of embodied [and materialized] language that takes shape like chords of music or visual poetry, with every colored string [and] knot [...] a semantic unit [can] be read, heard, [felt], and interpreted in dialogue with the other knotted strings." (Bryan-Wilson 2017, 111) Thus, her quipus fulfill a visual manifestation of the way textile objects can store and render information and are an integral part of epistemologies of the South.

The hanging woolen webs create a richness of association that refers to the many disappeared people and lost lives during twentieth century American dictatorships, already referred to in the title. The representation of

the non-visible ultimately amounts to the evocation of a sphere in which it is not the recall of a reality that is decisive, but the thinking of perceptions. The hanging woolen strands assign a concrete place to the absent – the disappeared bodies occupy a place. Furthermore, their visualization through the medium of the quipu, as the official means of communication of the Incas, mediates an official and political claim.

The presence of the disappeared is complemented by the historical context of archaeological objects in small glass cases that were placed next to the meter-high spatial installation. Furthermore, the entire installation is spotlighted with projections of images of historical textiles. The depicted textiles are from the ancient Andean collections of the Brooklyn Museum and the Museum of Fine Arts, New York. Curatorially, this implies references to the past, or exhibits them as part of contemporary quipus. Furthermore, a recording plays chants by the artist, culminating in elements of spoken word and melody. The light and sound installation plays on all the textiles located in the space and is thus also conceptually connecting them.

The exhibition concept took *Quipu desaparecido* as its main point of departure and led it back to pre-colonial times by means of historical quipus and textiles. In curatorial terms, Vicuñas artwork can be seen as a representative continuation of this cultural tradition, demonstrating its persistent existence beyond colonization and into the present. According to my argument, Vicuña's engagement with and taking up of Américan textile traditions is an evaluation of temporalities and their consequences and effects on concepts of the past, memories, and loss. With her work, she moves toward a setting that recognizes and analyzes multiple understandings of time and forms of knowledge. This process involves the unlearning of the standardization of time emanating from Europe and its conceptualization as neutral, constant and measurable. Therefore, time must be understood as a historically justified social and colonial construction (cf. Nanni 2012; Philips 2021), whose unlearning can mean a form of decolonization. According to this understanding of temporalities, the concepts of past, future, and present coexist in Vicuña's quipu. This phenomenon is also reflected in Vicuña's other quipus, in which she refers to the present by globally addressing means of

communication that have been relegated to the past in order to create awareness of the future. Vicuña takes up decolonizing understandings of time, as a concept to be revised.

Even if the exhibition form in New York makes visible the transtemporal quality of the quipus and thus also of the Américan textile tradition, the exhibition also points to the common curatorial practice of showing contemporary textile art – especially Américan – not autonomously, but together with its (supposed) historical context; the narrative of rediscovered and reanimated cultural traditions and of a cultural tradition that is always linked to the past is thus cultivated. Art historiography, however, is able to challenge this premise that Américan art must be historically contextualized in order to understand it. Historical contextualization of contemporary art is often exoticizing and mystifying and serves the eurocentric narrative of Américan (textile) art as component of a past. Dealing with it therefore inevitably calls for an investigation of the “fractures and ruptures in arthistorical timelines” (Kernbauer 2017, 4) as well as their continuities of history and temporalities. Plenty of works of Américan artists are certainly embedded in discourses of contemporary history with a relationship of historicity and consciousness of the past (cf. Rith-Magni 1994). However, recollection does not equal regression, and tradition does not equal the past.

Nevertheless, in the context of *Quipu desaparecido* it is difficult to let the textile installation speak for itself, to understand it only as present and the historical references as a mediating aspect of the quipu’s explanation as a millennia-old concept. The historical quipus in their showcases are part of the present. In this case, the temporalities are inseparable; at some point they even overlap through the light and sound installation, disrupting the colonial chronology.

With her installation, Vicuña thus reached back to an ancestral form of communication whose cultural significance stretches from the pre-colonial past to the present – and this at a time when technological developments are influencing contemporary understandings of knowledge, history, language, reality, and community (Lee 2019).

Vicuña and, as will be explained in the following, also Eielson, argue with the contemporaneity of the supposedly past through the presence of physical materials. They thus don't tell a story about Américas's past, but they tell a story about Américas's present.

### **Performative Knots**

Jorge Eduardo Eielson is one of the first artists to artistically deal with the design feature of the knot, titling his works "quipu" in an affirmative way as reference to the pre-colonial accounting and communication system. He grew up in Peru in the 1930s and 40s. During this time, archaeological excavations and finds, as well as scientific research on pre-colonial artifacts, increased and became a central interest for Peruvians, as well as early forms of tourism (Castro Sajami 2016, 31).

Eielson, who in this field was well educated and collected pre-colonial ceramics and textiles, began to journalistically deal with the relevant content at a young age and published several texts on the subject during his life. His articles not only reflect his literary and philosophical views, but also testify to his interest in Peru's cultural history as well as in current art debates (Castro Sajami 2016, 31). In this context, it is necessary to consider the artist's contemporary knowledge of the quipus. Similar to Vicuña, Eielson had a much more spiritual understanding of the quipus than the current state of research. That Eielson researched the historical quipus and other pre-colonial textile works in depth is evidenced, among other things, by his many visits to the Amano Museum in Lima.<sup>40</sup>

Eielson's quipus run intermedially through his oeuvre from the 1960s onwards, progressively taking on the form of autonomous sculpture, being placed in spatial installations, or wrapping the body of a female model during a performance. All of Jorge Eielson's quipus were created according to a similar basic principle, whose defining formative features are knots.

Eielson's first textile knot(s) from 1964, titled after the traditional knotting system is called *White Quipus*. It consists of four different colored cotton strings, knotted together in front of a white canvas. In contrast to the historical examples there is no clear main cord visible in Eielson's artistic

quipus, from which the reading direction emerges, which in turn would allow a stored information to be successively decoded; in Eielson's work however, the canvas assumes the cohesive function of the main cord. It is the connecting element to which the knots created through different techniques are attached.

Eielson transfers the various knotting and twisting techniques of the historical models and combines the colors and shapes according to his subjective perception. Accordingly, these twists and knots are not based on any predefined coding, but have emerged from his aesthetic sentiment (cf. Rith-Magni 1994). He plays with the possibilities offered by the textile material, with its colorfulness, its flexibility as well as different manifestations. Particularly through the procedure of stretching the textiles over the canvas in different ways, a dialogue between the materials occurs and a focus on textiles as an independent artistic material is made.<sup>4</sup>

Eielson already combined the influences he absorbed from contemporary European art movements with pre-colonial knotting techniques in his first quipus. As a logical consequence of the stylistic developments, Eielson's visual language became more concentrated over the years: the knots per work were reduced, and, in later works, monochrome followed polychrome textiles stretched over a single- or two-color surface. Good examples for this phenomenon are *Progresión gris* (1966) and *Quipu 29 A-I* (1966-1971). The entire fabric is under tension: because, in addition to the twisting and knotting, the cotton fabric was soaked in paint and glue, so that when it dried it lost its flexibility and softness – characteristics of textiles. Here, the textile undergoes a change in its natural appearance. The wrinkling here makes the tension visible and is not a reaction to an underlying body. This, too, makes the textile an independent actor in Eielson's artworks, especially since he mainly used the specific properties of textiles, knotting, felting, and twisting them on the picture surface, forming fabric folds and unfolding them, and then manipulating and preserving them through the additional use of glue (Rith-Magni 1994, 220), cement, plastic or paint. Eielson's procedure of hardening the textiles, so that there is a detachment from the conventional 'soft' perception is an example of the necessity of a

material aesthetic method: it is precisely this separation and the simultaneous difference to the original flexibility that brings the significance of the work, or rather its meaning, to surface.

Another example for this proceeding is his quipu *Tornillo para Rafael*<sup>12</sup>, which Eielson made in December 1972 for his close friend, the artist Rafael Hastings. Here, the white fabric, hardened with glue, runs diagonally from top right to bottom left over a wooden, natural surface. The small format is unique among Eielson's quipus, which gives the quipu a personal character. This is further stressed by the format that is similar to a framed memory photo, which can be taken anywhere due to its convenient size. The wooden surface, which has remained almost untreated, also differs from Eielson's backgrounds that are usually painted with bold and eye-catching colors. *Tornillo para Rafael* is a work that is restrained in its effect and metaphorically stands for the friendship between Eielson and Hastings.<sup>13</sup> Eielson's work, like a photograph, can be understood as an attempt to capture and record time, in which again a reference to the information- and memory-storing quipus can be seen. This impression is particularly supported by the artificial hardening of the textiles, which also preserves the object.

Similarly, the work *Nudo* from 1973, by its weight, holds the gesture of knotting forever. The knot, weighing two kilograms, is relatively heavy and immobile. It can only be assumed that Eielson probably filled a tube with liquid cement and knotted it while it was still flexible and, after it had hardened, covered it with a fabric, which was then dipped in glue to harden the folds. The *Nudo* is solidified not only in its nature and technique, but also in its materiality, which combines softness and hardness also on a metaphorical scale.

Against this background, Eielson's artistic quipus can also be understood as a way to capture, make aware of, visualize, as well as metaphorically and actually conserve and value the cultural textile tradition and communication medium. The gesture of knotting can be understood as a "citational act" according to Butler that traverses the realm of language and performance (Butler 2019, 39). Gesture as quotation (historical quipus and

languages) and as event (act of knotting) is used by Eielson as a critical practice towards forms of expression. Thus, it should be noted that Eielson's quipus are an examination and questioning of painting, and the knot becomes a performative act with which the artist succeeds in expanding his contemporary understanding of art. Fittingly, he refers to his quipus as "fragments of language and archaeological remains." (Eielson, in: Rabaza Soraluz 2010, 111-112)<sup>14</sup> If his quipus were excavated after centuries, they would provide information about the anthropocene, not only because of their material durability, and bear witness to their producer.

It is clear that the materiality of the knots not only makes technical statements about the artistic quipu, but also statements about their content. The knot is thus no longer just an object, it is a kind of gesture or movement as well as the result of force and centered energy. The effort and strength required to create the tensions of Eielson's quipus is stored in the stiffness. Unlike historical quipus, whose knots do not require muscular strength, Eielson's quipus seem to be the result of shared forces (cf. Lerner 2018, 43-44).<sup>15</sup>

### **New 'vocabularies'**

Eielson and Vicuña create transcultural means of communication that mediate between them and the recipients. They take up the concept of the historical quipu system, make the signs their own, and invent new 'vocabularies' for their own nodal language. Both combine different quipu systems – the tactile and the virtual – as well as their inherent temporalities to make different statements. Thus, a new aspect is added to the quipu as a phenomenon of contemporary art: it is no longer just an object or an action, but also a virtual and material concept that comes with plural temporalities like deceleration and simultaneity. Furthermore, it is the deceleration that is often associated with the textile material, which is also one aspect of the growing discourse on traditional textile techniques in contemporary art. That deceleration goes beyond the production process; it also influences the reception and the viewer's behavior.

Vicuña and Eielson studied and interpreted the knot system and its materiality as well as techniques and transferred as well as translated them in their artistic practice into a transtemporal form of communication. On the one side this approach can be described as a form of postcolonial retransfer of quipus into their textile material, from which some were extracted during the colonization. There the quipucamayocs, the cord keepers “offered oral renderings of their khipus, which were subsequently translated into Spanish and transcribed in the written proceedings as paper khipus” (Medrano 2021, 2 after Brokaw 2003, 113). By hardening, preserving the material and enlarging the strands and knots into meter-high dimensions, Eielson and Vicuña make the quipus an unmissable part of transcultural art history. On the other side both artists not only adapted the textile medium into a new tangible understanding, they also referred to the omnipresent cultural history in their countries of origin and contemporary trends, such as the increasing scientific research on these artifacts.

According to my estimation, Eielson and Vicuña are the first artists to artistically deal with the concept of the quipus. Here I am particularly referring to the explicit titling of artworks as “quipus,” which was not done, for example, by Anni Albers and Sheila Hicks. Both of these female artists had been working with the knotting technique of the quipus from the 1950s onward. It is remarkable that Anni Albers's book *On Weaving*, a survey work published in 1965, was published only shortly after Eielson's and Vicuña's first textile works. Even though neither artist adapted Albers's work, the simultaneity of American textile traditions gaining global importance is made clear.

In addition, Eielson's and Vicuña's works had an exemplary character: many artists of mostly American origin deal with the concept of quipus. One example is the Mexican artist Tanya Aguiñiga with her multimedia quipu project, in which she invited people waiting at the border between Mexico and the United States to tie strings to the wall. These knotted strings can also be classified as a form of transnational communication as well as a storage for memories.

In conclusion, the artistic quipus can be said to correspond to an object of discourse since the early 1960s and, beyond the function of the respective knots, to be recognizable as an independent formative element in contemporary art.<sup>16</sup> The process of transformation and inscription carried out by Eielson and Vicuña in different ways and independent from each other can be described as a complex cluster of transnational influences. In this context, the interrelationships and also the symbiosis of visual art, poetic and (written) signs resemble a consequent crossing of borders. Eielson and Vicuña act as transcultural agents, whose biographies and artistic practices are determined by exile and migration (Eielson to Italy and Vicuña to England and the USA).

With that in mind, I understand the artistic quipus as a form of textile technology that can be described, following Elvira Espejo Ayca and Denise Arnold, in a general sense “as a set of knowledge and practices constructed historically within a region. They can be understood at an intellectual and corporeal level, while at the same time being practiced in material contexts and also in the sphere of artefacts.” (2015, 29) This technological entanglement between “the corporeal and the material aspects” (2015, 29) supplies to the inclusion of the epistemologies of the South in artistic practice as well as academic writing and thinking.

The manifold forms of reception that can be identified from this can be described, for example, as the interpretation and continuation of textile techniques, but also motifs and traditions. In the quipus by Eielson and Vicuña discussed here, there were no dichotomies between the sense of sight and touch, writing and visual art, or tactile and visual perception. Their interactions were effectively used to achieve an activation of the senses through the experience of art, starting from the interrogation of textiles, and thus transcending the boundaries of art – as well as geographical ones.

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## Endnotes

1. In addition to Vicuña, the German artist Katharina Fritsch has also received the Golden Lions for Lifetime Achievement of the 59th Biennale di Venezia. The decision was approved by La Biennale's Board of Directors, chaired by Roberto Cicutto, upon recommendation of the Curator of the 59th International Art Exhibition, Cecilia Alemani.

2. Hereby I refer especially to: Sousa Santos, Boaventura de: *Epistemologien des Südens. Gegen die Hegemonie des Westlichen Denkens*. Münster: Unrast Verlag 2018.
3. With the designation of „the Américas“ I follow Miriam Österreich and Franziska Neff (Neff/Österreich 2018 (2020), 6).
4. Following Eielson and Vicuña, I use the Spanish spelling "quipu" instead of the English "khipu".
5. The first quipu Vicuña saw was in a book belonging to her aunt, which dealt with the history and function of cords and knotting techniques. Vicuña / Gschwandtner 2005, Minute 00:00-03:00; Also see Bryan-Wilson 2017, III.
6. The book *The Precarious (The Art and Poetry of Cecilia Vicuña) / Quipoem*, published by Vicuña and M. Catherine de Zegher in 1997, contains the written thought of the *Quipu que no recuerda nada*, in English: "The Quipu that remembers nothing, an empty cord - the heart of memory." Vicuña 1997, 8-10.
7. Likewise, in the conversation cited above, Urton confirms following Vicuña's artistic practice since the 1990s and approving of her approach, Min. 9:00-10:00.
8. The first performance of this kind took place in 1966 and is titled *Guante*. Others are: *Amor. Weaving in All the Wrong Places*, 1981; *Amarrando Bogotá*, 1981; *Allqa*, 1997; *Cloud-Net*, 1999; *Quipu menstrual*, 2006; *Quipu vivo*, 2006; *Beach Ritual (near Athens)*, 2017; *Living Quipu*, Brooklyn Museum, New York, 23.9.2018; *Living Quipu* Fine Art Museum Boston, 19.10.2018; *Living Quipu*, Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle, April 2019.
9. However, since these research results were published after Vicuña's performances, I will not draw references between them. What is particularly important here is the still ongoing and evolving process of decoding on the part of the researchers and also the artist.
10. The Amano Museum was opened in Lima in 1964 and is still one of the world's most important museums for Peruvian textiles. According to the museum, Eielson often booked private tours there, during which not only the textiles in the permanent exhibition are explained by restorers or curators, but also drawers and cabinets are opened, in which further textiles are located. Carlos Runcie Tanaka, Rafael Hastings and Manongo Mujika also confirmed Eielson's regular visits to the Amano Museum.
11. With this decision to make the cotton textiles into essential subjects themselves, Eielson certainly followed models such as Lucio Fontana (1899-1968). The knot as an archetype of an act of strength seems here like a counterpart to Fontana's cuts, as the art historian José Ignacio Padilla (2002, 240) described it. Especially in Eielson's and Fontana's repetitive procedure and gestural approach, a connection to contemporary artistic movements in Italy, Germany, and France, where both artists resided at some time, can be detected.
12. Jorge Eduardo Eielson: *Tornillo para Rafael*, 1972, cotton fabric soaked in white paint and glue over wood, 28,3 x 21,5 cm, private collection Rafael Hastings & Yvonne von Möllendorff.
13. Already in 1970 Eielson had made one of his textile pyramids from Hastings paintin grags, for which Eielson also specially built a wooden display case. Hastings had this in his living room, which illustrates the importance that the work had for him.
14. Eielson chose this description for the exhibition text of his first exhibition in Lima after his departure to Europe in 1967. Moreover, it was the first exhibition of his quipus in América which he had already shown a year earlier in Venice at the Biennale.
15. The fact that Eielson's quipus always had to be twisted and tied by two people is also confirmed by the artist's later assistant in Patricia Pereyras Film *Eielson Des-nudo*, Lima 2014, Min. 4:00-4:25.
16. In this context, it is also interesting to highlight that in 1973, at the same time as Eielson's *Alfabeto*, the American artist Lynda Benglis began tying various materials such as zinc and metal into meter-sized knots. In these knots, the tension between surface and form becomes a provocative metaphor for mediated embodiment and the interplay between the physical and social body. But the titles of her knots as well as their typeface are also significant: for example, she used the phonetic alphabet of the American military for the metallic knots and Greek

letters for her later glittering knots (Richmond 2013, 101); At the beginning of this series of works, Benglis formed some of the knots according to certain Latin letters. Ultimately, Benglis' knots cannot be read and deciphered literally any more than Eielson's, and yet the titles and forms provide information about their meaning (Richmond 2013, 101-104).

# Representing and Negotiating the US-Mexico Borderlands: Photography, Migration, and Transculturality

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## **ABSTRACT**

The U.S.-Mexico border is both a geopolitical boundary and a social construction. As a space of national fortification and a porous zone of migration, mobility and movement of people, objects and practices, the borderlands can be defined as a hybrid in-between space and a transcultural contact zone. Since the installation of the border following the Mexican-American War, the medium of photography has been closely linked to the making of the border. This paper examines the role of photography in making the border and works of contemporary photography, presenting the borderlands as a transcultural space in a constant state of movement.

## **KEYWORDS**

US.-Mexico Borderlands; Photography; Transculturality; Migration, Postcolonial Theory.

The history of the U.S.-Mexico border runs parallel with the history of photography<sup>1</sup> In the first half of the nineteenth century, photography emerged together with the events that led to the definition of the U.S-Mexico border and the world's first photographs of war are those of General John E. Wool's troops, taken by an unknown daguerreotypist during the American occupation of Saltillo, Mexico in the Mexican-American war in 1847 or early 1848.<sup>2</sup> This paper examines the photographic constructions and representations of the Western U.S.-Mexican border, focusing on migration and transcultural processes of exchange from early views of the boundary line in the mid-nineteenth century to today's works of contemporary artists. Crucial for the analysis is the relationship between seeing, representing, and the question of how the border as a cultural construction came into being through the use of the photographic medium. From whose point of view were photographs of the border taken, to what purpose and what do they convey?

As geopolitical boundaries, borders are commonly defined as international boundaries between nation states.<sup>3</sup> However, rather than being a rigid, pre-given and fixed line separating two nation states, the US-Mexican border is both, a physical construction on the actual ground and a social construction that does not have a single, static, and unchanging meaning. It acts as both, a space of national fortification and a porous zone of migration, mobility and movement of people, objects and practices.<sup>4</sup> From a postcolonial approach, the U.S.-Mexican borderlands can be defined as a hybrid "in-between" space following the definition by Homi Bhabha.<sup>5</sup> Using the term by Mary Louise Pratt, they can also be described as a transcultural, liminal "contact zone" of encounter and powerful negotiation including conditions of coercion, inequality and conflict in which different cultures in the Americas meet and clash.<sup>6</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa has called the U.S.-Mexico border "*una herida abierta*"<sup>7</sup>, an open wound, "where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds".<sup>8</sup>

In this respect, the focus is on the landscape of the borderlands: How is it represented? Which images and imaginations of the landscape are transported? Which role do plants and stones and rocks play? How do landscape and migration come together? Which signs of migration can be

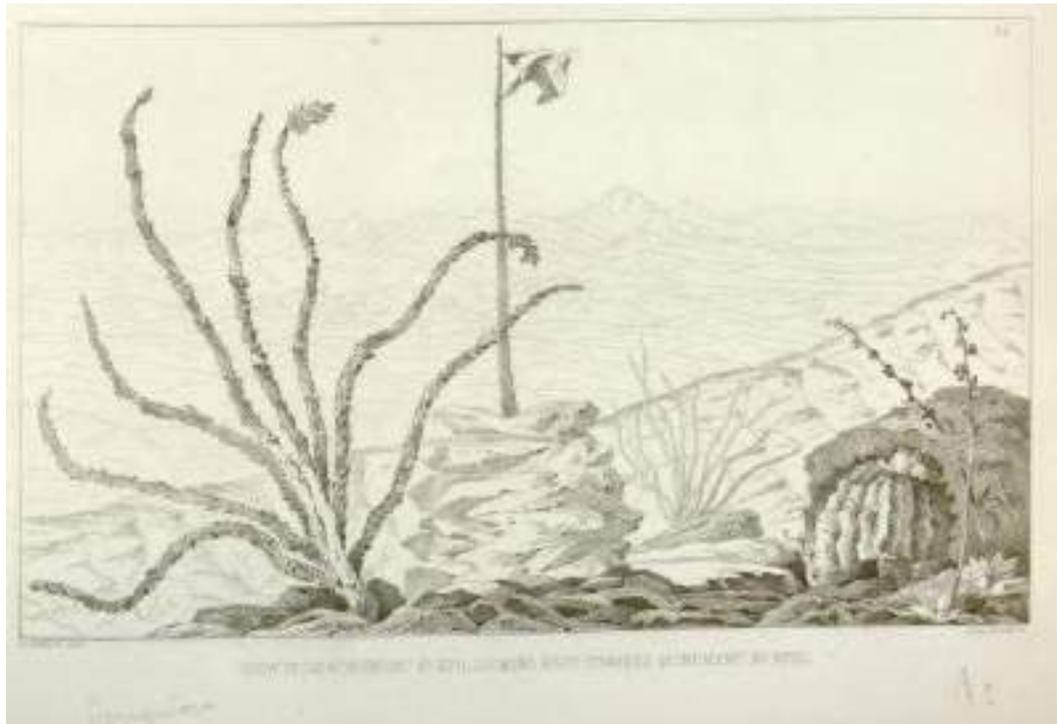
found in the images of contemporary photographers who show the Sonora region as a landscape of migration? Closely connected to the borderlands as a landscape of migration is the aspect of transculturality: How does contemporary photography show the everyday life of people living on both sides of the border, making it a transcultural zone of contact and exchange?

The history of the U.S.-Mexico border began in the early nineteenth century. After Mexico had declared its independence from Spanish colonial power in 1821, the competing territorial visions of both states brought them to war in 1846.<sup>9</sup> In September 1847 American troops invaded Mexico. After the occupation of the Mexican capital by U.S. soldiers, in 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo brought an end to the Mexican-American War. With the Gadsden Purchase in 1853, a new international boundary was set, extending nearly two thousand miles from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific Coast. By agreeing to this, Mexico was forced to give up more than half of its territory to the United States who in turn acquired what is now the American Southwest.<sup>10</sup>

Long, straight international boundaries were not common in the mid-nineteenth century, the more usual approach to establishing borders was to use the contours of nature.<sup>11</sup> But whereas for the eastern part of the border, from the Gulf of Mexico to El Paso, the center of the Rio Grande was defined as the boundary, U.S. and Mexican officials determined the location of its western part by simply drawing straight lines between a few geographically important points on a map – El Paso, the junction of the Colorado and Gila rivers, and San Diego Bay. The analysis focuses on this Western part – the desert border running from west of El Paso to the Pacific Ocean as an entirely new space created by the U.S. and Mexican nation-states.<sup>12</sup>

For the demarcation of the new boundary, a joint Boundary Commission, headed by William Hemsley Emory of the United States and José Salazar y Larregui of Mexico,<sup>13</sup> employed survey parties along the boundary to fix the new line by producing fifty-four sectional maps.<sup>14</sup> Transferring the maps to the ground, fifty-two boundary markers were erected along the border to mark the line on the ground.<sup>15</sup> As the markers were vulnerable however, subject to people moving or destroying them, or to landslides and other

dangers,<sup>16</sup> images were needed to “perpetuate the evidences of the location of the boundary, in the event of the Indians removing the monuments erected on the ground”<sup>17</sup> as the 1857 Report of the Boundary Commission states. Indeed, the new boundary line, imposed by colonial powers that claimed indigenous territories as their own, cut the lands of the Tohona O’odham people in two, leaving half on the U.S. side and half on the Mexican side.<sup>18</sup> Their dispossession from their lands is today mirrored by immigrant rights groups’ counter-discourse, stating, “We didn’t cross the border, the border crossed us”, thereby referring to land that was once Mexico, but which has been indigenous land long before that.<sup>19</sup>



**Fig. 1.** Arthur Schott, *View from Monument No. XVII, Looking East towards Monument No. XVIII*, engr. J.D. Smillie, c. 1856, William Emory, *Report on the United States and Mexican Boundary Survey*, 1857, vol. 1, pl. 38, <https://archive.org/details/mobot31753002023569/page/n1/mode/2up>

There is a set of thirty-two steel engravings in the first volume of the Report of the Boundary Commission whose purpose was to record the

location of the markers erected along the border.<sup>20</sup> These boundary views thus helped establish the imagination of a continuous, coherent boundary line. The pictorial inaccessibility caused by the bare rocks and sharp needles of the cacti and other peculiar plants in the foreground<sup>21</sup> (fig. 1) is an expression of the struggle to come to terms with the unwelcoming strangeness of the unfamiliar landscape<sup>22</sup> and the strains and hardships that had to be overcome by its survey. The views put the emphasis on the line and the discipline required to keep it true<sup>23</sup> and legitimated both the boundary and the survey that defined its official course.<sup>24</sup>

By the 1880s, a new International Boundary Commission with engineers from Mexico and the United States was organized to resurvey the boundary line. New, obelisk-shaped monuments were erected, increasing the number of markers to 258 along the U.S.-Mexico land border from El Paso to the Pacific Ocean. They were never footed more than five miles apart and were placed on high ground wherever possible. The aim was to provide the line with greater visibility and they were positioned so that any one of them could be seen from the one adjacent to it.<sup>25</sup> Prefabricated from cast iron, serialized, and standardized, the border monuments were meant to embody the regularity, uniformity, and industrial precision of the boundary commission's task.<sup>26</sup> Together with the increasingly marked and enforced boundary came a new and similarly efficient medium that could be easily reproduced: photography.

In the 1890s, individual photographs of the monuments were taken with the aim of creating a continuous visual record of the border. The focus remains the same throughout the Boundary Commission's album, with the monument in the center of the image while the surroundings change. Whilst these photographs take their visual language from the earlier sketches of the border monuments, it was however the characteristics of photography with its supposedly truthful rendering of reality and its wide distribution as an early mass medium that made it ideal for the task. Understood as faithful documents, the photographs show the violent act of taking possession of the land, disguised in seemingly objective landscape pictures. The images helped with the construction of a U.S.-American national identity by establishing the

border line, based on difference from ‘the others’ that were meant to be kept out of the new nation’s land.

In this respect, the often elevated vantage point is important: expansive, vast and ‘empty’ mountainous landscapes void of human presence, seemingly waiting for their exploitation and development (fig. 2).<sup>27</sup>



**Fig. 2.** *Mon. No. 185, (Iron), View to the N.W. On high, rough peak of Tule Mountains, Report of the Boundary Commission Upon the Survey and Re-Marking of the Boundary Between the United States and Mexico West of the Rio Grande, 1891-1896, University of North Texas Digital Library, <https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1030/>*

Although the aerial photograph taken from an airplane was not yet available to the early surveyors, an aerial sensibility, expressed in bird’s-eye drawings, maps, and plans, nonetheless pervaded the constructing, surveying, and colonizing of the lands in the American West. The power of the aerial image

reflects *and* constructs the world.<sup>28</sup> Like map-making, air photography and obtaining accurate photographic and remote sensed images of the earth from above has, from its earliest days to the present, been of state and military interest.<sup>29</sup> The concept of the border takes on a bird's-eye view, from which the object and its dividing lines are seen from a distance above. In this sense, borders are understood as a more or less clear demarcation line.<sup>30</sup> According to the ideal of mechanical objectivity, photographs – technically produced images that could seemingly be made without human intervention – were considered particularly desirable. Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison consider the multiple applications of the new medium of photography and the new ideal of objectivity<sup>31</sup> and Thomas Nagel has called the effort to achieve a rational and distanced gaze, which became stronger in the course of the 19th century, the “view from nowhere”.<sup>32</sup> This ‘objective’ view from above is at the same time a cartographic view. The map materialises the boundaries of a territory. Maps also serve to monitor and control the world, up to the planning of strategic bombardments or for the division of a territory according to ‘ethnic’ groups.<sup>33</sup> Christine Buci-Glucksmann writes that the cartographic gaze oscillates between aesthetic observation and political intervention, which can also be called a panoptic gaze as an expression of knowledge and power, i.e. of surveillance, discipline and control with reference to Michel Foucault.<sup>34</sup>

Today, this controlling gaze from above can be found in the media framing of so called “migrant caravans” as in the photograph of a group of mostly Honduran migrants heading to the United States, on the Southern border of Mexico with Guatemala in October 2018.<sup>35</sup> In recent years, groups with thousands of people fleeing violence and insecurity in Central America have made their way northwards, from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador in hopes of finding asylum in Mexico or the United States. Such images were used by the U.S. administration for their cause, with then President Trump calling the migrants “an invasion”.<sup>36</sup> The media, which described migrants as “marching”, picked up a tone that treats migration in terms of nationalism and a threat to the nation. In September 2021, a drone operated by Fox News was banned from flying over the International Bridge between Del Rio in

Texas and Ciudad Acuña, Mexico after thousands of migrants, mostly Haitian, had assembled underneath the bridge.<sup>37</sup>

Whereas at the end of the nineteenth century, photography served the national, colonial project of demarcation in the U.S.-American nation-building, and recent news coverage often constructs and reinforces national imaginations, fostering binary oppositions of “us and them”, artists and writers have traveled along the line with different goals and works of contemporary photography draw attention to the complexities of migration from a wider perspective. In the following analysis, the borderlands are looked at from both sides of the line to explore how both national states have used them to foster transnational communities as well as to divide them.



**Fig. 3.** Jay Dusard, *Mercado Cuauthémoc, Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua*, in: Alan Weisman and Jay Dusard: *La Frontera: The United States Border with Mexico* (San Diego et al.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1986), pl. 25

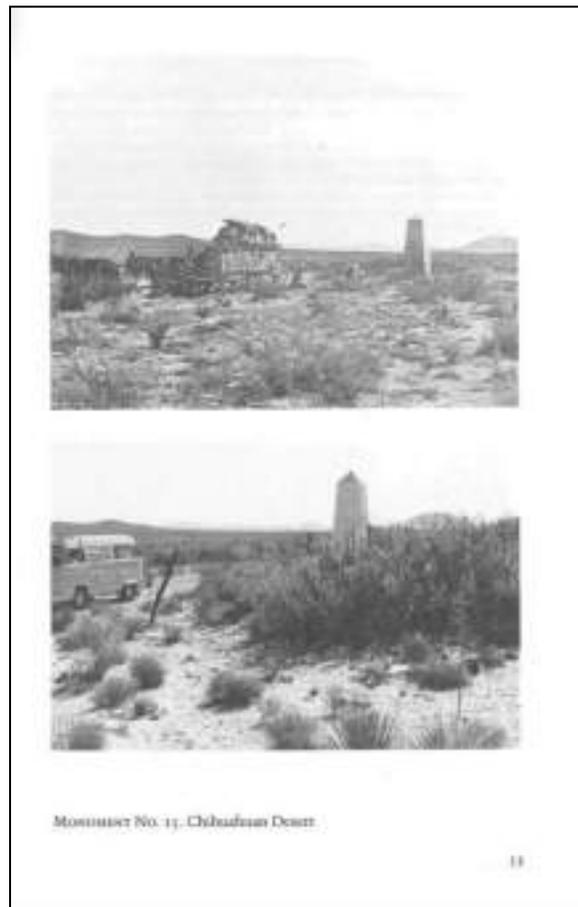
In the early 1980s, author Alan Weisman and photographer Jay Dusard were the first to travel the complete borderline from the Gulf of Mexico to

the Pacific Ocean. Their resulting book, *La Frontera: The United States Border with Mexico*, captured a region that was largely unknown to both, the U.S.-American and Mexican publics. Divided into nine chapters, each representing a geographic area and accompanied by Dusard's black and white photographs, their publication is less interested in the demarcation of the line by the boundary monuments as it is in presenting the region from the point of view of the people who live and work along the varied and increasingly complex border (fig. 3).

Through their narratives, readers are introduced to the landscape, the economy, local and international politics, and the constant struggle for survival of border cities and industries. In the book's preface, Weisman declared that their "intention was to learn what this region meant to the two worlds that held it like a vise and whether it had metamorphosed under this pressure into a new, separate entity", i.e. a transcultural, hybrid in-between space, concluding that "most of it is a stunningly beautiful international treasure. To some, it divides two countries, to others, it unites them. We discovered the truth to be a bit of both, but it is still the former more than the latter."<sup>38</sup>

In 1983, Robert Humphrey, professor of ecology and evolutionary biology at the University of Arizona, used the 1890s Boundary Commission Album for a rephotography project. Interested in the study of vegetation and landform change, he traveled along the New Mexico and Arizona sections of the border, retaking photographs of the same places as earlier nineteenth-century photographers had done, and used the images to compare changes in vegetation over time. In his book *90 Years and 535 Miles: Vegetation Changes Along the Mexican Border* he juxtaposes each of the 1890s album's images with one of his own photographs, taken from the same direction.<sup>39</sup> While the album's photographs focused on the monuments, Humphrey drew the viewers' attention to their surroundings – the vegetation depicted in his images compared with their counterparts from the 1890s. Using the photographs as scientific evidence made it possible to show ecological changes taking place. However, Humphrey also gives a personal comment

when his carefully positioned Volkswagen bus replaces the horse-drawn wagon shown in the 1890s counterpart (fig. 4).<sup>40</sup>



**Fig. 4.** Robert R. Humphrey, *90 Years and 535 Miles: Vegetation Changes Along the Mexican Border* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), 53.

After the Boundary Commission Album of the 1890s, there had been no complete documentation of all the boundary monuments in more than a hundred years. David Taylor traveled the borderline, often in the company of border agents, to locate and photograph all of the 276 monuments. His series *Monuments: 276 Views of the United States - Mexico Border* was published in 2015.<sup>41</sup> As a documentary catalogue, his photographs echo those taken by the International Boundary Commission. However, instead of merely re-taking them from the same point of view as the album's photographers, he also focuses on the surroundings and the impacts on the landscape, as well as the lives of the people in the borderlands. Thus, Taylor's images are at the same

time an artistic and a critical comment. With social and political discourse surrounding the border as a symbol for the enforcement of immigration policies driven by a concern for national security, the images show “a highly complex physical, social and political topography during a period of dramatic change”.<sup>42</sup>

A symbol of the constant surveillance is a camera tower in the border town of Nogales, Arizona, from the series *Working the Line*. (fig. 5). From a hilltop perspective, Taylor here inverts the surveilling gaze from the United States onto Mexico by casting a downward gaze from Sonora onto the militarized border zone on the U.S.-American side of the border fence.<sup>43</sup>



**Fig. 5.** David Taylor, *View into Nogales from the Border Fence (with camera tower)*, 2009, from the series *Working the Line*. Courtesy of the artist

In his photographic project *El Camino del Diablo*, Mark Klett also takes an approach of revisiting the border region, following an earlier, literary source. The “Road of the Devil”, a trail running parallel to part of the Arizona-Mexico border across the Sonoran Desert and terminating at the Colorado River is known for its remoteness, extreme heat, and lack of water. One of the earliest accounts was written in 1861 by Raphael Pumpelly, a geologist, explorer, and

mining engineer on his westward journey to take charge of the Santa Rita silver mines, south of Tucson. Klett took the same route, but unable to trace Pumpelly's exact steps, he created images that are not literal references as he focused instead on the landscape and the people taking the route today.<sup>44</sup> The Camino del Diablo is a part of the desert which has been traveled by the O'odham people to-and-fro between what is modern-day Mexico and the United States. Today migrants also cross here. Klett shows vast, empty landscapes, seemingly without any human presence. But he includes traces of human evidence: the remnants of struggle and suffering: migrant trails, clothing left behind by migrants or empty water bottles.<sup>45</sup> By focusing on the beauties of the Sonoran Desert while at the same time including traces and objects left by migrants, Klett represents it as a landscape of migration. His portraits of giant saguaro cacti, taken in the deserts of central and southern Arizona between 1987 and 2006, are straightforward and frontal, with each cactus in the center of the photograph, in black and white and thus reminiscent of the seemingly objective presentation of the border monuments in the album of the boundary commission, but making the plants the objects of interest and symbols of the desert.<sup>46</sup>

In his *Frontera* project, Mexican artist Pablo López Luz traces the boundary line from above, examining it in aerial photographs taken from both sides of the line. Over four helicopter rides in 2014/2015, he captured 2,000 km of land between San Diego/Tijuana and El Paso/Ciudad Juarez in large-format landscape photography. *San Diego – Tijuana XI, Frontera USA-Mexico*, 2015, taken from the U.S. side, shows the border between Tijuana and San Diego.<sup>47</sup> Whereas almost 50 million people cross it each year, making it the busiest land-border crossing in the world, López Luz shows it void of human presence. The photographs offer no indication of who 'belongs' on either side of the border. Instead, he concentrates on the green and brown, sublime mountain landscape which is divided by a thin line.<sup>48</sup> From the air a seemingly uniform landscape can be seen whose nature is emphasized as common ground.

Through a combination of black-and-white landscape and portrait photographs, illustrations, maps, instructions and personal narratives, Paul

Touronet's photo book *Estamos Buscando A*, meaning "We are looking for", gives insight into the experience of migrants along the U.S.–Mexico border region. It features portraits of migrants or those who have plans to migrate in the Sonora-Arizona region and written accounts of what Touronet himself saw over many years of studying their crossings.<sup>49</sup> The little booklet, with text in Spanish and English, has been designed to reference the migrant safety guides that are given to migrants by the Instituto Nacional de Migración of the Mexican government which works for the protection and defense of human rights of migrants on Mexico's northern and southern borders. The text warns people thinking of walking across the border not to do it, counseling them, instead, to seek legal means of entry. But it also offers them advice on how to proceed if they must. Sections include "Be Careful of Smugglers", "If You Are Detained", or advice on how to cross the desert or a river.<sup>50</sup> The photographs are marked with a number that corresponds to a location along the U.S. – Mexico border that can be found on the foldout map provided.

Between 2005 and 2007, the organizers of the Border Film Project distributed disposable cameras in northern Mexico among Mexican and Central American migrants as well as among Minutemen who worked together with the Border Patrol, surveilling undocumented migrants at "observation sites" along the U.S. side of the border. Each of the two groups was asked to take photographs that would later be assembled into a traveling exhibition, a website and the book *Border Film Project: Photos by Migrants & Minutemen on the U.S.-Mexico Border*. The intention of the project was to enable each group to self-represent their views. In the accompanying interviews, the Minutemen described their tasks of surveillance, of spotting and reporting migrants to the Border Patrol, using photography not only as a form of surveillance, but also to document "caught" and detained people.<sup>51</sup> The migrants used photography as a means to make visible their political and material circumstances as well as the structural violence produced as a result of U.S. border policy. Their photographs have the power to challenge nationalist discourses by presenting the border as a porous, transcultural space in a constant state of movement.<sup>52</sup>

All the artists presented here use the medium of photography, but they do so in different ways, with different intentions, goals and results. They all focus on the impacts that the border has on the lives of people living in these borderlands, on the landscape or on ecological changes, on migration and social space. The examples examined here show that photography can be used to build national identities, to foster nationalist discourses, and, as in the cases of the Boundary Commission Album, the Border Patrol or the Minutemen, as a means of surveillance. But photography can also be used for counter-discourses as in the case of migrants' self-representation in the Border Film Project. Like the Boundary survey album, the artists' photographs have also been published in photo books. Photography is thus used as a mobile, transportable medium in order to draw attention to the issues concerning the border and to reach a wider audience. As Burcu Dogramaci and Helene Roth have shown, photography is the diasporic medium par excellence. By transgressing national and global boundaries on the move and being used as a means of memory and communication, it becomes a transcultural medium in itself.<sup>53</sup>

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# Hurricane Hybridity: Migration, Transculturation, and the Art History of Hurricanes

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## **ABSTRACT**

This essay examines the cultural politics, art, and architecture of catastrophe, which uniquely transformed the urban and visual landscapes of the Caribbean across generations. Natural disasters are cultural artifacts, I argue, which participate in interrelated histories of migration, transculturality, hybridity<sup>1</sup>, and decoloniality in the Caribbean context throughout time and space (as outlined by writers like Antonio Benítez-Rojo, Édouard Glissant, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, and others). Drawing from the writings of Fernando Ortiz on the visual anthropology of hurricanes, this discussion begins with the visual works and buildings of the Carib and Taíno peoples, and later depictions, expressions, and built environments related to hurricanes by European colonizers and descendants of enslaved Africans during the colonial period. It then projects forward to the interweaving histories of revolution, emergent democracies, imperialism, modern art, and hurricanes that defined the greater Caribbean during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. This *longue durée* look at hurricanes in visual and material culture ultimately aims to demonstrate the productive possibilities of visual and material culture in our current geologic era, the Anthropocene, an age marked by human-made climate ruin.

## **KEYWORDS**

Cultural Politics; Climate Change; Hurricanes; Longue Durée; Poetics Of Catastrophe.

Antillean writers (Édouard Glissant, Edwidge Danticat, Antonio Benítez-Rojo, and many others) have observed how the history of the Caribbean traces a poetics of catastrophe: from slavery and colonialism to economic exploitation and deadly calamities. This paper examines the interrelated *cultural politics, art, and architecture* of catastrophe, particularly that of hurricanes and their aftermath, which uniquely transformed Caribbean cultures across multiple historic periods. Hurricanes and other natural disasters represent more than poetic metaphors of tropical entropy. Natural disasters are also cultural artifacts, I argue, which participate in interrelated histories of migration, transculturality, hybridity, and decoloniality in the visual and material context of the Caribbean.

Hurricanes are, by nature, transregional super-forces, no less so in art and architectural histories than global climate change. Hurricanes exceed and redefine the visual, material, and cultural landscapes of the Caribbean, as well as the globalized world, across time and space. Hurricanes are without boundaries (hyper, multi, super, and trans). They affect the development of cities like Fort-de-France, Houston, Nassau, New Orleans, San Juan, Santo Domingo, and Havana just as they once inspired the British bard William Shakespeare and his archetypal play *The Tempest*; iconic American artist Winslow Homer and his racial justice-themed paintings *The Gulf Stream* and *After the Hurricane, Bahamas*; Puerto Rican modernist, printmaker, and muralist Rafael Tufiño's masterwork of popular culture *La Plena*; and contemporary Caribbean artists, like Poli Marichal and her haunting linocut series *Hurricane Redux* that followed Hurricane María in Puerto Rico in 2017; or Angelika Wallace-Whitfield and her graffiti-tagging charitable project *Hope is a Weapon* that responded to the pain caused by hurricane Dorian in the Bahamas, 2019.

The Atlantic hurricane is a chronotopic force that produces historic moments of crisis in human society.<sup>2</sup> Natural disasters, like the hurricane, become cultural disasters based on human responses before and after the crisis event, evidenced in art, architecture, and urbanism as much as writing, poetry, and law. Writers like Homi K. Bhabha, following Frantz Fanon and others, might remind us that it is precisely from crises (wars, colonialism,

imperialism) that new cultures are negotiated and translated.<sup>3</sup> Hurricanes destroy cultural boundaries, identitarian politics, and physical space, but those storms also produce a need to create, reconstruct, and remake. Hurricanes are not solely catastrophic meteorological events. They also effectively *made* and continue to redefine the migratory and transcultural environments of the greater Caribbean and by extension the global community. Contemporary philosopher Timothy Morton has designated the hurricane as a “hyperobject” in the era of global climate change – an event beyond human comprehension that yet unites us all.<sup>4</sup> Anthropologist Jorge Duany and many others have argued recently that migrants from Puerto Rico and other parts of the Caribbean are, in fact, refugees of climate ruin - displaced by super storms and other natural disasters ultimately caused by industrial societies around the world.<sup>5</sup> In our present Anthropocene, as we humans create new and unforeseen dramatic changes to the natural environment, the humanistic study of hurricanes in the *longue durée* becomes ever more important. To understand the threat of human-made climate ruin (as well as wide-ranging and related histories of racism, immigration, technology, and so forth), we must also consider the cultural life of natural disasters. Of these, none is more iconic or defining of the Caribbean cosmos (to borrow from artist Teresita Fernández) than that of the hurricane.<sup>6</sup>

Art historical writings have logically privileged the role of human actors in retelling those palimpsestic moments of destruction and reconstruction that would come to define the complex cultural currents of Caribbean material and visual cultures, whether early modern conquest, colonialism, and revolutions or Cold War imperialism and contemporary neoliberalism. Culture-altering disasters, however, are not always human products. Change may also come through the indifference of nature. The Atlantic hurricane was a particularly profound source of change in the Caribbean, from ancient times into the present. The swirling rain bands of the Atlantic hurricane reach back to the ancient cultures of the Caribbean and Gulf Coast as they project forward through colonialism, plantation slavery, and modernism into the Anthropocene. By Anthropocene I mean to

say our current era since the 1950s, which has been defined by humanity's effect on earth's geology. Human visual culture and the earth's climate, however, have a much longer and storied history. "Huracán," from whence came the word hurricane, was the name of a deity of destruction and creation across multiple Indigenous cultures, including the Taíno and Carib of the Antilles and the Maya of Yucatan and Mesoamerica. Ancient Indigenous art likely representing the same god included counterclockwise spirals around an ambiguously gendered head, sometimes depicted inside the body of a woman (possibly the nature goddess Guabancex and her child Huracán) (Figure 1).

Indigenous artworks of stone and clay demonstrated a remarkable visual knowledge of the cyclonic nature of Caribbean storms, many hundreds of years before the development of meteorology in Europe. These ancient artworks (with only one known exception) suggest an astute visual understanding of the rotation of winds and water according to the magnetic poles and earth's rotation, better known today as the Coriolis effect (storms swirl counterclockwise in the northern hemisphere and clockwise in the southern).<sup>2</sup> Famed Cuban ethnographer Fernando Ortiz, inventor of the term transculturation – an influential if not controversial concept of cultural intermingling that would come to encompass the African, European, Asian, and Indigenous origins of Cuban culture — was among the first to discuss these enigmatic figures. Ortiz suggested various interpretations. Perhaps they were symbols of a swirling dance; of fertility; of birth. Or they encompassed all these ideas: birth, life, death, and rebirth. For Ortiz, these figures were likely a representation of that unrepresentable and sublime force we call the Atlantic hurricane.



**Fig. 1.** *Indigenous Idol (“Guabancex and Huracán”), diorite, 7.5” x 3.3” x 2.18”, date unknown, reproduction from Ortiz, *El Huracán: Su Mitología y sus Símbolos*, 22.*

Hurricanes could not be seen (as we do now with airplanes and later satellites), yet Indigenous peoples understood their visual form well through lived experience. That understanding affected their aesthetic, social, and religious world. The winds that spiral counterclockwise, and the calm eye that defines the center of the hurricane also represented a configuration of Indigenous understandings of space and time. For the Taíno and other Indigenous groups in the greater Caribbean, the hurricane was not only a destructive force. It was also a creative energy. They observed how the hurricane affected crops and new growth, as an integral part of a larger ecosystem. Those storms would thus dictate Antillean cuisine, particularly the reliance on ground crops and tubers like Yucca and Casaba. Just as they also came to define Indigenous architecture and urban space. A prime example can be seen in the use of natural materials like the strong bejuco

climber vine. Spanish chronicler Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés noted how Arawacks used the bejuco for tying down the deep-driven columns of their homes, known as bohíos.<sup>8</sup> The columns themselves were made of ausubo wood: a native Caribbean tree that the British later called ironwood (in their observations of the tree's strength).<sup>9</sup> Like their homes, Taíno and pre-Taíno urban spaces were often oriented in a circular form. The Indigenous Antillean village was a ritual space, often set around a large ceiba tree or ancestral burial ground. In addition to spiritual traditions, the circular form of their architecture and urbanism reflected a profound understanding of physical geometry in the face of natural hazards. Round or multi-sided homes are more resistant to hurricane-force winds, a fact of aerodynamics deployed by many architectural firms working in the Caribbean today.<sup>10</sup>

The Spanish quickly usurped, burned, and destroyed the architectural innovations of Indigenous Caribbean peoples after 1492, along with cacique leaders like Anacaona – the Flowery Queen of Haiti, as they strove to introduce their own materialist order in the so-called new world. Spanish colonists appropriated materials and techniques in the process, which resulted in new Ibero-American expressions. The Spanish made sure to clear cut forests of powerful ausubo trees for use in their own fortifications, including the fortified cities of Havana and Porto Rico (now known as San Juan) and the strong roofs of nearby sugar, coffee, and tobacco plantations – principal elements in the economic engine that was the Spanish kingdom.

And so, the cyclonic arms of the hurricane accompanied the catastrophes of the colonial period, a moment marked by European conquest, Indigenous genocide, and the enslavement of African peoples. It is then, too, that we see the beginning of an unprecedented exploitation of the natural world on a global scale, alongside tremendous cultural intermingling, migrations, and evolution. The hurricane is central to that history. It was providential that Christopher Columbus managed to avoid the annual storms of the region when he landed in Guanahani (later San Salvador) of the Bahamas at the height of hurricane season, October 12, 1492.<sup>11</sup> The hurricanes that Columbus narrowly avoided would soon define the schedule of the Spanish silver fleet. Laden with riches from New Spain, Peru, and Manilla via

Acapulco, galleons had to leave the Bay of Havana for Seville in June or July before the hurricane season began in earnest. The steady schedule of storms made the fleet an easier target for pirates. But for the Spanish crown, the Atlantic hurricane was a far greater danger than any corsair's blade. You could lose a whole fleet to a storm. This was the case throughout the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. A hurricane July 31, 1715, for example, claimed 11 of 12 ships and over a thousand Spanish sailors' lives. Gold escudos and silver cobs from the drowned fleet still sometimes wash along the shores of Florida. Faded towers and lions on shipwrecked coins offer reminders of the hurricane's economic toll for the rulers of Castille and Leon.<sup>12</sup>

Not just fleets, but entire cities were lost to storms. European settlers, unaware of the science of hurricanes, often built their first settlements in the Caribbean along those coastal regions most susceptible to storms. Veracruz set along the Gulf of Mexico was nearly undone in the hurricane of 1552, just 30 some years after Hernán Cortés precipitated the conquest of the Mexica after burning his own fleet in the port of the new settlement in 1519.<sup>13</sup> As storm after storm battered prized colonial port cities and plantations (we see one such storm in Havana in 1846, as illustrated by the French lithographer Frédéric Mialhe, for example), European parvenus came to join Indigenous peoples in their belief that hurricanes represented a divine (or diabolic) force (Figure 2). The hurricane was, for many, a punishment for sins. A sixteenth-century depiction of one such storm by Flemish-born German engraver Theodor de Bry shows us Spanish colonists gazing skyward in a penitent gesture. They flee along a rocky shoreline, strewn with discarded harquebuses. Half-nude Indigenous figures seek shelter under large stones, matching (ethically dubious) descriptions of "Indians" hiding "in holes in order to escape such disasters (Figure 2)."<sup>14</sup>



**Fig 2.** Theodor de Bry, *Ein schrecklich und unerhörtes Ungewitter*, engraving, circa 1594, from Benzoni and De Bry, *America (Band 4)*. Image courtesy of the University of Heidelberg Digital Library. Available at <https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.8296>

After the introduction of the slave trade in the colonial period, African descendants in the Caribbean likewise came to view the annual hurricane as both a natural and spiritual force. Religious affiliates of African-derived belief systems would represent the swirling winds of the hurricane in their whirling performances, as in those of Oya – the orisha of wind – and Changó – the deity of lightning. Hurricanes were a powerful embodiment of *aché* – a spiritual energy to make things happen.<sup>45</sup> Beyond potent destructive force, the storm also represented a divine possibility for enslaved peoples and colonial subjects alike. British, Spanish, Dutch, and French colonial powers feared the fallout of annual hurricanes. The storm weakened the plantation economy and presented opportunities for revolts and revolutions like those

of the United States and Haiti. The deadly hurricane of 1780, for example, considered the most fatal in human history with a toll of 22,000 souls, sunk whole fleets of French and British ships deployed to either aid or thwart the American Revolution.<sup>16</sup> The British had to cede Yorktown to revolutionaries after losing 24 warships to the storm of 1780. Those devastating scenes of ships lost to Atlantic storms were a common theme of British art, from the early prints of Valentine Green after William Elliot to the infamous *Slave Ship* of James Mallord William Turner (Originally Titled: *Slavers Throwing overboard the Dead and Dying—Typhoon coming on*) (Figures 3). Turner's iconic painting shows us brilliant crimson and yellow cirrus clouds juxtaposed with the prostheses of enslaved African peoples drowning in ochre waves.<sup>17</sup> The storm here would seem to consume the sinful products and real human costs of colonialism and capitalism at once. Those same sins and storms would undergird the Haitian Revolution, too. Early French and Haitian chroniclers symbolically suggested that the only successful slave revolt in world history started with a vodou ceremony at the rise of a tropical storm in August of 1791.<sup>18</sup> That fabled storm would follow a series of truly deadly hurricanes throughout the 1780s, alongside the American and French Revolutions, which fundamentally disrupted the plantation state and eventually resulted in the establishment of the first Black Republic in 1804.

Major hurricanes had the potential to help overturn the world order. Yet, they could also present opportunities for those with power to maintain their hold. Such was the case in the major storms of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, beginning with San Ciriaco in Puerto Rico in 1899.<sup>19</sup> Coming less than a year after the United States took possession of Puerto Rico from Spain, the storm of San Ciriaco presented US officials with an opportunity to cement the empire's power, quite literally, through the reconstruction of roads, homes, and public buildings. San Ciriaco preceded the deadly storm of Galveston, Texas in 1900.<sup>20</sup> That storm, too, opened opportunities for the assertion of so-called white power in the Southern United States after the Civil War, haunted by the same socio-racial hierarchies of most of the ex-colonial world. After the storm, white vigilantes executed dozens of African Americans, whom they accused of looting. With

this and later storms, we see how hurricanes disproportionately affected Black communities and communities of color in the greater Caribbean, whether in acts of outright violence or in state negligence. Here we witness the non-ethics of disaster response (to borrow from Puerto Rican philosopher Nelson Maldonado-Torres) which would reveal the coloniality of modernity.<sup>21</sup> These historic inequities and storms inform the anti-racist themes of Winslow Homer's 1899 paintings, too, like *The Gulf Stream* and *After the Hurricane, Bahamas* – hinting at the natural and cultural disasters that would continue place the Black body in crisis.<sup>22</sup>

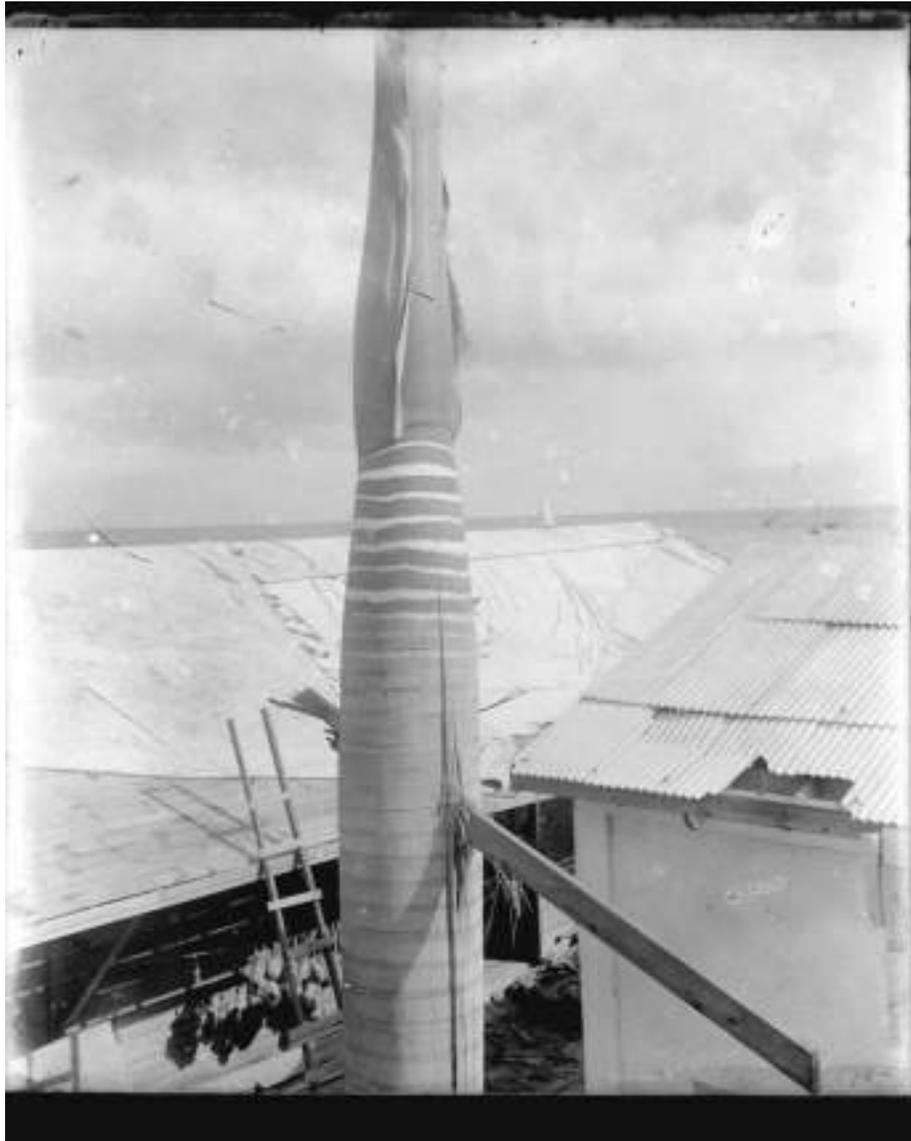


**Fig. 3.** J.M.W Turner, *Slave Ship (Slaver's Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying Typhon Coming On)*, oil on canvas, 1840. Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Decades later, the entire world was in crisis with the advent of World War I, the Great Depression, and eventually the rise of Nazism and the start of World War II. This period between the 1920s and 1940s also witnessed the

worst storms in Caribbean history, due to major shifts in climate caused by El Niño-Southern Oscillation weather effects. The most devastating storms of the twentieth century presented unique political opportunities across multiple cultural sectors. US imperial officials, Caribbean despots, and local reformers alike used architecture and visual propaganda to restore, reshape, and control cities affected by the worst hurricanes of the period. This included the ornate buildings, highways, and parks of the US-funded public works program of Cuban dictator Gerardo Machado in Havana that followed the hurricane season of 1926; the cementing of US imperial power in concrete and neoclassical monuments in San Juan and Puerto Rico after hurricane San Felipe II in 1928; and the modern architecture and urbanism that refashioned Santo Domingo as Ciudad Trujillo under the infamous despot Rafael Leónidas Trujillo after San Zenon struck the Dominican Republic in 1930.<sup>23</sup> In each case, the hurricane acted as a cultural catalyst, which operated alongside political and social structures. An apt metaphor of those storms and their unsettling cultural echoes can be found in the commonly circulated photograph of a palm tree stabbed by a beam of wood (thrust so by hurricane force winds after each storm). Created during the rise of surrealism in Europe, these storm photos offer us a glimpse of the uncanny – a crisis of natural and cultural orders across multiple insular contexts – *el huracán que se repite*, the repeating hurricane (to riff on Cuban postmodernist Antonio Benítez-Rojo) that produces and reproduces Caribbean visual cultures (Figure 4).<sup>24</sup>

Those historic storms destroyed and then, through public art and architecture, recast the modern cities of the Caribbean. Yet, the political forces (US capitalists and local caudillos) that drove those post-disaster building projects would no less threaten the region's most vulnerable populations for generations to come. Puerto Rican printmaker Carlos Raquel Rivera thus justly represented one such storm in his mid-century linocuts as a visible metaphor for the ruinous effects of US-style capitalism (and its support of local despots and exploitative businesses).



**Fig. 4.** Manuel Martínez Illa, *Palm Tree Stabbed by Beam of Wood*, 1926. Courtesy of the photo archives of the Oficina del Historiador de la Ciudad de la Habana.

Annual storms and major hurricanes would continue to redefine the art, architecture, and cultural politics of the Caribbean throughout the late-twentieth century into the twenty first. Acknowledging perhaps the humanistic effects of those storms after 1953, the US weather service began naming them. We can all recall the names of the most devastating storms in our recent history: Katrina, Harvey, María, Dorian. In the era of climate ruin,

those storms that were once viewed by Indigenous and African diasporic peoples as spiritual energies and by European colonists as punishment for human sins, have again taken the form of arbitrator in human affairs. In the age of human-made climate change, super storms loom on the horizon, foretelling of a new decade of storms, empires, and despots like that of the 1920s and 30s; or a new powerful force that could upend colonialism and the world order like the storms of the 1780s. Today's storms leave new yet strangely familiar images and constructs in their wake: flooded streets and felled trees, boats on highways, the bureaucratic temporary housings of government agencies like FEMA. Contemporary art in the age of climate ruin no less reflects an aesthetics of catastrophe over the *longue durée*. As it also gestures at the radical decolonial solutions that our present climate crisis will require. The art produced in protest of the United States failures after Hurricane María in 2017 is a case in point. As of 2021, Puerto Rico had only received 1/5 of the 90 some billion dollars needed for full reconstruction – turning a natural disaster into an utterly cultural one. Decoloniality becomes a form of critical thinking made tangible in the “ugly” rusted sinks of Rafael Vargas Bernard's *Tenemos sed – We are thirsty* and the felled powerlines of Gabriella Torres-Ferrer's *Valora tu mentira americana (Value your American Lie)* (Figure 5).<sup>25</sup>



**Fig. 5.** Gabriela Torres-Ferrer, *Untitled (Valora tu mentira Americana)*, 2018. Hurricane ravaged wooden electric post with statehood propaganda. 116” x 118” x 122”. Collection of César & Mima Reyes. Courtesy of the artist and Embajada, San Juan, Photo: Raquel Perez-Puig.

Tracing the art, architecture, and cultural politics of hurricanes throughout history, I hope to reiterate in closing, is a critical step toward confronting the social, economic, and emotional entanglements of migration and transculturation in the contemporary Anthropocene. We continue to grapple with debates over climate change, immigration, international policies, and the haunting legacies of European colonialism, the Monroe Doctrine, and US ambitions to empire in the Western hemisphere. The artistic and architectural legacy of hurricanes is not epiphenomenal to those larger debates, but rather central to confronting our shared crises. Nor are visual and material cultures epiphenomena of other prime movers (be they war, disease, or natural disasters). On the contrary, the history of art and architecture allows us to ontologize hurricanes and their complex effects on theories of migration, transculturality, hybridity, and decoloniality in the Caribbean context. The hurricane is a traumatic but creative element in the non-art history of the Caribbean's chaos-monde (to borrow the parlance of Martinican poet Édouard Glissant).<sup>26</sup> Art and architecture provide the conditions of possibility for the hurricane in the Caribbean and worldwide, whose ultimate effects, history tells us, depends on humanity's (yours, mine, and the world's) material response.

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1. Recognizing the complexity of this widely used and debated term, I hope to employ “hybridity” here in the spirit of scholars like Shirley Anne Tate, Robert Young, Homi K. Bhabha, and Mikhail Bakhtin. That is as a conscious or intentional form of hybridity, embodying a political effort to disrupt homogenization and ultimately reverse colonial structures of domination. Caribbean art made in response to hurricanes, especially recent works aimed at critiquing the colonial status quo, possess that very potential. This contrasts with an unconscious deployment of hybridity. Resting on racist assumptions and colonial discourse, unconscious hybridity assumes a passive mixture of cultures, which at best erases oppositional histories and at worst implies lesser value. See Shirley Anne Tate, *Black Skins, Black Masks: Hybridity, Dialogism, Performativity* (London: Routledge, 2017); and Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 2005).
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# Modified Fruit: Weaving Transcultural Threads Between Santa Cruz and Santa Cruz

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper addresses the politics of authenticity through a strategy of transcultural appropriation. I draw on the history of *piña* (pineapple cloth from the Philippines) as a metaphor for a transcultural ‘traveler.’ The pineapple, indigenous to Brazil was thought to have been accidentally brought to the Philippines during Magellan’s circumnavigation of the globe. The fruit’s consequent production into *piña* cloth and eventually into a national symbol may be attributed to the actions associated with European colonization and indigenous weaving practices, which, in the age of nineteenth-century nationalism, converged with print technology. Ecclesiastically Baroque embroidered *piña* cloth was gifted to European courts as lace; Indigenous animism was conflated with Christian vestiaries and embroidery illustrating the power of cloth as a colonizing tool. *Piña* cloth, unmoored from artworld preconceptions and as a cultural material formed by an intermeshing of cultures, operates in its own space; the syncretic mode by which this material was formed has made possible its hybrid contemporary forms; a transcultural material which resists homogenization addresses and challenges essentialist ideas of culture as static and pure.

## **KEYWORDS**

Transculture; Appropriation; Textile; Syncretism; Decolonization.

**Modified Fruit: weaving transcultural threads between Santa Cruz and Santa Cruz**



**Fig. 1.** *Santo Niño and pineapple* (no date), Manuel Baldemor, 70 cm x 100 cm, oil on wood, photograph taken by the author courtesy of India Legaspi 2017, Kalibo, Aklan, Panay, the Philippines.

This paper traces the trajectory of the pineapple from Brazil to the Philippines as an analogy of the transcultural agency of subjects in motion. Transcultural agency lies within ideas which surround acts of appropriation and mis/translation which produce confluences that can demonstrate that ‘the transcultural dynamic is directly proportional to the limits and opacity of its translation’ (1). An example is the syncretic conflation of indigenous Animism with Christianity (2) is in the collapsing of the image of the pineapple into the figure of the Christ Child, in figure 1, the *Santo Niño*. Pineapple cloth is woven from the leaves of the pineapple plant in the Philippines, and this cloth,

unbound from any original tradition and the syncretic mode by which this material came to be, has made possible its hybrid contemporary forms.



**Fig. 2.** Extracting *liniwan* 2014, the innermost fiber of the leaf of the pineapple plant, Barangay Fulgenzio del Norte, Aklan, Panay, the Philippines

To travel the route of the biography of things (3) is to trace how ‘subjects get constituted in and by their relations to each other’ (4). Syncretic forms are the result of transcultural processes in which appropriation occurs through any contact; a displacement which makes visible a ‘diasporic sensibility in which agency is found in the very fragmentation, translations and crossings of dispersal’ (5).

The pineapple is indigenous to Brazil where for 4,000 years it was cultivated by the Tupinamba (6). In 1400, varieties of the plant were carried by Tupi descendants, the Kalinago, from the interior of Brazil along the Orinoco River to the Caribbean where on November 4, 1493, Columbus was presented with one during his second voyage to the West Indian Island of Santa Maria de Guadeloupe (7). Within 200 years after this contact, the pineapple was transported from Santa Cruz, in the first colonized part of Brazil, all around the globe; the pineapple is thought to have landed on the island of Samar in the Visayan archipelago via Magellan’s circumnavigation in 1521 (8). The research for this paper began in the province of Santa Cruz in the Philippines, a center for embroidering the *Barong Tagalog*, the National dress.

The name *piña* is a conflation of the Tupi name for pineapple–Nana, ‘excellent fruit’ and the Spanish word, *piña* (9), because of its resemblance to a pinecone. It is thought that the Tupi cultivated the pineapple to make rope and wine (10) and that pineapples first left the shores of the Americas as a cure for scurvy on long voyages (11). According to Montinola (12) the accidental discarding of the pineapple suckers, rather than its deliberate introduction, is credited with its introduction into the Philippines. However it arrived, the climate was right for the discarded suckers to grow, and this, converging with indigenous weaving practices (13) and at the time, colonialism and print technology, led to the production of pineapple cloth, *piña*, in the Philippines.



**Fig. 3.** Knotting *piña* fiber 2014, Barangay Fulgenzio del Norte, Aklan, Panay, the Philippines

The power invested in objects on the periphery is that constraining structures are absent and within, objects and images unmoored from preconceptions and as cultural material formed by an intermeshing of cultures, operate largely in their own space. Similarly, Oswaldo Andrade's Anthropophagic metaphor of transcultural appropriation in Brazil points to a 'procedure that is characteristic of post-colonial art and implies the perception of anthropophagy as a metaphorical definition of the appropriation of otherness for one's own liberation' (14).

*Piña* cloth's significance shifted through oscillating between ideas of power, identity, tradition, and nationalism (15). The rapid Christian conversion in the Philippines is evidenced in its visual representation through catholic vestuary; it then became a marker for denoting race and class imposed by the Spanish in 1741 to the early 19th century. In paintings and travelers' accounts,

*mestizos* wore *piña*. The weaving, embroidering, and wearing of *piña* cloth came to be associated with the Spanish Chinese *mestizos* who were the administrative class below the *peninsulares* and the *insulares* (Spanish born in Spain and Spanish born in the Philippines). The *mestizos* became the new wealthy elite after the demise of the Galleon trade in 1815. This new blend of Spanish and Chinese *mestizos* and *criollos* travelled to Europe and returned home as the, the *ilustrados*, the creolized elites who adapted European ideologies in an active strategy of decolonization. This class wore *piña*, which came to be identified as national dress (16) and to identify as the Spanish ‘other’ at the onset of American colonization.



**Fig. 4.** Working with old *piña* 2014, (courtesy Patis Tesoro) Barangay Concepción, Lumbang, Laguna, the Philippines

*Piña's* history can be read through its shifting role and appropriative hybrid forms. Woven into *piña's* performative social life and surface is a combination of appropriative imagery and ritual. While the European baroque language of ornamentation marginalized the pre-colonial voices of Indigenous culture; since the revival of *piña* cloth in the eighties, designers have crafted their practice by contextualizing it within indigenous textiles.

The research of *piña* cloth as an analogy of a transcultural traveler and tracing its thread was undertaken to understand a way with working with a significant cultural material from a practitioner's point of view, which is, from elsewhere.



**Fig. 5.** OO (YES) 2017, (detail, author's work in progress) 50 cm x 200 cm, *piña*, silk, polyester, Barangay Fulgenzio del Norte, Aklan, Panay, the Philippines

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## Endnotes

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# Pop Art or Sots Art? Appropriation of Soviet Visual Culture in Estonian Art under Late Socialism

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## **ABSTRACT**

The location of Estonia as the Westernmost Soviet republic during late socialism (1956-1985) made it a transcultural areas par excellence. Artistic ideas from the socialist East as well as the capitalist West met here to merge into complicated hybrid forms, challenging the existing art historical narratives. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, several Estonian artists also turned their attention to the surrounding Soviet reality, creating unique examples of what have thus far been tackled as Pop Art in Estonian art histories. However – should today's scholars, equipped with mighty tools from postcolonial and decolonial theories, global and horizontal art histories, describe these local phenomena in the framework of global Pop Art or regional Sots Art? The group SOUP'69 in Tallinn, just like Sots Art artists in Moscow, were unsatisfied with the socially unengaged practices of their predecessors and started to accommodate principles of American Pop Art to the Soviet reality surrounding them. For the leading members of the group Andres Tolts (1949-2014) and Leonhard Lapin (1947) this meant widening their interest to the Soviet aesthetico-political legacy, appropriating and investigating Soviet visual culture in their early collages, assemblages and paintings.

## **KEYWORDS**

Sots Art; Pop Art; Appropriation; Soviet Union; Unofficial Art.

Fernando Ortiz has described transculturality as something that is shaped as a result of the extremely complex transmutations of culture at the crossroads of various civilizations and colonial cultures.<sup>1</sup> The location of the Baltic countries had historically been at such crossroads, but becoming the Westernmost Soviet republics after 1945 - known as the Soviet West in the rest of the Soviet Union - made them transcultural areas par excellence. Among the three Baltic countries, the Iron Curtain in the Northernmost Estonia became especially porous during late Socialism: in the 1950s radio programme American Voice began broadcasting in Estonian, in the 1960s Finnish television channels could be easily received in the Northern part of country and in 1965 the first ferry line after World War 2 started to operate between Tallinn, the capital of Soviet Estonia and Helsinki, the capital of Finland. Whereas the institutional life in Soviet Estonia was still shaped by the Soviet regime and in fine arts, Soviet infrastructure created in the 1940s and 1950s persisted until the very fall of the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup> It was then inevitable that artistic ideas from the socialist East as well as the capitalist West met here to merge into complicated hybrid forms, challenging the often binary Cold War art historical narratives.

Within the Soviet Union, the Baltics also gained image as the Soviet West because of its more liberal cultural life in the 1970s, and its capitals would become important art centres where official exhibitions had long abandoned Socialist Realism. Moscow and Tallinn had therefore become palpably different art cities by the 1970s: when Moscow was strictly divided between official and unofficial art scenes, then Tallinn, because of its peripheral location and locally appointed officials on the one side, but easy access to Western media on the other side, could maintain a more liberal official exhibition scene. By the second half of 1960s, abstractionism and surrealism were common phenomena at the official exhibitions in Tallinn, and by the early 1970s the most avant-garde art of that time — such as conceptual art and appropriation art — could be exhibited in semi-opened cafe and research institute exhibitions. As a result of these differences, the unofficial art circles of Moscow visited Tallinn regularly in the 1970s, whereas in Moscow, the Bulldozer Exhibition of 1974 showed clearly that there was no

place for the more liberal art life even in the outskirts of Moscow. Keen friendship between the key figures of Moscow and Tallinn art scenes, Ilya Kabakov and Leonhard Lapin, proved that tight connections between the two cities were also interpersonal.

Leonhard Lapin, one of the defining artists of the conceptual turn that took place in Estonian art during the 1970s, is best known in Estonian art history as the founder of the group SOUP'69. The group SOUP '69, which brought together design and architecture students at the Estonian art institute, got its name from the exhibition that took place at Pegasus Café in Tallinn in 1969. Although the name and the poster of the exhibition clearly referred to American Pop Art, the main ideologist of the group Leonhard Lapin stressed that: "Although United States pop art was the model for SOUP'69, its system of images was not adopted mechanically. As intellectuals, we examined the ideological and aesthetic background of pop art, and understood that at home we must turn our attention to our own symbols and Soviet mass culture, which for us was Communist political propaganda."<sup>3</sup> For the leading members of the group Leonhard Lapin and Andres Tolts this meant turning boldly to Soviet visual culture, appropriating reproductions of Socialist Realist paintings and investigating Soviet symbols in their early collages and paintings. However, in the small and unified Estonian art world, this was a rebellious act by the young artists as the 1960s had been a decade prevailed by the aesthetic doctrine of Tõnis Vint and the group ANK'64. For Tõnis Vint, the spiritual and intellectual leader of the 1960s Estonian art scene, the socially escapist aesthetic doctrine was not only a question of aesthetics, but also of ethics in the Soviet context.<sup>4</sup> And for ANK'64, the imported aesthetics of Pop Art – lent from an opposingly different, capitalist society - offered a way for realizing the socially escapist beauty doctrine that Vint had envisioned. According to Elnara Taidre, Pop Art attained an entirely different meaning for Vint, where the critique of the Western consumer society via parodying its attributes, was replaced by the means of making the Soviet everyday environment more pleasant, humane and consistent.<sup>5</sup> However, as Sirje Helme has pointed out, the escapist part of Estonian pop art

remained a pop dream as imagination of how the Soviet environment could look like prevailed over what the environment really looked like.<sup>6</sup>

Catherine Dossin in her recent book „The Rise and Fall of American Art“ has claimed that the triumph of American art in Europe was not the triumph of Abstract Expressionism in the 1950s, but the triumph of Pop Art in the 1960s, as the latter’s arrival was timely to resonate Europeans’ desire for something new as well as meet their growing attraction for the country of John F. Kennedy.<sup>7</sup> Recent large museum shows dedicated to the globalization of Pop Art, such as *The World Goes Pop* (2016) at Tate Modern and *International Pop* at Walker Art Center (2016) have confirmed the movement’s history as that of the invincible Anglo-American style taking over the world. Socialist Eastern Europe, being cut off from the rest of the world after World War II, became especially receptive to the fragmentary artistic ideas coming from the West. However, the uncritical acceptance of Pop Art in the unofficial art circles of the Soviet Union deserves a second look, as the socialist one-party state had its own all prevailing mass culture to turn to, not to mention that there was no abundant consumer society to criticize in the Soviet Union. Dávid Fehér has therefore used the phrase pop beyond pop while describing the pop art influenced art in Hungary on the 1960s and 1970s and the Hungarians’ peculiar understanding of pop art that was shaped by the local discourses of realism.<sup>8</sup> However, artists working in the Soviet Union in the 1970s had invented their own term for the hybrid pop art influenced art that instead of imagining a different environment, turned its attention boldly to the surrounding Soviet reality.

In 1972 the Moscow duo Komar and Melamid founded Sots Art that started to systematically appropriate Soviet visual culture to analyze the aesthetico-political nature of the Soviet project. Mixing together the terms of Socialist Realism and Pop Art, Sots Art in itself was a chimera, a transcultural term, revealing and accepting the hybrid nature of the unofficial art created inside the Soviet Union as well as the impossibility to create pure-bred pop art in the context of planned economy and its systematic deficit. Even more, according to Boris Groys, the main goal of Sots Art was specifically bound to Soviet society: it was to analyze the aesthetico-political will to power that the

artists acknowledged was present in all artistic projects, including the Soviet and their own.<sup>9</sup> Looking at the movement's legacy today, we see that Sots Art appropriated tropes not only from Socialist Realism, but from Soviet visual culture in its wider meaning, including the Soviet printed matter, official symbols and ordens, street banners and railroad signs, and also the early Russian avant-garde. Hence, equipped with timely distance and moving away from the deconstructive approaches of the late 80s and early 90s, we can look at Sots Art today as a reflection of Soviet modernity, specific Eastern European modernity where visuality played an important role. Martin Jay has described modernity as a scopic regime that is ruled by the omnipresent seeing as the master of the senses of the modern era.<sup>10</sup> According to Leah Dickerman, the Soviet Union was the first to realise that the world was standing on the threshold of a new media age: that mass politics needed mass communication. Dickerman also finds that the production of state-controlled images on such a scale, and the accompanying system of regulation could not be found in any of the Western European media cultures at the time.<sup>11</sup> But looking at Soviet modernity this way also allows us to review the ways in which Soviet empire sought to establish itself in its vast territories, using a wide variety of and often mass produced visual culture to colonize its peripheric areas. Bringing the Soviet rule to Estonia in 1940 with a special train, the front of which carried a reproduction of Stalin's portrait, is a telling example of this visual cultural colonization.

Sots art is in fact an interdisciplinary term applied to fine art, as well as literary works, that used the ideological clichés of Soviet mass culture as its subject matter and stemmed from the Moscow unofficial art of the early 1970s.<sup>12</sup> Although it is more common to start the history of the Soviet unofficial art with the Khrushchev Thaw and to consider the artists of the 1970s as the second generation of unofficial art, Joseph Bakshtein has called them the third, 'Soviet generation' of unofficial art, thus distinguishing them from the first generation of the Stalinist era and the second, 'modernist' generation, which was forced underground after the scandal in the Moscow Manege exhibition.<sup>13</sup> Looking at Sots Art as a generational phenomenon allows us also to see it through changed mentality compared to the previous

generations: when for the modernists of the 1950s and 1960s it was essential to denounce any kind of Soviet discourses, then the Soviet generation focused precisely on the most outstanding declarations of the Soviet visual culture, quoting, modifying and hyperbolizing its motives and symbols. The latter was also the reason why in Moscow, the two generations ended up in unresolvable conflict of virtues that became one of the reasons for the Sots Art generation to emigrate and relocate to New York in the 1970s. However, in Estonia, with its more liberal art life among other reasons, the Pop Art and Sots Art generations could not afford a similar open conflict, so no comparable emigration wave took place.



**Fig. 1.** A train carrying the reproduction of Stalin's portrait, which returned the delegation of the Estonian National Council from Moscow in August 1940. Estonian National Archives

Appropriating reproductions of Socialist Realist paintings and kitschy postcards, as well as Soviet mass production in their collages and assemblages, Andres Tolts and Leonhard Lapin did manifest discontent with the unsocial practices of Estonian art at the time. Admiring the sociality of

American Pop Art, the artists nevertheless understood that at home, they must turn to their own environment, saturated with Soviet mass culture at the time. Andres Tolts completed around sixteen collages based on Soviet magazine pictures in the period of 1967-1968, when he was still a high school student. The source material for Tolts's early collages mainly came from the weekly illustrated Soviet magazine *Ogoniok*, although a closer look at his work reveals more varied source material, including the Estonian and German language magazines, but also the Soviet study books that Tolts had used as a schoolboy. However, it is inevitable that *Ogoniok* with its large scale colour pictures would become a favourite of the Soviet-era collage artists. In the Perestroika era, *Ogoniok* became one of the most-read magazines in the Soviet Union, although in the 1960s, it did not yet stand out for its liberal content, but rather for large-format retouched colour photos and reproductions of Socialist Realist classics. The latter was also the reason why Russian artist Gennady Goushchin completed a magnificent multi-part collage series *Alternative Museum* (1970–1990) on the basis of *Ogoniok*'s reproductions. A common thread in the series is the unexpected intervention into the most popular reproductions of the Soviet and Russian art classics, such as Ivan Shishkin's *Morning in a Pine Forest* (1889) or Isaak Brodsky's *Lenin in Smolny* (1930), although these were definitely not meant just as harmless jokes directed at the Soviet art classics.

Since the Soviet art system was built on the circulation of a limited number of approved visual tropes, which were meant to keep the system monolithic and safeguard it against dangerous influences, the mass reproduction of art classics was a symbol of the Soviet art system. Ekaterina Dyogot has even claimed that in compliance with the Socialist Realist art canon established in the 1930s, which directed completed artworks directly to mass circulation via magazines and postcards, the works of Socialist Realist art were meant to exist rather as reproductions than original pieces of work.<sup>14</sup> Similarly to Goushchin's *Alternative Museum*, Tolts's collage *School* (1967) is an intervention into the reproduction of the Soviet artist Vladimir Rutstein's work *Back at the Local School* (1950s). This reproduction was commonly used in Soviet Estonian school books as a didactic illustration to teach children to

respect the older people and accept them as their teachers. However, Tolts decisively ruins the reunion between an old grey-haired teacher and her former student by gluing a figure of a soldier cut out from another reproduction over the teacher and scattering heads and butterflies from another context all over the image. The floating butterflies that can also be found from his other collages from that period, can be interpreted as a link between Soviet visual culture and kitsch because kitsch was a phenomenon that interested Tolts at the time, he even wrote a newspaper article about the links between kitsch and Soviet Estonian souvenir production.<sup>45</sup>



**Fig. 2.** Andres Tolts. School. 1967. Collage. Art Museum of Estonia

In the following two years, Tolts moved from collages to assemblages, and started to appropriate Soviet industrial output – such as floral chintz,

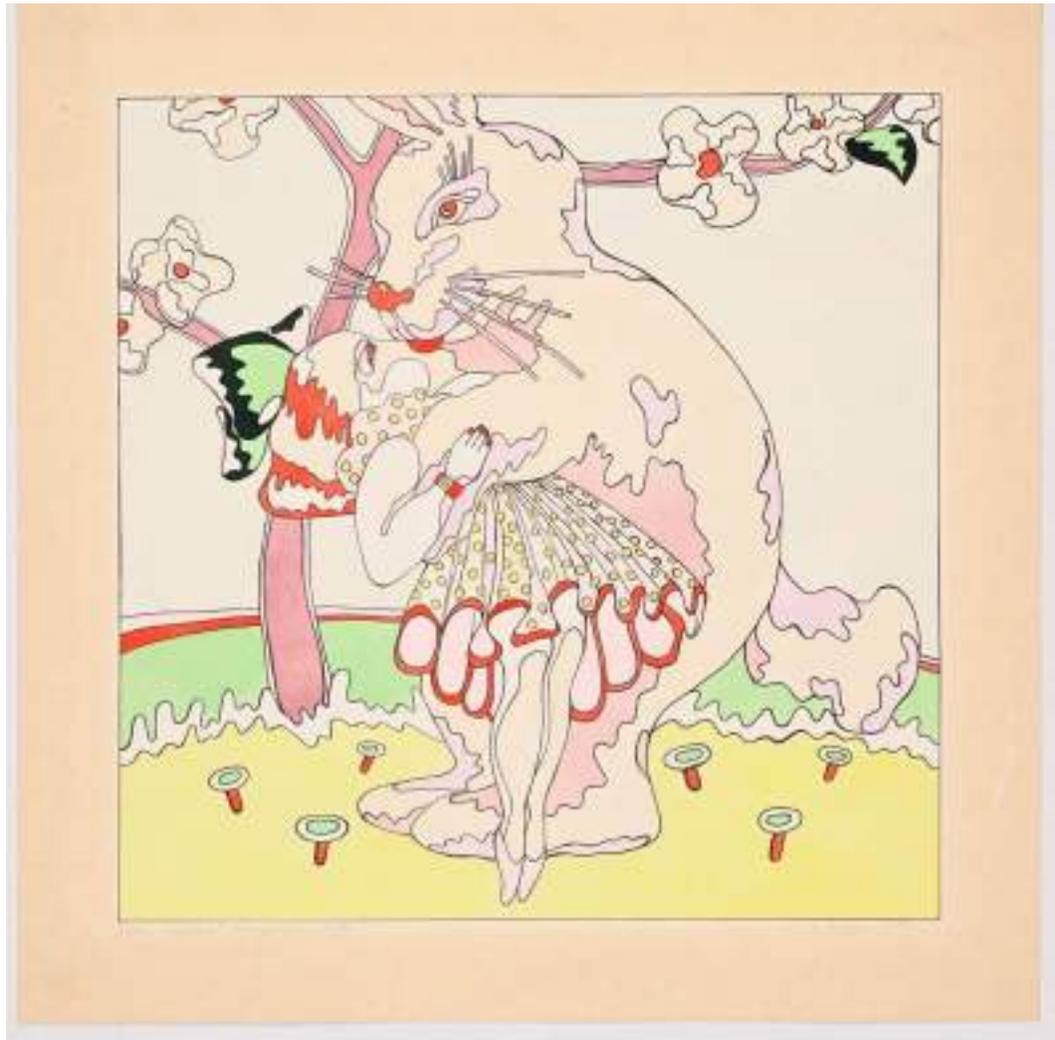
patterned wallpapers, mass produced toys - instead of images from magazines, replacing the two-dimensional depiction with the three-dimensional world. The textile assemblage *Resting Place* can be seen as a summary of Tolts's early Sots Art period, because the artist here combined two floral-print cotton fabrics, a pink blouse collar and a pink object resembling a breast. Since the semi-circular form of the work was derived from the Soviet Komsomol badge, the breast-shaped form in the middle of the work can only be seen as a humorous-blasphemous reference to Lenin's bald head. The floral chintz which was also mass produced in Kreenholm factory in Estonia and which for Tolts symbolized the working woman's gown that was the most common clothing item in the deficit Soviet society, became one of the most important leitmotifs of Tolts throughout his entire career. Being trained as a designer at one of the most progressive departments at the time of the Estonian Art Institute, Tolts's gaze on the Soviet floral chintz was playfully ironic and creative, close to the Camp sensitivity described by Susan Sontag.<sup>16</sup> The extensive use of textile by a male artist also referred to the queering or emasculating of the brutally perceived Soviet environment that had invertedly inspired Tolts. But Tolts's gaze was also orientalizing, placing Estonian culture above the occupying Soviet culture and therefore turning the traditional relationship between the colonizer and the colonized upside down.

Whereas Leonhard Lapin, the main ideologist of the group SOUP'69, but also one of the most important links between Estonian and Russian artists in the 1970s, was greatly inspired by Russian avantgarde. Architect by education, Lapin began to take interest in fine arts already during his study years at the art institute. In his early work *Bunny's Kiss* (1970) we can see similar interest in the notion of kitsch that Tolts had around the same time. Although here, Lapin has appropriated an Easter greeting card from the interwar period, it is still clear that what is tackled here is the Soviet Union as an empire of kitsch and the artists's role in maintaining this. Immediately after returning from the Soviet Army, Lapin completed several works with revanchist subtext, which he was later forced to destroy in fear of searches related to the *Harku 75* exhibition. Among them are the first works in a series

of gouache drawings called *Red Porn* (1972), in which the socialist symbols of the hammer and sickle are combined with female nudes in pornographic poses. Thus, in Lapin's case, the misuse of the Soviet discourse paradoxically began while he was still in the Soviet Army, where he, along with the representatives of many other small nations occupied by the Soviets, had learned to speak Russian properly as well as with an exaggerated foreign accent. Here we can see parallels with postcolonial appropriation, in which the language of colonisers is acquired so successfully in the colonial situation that the colonial subjects can use it to position themselves as the antithesis to the cultural meta-narrative of the imperial centre. Although Lapin destroyed all the early work of *Red Porn*, they should be seen as the artist's first Sots Art series, and as the starting point for the postcolonial appropriation art that was developed further in his subsequent works.



**Fig. 3.** Andres Tolts. Resting Place. 1970. Assemblage. Tartu Art Museum



**Fig. 4.** Leonhard Lapin. Bunny's Kiss. 1970. Lithography. Art Museum of Estonia

Lapin was also in the middle of a creative period at the time characterised by the appropriation of material from Soviet visual culture and a move to the favourite medium of conceptual art: the multi-part series. During the next two years, Lapin's body of work included several series which appropriated various aspects of institutional Soviet visual culture, from medical and technical drawings to the human-shaped targets used in military shooting ranges. As a conceptual gesture, in the *Saku '73* exhibition Lapin combined a smaller sub-series into a larger "bleeding" series, which could be read as a critique of violent Soviet modernity and the series later indeed

became known as *The Bleeding Systems* (1971–1973). In the series of paintings called *Signs*, which were created between 1978 and 1980, Lapin assimilated Soviet visual culture already in a postcolonial way, and the consolidation of Soviet avant-garde and Soviet institutional signs into a single visual cultural alphabet can be seen as a classic take of Sots Art. Thus, upon closer inspection, Marx’s profile silhouette turns out to be the artist’s own profile, the masthead of the Soviet Estonian newspaper *Rahva Hää* is painted in a barely perceptible colour combination of blue, black and white, which are the colours of Estonian flag. Such multi-layered interpretive potential would have been immediately labelled as having an “uncontrolled subtext” and banned by the Soviet censors. The painting series *Signs* was never exhibited in its entirety in Soviet Estonia, and Lapin soon sold almost the entire series to the American art collector Norton Dodge, which is why this vast conceptual series has been somewhat overlooked in Estonian art history. However, based on the works now in the Dodge collection, the Polish-American art historian Marek Bartelik has treated Lapin as an outstanding example of Soviet conceptualist who also proves that the term of Moscow Conceptualism might be slightly misleading.<sup>17</sup>

As already mentioned above, in Estonian art history the early work of Andres Tolts and Leonhard Lapin has generally been tackled as Pop Art. It is perhaps best epitomized by the 2009 great hall exhibition at Kumu Art Museum that was curated by Sirje Helme and carried a manifestative title *Popkunst Forever! Estonian Pop Art at the Turn of the 1960s and 1970s*. Anu Liivak, who was the director of Kumu Art Museum at the time, explained the manifestative title in the main Estonian art magazine *Kunst.ee* with a historical excursion to the times when Pop art was still very much under attack in Soviet Estonia. But she stated also that “the distance between Estonian art and the ideas that were internationally actual and going through their highpoints was smallest at the second half of 1960s and in the beginning of 1970s. In terms of art movements, it was mainly connected with Pop Art, Conceptualism and Hyperrealism.<sup>18</sup> So clearly, Estonian art history that was written after the fall of the Iron Curtain, was concerned with the questions of temporality and contemporaneity, the way they were dictated by the Western

art centres. The exhibition *Popkunst Forever!* was looking at Pop Art in Estonian art as a wider phenomenon that crossed different art groups and artist generations, as well as extended its influence into the fields of animation and graphic design. Whereas the title clearly manifested that Estonian art has always been and will always be part of the Western art world, it is important to understand the psychological reasons behind this manifestative stance. And these psychological reasons are far from being characteristic only to postsoviet Estonia.



**Fig. 5.** Leonhard Lapin. From the series Signs. 1978-1980. Zimmerli Art Museum; Art Museum of Estonia

After the fall of the Iron Curtain, East European art histories have often embraced Western methodology and terminology, being motivated by the wish to fill in empty brackets and reverse the Soviet era antipropaganda for everything Western. Andrey Shental has recently analysed the activity of the Russian art museums through the notion of self-colonization and claimed

that the recent activity of the most prominent Moscow art museums has not helped Russian art museums to overcome the complex of provincialism.<sup>19</sup> And one of the most eloquent examples of such self-colonization according to Shental is the large-scale exhibition “Pop Art in Russia”, curated by Andrey Erofeyev at Tretyakov Gallery in 2005. Shental states: “Oriented towards the exhibition experience of other countries, they automatically sign the teleology, linearity and homogeneity of international (read Western) art history. And because Russian art and art history have been left out of major historical narratives, such exhibitions seek to conceptually resonate local art practices with global ones or elevate them to Western levels, as does Andrei Yerofeyev's Tretyakov Gallery exhibition "Pop Art in Russia."<sup>20</sup> The latter is well illustrated by the use of the terms 'Pop Art' and 'Sots Art' in the Russian text corpus of Google Books: the red line of "соц-арт'и" stays below the blue line of "поп-арт'и" in all decades, starting from 1960s and finishing in the 2000s.<sup>21</sup> These graphics about the incomparable use of Western and Eastern European art terms not only in the English text corpus, but also in the Russian, are signs of the challenges that postsoviet Europe is facing in writing transcultural art history. Estonian artist and decolonial thinker Tanel Rander has summed these challenges up with the harsh metaphor of a guillotine, saying that the Eastern Europeans' heads are not where their bodies are.<sup>22</sup>

In postcolonial studies, appropriation is most often used as “a term to describe the ways in which postcolonial societies adopt these aspects of imperial culture — language, forms of writing, film, theater, even ways of thinking and arguing such as rationalism, logic, and analysis that may be useful to the articulation of their own social and cultural identities.”<sup>23</sup> In the context of Western contemporary art, however, appropriation refers to the use of existing objects or images through minor alteration, and such practices are associated with critiques of central concepts of originality and authenticity in certain artistic definitions.<sup>24</sup> In Estonia, these last definitions of appropriation were especially important, as appropriating Soviet visual culture was a contemporary art practice - concurrently influenced by American Pop Art and shaped by the surrounding Soviet visual culture - as well as postcolonial gesture in the Soviet Western periphery. The world has

changed after Russian invasion to Ukraine, which from one side, has brought along a wave of solidarity among the postsoviet nations of Europe, but on the other hand, activated all the Cold War fears and oppositions, as well as revitalized desires of belonging ever more firmly to the Western cultural hemisphere. Geopolitically seismic border cultures such as Estonia - or postsoviet Eastern Europe in a more general meaning - will highly probably keep experiencing challenges in describing themselves as transcultural, even if their cultural texts may clearly indicate that transculturality is at play in their cultures. However, going back to the highly politicized art histories written in the 1990s takes Eastern European scholarly community back in decades and away from the ideals of horizontal art history, described by the Polish art historian Piotr Piotrowski as “polyphonic, multidimensional and free of geographical hierarchies”.<sup>25</sup>

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# Agents of the Construction of Asianistic Aesthetics in the West: Ernest Fenollosa, Okakura Kakuzō and the Paintings of Agnes Martin in Post-War American Art

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## **ABSTRACT**

Through analyzing the writings of Ernest Fenollosa and Okakura Kakuzō, this paper traces the *transmission culturelle* of their ideas from approximately 1880 to 1960, examining how their concepts formed categories of an Asianist pictorial aesthetic. Both authors discuss categories such as emptiness/fullness, variation/repetition, and imperfection or simplicity, thereby anchoring themselves in categories of an Asian visual aesthetic. As mediators and translators of these categories, Fenollosa and Okakura had a partly US-American, partly Japanese background and pursued their interests in the critique of modernity or in the struggle for a “better modernity.” Under their influence, a convoluted concept emerged that the West regarded as Eastern philosophy, but in which a Western desire for non-rational ideologies was also inscribed. While these historical contexts are interwoven and filled with desires or projections in the US-American avant-garde reception, they led to remarkable visual practices. The example of Agnes Martin's paintings demonstrates translations into the pictorial that should not be treated as a history of form or motif, but rather make the specific aesthetics and modes of an Asian pictorial culture tangible.

## **KEYWORDS**

American Abstract Expressionism; Migration of Aesthetic Concepts; Asianisms; Japonisme

When one considers the construction of an East Asian aesthetic in postwar US-American Art, particularly in Abstract Expressionism, one sees that this is not a Postwar phenomenon, but rather that the reception has been fed by contact zones and appropriation processes since the 19th century. A central agent who decisively influenced the process of this construction was Ernest Fenollosa (1853–1908). The US-American philosopher and art historian of Asian Art graduated from Harvard University in 1874 and was invited by the Japanese government to teach as a professor of philosophy and political economy at the Tokyo Imperial University during the Meiji Restoration from 1878 onwards. He went on to fundamentally shape the formation of Asianist aesthetic categories in his function as a curator of the Boston Museum of Fine Art together with his students Okakura Kakuzō (1862–1913) and Arthur W. Dow (1857–1922).

My paper will trace this *transmission culturelle* by analyzing the writings of Fenollosa and Okakura, examining how their concepts formed categories of an Asianist pictorial aesthetic. Today, Asian art and its related concepts are frequently still construed as “foreign” and “other” in contrast to Western art, a rhetoric that Edward W. Said formulaically described as “us and them.”<sup>1</sup> As a result, different currents and trends are combined in a universalizing manner as being ‘Asian’ and linked to one another in a stereotypical Western perception. I believe these references cannot be understood one-sidedly as “resemblances to Oriental modes”<sup>2</sup> as art critic Clement Greenberg did; instead they should be considered processes of exchange in which the reception of concepts helps to construct them in a decisive way. This paper will therefore use the conceptual term “Asianism” to describe the mediated and stereotypical reception of what is purported to be genuinely ‘Asian.’ Nicola Spakowski and Marc Frey adapt this term both for discursive constructions of Asia as a region and for the political, economic, social, and cultural practices these are associated with:

The origin of these multiple discourses and practices need not necessarily lie in Asia itself. They can also be imported from Europe or North America or can emerge

in the interaction and collaboration of Asian and non-Asian actors.<sup>3</sup>

I use the term “Asianism” to emphasize that the concept is a construct and to describe the cultural phenomenon in the art historical discourse. Strictly speaking, every attempt to come to terms with Asian philosophy is necessarily Asianist, that is, a construct. It should be said however, with regard to the nature of Asianisms as constructs, that although they are projections, they nevertheless actually exist within the cultural field of the United States because they do exert influence. As dynamic and mutable as they are, and also (re)produced and revised in this study, they continue to have an impact on the cultural milieu because every representation of reality is simultaneously a production thereof, as Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson emphasize: “[S]emiotics reinforces tendencies within the social history of art that view representations not as the reflection of a reality found elsewhere but rather as an active and shaping force in society.”<sup>4</sup>

Hegemonic interests are involved in naming the categories of an Asianist pictorial aesthetic, which rhetorically evoke a different modernism that must overcome the alienation effects of Western industrial culture and sets the stereotypical notion of a rational materialistic West (Occidentalism) against a spiritual East (Orientalism). While these historical contexts and interests in “Asia” are even more entangled and filled with desires and projections amongst the Postwar avant-garde in North America, they nonetheless led to remarkable pictorial practices. I will illustrate this in the second part of my paper, which analyzes works by the Canadian American artist Agnes Martin from around 1960.

### **Construction and Function of Asianisms**

After helping found the Tokyo School of Fine Arts with Okakura Kakuzō in 1887 and converting to Tendai Buddhism, Ernest Fenollosa returned to the United States in 1890 to become a curator of Japanese art at the Boston Museum of Fine Art.



**Fig. 1.** Unknown: Photo of Edward S. Morse, Okakura Kakuzō, Ernest Fenollosa, William Sturgis Bigelow (from left to right), 1882, Photograph: © 2022 Lowell Observatory Archives, Flagstaff.

Donors like Edward S. Morse and William Sturgis Bigelow provided the foundational support for the development of the Asian Collection at the museum, which is marked by distinction, economic and traditionalist puritanical objectives, and US-American Exceptionalism. The puritanical objectives in particular were also a form of exoticism, and formed the other side of the exoticized reception of Japan in French impressionism, which constructed Japan as a pleasure garden for the senses. In the following, I aim to illustrate that it is not an aesthetic per se that is received, but rather that this aesthetic is shaped through desires, interests, and political instrumentalization.

With his book *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art: An Outline History of East Asiatic Design*,<sup>5</sup> published in 1912, the US-American curator, professor,

and East Asia connoisseur Ernest Fenollosa crucially shaped the Western canon of East Asian art history. His formation of categories was marked by his concerns, shared with his Japanese student, the art historian and cultural functionary Okakura Kakuzō. On one hand, they argued that Japan had fine art that could stand up to that of the West and, on the other hand, they sought to curb the influence of Western art practices in Japan, which was expressed, among other ways, through an uncritical adoption of Western oil painting. Both scholars were commissioned by the Japanese government to support Japan, which was under pressure to modernize during the period from 1868 to 1912, in its conscious effort to acquire Western knowledge in the areas of economics and engineering as well as academic art training. The Meiji strategy was not a confrontation against the West, but instead embraced Western concepts. Fenollosa and Okakura were, following the Meiji doctrine, keen to use these policies concerning the acquisition of Western art and industrial methods to demonstrate in parallel Japan's superiority insofar as the country was integrating craft technique, an aesthetic understood as traditionally Japanese, into its version of "another" modernity, as well as the linking of tradition and nature. That Fenollosa argued in the idealistic tradition of Friedrich Hegel within a Japanese context was all the more suited to the connectivity of Zen painting in the Western context, since East Asian painting had previously tended to be dismissed in Europe and the United States.<sup>6</sup> Fenollosa's two richly illustrated volumes disseminated illustrations of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean works of art and contributed to the formulation of a visual canon. He divided his text chronologically and laid out in the chapter titles of the first volume a history of the development from "Primitive Chinese Art" by way of diverse Chinese and Korean periods to "Mystical Buddhist Art" in China and Japan.<sup>7</sup> This genealogy supported the imperial argumentative models of the Meiji government, which claimed that all Asian cultures could be assimilated and refined in Japanese art and culture. This was an attempt to culturally legitimize the hegemonic position that Japan was striving for in the pan-Asian realm.<sup>8</sup>

In other contexts, Fenollosa emphasized abstraction in Japanese art and design. Art Historian David Clarke has argued that Fenollosa's *abstract*

reading was one reason why the artistic avant-garde was interested in Japanese art.<sup>9</sup> The topos of abstraction that emerged in Japonisme is expressed in a lecture given by Fenollosa in Boston in 1892: “The Japanese [...] would just as lief at first see a picture upside down; that is, they admire beauty of line and color in art, rather than [...] merely depicting nature.”<sup>10</sup> Fenollosa preferred to explain the specifics of ink painting using examples from the works of the painter Sesshū Tōyō—a preference that his pupil Arthur Wesley Dow, who was a painter and later teacher at Teachers College at Columbia University New York would later adopt.<sup>11</sup>

Fenollosa’s approach and his argumentative models were also adopted by his student and translator Okakura Kakuzō on their travels in Asia together, and he continued to develop both in his own English-language publications. Okakura published his books *The Ideals of the East with Special Reference to the Art of Japan* in 1903 and *The Awakening of Japan* the following year for a Western readership. In 1906, his popular short publication *The Book of Tea*, which was intended to convey the “essence of the genuinely Japanese,”<sup>12</sup> explains the historical background of tea ceremony culture. In this book, Okakura presented Chinese Taoism as the precursor to Japanese Zen Buddhism, to which he closely tied the tea ceremony. In doing so, he followed nationalist Meiji identity politics, which positioned Zen Buddhism and the tea ceremony as the specifically Japanese opposite pole to Japan’s Westernization. Like Fenollosa, Okakura was writing the genealogy of Chinese Taoism, which, he said, was refined in Japanese Zen Buddhism in order to provide a foundation for Japan’s privileged rank in Asia itself and, beyond that, its relation to the West.<sup>13</sup> Okakura mentioned the scholar Lao Tzu and Zhuang Zhou as protagonists of Taoism.<sup>14</sup> He emphasized the notion “Its Absolute is the Relative” as characteristic of Taoism.<sup>15</sup> According to Okakura, Taoist doctrines offer a major contribution to the field of aesthetics, particularly its doctrine of “the ‘art of being in the world.’”<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, he introduced the concept of the “void,”<sup>17</sup> which would later become important in the formation of aesthetic categories. Relativism (of perception) and individualism;<sup>18</sup> a penchant for “the Abstract,”<sup>19</sup> revealed in the preference of black-and-white drawings over the polychrome painting of

classical Buddhism; and the equal recognition of the “mundane” and the “spiritual”<sup>20</sup> were all seen by Okakura as important aspects that Zen Buddhism had adopted from Taoism. This refinement of perception is the central theme *The Book of Tea*. In the spirit of distinction, Okakura declared all votaries of this philosophy of tea to be “aristocrats in taste.”<sup>21</sup> However, he also called attention to how perception is conditioned by culture,<sup>22</sup> how it differs in the East and the West, and how stereotypes form: he called it the “glamour of the perspective.”<sup>23</sup>

Yet Okakura, as a member of the Japanese nationalist Dragon Society (Ryūchi-kai), was himself operating with the logic of stereotyping as well as of (self-)Orientalizing and Occidentalism. His achievement as a translator lay in the “selective choice and appropriation of certain models of thought developed in the West [...], which, however, he crucially modified in translation” as art historian Vera Wolf has pointed out.<sup>24</sup> The method he employs to that end is inversion, a figure that, as the scholar of Asian religions Bernard Faure has shown, was characteristic of several major players in this mediating process.<sup>25</sup> Okakura advanced Japanese self-Orientalizing by turning qualities that the West described as defects into positive, worthwhile attributes. This becomes particularly clear in the topos of the perfection of the imperfect. In Okakura’s argumentative model for the aestheticizing of the imperfect, the lack of perfection that constitutes the imperfect leaves perfection to the aesthetic imagination. In this idealized process of perfection by the imagination, moreover, the artist and the viewer become one.<sup>26</sup> Okakura saw this kind of perception as the essential aesthetic conveyed by the tea ceremony: “It is essentially a worship of the Imperfect, as it is a tender attempt to accomplish something possible in this impossible thing we know as life.”<sup>27</sup> At the same time, – as Vera Wolff has argued – Okakura linked this aesthetic of the imperfect in the process of modifying perception to an ethical dimension, arguing that because an aesthetic that aims at material perfection is always deficient, the aestheticizing of the imperfect is:

the truly idealistic approach to the spirit, because it remains in the spiritual and does not aim to depict the ideal

materially. And whereas the Latin and Germanic people sought to achieve the ideal objectively and materialistically, [...] according to Okakura, the Japanese had been striving for fulfillment of the ideal along this subjective-idealistic path.<sup>28</sup>

This was intended to be yet another demonstration of the superiority of the Japanese aesthetic over the Western one. This ennobling of the imperfect around the turn of the century happened at a time in which the category of the perfect lost value in the wake of perfecting industrial production. Okakura, by contrast, emphasized the ideal beauty of imperfection as an aesthetic category for the industrial age.<sup>29</sup> The perfect imperfection of Japanese Raku pottery prominently illustrated this idea and exquisite examples of this pottery were collected by Edward Morse to later be shown in the collection of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.



**Fig. 2.** Raku Chōnyu: Tea bowl, 18th century, Raku ware, earthenware, 4 1/16 x 2 1/4 in., Museum of Fine Arts, Boston Morse Collection. Museum purchase with funds donated by contribution. Photograph: © 2022 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

The agents imparting and translating these categories had a background that was partly American and partly Japanese and pursued their interests in critiquing modernity or struggling for a “better modernity.”<sup>30</sup> Under their influence a hybrid concept took shape that the West viewed as Eastern philosophy into which, however, was also inscribed a Western desire for non-rational ideologies and distinction. If one analyzes the writings of Ernest Fenollosa, Okakura Kakuzō, and Arthur Wesley Dow in terms of the aesthetic categories they developed, it becomes clear that elements such as abundance and emptiness, variation and repetition, simplicity and refinement, the correspondence of antithetical qualities (yin and yang), the foregoing of the depiction of depth, primacy of line, and a concept of abstraction were cited in many publications. Even into the postwar period, these elements became firmly established as categories of an Asianist pictorial aesthetic.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, Bernard Faure describes the promise of the Western Orientalists within the context of postwar US-America as propagating Asian spirituality as a cure for the difficulties of a society marked by Western materialism as a form of “secondary orientalism.”<sup>32</sup>

### **Agnes Martin and the Asianism of Imperfection**

From these categories, I would like to focus on the idea of imperfection and discuss it using the example of paintings and drawings by the artist Agnes Martin as variations of strays and slips.<sup>33</sup> To judge from the sources (writings, letters, interviews, contemporaries), Martin studied Buddhist and Taoist writings. In her published texts—*Writings* (1992)—and in interviews, she mentions works such as the Taoist philosophy of Laozi and Zhuangzi as well as Buddhist sources by Dàjiàn Huínéng, the Sixth Patriarch of Chan Buddhism, which she consulted and whose theories circulated in artistic and intellectual elites in the United States.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, the artist studied the writings of the *Tao Te Ching* by Lao Tzu as translated by the American writer Witter Bynner.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, Martin was a frequent visitor of Asian Art collections for example those of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, which Fenollosa had established, and which Arthur Wesley Dow later also curated.

Furthermore, Martin studied art at Teachers College, Columbia University New York, where the textbook *Composition: A Series of Exercises in Art Structure for the Use of Students and Teachers* by Fenollosa's student Arthur Wesley Dow was one of the central foundations of the curriculum. In this book, compositional aspects are described and explained with/alongside examples of Chinese and Japanese art.<sup>36</sup>

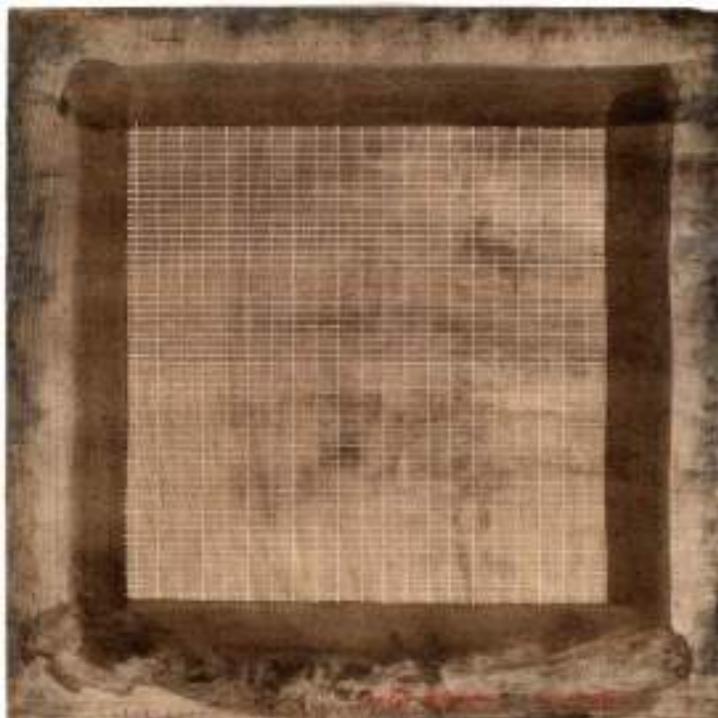


**Fig. 3.** Agnes Martin: Leaf, 1965, acrylic, graphite and plaster on canvas, 72 x 72 in., Philadelphia Museum of Art, Bequest of Daniel W. Dietrich II. © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2022, Estate of Agnes Martin.



**Fig. 4.** Detail of: Agnes Martin: Leaf, 1965, acrylic, graphite and plaster on canvas, 72 x 72 in., Philadelphia Museum of Art, Bequest of Daniel W. Dietrich II. © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2022, Estate of Agnes Martin.

Agnes Martin produced many of her grid paintings and drawings beginning in 1960 by running a graphite pencil along a straightedge on the primed canvas to produce a grid. In the specifics of her artistic work (square format, glazing of the ground, and graphic fields of lines and grids drawn with a ruler and by hand), she developed an “abstract” pictorial world that resulted both from processes of exchange between contemporaneous American discursive practices and the associated engagement with Asian models of thought and an appropriation of them. Concerning Martin’s paintings, the art critic Janet Hobhouse remarks: “any irregularity is greeted with joy. Miss Martin has anticipated this excitement, and her works are occasionally generously irregular.”<sup>37</sup> Martin’s floating between the regularity of the grid structure and the irregularity of the line does indeed represent a very striking aspect of her work. The reason lies in the fragility of the line. Its irregularity is only reinforced by its repetition, as a detail of Martin’s painting *Leaf* from 1965 illustrates.



**Fig. 5.** Agnes Martin: *Waterflower*, 1964, watercolour on paper, 11 7/8 x 11 15/16 in., National Gallery of Art Washington, D.C., © Photograph: National Gallery of Art Washington, D.C., VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2022, Estate of Agnes Martin.

Many of her paintings point to imperfection in that they contain obvious errors, for example, the line that strays from the guided structure of the straightedge. In the painting, Martin's brittle cracks, omissions, and deviations from the orthogonal grid can be compared structurally to the irregularities and cracks in Raku ceramics (see image 2). The watercolor *Water Flower* from 1964 features different line thicknesses, distance markings, and overlapping grid lines.

They testify to the moment and the gesture of the process in which they originated. By repeating the lines of the grid by hand, the mistakes and strays stand out in the grid or line system. The unrepeatability and individualization, yet de-subjectification, of the line points to the trace of the process of the physical act of drawing. Here, her use of the straightedge does not give the drawing an unambiguous quality.

The aesthetic of the fragment as a quasi “unfinished” and hence imperfect artifact is certainly a theme in Western art. According to the classic European concept of the sculpture, it is about imagining the continuation of the unfinished and about the topos of the “sculpture being peeled out of the stone.”<sup>38</sup> This notion of the imagination also plays a central role in the work of Okakura; the idea of imperfection, however, has an even more fundamental tradition in Japanese aesthetics, which was disseminated in Europe and the United States by means of the tea ceremony and its artifacts and was considered a sign of connoisseurship: in the process, imperfection is ennobled by regarding the perfection of the work of art as a mental process of perfecting in the imagination, and that in turn as the artist and viewer becoming one.<sup>39</sup> In the Asianist context, the intended gesture should be understood as one in which imperfection is inherent in the process. Accepted imperfection is aestheticized as such. This Asianist aesthetic of the imperfect can be seen as inspiration for Martin’s drawing practices of imperfection.

In that sense, the example of Agnes Martin’s paintings shows that her appropriation goes beyond borrowing Japoniste elements like similar motifs or colors as seen, for example, in the work of the painters James Whistler and John La Farge. The influences are noticeable not (merely) on the level of “oriental modes” as in the form of a line in imitation of calligraphy like Franz

Kline. Martin's work demonstrates translations into the pictorial that are not to be treated as formal or motivic history, but rather enable one to *experience* the specific aesthetic and modes of an Asianist pictorial culture. By doing so, Martin does not simply appropriate a style or motif, but rather creates a hybrid pictorial aesthetic.

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## Endnotes

1. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 2003), 334.
2. Clement Greenberg, "American-Type" Painting (1958, reworked version of 1955).
3. Marc Frey and Nicola Spakowski, "Einleitung: Asianismen seit dem 19. Jahrhundert; 'Asien' als Gegenstand nationaler und transnationaler Diskurse und Praktiken," in idem, eds., *Asianismen seit dem 19. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitäts-Verlag, 2009), 7–15, esp. 8. The term 'Asianism' is thus not used in the present study in the sense of a pan-Asian discourse.
4. Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, "Semiotics in Art History," *Art Bulletin* 72, no. 2 (1991): 174–208, esp. 195.
5. Ernest Fenollosa, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art: An Outline History of East Asiatic Design* (2 vols.), (New York, Tokio: Frederick A. Stokes company, 1912).
6. Cf. Vera Wolff, "Not a real thing at all: Zur Kulturellen Übersetzung künstlerischer Techniken am Beispiel der japanischen Ölmalerei." In: *Kulturelle Übersetzungen*, ed. Anika Keinz, Klaus

- Schönberger and Vera Wolff (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag GmbH, 2012), 73. One of the first Japanologists, Basil H. Chamberlain, for example, criticized Japanese painting in his popular compendium of Japanese art, *Things Japanese*, published in 1890, for not being able to convincingly imitate nature (cf. Basil Hall Chamberlain, *Things Japanese. Being Notes on Various Subjects Connected with Japan* (London/Kobe: J.L. Thompson & Co, 1927 [1890]). The German translation bears the derogatory title: *Allerlei Japanisches: Notizen über verschiedene japanische Gegenstände für Reisende und andere*, trans. Bernhard Kellermann (Berlin: Hans Bondy, 1912).
7. Cf. Fenollosa, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art: An Outline History of East Asiatic Design*.
  8. On hegemonic foreign policy aspirations in the Meiji period and their narratives, see in detail: Wieland Wagner: *Japans Außenpolitik in der frühen Meiji-Zeit (1868 – 1894). Die ideologische und politische Grundlegung des japanischen Führungsanspruchs in Ostasien* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1990).
  9. David J. Clarke, *The Influence of Oriental Thought on Postwar American Painting and Sculpture* (New York, London: Garland Pub, 1988), 27.
  10. Lecture by Ernest Fenollosa, quoted in Lawrence W. Chisolm, *Fenollosa: The Far East and American Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 94.
  11. Alexandra Munroe. "The Third Mind: An Introduction." In *The Third Mind. American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860 – 1989*, edited by Alexandra Munroe, New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2009, 29.
  12. Afterword by the German translator Horst Hammitzsch: Kakuzo Okakura, *Das Buch vom Tee* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 2002 [1906]), 110.
  13. On Okakura's adaptation of Hegelian idealism, which he received through Fenollosa's seminars at the University of Tokyo, and his indirect overruling of its dialectical structure, see Vera Wolff, *Die Rache des Materials: Eine andere Geschichte des Japonismus* (Zürich: Diaphanes, 2015), 70–71.
  14. Kakuzo Okakura, *The Book of Tea* (London, New York: Fox, Duffield & Company, 1906), 63.
  15. Okakura, *The Book of Tea*, 50.
  16. Okakura, *The Book of Tea*, 58.
  17. Okakura, *The Book of Tea*, 60. Here Okakura uses the term 'vacuum' instead of 'void,' incorrectly.
  18. Okakura, *Das Buch vom Tee*, 49.
  19. Okakura, *The Book of Tea*, 67: "the Abstract."
  20. Okakura, *The Book of Tea*, 68: "the mundane," "the spiritual."
  21. Okakura, *The Book of Tea*, 4: "making all its votaries aristocrats in taste."
  22. Cf. Okakura, *Das Buch vom Tee*, 79, 12.
  23. Okakura, *The Book of Tea*, 9. Cf. on this the remarks with regard to Edward Said in Wolff, *Die Rache des Materials: Eine andere Geschichte des Japonismus*, 76–78.
  24. Wolff, *Die Rache des Materials: Eine andere Geschichte des Japonismus*, 72.
  25. Cf. Bernard Faure, *Chan Insights and Oversights: An Epistemological Critique of the Chan Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 53. He also mentions Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki in addition to Okakura. See also Irmela Hijjiya-Kirschnereit, "Okzidentalismus: Eine Problemskizze" in *Was heißt hier "fremd"? Studien zu Sprache und Fremdheit* ed. Dirk Naguschewski and Jürgen Trabant (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997), 248.
  26. Wolff, *Die Rache des Materials: Eine andere Geschichte des Japonismus*, 81; and see Kakuzo Okakura, *The Ideals of the East: With Special Reference to the Art of Japan* (London: J. Murray, 1903), 159. [Die Ideale des Ostens. Leipzig 1922.]
  27. Okakura, *The Book of Tea*, 3–4.
  28. Wolff, *Die Rache des Materials: Eine andere Geschichte des Japonismus*, 148–65.

29. Wolff points out that John Ruskin had already done this fifty years earlier: Wolff, *Die Rache des Materials: Eine andere Geschichte des Japonismus*, 83. Cf. Yuko Kikuchi and Toshio Watanabe *Ruskin in Japan, 1890 – 1940. Nature for Art, Art for Life*. (Tokyo: Cogito inc., 1997).
30. Cf. Mona Schieren, *Agnes Martin: Transkulturelle Übersetzung. Zur Konstruktion asianistischer Ästhetiken in der amerikanischen Kunst nach 1945* (München: Verlag Silke Schreiber, 2016), 377.
31. Schieren, *Agnes Martin: Transkulturelle Übersetzung. Zur Konstruktion asianistischer Ästhetiken in der amerikanischen Kunst nach 1945*, 32–79.
32. Faure, *Chan Insights and Oversights: An Epistemological Critique of the Chan Tradition*, 5–9.
33. For other categories see my study Schieren, *Agnes Martin: Transkulturelle Übersetzung. Zur Konstruktion asianistischer Ästhetiken in der amerikanischen Kunst nach 1945*.
34. Agnes Martin, *Writings/Schriften (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2005)*, 16.
35. Witter Bynner, *The Way of Life According to Laotzu: An American Version* (New York: Berkley Pub. Group, 1986).
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38. Ernst Kris, “Der Stil ‘rustique’: Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen, Wien, no. 1 (1926), 137-208, quoted in Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist: A Historical Experiment*, trans. Alastair Laing and Lottie M. Newman (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), 48. (Translation by the author).
39. Okakura, *The Ideals of the East: With Special Reference to the Art of Japan*, 159.

# Imaging Courtly Cosmopolitanism and Making of an Imperial Collection: An Exploration of Robert Clive's *Ganjifa* Cards from Eighteenth Century Bengal

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Ganjifa* playing cards has been part of a larger material culture of the political elites of the Islamic world in the early modern period. Its arrival, dissemination and creative adaptations within the South Asian subcontinent are associated with the Mughals. Through the 16th and 17th centuries, the Mughal *ganjifa* had spread to regional and subordinate courts of Northern India, Bengal and the Deccan as a component of Mughal courtly culture. More than just a game of cards, these cards served a purpose of political propaganda and reflected on the cultural preferences of their users. The Battle of Plassey (in 1757) saw the *masnad* of Murshidabad passing to Mir Jafar whose accession to the throne came with conditions of compliance and subordination to Robert Clive and the English East India Company. Situating a set of ivory *ganjifa* cards that was gifted to Robert Clive by Mir Jafar, this paper will study the courtly practices of the Bengal Nizamat in post-Plassey 18th century Bengal. Focusing on this 'Clive Ganjifa set' which was done in the traditional Murshidabad kalam of painting, this paper will go beyond the formalistic analysis and iconography of these cards to reflect on the cultural appropriation of Mughal courtly manners and customs by the Bengal Nawabs and its extension to an interlocutor like Robert Clive in the twilight period of late Mughal India.

## **KEYWORDS**

Early Modern India; Company Nabobs; Transregional Art Networks; Playing Cards; Islamic Material Culture.

### **Introduction**

The eighteenth century in India was characterized by two critical transitions which changed the structure of power and initiated important economic, social and cultural reconfigurations<sup>4</sup>. The first was the transition in the earlier half of the century from the Mughal political order to the regional political orders while the second transition saw the English East India Company steering its way to a position of political prominence in North India. While this century was indeed marked by violence it was also characterised by a great degree of political, economic and cultural adjustments, flexibility and pragmatism. The realignment and reorientation of power in several pockets of the erstwhile Mughal Empire led to the emergence of a number of regional successor states, of which some like the Rajput kingdoms, Awadh, Hyderabad and Bengal gained a position of prominence by the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Situating ourselves in the province of Bengal, through the course of this paper an attempt will be made to unravel a fascinating account of how complex transregional art networks were operating embedded in political nexuses that were ultimately getting constituted by reaching across lines of cultural and political differences in early modern India.

### **Mercantile Capital to Empire Building in Early Modern Bengal**

The eighteenth century in Bengal was dramatic to say the least. It recorded the passing away of one empire, the Mughal, and the advent of another, the British Empire, in less than a century. In the year 1711, Murshid Quli Khan, the last provincial Mughal governor or *Diwan* of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb effectively executed a clear break from the parent Mughal state structure as far as actual administrative subordination was concerned and proclaimed himself as the first autonomous ruler or Nawab of Bengal. From their capital at Murshidabad, the Nawabs of Bengal presided over the richest province of the Mughal Empire. Cotton, raw silk, saltpeter, sugar, indigo, opium and such other products seeming inexhaustible; all the European merchant Companies set up factories to trade in them. Traveling down river from the capital at Murshidabad was like traveling across a jumbled map of Europe: there were the Portuguese in Hughli, the Dutch at Chinsurah, the Danes at Sreerampore,

the French at Chandernagore and of course the British at Calcutta<sup>2</sup>. But among the numerous East India Companies that were constantly trying to carve out their mercantile and commercial niches along the Eastern coastline of India, it was the English East India Company that most successfully established its commercial supremacy and went on to lay the foundation stone of a colonial empire in the second half of the eighteenth century. Animosity ensuing between the Nawabs of Bengal and the English East India Company regarding trading rights and mercantile control eventually culminated into the historic battle of Plassey which was not just a pivotal point in the history of Bengal but also the event that marked the prelude to the British empire in the Indian subcontinent. It would, moreover thrust Robert Clive to the limelight of history.

A young East India Company clerk-turned-soldier, Robert Clive's fortunes turned on 23 June 1757 when he successfully managed to maneuver his way through the field of Plassey off the capital city of Murshidabad to win a decisive battle against the young Nawab Siraj-ud-Daulah. The victory, like so many of Britain's early forays of conquest in the Indian subcontinent rested on a foundation of lies, spies and betrayal. For, during his one year on the throne Siraj-ud-Daulah had alienated not only the East India Company but many of his own subjects particularly those who did business with the Company. A powerful contingent of bankers, merchants and courtiers had joined forces with the Company agents to oust the Nawab of Bengal. At the heart of the conspiracy was one of Siraj's top commander named Mir Jafar. Through a series of backroom maneuvers, the English East India Company had signed a treaty with Mir Jafar in which he agreed to grant the Company huge cash rewards and privileges in exchange for its assistance in toppling Siraj-ud-Daulah and installing him as Nawab of Bengal instead. In effect, Plassey was won even before it was fought<sup>3</sup>. After their defeat, the Nawabs of Bengal had to accept dependency upon the English East India Company. With the compliant Mir Jafar now installed as Nawab of Bengal the access to great wealth presented itself to the English East India Company as well as its messiah in Bengal, 'Clive of India'. Robert Clive was ruthless in terms of amassing wealth from the Bengal treasury not just in monetary terms but in

terms of Indian arts and artifacts, valuable bejeweled objects of daily use, intricate and delicate ornaments, arms and armour and every other object worthy of a Mughal aristocrat. In India, Clive had committed himself to empire building for the Company but in Britain he used his Indian fortune to start building a vast material empire for himself<sup>4</sup>. The material gains from the East enabled Clive to buy himself Powis castle in Wales and systematically procure a wealth of artifacts which was then stored in his empire of Powis. Through these things, Clive made a deliberate attempt to refashion himself from just a ‘Nabob’<sup>5</sup> of India to a British aristocrat. However it was not the trappings of British aristocracy like Italian marble statues, classic antiquarian art objects, French and Italian paintings, lavish furniture that Clive had acquired but hundreds of Indian art objects like ivories, textiles, statues of Hindu gods, ornamental silver and gold, bejeweled huqqa sets, exquisitely carved pieces on jade, weapons and ceremonial armours that have presently rendered the Powis Castle ‘Wales’ very own Jewel of India.’ A complex process of looting, gifting, trading, capturing came together to constitute what is today the most exquisite private collection of Indian and oriental artifacts of the United Kingdom. Of all the Indian treasures in Powis Castle, this essay will be based on a set of eighteen ivory playing cards called *ganjifa* done in Murshidabad style of painting that has now found temporary shelter in a private gallery in London<sup>6</sup>. Symbolising at once remnants of Mughal legacy, assertion of power and authority of the Bengal Nawabs and the intervention from a foreign power in the form of the English East India Company, a closer study of these cards reflects upon the larger study of transregional material culture and cosmopolitanism in early modern India.

### ***Ganjifa* in the Islamic World**

*Ganjifa* in its several forms of spelling (e.g. *Khanjafah*, *khanjifah* گنجیفة / کنجیفة) is a word signifying playing cards and card games in India, Nepal, Iran, several Arab countries and Turkey. Etymologically most likely to have originated from the word *ganj* (گنج) meaning treasure, the earliest references to *ganjifa* as playing cards can be dated to the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries with some scholars tracing it back to the thirteenth century. A famous pack of

early playing cards at the Topkapi palace museum in Istanbul consists of four suits (signs): cups, swords, coins and polo sticks with thirteen cards in each, including one *malik* (king), a *nai'b* and *thani na'ib* (governor and deputy governor). These represent four important functions at the court of a Mamluk Sultan i.e., the cup-bearers, the commander of the palace-guard, the exchequer and the polo-master or *jukandar*. This iconography with its obvious association with symbols and insignia of governance and courtly life, points to the close link between courtly culture and *ganjifa* cards in the Islamic world.



**Fig. 1.** Mamluk *Kanjifa* Cards. From Left to Right : 6 of coins, 10 of polo sticks, 3 of cups and 7 of swords. Topkapi Palace Museum. Date : Circa 1500

Being part of a larger material culture of the political elites of the Islamic world in the early modern period, it is not surprising that we can trace these *ganjifa* cards to Mughal India as well. The Mughal emperor Akbar having standardized the game, most of the *ganjifa* cards we find commonly in pre modern India are of either of the two variations- of a twelve-suited *ganjifa* set

or an eight-suited set. The more commonly found eight-suited packs have twelve cards in each suit with ten numerical cards and two court cards, the two court cards being the *mir* or ruler card and the *wazir* or minister card. Some of the most luxurious *ganjifa* cards were made of ivory, carefully painted and delicately worked upon. They may have been used for gifting and as souvenirs as well. More than just a game of cards, these cards hence also served a purpose of political propaganda and reflected on the cultural preferences of their users. Through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Mughal *ganjifa* spread to regional and subordinate courts of Northern India, Eastern India and the Deccan as a component of Mughal courtly culture<sup>7</sup>. The court of Murshidabad followed the trend.

Murshidabad has been known for its beautiful ivory carving and artisanal skill. With the establishment of the autonomous rule of the Nizamat by Murshid Quli Khan, the demand for ivory as a luxury good for the court is likely to have increased, encouraging artists and ivory carvers to produce ivory artworks of superior standard<sup>8</sup>. Thus, it is not at all surprising that in the collection of the oriental riches of the Powis Castle we would find a complete set of ninety-six elaborate ivory *ganjifa* cards of finest workmanship and very high artistic excellence. Originating from the concept of different components of court, the *ganjifa* cards represents the crown or *taj* for court regalia, whites or *sefid* for the silver mint, swords or *shamsir* for the armoury, slaves or *Ghulam* for the household, harps or *chanak* for the *zenana* or the domestic quarters of the court, reds or *surkh* for the gold mint, letters or *barat* for the *daftari* or clerical office and furnishings or *qimash* for the stores<sup>9</sup>. Conforming to Akbar's eight-suited *ganjifa* pack, this Clive set had twelve cards in each suit (ten numerical and two court cards). On top of the regular cards this pack had another twelve duplicate court cards as well. Each circular ivory card was of eight-centimeter diameter, finely painted in lacquer on white ground with gold leaf.



**Fig. 2.** The board of eighteen *Ganjifa* cards from the Clive Set. Bengal, Murshidabad. Painted Ivory. Francesca Galloway Gallery, London  
Date : Circa 1757-60

Figure 2 a display board showing eighteen of the hundred and eight cards of the Powis ganjifa set that is currently in the collection of the Francesca Galloway Gallery. In it we find from left to right the topmost row contains the cards of *Mir* of *Ghulam* suit, *Wazir* of *Qimash* suit, *Wazir* of *Barat* suit, *Mir* of *Shamser* suit, Five of *Ghulam* suit, and Three of *Ghulam* suit. In the second row from left to right we have the *Wazir* of *Taj* suit, Seven of *Ghulam* suit, *Wazir* of *Barat* Suit, *Wazir* of *Chang* (or *chanak*) and the last one which remains unidentified. Finally, the bottom row (from left to right) contains the cards for Five of *Shamsher* suit, *Wazir* of *Shamsher* suit, two unidentified cards, *Wazir* of *Safed* suit and finally the Four of *Chang* suit. At the very outset it is clear that the cards are painted in the sophisticated and mature style of Murshidabad painting that we have seen prevalent from the time of Alivardi Khan. We find the attendant figures with flywhisk or *morchhals* rendered with the same formality and stiffness which is a characteristic feature of this court style. The illustrations on the cards when compared with the renditions of the contemporary illustrated manuscripts from

Murshidabad, bear striking similarities right from the composition, schematic arrangement of the figures to style of painting the dresses and turbans. A closer look at the numerical *Ghulam* suit cards draws our attention to figures which are stout with a kind of stumpiness that nearly makes them appear as rotund. These figures bear distinct parallel to the depiction of seated figures in contemporary court patronised illustrated manuscripts. This helps us forward the hypothesis that these cards were worked upon by the court's atelier of painters to whom the illustrated manuscript like that of the *Dastur-i-Himmat* can also be credited<sup>40</sup>. Based on the stylistic resonance and considered as patronized by the Nawab of Bengal, scholars like Robert Skelton and Rosemary Crill who had systematically catalogued the Clive collection of Powis have further conjectured that this *ganjifa* set had been a gift to Robert Clive from Nawab Mir Jafar<sup>41</sup>.

#### **Political Significance of the Clive *Ganjifa* Set**

As noted before, the association of *ganjifa* cards with courtly practices was very well versed. The Clive set becomes an even more interesting subject of study when we realize that it has twelve extra court cards. Each suit has a *Mir* and *Wazir*. With eight suits there should be sixteen court cards but in fact the set has twenty-eight. Every court card in this collection (barring the *Ghulam wazir*, *Chang wazir* and *Surkh mir* and *wazir* cards) has an inscription written on the *chatris* of the *mir* cards and the haloes of the *wazir* card which corresponds to the name of the entire Mughal line of rulers from Timur upto Alamgir II. The great early princes of the Mughal dynasty from Timur to Shah Jahan are represented on the *mir* cards while the *wazir* cards represented the Mughal line from Aurangzeb to the later Mughal rulers ending in Alamgir II. It is probable that the extra twelve court cards that are a part of this set were added by the artist to represent the entire Timurid Mughal line from Timur to the contemporary Mughal Emperor Alamgir II. These portraits of Mughal royalty are also situated within typical *darbar* or court scenes: the royal figures are dressed in Mughal court attire with attendants bearing torches positioned behind them embodying the usual Mughal courtly formalism. It is significant that in a polity such as Bengal which had broken away from the

Mughal empire there was a constant effort at seeking the Mughal connection and political-cultural legitimacy associated with it. The embellishments on the playing cards by taking the form of portraits of the Mughal dynasty together with their ancestor Timur poses a poignant reminder to the users of these cards of the long and illustrious Mughal line with its Timurid origin and how the Bengal Nizamat sought a continuity with that.

Mir Jafar's act of gifting Clive with this precious ivory *ganjifa* is also significant. This was a time of considerable socio-political tumult where seeking legitimacy and claiming a continuation with the Mughal rule became a prerogative for a person like Mir Jafar whose accession to the throne happened under dubious circumstances. Firstly, it reminds us of the dependency of the Bengal Nawab on the English, an arrangement that was ushered in by Mir Jafar after the Battle of Plassey. By giving Clive this specific gift, the Nawab was making a political statement that stressed the connections between the two and perhaps emphasized the Nawab's indebtedness to the Englishman. Secondly, drawing from the imperial Mughal ideology in appropriating the gifting practices from the Mughal emperors and extending it to Robert Clive, the Nawab of this eighteenth century successor state was trying to forge an idea of kingship that sought legitimacy and continuation of the very same Mughal rule that they have broken away from. Hence the emphasis on gifting an exquisite *ganjifa* set highlights the emulative imperial ideology as well as the cultural appropriation of courtly manners and customs. Taking into consideration the political authority of the donor and recipient and the strategic timing of gifting this *ganjifa* set, we find an extension of this Mughal cultural significance to someone like Robert Clive; He was one of the pioneer interlocutors between the East and the West, and the life and the legacy of the huge material remains of his collection testifies for it.

### **Conclusion**

Robert Clive was the first imperial collector of British India. He had assumed that mantle in Bengal, in a metaphoric sense, by acquiring territory and resources for the English East India Company. He had also collected a

tremendous fortune for himself. Clive returned to Britain after the Battle of Plassey as the Baron of Plassey and rumors of egg-size diamonds and chests of gold followed him through the capital. Meticulous calculations found in the textual records of the Clive papers confirms that Clive's net worth at that point was roughly around half a million pounds, more than fifty million pounds by today's standard. It was the first and possibly the greatest rags to riches story of the British Empire. With his Indian fortune Clive systematically bought all the trappings of a British aristocrat: property, political power, great houses, fine arts, stylish furnishings, a British peerage and the social and dynastic securities that came with it. This self-fashioning that Robert Clive undertook from the 'Baron Clive of Plassey' to 'Clive of Britain' is probably best represented in a portrait that he had commissioned from the artist and his cousin Charles Clive in 1764.



**Fig. 3.** Baron Robert Clive (1725-1774), 'Clive of India'. Charles Clive. Date : 1760. Oil on Canvas. Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery, Accession Number-SHYMS: FA/1990/36

A flattering portrait where Clive is seen donning a baron's robe cuffed with brocade, garlanded with gold braid, on the table next to him sits his coronet he poses with the elegance of a nobleman. What makes this painting interesting is the painting of Nawab Mir Jafar, his Bengal ally, hanging over Clive's shoulder on the wall behind him. What accounts for this portrait within a portrait? A very interesting letter from Clive's wife Margaret dated February 1764, about the same time when this painting was painted, suggests that it may actually have been intended for Mir Jafar, a "present as a mark of our lasting sense of his favours<sup>42</sup>". The exchange of portraits between rulers being a common means of cementing alliances, this painting was the celebration of a remarkable symbiosis, that of transcontinental peers, of Nawabs and Barons, Robert Clive made Mir Jafar and Mir Jafar made him.

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### Endnotes

1. Seema Alavi(ed), *The Eighteenth Century in India : Debates in Indian History and Society* (New Delhi :Oxford University Press, 2002)
2. Maya Jasanoff, *Edge of empire: Lives, culture and conquest in the east, 1750-1850.* (New York : Vintage Books, 2005) p. 29.
3. Maya Jasanoff, *Edge of empire: Lives, culture and conquest in the east, 1750-1850.* (New York : Vintage Books, 2005) p. 29.
4. Maya Jasanoff, *Edge of empire: Lives, culture and conquest in the east, 1750-1850.* (New York : Vintage Books, 2005) p. 32.
5. An anglicized distortion of the term Nawab; Referring to British agents and officers who had amassed enormous personal fortunes in India through business or dispensation of other administrative functions in the name of the English East India Company.
6. The eighteen *ganjifa* cards discussed in this section are currently housed in the Francesca Galloway Gallery in London.
7. Kumkum Chatterjee, "Cards & Culture: Cultural Cosmopolitanism in Mughal India". Incomplete transcripts
8. Pratapaditya Pal, "The mastery of Tulsiram's Durga and Ivory Carving of Murshidabad" in *Murshidabad:Forgotten Capital of Bengal* (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2013) 110.
9. Toby Falk and Mildred Archer, *Indian Miniatures in the India Office Library* (London: Sotheby Parke Barnet, 1981).
10. *Dastur-i-Himmat*, MS.12 Chester Beatty Library Collection, Dublin.
11. Quoted from the object description of the Francesca Galloway gallery which cites the work of Rosemary Crill's, *Treasures from India- The Clive Collection at Powis Castle Catalogue*, 112.
12. Margaret Clive to John Carnac, February 27, 1764, OIOC :MSS Eur F128/27., British Library, London.

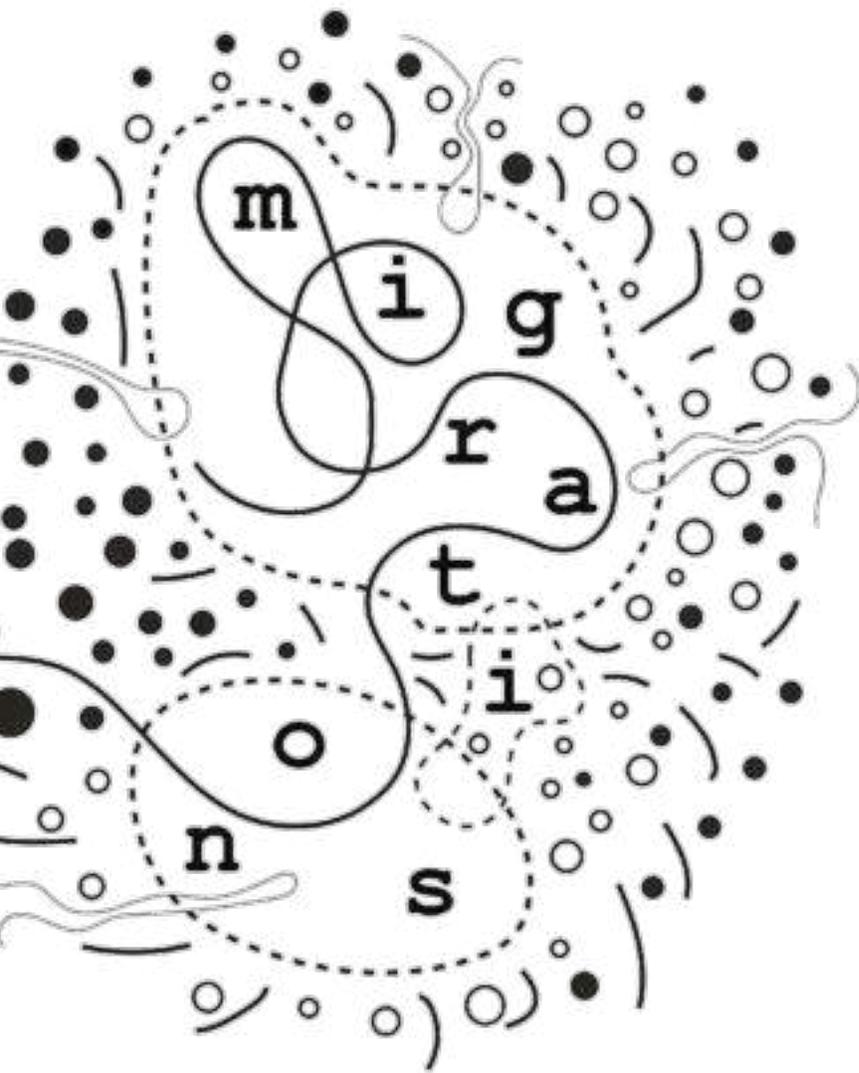
### Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful to my supervisor Prof. Kavita Singh for her insightful comments and feedback on this paper. I also benefitted from my discussions with Amrita Chattopadhyay and Deepashree Dutta. Further, I am grateful to Deepashree for graciously reviewing my draft. All mistakes are my own.

# Home and Hospitality

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## Session 14



# Session 14

## Home and Hospitality

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Home is a newly vital term in our field. Yet art historians and curators have long deemed origin and provenance as essential markers and as determinants of character, meaning, and value. We ask where is an object, a maker, an iconography, or a concept from and where has it been? But we seldom analyze the strategies by which artistic and art historical practices, indeed art objects, lay claim to belonging to a particular place or culture. The repatriation of looted objects and the right of return of people from exile suppose integral, historical, and even natural bonds. Migration, exile, and displacement often presume that the migrant has been uprooted, that their presence at home has been unnaturally severed, as if home is otherwise assumed and continuous. Home would seem to be on the side of possession, permanence, and immutability, and opposed to the dispossessed and the transient, although some might demure.<sup>1</sup>

As our session's contributors demonstrate, house and home have their own aesthetics, iconography, and architecture, and may function as symbols and agents of affinity or of a-partness, regarding everything from gender and family to the community and the polis. Home is integral to the discussion of migrations, if only because it is where the migrant object, person, or concept once began. The broad theme of this CIHA, migration, presupposes the concept of home, for it is from there that migration is set in motion. In ancient Greece, *ethos* meant the place where a person lived. Home was *ethos* itself

Who is at home and who should be allowed in? Jacques Derrida advocated for unconditional hospitality. When a stranger knocks at the door, we are obliged to host them, no questions asked, because, he reasoned, all homes are already based on a prior seizure. Derrida's universal illegitimacy

of at-homeness cuts in multiple ways: it would seem to require welcoming without friction any migrant, art, or art history arriving from somewhere else. At the same time and uncomfortably, it would seem to delegitimize the indigenous and the exiled claim to a homeland. And yet again, Derrida's postulate might unburden art history's genealogies that are supposed to guarantee meaning and status. Migration, like empire and hospitality, force the question of who and what is at home here, who belongs there, and to whom does a place and culture belong. While Derrida's postulate warns us of nefarious notions of possession, belonging, and power as based on blood and soil, it would also seem to undermine objections to alienation brought on by colonial dispossession. Ubiquitous in our discipline, until recently home has gone mostly unquestioned, but, when questioned, few issues are as vexing.

Let us consider a story that starts with thievery, attempted genocide, and the displacement of indigenous people in colonial history and museum practice, one that ends with survival and resilience, artistic invention, and a charge to curatorial caretaking. Living along the coastal areas of what is today Brazil, the Tupinambá people resisted the genocidal onslaught of colonial invasion and occupation. They were not eliminated. In the 1980s, they began the RETOMADA, the reclaiming and actual retaking of lands, resettling in the ancestral lands of the Serra do Padeiro in what is now Bahia. Accordingly, during the early 2000s Redescobrimto festivities, some of them came to Sao Paulo to behold the Manto Tupinambá, one of twelve ceremonial cloaks of their ancestors that were plundered and now reside in European collections.

The Tupinambá came to the exhibition in Sao Paulo, on the grounds of the Bienal, to reclaim the mantle. Although only two, Nivalda Amaral de Jesus, age 67, and Aloísio Cunha Silva, age 41, were able to see the Manto, they did not forget. A long saga ensued in which the Brazilian government refused to entertain their claim to reclaim, and the Danish National Museum quietly refused to lend the cape to the other venues of the Mostra do Redescobrimto. While the Tupinambá did not win back the singular museological object, they did set course for another chapter in their flourishing.

The Tupinambà came to see that they had never really given up the mantle, and they redeveloped the know-how to make them again. Many still knew how to make the required armature. For the cloth they relearned where to cultivate the fibers, when to harvest them, and how to weave them. They discovered again that bee wax was necessary to protect the fibers and make the capes resistant. In wonderful testimony, Celia Tupinambá recounts that, in the process of regenerating the land, their plumed collaborators returned to the area, sometimes leaving feathers by windows and doors, making them easier to gather.

Today the Tupinambá are no longer demanding that the eleven capes dispersed in European collections be returned. They realized the Mantos never left. The ones that were taken to Europe, as gifts, war trophies, and inglorious plunder, must remain with their takers. Colonizers have the burden to look after them. The takers can have the “pena,” the feather, which in Portuguese also means pity and obligation. The Mantos will always have their home in the Brazilian territory, but, while living abroad, they must be welcomed with hospitality and care, as if they were forever hosted with the respect that any outsider, alien, or *other* by all rights should be granted. These are ethics to pursue in our session and to maintain long after.

The aim of CIHA and the aim of this session is to contribute to a generative and hospitable field and practice. This is to our knowledge the first CIHA session dedicated to the work of emerging scholars. Thirteen researchers come from seven countries, five continents, and twelve different institutions, both museums and universities. We come together on a broad topic of shared interest, and, yet, the practices that we see and hear may be inflected by diverse and divergent geographies; methodologies; and national, linguistic, and institutional traditions.

Our goal is not to make a single way of doing art history, but to hear, savour, and learn from differences, the very intellectual richness of our field and our practice. To respect and learn from our alterities, from our accents and inflections, knowing that few are speaking their first language and, consequently, they may feel as though they are wearing someone else's clothes. Even if Brazil and Portuguese and English are not your home, and the time zone makes you suffer, gives you headaches or dizziness, we

respect that and want to make this a safe space for you to speak, have fun, discuss, listen, and share.

Collectively, our diverse cases took us from seventeenth-century Rome, Macau, and Mughal India to nineteenth-century New Orleans and Argentina. We considered colonial, imperial, Republican, and contemporary Brazil; Rome and Milan in the 1960s and 1970s; as well as contemporary Ghana, Germany, and China. Media under consideration included film and ivories; textiles, paintings, prints, and public monuments; performance art; and architecture of many kinds, including sacred building, prefabricated containers for housing, and refined maquettes, as well as an artist's own home and studio as site of creativity and display.

Through our happy cacophony, three recurring themes were sounded. First, the home as private abode: we saw the identification of the artist's body with the building; the home as sacred refuge for migrant and diasporic communities; works of art that hide who is at home; others that isolate and exclude; still others that spotlight the phoniness of home as private, as if not political, sphere. Second: there is a recurring interest in materials and ways of making that welcome and incorporate techniques and motifs from the outside while remaining recognizably from home and at home via an ethics of bringing in and weaving in; and, yet, there are other examples in which the importation of certain forms and iconographies from elsewhere are naturalized as if belonging to their new place, even as they force a potential absurdity by their foreign pedigree. Thirdly, and in a close echo of the CIHA general theme, migrations of form are also a recurring interest.

In our session, by putting the emphasis on home, we confront the dis-placement of subjects, artists, and artistic interests. These histories are not figured as smooth passages from one place to another but of dis-placement from here to there. But is displacement even the right word? Do we really want to suggest that everything that is un-displaced or not-yet-displaced is rightfully or naturally at home, as if placedness is natural and without question, and only ends when people and things are dislodged, thrown out of their homes. Our presenters lent nuance and analysis to the questions. As our presenters turn their attention to home and hospitality, their subjects do not so reliably guarantee security, harmony, and naturalness, but, instead, they risk provoking anxiety about legitimacy and

about belonging, about relations between here and there, and-- to the extent that these entities exist— also between *le nous et les autres*.

Brazilians enjoy welcoming people to their homes. They share their culture, food, spaces, music, dance, and conversation. The caipirinha, the moqueca, the mucura, the feijoada, the dabucuri, the barreado, and not only meals. If family, if friends, if colleagues, invite you to their homes and to meet their loved ones, do not take it for granted. You are being invited into their most precious universe.

Like many other things, we learned hospitality from native Brazilians. More than five million Indigenous peoples lived on this land before us, and more than a million are amongst us today. They come from three hundred nations and speak three hundred languages. It is the best kind of Babel from which we have much to learn. In Pirantininga (Sao Paulo), we acknowledge the land and the waters of the Guarani-Mbya, Tupinikim, Tupinambá, Kaiapó, Guayanás and Guarulhos people, as well as the Pankararu, Pankararé, and many other nations who came and settled. We welcome and we are welcomed.

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### Endnotes

1. Work for this session has been informed and enriched by: Pitta and Naine Terena's "Retomando narrativas: a Mostra do Redescobrimento e o protagonismo indígena," in P. Miyada, ed., *Bienal de São Paulo desde 1951* (São Paulo: Bienal, 2022). By the 2022 College Art Association sessions, "Claims on Home: Figures of Unbelonging," and "Claims on Home: Museums and Art's History Unbound," co-chaired by Porterfield and Kirsten Scheid; as well as by research undertaken for Porterfield's "Home and Alienation in the Colonies: Auguste Renoir in Algiers, Jean Renoir in India," in A. Dombrowski, ed., *A Companion to Impressionism* (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2021).

# Hosting the Ship of Salvation in India and East Asia, ca. 1600

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Texas State University

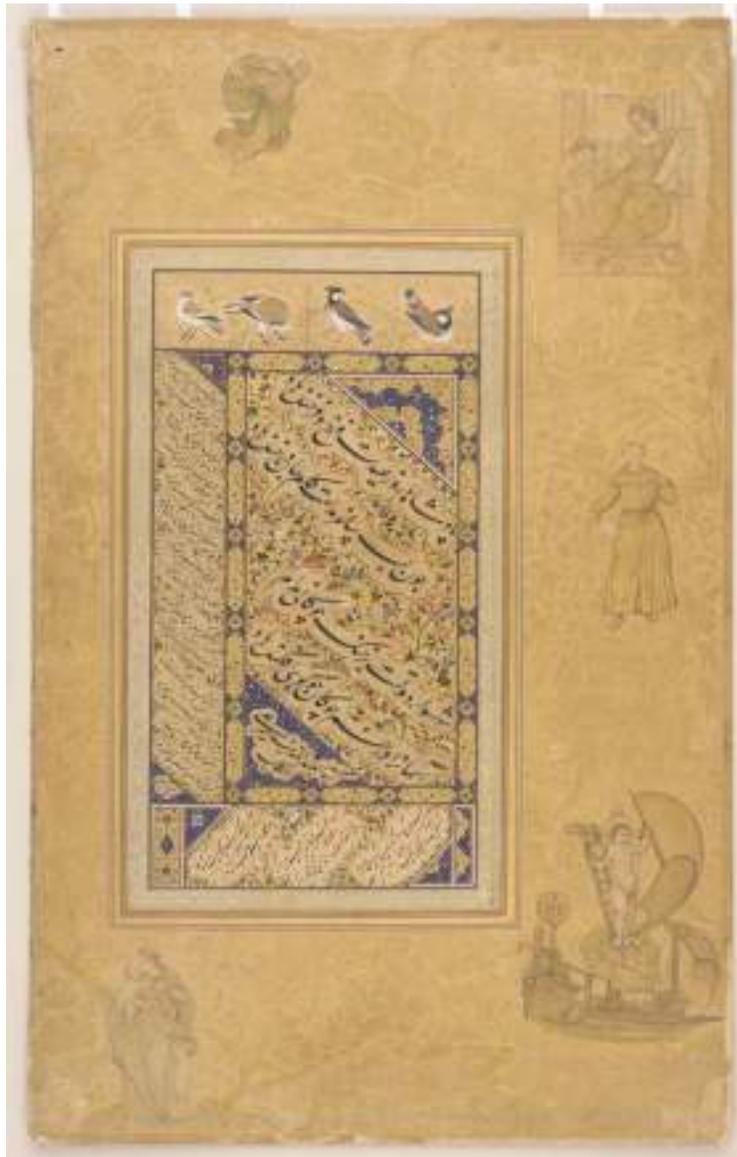
## **ABSTRACT**

This contribution focuses on the reception and remediation of a 1580 Roman print showing Christ as the pilot of the Ship of Salvation in Mughal India and East Asia. The Jesuits adapted an earlier iconography of Fortuna so that, in place of the fickle Roman goddess, the Christ child now steered the ship of life. An Indian painter reproduced this allegorical ship in the border of a folio from the Gulshan Album for the Mughal prince Salim, and an East Asian ivory carver, to whom the image of the Christian god would have looked utterly strange, figured the clouds at Christ's feet in an auspicious Chinese form. This essay examines the cultural logics at work in these acts of remediation of a print in painting and sculpture, respectively, and, it proposes a new way of thinking about the antisociality of images within their political contexts using an anthropological vocabulary of hosting and hospitality.

## **KEYWORDS**

Jesuits; Gulshan Album; Ivory; Transmediality; Allegory.

This essay focuses on two objects containing the same image of a young Christ on the Ship of Salvation. One is a leaf from the Gulshan Album, a group of folios assembled for the Mughal emperor Jahangir (r. 1605–27) from about 1599, and so begun while he was known as Salim (fig. 1). The other is an ivory plaque, measuring 13 by 9.8 centimeters, carved either in Macau or Manila by a Chinese artist (fig. 2).



**Fig. 1.** Unknown artist (Mughal), Decorated border with *God the Father*, *Geometry*, *Anthony of Padua*, *Ship of Salvation*, and *Charity*, ca. 1600. Ink, watercolor and gold on paper, 42.5 x 26.5 cm. Calligraphy by Mir 'Ali (d. 1559–60). Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



**Fig. 2** Unknown artist (Chinese), *Christ as Pilot of the Ship of Salvation*, ca. 1600. Ivory, 13 x 9.8 cm. British Museum, London.

My purpose is to assess (1) the extent to which the reception of this particular image in Mughal and East Asian cultural contexts parallels the reception of Christian religion in these places; and (2) how the reception of the European image in these two objects relates to the reception of European art forms in these contexts.

In some sense, this is an ideal image with which to analyze these two issues within a conceptual framework of hosting and hospitality, being that it shows the Christian god coming or going (depending on how you look at it). This is essentially to say that the hosting of this allegorical image can be investigated as an allegory of the hosting of European culture in India and East Asia.

The image of Christ at the mast derives from the Renaissance imagery of the goddess, or in the Christian universe personification, of Fortuna. This imagery was itself an adaptation of ancient Roman prototypes. It is an iconography where the nude female figure is shown holding a sail in her hand so that, as seen in a well-known relief at Palazzo Rucellai in Florence, her

body acts as a kind of mast.<sup>1</sup> This secular image is in turn adapted in the sixteenth century into a quintessential Counter-Reformation allegory of the Church militant. The main figure is no longer capricious Fortune but the dependable, if young, Christian God. It seems almost superfluous to say that the power of this allegory came from its topicality and intuitiveness; the image of the Christ child sailing around on the Ship of the Church to deliver salvation to all mirrored what was actually happening out in the world, where Jesuit and other missionaries were going out in numbers to proselytize, disseminating and circulating products of European visual culture as they did so.

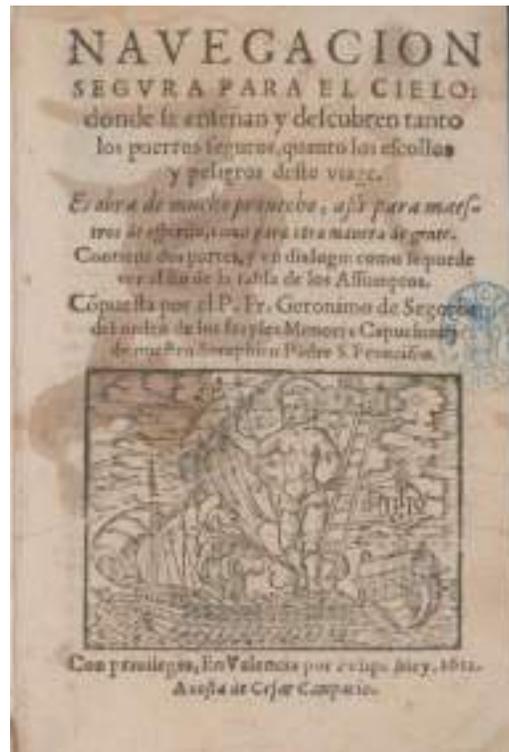
The actual print on which these two images are based is lost, but we know that it was Italian and issued in 1580 from two inscriptions copied onto the border of the Gulshan leaf. Under the stern of the ship one finds the inscription 1580, and, under its prow, ROME.<sup>2</sup> These were copied directly from the source print by an artist unaccustomed to the Latin alphabet.

The woodcut used on the frontispiece of the tract *Navegación segura para el cielo* by Spanish Capuchin Gerónimo de Segorbe (published 1611) is clearly derived from the same source, though here we have a Franciscan friar inserted kneeling at the feet of Christ.<sup>3</sup> This tract is all about a metaphorical journey toward perfection.

Jahangir's interest in European art predates his accession to the Mughal throne and is fairly well known.<sup>4</sup> In the Gulshan Album, he not only had his artists reproduce the compositions of prints, as occurs in the border that concerns us, but he also had them integrate European prints themselves inside ornamental frames.<sup>5</sup>

Before his accession, Jahangir spent much of his time in Allahabad as well as in the northern capital of Lahore. Jesuit priest Jerome Xavier, who brought images to Lahore as a missionary, observed the Mughal prince directing two of his painters to trace out and then paint with colors an image of the Deposition, which may be a painting from the Large Clive Album now at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. The avid Mughal prince even commandeered a Portuguese artist that the Jesuits had brought with them;

Xavier says that this man had no time for anything except painting images of Christ and the Virgin for Salim.<sup>6</sup>



**Fig. 3.** Title page of Gerónimo de Segorbe, *Navegación segura para el cielo*, Valencia 1611. Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid.

Unsurprisingly, Salim's extraordinary appetite for Christian images got the Jesuits very excited, because it made them think they had a chance of converting the future emperor to Christianity. This excitement was premised, however, on a misunderstanding. As emperor-to-be and then Mughal emperor, his patronage of Christian imagery was fundamentally rooted in a conception of universal sacred kingship which carried with it an ideal of absolute peace, *sulh-i kul* صلح كل, among all of the king's subjects.<sup>7</sup> This policy was convenient for an empire where the ruling elites were not only different in ethnicity but also in religion from the majority of the population. Some of the Hindus that they conquered converted to Islam, but millions of others kept their religion. And so there was a significant practical dimension to the Mughal kings' lofty vision of an empire in which religions could coexist under

the headship of a Muslim leader. Already Jahangir's father Akbar had established a kind of syncretic lodge at Fatehpur Sikri where Sunni, Shiite, Hindu, Jain, and Christian wise men could debate matters of religion, and Jahangir bragged in his own autobiography that in this period Christians could pray with Muslims and Jews in a single church.<sup>8</sup> Therefore we should see the incorporation of European images into Mughal albums as an expression of the idea that this was a rulership that encompassed all faiths.

Whereas the album leaf was made for a Muslim prince, the ivory plaque most likely had a Christian owner. The presence, on the back of the object, of a hardened brown putty-like substance suggests that it was once mounted on some kind of wooden backing, which would have made it easier to append to a wall.<sup>9</sup> This was clearly a personal devotional object that served a quasi-amuletic function for its owner (it was believed to protect the person from harm).<sup>10</sup> The legible IHS monogram in the round medallion at the back of the ship may indicate Jesuit patronage or a Jesuit connection. This plaque is still catalogued by the British Museum as South Asian, but it seems evident from the shape of the clouds at Christ's feet--about which I will say more below--that the maker of the object was Chinese. This would lead us to think, in turn, that the object was carved in Macau or Manila by an able craftsman trained in Zhangzhou, where the Chinese ivory carving industry was centered, or an heir to this tradition.<sup>11</sup> Whether the owner of the plaque was a missionary or not, it was probably someone who was used to long-distance travel at sea, and, given the object's maritime iconography, it is likely that one of its talismanic functions was to protect its owner specifically while sailing.<sup>12</sup> This raises the tantalizing possibility that it was used on a ship--certainly the ivory is small enough to make this practical--and in any case we may wish to think of it as belonging to the same domain of culture as the prayers that were said by sailors and voyagers before weighing anchor and when they could not see land on the horizon.

What we are dealing with here is the remediation of a European print in a diasporic Chinese and colonial context. A famous letter of 1590 from Domingo de Salazar, Bishop of Manila, to Philip II praises the Chinese carvers living in the city and avers that they are indispensable for the production of

figural images for churches in the Philippines.<sup>13</sup> The forms of these images are inflected by Chinese aesthetics generally. China had its own longstanding tradition of printmaking of which whoever made our ivory plaque was undoubtedly aware. Also, the period around 1600 was a fertile moment in which on the mainland Jesuits like Matteo Ricci were able to make deep inroads into Chinese culture, prior to the Ming clampdown starting in 1616. These Jesuits brought with them printed images like the ones in Jerome Nadal's *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines (Illustrations of the Gospel Stories)*, and the images in this book would eventually be re-carved by a local woodcutter for Giulio Aleni's Chinese version in 1637.<sup>14</sup> In order to fully address the question raised at the beginning of this essay, namely, how this particular case study relates to the broader reception of Christian religion and the broader reception of European art forms, we need to analyze the ivory in relation to objects from a wider East Asian cultural context.

The gods of the Chinese pantheon are thought to be constantly flying around, interacting with each other and descending when summoned to participate in rituals, to exorcize, to enjoy entertainment, and so on. In other words, we can think of Chinese religion as a continual ritualized process of summoning, hosting, and sending off, with its gods in constant movement.<sup>15</sup> In Chinese art the convention is to show clouds at the deity's feet and often also completely surrounding them. They are shown in this manner in a variety of media, from the brightly colored paintings of Buddhist ritual to sculpture to prints. A woodcut from the *Lie xian quan chuan* 列仙全傳, a collection of biographies of immortals, shows the female Immortal He Xiangü 何仙姑 surrounded by such clouds, for example. The accompanying text tells us that when she walked it looked like she was flying, and that she was able to transcend earthly experience to become a deity.

In the ivory plaque at the British Museum, clouds presented in a distinctive Chinese style clump together under the feet of Christ, marking him out as the deity of the Christian faith. Seventeenth-century European sources refer to the missionary as cloud.<sup>16</sup> The ivory asserts, by this logic, that the cloud-preacher carries Christ to Asian populations on the Ship of the Church. This way of thinking of person as cloud may seem unintuitive now,

but cloud is in fact eminently suitable as an allegorical motif because of its shapeshifting nature. It is mutable like allegory itself, a mode of figuration where a thing always means, and therefore becomes, something else.

The shape of the clouds is noticeably different from what we observe in the Mughal painting, and also from anything found in European art, such as in the woodcut Ship of Salvation reproduced above. The cloud of the ivory is a peculiarly Chinese form which resembles the *lingzhi* 靈芝 fungus. This type of cloud was seen as auspicious and had been in use for centuries; it was employed as an archaic reference already during the Song Dynasty.<sup>4</sup> Importantly, it is a type of cloud which is figured principally through line in all media in which we see it.



**Fig. 4.** *He Xiangu*, from Wang Shizhen, *Lie xian quan chuan*, 1600. Woodblock print, 26 x 16.6 cm. Harvard-Yenching Library, Cambridge, MA.

Now of course this was but one of several approaches to representing clouds available to artists in the contact zones of late Ming East Asia. To give just one diametrically opposed example, in the painting *Shaded Dwellings among Streams and Mountains* of ca. 1622–25 by Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555–1636), the clouds that invade the composition at the left are actually composed of unpainted reserves of paper—in other words, the absence of line or brush.<sup>18</sup>



**Fig. 5.** Dong Qichang, *Shaded Dwellings among Streams and Mountains*, ca. 1622–25. Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 158.4 x 72.1 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Dong Qichang was an important theorist and art historian as well as a major painter in whose art and writing there has been almost continual interest since his lifetime. He seems to have been inspired by European prints at a climactic moment of Jesuit activity in China prior to the Nanking persecutions of 1616; he drew from those prints not in a slavish or unthinking way, but for his own purposes. In a 1997 article, historian of Chinese art Richard Barnhart, inspired by a proposition made by James Cahill about a

different painting of 1602 by the same artist, argued that the texture strokes of Dong's *Wanluan Thatched Hall* of 1597 were ultimately inspired by the crosshatching of European engraving.<sup>19</sup> In 1597, Dong served as a court-appointed exam administrator in Nanchang at exactly the same time as Matteo Ricci was active in that city.<sup>20</sup> There is no textual evidence that the two met, but we do know that one of Dong's closest friends, Li Rihua, met the famous Jesuit. In a remembrance of the encounter, Li wrote that everyone liked Ricci, that Ricci showed him some strange things brought from Europe, and that the writer recognized some that were worth adopting.<sup>21</sup>

Those familiar with Chinese art historiography will know that Dong wrote extensively about the art of the past and what art should be like, and that his pronouncements became normative for later generations. Presently I would like to introduce two statements of his that I see as relevant to this essay. The first comes from a compendium called *Hua yan* 畫眼, *The Eye of Painting*. He remarks that, one day, while he is on a boat out on Dongting Lake, he looks up at the shapeshifting clouds, and this puts him in mind of paintings he has seen by the Mi family of painters from the Song period. Seeing the clouds helps him to understand the spirit of these paintings of mist-covered mountains, which he calls *mo xi* 墨戲, ink plays.<sup>22</sup>

No surviving painting is attributable to the father Mi Fu 米芾 (1052–1107), but there is a small group of paintings that can be confidently linked to his son Mi Youren 米友仁 (1074–1151), who is known for his hazy mountain landscapes with almost no contour lines and blank passages for cloud and mist.<sup>23</sup>

The second statement of Dong's that I wish to consider is a recommendation that he makes about painting clouds exactly in the hazy manner of the Mi family, without using contour lines. He refers to a disparaging comment made by Mi Youren about the otherwise revered eighth-century painter Wang Wei 王維 (699–759). Mi says that most of Wang Wei's works are unworthy of study because they are like "engraved painting," *ke hua* 刻畫.<sup>24</sup> The only exceptions are the ones by Wang of cloudy mountains, which are good because he does not use hard lines for the clouds. In Dong's time, Wang Wei was firmly part of the canon of important artists,

and the Ming-era painter was able to see a painting by this famed predecessor in the collection of a friend named Feng Kaizhi (1548–1605). Scholars believe this to be a handscroll now in the Ogawa collection, Kyoto; there are two related scrolls in Honolulu and Taipei.<sup>25</sup> Looking at these works it is clear why Dong associated Wang Wei's style, with its strong lines used to texture rocks, with engraving, or the lines of a woodcut.

The expression *ke hua* long predated Dong Qichang and was historically linked, therefore, to the pressed linearity of the Chinese woodblock tradition and not the European technique whereby crossed lines are employed to produce the illusion of volume and roundness. However, it stands to reason that, as a product of his encounters with European people and objects, Dong's understanding of what it meant for something to be carved took into account the nature of prints from this foreign tradition. This would be a logical extension of the argument by Barnhart, following James Cahill, that Dong's paintings evince awareness of, and respond to, European prints.

The term used to refer to carving as an art form from at least the fourteenth century was *diao ke* 雕刻.<sup>26</sup> This expression includes the character used to deride the print-like style of Wang Wei. *Ke* 刻 signals what is common to the making of print matrices and sculpture alike—to make a woodblock the woodcutter must carve away the areas that will not be inked. However, the visual effect of the Chinese print, generally speaking, is very different from the aesthetics of relief sculpture. Chinese prints tend not to have modelling, shading, or shadows, and this gives the images a certain flatness. This principle is nicely illustrated by a comparison of the *Nativity* engraving of Nadal's *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines* with the corresponding Chinese-made woodcut for the Aleni version. There is a considerable flattening out in the Chinese adaptation, a reduction of volume and depth. In the Aleni version, some of the clouds, too, have been remade in the Chinese idiom, with the result that they appear significantly less three-dimensional. This disparity in pictorial conventions explains why when European paintings and prints were shown to Chinese audiences they were sometimes described as being like sculpture—in other words, as having relief.<sup>27</sup> That a print of the

Ship of Salvation was converted into an ivory relief specifically is therefore charged with special significance in this transcultural context. It seems unproblematic to suppose, given the Roman origin of the lost source print, that its figures and objects had the roundness and volume of classicizing Italian art—that is to say, the appearance of relief sculpture.<sup>28</sup> In other words, the print looked to Chinese eyes like a familiar sculptural format, and this may have something to do with the decision to remediate the image in ivory.

I would now like to return to the two-pronged question that I raised at the beginning of this essay. Should we think of these acts of hosting this particular image in different media and contexts in Asia as acts of hosting Christian religion and European art-forms?

I wish to begin my summative response to that question by inverting it: what becomes strange, or skewed, in these acts of hosting? Is it possible to regard the attitudes of people in these scenarios, or the attitudes expressed through the objects, as inhospitable, alienated, or vexed? After all, we are dealing here with intersecting imperial and colonial regimes. China and Mughal India were empires, and Macau and the Philippines were Iberian colonies circa 1600. These powers were constantly jockeying with each other for position and often there was outright violence between them. The anthropologist Giovanni Da Col, in a recent issue of the journal *L'Homme* dedicated to hosting and hospitality, asserts that hospitality inhabits any concept of the social. The articles in the issue investigate what anthropology looks like if it takes hosting rather than the Maussian gift as the main conceptual framework for the analysis of human interactions.<sup>29</sup> A corollary of that argument, I would submit, is that colonial and imperial activity may be regarded as the antithesis of hosting. There is certainly nothing hospitable about invading, exploiting, settling, and imposing cultural norms and forms. Colonialism is best characterized, in this perspective, using analogies of forced hospitality, imposition, and parasitism. The important point is that colonialism and imperialism are, in any case, by Da Col's anthropological logic, fundamentally antisocial.

This, then, is the sociopolitical context in which these acts of artistic reception that I have been analyzing are situated. What would we see as the

markers of estrangement or alienation in them? First, Chinese audiences, including the Chinese carver himself, would not have been accustomed to seeing gods nude.<sup>30</sup> Secondly, Chinese deities fly around unencumbered--this Christian god, while not actually affixed to the Cross, seems nonetheless attached to and inseparable from the ship, clouds notwithstanding.

Although it is the Christ child that we see on the ship, the cross-shaped mast, the letters inscribed above it, the *arma Christi*, and the hands, heart, and feet on the sail refer unmistakably to the Passion, thereby linking the image also to the sacrament of the Eucharist. Though in English the word for the consecrated wafer is spelled the same way as the one for the person who receives a guest, the etymologies are in fact distinct: one comes from the Latin *hospes*, the other from *hostia*, victim or sacrifice. The Eucharist is a sacrifice ritually performed. However, there is also the notion that a person taking Communion is a guest at the altar table or *mensa*. When one accepts the Host into one's body, one is effectively hosting the Host. In doing so, however, the communicant becomes enrolled, or re-enrolled, into a universalizing Christian system of relations. Whether one is lovingly received into that cosmic order as a guest, or brutally as a victim, depends of course on one's point of view.

In the Indian example, there are no stigmata on the sail. Another difference is that the IHS medallion on the back of the ship is made up of little images of the Instruments of the Passion, doubling the larger ladder and cross on the ship and the column emblazoned on the sail.<sup>31</sup> A Wierix print with the same motif on a larger scale clarifies that the monogram of the source image consisted of the Column of the Flagellation as the *I*; a ladder as the left vertical and spear and sponge as the right vertical of the *H*; and an *S* made up of coins and dice.<sup>32</sup> In the Mughal painting, the representation of these letters-as-images has a maladroitness that is the result of the copyist not being a native user of the Roman alphabet. The Most Holy Name, believed to partake of the powers of God himself, here becomes a mere assemblage of images that is known by the painter to take the shape of the letter-forms of a foreign script. Given that it involves text presented explicitly as a set of

images, this case of remediation is especially eloquent as a reminder of the fact that when a foreign script is unintelligible what remains as significant is the visual form.<sup>33</sup>

Looking at the painting, we might also say that the Christ Child is a little paunchy, with a generous set of hips. Perhaps this is deliberate. To find the strongest expression of antisociality, however, one need observe the bearing of the vessel. What is most striking about this image is that the Mughal painter has the Ship of Salvation sailing away from his coastline, charmingly rendered in luminous shell gold, whose only architectural feature is a centrally planned polygonal building with a cylindrical drum and a bulbous dome.

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## Endnotes

1. See Cristina Acidini, “L’emblema della Fortuna,” in *L’Uomo del Rinascimento: Leon Battista Alberti e le arti a Firenze tra ragione e bellezza*, ed. Cristina Acidini and Gabriele Morolli (Florence: Mandragora, 2006), 166–67.
2. This is observed in Teresa Morna, “Young Christ as the mariner on the Ship of Salvation” (no. I-10), in *Encompassing the Globe: Portugal and the World in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Reference Catalogue*, ed. Jay Levenson (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2007), 112.
3. See Pedro Hernández Cañizares, “La fuente grabada del ‘Divino Piloto,’” in *Primer coloquio de arte valenciano* (Valencia: Universidad Literaria de Valencia, 1981), 78–80; and Margarita M. Estella Marcos, *La Escultura barroca de marfil en España: las escuelas europeas y las coloniales* (Madrid: C.S.I.C., Instituto Diego Velázquez, 1984), 337–38.
4. A good introduction to this topic is Susan Stronge, *Painting for the Mughal Emperor: The Art of the Book, 1560–1660* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2002), 110–41.
5. See, for example, Hana Knížková, “Notes on the portrait of Ibrahim ‘Adil Shah II of Bijapur in the Náprstek Museum, Prague,” in *Facets of Indian Art*, ed. Robert Skelton, Rosemary Crill, and Susan Stronge (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1986), 116–23.
6. Stronge, *Painting for the Mughal Emperor*, 111.
7. On *sulh-i kul*, see A. Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York, 2012), 130–69 and 178–79; and Ebba Koch, “Visual Strategies of Imperial Self-Representation: The Windsor *Padshahnama* Revisited,” *Art Bulletin* 99, no. 3 (2017): 93–124. *Sulh-i kul* was officially the policy of Jahangir’s father, Akbar; but it is clear through Jahangir’s use of the label *mazhar-i kul* مظهر كل (Universal Manifestation) for himself that the son claimed the same spiritual status.
8. Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 131–33; Koch, “Visual Strategies,” 93. The passage in Jahangir’s memoir on Akbar’s religious policy is Muhammad Hashim, ed., *Jahangirnama: Tuzuk-i Jahangiri* (Tehran: Intisharat-i Bunyad-i Farhang-i Iran, 1980), 22; and *The Jahangirnama: Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India*, ed. and trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1999), 40.
9. An example of a seventeenth-century ivory with a wooden frame and a metal fixture for hanging is described and reproduced in Bernardo Ferrão de Tavares e Távora, *Imaginária luso-oriental* (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 1983), 13.
10. I describe the plaque as quasi-amuletic because the term “amulet” is normally used to describe something worn; but the function is the same, i.e., to ensure well-being.
11. Gauvin Bailey suggests that the plaque was made in Macau in “Translation and Metamorphosis in the Catholic Ivories of China, Japan, and the Philippines, 1561–1800,” in *Ivories in the Portuguese Empire*, ed. Nuno Vassallo e Silva (Lisbon: Scribe, 2013), 248; but there is more evidence for the ivory carving industry in Manila. See Stephanie Porras, “Locating Hispano-Philippine Ivories,” *Colonial Latin American Review* 29, no. 2 (2020): 256–91.
12. Craig Clunas, *Chinese Carving* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1996), 17. There is also the possibility that it was for a Chinese Christian.
13. For a contextualization of the letter, see Porras, “Locating Hispano-Philippine Ivories.”
14. A good study of the global reach of Nadal’s images is Jean Michel Massing, “Jerome Nadal’s *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines* and the Birth of Global Imagery,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 80 (2017): 161–220.
15. See Craig Clunas, *Empire of Great Brightness: Visual and Material Cultures of Ming China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 53–83.
16. Cornelius a Lapide, *Commentaria in Ezechielem prophetam* (Paris, 1622), 89: “Tropologice, nubes sunt Apostoli, & praedicatores Evangelii ob novem analogias”; Henricus Engelgrave, *Caelum Empyreum* (Cologne, 1668), 898: “hic in Ezech. cap. 18: Recte, praedicatores sancti,

- NUBES appellati sunt”; Filippo Picinelli, *Mondo simbolico formato d’imprese scelte, spiegate ed illustrate con sentenze ed eruditioni sacre e profane* (Milan, 1669), 71: “Predicadores nubes sunt.”
17. See Peter Sturman, “Citing Wang Wei: Mi Youren and the Temporal Dimensions of Landscape,” *Ars Orientalis* 49 (2019): 55.
18. On the painting, see Maxwell K. Hearn, “After Tung Yüan’s Shaded Dwellings Among Streams and Mountains” (no. 57), in *The Century of Tung Ch’i-ch’ang*, ed. Wai-kam Ho, 2 vols (Kansas City, MO: The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 1992), 2:72–73. Hubert Damisch underscores the distinction between clouds figured using outlines and ones produced in other ways in *A Theory of /Cloud/: Toward a History of Painting*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 203–9.
19. Richard Barnhart, “Dong Qichang and Western Learning: A Hypothesis,” *Archives of Asian Art* 50 (1997/1998): 7–16; citing James Cahill, *The Distant Mountains: Chinese Painting of the Late Ming Dynasty, 1570–1644* (New York: Weatherhill, 1982), 95.
20. Barnhart, “Dong Qichang,” 8.
21. *Ibid.*, 9.
22. Dong Qichang, *Hua yan* 畫眼, 18, in Meishu congshu 美術叢書, ed. Huang Binhong and Deng Shi, 4 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai shu dian chu ban she, 2014), 1:133. On *mo xi*, see Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting: Su Shih (1037–1101) to Tung Ch’i-ch’ang (1555–1636)*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Hong Kong: The University of Hong Kong Press, 2012), 70–72.
23. See Eugene Wang, “Chinese Art: The Story of Haze (Part One),” *Orientalism* 49, no. 3 (2018): 73–85.
24. Dong Qichang, *Hua zhi* 畫旨 (Hangzhou: Xi ling yin she, 2008), 17; on *ke hua*, see Damisch, *A Theory of /Cloud/*, 208.
25. Wen Fong, “Rivers and Mountains after Snow,” *Archives of Asian Art* 30 (1976/1977): 6–33. The Honolulu painting is believed to be a Ming-era copy; Cahill argued that the Ogawa handscroll, too, is a sixteenth-century imitation. See James Cahill, *The Compelling Image: Nature and Style in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Painting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 47–49; and *idem*, *The Distant Mountains*, 91.
26. Clunas, *Chinese Carving*, 4–5.
27. Cahill, *The Compelling Image*, 71.
28. For prints produced in Rome around 1580, see Michael Bury, *The Print in Italy, 1550–1620* (London: The British Museum Press, 2001), 121–69.
29. Giovanni Da Col, “The H-Factor of Anthropology: Hoarding, Hosting, Hospitality,” *L’Homme* 231–232 (2019): 13–40.
30. This is not to say that there was no sensual religious sculpture in China; it was possible to see figures like Guanyin wearing clingy draperies in Buddhist art. The situation is, of course, entirely different in India.
31. A much less refined ivory at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (no. 267-1879) has the IHS monogram represented in this way, which suggests that this is how it looked in the source print.
32. Marie Mauquoy-Hendrickx, *Les estampes des Wierix conservées au Cabinet des Estampes de la Bibliothèque Royale Albert Ier: Catalogue raisonné, Troisième partie (premier fascicule)* (Brussels: Bibliothèque Royale Albert Ier, 1982), 428 (no. 2138).
33. Much has been written recently about script as image; see, for example, Brigitte Bedos-Rezak and Jeffrey Hamburger, eds., *Sign and Design: Script as Image in Cross-Cultural Perspective (300–1600 CE)* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2016).

# Discovery of Landscape: Xu Bing's Woodblock Prints in the 1980s

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## **ABSTRACT**

In the 1980s, Xu Bing's constant return to the village where he lived and worked during the Down to the Countryside Movement and his meticulous depictions of everyday rural scenes indicate that the zhiqing generation saw the countryside as their spiritual utopia when they faced difficulty in readapting to urban life. The artist's emotional connection with the countryside was in accordance with the return of humanism in the late 1970s and early 1980s. His small woodcuts of rural scenes show, on the one hand, his identification with Gu Yuan's humanistic portrayal of rural life; on the other hand, Xu's standpoint and composition, which are distinct from those of Gu Yuan, reveal Xu's inner detachment from countryside life and growing interest in formal experimentation, which can be seen as a prelude to his later experimental practices with prints.

## **KEYWORDS**

Xu Bing; Woodcut Prints; Gu Yuan.

As a Chinese artist active in the global art world, Xu Bing is renowned for his experimental installations regarding the transformation between texts and images that first drew international attention to him in the late 1980s. *Book From the Sky* (1988), for example, situates the spectator in a world of 4,000 hand-carved, unreadable Chinese-looking characters, was indeed a milestone in his artistic career. Interestingly, currently as one of the most renowned artists at home and abroad, he was never considered a key figure of any art groups formed during the new artistic movement known as the '85 New Wave Movement that emerged in the mid-1980s. Unlike his contemporaries who were actively engaged in the new art wave, he traveled back to the village where he resided from 1974 to 1977 during the Down to the Countryside Movement, absorbing himself in making small woodcuts that depicted rural scenery. Even these works are not included in the school of Village and Soil, a group of artists depicting rural life and scenery active in the early 1980s. These small woodcuts, though treasured by the artists himself, have thus far been little examined by researchers or included in publications covering the general history of contemporary Chinese art.

Raised in an intellectual family that was dishonoured during the Cultural Revolution, Xu Bing was sent to the countryside at the age of nineteen in accordance with Mao Zedong's call that "Educated urban youth receive re-education from the poor and lower-middle peasants." His four-year-long stay in Shoulianggou Village in Hebei province, near his hometown of Beijing, and his ten years of training at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, one of the most prestigious art academies in China with a strong socialist tradition, had a long-lasting influence on his early and later works. One important influence came from his teacher Gu Yuan, one of the most distinguished printmakers during the Yan'an period, whose works Xu Bing had admired since childhood and which he has constantly mentioned in his writings and interviews. In this essay, I will investigate Xu Bing's early woodcut prints and his writings at that time and later examine how the artist, as one of millions of educated urban youth returning to the city after spending years in the countryside, views and depicts the village of Shoulianggou and rural areas in other parts of the country and the

complexities of his relationship with the countryside. By making comparisons between Xu Bing's and Gu Yuan's work, I will also attempt to analyze his affinity with Gu Yuan's art practice in rural areas relative to the intellectual and cultural contexts of the early and mid 1980s China, and, more importantly, his departure from the socialist realist tradition within the academic institution, which can be seen as a beginning point to his artistic experiments in the late 1980s.

Soon after Xu Bing was admitted as a student in the Printmaking Department at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 1977, he started to make small woodblock prints depicting mostly everyday rural life and continued until the mid-1980s, naming the series of works *Shattered Jade*. In 1986, a small book entitled *Xu Bing Small Woodcuts* containing 128 woodblock prints was published by Hunan Art Press, which was the first official publication of his works. In a 1981 article titled "I Draw What I Love" (*Wo hua wo xihuan de dongxi*), published in *Meishu*, at the time the most significant official art journal in China, he recalled the time he spent with a group of high school graduates and local peasants, and how he cherished his life experience in the small impoverished village of Shoulianggou. He said: "I don't know how historians would evaluate the Down to the Countryside Movement, at least I don't think there is anything wrong with the movement. If I hadn't experienced such rural life, I couldn't imagine what I would like to draw . . . after I left, I started to yearn for the life in that small village. I miss the people there. Sometimes during the holidays I go back and stay for a couple of days. The millstones, the dirt roads, the haystacks . . . All these ordinary scenes make me feel welcomed. Everything is so plain, so real, and beautiful. My heart beats fast every time I think of them. It is life. When the past calls you again, life experience in the past becomes more poetic, and the feelings get stronger."<sup>1</sup>

In the *Shattered Jade* series, most of the pieces are square-shaped, and less than ten centimetres in length and width. In *Warmth* (1980), the artist delineates a mother pig crouching on the hay, with her eyes closed, breastfeeding little piglets. The dark hay underneath accentuates the bodies of the small creatures peacefully drinking the milk given by their mother. The

round-shaped contour of the mother pig and the square-shaped hay as the backdrop together build a stable and complete configuration of the scene. As in the excerpt from Xu Bing's article quoted above, the artist chose a familiar scene in rural life and gave the work the name *Warmth* with a symbolic meaning, not only to illustrate the tenderness of maternal love but also to indicate the harmonious relations among villagers. Another work from the same series is *Farmhouse* (1979), in which the artist captures the moment when dinner is just ready in a farmer's house, yet no family member is seated. The unadorned wooden dining table with four stools next to it is the only subject matter in this piece. The simple food, such as the steamed bread on the bamboo plate, reminds the artist of the modest life in the village. Just as Xu Bing mentioned in "I Draw What I Love," when one of his schoolmates said to him, "your eyes are only on the *kang* and stove," and he agreed. He said, "a small stove is not worthy as a subject matter for a whole oil painting. But for me, it is worthy of the effort because it has the trace of life."<sup>2</sup> From what he expressed in the article, we can see the artist remained obsessed with the scenery and local people even though he had left the village many years ago.

Interestingly, he also revealed his unwillingness to become a peasant and spend the rest of his life in the countryside. He said in "I Draw What I Love" that, although he misses the time spent in Shoulianggou Village, he knew that "fighting for food against the harsh climate shouldn't be the mission of my generation."<sup>3</sup> The artist also implied in another essay, which was published around the same time, how hard and unbearable the rustic life is: "We [the educated urban youth—the author's note] left the village, but they [the peasants—author's note] have to remain."<sup>4</sup> In a short memoir written in 2008 included in *The Seventies (Qishi Niandai)*—an anthology of a group of celebrated intellectuals of all fields recalling their youth in the 1970's—Xu Bing expressed his eagerness to leave the small village and enter the Central Academy of Fine Arts in order to fulfill his childhood dream to be an artist. His heart sank when he didn't get any news from the Academy about his application, and when it was finally confirmed that he was admitted to

the prestigious art school in 1977, he couldn't wait to pack his things and leave, though the local peasants still considered him as a member of their village.<sup>5</sup>

Here arises the question: why was Xu Bing obsessed with making small woodcuts depicting rural everyday scenery? Why did he keep going back to the small village of Shoulianggou after returning to the city and entering the art school he dreamt of since childhood?

In 1996, two months after Gu Yuan's death, Xu Bing wrote an essay "Gu Yuan in My Heart" (*Wo xinzhong de Guyuan*) commemorating this most prominent of printmakers during the Yan'an period. In this essay, Xu Bing expresses how much, since childhood, he has appreciated Gu Yuan's work and how hard he has attempted to understand the secret of his greatness. In 1990, Xu Bing moved to the United States because he wanted to see what was happening in the centre of the contemporary art world. After six years away from China, at his studio in East Village, New York, Xu Bing felt he finally understood Gu Yuan and found "a real spirit of avant-garde" in his teacher's work. The Yan'an artists' socially engaged art practices, as Xu Bing puts it, demonstrate "the sensitivity to social and cultural circumstances and methodological innovation of the past art practices,"<sup>6</sup> and, for Xu Bing, that is the real spirit of avant-garde. Interestingly, what Xu Bing probably didn't know is, almost half a century earlier, in the April 1945 issue of *Life* magazine, Gu Yuan's work was used to illustrate new life under the Communist rule in Yan'an.<sup>7</sup> In the same year, three of Gu Yuan's woodcuts were included in a collection of Chinese prints entitled *China in Black and White*, with an introduction by the American writer Pearl S. Buck, known for her novels depicting Chinese village and peasant life.<sup>8</sup>

Originating from a peasant family in Guangdong, Gu Yuan went to Yan'an in 1938 at the age of nineteen. After one year's training at *Luyi* (Lu Xun Art and Literature Academy), he was sent in 1940 to Nian Village to become a clerk for the local government in accordance with Mao Zedong's call that artists should leave the "small *Luyi*" and embrace the "big *Luyi*."<sup>9</sup> In his later years, Gu Yuan repeatedly recalled that the one year spent in Nian Village was a valuable experience for his artistic career. Clerical work gave him a chance to learn about real peasant life and how to make his artwork more appealing

to the taste of local people.<sup>10</sup> Looking at Gu Yuan's early works from around 1940–42, I indeed find similarities between teacher and student, although Xu Bing was seldom directly taught by Gu Yuan during his years in the Central Academy of Fine Arts. They both were interested in depicting ordinary rural life, and Gu Yuan's first individual works, such as *Fetch Water* (1940), *Transport Straw* (1940), *A Flock of Sheep* (1940), *Cutting the Straw* (1940), and *Rural Scenery* (1940), are mainly portrayals of the everyday agricultural activities of peasants. Unlike his better-known later works, the style of these works, featuring heavy shading and dense lines, are associated more with the Leftist New Woodcuts, a movement initiated by the renowned author Lu Xun and active in the 1930s in major cities such Shanghai, Hangzhou, and Tianjin. The figures in the prints by Gu Yuan are either in profile or viewed from behind, with little revelation of their facial expression. The peasants are simply doing the same farm work day after day, as if they have been integrated into the background scenery, creating a tranquil and nostalgic mood, yet, at the same time, there is a sense of detachment. The peaceful yet isolated atmosphere in Gu Yuan's early works have comparisons with Xu Bing's rural woodcuts and sketches of the 1980s, although, as I mentioned earlier, the latter contains few figures.

During the Cultural Revolution, a time when it was extremely difficult to gain access to a diversity of books, Xu Bing, as a teenager, luckily received a collection of books belonging to Zhao Baoxu, an art enthusiast and colleague of his father. Among the books in the collection, *Northern Wood-engravings*,<sup>11</sup> with Gu Yuan's *Rural Scenery* on the cover, was one of main resources of Xu Bing's self-artistic cultivation.<sup>12</sup> This compilation includes twenty-three works by Gu Yuan, among which are the above-mentioned early pieces, as well as some mature works, such as the Yan'an prints school style he is known for.<sup>13</sup> As Xu Bing commented, Gu Yuan's woodcuts are deeply engaged with the social and political shift, not only in terms of the modification of print styles that were more appealing to the local peasants of the communist run area, but also his choice of subject matter.<sup>14</sup>

If we go through the most successful works by Gu Yuan created between 1942–44, the peak of the school of Yan'an printmaking, it is not hard

to find clues about his preference of motifs. Even though most of his works during this time of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) were for propaganda use, essentially to promote military recruitment campaigns and boost a more solid morale, he avoided portraying brutal battle scenes that incited collective hatred against Japanese invaders. Instead, he concentrated on depicting a sense of warmth and harmoniousness between the communist army and the peasants. For example, *A Soldier Returns on Home Leave* (1942) represents a family gathering to welcome the young soldier returning home. While he is busy telling his parents and relatives news from the army, his younger sister is curiously looking at his armband, his younger brother trying on the soldier's army cap, implying that the younger generation is a future army reserve force for the Communist Party. However, recruitment promotion, the actual theme of the work, is hidden behind the portrayal of a joyful family atmosphere. Gu Yuan's work "presents the party line not with tired slogans but with warmth and intimacy."<sup>15</sup> Other works propagandizing the political social reform carried out by the Communist Party in the Yan'an base areas also have the similar characteristics. Take *Marriage Registration* (1942) and *An Appeal for Divorce* (1943) as examples, even though both are aimed at promoting the new marriage policy, the artist intentionally softens the intervention of administrative order into personal and domestic issues by situating the government official in a secondary position. In contrast, highlighting the protagonists of the marriage—the family and the fellow villagers—the artist also attempts to integrate the will of the party with rural conventions, individual emotions, and community life.

However, there are also several obvious dissimilarities between Xu Bing and Gu Yuan. For example, take a group of small woodcuts by Xu Bing between 1980 and 1982: *Field* (1980), *Pond* (1980), *Sounds of Spring* (1982), *Garden Patch* (1982), and *Winter Courtyard Scene* (1982). One can find a perspectival commonality in all of these works—the village scene in each piece is restricted to a closed space, either in a courtyard, or in a garden or a poultry farm with a fence around them. The shape is either round or square. In the foreword to *Xu Bing Prints*, Xu Bing explains that one of the reasons the print is a most suitable medium for his art making, especially woodblock

printmaking, is that it brings “an organic sense of completeness.”<sup>16</sup> To fully cover the surface of the woodblock can be seen as a pursuit of “completeness.” Although almost all of these prints depict rural scenes in an outdoor setting, the scenes are separate from their surroundings. Each print constructs an independent, self-contained world enclosed by a kind of fencing, indicating an independent habitation of the area within.

In comparison with Xu Bing’s enclosed spaces, Gu Yuan’s representative works—for instance, *An Appeal for Divorce*—even though the print is set in the interior of a house, the the figures standing in the doorway makes the exclusive interaction between the wife and administrator extend to the outside, and can be seen as the symbol of community life. Another example is *Celebration of the Birthday of an Army Cook* (1944). A birthday celebration is usually a personal ceremony with friends and family. However, in this print, there are people in silhouette sitting in the foreground as audience, with the army cook, the main character, standing in the centre and receiving birthday gifts from the people on the right side coming in from the outside. Among this group of people are both local farmers and army officials. On the left side, several people playing musical instruments add a joyful atmosphere to the party. All these compositional arrangements make the army cook’s birthday celebration a stage show, and although it largely takes place in an enclosed indoor space, it connects the individual with the collective, expanding personal ceremony to a semi-public experience.

What is more, Xu Bing’s prints cited above are seen from an aerial viewpoint. This allows the artist to observe the entire landscape without anything blocking his view. For instance, in *Sounds of the Spring*, all the chicks are arranged without any overlap. At the same time, they are reductively depicted, with only the black silhouettes suggesting their different shapes and movements. Similarly, in *Garden Patch*, the three patches where different vegetables grow are fully represented as well as the laundry hanging on the fence and the three chicks in front of the fencing. However, the rural scenes in these prints are not panoramic. Each work in this series shows only one fragmentary aspect of rural life—either it is a piece of land, a small pond, or a vegetable garden. In addition, seen from a bird’s-eye view, everything is

foreshortened. For example, in *Stone Roller*, the stone roller and the horse equipment are widened and flattened as if they are seen through a wide-angle lens. What is more, in *Field*, the foreshortened crops have lost their entire volume and are reduced to only two-dimensional dots and lines. Like the vegetable garden in *Garden Patch*, the viewer can clearly see how the various field patches are horizontally and vertically arranged. Also, the well is reduced to a geometrical shape, with only a few details indicating what it actually is. In this way, the simplified approach to depiction makes the print nearly abstract, almost like a diagrammatic map.

Interestingly, Xu Bing's writings throughout the 1980s are associated with the basic dogma of socialist aesthetics—the close relationship between art and the people. In addition, even until 1996, after he had exiled himself from the Chinese art world and the socialist tradition during his six years in the US, Xu Bing's interpretation and appraisal of Gu Yuan's work still in accordance with the main thoughts of Mao Zedong's *Talks at the Yan'an Forum on literature and Art*—art must be engaged with social change; artists must be integrated with the people. Therefore, there is a contradiction between his artist statement on the relationship art and the people and his visual expression.

In order to address this contradiction, I want to refer to the concept of symptomatic reading put forward by the French philosopher Louis Althusser (1918–1990) in his book *Reading Capital* (1970, co-authored by Étienne Balibar), a rereading of Karl Marx's monumental *Das Kapital*. In this book, Althusser asserts that Karl Marx has two ways of reading a text. The first type of reading is the standard one, which focuses on the immediate visible part of the text; the second reading is called symptomatic reading, a reading strategy focusing on the invisible part of the text, the meaning that is “excluded” and “forbidden.” As Althusser puts it, “The invisible is defined by the visible as its invisible, its forbidden vision: the invisible is not therefore simply what is outside the visible (to return to the spatial metaphor), the outer darkness of exclusion—but the inner darkness of exclusion, inside the visible itself because defined by its structure.”<sup>12</sup> Althusser asserts that a symptomatic reading is “a reading that might well be called ‘symptomatic’ (symptomale),

insofar as it divulges the undivulged event in the text it reads, and in the same movement relates it to a different text, present as a necessary absence in the first. Like Marx's first reading, his second reading presupposes the existence of "two" texts and the measurement of the first against the second. But what distinguishes this new reading from the old one is the fact that in the new one the second text is articulated with the lapses in the first text."<sup>18</sup> That is to say, although being absent, the invisible and unspeakable part of the text leaves traces that can be brought to light by the reader.

In this respect, I would argue, in Xu Bing's case, "the first text" (the visible) and "the second text" (the forbidden) are somehow separate. Xu Bing's writings, mostly in accordance with the socialist aesthetic thoughts, can be considered the "first text," and his small woodcuts and sketches the "second text." Reading his artist statements published in official art journals, especially those written in the early 1980s, shortly after the Cultural Revolution, we can see that as a young man coming from a disgraced intellectual family, who was lucky enough to have a chance to be selected as a worker-peasant-soldier student, enter a prestigious art college, and have a stable position in the academic institution, Xu Bing was fully aware of what he was expected to express in public, and he actually uses his writings as a chance to declare where he stands—with the people (especially the peasant), with collectivity, and with socialist realist convention. However, when it comes to pictorial expression, which can be more ambiguous than textual ones, the artist lets down his guard and unwittingly reveals symptoms of his inner emotions and thoughts, which may have been silenced by ideological convictions. Such repressed symptoms, camouflaged by conventional motifs and socialist realist techniques, represent Xu Bing's longing for individuality and self-consciousness as an independent artist.

A sense of isolation that is evident in Xu Bing's work implies the distance between the viewer and the picture, as well as the artist's inner self and outer world. In his article "The Discovery of Landscape," Japanese philosopher and literary critic Karatani Kōjin argues that there is "a link between landscape and an introverted, solitary situation. . . . it is only within the inner man, who appears to be indifferent to his external surroundings,

that landscape is discovered. It is perceived by those who do not look outside.”<sup>19</sup> In Xu Bing’s case, the rural scenery he depicts is distanced, but at the same time, internalized, becoming integral to the artist’s spiritual and emotional territory. The people who are of no consequence recede into the landscape in the background yet become part of it, which Karatani describes as the eccentric “people-as-landscapes.”<sup>20</sup> In Xu Bing’s small woodcuts, the villagers are largely invisible, almost completely dissolved into the rural context, with their existence suggested only by the presence of farming and domestic equipment. Even in *The First Lunar Month* (1982) and *Harvest End* (1982), two of Xu Bing’s few woodcuts that include figures and include colour, are not so different from the non-figurative works analyzed above, the artist again presents a bird’s-eye viewpoint and compositionally sets the gathering scene within a closed space. The villagers in *The First Lunar Month* congregate in a circle and watch a lion dance performance, but, at the same time, the high viewpoint indicates the observant eye of the artist standing above, who is overlooking the whole scene as landscape. Similarly, in *Harvest End*, the hay stacks around the crowd form a semi-circle, which suggests the grain has been harvested, and the peasants have free time to watch an open-air movie. All the villagers, including the movie projectionist, with their back towards the audience, are attentively watching the movie, projected on the curtain in the far background. Only the artist, who commands a panoramic view, absorbs everything, the stars, the moon, the haystack, and the people in his own yard.

The people as romantic landscape in Xu Bing’s work are obviously different from “the people” in Gu Yuan’s work, who are both the artist’s subject matter as well as the receivers of propaganda. One thing is for sure, in both Xu Bing and Gu Yuan’s work the people (the peasant) are delineated as a whole; the difference is, Gu Yuan attempts to select “typical characters under typical circumstances,”<sup>21</sup> (a basic rule of socialist realism) to represent the whole peasant population, to absent the artist himself and draw the audience into the depicted scene. By contrast, in Xu Bing’s work, such as *The First Lunar Month*, the composition is completely decentralized. There is neither a main figure nor minor figure. All the figures are either unseen, obscured, or

integrated as part of the landscape.

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## Endnotes

1. Xu Bing, "Wo hua wo xihuan de dongxi," *Meishu* no. 5 (May 1981), 18.
2. Ibid., 19.
3. Ibid., 18.
4. Xu Bing, et al., "Jianchi zai wenyi zuotanhui shang de jianghua de genben jingshen, cujin meishu de fanrong fazhan," *Meishu* no. 5 (May 1982), 9.
5. Xu Bing, "Yumei she yizhong yangliao," in *Qishi Niandai*, eds. Bei Dao and Li Tuo (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing, 2009), 25-26. For the English translation of the essay, see Xu Bing, *Xu Bing Prints* (Beijing: Culture and Art Publishing House, 2009), 206-219.

6. Xu Bing, “Wo xinzhong de Guyuan,” *Meishu yanjiu* no.1 (1997), 17.
7. “Woodcuts Help Fight China’s Battles,” *Life* (April 9, 1945), 57–60.
8. *China in Black and White: An Album of Woodcuts by Contemporary Chinese Artists* (New York: The John Day Company, 1945). The collection of woodcuts are selected by the China Woodcut Association and the Chinese Ministry of Information.
9. Gu Yuan, “Dao daluyi qu xuexi,” *Meishu* no.3 (1962), 9. Going to “The big *Luyi*” basically means that artists should leave their small intellectual circle and blend into local peasants’ life.
10. see Gu Yuan, “Yaolan,” in *Yan’an suiyue: Yan’an shiqi geming meishu huodong huiyilu*, eds. Sun Xinyuan and Shang Dezhou (Xi’an: Shaanxi People’s Fine Art Press, 1985), 67–71.
11. *Northern Wood-engravings* (Shanghai: Gaoyuan Bookstore, 1947). The compilation includes 122 pieces created during wartime by twenty-eight printmakers from the northern and northwestern China. Many of them come from the Communist-held Yan’an, such as Li Hua, Wang Qi, and Wo Zha.
12. Xu Bing, *Xu Bing Prints* (Beijing: Culture and Art Publishing House, 2009), 9.
13. Felicity Lufkin describes the Yuan’an print school style as “bold, uncluttered outline-and-silhouette” largely developed by Yan’an printmakers Gu Yuan along with Yan Han and Hu Yichuan. The style draws on the folk style of popular prints as a response to peasants’ criticism of the New Prints style, in accordance with Mao Zedong’s “Yan’an Talk” (1942) that artists should meet the taste and needs of local people. Felicity Lufkin, “Folk Art in Modern China, 1930–1945” (Phd diss., University of California, Berkley, 2001), 304.
14. Xu Bing, “Wo xinzhong de Guyuan,” *Meishu yanjiu* no.1 (1997), 16.
15. Chang-Tai Hung, “Two Images of Socialism: Woodcuts in Chinese Communist Politics,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 39, No. 1 (January, 1997), 50.
16. Xu Bing, *Xu Bing Prints* (Beijing: Culture and Art Publishing House, 2009), 14.
17. Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, Translated by Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1970), 27.
18. *Ibid.*, 29.
19. Karatani Kōjin, “The Discovery of Landscape,” in *The Origin of Japanese Modern Literature*, translated and edited by Brett de Bary (Durham: Duke University, 1993), 25.
20. *Ibid.*, 24.
21. “Realism, to my mind, implies, besides truth of detail, the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances.” Friedrich Engels, “Letter to Margaret Harkness, Beginning of April 1888,” *Marx and Engels on Literature and Art: A Selection of Writings*, eds. Lee Baxandall and Stefan Morawski (New York: Telos Press Publishing, 1973), 114.

# Appropriation of Migrant Art Genres into the Asante Kente Home Craft: A Symbol of Unconditional Hospitality

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## **ABSTRACT**

Mobility and migration of various art genres in different cultures have impacted significantly the production of the Asante Kente in the late 20th and early 21st century in Ghana. Appropriation of the philosophy, materiality, and design elements of these migrant art genres, specifically embroidery and screen printing into the production of the Asante Kente has opened up a dialogue on whether or not this is healthy for the growth of the prestigious indigenous cloth of the Asantes of Ghana. This qualitative descriptive phenomenological study was conducted between June 2020 and March 2021 at Bonwire in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. Qualitative data of Asante Kente weavers, Asante Kente traders, and elders who are custodians of the Asante Kente craft were garnered via extensive personal and focus group interviews and analyzed thematically. The findings reveal that the appropriation of migrant art genres into the Asante Kente has positive ramifications for the preservation, appreciation, marketing, and sustainability of indigenous cloth. Amongst other things, the reception of the migrant art genres is a reflection of the unconditional hospitality of the Asante people; assisted in meeting the differing tastes of Asante Kente consumers; increased its patronage among those with minimum living standards to patronize the cloth; increased the creativity and innovation of the Asante Kente weavers.

## **KEYWORDS**

Asante Kente; Appropriation; Embroidery; Ghana; Hospitality; Migrant Art; Screen Printing

### Introduction

The Asante is the largest and dominant ethnic society among the Akan-speaking ethnic societies in Ghana. They are located largely in Kumasi, the second capital city of Ghana, and are predominantly scattered in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The Asante kingdom was formed in the 17th century following the military alliance of ten independent Asante states to wage war against the Denkyira.<sup>1</sup> The independent Asante states include Kwaaman, Juaben, Kuntanase, Nsuta, Kumawu, Mampong, Ejisu, Kokofu, Bekwai, and Asumegya. The formation of the new Asante kingdom in the 17th century was cemented with the appointment of their first king, Otumfuo Osei Tutu I, and the enchantment of a golden stool<sup>2</sup> from the sky by a powerful traditional priest who became the most trusted ally of the first king by the name Okomfo Anokye.



Fig. 1. Map of the Study Area



**Fig. 2.** Golden stool (*Sikadwa Kofi*)

The Asante kingdom since its inception in the 17th century has become one of the most powerful and most sustainable kingdoms in Ghana. It is not surprising that the Asantes have a vibrant artistic and cultural heritage. Amongst the numerous age-long artistic innovations with cultural significance is the Asante Kente. The Asante Kente is the most cherished and valued African indigenous clothes. The traditional cloth is woven in narrow strips on a traditional loom called *Nsadua Kofi*.<sup>3</sup>

After that, the narrow strips measuring 7.5 cm to 11.5 cm wide are sewn together to get the large fabric. The specification for men is 300cm-360cm long while the specification for women is 180cm long. Thomas Edward Bowdich describes how the Asante Kente is worn by men, that it is wrapped around the shoulder like the Roman Toga.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the women sew the fabric into a skirt and a blouse or a straight dress. The weaving of the Asante Kente is traditionally a craft for males. Women were culturally prohibited from weaving the cloth on the loom. It is believed among the Asantes that the menstruation of women defiles their purity and as such renders them unfit to sit on the *Nsadua Kofi* loom to weave the Asante Kente. Their roles in the Asante Kente production have been traditionally restricted

to the preparation of the yarns such as spinning the yarns and winding them onto weaving accessories for the men to weave on the looms, sewing the narrow strips together to form large fabrics, and marketing the Asante Kente clothes. This underscores why the Asante Kente is seen as a sacred cloth often worn for sacred events among the Asantes, such as the swearing-in of new chiefs, the performance of ancestral veneration, traditional festivals, rituals, and rites.



**Fig. 3.** *Nsadua Kofi*

Issues on appropriation often resulting from various consumption patterns, mobility, trade, and cultural exchanges date back to many centuries in human history.<sup>5</sup> This explains the appearance of the same or similar designs in different cultures and locations across the globe. Kristin Lunde mentions that in the area of textiles, the appropriation has largely focused on the transfer of symbols, motifs, and decorations from other societies. Adom and his colleagues aver that due to globalization, technology, as well as mobility, and migration, the Asante Kente has undergone various

transformational changes in its materiality, philosophy, production, and finishing.<sup>6</sup> This has resulted in the appropriation of some techniques and design elements in the migrant art genres of other cultures into the Asante Kente. The dominant migrant art genres that have been appropriated into the Asante Kente are embroidery and printing. Essel and Opoku-Mensah have attributed symbol creation and other decorative techniques particularly embroidery, in the Asante Kente by the Asantes as a skill learned from Egypt due to migration and mobility around the 10th century.<sup>7</sup> It is possible that the trade relations that made it possible for the spreading of the hand-made embroidery affected other countries in Africa. Adiji and Ojo opine that among the Nupe and Hausa ethnic societies in Nigeria, the hand-made embroidery has a long history dating between 200 A. D.-500 A. D. though they agree it is not indigenous to Nigeria.<sup>8</sup> In Ghana, the hand-made embroidery technique is known as *Nwomu* (piercing through something) learned through trade and migration has been appropriated into the Asante Kente.<sup>9</sup> The creativity of the Asante Kente weavers has resulted in the diversity of the technique, giving birth to the *Kukrubuo* (linear patterns) and the *Kawo* (centipede patterns) of the *Nwomu* hand-made applique embroidery. Today, most Asante Kente weavers have embraced machine-made embroidery which is less time-consuming, unlike the *Nwomu* hand-made embroidery. Also, the machine-made embroidery gives high precision to the designs incorporated into the Asante Kente.

Another significant migrant art genre that has affected the production of the Asante Kente is screen printing. This printing technique became dominant in the 20th and 21st centuries in the indigenous textile industries in Ghana. Allison Joan Martino attributes the popularity and appropriation of the screen-printing technique into indigenous textile production (*Adinkra* cloth and Asante Kente) to Ablade Glover, a retired professor at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana.<sup>10</sup> Glover learned the screen-printing technique while studying at the Central School of Art and Design, London, and introduced it to the indigenous cloth makers at Ntonso, a community famed for the production of the *Adinkra* cloth in the 1970s. Gradually, screen-printing was incorporated into the Asante Kente woven

clothes. The reception and hospitality of the Asante Kente to these dominant migrant art genres have resulted in a high level of cross-cultural pollination, interculturalism, and cultural hybridity. Scholars such as Susanna Gristina and Paulette Young have taken a stand that the value of traditional clothes has been heightened following their hospitality to the appropriation of elements from migrant art genres. For instance, Gristina mentions that appropriation is relevant in promoting the sustainability and creativity of traditional clothes. Embarking on the “Kòrai x Kente” Project that combines the craftsmanship of Sicily, Italy with the traditional Asante Kente of Ghana, she affirms that appropriation of migrant art genres into local textiles promotes social inclusion, interculturalism, and innovation. In a similar vein, Paulette Young asserts that the appropriation of the Dutch wax print into a local textile cloth by redefining the migrant wax print through local naming and assigning Ghanaian cultural meaning has given a new visual voice to creative expression.<sup>11</sup> Yet, other scholars such as Okyere and Denoncourt have raised issues on the loss of identity of the Kente and the reduction of its quality which they assert is being adulterated from its originality because of its acceptance to migrant art genres and as such requires an international property right.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, this empirical study in Bonwire, the largest traditional community for the production of the Asante Kente in the Ashanti Region of Ghana was carried out to scholarly investigate the level of acceptance or hospitality appropriation of various art genres on the Asante Kente. A qualitative descriptive phenomenological study was used for this study. The study participants included seven Asante Kente weavers who were personally interviewed extensively. Likewise, five Asante Kente traders and 12 elders who are custodians of the Asante Kente weaving in the study area were involved in extensive focus group interviews to shed light on the phenomenon under investigation. They were selected purposively based on the distinctive characteristics that they had which made them knowledgeable in the phenomenon under investigation. The personal interviews and focus group interviews were conducted using a well-designed and pre-tested interview guide that was developed based on the study's objectives. Written and oral

consent of all the study participants was sought before they were recruited for the study. The data from the interview were audio-recorded, transcribed, and vetted for accuracy by eight members of the sample from each of the three categories of the sample. Descriptive observation of the materiality, philosophy, production techniques, and finishing of the Asante Kente produced in the past five years (2016-2021) that significantly show the influence of the migrant art genres specifically, printing and embroidery were done using a well-developed observation checklist. The final data were analyzed using the procedural steps in the thematic data analysis.

## Results

### Appropriation of migrant art genres in the design and production of Asante Kente to meet customers' preferences and taste

The Asante Kente weavers revealed the influential migrant art genres and reasons why their appropriation into the production of the Asante Kente is significant. Their views indicate that the appropriation of the migrant art genres is largely driven by customer preference:

'Customers have their preferences, some like the Asante Kente which has been embroidered, some prefer the Asante Kente which has incorporated some prints, while others do not want any incorporation of the prints. Asante Kente has changed on the good side because it tries to have different types of art genres incorporated in it which caters for each person locally and also internationally' (BON-AKW-PI, Personal Communication, November 4, 2020).

The Asante Kente traders equally made favorable remarks on the incorporation and diversification of products from the Asante Kente as a result of the influence of the migrant art genres. In an FGD interview, they told the researcher:

'Some customers prefer *loromi* (embroidery designs) intermixed with the hand-woven Asante Kente. Some designs cannot be created on the *Nsadia Kofi* loom but can be easily produced using the *loromi* (embroidery).

This makes the final cloth very unique' (BON-AKT-FGD, Personal Communication, November 11, 2020).



**Fig. 4.** Design appropriation of embroidery patterns in Asante Kente.



**Fig. 5.** Design appropriation of screenprints in Asante Kente.

However, it should be noted that the Asante Kente weavers have incorporated the techniques in these migrant art genres but have tactfully utilized them in producing designs and patterns that reflect the culture of the Asantes. The Asante Kente weavers disclosed:

‘We incorporate Asante cultural symbols such as Adinkra symbols into the already woven strips of the Asante Kente in either printed (Using silk screens) or embroidered forms. The colors we select also reflect our philosophies of color. The information we want to use in the final cloth in communication has not changed. We have only accepted and appropriated the migrant art genres because we are hospitable people and want to satisfy the preferences of our customers, both local and international’ (BON-AKW-FGD, Personal Communication, November 8, 2020).

#### **Appropriation of migrant art genres is a result of the unconditional hospitality notable of the Asantes**

The views expressed by the elders and family heads interviewed at Bonwire are similar to the position of the Asante Kente weavers. They revealed that they are not against the diversification of products using the Asante Kente. In an FGD interview, the elders remarked:

‘Asantes do not like discrimination. Culturally, Asantes are instructed to be hospitable and accommodating. That is the reason why we don’t see the introduction and incorporation of the migrant art genres as a threat to the value of the Asante Kente. It is rather popularizing the cloth and making people know of our rich cultural heritage’ (BON-E-FGDI, Personal Communication, November 11, 2020).

The Asante Kente weavers told the researcher that due to the hospitality of the Asantes, they also welcome people from different ethnic societies into Bonwire. These migrant groups and persons travel to Bonwire to find greener pastures since the place is a big trading center for the Asante Kente. Some of them travel to Bonwire to learn the skills in weaving the Asante Kente weaving as a professional craft. Others already know the weaving craft but hail from other areas in Ghana but seeks employment at Bonwire. The dominant ethnic group where Kente weavers traveled from is in

the Volta region of Ghana. Krammer reports that since the 1950s, the Ewe Kente weavers from the Volta Region of Ghana started to appropriate the use of rayon yarns in contrasting colors to weave non-figurative weave patterns, a distinctive Kente weaving technique characteristic of the Asante Kente. Thus, these Ewe Kente weavers easily find themselves jobs whenever they settled in traditional Asante Kente weaving communities in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. Interestingly, some Ewe Kente weavers learn the distinctive characteristics of the Asante Kente when they settle in the Ashanti Region while the Asante Kente weavers equally appropriate the Ewe figurative weave patterns into the Asante Kente. Thus, mobility and migration contribute to the cross-cultural design appropriations within the two significant indigenous weaving communities in Ghana.

#### **Appropriation of migrant art genres has heightened the value and appreciation of the Asante Kente**

The Asante Kente weavers were not perturbed because there are wholly printed forms of the Asante Kente weave patterns on the market. These printed Asante Kente clothes are cheaper when compared to the original hand-woven Asante Kente cloth. Yet, the Asante Kente weavers mentioned that they applaud their desire to wear the Asante Kente, though they do not have the financial strength to purchase the original. They remarked:

'It is not everyone who can afford the cost of the hand-woven Asante Kente cloth. As such, it is not wrong for our people to purchase the printed Asante Kente cloth. Their desire to wear the hand-woven Asante Kente-inspired prints must be lauded. After all, the weave patterns, color, and culture they are portraying are still Asante and Ghanaian. People can easily tell the difference between the hand-woven and printed versions so there is no cause for worry. For such customers, when the desire for the Asante Kente heightens, they will save money to purchase the original hand-woven Asante Kente eventually. Everyone values the original (hand-woven Asante Kente clothes) and not the fake (printed Asante Kente clothes)' (BON-AKW-FGD, Personal Communication, November 14, 2020).

Numerous products are today produced using Asante Kente either the hand-woven or printed forms. These include flying and bow ties, dressing bags, picture frames, T-Shirts, and many others.

### **Discussion**

The study's findings revealed that the presence and acceptance of the Ewe weavers to reside in the Bonwire vicinity is an indication of the hospitality of the Asantes, allowing the Ewe weavers to stay to be able to learn (as I noted in some home-based weaving centers at Bonwire) and make a living and not as a result of the Ewes teaching the Asantes how to weave because they have authority over the weaving skills.<sup>13</sup> Courtney Micots reports that when the Ewes were under the rule of the then Asante King, Otumfuo Osei Tutu I, they learned the weaving skills from the Asantes to appropriate their weaving skills.<sup>14</sup> Thus, migration and mobility have made possible the learning of the weaving craft and aspects from each other, nourishing and improving the weave patterns produced among the two ethnic societies. According to the Asante Kente weavers interviewed, they admitted that they employ Ewe Kente weavers who have the basic skills in weaving and teach them how to patiently weave the Asante patterns for their clients. Evidence from the field shows that some Asante Kente weavers have appropriated the Ewe designs into the Asante Kente to meet the differing preferences of customers, some of them who want the figurative elements notable in the Ewe Kente tradition.

The Asante Kente cloth and items produced by borrowing and/or incorporating migrant art genres are given as souvenir items to visitors and tourists. Though this acceptance and diversification of the Asante Kente are seen as a threat and a drain on the pocket of the Asante Kente weavers as Okyere and Denoncourt alluded, the findings of the study suggested otherwise. The hospitality of these migrant art genres and products according to this study has rather enhanced the sales of the Asante Kente as it has made it possible to satisfy the design preferences of customers. In her Kòrai x Kente project in Sicily in Italy, Gristina emphasized the acceptance of migrant art genres in the diversification of Kente into various products such as Sicilian hats, bags, wooden objects, and earrings. She added that it is a creativity and

sustainability step that enriches the value of traditional cloth without compromising its local identity. This agrees with the views expressed by the study participants. The findings of the study agree with the observation of Adom and his colleagues that the designs that embody the Asante philosophies have been maintained despite the hospitality of the Asante Kente to the influences of migrant art genres. Therefore, the hospitality received by the migrant art genres, which is a reflection of the Asante cultural heritage of hospitality is a good step to promote and enhance the marketability of the Asante Kente.

### **Conclusion**

This study adopted the descriptive phenomenology in probing how the reception of the migrant art genres and cultures into the production of the Asante Kente reflects on the unconditional hospitality ingrained in the Asante culture. The findings revealed that the migrant art genres, particularly, embroidery and printing have greatly influenced the production of the Asante Kente and there has been an increase in the diversification of the products produced with the Asante Kente. Asante Kente's reception to the migrant art styles is to satisfy the preferences of both local and international customers which issues from the Asante culture of hospitality that frowns on discrimination. The Asante Kente's hospitality to the migrant art genres and cultures has raised the market value of the Asante Kente, increased its popularity; intensified creative products from the Asante Kente. The incorporation of the techniques in the migrant art genres has been tactfully utilized in producing designs and patterns that reflect the culture of the Asantes. The study contends that appropriation of the elements in migrant art genres into indigenous art and craft could be healthy as it offers great avenues in heightening the value of the indigenous products and widening their patronage. Based on these key findings, the study recommends that the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture should partner with Art and design institutions to train Asante Kente weavers to enhance their understanding of the migrant art genres and build their capacities on how to incorporate them

more creatively into the designing and production of the Asante Kente to meet the demands of the current market.

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## Endnotes

1. The Denkyira kingdom existed before the 1620s and originated from the Bono state and resided mainly in Agona. The Asantes were a tributary and served the Denkyiras until 1701 when the Asantes waged war (The Battle of Feyiase) against them and became victorious. They

captured their king, Ntim Gyakari and since then the Denkyiras became the servants of the Asante Kingdom afterward.

2. The Golden stool, known in the Asante language as *Sikadwa Kofi*, is a sacred stool that *Okomfo* Anokye, the traditional priest for the first Asante King, Otumfuo Osei Tutu I conjured from the sky after he performed some rituals. Among the Asantes, the stool is believed to be a repository of all the souls of Asantes. Owing to this, it is believed to be the sacred artifact that unifies all the Asantes.
3. The weaving loom referred to as *Nsadua* in the Asante local language is a wooden structure that is operated with the hands. The loom was developed by Ota Kraban, an indigene of Bonwire on a Friday. Hence, the wooden device for weaving is referred to as Kofi, the name for a male child. It is revered as if it was human, explaining why it is given a human name.
4. Bowdich Thomas Edward, *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee* (London: Routledge, 1966), 624.
5. Scheel, "Ancient, Indigenous and Iconic Textile Motifs", 1093.
6. Adom, Bonsu and Kissi, "The influence of European elements", 41-46.
7. Quaicoo and Opoku-Mensah, "Pan-African artistic reflections", 30-41.
8. Adiji, *Assessment of Embroidery Production on Textile Garments*, 421.
9. Amissah, Amoako, and Essel, "Nwomu: Hand-Made Embroidery", 500-511.
10. Allison Joan Martino, *Stamping History*, 331.
11. Paulette Young, "Ghanaian Woman and Dutch Wax Prints", 305-327.
12. Okyere and Denoncourt, "Protecting Ghana's intellectual property rights", 415-425.
13. Frimpong and Asinyo, "A comparative study of history", 1-18.
14. Micots, "Kente cloth."

# **Orientalism in a Tropical Empire: Orientalist Artistic Models and Pedro Américo's Artworks in Rio de Janeiro**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In this paper, I will approach the presence of orientalist artworks and artistic models in the nineteenth century art in Brazil. This text was developed in three steps: at the first moment I will present what I found to be the assessment of a canon of orientalist painting since the nineteenth century, focusing on the establishment of the *Société des Peintres Orientalistes Français* in France. In the second part, focusing on Brazil, I will inquire the presence of orientalist artworks in Brazilian museums, art exhibitions and historiography. Finally, I will present what I found to be the tour de force of orientalism in the Brazilian Empire: the presence of Pedro Américo's artworks at the 1884 "Brazilian Salon", the last general exhibition held by the Imperial Academy prior to the Proclamation of Republic in 1889.

## **KEYWORDS**

Art in Brazil; Nineteenth Century; General Exhibitions; Léonce Benedite; *Orientalismo na pintura*.

**Creating genealogies, establishing a canon: *Première exposition retrospective et actuel des peintres orientalistes français (1893)***

The category of “orientalism” or “orientalist art” is a familiar one in art history. It can be found on labels in permanent collections in museums such as the Musée d’Orsay, in specialized department at auction houses such as Christie’s and Sotheby’s or in art history exhibitions and publications. When we talk about orientalism in nineteenth century art, we expect the listener to recall specific artists and artworks. Eugène Delacroix and Jean-Léon Gérôme are on the top of the list when we refer to what Linda Nochlin called the *Imaginary Orient*. Nonetheless, we should ask ourselves: when and how exactly did this canon enter art history?<sup>1</sup>

It is important to understand the emergence of orientalism and its definitions during the nineteenth century, when the category started to be used, to situate the reception or the definition of orientalist art in Brazil. Looking into the history of the category in France, we observed that some art critics writing French Salon reviews noted the frequently depicted “trend” of the oriental imagery, trying to trace its roots within French production. Ernest Chesneau<sup>2</sup> claims that Egypt's campaign opened the Orient to French artists. Jules Castagnary<sup>3</sup> argues that orientalism began with the insurrection of Greece and the death of Lord Byron, renewing itself with the conquest of Algeria<sup>4</sup>.

However, it is not until the *Exposition d’Art Musulman* shown at the Palais d’Industrie between October and December of 1893 that one finds a precise configuration of an art historical canon composed of orientalist paintings in an exhibition. The first part of the exhibition catalogue was dedicated to the *Première Exposition d’Art Musulman*<sup>5</sup>, with an introductory text and the list of the pieces exhibited grouped according to their owners. The following part of the publication presented the *Première exposition retrospective et actuel des peintres orientalistes français*. This second section was also followed by an introductory text signed by Léonce Benedite<sup>6</sup>, curator of the Luxembourg Museum. The list of artworks was then split in three categories: the retrospective part including 17th and 18th century art; deceased artists from the 19th century; and current production. We can

imagine that the objects in the first section of the catalogue were familiar to the public due to their representations in Salon paintings and print reproductions. Therefore, they were not only offered as single objects to the viewer, but also confirmed the precision with which they had been represented by French orientalist artists in their paintings.<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that among the owners lending objects to the exhibition were renowned orientalist painters, such as Félix-August Clement, Jean-Léon Gérôme, Ferdinand Cormon, Etienne Dinet, and the architect Henri-Jules Saladin.

At the same time, by referring to artists that represented the Orient in past centuries, these artists were also inscribing themselves in a specific tradition, which included artists such as Van Loo, Boucher, Liotard, Fragonard, Girodet, Decamps, Marilhat, Delacroix, Chasserieu, among others. It is not unusual to find echoes from this selection in recent museum exhibitions or art history publications on orientalism. The exhibition also marks the founding of the *Société des Peintres Orientalistes Français*, as shown by Stéphane Richemond<sup>8</sup>.

In the words of Benedite, the painting's curator and leader of the *Société*:

This little exhibition therefore has its own moral. It proves that the Orientalist School is not an artificial and arbitrary group; it establishes its genealogy, made up of glorious names over several centuries, and affirms its *raison d'être*. It is an undisputed fact that the Orient has taken a special place among the inspirations that drive the contemporary art movement.<sup>9</sup>

One can say that the *Première exposition retrospective et actuel des peintres orientalistes français* was a *manifesto* of the society and established a canon of orientalist art. In January of the following year, Ary Renan published *La Peinture Orientaliste* in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*<sup>10</sup>. In 1895, when the second exhibition of the French orientalist painters was opened at the Galerie Durand-Ruel, Benedite published *Les Peintres Orientalistes Français* in the periodical *L'Artiste*<sup>11</sup> and the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* reviewed

the exhibition in their supplement<sup>12</sup>. Finally, in 1899 Léonce Benedite wrote *Les Peintres Orientalistes Français* at the Gazette<sup>13</sup>. All these publications were associated to exhibitions organized by the society that annually dedicated a solo retrospective exhibition for an orientalist “master”.

Many exhibitions in the last decades have shown the impact of the Society on the development of the concept of orientalist art. However, little is known about the relation of this canon with the arts in Brazil.

### **To collect, discuss and display: orientalist artworks in Brazil**

The presence of orientalism in Brazilian museums and collections is significant. It can be found displayed in public and private collections, such as the *Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo* or *Museu Mariano Procópio* in Minas Gerais. Although we can associate many art objects with orientalist models, there is a lack of information about how these objects were incorporated in the Brazilian collections or how they can be inscribed in the writing of art history in Brazil.

The first article entirely devoted to orientalism in Brazilian painting was written by Bernardete Dias Cavalcanti, in 1988, under the title *Orientalism in the nineteenth century and Pedro Américo's work*<sup>14</sup>. After that, there was no significant research dedicated to orientalist artworks in Brazil until the publication of my own master thesis in 2018<sup>15</sup>, although some art historians, such as Madalena Zaccara<sup>16</sup>, Ivan Coelho de Sá<sup>17</sup>, Marcela Formico<sup>18</sup>, Fernanda Pitta<sup>19</sup> and more recently Camila Dazzi<sup>20</sup>, touched on the subject in their work. If a larger survey on orientalism in Brazil is absent in the bibliography, maybe the exhibitions can help elucidate some of this history.

The path that we tried to follow here starts with perhaps the only Brazilian exhibition dedicated to orientalism, held in the National Museum of Fine Arts (*Museu Nacional de Belas Artes*), heir to the collections of the Imperial Academy and National School of Fine Arts. As I was investigating some little-known artworks maintained in the museum, such as *Arab praying* (*Árabe em prece*, 1888), painted by the French Eugène Alexis Girardet, I found a note mentioning that the painting had been exhibited in an exhibition

called *Orientalism in painting (Orientalismo na pintura)*. There were, however, no institutional registers on such an exhibition. Not a mention in the list of exhibitions held in the museum or in the historical archives, nor the presence of a catalogue in the library. However, I was able to find some information in the newspapers of the time.



**Fig. 1.** Eugène Alexis Girardet. *Árabe em prece* (Arab praying), 1888. Oil on wood, 32,0 x 22,0 cm. Coleção Museu Nacional de Belas Artes/Ibram, Rio de Janeiro.

The exhibition opened in December 1998 with the Brazilian president and political figures of Mercosur inaugurating the so called “Room of special artworks” (*Sala de obras especiais*)<sup>21</sup>. A more detailed notice revealed that: “‘Orientalism in painting’ is the name of the exhibition that the National

Museum of Fine Arts (Av. Rio Branco, 199) is hosting until January 10th. There are 10 medium-sized canvases from the museum's collection, produced in the 19th century. Among the artists, the French Alexandre Cabanel and Auguste Petit and the Italians Fabio Fabbi and Atanásio Natale stand out”<sup>22</sup>.

The files of artworks in the museum confirmed that, besides Girardet's painting, previously mentioned, Cabanel's *Arab* (*Árabe*, unknown date) and Auguste Petit's *Arab* (*Árabe*, 1898) were also exhibited. Among the Italian painters, it seems safe to guess that the works exhibited were Fabio Fabbi's *Woman of Algiers* (*Algeriana/Argeliana*, c. 1893) and Natale Attanasio's *Harem's interior* (*Interior de Harém*, 1895).



**Fig. 2.** Natale Attanasio. *Interior de harém* (Harem's interior), 1895. Oil on canvas, 40,0 x 24,5 cm. Coleção Museu Nacional de Belas Artes/Ibram, Rio de Janeiro.

Although the exhibition had little repercussion in the press and did not have any consequences for the institution, or for the historiography, it seems important to bring the artworks to light, since they help us trace the

previous history that made their exhibition at the National Museum of Fine Arts possible. Among the five identified works, three are dated to the 1890s. According to their provenance, all of them were donated, either by the artist himself (Auguste Petit's case) or by private collectors (Viscondessa de Cavalcanti, Luiz de Resende, Artur Índio do Brasil, Almirante Câmara<sup>23</sup>). All five paintings fall into the category of genre painting, three of them being "type figures paintings" (Girardet, Cabanel and Petit), focusing on ethnic and cultural characteristics – costumes, customs, environment and physiognomy –, and the other two (Fabbi and Attanasio), a type of orientalist studio's fantasy, in which the attention falls on the creation of an oriental atmosphere. Tapestries, hookah and recognizably oriental objects are some of the presented elements, all in vogue since the beginning of the century as markers of the Orient, as presented in Ingres' *La Grande Odalisque* (1814). These objects, as previously showed, were collected by painters and their public, to the point where they started to be produced in European territory.

All the mentioned paintings found their way to Brazil and into the National School collections during the Republican period, which invites us to ask about the circulation of orientalist models before that in Rio de Janeiro, during the Empire.

### **Showing oriental scenes in a Tropical Empire: orientalist episodes in Rio de Janeiro's public exhibitions**

The principal venue for showing artworks during the Empire in Brazil was the General Exhibition of Fine Arts held by the Academy in Rio de Janeiro. According to Carlos Roberto Maciel Levy between the years of 1840 and 1884 there were 26 editions of the General Exhibition, involving approximately 516 artists and 3315 artworks<sup>24</sup>. Within that universe, only eight works were presumed orientalist paintings<sup>25</sup>. It is in the decade of 1880, however, that orientalist artworks really start to be displayed in Brazilian exhibitions. As Fernanda Pitta has shown, it is around this period that artists trained in Rio de Janeiro start to travel to Europe more frequently, resulting in the introduction of new art references in the Brazilian art scene<sup>26</sup>.

In the last exhibition of the Empire in 1884, orientalist scenes pave their way specially through biblical paintings. Pedro Peres exhibits his *Flight into Egypt (Fuga para o Egito, 1884)*, in which the holy family is clearly represented in an oriental landscape. He was probably inspired by the success of Luc Olivier Merson's *Rest on the Flight into Egypt (1879)*. José Ferraz de Almeida Junior, who had returned from Paris two years before, showed *Judas' Remorse (O Remorso de Judas, 1880)* and *Flight into Egypt (Fuga da sacra família para o Egito, 1881)*. The oriental clues are more subtle in Almeida Junior's paintings. Even though the Judas is not presented with oriental characteristics and clothes, we can see in the background the reminiscence of Gêrome's *Consummatum est... (1867)*. Both artists are giving us different point of views of the Crucifixion, which is taking place in an oriental setting. It is also in a discreet oriental setting that Almeida Junior's holy family is portrayed, with an obelisk, sphinx, and pyramids in the background. Rodolpho Amoedo, a government financed student in Paris, sent a study for his historical piece *Christ in Cafarnaum (Jesus em Cafarnaum, 1884)*, in which the clothing, the background and city details are orientally inspired. We can compare his composition to Edmond Dupain's *The Good Samaritan (Le Bon Samaritain, Salon 1877)*.

**Pedro Américo's oriental(ist) fictions for the 1884 General Exhibition: biblical history paintings through the lenses of contemporary genre painting**

Pedro Américo's paintings offers us the best entrance to discuss uses of orientalism in Brazil. His genre paintings, such as *Arab Lunch (Colação Arabe, 1879)* and *Arab Fiddler (Rabequista Arabe, 1884)*, were produced in the same period as the history paintings *David and Abishag (Davi e Abizag, 1879)*, *Judith and Holofernes (Judite e Holofernes, 1880)* and *Moses and Jochebed (Moisés e Jocabed, 1884)*. It is the latter group of artworks that reveal his daring choices, which aimed at a renewal of history painting and biblical scenes.



**Fig. 3.** Pedro Américo de Figueiredo e Mello. *Davi e Abizag* (David and Abishag), 1879. Oil on canvas, 171,5 x 215,5 cm. Coleção Museu Nacional de Belas Artes/Ibram, Rio de Janeiro.

These works were exhibited amidst a set of fifteen paintings comprising mostly historical genre paintings related to the history of Europe. The 1884 event marks the last relevant participation of Pedro Américo in a General Exhibition. At that point, Pedro Américo was a consecrated artist, having received the most important academic prizes. Since he started his artistical training, Pedro Américo managed to travel to Paris at the expense of the Emperor. He was appointed professor at the Academy, moved to Florence and paved his way as one of the greatest Brazilian artists and history painters – sided by Victor Meirelles. Pedro Américo attracted attention mostly through his controversial actions, aiming at establishing a name for himself and for his large-size national historical paintings, such as *Battle of Campo Grande* (*Batalha do Campo Grande*, 1871) and *Battle of Avaí* (*Batalha do Avaí*,

After establishing his reputation as an artist in Brazil, Américo continued to reside mainly in Florence, travelling across Europe. The paintings presented at the 1884 Academy exhibition all belonged to the long period after 1878 when Pedro Américo was away from his native country. It is important, therefore, to acknowledge that we are speaking of artworks made in Europe by a consecrated Brazilian artist.

Pedro Américo's biblical depictions are constituted by elements of an orientalist visual culture, mostly shaped by genre scenes. In the painting representing Abishag warming up King David, he uses elements of odalisques and harems representations, such as warm tones, animal furs, jewelry, tapestries, and exotic patterns. For his *Judith and Holofernes*, for example, he worked with the representation of Egyptian dancers, *almées*, including patterns, tapestries, oriental costumes and objects in the scene. For this text, I would like to detain myself on the analysis of another painting from this group: *Moise and Jochebed*. This painting presents an intriguing scene and setting, which are commonly overlooked. Some critics described the main character of the picture as a “white marble sphinx”, an “Egyptian woman” or “the type of Hebrew race”.



**Fig. 4.** Pedro Américo de Figueiredo e Mello. *Judite e Holofernes* (Judith and Holofernes), 1880. Oil on canvas, 229 x 141,7 cm. Coleção Museu Nacional de Belas Artes/Ibram, Rio de Janeiro.



**Fig. 5.** Pedro Américo de Figueiredo e Mello. *Moisés e Jocabed* (Moses and Jochebed), 1884. Oil on canvas, 151,2 x 105,5. Coleção Museu Nacional de Belas Artes/Ibram, Rio de Janeiro.

Jochebed is depicted when she is about to leave her son, Moise, in the Nile River. We see a monumental woman, holding Moise in a basket with the river right behind her. Her long dark hair is barely tied by the striped tissue around her head. The earthly tones of her clothing match the natural setting, as do the applied shells that outline her cleavage. Américo's choice of clothing was not accidental or naive, as he created his composition with a clear image in mind: the depiction of the *femme fellah*.

The fellaheen women were a present element in nineteenth century French visual culture, as we can see it discreetly placed in Léon Cogniet painting for the decoration of the Musée du Louvre. According to an article in

the *Le Magasin Pittoresque* focusing on the *fellah* women, “the word fellah, in Arabic, means cultivator. Thus, the fellah woman is properly the Egyptian peasant woman”<sup>27</sup>. In the idyllic description, we can sense the binding of this figure to their belonging territory: “the life of female fellahin flows quietly like the water of their Nile”<sup>28</sup>. Américo chose to represent Jochebed, a woman by the Nile, just like a fellah in her “natural environment”. We can find their images in engravings from travel literature, in colonial and ethnographic photography, as well as in Salon paintings, such as Léon Belly’s *Femme fellahs au bord du Nil*. Commonly represented carrying large vessels of water by the river or simply holding their small children, they are just the perfect match for the making of Jochebed. It was possibly because of this great fitting that some critic observed, in addition to the parallels with a sphynx, that: “Jochebed’s picture is a vigorous composition; the main figure is that of a truly biblical woman”<sup>29</sup>.

However, despite Américo’s *coup de maître*, orientalist genre scenes and biblical episodes were not exactly what the critics were expecting, especially from an artist like Américo. We can sense a disappointment of some critics about his choices of subject. A decade later, Oscar Guanabario, an enthusiast of the new Republican regimen, compared the so-called first Republican general exhibition of 1894 with the last Imperial one held in 1884, “the best one that the old empire was able to achieve”:

[...] Historical painting, so recommended and demanded, always presented historical facts, which had no relation to our lives. Pedro Americo, professor of archeology, falling into constant errors in this matter, gave us Joan of Arc, Moysés, Judith, Heloise and Abelard, Voltaire, and many other paintings of foreign subjects, when our history was still, as it is, unexplored; and as this painter was the one who ‘called the shots’ at that time, all the others followed him in the waters and there came the biblical collections, in which S. Jeronymo did not fail. At the moment an art appears which, if it is not frankly national, clearly accentuates the tendency towards it. [...] <sup>30</sup>

We could say that Guanabardino's point of view was the one that prevailed ever since – or, at least, for a century. It was precisely the dialogue with European productions and themes that devalued, for a long time, nineteenth century painting in Brazil. The art praised was the one portraying national themes. Nineteenth century art was not only not modern, but it was also not considered national. Too academic and too international, completely out of time and out of place, just like Pedro Américo's proposal for the renovation of Brazilian art – or, at least, for the renovation of his image as a Brazilian artist. His artworks presented in 1884 invite us to look to other places, to Europe or to the Orient, in another time, Medieval and Modern for the former, Biblical and Contemporary for the latter. The question that remains is: can we inscribe these views in our “national landscape”? Can we leave biased opinions aside and cease to ignore “non-national themed” nineteenth century paintings maintained in Brazilian collections? It shall be a way to assess the global aspects of art history in Brazil.

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## Endnotes

1. The research that resulted in this text was developed with FAPESP support, grant 2016/01908-4, São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP).
2. Ernest Chesneau, “Le Salon Sentimental,” *Revue de France*, 1874.
3. Jules Castagnary, “Salon de 1876,” in *Salons (1857-1870)*, T. 2 (Paris: Bibliothèque-Charpentier, 1892).
4. It is by the same time that Paul Mantz refers to Horace Vernet’s artworks as the introduction of “the fanfares of orientalism” in the Bible representations, as Vernet considered that “a trip to Algeria was enough to explain the Old and the New Testaments”. See Paul Mantz, “Le Salon III,” *Le Temps*, May 23, 1877, 1. On Vernet and his orientalist propositions for biblical history painting, see Fabriccio Miguel Novelli Duro, “‘Costumer la Bible, c’est la détruire’: a recepção crítica das proposições orientalistas de Horace Vernet para a pintura bíblica na França,” in *Caiana. Revista de Historia del Arte y Cultura Visual del Centro Argentino de Investigadores de Arte (CAIA)* 16, (2020).
5. One of the objectives of the exhibition was to regroup and classify examples of Muslim Art scattered in museums and private collection. See George Marye, “Première Exposition d’Art Musulman,” in *Exposition d’Art Musulman* (Paris: Imprimerie A. Bellier et Cie, 1893), 13.
6. The first two parts of the introductory text were already published in 1888, in an article dedicated to the death of Gustave Guillaumet. Léonce Benedite, “La peinture orientaliste et Gustave Guillaumet,” *La Nouvelle Revue*, 1888, 326-343.
7. As the curator pointed out – “qu’elle est le commentaire en quelque sorte vivant de notre réunion de monuments islamiques, qui ne peut, par sa diversité même, que laisser deviner le pittoresque de la civilisation musulmane”. Marye, *Art Musulman*, 14.
8. Stéphane Richemond, “Histoire de la Société des Peintres orientalistes français,” in *La Société des Peintres Orientalistes Français: répertoire des exposants et liste de leurs oeuvres 1889-1943*, edited by Pierre Sanchez. Dijon: Editions de l’Échelle de Jacob, 2008.
9. “Cette petite Exposition a donc sa morale. Elle prouve que l’Ecole orientaliste n’est point un groupe factice et arbitraire ; elle établit sa généalogie, formée de noms glorieux à travers plusieurs siècles et affirme sa raison d’être. C’est un fait indiscuté que l’Orient a pris une place spéciale parmi les inspirations qui dirigent le mouvement de l’art contemporain”. Léonce Benedite, “1<sup>re</sup> Exposition rétrospective et actuelle des peintres orientalistes,” in *Exposition d’Art Musulman* (Paris: Imprimerie A. Bellier et Cie, 1893), 167.
10. Ary Renan, “La Peinture Orientaliste,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, January 1, 1894.
11. Léonce Benedite, “Les Peintres Orientalistes Français,” *L’Artiste*, December, 1895.
12. S. A., “Petites Expositions. Les Peintres Orientalistes Français a la Galerie Durand Ruel,” *La Chronique des Arts. Supplément a la Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, March 9, 1895.

13. Léonce Benedite, “Les Peintres Orientalistes Français,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, March 1, 1899.
14. Bernardete Dias Cavalcanti, “O Orientalismo no século XIX e a obra de Pedro Américo,” *Gavea* 5 (April 1988).
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16. Madalena Zaccara. “Pedro Américo: vie et oeuvre. Son rôle dans la peinture du Brésil au XIXème siècle” (PhD diss., Université de Toulouse, 1995); Madalena Zaccara, *Pedro Américo: um artista brasileiro do século XIX* (Recife: Ed. Universitária da UFPE, 2011).
17. Ivan Coelho de Sá, “A Academização da Pintura Romântica no Brasil e sua ligação com o Pompierismo Francês: o caso de Pedro Américo” (Master thesis, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, 1995).
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19. Fernanda Mendonça Pitta, “Um povo pacato e bucólico: costume, história e imaginário na pintura de Almeida Júnior” (PhD diss., Universidade de São Paulo, 2013).
20. Camila Dazzi, “Os Hebreus no Orientalismo Brasileiro,” in *Anais do XXXIX Colóquio do Comitê Brasileiro de História da Arte: Inquietações e estratégias na história da arte, 29 out.- 02 nov. 2019*, edited by Marco Pasqualini, Neiva Bohms, Rogéria de Ipanema, Arthur Valle, 82-93 (Uberlândia: Comitê Brasileiro de História da Arte - CBHA, 2020 [2019]); Camila Dazzi, “Uma Rua de Tanger,’ de Pedro Américo - representações do Oriente islâmico no Brasil Oitocentista”, 19&20, v. 14, n. 2 (2019).
21. Fatima Sá, “Lance-Livre,” *Jornal do Brasil*, December 8, 1998, 6.
22. “Outras telas; em cartaz,” *Tribuna da Imprensa*, December 15, 1998, 6.
23. Maria do Carmo Couto da Silva argues that Almirante Câmara donated Fabbi’s *Argeliana*. Maria do Carmo Couto da Silva, “Alguns destaques do acervo oitocentista italiano do Museu Nacional de Belas Artes do Rio de Janeiro (RJ) e sua importância para a história da arte brasileira do século XIX,” in *Anais do XXXIV Colóquio do Comitê Brasileiro de História da Arte: Territórios da História da Arte*, ed. Marco Antonio Pasqualini de Andrade (Uberlândia: CBHA, 2015, v. 1, 178).
24. Carlos Roberto Maciel Levy, *Exposições Gerais da Academia Imperial e da Escola Nacional de Belas Artes. Período Monárquico* (Rio de Janeiro: ArteData, 2003 [1990]), 7.
25. *A turkish (Hum turco, 1844 General Exhibition)* by the French Emma Gros de Prangey, *A Street in Cairo (Uma rua no Cairo, 1860 G. E.)* by the French Eugene Philastre, *The Ship Algiers in the port of Smyrna and Smyrna and the French station (Navio Algiers no porto de Smyrna; Smyrna e a estação franceza, 1875 G. E.)* by the Italian Edoardo de Martino. Those paintings were enlisted in the exhibition catalogue as presented by the artists themselves. On the other hand, we also noticed some orientalist paintings shown by their owners in 1879 General Exhibition: the collector Friedrich Steckel presents an *Odalisque (Odalisca)* by Menotti, presumed Italian painter, while other collector, E. Callado, exhibited three paintings by the French Paul Delamain: *Arab camp (Acampamento árabe)*, *Travelling bedouins (Beduínos em viagem)* and *Bedouin travelers (Viajantes beduínos)*.
26. Pitta, “Almeida Júnior”.
27. “Le mot fellah, en arabe, signifie cultivateur. Ainsi, la femme fellah est proprement la paysanne égyptienne”. “La Femme Fellah,” *Le magasin pittoresque*, 1838, 182.
28. “La vie des femmes fellahs s’écoule tranquille comme l’eau de leur Nil”. “Fellah”, 182.
29. “O quadro de Jocabed é uma composição vigorosa; a figura principal é de uma mulher verdadeiramente bíblica [...]”. F. F. [Felix Ferreira], “Bellas-Artes. A Exposição Geral de 1884. X,” *Brazil*, October 5, 1884, 1.
30. Oscar Guanabarro, “Artes e Artistas. Escola Nacional de Belas Artes. Exposição Geral,” *O Paiz*, October 1, 1894, 2. Some of Guanabarro texts on the General Exhibitions were

transcribed by Fabiana Guerra Granjeia, see  
[http://www.dezenovevinte.net/artigos\\_imprensa/guanabarino\\_1894.htm#\\_edn1](http://www.dezenovevinte.net/artigos_imprensa/guanabarino_1894.htm#_edn1).

# “Nationality Is The Homeland”, Is It? Argentine Artists In Rome Between The Late 19th And The Early 20th Century

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## **ABSTRACT**

Between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century an important contingent of migrant people left Europe to go to America, mainly to find a better lifestyle. Italians represented a significant front, especially in South America. In Argentina, their growing presence in society caused particular feelings of concern. In artistic discourses, cosmopolitanism represented a danger for the formation of an “Argentine soul” and, consequently, for a national artistic language. In parallel, the country was consolidating its national system of art and it was therefore necessary to encourage European stays for artistic education through government pensions. The artists who could travel were recognized in their country, but they were foreigners living in unknown geographies where they could emerge with difficulty. “Nationality is the homeland”, wrote Arturo Reynal O’Connor about the Argentine poets and the risks of the immigration for the “Argentine race”. This paper proposes to consider the multiple dimensions (artistic, political, social) of the Argentine artistic field between the late 19th and the early 20th century focusing on some travelling artists, to discuss the feeling of belonging to a single place (coincident with their nationality). Through the case of Argentine painters and sculptors who lived in Rome, the goal is to present the networks of relations that they formed with other Ibero-American artists as a response to the marginalization that implied their status as foreigners.

## **KEYWORDS**

Argentinian Artists; Rome; Nationality; Integration Strategies; Late 19th-Early 20th Century.

### The immigration issue

The question that entitles this paper was inspired by a quote included in an article written by Giuseppe Parisi in an important Italian newspaper published in Argentina, called *La Patria degli Italiani*.<sup>1</sup> The author was a journal correspondent, and he dedicated several articles to the artistic news from Italy through the section “Lettere Italo-Argentine”. In August 1908, he reported his visit to some Argentinian sculptors who were living in Rome, with the aim of pinpointing the necessities to improve national art in Argentina.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, at the beginning of the article he mentioned the lack of great names of Argentinian artists and, to introduce his argument, he quoted the words from writer Arturo Reynol O’Connor: “The Argentine race and especially the *porteña* one [...] disappears due to migratory flows, and the race is the nationality [...], and the nationality is the homeland (and the empty houses remain, converted into a simple building that foreigners occupy transforming it into a *conventillo*)”.<sup>3</sup> Through a metaphor between homeland-nationality and the typical Italian-migrants house building (the *conventillo*), O’Connor expressed his concern about the loss of Argentinian cultural identity because of immigration and, especially, the Italian one.

O’Connor’s fears were not isolated, but were indeed shared by most Argentinian artists, writers, and intellectuals since the last quarter of 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> The first Centenary of Independence Revolution in 1910 amplified them, as many foreign artists were commissioned the production of celebratory monuments and decorations. An example of this was the contest for the Independence monument, which was awarded to two Italians, Gaetano Moretti (1860-1938) and Luigi Brizzolara (1868-1937), while Argentinian Rogelio Yrurtia only won the second place. The public opinion was thus divided between those who believed that a national monument had to be commissioned to a national sculptor and those who thought that there was not one that was good enough for such endeavor yet.<sup>5</sup>

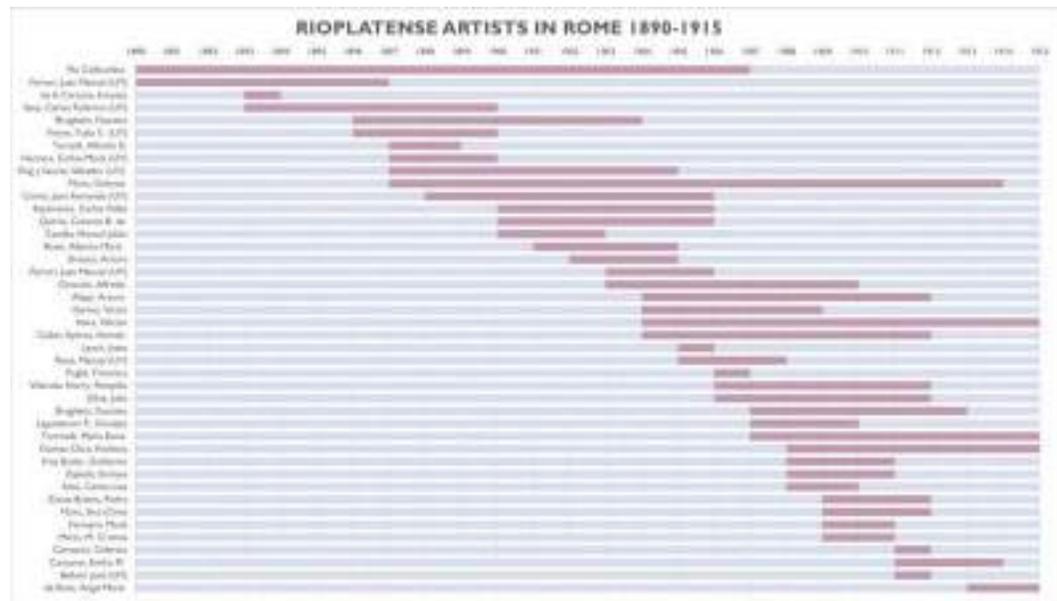
A similar discussion arose regarding the European journeys of Argentinian artists: the Argentinians who travelled to study in Europe were educated in a cosmopolitan environment, which, according to a part of the

public opinion, complicated the creation of a pure Argentinian identity. At same time, the European artistic trip was necessary because there was not a fully developed national artistic system yet. It is important to mention that in Argentina a national art academy in 19<sup>th</sup> century did not exist, only a private school of art called Sociedad Estímulo de Bellas Artes was founded in 1876, and was converted into National Art Academy in 1905.<sup>6</sup> Resuming Parisi, it should be noted that he quoted O'Connor ironically, as he strongly believed - in opposition to the writer - that immigration could be a valid contribution for building the cultural identity of a young country. In fact, Parisi drew attention to the negligence of the Argentinian state to show interest in the young artists who were studying abroad, especially in Italy.

These discussions lay on the background of different artistic experiences between the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, it can be productive to focus on some aspects of these experiences and question whether these discourses influenced the stays of Argentinian artists in Rome. Using the O'Connor correlation quoted by Parisi ('nationality' equals 'homeland' equals 'home/house') I will address the case of the Argentinian community in Rome so as to examine whether their nationality was an aid or an obstacle when it came to establishing a temporary home in the city that hosted them. I propose to focus on some travelling artists with the aim of analyzing the feeling of belonging to a single place (coincident with their nationality) and, in some manner, to put in discussion the very concept of nationality.

Although since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century several Latin American artists began to travel to Europe to perfect their studies, few Argentinians traveled before 1900. Most of them were divided between Italy and Paris; however, particularly in Rome from 1890, a colony with Uruguayans was formed.<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, the colony recognized itself as Rioplatense, which is yet another element that brings into discussion the idea of nationality and homeland.<sup>8</sup> As Figure 1 (fig.1) shows, between 1890 and 1915 around forty-five artists from the Río de la Plata lived in Rome. Among them, Uruguayans represent a small percentage that was concentrated in the last years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Hence, such convergence enabled the consolidation of

friendships and connections amongst artists, which also set up some of the social and cultural dynamics of the original nucleus of the colony. I will continue analyzing more specifically the case of some Argentinian artists, but I think it is important to keep in mind that Argentinians and Uruguayans in Rome were linked almost as compatriots.<sup>9</sup>



**Fig. 1** Presence of Rioplatense artists in Rome between 1890 and 1915. Graphic elaborated by Giulia Murace

### **National feeling at the temporary home**

The young Argentinians who travelled to study immediately became aware of their peripheral position in the European artistic society, not only because of their geographical origin, but also because of their artistic and visual background. The case of Pio Collivadino (1869-1945), an Argentinian painter who settled in Rome from 1890 until 1906, is representative. He admitted in a later interview:

When I was 21 years old, I went to Rome. I was ready to be better than Raphael, Michelangelo ... to conquer the Pope's friendship... Oh! As soon as I visited the museums and talked with some painters, I understood that all the



Both spaces were fundamental for the integration of Rioplatense artists within Roman sociability and to surmount their marginal position.<sup>13</sup> The formation of a colony can be read under this light, and, as further consequence, it fostered the consolidation of a national feeling among Argentinian and Uruguayan artists. In this sense, Collivadino is a significant reference because he was undoubtedly one of the most successful Rioplatense artists of this period in Italy and he was a key figure for the functioning of the colony and for the insertion of other artists in the Roman context. Such connections are clearly illustrated by Figure 2 that shows Collivadino's networks during his Roman stay (1890-1906) and how central he was in that network.<sup>14</sup>

Collivadino was a popular figure among the young artists living in Rome in this period and he integrated perfectly into the Roman environment. Often, critics (both Argentinians and Italians) recognized in him a certain Roman identity that can be observed/noticed in his works. For instance, the painting he presented at the 1901 Venice International Exhibition, *Vita Onesta* (1901, Udine, Casa Cavazzini-Museo d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea), is closely linked to the Roman intimists and to social painting with sentimental tones.<sup>15</sup> The Italian pavilion in the first editions of the biennial was organized with the criteria of "regional schools";<sup>16</sup> and since Collivadino lived in Rome his submission was accepted as part of the Roman room but the Argentinian sent a rectification: "I wish to belong to the international section as a citizen of the Argentine Republic".<sup>17</sup> This demonstrates the tension between the concept of national/regional identity and the sense of belonging and evinces that national identity almost gets stronger for artists while abroad, rejecting the aforementioned hypotheses of many Argentinian critics who believed that cosmopolitanism was a threat for it. Collivadino's parents were Italian, but even though he was aware of his Italian heritage, he could already be considered as the son of a new, young, and fully Argentinian generation.

In the Venetian work, as in many others made during his stay in Rome, such as one of his early masterpieces, *Ora di pranzo* (1903, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Argentina) or the very Roman *Via Appia* (fig.3), Collivadino is in line with the artistic orientations prevailing in Rome at the turn of the

century. Nevertheless, following the previous argumentation, it could not be read these artistic decisions just to insert him into a local artistic tradition, as often prevailed in traditional art history historiography. Furthermore, during his Roman stay Collivadino was already thinking about the future and his return to his homeland. On one hand, still in Rome, alongside some compatriots, he started to design Nexus, a group that was to become representative of a new generation of artists in Buenos Aires who were thinking about national art. On the other hand, Collivadino was a key figure in the process of modernizing the art system in Argentina with his appointment as director of the National Academy of Fine Arts in 1908, just one year after his return.<sup>18</sup>



**Fig. 3** Carlos Ripamonte in his studio in Rome, 1905 ca., photography, Archivo General de la Nación, Photographic Department, inv. 80239.

In these experiences, Collivadino was assisted by another Argentinian painter who lived in Rome from 1900 until 1905, sharing a lot of years, places, and friendships with him: Carlos Pablo Ripamonte (1874-1968). It can be

argued that Ripamonte's Roman stay can be analysed in the same terms as Collivadino's. In 1903 he claimed his preference for Rome because its history, landscapes, lights, and colors offered him greater inspiration than its "glorious artistic tradition", and he stated: "I deeply love that it [Rome] materially resembles my homeland".<sup>19</sup> If we observe the paintings in Ripamonte's Roman atelier (fig.4), we can notice many landscapes of the *Campagna romana* (the countryside around Rome) and of folkloristic types. More so, when we compare them with a painting from his mature and fully Argentinian years like *El boyero (the drover)* (1920, Galería Zurbarán, Buenos Aires), we could draw the same conclusions as for Collivadino. All the paintings, the landscapes, the ruins, and the characters seen in Rome were models of inspiration for shaping an artistic identity that potentially could coincide with one's national identity. In this view, I would like to quote the definition of a cultural artistic identity given by Ariane Varela Braga and Thomas Leo True: "Cultural artistic identity is now more clearly understood as the product of complex, conflicting and ever-changing processes of negotiation, evolution and recreation in a shifting panorama of artistic geographies".<sup>20</sup>



**Fig. 4** Pio Collivadino, *Via Appia*, albumin photography, 17,5 x 25,4 cm, Colección Museo Pio Collivadino, Universidad de Lomas de Zamora, Buenos Aires, inv. 2.71/263

### **The cosmopolitanism of Rome**

The dichotomy between the identification of the Argentinians in the Eternal City as foreigners and the assimilation of an ideal Italian and/or Roman character becomes the very essence of these travelling artists and, in a certain sense, their weapon to characterize themselves as a cohesive group, thanks to which they can integrate themselves in the foreign context.

In another article from “Lettere Italo-Argentine” Parisi reported: “one of the best virtues of Argentines living abroad is without any doubt the *amor patrio* [the love for their homeland]”. In this occasion the little Argentinian colony in Rome celebrated the national Independence Day (July 9th) together: female painter Elena Torricelli organized a dinner with artists, writers, and political figures at the studio of the Italian painter Umberto Cacciarelli.<sup>21</sup> A similar group gathered in 1909 to celebrate another national day, the Día de la Revolución de Mayo (May 25th).<sup>22</sup>

However, there are also cases that did not manage to feel completely "at home" in Rome, such is the example of sculptor Pedro Zonza Briano (1886-1941), who came to the city in 1909 after winning the Europa Prize. Unlike Collivadino, he arrived well prepared thanks to his training at the new National Fine Arts Academy of Argentina and for this reason he decided to avoid attending the academy in Rome. He stayed in the city for about two years, exhibited his works in some expositions and was very well received by critics. For example, in the *Rivista di Roma*, an article complained that the Italian State did not buy at least one of Zonza Briano's groups among those exposed at the Amatori e Cultori di Belle Arti of 1910.<sup>23</sup> Another article written by Enrique Gómez Carrillo (1873-1927) in 1911 stated that Italian critics said that Zonza Briano was: “the most profound of our artists”, and by our he referred to Italy. Yet he later remarked:

what they don't say [...] is that the artist is not Italian, but Argentine. And when I say Argentine, I do not mean that he was born in Buenos Aires, in the bosom of a foreign family, and that later he uprooted himself [...]. No. He is Argentine in soul, Argentine in ideas, Argentine in character. Even in

Rome, which, if I am not mistaken, is the birthplace of his grandparents, he feels, according to his own confession, like an exile.<sup>24</sup>

This excerpt provides a double information: the sculptor was praised by Italian critics as an artist of their own, which confirms his integration in the Roman artistic system; but, at the same time, the Argentinian's feeling of exile, who said that he had not found his environment while in Rome, perhaps pushed him to move to Paris. Furthermore, these words confirm that in spite of Zonza Briano's Italian descent, his patriotic feeling was deeply Argentinian. This source also clarifies what has been stated about identity defined as a set of multiple factors.

To conclude, it could be interesting to add a final aspect to analyze the integration of Argentinian artists in Rome: most of them managed to feel "at home" also thanks to the cosmopolitanism of the city, which has always been its identity character.<sup>25</sup> Since the 17th century there was a large foreign presence in the city and this characteristic did not change with the end of the Papal State. One of the first artistic institutions born after the Unification of Italy, in 1870, was the already mentioned Associazione Artistica Internazionale. In its statute it rightly claimed the internationality of Rome and the importance of the Associazione as a place where "everyone can meet and reciprocally enlighten themselves, because the arts are not the privilege of a single epoch, nor of a single country".<sup>26</sup>

This feature of Roman artistic sociability allowed artists to feel part of a community, even for those who were coming from the most peripheral places. Although the creation of a network of relations between Argentinians (and Uruguayans) worked as a response to marginality, the integration of these artists was successful thanks to the cosmopolitan character of the capital of Italy. Rome was everyone's ideal homeland. In Rome, Argentinians often felt even more Argentinian, but they also identified with Italians, found a temporary home and, at the same time, they thought about projects for the future of their homeland.<sup>28</sup>

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- . ‘Lettere Italo-Argentine. Gli Artisti Argentini in Italia’. *La Patria Degli Italiani*. 5 August 1908.
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## Endnotes

1. About the importance of this journal of Italian migrants in Argentina Weber 2014. About Italian immigration in Argentina see Fernando Devoto, *Historia de Los Italianos En La Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2006); Fernando Devoto and Gianfausto Rosoli, eds., *La Inmigración Italiana En La Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2000).
2. Giuseppe Parisi, 'Lettere Italo-Argentine. Gli Artisti Argentini in Italia', *La Patria Degli Italiani*, 5 August 1908.
3. Original quote: "La razza argentina e specialmente la portegna, che ha dato più poeti, sparisce per il flusso dell'immigrazione, e la razza è la nazionalità, che trascina nell'evoluzione politica, sociabilità, storia e tradizioni proprie. E la nazionalità è la patria (e la casa vuota resta convertita in un semplice edificio – che gli stranieri occupano, trasformandolo molti in un 'conventillo')". All translations were done by Giulia Murace with the help of Milena Gallipoli, to whom I am deeply grateful.
4. The massive Italian immigration caused a really stereotypization of Italian as rude and ignorant people Luciano Gallinari, 'Tra Discriminazione e Accoglienza. Gli Italiani in Argentina Da Luigi Barzini a Tribuna Italiana', *RiMe*, June 2010.
5. Miguel Ángel Muñoz, 'Un Campo Para El Arte Argentino. Modernidad Artística y Nacionalismo En Torno al Centenario', in *Desde La Otra Vereda. Momentos En El Debate Por Un Arte Moderno En La Argentina*, ed. Diana Wechsler, Archivos Del CAIA 1 (Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Jilguero, 1998), 43–82; Miguel Ángel Muñoz, 'Obertura 1910: La Exposición Internacional Del Arte Del Centenario', in *Tras Los Pasos de La Norma. Salones Nacionales de Bellas Artes (1911-1989)*, ed. Marta Penhos and Diana Wechsler (Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Jilguero, 1999), 13–40; Academia Nacional de Bellas Artes, 'Las Artes En Torno al Centenario. Estado de La Cuestión (1905-1915)', *Temas de La Academia*, 2010; Laura Malosetti Costa, 'Arte e Historia En Los Festejos Del Centenario de La Revolución de Mayo En Buenos Aires', *Caiana. Revista de Historia Del Arte y Cultura Visual Del Centro Argentino de Investigadores de Arte (CAIA)* 1 (2012), [http://caiana.caia.org.ar/template/caiana.php?pag=articles/article\\_2.php&obj=2&vol=1](http://caiana.caia.org.ar/template/caiana.php?pag=articles/article_2.php&obj=2&vol=1).
6. About Sociedad Estímulo de Bellas Artes and the formation of an art field in Buenos Aires see Laura Malosetti Costa, *Los Primeros Modernos. Arte y Sociedad En Buenos Aires a Fines Del Siglo XIX* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2021). About the nationalization of Academy of Buenos Aires see Matías Zarlenga, "La Nacionalización de La Academia de Bellas Artes de Buenos Aires (1905-1907)" En *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 76, Núm. 3, Julio-Septiembre, Pp. 383-411., 2014. About the system of art between the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Buenos Aires see María Isabel Baldasarre, 'Between Buenos Aires and Europe Cosmopolitanism, Pensionnaires, and Arts Education in Late 19th Century Argentina', in *Academies and Schools of Art in Latin America*, by Oscar E. Vázquez (New York: Routledge, 2020), 17–32. In this work Baldasarre also addressed some notices about the concerns of Argentinian government in relation with the pensionnaires.
7. I use the term "colony" in the sense of Oxford dictionary transmits: "a group of people from the same place or with the same work or interests who live in a particular city or country or who live together". <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/colony?q=colony>
8. I studied the artistic travels of Rioplatense artists to Rome in my PhD thesis entitled "Roma desde el Río de la Plata: artistas argentinos y uruguayos en viaje (1890-1914)", discussed in March 2022 at Universidad Nacional de San Martín. In this work I argued the importance to analyze

the consolidation of the systems of art in Buenos Aires and Montevideo in connected perspective.

9. A reference to examine the strategies of integration of a stranger community in Rome is Christine A. Dupont, *Modèles Italiens et Traditions Nationales. Les Artistes Belges En Italie 1830-1914*, Institute Historique du Belgique (Bruxelles-Roma, 2005).
10. Juan José De Soiza Reilly, 'Toda Una Vida Consagrada al Culto de La Belleza Artística: Pío Collivadino', *Caras y Caretas* 1819 (12 August 1933). Original quote: "A los 21 años me fui a Roma iba dispuesto a enmendarle la plana a Rafael y a Miguel Ángel. Iba dispuesto a conquistarme la amistad de los Sumos Pontífices... ¡Ay! Tan pronto como visité los museos y hablé con algunos pintores, comprendí que todo el caudal artístico que yo llevaba de Buenos Aires, era humo de tabaco criollo"
11. Laura Malosetti Costa, *Collivadino*, Ateneo (Buenos Aires, 2006).
12. Giulia Murace, 'Artista Geniale e Amico Di Tutti', in *El Taller de Pio Collivadino*, ed. Nora Altrudi and Carolina Vanegas Carrasco (Buenos Aires: Unsam Edita, 2019), 106–37; Teresa Sacchi Lodispoto, 'L'associazionismo Artistico Romano (1870-1878)', *Roma Moderna e Contemporanea*, 1999; Valentina Moncada di Paternò, ed., *Atelier a via Margutta. Cinque Secoli Di Cultura Internazionale a Roma* (Torino: Allemandi, 2012).
13. I refer at the Natalia Majluf concept of "marginal cosmopolitans", that defines the travelling artists from Latin America to Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Natalia Majluf, "Ce n'est Pas Le Pérou", or the Failure of Authenticity: Marginal Cosmopolitan at the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1855', *Critical Inquiry*, 1997.
14. The graphic shows the values of betweenness centrality which is the amount of influence a person has over the flow of information in a network.
15. Anna Maria Damigella, Paola Frandini, and Gianna Piantoni, *Aspetti Dell'arte a Roma Dal 1870 al 1914* (Roma: De Luca, 1972); Manuel Carrera and Jolanda Nigro Covre, eds., *Secessione Romana 1913-2013. Temi e Problemi* (Roma: Bagatto Libri, 2013); Manuel Carrera, Niccolò D'Agati, and Sarah Kinzel, eds., *Tra Oltralpe e Il Mediterraneo. Arte in Italia 1860-1915* (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2016).
16. Jean Clair and Giandomenico Romanelli, *Venezia e La Biennale. Percorsi Del Gusto* (Milano: Fabbri Editori, 1995).
17. Pio Collivadino, application form n. 14Ce115, folder "Roma", box "Attività 1894-1944", n. 14, series Scatole Nere, Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee (ASAC), Venice. Original quote: "desidero appartenere alla sezione internazionale essendo cittadino della Repubblica Argentina".
18. About Nexus and Collivadino as Academy director, see Malosetti Costa, *Collivadino*, 69-79; 133-155. In another paper with Larisa Mantovani, we have hypothesized about the importance of Collivadino Roman journey for the modernization of Argentine National Academy, and in particular in relation with his attention to the education in Decorative and applied arts. Larisa Mantovani and Giulia Murace, "Enseñar En Las Fábricas El Amor a Lo Bello". *Artes Industriales y Academia a Comienzos Del Siglo XX En Argentina*, in *Modelos Na Arte. 200 Anos Da Academia de Belas Artes Do Rio de Janeiro*, ed. Ana Cavalcanti et al., *Anales Electrónicos Del VII Seminário Do Museu D. Joao* (Rio de Janeiro: EBA/UFRJ, 2017), 372–87.
19. Carlos Ripamonte to Eduardo Schiaffino [mail], Anticoli Corrado 12/07/1903, Archivo Schiaffino, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (Buenos Aires), Armario III /E1/ BVIC4d8. Original quote: "Amo la naturaleza del suelo italiano, y, aunque no dedique mis pinceles a buscar en sus gloriosas tradiciones artísticas lo que llaman inspiración [...]. Amo mucho que se parece materialmente a mi patria".
20. Ariane Varela Braga and Thomas-Leo True, 'Studying Foreign Artists in Rome', in *Roma e Gli Artisti Stranieri. Integrazione, Reti e Identità (XVI-XX s.)* (Roma: Artemide, 2018), 15.
21. Giuseppe Parisi, 'Lettere Italo-Argentine. Come Gli Argentini All'estero Amano La Loro Patria - Commemorando Il 9 Di Luglio - Una Nota Acerba', *La Patria Degli Italiani*, 11 August 1908.

22. 'El 25 de Mayo En Roma', *Caras y Caretas* 560 (26 June 1909).
23. Giacinto Stiavelli, 'LXXX Esposizione Internazionale Di Belle Arti in Roma', *Ars et Labor* 65, no. 5 (May 1910): 338–46.
24. Enrique Gómez Carrillo, 'Un Gran Artista Argentino. El Escultor Zonza Briano', *Elegancias*, 1 September 1911, 272–73. Original quote: “los críticos, unánimemente, dicen: - es el más profundo de nuestros artistas. Pero lo que no dicen, no sé si porque lo ignoran o porque no tienen empeño en propagarlo, es que aquel artista no es italiano, sino argentino. Y cuando digo argentino, no quiero indicar que nació en Buenos Aires, en el seno de una familia extranjera y que luego se desarraigó de la tierra del azar de su raza. No. Es argentino de alma, argentino de ideas, argentino de carácter. Aún en Roma que, si no me equivoco, es la cuna de sus abuelos, se siente, según confesión propia, como un desterrado”.
25. On this same feeling, Stefano Cracolici recently wrote in a text in which he investigated epistolary correspondences between foreign artists living in Rome. Stefano Cracolici, “Costoro Non Vogliono Malinconie”: Il Registro Brillante Nelle Lettere d'artista (Primi Sondaggi Su Carteggi Eteroglossi a Base Italiana), in *Lettere d'artista: Per Una Storia Transnazionale Dell'arte (XVIII-XIX Secolo)*, ed. Giovanna Capitelli et al. (Cinisello Balsamo (Milano): Silvana Editoriale, n.d.), 16–39. About the cosmopolitan identity of Rome see at least Giovanna Capitelli, Maria Pia Donato, and Matteo Lanfranconi, 'Rome Capital Des Arts Au XIXe Siècle. Pour Une Nouvelle Périodisation de l'histoire Européenne Des Capitales Culturelles', in *Le Temps Des Capitales Culturelles. XVIIIe-XXe Siècle*, ed. Christophe Charle (Seussel: Champs Vallon, 2009), 65–99.
26. Sacchi Lodispoto, 'L'associazionismo Artistico Romano (1870-1878)', 297. Original quote: “Roma da secoli è il luogo di convegno a numerosi artisti di ogni Nazione. È quindi facile di costituire una *Associazione Artistica Internazionale*, dove a ciascuno sia dato d'incontrarsi e d'illuminarsi scambievolmente, perché le arti non sono il privilegio né di un'epoca sola, né di un solo paese”.
27. In this same direction went the projects of creation an Argentinian (and next a South-American) Academy in Rome, about which I wrote in the proceedings of the first part of the 35<sup>th</sup> CIHA Motion-Transformation that took place in Florence in 2019. Giulia Murace, “Engaged in an Undertaking of the Highest Artistic Culture”: Two Projects for a South American Academy in Rome (1897-1911), in *Proceedings of the 35th CIHA World Congress-Transformation* (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2021), 123–26.

# Migrations Between Rio and Paris: Architecture in the Work of Lygia Clark

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## **ABSTRACT**

Often recognized for her *Bichos* (1960–1966) and *Caminhando* (1963), Lygia Clark is a pivotal figure in modern and contemporary art because she encouraged viewers to expand beyond the visual to physically interact with her works. Less acknowledged in scholarship are her depictions of the home and how Clark's changing geographies altered ideas of space and place for the artist and participants. This paper investigates how Clark's changing residences in Rio de Janeiro and Paris reflected her evolving construction of the home and increasing interest in architecture. Using social art historical analysis, this paper finds that varying geographic contexts inspired Clark whether through her training with landscape designer Roberto Burle Marx and painter Fernand Léger or contexts of modernization. While living in Rio de Janeiro, the home became a symbol for inclusion as seen through *Build Your Own Living Space* (1960), suggesting that choosing a home's layout was an act of choice. In Paris, the home embodied more of a collective identity as evidenced in *Live Structures* (1969), where participants' bodies gave shape to a web of elastic bands and plastic sheets. This installation achieves new meaning when contextualized with student protests in May of 1968 in Paris. Through such connections, this study emphasizes that Clark's migrations articulated her evolving representations of the home, while also informing enduring legacies of her native country and abroad.

## **KEYWORDS**

Lygia Clark; Architectural Maquettes; Architecture; Home; Brazil.

### Introduction

As one of postwar and contemporary art history's most important artists, Lygia Clark (b. 1920 Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais–d. 1988 Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro), had a prolific career that intersected with painting, sculpture, and therapy, and as this article demonstrates, to architecture and the home. Well-known both within her country and abroad, her works are part of museum collections around the world, such as the Gilberto Chateaubriand Collection at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro, the Patricia Cisneros Collection at MoMA in New York, and the Tate Modern in London. Her works cover a large variety of subjects and styles that can be divided into various periods, beginning with her abstract paintings and her association with the Grupo Frente in the mid-1950s and later affiliation with Neo-Concretists in Rio. By the 1960s, much of Clark's works were participatory. After her return to Rio from Paris in 1976, she focused on her relational objects employed during therapy sessions.

Clark's career has been the subject of scholarship by long-time interlocuters such as Guy Brett, Yve-Alain Bois, and Suely Rolnik in addition to art critics Mário Pedrosa and Ferreira Gullar. More recent scholarship by Mónica Amor, Adele Nelson, Sérgio B. Martins, and Geanine Gutierrez-Guimarães has also accounted for Clark's re-interpretation of the art object and confrontation of medium-based classifications in art history. Clark's career has been documented in recent solo exhibitions at the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao (2020), Luhring Augustine Gallery in New York (2017), and the Museum of Modern Art in New York (2014). Most recently in 2021 and 2022, the Pinakothek Cultural de São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro in collaboration with the Associação Cultural Lygia Clark hosted the exhibition "Lygia Clark (1920-1988) 100 anos," curated by Max Perlingeiro. Selected as the top retrospective of the year by the São Paulo Association of Art Critics (APCA), this exhibition brought together 100 works, some of which were made available to the public for the first time.<sup>1</sup>

While Clark's legacy has been extensively researched within contexts of painting and sculpture, her connection to architecture remains overlooked by her more popular works, such as her *Bichos*, geometric paintings, and

relational objects. The “home” underlies many of Clark’s representations of architecture as evidenced in paintings and drawings from 1951, architectural models from 1955 and 1960, and installations and propositions from 1968 and 1969. Using these works as case studies, this paper investigates how Clark’s interest in architecture and varying portrayals of the home facilitated Clark’s migration(s) between media within multiple cities of Brazil and Clark’s multiple stays in Paris. It is through the lens of the home, that Clark’s legacy expands to understudied contexts of modernization and modernist elements of the home.

This article first contextualizes Clark’s early stages of her career with landscape designer Robert Burle Marx and painter Fernand Léger. These formative years are of particular interest because they involved Clark’s early introductions to architectural thinking and an integrative approach to the arts. After investigating Clark’s early years, this text then examines Clark’s architectural maquettes, *The House* (1955), and *Build Your Own Living Space* (1960) within larger contexts of car culture, elements of the modern home, and consumerism. The final portion of this article analyzes Clark’s forms of architecture through a variety of media such as the installation *The House is the Body: Penetration, Ovulation, Germination, and Expulsion* (1968) and the propositions *Biologic Architecture* (1969) and *Live Structures* (1969).<sup>2</sup> This article posits that it is through such works that architecture becomes a form of communication, action, and bodily structure. I find that such works achieve new meaning when contextualized with the unstable politics of Brazil’s military dictatorship (1964–1985) and larger contexts of student activism in the 1960s.

### **In Roberto Burle Marx’s Workshop and Beyond: Clark’s Studies of Staircases**

Clark’s early interest in architecture began alongside one of her earliest mentors: landscape designer Roberto Burle Marx during her study in Rio from 1947 to 1949. During her training with Burle Marx, Clark painted compositions with curvilinear and organic shapes that resembled some of Burle Marx’s layouts of gardens, as evidenced in Clark’s *Composition* (1948)

and Burle Marx's *Garden Design* for Sáenz Peña Square in 1948. Both compositions display asymmetry, solid sections of color, and curving shapes. Such affinities emphasize a synthetic approach to the arts.<sup>3</sup>

Similar to Burle Marx, who began his career in painting and later shifted to designing landscapes, Clark also moved between media and encouraged collaboration between artists and architects.<sup>4</sup> It is also speculated that Clark collaborated with architect Oscar Niemeyer on his Conjunto Kubitschek in Belo Horizonte and Leopoldo Teixeira Leite for a school in Itatiaia in Rio de Janeiro.<sup>5</sup> While the details of these collaborations require further scholarship, such connections propose that Clark hoped to expand beyond architectural models to contribute to the built environment.



**Fig. 1.** Lygia Clark, *Ateliê* (Studio) “1951;” ref. no. 01892, photographer: André de Arruda Pimental; Number of archiving 737/ Certificate Number 000821, Courtesy of – “The World of Lygia Clark” Cultural Association

While working with Burle Marx, Clark painted *Staircase* (1948), which shows a curving staircase, much like the layout of Burle Marx's gardens that resist the modern grid with their amorphous shapes. Burle Marx's interest in botany also surfaces in Clark's charcoal drawing *Staircases* (1951). For example, *Staircase* (1951) reflects the texture of leaves and foliage from Burle Marx's drawings of the Gardens of Casa Forte City Hall in Recife in 1935. *Staircases* (1951) was one of the many staircases that Clark made that year. Another charcoal on paper from 1951 shows Clark's shift towards a more realistic portrayal of a staircase. For example, she included spiraling individual treads rather than a more organic form that looks like the wing of a bird. In her oil on canvas work, her commitment to built forms grew as she placed a staircase within identifiable elements that comprise a room: a floor, walls, and a railing.

Painted during the same period as her staircases during her first stay in Paris between 1950 to 1952, Clark's *Studio* (1951) shows her workshop. A linear staircase leads to the floor above, eventually disappearing behind a wall. In this painting, the artist used stairs to expand the picture plane beyond the frame, emphasizing that a frame could not limit space. In this painting, Clark emphasized an easel that supports a large and small canvas. It takes up most of the composition and stands at the center of the plane. The larger canvas leans against the easel with its frame lining up with the post of the easel, mimicking its supports.<sup>6</sup> This mixture hides the canvases behind it and accentuates a large blank canvas, destabilizing the assumed hierarchy of painting as a medium. In *Studio* (1951), this canvas essentially loses its function and instead visually performs and assumes the role of architecture.

### **Moving Beyond the Frame: Clark's Architectural Maquettes in 1955 and 1960**

Similar to Clark's earlier mentor Burle Marx's integrative approaches, her other teacher, Fernand Léger, also experimented with design and painting. In doing so, Léger sought to blend art and architecture through concepts such as living walls, inhabitable rectangles, and elastic rectangles.<sup>7</sup> For example, Léger's mural paintings in the 1925 Pavilion of the New Born Spirit at the

International Exhibition of Decorative Arts in Paris operated as an example of “living walls” through their function as an example of his interest in fusing art and architecture into the architecture of a pavilion.<sup>8</sup> For this exhibition, Léger incorporated mural paintings into the wall of the pavilion by painting vertical and horizontal bands for a wall, rather than staying within the limits of a frame. He wrote, “pure colors and geometric forms are not compatible with easel painting. Abstraction requires large surfaces, walls. There one can organize an architecture and a rhythm.”<sup>9</sup> Three years after leaving Paris, Clark began her making her architectural maquettes or models in 1955, which helped to transition her geometric paintings into three-dimensional objects. For example, the walls of her models looked like compositions of prior abstract paintings.<sup>10</sup>

Clark’s architectural models also bear importance because of their connections to contexts of modernization, particularly in the 1950s when Brazil witnessed shifts in its economy from agriculturally focused to more industrial sectors. This shift encouraged new working methodologies based in new materials and methods to develop new ideas, which this paper posits surfaced in Clark’s architectural maquettes from 1955.<sup>11</sup> For example, in an interview about her modulated surfaces from 1955 and 1957, Clark mentioned that she used a nitrocellulose paint, which was used in the fabrication of cars.<sup>12</sup> While this interview postdates Clark’s initial architectural maquette production in 1955, her choice of materials in her models suggested her interest in non-traditional materials also occurred in her architectural maquettes.

Clark’s use of enamel paint—which is still used today on cars, planes, and boats— for her architectural maquette, *Maquette for Interior* (1955), places her within a Brazilian economy that underwent stages of modernization instigated by industrialization in the 1950s. It was not until this decade that local production of steel and products such as gasoline, asphalt, and plastic became readily accessible. Because of this increasing emphasis on modernization, ten car factories opened in Brazil by the end of the 1950s. The growing presence of the automobile spurred government investment in motorways, facilitated the growth of travel agencies, and

created a need for the Brazilian Motel Club, which provided information about lodging in the country. As a result of this enthusiasm, some construction laws in Brazil were updated to require some homes to have their own garages.<sup>13</sup>

An increasing interest in cars also appeared in the new capital Brasília, which opened in 1960, just five years after Clark's first maquette. A car aficionado, then President Kubitschek made sure that Brasília had garages for apartment buildings and that the streets were conducive for those traveling by car. These details suggest that Clark's use of automobile paint coincided with the increasing enthusiasm of both car production and ownership in 1950s Brazil. Brazil was not alone in its dedication to car ownership and production. In secondary scholarship about the rising popularity of the automobile in the postwar era, Kristin Ross writes, "In the middle of the century the automobile industry, more than any other, becomes exemplary and indicative; its presence or absence in a national economy tells us the level and power of the economy."<sup>14</sup>

Clark embarked on her most intricate undertaking into building design in the maquette, *The House* (1955), which shows multiple rooms. Its length of 19  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches made it one of her longest maquettes, just slightly longer than *Maquette for Interior* (1955) mentioned prior. *The House* (1955) also includes a flat-cantilever roof with a hole in the center that perhaps existed for viewers to peer inside at its contents. The maquette is one floor and includes a compartment in the center with small wooden panels that extend out past the roofline. To the left of the central compartment is a wooden table attached to the wall. The roof overhangs both the left and right side of the maquette. While sloping and butterfly roofs were the most popular style in modern homes in 1950s and 1960s Brazil, flat roofs also were also present in smaller numbers.<sup>15</sup> Examples of this type of roofing occur in neighborhoods in Belo Horizonte, such as Pampulha. These details suggest that Clark used her maquettes to engage with local examples of domestic architecture and modernist elements of the home.

Clark continued her engagement with modernist elements of architecture in her later architectural maquettes. In *Build Your Own Living*

*Space* (1960), Clark used a drawing board as a foundation for a grid layout. This model employed the grid as a manipulatable floor plan with movable rectangular compartments and slidable partitions. For example, in her description of the model, Clark wrote, “The house would be made very simply, and I thought of making the project myself. So I then made a drawing in which there was a fixed nucleus around which one circulated during the day, and, at night four compartments were closed in.”<sup>16</sup> As such, this changing organization challenges the usual connotations of the grid such as geometry and order and the antireal and antinatural.<sup>17</sup>

An October 1955 advertisement from the magazine *Casa e Jardim* contextualizes Clark’s *Build Your Living Space* (1960) with larger ideas of consumerism. In an advertisement for the paint brand Cai lux, a female consumer gestures towards a dining area. This scene appears in the shape of a paintbrush, mimicking the outline of a handheld mirror, reinforcing that the home reflects a sense of identity and one’s place in society. To the left of this section is another consumer painting a wall, which implies a sense of choice in decorating their homes, a similar notion in *Build Your Living Space* (1960). Clark’s collaboration with architect and furniture designer, Sergio Rodrigues, when designing *Build Your Living Space* (1960), suggests her interest in interior design and the home as a “canvas” for the possibilities of home design.<sup>18</sup> For example, Clark largely left each compartment empty in the maquette.

### **Not Just a Structure: Architecture as Action**

Shortly after completing *Build Your Own Living Space* in 1960, Clark continued her interest in participatory expressions as seen in her handheld *Matchbox Structures* (1964). In this proposition, a participant could move the *Matchbox Structures*’ diminutive drawers, which created varying configurations. Their varying appearances draw comparisons to a chest of drawers or skyscrapers when put on their sides. While making her *Matchbox Structures* (1964), Clark recalled feeling a sense of imprisonment because of her ailing health.<sup>19</sup> It can be suggested that the compartments that slide within their shell reflect a sense of confinement when enclosed and the

opposite sensation when pulled out. These ideas also draw a parallel to the political climate of Brazil building up to the start of a military dictatorship that began in 1964, the same year as Clark's *Matchbox Structures*.

The military dictatorship began after a coup of leftist-leaning president João Goulart (1961–1964). During the backdrop of the Cold War many nations feared that some Latin American countries would succumb to communism, which led to Goulart's exit from politics and a tumultuous time in Brazil's history. It is within this period that torture, censorship, and decrees such as, *Ato Institucional Número Cinco* (Fifth Institutional Act) "AI-5," went into effect. For example, on December 13, 1968, "AI-5," suspended *habeas corpus* and Congressional actions. Within this context of repression, many artists, like Clark, used their work as a form of expression through the incorporation of participants' bodies.<sup>20</sup>

Clark's *The House is the Body* (1968) was first displayed at the Museu de Arte Moderna in Rio de Janeiro and then at the Venice Biennale in 1968. In this installation, Clark connected the home's layout to different processes of the body. Overall, the installation measured twenty-six feet long with four small rooms for each bodily stage: penetration, ovulation, germination, and expulsion.<sup>21</sup> The penetration section was completely dark and destabilizing for the viewer. Ovulation was the same dimensions as the previous section, but had helium filled balloons. The remaining two rooms contained other elements such as "hairs," balls, and a deformed mirror.<sup>22</sup> As such, this installation encouraged a tenuous and uncontrollable relationship to its environment, similar associations for some who lived under dictatorship.

Following *The House is the Body* (1968), Clark intensified her incorporation of participants' bodies in the proposition *Biologic Architecture* (1969). Functioning as a freely chosen and participatory act, rather than an orchestrated performance, this proposition incorporated the body of participants by using tubing and plastic sheets as a form of shelter. Dissolving the separation between object and subject, the tubing and sheets became extensions of the body by adopting the role of a collective tissue or skin. In this instance, *Biologic Architecture* (1969) became a communal body in the form of a moving and "living" piece of architecture. Attaching the bodies not

only in physical ways, this piece also encouraged participants to think about the psychological connections that formed between them. In this case, architecture became more than a shelter, but also an opportunity to connect to others. Similar ideas regarding the body, movement, and architecture also surfaced in Clark's *Live Structures* (1969).



**Fig. 2.** Lygia Clark, *Arquitetura Biológica* (Biologic Architecture) “1969”; Ref. no. 22828; Photographer Alecio de Andrade; Courtesy of “The World of Lygia Clark” Cultural Association.

*Live Structures* (1969) constructed in Paris and later used during her class at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1972, activated ordinary objects like rubber bands through bodily movements. As such, this proposition proposes that corporeality can give shape to structures by molding space. The form of the structure relies on the intricate layout of the bodies' limbs, which is dependent on the others; one's hand does not act alone, but rather functions in relation to the other parts. For example, stimuli from the environment stimulates the brain to signal to nerves and muscles to move the hand. Connecting rubber bands to varying limbs facilitates bodies to work together.

If one arm of a person moves, the other limbs of the other bodies will react, which requires people to communicate and interact with others to problem solve and react.

Clark's incorporation of students operated within larger contexts of activism in Paris. In May 1968, seven to ten million students and workers went on strike to protest unjust levels of authority in family life, school systems, and politics. These events disrupted everyday life: blockades limited streets' accessibility and the president vanished from public appearances.<sup>23</sup> Photographer Serge Hambourg captured many of these events in Paris from May 1968. Some pictures show students at the Sorbonne campus — where Clark taught in 1972 — sitting against a statue of Louis Pasteur. On the pedestal of Pasteur's stature reads "Free Expression" in black graffiti paint. A horizontal image of the student leaders: Alain Geismar, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, and Jacques Sauvageot with their arms crossed emphasizes solidarity. These images suggest the historical context in which Clark worked and lived. As such, it can be suggested that her *Live Structures* (1969) and *Biologic Architecture* (1969) reflected a continuation of the ideals presented by the May 1968 protest, where many young people joined together to make a difference by communicating and questioning their world.

### **Conclusion**

Offering a revisionist history, the present article has demonstrated a more nuanced understanding of Clark's career evolution where architecture and varying representations of the home connect her oeuvre's seemingly disparate stages. It is through such avenues that Clark migrated between media, engaged with her changing residences, and narrated individual and collective identities. As a result of these findings, this paper further develops Clark's legacy as one not just grounded in issues of participation and discourses of painting and sculpture, but also that of architecture, modernization, and modernist elements of the home.

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## Endnotes

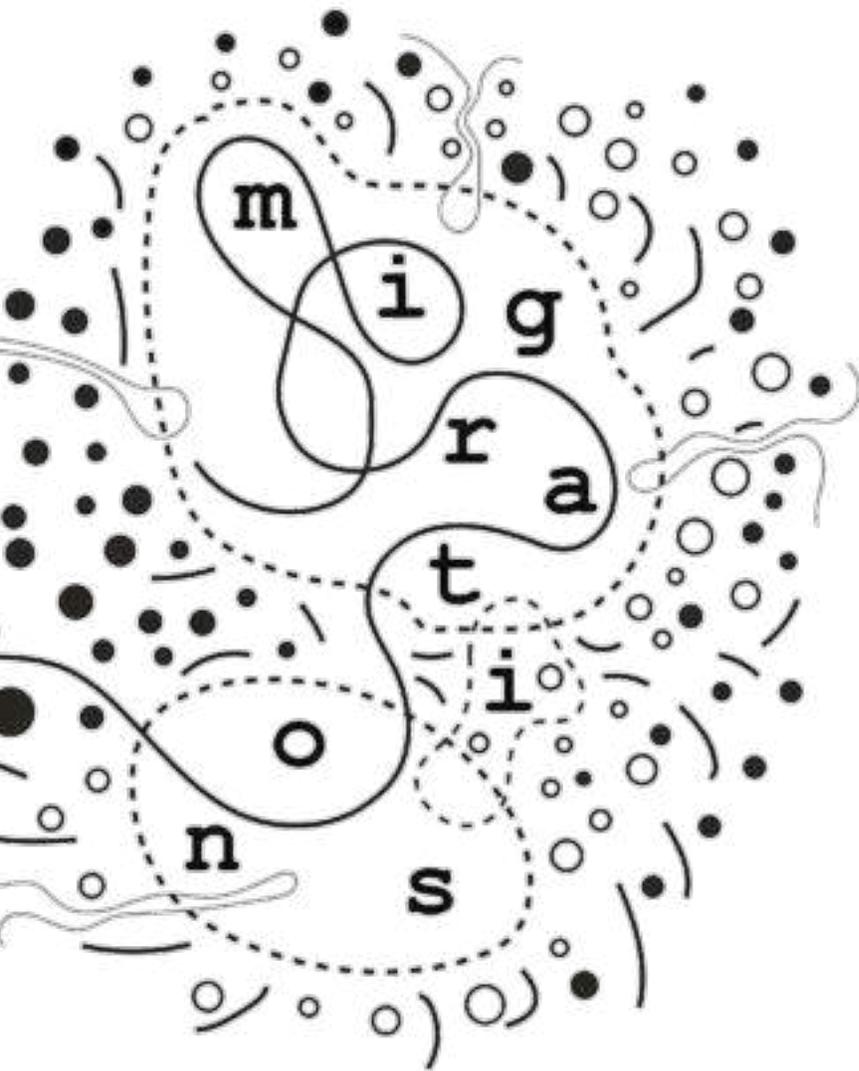
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# In Transit: Addressing World Art Systems

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## Session 15



## Session 15

# In Transit: Addressing World Art Systems

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The circumnavigation of the world provoked displacements of large populations and along with them the permanent removal and dislocation of objects from within their original place and cultural context. The field of art history and art museum collections inextricably controlling their presentation, circulation, research and interpretation, are facing urgent and critical ethical questions of accountability, responsibility and self-determination. This seminar intends to examine the history of museums and their expansion, especially the recent phenomenon of satellite museums, as well as art fairs, biennials, and major international exhibitions as it concerns the idea of migration considered from the point of view of institutions. It evokes the transit of institutional models, such as schools and art academies, whether linked or not to crafts and teaching in workshops. The session also intends to examine the unfolding of the various world art systems in the processes of globalization. Scholars as well as curators and artists, are working to articulate new and better questions, negotiate new truths, formulate and implement new frameworks and theoretical propositions, as a means to broaden the established art historical tradition and re-centre art, artists and their voices.

How do contemporary artists engage with and offer new perspectives in addressing such emotionally and politically charged issues as cultural, physical, social and artistic dislocation and displacement?

What are the ethical and scholarly responsibilities of art historians in dealing with the research, interpretation, exhibition and publication of art that continues to be 'disconnected' from its context and thus in danger to be limited by a Euro-centric lens? What are the new methodological

approaches that offer art historians and curators means to navigate respectfully and insightfully across cultures?

How do institutional models, often based upon a specific set of values and practices, migrate, adapt and ultimately affect the different cultural contexts where they are established? How are art historians and curators questioning and eventually reconfiguring those institutional models?

Those are some of the questions that this session proposes to address.

# Migrations of ideas: Lina Bo Bardi's Approaches to Brazilian Culture

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper focus on some aspects of the performance of Lina Bo Bardi in Brazil, at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo, through the analysis of two exhibitions, held between 1968 and 1969, at the opening of its new headquarters on Paulista Avenue: the museum's collection exhibit on the glass easels and “A Mão do Povo Brasileiro” (Hand of the Brazilian People).

## **KEYWORDS**

History of exhibitions; Art Museums; Museu de Arte de São Paulo; Art History in Brazil; Lina Bo Bardi.

Since its inauguration in 1947, Museu de Arte de São Paulo proposed to work beyond the model of museum seen only as a deposit of works of art, a profile still very recurrent in Brazil at that time. In the first decades of its existence, the Museum developed actions through which they experimented different ways of acting. At that time, architect Lina Bo Bardi was responsible for the adaptations of the buildings that housed the institution as well as for expographic projects developed there.

The director of the Museum, Pietro Maria Bardi, and also Lina Bo structured the Museum around diverse forms of extroversion of its collection, among them: expositive experiences, lectures and courses, sections of cinema and music. In this way, the intention was to make the Museum a center of formation in arts, which did not exist in Brazil at the time.

The Museum's new building in Paulista Avenue also underlies its program and the actions resulting from it, by providing material structure appropriate to its development. Pietro Maria and Lina Bo Bardi announced to Brazil and the world their way of seeing art through the exhibitions with which they inaugurated the new Museum, in 1969.

The architecture developed there by Lina dialogued with several areas of knowledge, not only those of university theorists, but also with those of manual doing of the daily life of the people of various localities of Brazil. At the same time as the Museum would be the meeting place of the population, open to all, it also marked an imposing cultural space next to the financial center of the city, which constituted as the most important in the country.

The exhibitions we will analyze here compose with the new building a moment of synthesis of Lina's references, both related to modernist architecture brought from her degree in architecture in Italy and developed in Brazil, as well as the knowledge she acquired during her stay in Bahia between the end of the 1950s and early 1960s - especially with regard to the theme of the popular Brazilian culture.

It is verified throughout the trajectory of Bo Bardi, that her interest in the study of form transcends the architectural form itself and goes beyond pre-established categorizations around human production that separate the

typologies of objects such as: artistic, handmade, functional, ritual, among others.



**Fig. 1.** External view of MASP, 1970s. Photo: Unknown – Collection of Centro de Pesquisa do MASP – Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand

After finishing her course at the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Rome, Bo Bardi worked in the office of Gio Ponti, director of the Milan Triennale and *Domus* Magazines, who headed the movement of valorization of so-called artisanal production in Italy.

In 1944, Lina, in her article “Disposition of internal environments”, discusses a history of the relationships between art and technique as well as between art and life, when dealing with decoration, once again evidencing her interest in form and bringing the production traditionally associated with the

term “Fine Arts” closer to what would be the so-called “industrial design” in the future.

Lina states that the ancient precepts linked to the Academy of Fine Arts excluded artists from manufactured and industrial production. Over time, especially after the second half of the 19th century, this relationship was broken and there was an approximation between artists and the industrial world.

Probably one of the relationships between Lina and the issues related to human production – contained in the named artistic, industrial and artisanal manifestations – is based on her interest in form – the form elaborated by people from their intellectual and manual/practical activities. Such interest of Lina was possibly an important factor, which led her to focus more closely on Brazilian popular production. This will give rise to the work she developed intensely from the end of the 1950s.

But, Lina would deal with such a production also seeking to understand it from various bias, inserting it in the political and social context of the time, for example.

In taking stock of the history of manual production of popular Brazilian civilization, the architect considers that:

The review of the country's recent history is necessary [...] This balance is not the balance of folklore, always paternalistically supported by high culture, it is the balance 'seen from the other side', the participant balance. It is the Aleijadinho and the Brazilian culture before the French Mission. It is the northeastern that makes the leather [...] it is the black and the indigenous. A mass that invents, which brings an indigestible, dry, hard-to-digest contribution. This urgency, this cannot wait any longer, is the basis of the Work of the Brazilian artist, a reality that does not need artificial stimuli, a cultural invoice at his fingertips, a unique anthropological richness, with tragic and fundamental historical events. Brazil has industrialized, the new reality needs to be accepted to be studied. The return to extinct social bodies is impossible, the creation of artisanal centers, the return to a craft antidote to an industrialization foreign to the cultural principles of the

country is wrong. Because crafts as a social body never existed in Brazil [...] What exists is a domestic pre-crafts [...] The cultural survey of Brazilian pre-handicrafts could have been done before the country went down the path of dependent capitalism, when a bourgeois democratic revolution was still possible. In this case, the cultural options in the field of Industrial Design could have been others, more adherent to the real needs of the country [...]. (Bardi, Lina, 1994, p. 12-13)

The edition of Habitat and Mirante das Artes magazines and the articles made by Lina for the newspaper Salvador News Diary, in Bahia, can be understood as a means of disseminating her reflections on art, design, culture, architecture, among other subjects.

In the preface to the first Habitat Magazine, from 1950, Lina Bo expressed her concern in making a magazine that would help Brazil to know its own reality, highlighting its studies on the specificities of the country:

The history of Brazil remains largely unprecedented [...] Thus, the past so rich in themes for re-recall and the effervescent activity of the present have not yet found a documentation and computerization appropriate to reality and its importance, although day by day increases the desire to know what is done in the country and outside it in matters of art. It is enough to reflect on the extraordinary increase in modern architecture, the impulse given to culture by the new museums, the statements of painting, the outbreak of industrial arts, not to mention the diffusion of music [...] and the enthusiasm with which the problem of theater and cinema is being faced, to evaluate the terms in which Brazil has posed the problem and intends to solve the issue of the arts as an educational factor [...]

The imaginative beauty of a forest, a pau-a-pique hut, a marajoara pot, a baroque church, the Aleijadinho, the goldsmiths of Bahia, the Manueline furniture of Recife, the epiglets of the French mission, the architects of the theater of Manaus and those of the Ministry of Education and Health of Rio, the country painters and renowned artists, ceramists, the gameleiros of the coast, indigenous, African, descendants of conquerors, emigrants, all who

contributed, continue contributing and participate in some form of art in Brazil will have their activities disseminated in 'Habitat' with the commitment of those who know how to appreciate what the country has most characteristic. (Bardi, Lina, apud Pereira, 2008, p. 37-38)

In addition to the activities developed in Habitat Magazine and during her stay in Bahia, Lina came to São Paulo and conceived, in partnership with Martim Gonçalves, representative of the Theater School of the Federal University of Bahia, the exhibition "Bahia", held between September and December 1959, at Ibirapuera Park, next to the V Bienal de Arte de São Paulo.

The exhibition aimed to problematize the limits of what was considered as "Art", with a capital "A". The text in the catalogue begins by raising these questions:

What is generally defined as 'popular art', 'folklore', 'primitive art' or 'spontaneous', implies that tacitly in an art classification that, excluding man<sup>4</sup>, considers the same art as something individual, abstract activity, privilege. Where does art start and end? What are your borders? This 'no man's land', which limits man in the expression of his total humanity, depriving him of one of the most necessary and profound manifestations, such as aesthetics, this boundary between Art and art, is what this Exhibition suggests.

What is the place occupied in the graduation (explicit, implicit or 'condescending'), of the Arts, by the so-called popular art, spontaneous, primitive?

What does it mean? Why is there popular art, not that of civil servants, engineers and bankers? What is called 'people' is the only class not inhibited by 'cultural' schemes and concepts, the only one perhaps that preserves the habit of natural explanations of aesthetic man.

The term 'folklore' defines – seen and classified by 'cult' men – the need and the capacity for aesthetic manifestations of culturally 'isolated' man (whenever the term 'culture' is used in the traditional sense). But art seems to claim today its human values, abandoning schemes and seeking, beyond art itself, the fullness of its expression. From the return, of the desire for self-annulment, begins a time when the totality of human values, in its material

expression, is linked to a critical lucidity and an autonomy, which no longer admits divisions in watertight categories or compartments, a time that can no longer deny man, in the name of any creed and no myth, the right to live in this fullness. (Bardi, Lina; Gonçalves. In: Ferraz (Org.), 1993, p. 134)

It is not by chance that "Bahia" was presented to the city of São Paulo parallel to an International Art Biennial, which was and is seen as one of the most important shows about world-renowned artistic productions, considered historical or contemporary icons of "Art".

The text of the catalog of "Bahia" returns art to its condition of simple human manifestation, seeking to remember that its origins are inherent to human life. The dialectic between art and life is in man. Only the human being sees, thinks and makes art. Aesthetics exists because of it.

In the exhibition, popular objects, handmade, rustic, everyday, ritual and decorative use, appeared exhibited in the same environment in which were capoeiristas, baianas serving typical food and also, following certain exhibition patterns similar to those used in exhibitions dedicated to "Art" with "A", such as those used in the Biennial to display paintings, drawings and sculptures.

To clarify the context of the conception of "Bahia" and the exhibition "A Mão do Povo Brasileiro", we will briefly discuss the period in which Lina Bo Bardi lived in the Northeast.

In April 1958, Lina was invited to give lectures on the problem of space in architecture at the School of Fine Arts of the Federal University of Bahia. In August of the same year, the architect would return to Bahia to teach three months of course on Theory and Philosophy of Architecture, at the same university.

In her writings for the first class of the course, Lina Bo Bardi characterizes the definition of an architect:

[...] is a skilled worker who knows his office not only practice as theoretically and historically, and is aware that his humanity is not an end in itself, but is composed, in addition

to his own individuality, of other men and nature. [Bardi, Lina, 1958. In: Rubino; Grinover (Org.), 2009, p.82]

It is observed there, among other aspects, a concern to instruct future architects about a line of action that would link theoretical knowledge with practice. This would be an urgent problem that would derive precisely from the end of the craft era: the split between technician and executing worker.

Still in her class, Lina talked about the care that the architect must have in carrying out work that establishes dialogues with the needs of the place where it is being made. Lina's short teaching period reveals a dedication to convey to her students the principles and concerns that permeated her own architectural works, for example, in the projection and construction of MASP.

As a kind of solution to the problem of the rupture between the technician and the executing worker, Lina proposes in the article "Industrial art" the creation of a museum:

The central subject could be placed at the immediate collecting of all the ancient and modern handmade material existing in each country, in the creation of a large living museum, a museum that could be called Crafts and Industrial Art and that constituted the root of the historical-popular culture of the country.

This Museum should be completed by a school of industrial art (art in the sense of craft, in addition to art) that would allow contact between technicians, designers and performers. To express, in the modern sense, what was handicraft, preparing new generations, not for future utopias, but for the reality that exists and that everyone knows: the plank architect who does not know the reality of the work, the worker who does not know how to 'read' a plant [...]

We do not want to devalue the official aid work for artisanal groups. This help is a transition, a necessary transition phase, while the popular artist is a pure artist and cannot suffer directed influences

Ours is a collective time [...] men must be prepared for this collaboration. No hierarchical distinction between

designers and performers. [...] Collective and no longer individual participation; the technical result of the craftsmanship of our day: the industry. (Bardi, Lina, 1960. In: Rubino; Grinover (Org.), 2009, p.111)

This care pointed out by Lina, in the excerpt, regarding the study and presentation of the objects and the contents that involved them can be observed in the exhibition "Bahia". There was evidenced this concern that the museum, proposed in her text, should have with regard to the collection of old handmade material and the present.

Still in this article, the architect defines the differences between the terms crafts, craftsman and popular artist who will guide her speeches at this moment:

What is handicrafts? The expression of a time and a society, a worker who owns a modest capital, which allows him to work the raw material and sell the finished product, with material profit and spiritual satisfaction, being the project designed and executed by himself.

What's a craftsman today? He is an executor, a specialist without capital who lends his own service to those who provide him with the raw material, that is, owner or client, and receives a salary in exchange for his own execution work [...]

What is folk art when true? It's Art, with capital A. [Bardi, Lina, 1958. In: Rubino; Grinover (Org.), 2009, p. 107-108]

The museum proposal described by Lina in the text "Industrial Art" was worked on the activities she developed with the Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia (MAMB) and the Museum de Arte Popular do Unhão, in the early 1960s. These institutions sought to become centers of cultural meeting and also training centers, always related to aspects of the work developed in the MASP.

MAMB was founded on January 6th, 1960, and Lina took over as director. The Museum occupied the space of the former Castro Alves Theater, located in the center of Salvador and adapted by Lina.

The last project planned by Lina in 1963, in Bahia, was a School of Industrial Design and Handicraft, which would be constituted next to the Museu Solar do Unhão and aimed to place designers (students of architecture and engineering) together with master craftsmen, so that, intellectual and practical knowledge of both groups could be exchanged. However, with the military coup in 1964, her projects were foiled and Lina returned to São Paulo.

The construction of the MASP occurred between Lina's stay in Bahia and São Paulo, during 1957 to 1968. Lina constituted on Paulista Avenue what she called a *modern popular museum*: on the one hand, a center conceived from the experiences obtained with Brazilian popular culture - which helped her in the search for simple and economic solutions to the forms and the materials used in the construction of the Museum - and, on the other hand, that had popular projection and was frequented by the people.

The Trianon region was considered by Lina as the ideal place to receive the new building of the institution, precisely due to the ease of access. The architect intended to make the Museum a meeting point for people, which was open not only to cultural manifestations, but to any collective manifestations.

According to Freire (1997), the Trianon's vocation to be a social meeting point was pointed out in the writings of Mário de Andrade, from the early 1920s, who met there together with other intellectuals and artists. In 1950, the Belvedere of Trianon was overthrown and hosted the first São Paulo Arts Biennial the following year. According to Freire (1997, p. 269), "the news that the São Paulo Museum of Art would occupy the trianon site caused a positive reception from those who knew it in their aureous times".

Thus, a building of "seventy meters of light", as Lina Bo Bardi said, basically consisting of concrete and glass was erected.

I looked for a simple architecture, [...] that could immediately communicate what, in the past, was called a 'monument', that is, the sense of 'collective' [...]. I took advantage of the experience of five years in the Northeast, the lesson of popular experience, not as folk romanticism but as an experience of simplification. Through a popular

experience I came to what I could call Poor Architecture [...] I think at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo I eliminated cultural snobbery [...] opting for direct solutions [...] (Bardi, Lina, 1997, s/p.)

The huge free span, achieved through the suspension of two floors of the building, supported by four pillars, was the solution found to respect the requirement of the donors of the land, to keep the view to the city center.

On the second suspended floor, Lina exhibited part of the paintings of the museum collection hanging on crystal easels. These were arranged throughout the entire length of the huge room, so that the front of each painting could be seen from the entrance of the room and the verse, which contained the technical information and explanations about the work, could only be observed if the visitor surrounded the easel. The rectangular exhibition room had two of its four walls made of glass, through which one, inside the room could see the outside, and one from the avenue could see some art pieces.



**Fig. 2.** View of the picture gallery of MASP on Paulista Avenue, 1960s. Photo: Unknown – Collection of Centro de Pesquisa do MASO – Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubrind.

The collection was not presented in accordance with the traditional chronological linearity of art history. Paintings of the most diverse localities, eras, styles and movements were gathered there.

This peculiar organization of the art pieces emphasized the idea of art being a unique production – it would depend on the human creative act to exist and would not need, because of this, hierarchies or time or stylistic distinctions etc.

The meeting of works of different periods, techniques, styles and materials rescues the discussion raised by Malraux (2000, p. 10), in *The Imaginary Museum*. For him the museum is "[...] a confrontation of metamorphoses".



**Fig. 3.** View of the picture gallery of MASP on Paulista Avenue, 1960s. Photo: Unknown – Collection of Centro de Pesquisa do MASP – Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand.

It is understood, from the analysis of his text, that the works of art undergo metamorphoses throughout history; these metamorphoses can be related to several aspects: to the studies that are made of them and that can

change the way they are perceived, or to the new conditions in which they are placed, when museums were raised in the 19th century, for example, and a new relationship was imposed between spectator and work.

In Malraux's perspective, this exhibition is exemplary, because it provided, through the use of transparency, an environment that proposed an intense confrontation between the various metamorphoses evidenced by the works exhibited there.

This exhibition space was created in such a way as to involve the visitors, allowing them to freely pass through the works trapped in the glasses, being able to observe them individually, but, at the same time, also being able to look at them as a set. The spectators were not guided by the exhibition, on a one-way path, but was free to make the route they desired, with associations or even dissociations, that appeared during their stay there. Lina declares that placing the paintings on easels was an effort not to present a sacred object, but a work done by a person.

This reflection resembles the work of art of any other piece produced by a person. And it is in this sense that the crystal easels pointed out many of the issues raised by Lina in her work in relation to popular production. This facet of the work developed throughout Lina's career was also present in the inauguration of the new MASP's headquarters with the exhibition "A Mão do Povo Brasileiro".

The exhibition was organized by Lina and Pietro Bardi, Martim Gonçalves and Glauber Rocha and was set up in the temporary exhibition space on the first floor of the building. Hundreds of objects from various localities in Brazil and of various natures were presented there together: ritual use in religions such as Candomblé, Catholicism and indigenous cults, household, furniture, toys, decorative objects, archaeological pieces etc. The objects were not collected directly from their original environments, but from private and institutional collections.

Since the objects displayed in the show were borrowed from collections, it is considered that they were removed from their original contexts and functions, because, when they entered in private and institutional collections they acquired a new category.



**Fig. 4.** View of the exhibition “A Mão do Povo Brasileiro”, 1969. Photo: Unknown – Collection of Centro de Pesquisa do MASP – Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand.

This temporary exhibition room consisted of white walls that prevented the dialogue between the internal space of the Museum and the city, as occurred with the pinacotheca’s room. The lighting was artificial. An exhibition environment was created that did not interfere so significantly in the contemplation of the pieces presented, which brought it closer to that related to the term white cube.

However, the exhibition furniture was made of reused wood, which, according to Lina, set dialogues with the original environment of people’s day by day, more rustic, such as that of the fairs, for example.

The room had a rectangular shape and the show was designed in a way that from the entrance of the room one could see three parallel rows of low rectangular bases, which served as support for objects of various sizes; on the two side walls of the room were placed species of bookshelves and panels to support smaller objects.

The combination of the characteristics of the exhibition environment in which the show was made – closer to what is defined as a white cube – to the specificities of the works presented – pieces of collections – associated the objects exhibited to an institutionalized environment.

At that time, Bo Bardi no longer claimed the place occupied by popular production in the categorizations made by the traditional methodologies of Art History, as we observed in her writings:

We talk about crafts and folk art. At the Museu de Arte de São Paulo we set up an exhibition that includes all these problems. To this exhibition the director of the Museum gave the title of 'The Hand of the Brazilian People': it is a tribute to the People of Brazil.

The exhibition is just a presentation of creativity and possibilities. It is not an exhibition of Art as consolation, we did not want to be interpreted in this sense, it is not an invitation to overvaluation of a production that expresses difficult living conditions. We are convinced that everything that can make misery compatible must be destroyed. (Bardi, Lina, 1969. In: Ferraz (Org.), 1993, p. 192)

Behind the arrangement of the objects in the show was the idea of systematization, recording and dissemination of information related to such production. But still, there were gaps as some authors point out, pieces produced in different contexts, with different functions appeared close, suggesting homogenizations that were not always real.

The pieces also appeared without information about authorship or production contexts, different from those present in glass easels, which most often had well-explained European authorship.

This kind of critics and others have been taking part of the discussion about Bardi's legacy and become evident the importance to revisit documentations and bibliographic collections in the art museums, as well as the museological collections. One research work that follows this path was made by Paulo Tavares (2021).

Lina's concern at the peculiarities of Brazilian culture, especially those related to what was called for her *popular* culture, led to the MASP such

problematic, which opened up the Museum even more to the dialogue with the social environment in which it was. But of course with many gaps, that would happen at that time, and that were pointed more recently by researchers like Helio Meneses (2017) and Ana María León.

The search for freedom may have been a theme of life for Lina. From the beginning of her professional practice she followed ideals of a libertarian character when using, for example, precepts of modern architecture in her works. However, her gaze in search of freedom seems to have been in fact fed in Bahia.

In MASP already appear, among the most programmatic freedom associated with modern architecture, the solutions that the architect learned in her encounter with the Brazilian popular universe, when she elaborated, for example, the term “poor architecture”, to define the simple architectural solutions she found for the design of the Museum, inspired by the simplicity of the solutions seen in popular productions. The scenic architectures of the exhibitions, analyzed here, were also thought from the simplicity in the use of materials and drawings.

In a statement to FAU USP, in 1989, Lina supports this inference that elements of her encounter with freedom already appear in the conception of the MASP building and the exhibitions developed there in the late 1960s, stating that:

When the musician John Cage came to São Paulo, passing through Paulista Avenue, he stopped the car in front of MASP, went down and, walking from one side of the belvedere, his arms raised, shouted: 'It's the architecture of freedom!'. Accustomed to the compliments of the 'largest free go in the world, with permanent load, covered in plan', I thought that the judgment of the great artist might be able to communicate what (I) meant when I designed the MASP: the museum was a 'nothing', a search for freedom, the elimination of obstacles, the ability to be free in the face of things. (Bardi Lina. In: MASP: the color of passion for art. São Paulo: MASP, 1990, s/ p.)

The MASP, since its physical structure, has worked with the issue of freedom. The possibility of appropriation of the Museum took place from its

free span, designed in such a way as to be used by the population in various ways, as Lina said:

I finally tried to recreate an 'environment' in the Trianon. And I'd like the people to go there, see outdoor exhibitions and discuss, listen to music, watch tapes. Even children, go play in the morning and afternoon sun. (Bardi, Lina, 1997, s/p.)

The staircase and elevators gave direct access to the Museum through this free space, inviting people to enter there <sup>2</sup>. The pinacotheca's room expanded into the city or let it in, establishing a dialogue between the works of art presented there and the life of the city that took place outside. To those who wanted to know more about the art works, the Museum provided information on the back of the easels that exhibited the pieces so as not to interfere in their contemplation. The realization of exhibitions such as "A Mão do Povo Brasileiro" showed an attentive look directed to the local Brazilian specificities, expanding this care with the collective of Brazil.

The broad set of actions of the Museum at that time was based on taking care of the arts by the bias of the collectivity, that is, to try to consider some of the multiple characteristics that artistic productions can have, as well as the varied specificities of the audiences to which the museum should turn.

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### Endnotes

1. The vocabulary "man" or "men" is used in the period to refer to humanity, human beings.
2. At the time there were no glass panels that currently surround the entrance to the Museum.

# Migration Heritage, Contemporary Art and Archives: Representations, Memories and Identities

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## **ABSTRACT**

Archives are generally viewed as ordered collections of historical documents that record information about people, objects, places and events. They are the main tools used by historians and other researchers to analyze society. Nevertheless, this definition of the archive obscures a crucial element: the archive is primarily concerned with representations, memories and identities. Museum's collections are invested by political categories and practices — be they ideological constructions, questions of visibility and representation, or the various ways in which power is exerted, contested or actualized in cultural practices. How recognizing memories can empower groups and minorities that have been subjugated or suppressed like for example in the case of migrant communities? Another important question is how contemporary artists use and disrupts the function of the archive as a foundation for their creative process, in doing so how do they highlight the internal dynamics and politics that are in creating/producing archives? The aim of this article is to highlight the different processes of displaying migration and archiving of the "memory" of different immigrant communities and how the contemporary artworks presented in the museum interact and dialogue with it.

## **KEYWORDS**

Migration; Museums; Contemporary Art; Archives.

Archives are generally viewed as ordered collections of historical documents that record information about people, objects, places and events. They are the main tools used by historians and other researchers to analyze society. Nevertheless, this definition of the archive obscures a crucial element: the archive is primarily concerned with representations, memories and identities.

Museum's collections are invested by political categories and practices — be they ideological constructions, questions of visibility and representation, or the various ways in which power is exerted, contested or actualized in cultural practices.

How recognizing memories can empower groups and minorities that have been subjugated or suppressed like for example in the case of migrant communities? Another important question is how contemporary artists use and disrupt the function of the archive as a foundation for their creative process, in doing so how do they highlight the internal dynamics and politics that are in creating/producing archives?

The aim of this article is to highlight the different processes of displaying migration and archiving of the "memory" of different immigrant communities and how the contemporary artworks presented in the museum interact and dialogue with it.

### **Staging Migration in Museums: How to display movement?**

Migration museums are confronted with the challenge of how to put on display a non- static phenomenon by nature: the continual displacement, the non-place. How to create a museography that shows the inconstancy of migration?

The moving frame: how to follow a mosaic of destinies to contribute, despite everything, to go from a plurality of crossed memories to a shared memory?

If the reference to a national narrative is not always as explicit in migration museums, those responsible for the museography were always conscious of the importance of the overall story these institutions were

seeking to tell. Narrative and display on migration museums are essential to create a more understanding society regarding migration.

Refugees and forced displacements are likely to become a defining issue of the 21st century.” says Alexander Betts, director of the Refugee Studies Centre at the University of Oxford (from 2014 to 2017). Mass migration, driven by conflict, oppression, political upheaval, economic distress and environmental disasters have been described as defining issues of this century along with climate change and the need to think of sustainable solutions in our cities and communities.

These traumatic relocations reshape the lives of the people who are displaced and of their new host communities, and ignite both the best and the worst of human behavior. Museums can use their influence to build bridges between established residents and newcomers: easing fears, building trust, and finding common ground to create a more united society. And new migrants can help museums reexamine their relationships to belonging, to heritage, and to social and ecological transformations. As members of museums’ communities, migrants and refugees bring their own particular needs, notably to remember and preserve their history and culture even as they settle into their new country.

Recent work in critical museum studies, has shown that migration museums can use objects and strategies of display to transmit positive representations of migration, promoting diversity and a more inclusive national identity as propagating a better knowledge of the subject. The idea is to see the museum as a space for transmission of images and representations: What is the representation of migration that is given to see in these museums?

In this paper, I will present different topics that are recurrent when analyzing the permanent exhibitions of different migration museums to try to identify its common structural points and to show how migration is represented.

The idea is also to see the museum as a space for perception of images and representations: What is the representation of immigration that is given to see in these museums?

Staging and displays are essential to understanding the production of museum discourse. It is the whole spatial arrangement, the layout and presentation of the objects and documents as well as all the texts (and the catalog) that produce a message, a speech to be interpreted by the visitor. In the exhibition, meaning is therefore intrinsically dependent on staging and space as the arrangement of things in order to allow access. Therefore, one can assume that, in examining the exhibition design, it is possible to identify some recurring elements that structure and characterize their display and narrative.

### **Recurring themes structuring the museum itinerary**

The exhibitions analyzed here (1) include different scenographies but the topics discussed remain the same when we talk about migration: the departure; the journey (and border crossing); arrival and sorting process with local authorities (medical visits, refusal or acceptance of entry into the host country); adaptation (or not - ‘rooting or not’) in the host country and contemporary migrations.

These themes basically function as threads for the museum’s narration recounting the experience of migrating. Maps and chronological context (such as timelines) are also presented to the visitor as historical support. Oral history is a strong feature in these museums as allied with testimonial objects it can bring plural narratives and memories to life. By adding these multivocal narratives the museum brings a more immersive and empathic approach as we will see further in this article.

The permanent exhibition (*Repères*) of the *Musée national de l’histoire de l’immigration* - MNHI focuses precisely on “small objects slipped into the pocket” before departure. A strong emphasis is placed on individual memories and personal narratives of departure and travel: the migration experience is presented at an individual level (especially when we look at the Galerie des Dons). (2)

Different from the permanent exhibitions of the Ellis Island Museum in New York and the *Museu da Imigração* de São Paulo, which support their museum narrative on the building history and the path of the immigrant upon his arrival in these places of passage that constitute these institutions (the governmental institutions of “sorting” immigrants), the *Repères* exhibition, is organized around concepts, of key words one could say, which guide the migratory experience. Thus, it is logical that the exhibition has as a starting point the very idea of *Departure*.

### I. The Journey

Another master theme central to the migrant experience (3) is the grand narrative of the journey. The voyage is the ‘rite of passage’ that transforms and conditions the very status of the individual who migrates. To migrate is to cross a sea, an ocean, a desert, a mountain: the journey, sometimes dangerous, to reach a new unknown land (which will become his new home). Like the myths in which the hero makes an initiatory journey: even if he returns to his point of departure (his native country), he is profoundly transformed by this experience.

For example, in the Ellis Island Museum there is a ‘grand’ narrative focused on the voyage. But is not a chronologically consistent one as visitors travel through different times before and after through the different permanent exhibitions that the museum presents.

Still, the narrative the museum conveys most powerfully is the drama of passing the inspection process and making it through Ellis Island’s gate. The inspection drama begins as visitors climb the restored stairs to the Great Hall, which immigrants climbed on their way in to be processed, observed as they climbed by doctors looking for possible weakness of heart, limb, or mind.

Another museum that structures its exhibition around the path of a migrant from its departure to its arrival in the new country is the *Galata Museo del Mare*. There we can find scale reproductions of the housing where migrants used to live in Genoa, passing through reproductions of the ships

accommodation during their voyage and the houses they would live before and after the “crossing”.

## 2. Human Diaspora or Immigration as a Human phenomenon

The perspective of migration as part of human nature is often presented to the public to highlight the “natural” origin of the phenomenon. By doing so, the museums are looking to find common ground in between visitors that never had the experience of migrating and those who have. It shows that moving and changing cities, countries or continents is part of human history and should be perceived as a common phenomenon that is part of humanity’s behaviour.

The *Museu da Imigração* starts its permanent exhibition with this theme under the name of ‘*Diaspora Humana*’ (‘Human Diaspora’). They present a video where the visitor can see the different migration routes that humanity used since prehistoric times to populate the earth.

The Red Star Line Museum also presents a chronology from antiquity to today to show how human migrations have always existed and how cultural exchanges are essential for humankind.

## 3. Workforce - Labor

The theme of Labor is also central in migration museums since the vast majority of a paid position of regular employment. Workplaces, formal or informal, remain the most important places of integration for migrants and refugees in their new country. Therefore, it is an important theme when displaying migration history.

In its permanent exhibitions the *Musée national de l’Histoire de l’immigration* and the *Museu da Imigração*, show the importance of work in creating a new network for the newly arriving migrants. By presenting working tools among other artifacts, these museums point to the relevance of migrants as a working force helping to build economic prosperity in their new home country.

#### 4. Iconic objects: the importance of the object as a memorial support

These themes presented above are often linked visually to the staging of a series of iconic objects, usually personal items such as luggage, travel documents (e.g. passports), migrants' letters, clothes or toys for babies and children. These objects are frequently used for their effective visual impact and their immediate connection with the themes of the exhibition. They are rarely of historical or artistic value in themselves still they embody the memory of migration and have a strong visual impact.

In exhibitions dealing with the theme of migration, whether temporary or *mise-en-scène* that evokes the "migrant experience". This presentation of objects is characterized by a desire to immerse the visitor in the museum narrative and thus create a sensory link between the displays and the visitor.

The suitcase remains the iconic object of immigration *par excellence*: whether presented alone or in support of interactive devices, it represents the 'magic box' that contains the objects chosen by the immigrant during his departure and who will accompany him on his journey to always remind him of his origins.

The moment of departure is crucial for those who decide to leave their country and to embark on the unknown that is the 'journey', dangerous in many cases, to access a new life. Once the sorting of memories and objects to bring with oneself, the suitcase presents itself as the "sacred" receptacle of these precious memories of a world which will remain in the past of those who leave. Thus, the suitcase would be this container that contains "memory objects" chosen by their personal symbolic importance, real relics that are supposed to recall and, to a certain extent, put in contact with the one who possesses them with his past and his family. The crossing to the unknown is done with his suitcase and the relics it contains: symbol of the traveler and also that of the immigrant, the exile.

Museums can ask visitors: What would be the object they would choose to bring with them if they were to leave their home and country forever? (4) This choice is very personal and intimate but some objects are quite common such as: family photographic albums.

The architectural context of migration museums often complements the visual communication of displays. These museums are usually located in places that have a history related to migration, such as docklands, border or departure and museums are located at historical buildings connected with stories of migration and bearing itself a memory of migration, making them very emblematic buildings.

It is necessary to historicize these *lieux de mémoire* (memorial spaces) and *lieux de passage* (transit spaces such as ports, train stations, airports but also temporary constructions created to hold and control migrants) while releasing their deep socio-anthropological sense. These places where migrants were processed and had their destinies changed forever are now ‘monuments’ to the memory of migration. It is very paradoxical to have those impressive buildings, once abandoned facilities, turned now into Museums dedicated to the history of migration (a *non-lieux* phenomenon).

#### **5. Contemporary art: a strategic solution to dealing with sensible histories?**

We would like to end this presentation by briefly evoking the importance of contemporary creation in museums of society and in our more specific example of the Museu da Imigração. As Noémie Drouguet points out: “Contemporary creation is regularly invited to participate in the “society” exhibition. Many museums now call on artists or integrate works to evoke societal aspects, in particular the most delicate issues to deal with. Does the artist replace the museographer/scenographer when the latter does not dare to address certain subjects? (Drouguet, 2015: 170).

The work of contemporary art, which has been disseminated since the 1990s in society museums (Yves Bergeron, 2010: 45), is also another source of immigration museums, because it makes it possible to open up yet another perspective on the subject matter. The contribution of contemporary art finds its relevance in the nature of a testimony of another order. Through the subjectivity of the artist, the visitor is invited to see the question of migrations from another angle and to confront his own perceptions on the subject with those of someone else. We must not forget that a work of art can

have a multitude of interpretations since the spectator, the one who observes it, is in co-creation with the artist of its meaning.

In 2015, the Ellis Island Immigration museum had an art installation by the contemporary French artist JR in the old hospital buildings that were never renewed. The process of creating this art installation had JR going through the archives of the museum looking for photographs and letters of migrants that have passed through Ellis Island. What were their hopes and dreams? But also their fears and regrets?

The name of the installation, “The Ghosts of Ellis Island”, says a lot about the idea of finding the traces left by those who passed through the walls of the abandoned hospital. The art installation was also the thematic of a short movie called *Ellis (5)*, where Robert de Niro reads the passages of letters found in the archives of Ellis Island and walks around the old hospital installations that are just ruins now.

The art installations of JR not only bring the “*lieu de mémoire*” memorial aspects of the building but also the importance of the archives (photos, letters and personal documents) to create art. This is a perfect example of how artists disrupt the function of the archive as a foundation for their creative process. The “appropriation” of historical documents to create an artwork that brings to life personal memories forgotten and by doing so, brings a new light onto the “migrant experience”.

Other migration museums also invite contemporary artists to create artworks that dialogue with their collections and permanent exhibitions. At the Museu da Imigração in São Paulo, since the reopening of the museums in 2014, contemporary artists were invited to create artworks that would create a dialogue with its permanent exhibition “Migration: experiences, memories and identity.” From 2014 to 2018, visitors to the Museu da Imigração began their journey with the work of Brazilian artist Nuno Ramos, placed at the entrance to the permanent exhibition, which is also the center of the exhibition, the central nerve, by the spatial arrangement of the building and thanks to its impressive size, it attracted the attention of the visitor: a lorry compartment filled with bricks tilted to the side to symbolize the question of work but also of migrations.

The title of the work is a question, thus the visitor is invited to ask himself questions at the beginning, to continue his reflection in the middle of his journey (and perhaps to question what he has been able to see until present) and, at the end of his visit, confront what he saw in the exhibition with the central idea of the artist: the question “Is this a man? » therefore remains central to the reflection on the permanent exhibition. The truck used in this work is often used to transport immigrant workers or migrants from the northeast of the country. The bricks symbolize those workers who helped build the economic wealth of the State of São Paulo. Thus, when the truck is overturned on its side, and the bricks break on the ground, they symbolize the fragility of the bodies of the immigrants transported by these trucks. The precariousness of the lives of these people who work in very difficult, sometimes subhuman conditions, is therefore highlighted by this work of strong visual impact.

The question of the humanity of the immigrant is therefore posed by this contemporary work of art, but the final interpretation is left to each visitor. The latter is free to give meaning to the installation of Nuno Ramos, each using his directory. It is a kind of prelude, prologue, preface and epilogue which announces and concludes the main theme of the exhibition: work.

When we analyze the symbolic choice of the artist, who was commissioned by the State of São Paulo and the new management of the museum to create this monumental work, it is clear that representing a truck which is not only used to transport building bricks but also immigrant workers from other regions of the country, mainly from the North-East, brings the question of the immigrant labor force to the center of the work. Whether immigrants from Europe, Asia or other regions of the country, the question of work is at the heart of these migrations since on their arrival they were directly assigned to the coffee plantations, to the emerging industry or even small trades in the city of São Paulo.

Since February 18, 2020, a new work of contemporary art has bridged the gap between the two parts of the exhibition: a videographic installation *SobreNomes*. This work uses the technique of mapping where a video is projected on a wall of thirteen meters at the entrance of the permanent exhibition. The central question posed to the visitor is: "What does your last name mean to you?"

With this question, the visitor is led to wonder about the heritage represented by his family name (6), as well as the origins to which he sheds light. As with the work of Nuno Ramos, work was at the heart of questions about immigration, with this new video-installation, the museum wants to highlight the heritage and the intergenerational nature of immigration.

To a certain extent, visitors are quite often more attracted to a subject where they can recognize themselves or if they feel concerned (or even exposed). This new work of contemporary art could invite visitors to recognize themselves in the exhibition. What is exhibited by the museum would therefore be constituent elements of his own family culture perhaps (if the visitor has immigrant origins) and therefore speak to him more, triggering more emotional reactions in him. Patrimonial emotions (Fabre, 2013: p. 10) provoked following the identification felt at the sight of memory objects or listening to the testimony from an immigrant, can be stronger than any academic analysis on the subject. Thus, the contribution of this work of art, combined with a museographic journey that favors oral history and witness objects, affirms the museum's desire to dialogue directly with its public and to lead it to feel empathy (Landsberg, 2009: 221) towards the comments and memories shared and exposed. The history of immigration is thus recognized on a more personal level and therefore appropriated by the visitor.

The latest artistic residency in progress at the museum has invited the artist Paulo Chavonga, who has worked directly with museum researchers to create an exhibition of portraits of people considered invisible in Brazilian society, "Rostos invisíveis da imigração no Brasil". In discourses on immigration to Brazil, the memorial and celebratory aspect of the old waves of immigration of European origin is often favored, but contemporary migrations from Africa or other Latin American countries as well as people of

indigenous origin and Syrian refugees, are "forgotten" and ignored. The importance of creating a space of visibility for these people from contemporary migrations is at the heart of this temporary exhibition project. Thus, this artistic residency is in direct harmony with the contemporary questions of the museum and the guidelines for creating a space for reflection on current debates within Brazilian society.

Nuno Ramos & Paulo Chavonga are both presenting artworks that deal with the invisibility of (poor) migrants that leads to high levels of exclusion (psychologically, physically and socio-economic exclusionary systems). The "fragility" of the bodies of migrants and their situation are shown through these two examples of contemporary artworks.

To finish this article we would like to comment on some of the artworks that were presented at the Cité nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration (CNHI), since 2013 Musée de l'histoire de l'immigration (MHI). This is a museum that presents a historical and cultural approach to immigration as well as contemporary works of art dealing with the theme of immigration.

A particular feature of this museum is the lack of a pre-existing collection, in other words, the current collection was "created" according to the guidelines in the scientific project. The collection follows three main guidelines: an historical axis with archives documents on immigration, an ethnographical axis based on objects that are donated by immigrants to the museum and a contemporary art axis with art works. The contemporary art collection at the focuses on artists from different backgrounds that have as their main subject migrations, post-colonialism and the concept of "transnationality".

The contemporary artworks and digital performances in relation to the archives on migration present at this museum are very important not only in the permanent exhibition *Repères*, but also in temporary exhibitions such *J'ai deux amours* (2011-2012); *Persona Grata* (2018-2019). We are going to analyze below some of the most significatives artworks in this museum collection.

The artwork “Climbing Down” by Barthélémy Toguo is exhibited since 2007 (the opening of the museum) in the “Lieux de vie” section of the permanent exhibition Repères, this work refers to housing for immigrants where the lack of privacy and the overcrowding of bodies is part of their daily reality. It was an impressive installation that caught the eye and attention of the visitor, wondering why this monumental bunk bed is at the heart of the exhibition. It makes the visitor reflect on the reality of the spaces where migrants sleep when they first arrive: most likely they will share a bedroom with a dozen other migrants and even sometimes the bed. Once again through the archival documents and the real objects presented in this section, the visitor is invited to reflect on the reality of the “migrant experience” when confronted to the impressive scaled bunk bed created by Barthélémy Toguo.

Another artwork that uses archives as a source of inspiration is the “Grand Ensemble” by Mathieu Pernot that presents a large set that brings together three series of photographs around the same subject. The title of the work, in the singular, refers both to the iconographic ensemble that constitutes the images and to the social housing districts integrated on the outskirts of major French cities from the 1950s to the 1970s. Here archival documents and old postcards serve as a way of documenting the implosions of HLMs (*habitation à loyer modéré* or low-rent housing in English) but also the anonymous witnesses that were immortalized in the pictures.

This large-format photograph is from a series taken between 2000 and 2006. It presents, quite frontally, the destruction of a building, as part of urban renovation operations. The building disappears under the heavy wisps of dust raised by the implosion. The photographer's lens then freezes the building in a moment of spectacular violence, the moment of its collapse and disappearance.

These enlargements of postcards, made by the photographer, bring out the imprecise silhouettes of the inhabitants of these places. The enlargement seems to have allowed the emergence of these figures. The tiny scale of these existences contrasts with the immensity of the places that house them. These characters often appear in a state of observation, “as if they were witnesses to something happening”, comments Mathieu Pernot.

This is the case, for example, of a woman and her daughter, who seem to be turning towards the lens at the moment of the shot.



**Fig. 1.** Artwork by Nuno Ramos at the Museu da Imigração, São Paulo, 2015.

### **Conclusion**

There are a series of questions and points that emerge when talking about migration museums (or other museums that present other cultures): What are the spaces of representation inside museums and what is the relationship with the representation of minority communities? The question of "editing" or Editing History is also present since the exhibitions always present a discourse constructed from a unique perspective. The question also of the mobility of exhibitions (mobile museum?) And permanent exhibitions which are renewed more frequently to "refresh the discourse" on the migratory phenomenon which is constantly changing. It is for this reason that many museums recently opened (like, for example, the Migration Museum in London and the new Immigration Museum in Brussels) offer temporary

exhibitions that are renewed more quickly than creating a permanent museography route.

The question of the representation of other cultures, which we mentioned in the questions related to immigration museums (at the start of this presentation), is central to creating a more inclusive exhibition that can raise and encourage a real dialogue between cultures. Memory and contemporary art are also central in the construction of exhibitions on immigration.

Artworks, personal items, audio-video testimonials, real scale reconstructions, common iconic objects such as suitcases and passports, and highly scenographic and interactive displays, are often used in the *new museography* presented by immigration or emigration museums. Their visual impact makes it easier to understand and remember what's on display. All these exhibit solutions are largely characterized by the intention to **stimulate empathy** in the visitor toward the story told and aimed at achieving a greater visitor involvement.

Also, the visual language adopted is different when the exhibition deals with contemporary migrations rather than with historical migrations. Museums dealing with contemporary migration frequently resort to more temporary displays where artworks, videos, and graphic design play an important role. On the other hand, museums presenting historical migrations, the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, would involve more permanent galleries and full scale.

Both undoubtedly work in creating a strong synergy with the museum narrative and the collection. Nevertheless, by repeating the same thematic approaches and using the same iconic topic of migration deserves. Hence, migration museums should encourage more multivocal projects and exhibitions, engaging different migrant communities to collaborate with them.

Finally, museums dedicated to the history of immigration remain recent initiatives in the international museum landscape, but as the theme is gaining in importance in the international political scenario, due to the current migration crisis, they are gaining space in contemporary discussions

on heritage and social inclusion. Even though some museum professionals argue that the ideal scenario would be to include the history of immigration in national history museums instead of having a museum dedicated to immigration itself, at the moment it is essential to have a platform to discuss and reflect on immigration as well as on the migratory phenomenon in our contemporary societies. With the growing role of museums as social actors, immigration museums could turn into a platform for discussion on the socio-economic inclusion of immigrants and refugees.

When talking of the museology of reconciliation, we have to think of how Migration museums are trying to create a link between the different communities (sometimes around the area of the museum, e.g. the Migration museum in Sao Paulo) and the museum space. Thus, opening up to become a space that fosters “social justice” and dialogue between different cultures and social backgrounds.

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## Endnotes

1. This article is based on my PhD research that focused on three Migration museums: the Ellis Island Immigration Museum in New York, the Museu da Imigração in Sao Paulo and the Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration in Paris. But during my research I also had the occasion to visit and analyse other museums that have exhibitions dedicated to migration (e.g. Red Star Line Museum in Antwerp and the Galata Museo del Mare in Genoa).

2. The exhibition *Repères* and the *Galerie des dons* was officially closed in December 2020.

3. Here we use the expression “migrant experience” as these museums try to create an immersive experience for the visitors, thus inviting the visitors to experience its visits through the point of view of an immigrant. That is what we can experience at the Ellis Island Museum in New York, the Deutsches Auswandererhaus in Bremerhaven, the Epic museum in Dublin or the Red Star Line Museum in Antwerp for example.

4. This is the main question asked to the visitors at the 19th Princelet Street project in Spitalfields, London. I had the occasion to visit and to interview the conceptors of this very unique project at the heart of a multicultural neighborhood in London and close to the famous Brick Lane from Monica Ali's book.

5. The short film is available on Youtube :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqLFq7WOOog&t=787s>

6. Here again the archives of the museum are used by the artists to create their artwork as the last names used in this installation are all the ones they found in the archives of arrivals that are still conserved at the museum.

# Laughter, Shame, Regret: Performance Art and the Social Recognition of Rape

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper addresses the issue of rape focusing on three performances held in the 2010s. In *If I Wanted Your Opinion, I'd Remove the Duct Tape*, poet, performer, and criminal appellate attorney Vanessa Place presents over 200 rape jokes. The Clifford Owens episode, during the *Anthology* exhibition held by MoMA PS1 from November 2011 to May 2012, involves a performance proposal written by Kara Walker that entailed the threat of forced sex. *Elegy*, by Gabrielle Goliath, honors one or more raped and murdered women through a chorus of lyric singers who, one after another, sustain a single musical note for one hour.

## **KEYWORDS**

Performance Art; Body Art; Rape; Violence in Art; Contemporary History of Art.

In 2017, an AI sex doll robot was on display for some hours at the Ars Electronica Festival in the city of Linz, Austria. The robot's name was Samantha and it/she was developed by Synthea Amatus, a Barcelona-based firm, with 11 sensors designed to respond to the user's touch and a thermoplastic elastomer outer layer designed to feel like human skin. The press material released at that time<sup>1</sup> states that “the doll may be touched and has different modes of interaction such as ‘romantic’, ‘sexy’ and ‘family’”

At Ars Electronica Festival, Samantha was wearing clothes — a white cropped t-shirt and shorts, a pair of sneakers — and was displayed sitting on a couch. Her creator, Sergi Santos, expected the visitors to talk to her, feel her skin, maybe hold one part or another to test the consistency of the artificial body. Instead, attendees mounted her breasts, legs, and arms, and broke two of the doll's fingers, all while being watched by others. Sergi Santos said at that time that Samantha was “heavily soiled”, and that the audience acted “like barbarians”.<sup>2</sup> This was unexpected behavior in a technology fair named “Ars Electronica”, specialized in artificial intelligence, which presented 1,000 artists and scientists from over 40 countries and brought together a hundred thousand visitors that year.<sup>3</sup>

Although Samantha is a robot, unable to feel (as far as we know), the incident shows how the public can become sexually abusive when the need for consent is not socially implicit. A similar situation took place in 1974 at Studio Morra, a gallery in Naples, when Serbian artist Marina Abramović performed one of her most famous works, *Rhythm 0*. It consisted of Abramović standing still in a room with a table, where 72 objects were disposed, including a rose, a feather, perfume, honey, bread, grapes, wine, scissors, a scalpel, nails, a metal bar, a gun, and a bullet. The proposal of the action provided by the artist at the time was:

Instructions

There are 72 objects on the table that one can use on me as desired.

Performance.

I am the object.

During this period I take full responsibility.

1974

Duration: 6 hours (8pm–2am.)

Studio Morra, Naples

(Reproduced in Abramović, 1998: 80.)

Art critic Thomas McEvilley (apud Ward 2012, 120), who was at the gallery, described that moment:

It began tamely. Someone turned her around. Someone thrusts her arms into the air. Someone touched her somewhat intimately. The Neapolitan night began to heat up. In the third hour all her clothes were cut from her with razor blades. In the fourth hour the same blades began to explore her skin. Her throat was slashed so someone could suck her blood. Various minor sexual assaults were carried out on her body. She was so committed to the piece that she would not have resisted rape or murder. Faced with her abdication of will, with its implied collapse of human psychology, a protective group began to define itself in the audience. When a loaded gun was thrust to Marina's head and her own finger was being worked around the trigger, a fight broke out between the audience factions.

According to Abramović's own testimony (The Museum of Modern Art 2009), when the six hours ended and the artist started to recover the movement, "[...] naked and with blood, and tears in my eyes", the audience literally ran out of the gallery.

It might be argued that displaying a table with 72 objects and assuming responsibility is already a consent for the acts that happened in that room at Studio Morra. One might argue that exhibiting a sex robot, or the very existence of a sex robot, is a consent for the assault in *Ars Electronica*. In both cases, the actions of the audience were collective — or, as Frazer Ward (2012, 123) states in his analysis of *Rhythm 0*, "[...] it generated an amalgam of the

exposure of gendered fantasy and the adumbration in the negative of an ethical community. It did so in almost as aversive a form as it is possible to imagine [...]. Both approaches only stopped because the object of submission was taken from the audience. The object, in both cases, was a female body.

The objectification of the female body in Western cultures, argues the philosopher and feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz (1994), dates back to ancient Greece and is consequence of a correlation that associates the separation of mind and body with the opposition between men and women. According to Grosz (1994, 5), Western philosophy has been affected by a "profound somatophobia" since Plato — one that claims the body as "[...] a betrayal of and a prison for the soul, reason, or mind", that should be ruled by reason to enable a harmonic relation within the state, the family, and the individual. Aristotle distinguished matter or body from form, relating the shapeless matter of the body to women and maternity — establishing, therefore, "the binarization of the sexes, the dichotomization of the world and of knowledge" (Grosz 1994, 5).

Within Christian tradition, the separation between mind and body was related, respectively, with what is immortal (sacred) and what is mortal (lustful, sinful). This opposition, Grosz sustains (1994, 6), was intensified after Descartes detached soul from nature by distinguishing, in human bodies, a thinking substance (*res cogitans*, mind) and an extended substance (*res extensa*, body), the latter governed by nature's physical laws and ontological exigencies. "This exclusion of the soul from nature [...] is the prerequisite for founding a knowledge, or better, a science, of the governing principles of nature, a science which excludes and is indifferent to considerations of the subject." (Grosz 1994, 6).

Still according to Grosz (1994, 13-14), the connections between mind, reason, and male, and between body, nature, and female, have been consolidated for centuries in Western cultures — relying on essentialism, naturalism and biologism to stablish a common sense that women are somehow more biological, more corporeal, and more natural than men. Such premises justify misogynist assumptions about women's secondary social

position, due to their supposed vulnerability, weakness, and unreliable behavior.

The coding of femininity with corporeality in effect leaves men free to inhabit what they (falsely) believe is a purely conceptual order while at the same time enabling them to satisfy their (sometimes disavowed) need for corporeal contact through their access to women's bodies and services (Grosz 1994,14).

Transmitted as the truth throughout generations and societies, the notion of female bodies as someone else's property and responsibility became common sense, as well as the idea that sexual violence indirectly affects the property or the honor of a third party (a father, a husband, a group, or a nation). According to the Argentinian anthropologist Rita Segato (2014), sexual crimes against women must be understood as crimes of domination and submission. She defends the demystification of the rapist as a person who practices violence for sexual pleasure. Rape has existed as a mean of domination and humiliation since early civilizations, and its understanding as a crime against human life is relatively recent, a notion assimilated by Western countries over the past century.

This unconsciously shared belief, among others, explains the existence of rape jokes — those in which the concept, the action, or simply the word “rape” are mentioned with humorous intention. Most of these jokes are narrated by men, usually the rapist or the husband, while victims are often women and children. When such joke is told, it is usually by a man surrounded by male friends, although occasionally a humorist breaks this implicit rule to attract attention or to shock others.

The gender of the joke teller, therefore, is one of the sources of discomfort operating in the performance *If I Wanted Your Opinion, I'd Remove the Duct Tape*, by the poet, performer and criminal appellate attorney Vanessa Place. The artwork, which has been presented in museums, galleries, and festivals since 2016,<sup>4</sup> consists of the reading of over two hundred jokes in a monotone voice for 45 minutes. Vanessa Place, the reader, wears a

suit and neither greets nor thanks the audience. The spotlight is on the crowd, while she remains in the shadows.

The performance's text was published in the book *You Had to Be There: Rape Jokes* (PowerHouse Cultural Entertainment 2018). Place has significant experience with the subject of rape — as a defense appellate attorney, she represents indigent convicted sex offenders, the ones that can't afford a lawyer.<sup>5</sup> Based on Freud, the artist (2017) states that a joke is a sudden discharge of repression — often sexual, often kind of obscene — and, in this sense, it ends up having the same structure as rape: a violent discharge of repressed sexuality.



**Fig 1.** Vanessa Place. *If I Wanted Your Opinion, I'd Remove the Duct Tape*. Performance. NU Performance Festival 2016, Tallinn, Estonia. Courtesy of the artist.

As the lights are on the audience, spectators become aware of laughing and are watching their neighbors, which are also watching them. Vanessa Place<sup>6</sup> believes that, at some point, the performance becomes less about what she is saying and more about the reactions.

By collecting these jokes and reading in public what should be restricted to small groups of male adults, Place shows how objectifying some bodies and the possibility of rape adhere to the social repertoire to the point

that the narrative of some cases is not understood as revolting but as laughable. This alien is admitted, to a large extent, because the content is understood as something in the field of imagination. The situation changes when the chance of being raped is more palpable, even though it remains in the artistic sphere.

### **An uncomfortable approach**

During the *Anthology* exhibition held by MoMA PS1 in 2011 and 2012, Clifford Owens challenged himself to present 26 performance scores — written or graphical instructions for actions. The propositions were provided by a multigenerational group of African American artists to highlight the contribution these artists have made to the history of performance art and of contemporary art.<sup>7</sup> For 10 months, on a weekly basis, Owens performed the scores in various locations of the building, which were documented in photographs and video for the exhibition. One of them overcame the interest of the others: it was Kara Walker's piece. A longtime researcher on suffering inflicted on the bodies of African descents during the slavery period in the United States, including the exploitation of bodies by the white landlord, Walker delivered to the exhibition a performance score that involved the possibility of forced sex, with Owens as the perpetrator.

The executions of Kara Walker's proposition happened in a studio, where the audience was instructed not to sit down, but to stand along the perimeter of the room. Christopher Y. Lew, Assistant Curator of MoMA PS1 and the exhibition's organizer, started by reading the score as Owens paced the room trailed by a photographer and camerawoman. A description by the performance artist, writer, and curator Marissa Perel (2011) explains the dynamics of Owens' performance:

We are all lining the hallway of the 3rd floor in front of the *Anthology* exhibition at PS1. Owens hands Walker's score to curator Christopher Lew, and asks him to read it aloud. "Score: French kiss an audience member. Force them against a wall and demand sex. The audience/viewer should be an adult. If they are willing to

participate in the forced sex act abruptly turn the tables and you assume the role of victim. Accuse your attacker. Seek help from others, describe your ordeal. Repeat.”

Owens then saunters up and down the hall, eyeing people, pausing, considering the bodies of different audience members. From my vantage point, I am only able to see one side of the performance. Owens seems to prefer approaching white women. He goes up to one woman repeatedly and lightly touches her hip, the outline of her ass. She holds her body tenuously, allowing the touch but turning her head away from his gaze. He backs away. He turns toward another woman standing against the opposite wall. They kiss and he begins to feel up her shirt. I don't know what initiates the breaking apart, whether she says no, turns her head, or he senses that she can go no further.

Owens advances toward another woman who is not white. She crosses her arms and keeps them crossed. He plays with her scarf, she stands still with a steely look in her eyes. He continues on to a woman who appears to be in her 50's, distinctly older in age than the majority of his choices thus far. This gets steamy. They make out for a while and she, unlike the other women, wraps her arms around him and brings his body close. He touches the lining of her pant-zipper and she appears to be deciding whether or not to permit more. She says “no,” and they hold each other's gaze for an instant before he stops. In between each new advance on different audience members, Owens asks Lew to re-read the score aloud, which serves to build suspense among the audience via the persistent language of coercion. Owens wears an affect of confidence as he takes time to gaze at everyone; there is a sense of power in his gait, and a force driving his experiment that fills the space with a subtle sense of terror.

During the exhibition season, Clifford Owens performed only the first part of Kara Walker's score. A video and photographs of Owens's previous performances lined one wall of MoMA PS1, so the audience members had the chance to see how others had reacted during the previous iterations. They were therefore supposed to be aware of the performance's unfolding.

However, there was always a veiled risk, as the score reminded the audience repeatedly.

In March 2012, by the end of his residence at PSI, Owens declared in an interview<sup>8</sup> that he was nervous because he would execute Kara Walker's whole score on the last presentation of the season. On the following day, Walker sent a note to Owens withdrawing the score from the exhibition.<sup>9</sup> "Your interpretation of my score, which I composed as a hypothetical, a 'modest proposal' in the Swiftian sense has pushed at the boundaries of what I deem acceptable. [...] Challenging and highlighting abusive power dynamics in our culture is my goal, replicating them is not." (apud Jovanovic 2012).

Later that Sunday, when Owens entered the room, Kara Walker joined him.<sup>10</sup> As he approached the audience, she was beside him, watching both the performer and the visitors. He ended up kissing only two people, his hands tight firmly behind his back. The participation of Kara Walker, allegedly invited by Owens, completely changed the way the score was performed.

Walker became a worldwide known artist in 1994, when she started presenting installations such as *Gone, A History of a Civil War as It Occurred Between the Dusky Thighs of One Young Negress and Her Heart* (1994), a parody of the famous *Gone with the Wind* with silhouettes of compromising master-enslaved relationships. Walker's silhouettes illuminate the racist political and social histories of the United States and other colonized countries and denounce the perpetuation of racist stereotypes and domination through sexual violence within literature, material histories, and the Western art historical canon. The context addressed by Walker adds a layer to the previously mentioned inequalities between mind and body, reason and nature, male and female: the one that is established, through domination, between Europeans and native peoples from other continents; the latter are understood by the invaders of their lands as intellectually inferior and thus should receive orders and be subdued.

According to this logic, African bodies, as well as those of indigenous people on the American continent and Oceania, lost their freedom during the colonization process and were exposed to inconceivable torture. Europeans and landowners raping enslaved women and women in indigenous villages

was a current practice for up to four centuries, and forced miscegenation is inscribed in the DNA of populations such as Brazilians.<sup>4</sup> “Rape and the act of possessing and violating the Black female body were common practices, as was the lynching of Black men accused of having had sexual relations with white women or merely having spoken to, whistled at or tried to approach them” (Kilomba 2010, 96).

The assumption of a subservience of these bodies, and the supposition that they are predisposed to wild attitudes, have made them a frequent target of various types of prejudice and violence, including sexual, until the present days. Coco Fusco (2001, 10) states that even between modern 20<sup>th</sup> century artists and ethnographers in Europe and the United States, “[...] the desire for black bodies was derived from perceptions of them as repositories of transgressive energies which would serve as antidotes for a white society suffering from excessive rationality and spiritual emptiness”. Concerning Native women in United States, Sarah Deer (2015, XX) reports:

The oft-repeated statistics reflect a grim reality that rape has become the “norm” in tribal communities. Yet skepticism about the accuracy and reliability of hard numbers has at times threatened to eclipse the larger concern about the harm rape does to tribal societies. I argue that too much emphasis has been placed on “proving” a human rights crisis that Native women have been documenting and explaining for generations.

Among the multiple aspects that are involved in the construction of the social convention that some bodies are hierarchically inferior to others, a considerable role is played by the naturalization of certain images through art. The aggressive and sexual approach to women, often personified by the supposed heroes of an era, is pervasive in the history of art and visual culture from Hellenistic Greece to modern times. Mythological themes expressed by Greeks and Romans in sarcophagi, paintings, and sculptures, also known as “heroic rapes” — such as the rape of Cassandra by Ajax the Lesser, the abduction of Persephone, the rape of Lucretia by Tarquin the rape of Proserpina, and the rape of the Sabine women — inspired painters and

sculptors since the Renaissance, reinforcing such acts were not only as acceptable, but as worthy of appreciation. A similar approach can be found among visiting or resident artists of the colonies in the 15th to 19th centuries when portraying indigenous or enslaved descendants of Africans. Acts of violence inflicted on them, and sometimes subtle indicatives of sexual violence, became part of museums and domestic environments, rarely accompanied by a critical reading.

Theorists like Aby Warburg and, more recently, Georges Didi-Huberman and Stephen Eisenman, have discussed how visual repertoire influence the way people feel authorized to certain attitudes, including violent acts. In his book *The Abu Ghraib Effect* (2007), Eisenman analyzes photographs taken by United States soldiers of various tortures at the prison of Abu Ghraib, in Iraq, and finds astonishing visual proximities between those images and famous works of art, like paintings by Michelangelo, Caravaggio and Edouard Manet, and engravings by William Hogarth and Francisco de Goya. Mentioning Warburg's concept of an artistic *nachleben* (afterlife) of images, Eisenman (2007, 53) argues that the photographs of torture at Abu Ghraib are part of a much bigger group of images over the history and can be seen as the product of a "heritage stored in memory".

They are the expression of a malevolent vision in which military victors are not just powerful, but omnipotent, and the conquered are not just subordinate, but abject and even inhuman. The presence of the latter, according to this brutal perspective, gives justification to the former; the supposed bestiality of the victim justifies the crushing violence of the oppressor. (Eisenman 2007, 17).

The concept of *Nachleben der Antike* (afterlife of Antiquity) was proposed by Warburg in 1893 to comprise the ways in which certain characteristic motifs of pagan art and literature were identifiable in paintings from the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries — not necessarily as figurative topics, but as psychic forces activated by cultural memory, crystalized for long periods and then released in an unexpected manifestation. Eisenman demonstrates in his

book how this aesthetic information is fluid and easily accessible in our days, being reproduced by US soldiers probably not conscious of possessing this visual repertoire informed (and formed) by Manet, Caravaggio, Goya, and much older references. Following the same parameters, people in Western cultures with access to masterpieces suggesting rape and violence against women get used to this idea as something shameful, yet still part of life.

### **Mourning as a politic act**

Given this load of a past that sustains the existence of rape in Western society, artworks that mention the theme critically, and through the body, can serve as an antidote to a growth of consciousness on the subject. Indignation with what seems inevitable is the motivation for the performance project *Elegy*, started by South African artist Gabrielle Goliath in 2015. For this work, a delegated performance, Goliath hires seven lyric singers to take turns projecting a musical note, a natural B, over the course of an hour. All singers are dressed in black. Each should climb the stairs of a small platform, project the note with the breath of her lungs and come down when she can no longer hold the note, when she is replaced by the following singer in line, with the effect of a continuous sound.

The *tour de force* is preceded by the reading of a brief statement, which informs the audience that the presentation is a mourning for one or more South African women. Gabrielle Goliath invites female writers to honor the memory of women killed after suffering extreme violence. Among them are Louisa van de Caab, an enslaved woman killed by her intimate partner in 1786; Kagiso Maema, a transgender woman murdered in 2018; and the couple Sizakele Sigasa and Salome Masooa, murdered after a corrective rape in 2007.

The singers, previously oriented by Goliath, project their voices keeping in mind the story of the women they honor and of others they might have known who were under similar situations, granting them the love and dignity they were denied in life. The labor is physically and emotionally exhausting, what is visible during the presentation. By this continuous lamentation, Goliath establishes an event where pain and sorrow are vocalized

and turned into other sort of disruptive release — maybe as uncontrollable as the laughter.

This effect was potentialized when the video documentation of seven *Elegy* performances became an open-sound installation in 2019. Seven video screens were disposed in a vertical position, describing a semicircle, each showing a one-hour presentation. This installation, also called *Elegy*, was released in Venice by the time Goliath was awarded a Future Generation Special Prize.



**Fig. 2.** Gabrielle Goliath. *Elegy – Eunice Ntombifuthi Dube*. Performance. The Centre for the Less Good Idea, Johannesburg, 2018. Photo by Stella Tate. Courtesy of the artist.

Gabrielle Goliath’s piece is a long run, and the natural B sound persists in the audience’s ears for a long time; but some honoring actions can be brief and last for life. In 2015, Brazilian performer Hilda de Paulo had a name tattooed above one of her eyebrows: Gisberta. The act figures as an artistic tombstone to Gisberta Salce, a transgender Brazilian woman who lived in

Portugal and was raped, tortured, and murdered by 13 teenagers in 2006, while she was living on an abandoned building.



**Fig. 3.** Hilda de Paulo. *Me, Gisberta*, 2015. Photography + Text-Manifesto, 100 x 100 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Hilda, also a Brazilian “travesti”<sup>12</sup> living in Portugal, denounces the silence of the Portuguese court, which has not condemned any of the 13 people involved in the murder. According to the artist (2022), “in *Me, Gisberta* — as well as in other body art works performed through tattooing —, I

maintain an uninterrupted exhibition on my own body, which operates as a relational aesthetic, permanently bringing to light the dark history that surrounds Gisberta Salce [...]. *Me, Gisberta* is a discreet call that stays on Hilda's face, a fear for the same fate, a protest for the end of transphobia and of the colonial power that still interfere in the lives of people from the former colonies.

Throughout this overview, I hope to have shown how performance artworks can raise an intimate identification and encourage a deeper reflection on prejudice, co-responsibility, and conditions for the permanence of this practice in different contexts. Since our eyes are impregnated with a not so honorable past, perhaps the other senses can help to get us out of this vicious circle and establish non-violent parameters of coexistence.

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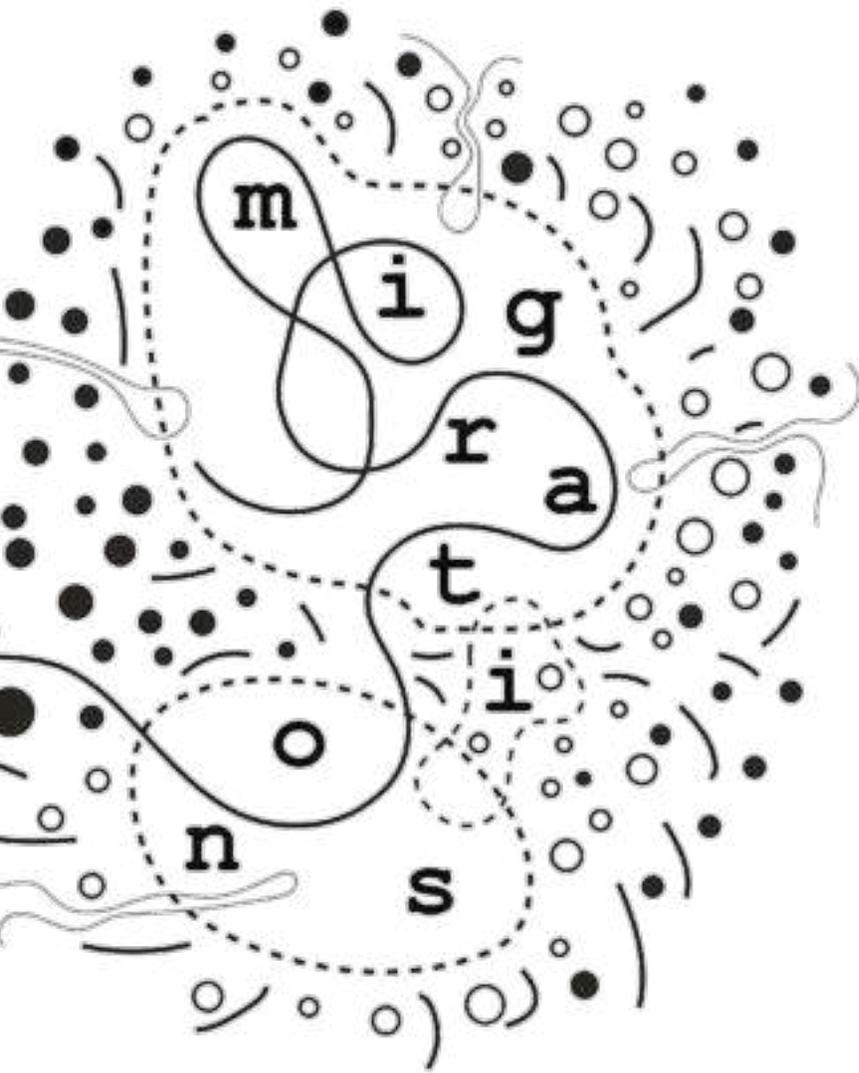
11. Preliminary results of the research DNA in Brazil, conducted by the University of São Paulo Institute of Biosciences, through the complete sequencing of the genome of 1,247 volunteers, attests that 75% of the genetic burden from Brazilian ancestors come from Europeans and 0.5 %, indigenous. As for the genetic load that maps the exclusively female lineage, 34% come from indigenous people and 14%, from European. Adding female percentages, 70% of the genetic load of the Brazilian population comes from African and indigenous people, and 75% of the paternal load was provided by Europeans.

12. The denomination "travesti" (transvestite) is used by Hilda de Paulo and by Brazilian authors such as Leticia Nascimento (*Transfeminismo*, Ed. Jandaíra, 2021) to give visibility to this socially marginalized gender identity, recalling the aggressions historically suffered by these women and the resistance of ancestors who made room for their inclusion in society.

# Voyages Between Brazil and Italy

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## Session 16



## Session 16

# Voyages between Brazil and Italy\*

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Considering the main theme of the 35th World Congress of the Comité International d'Histoire de l'Art – Motion – this special session was conceived both in continuity and as a connection between two different CIHA Italy-Brazil meetings that took place – the first in Florence, in 2019, focusing more specifically the concept of motion, the second in São Paulo, in 2022, which discussed migrations. Between the two meetings, the world changed in an unexpected and difficult way: the Sars Cov-19 pandemic, ironically, suspended temporarily both motions and migrations worldwide. Uncertainties postponed the Brazilian Congress a few times; when it finally took place, mobility was still a concern, as motion was not freely possible worldwide. In spite of all the problems, the Congress was held, our session occurred, and it was warmly welcomed by the speakers and the public. Technology once again shortened distances, allowing virtual voyages and meetings.

In this session our goal was to discuss the concepts of voyage and/or migrations, besides their possible derivations, with specific focus on the artistic and cultural exchanges as well as migrations between Italy and Brazil (either as part of Portuguese territory or as an independent nation). Scholars in different fields, from various institutions, presented their ideas on the concepts of “Voyage” and/or “Migrations”, focusing the many relations between Brazil and Italy, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We hoped to discuss the journeys of artists, critics or cultural

promoters, as well as the circulation of objects, concepts, visual recordings and written sources.

As a result, we were bestowed with wonderful presentations that reinforced the artistic connections between both countries at least since the nineteenth century, when the Prix de Voyage was given to students from the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts (Academia Imperial de Belas-Artes – AIBA) in order to study in Rome (Paris, in fact, was not the only destiny aimed by Brazilian artists). The history of travel governed by academic institutions was addressed here using new historiographical points of view, as in Mazzarelli's talk, which focused on the practices of sojourning in foreign lands and on the exercise of copying from ancient art as a way of socializing and sharing patterns and tools. Two talks on Pedro Américo, the traveling artist par excellence in Brazil (from 1866 until his death in 1905), showed how multifaceted may be the new iconographic, stylistic, and theoretical references acquired through Italian sojourns. Almeida and Scapol Monteiro have enabled us to unravel this complex matter.

Still, in the nineteenth century, this movement between Italy and Brazil was particularly reinforced with the arrival of Teresa Cristina of Bourbon, the Italian princess who became Empress of Brazil. Regarding this interesting figure of a sovereign of the Bourbon family, born in Naples, a lover of art and archaeology, art and antiquities collector, we were fortunate to listen to speeches by both Italian and Brazilian scholars (Ruga and Azevedo). Here, too, the crossing of gazes and historiographies ensured a fuller understanding of the topic. On the one hand, emphasizing the sovereign's starting point, her background, her family's artistic commitments; on the other hand, following the developments, the changes that took place in Brazil in the encounter with her spouse and the local arts and museum system.

Migrations from Italy to Brazil, in the last years of the nineteenth century and in the first decades of the twentieth century, were especially of people who brought their culture and experiences to a new country. This process reinforced liaisons between both countries, and sustained artistic connections throughout the twentieth century, which were made evident, for instance, in several events. It is, in fact, no coincidence that many speakers at our session dwelt on expositions, congresses and exhibitions, such as the

Commemorative Exhibition of the 50th Anniversary of Official Immigration, in São Paulo, in 1937 (Marinho), the first Brazilian participation at the Venice Biennale in 1950, the first Bienal Internacional de São Paulo, in 1951, known as the first modern(ist) exhibition outside the well-established geographical axis between Western Europe and United States of America, in which the Italian section was one of the largest. Or even concentrates on the Extraordinary International Congress of Art Critics, held in the same city in 1959, concomitant to the Biennial (Caputo). Iamurri and Casini addressed for us the analysis of key figures of these artistic exchanges, mediators and critics such as the already well-known Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, Lionello Venturi, Pietro Bardi, Lina Bo Bardi.

All these events stress the artistic and political importance of the Italian presence in Brazil. The figures of Buzzi (with his three Brazilian Rooms), Di Prete e Buffoni have been the focus of analysis by Nigro, Freitas and Rocco, and the network of relationships between artists of both countries (Cordeiro, Dias) was the center of investigations for Espada and Guimarães Martins, as the circulation of an artistic movement in Italy show: the Brazilian Concrete Poetry throughout the 1960s and 1970s (Perna).

We were glad to realize the connections between different papers that were presented during our session, which give us hope that it may have new developments in the future, in seminars or new interconnected researches.

*\* Connecting session between Firenze 2019 and São Paulo 2022, in collaboration with the Italian scientific committee*

# Brazilian Artists in Italy in the 19th Century: Visiting Museums, Copying the Great Masters

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## **ABSTRACT**

In the context of the change of Italian Museum system during the Nineteenth century, as a place increasingly open to the public of travelers and tourists, this paper intends to question itself on the comparison created by Brazilian painters with the reality of the museum as a whole: spaces but also its "actors" - from the custodians to the Directors - the other artists, from all provenance, who simultaneously attend the rooms of the museums visited by the Brazilians, the impact with the system of regulations and, last but not least, the comparison with the selected works of art selected as reference models. The "experience" of Rome also of Brazilian artists is reconstructed in its complexity as a shared experience: artists from Europe and the Americas chose Italian cities, Rome, Venice, Naples and Florence in particular, as privileged places of comparison with different and cosmopolitan realities. Privileged sources are the "licenses" for access to museum to copy: an often underestimated documentation connected with the disciplines that regulated entrance to the Museums and which is extremely interesting for the study in question.

## **KEYWORDS**

Copie; Voyage in Italy; Visiting Museums.

This paper proposes a different view on the theme of the journey to Italy by artists from the Americas and Brazil in particular during the Nineteenth century. Focusing on the mobility of people, objects and ideas, and on the osmosis of artistic and cultural transfers, the theme of migration will unfold from two points of view: that of the encounter of Brazilian artists with a complex institution typical of the Italian reality, museums and academies in particular, and that of the migration of models considered exemplary by the artists who copy them in Italy.

The copy itself can be understood as a form of "movement" of the original object from a twofold perspective: it transforms it, re-elaborates it also in formal, stylistic and technical terms, but it is also a material migration since, as happened in the same years for many other Academies in Europe and World, the copies reproduced in Italy by Brazilian painters are in fact destined to the greater part of the cases to increase the collections of the Academy of Rio de Janeiro and to contribute to the construction of a national art school, especially for history painting.<sup>11</sup>

The case study I am proposing, should be seen in the context of a broader research question. The theme of travel in Italy between the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries also raises questions about the experience of the first public museums: what forms of museum use were being defined in this period? Which publics are admitted, which are excluded in relation to a new notion of "open museum" but also to the Regulations that the institutions are simultaneously implementing? In this perspective, I also intend to look at and therefore re-read the copying and study practices of the artists admitted to the Museum, and I intend to try to "enter" the spaces, reinterpreting them from a transnational point of view: the Museum is therefore also intended as a space of encounter and confrontation not only between artists and artefacts studied and copied, but also between artists and institutions, as well as between artists and artists coming from multiple cultures and geographies.

The starting point is Rome during the Restoration period, i.e. between 1814 and 1870, for two reasons: firstly, because following the return of

artworks from France, as is well known, the existing museums were renovated, while new institutions were also set up; finally, there were numerous campaigns for the restoration and protection of ancient and modern monuments.

Moreover, studies conducted in recent years on the arts system in this phase of the Papal capital's history have amply highlighted the peculiar cosmopolitan dimension of Nineteenth-century Rome, thanks to the structural role that this city continued to maintain throughout the Nineteenth century as a capital for the education of artists, which made it a privileged ground for reading art history from a transnational perspective.<sup>22</sup>

What sources can be used to answer these initial questions? On the one hand, we will use the artists' correspondence and, on the other hand, a less explored but extremely interesting documentation: the requests for licences to study and copy in museums, regulated by papal legislation since the mid 18th century.

In both cases, these sources testify to how complex it was for an artist to move around in a city like Rome, especially if he or she was a foreigner and needed to build up a solid education and, possibly, a remunerative profession in the cosmopolitan capital of the arts. The "licences", in particular, tell us about the evolution of the systems, generated by the opening of the Museums, of "disciplining" the public admitted (or excluded) and, more generally, of the different forms that the experience and enjoyment of the City with its monuments, churches, palaces and antiquities takes in the age of the first and second Restoration. They also allow us to interpret this system in a dialogical perspective: from the point of view of the artists in relation to the institutions and, vice versa, from the perspective of the progressive actions of protection of the monuments implemented by the Papal State during this period, as well as to "network" the many actors involved, from the Academies to the European and World diplomacies. In a certain sense, this documentation allows us to "map" the world in Rome and, at the same time, offers precious indications on the directions in which models were exported from Rome to the world. These materials allows us to record that multiplicity

of geographies which we have mentioned above and which coexists in Rome and often finds a meeting point in the Museum, as well as in the Academies.<sup>33</sup>

For example: from requests submitted between the 1840s and 1860s: we find the Mexican Primitivo Miranda, who had come to Rome as a student at the Academy of San Carlos, asking to enter the Pinacoteca Capitolina in 1842 with a declaration of eligibility signed by Giovanni Silvagni, a professor at the Academy of San Luca; in 1855 there is a request from the sculptor Shakspere Wood, "a citizen of S. M. Britannica" commissioned, according to the request, by the Academy of Fine Arts "which has just been established in Madras in the East Indies, to take castings of all the most remarkable works of statuary and architecture existing in this Metropolis";<sup>44</sup> and again it was for a Crucifix to be sent to Montevideo in Uruguay that Vincenzo Podesti asked to copy "the Crucifix by Guido Reni in the church of San Lorenzo in Lucina "having been commissioned by the Papal Consul".<sup>55</sup> In 1868 there is a request from "Augusto Chatelain" who "having been commissioned to make a small copy of Pietro Bianchi's Conception for a church in New York [...]".<sup>66</sup>

It is therefore from these assumptions that I propose some reflections on the journey to Italy by Brazilian artists. The historical-political context is the one following 1840 and the coronation of Dom Pedro II which, as we know, coincided with the definition of the national character of the Empire and the unity of the state guaranteed by the monarchy: Brazil, definitively separated from Portugal, assumed from that moment on the character of a specifically American nation. The journey in Italy of Brazilian artists represents an essential step in academic education, particularly since 1845 when the Brazilian government decided to support the Academy's students with a scholarship for a stay in Italy and in Europe, largely inspired by the French model of Prix de Rome.<sup>77</sup>

In fact, it is interesting to recall the exhortation speech to the students presented by the director F. Emile Taulnay as early as 1834 which, as noted by Luciano Migliaccio, clearly highlights the desire to give the Academy a priority role in the construction of a public and an art market in the capital, creating a national art project starting from the dialogue with foreign travelers.<sup>88</sup> It may be interesting to recall how the words "migration/movement" are

programmatically solicited in this discourse as a synonym of a modernity to be pursued, of a progress based on mutual exchange with Europe:

The spirit of association is fervent. Communications are opening up... steamships, canals, roads, railways, the immense arteries of the great empire, are showing you productive activity and entrepreneurial genius on all sides. And you, in order not to be left behind in this noble progress, which magnifies the future of the arts, to the artists who will bring the current of immigration from Europe, you will have to offer, with the help of generous hospitality, the participation in the observations that, for the benefit of the arts and for the honour of the Brazilian school, a brilliant and happy experience will have suggested to you.<sup>99</sup>

It should also be noted that in this context, the stay in Rome remained the most sought-after destination in the programme of training trips to Europe proposed by the Imperial Academy; a stage, that of Rome, reserved only for the most promising artists. The papal capital was clearly seen as an essential resource for this exchange aimed at the advancement of the arts, not only because of the models of artistic tradition on which to draw but also as a forge of social, cultural and material avant-garde experiences. Next to Paris, the pontifical capital of the Restoration, represents in fact a point of reference for Brazilian artists formed in this time frame: from Agostinho de Mota and Victor Meireles who arrived in the early 50s to Zeferino de Costa, Prix de Rome in the 1868 where he studied with the painter Cesare Mariani.<sup>100</sup>

For these artists their stay in Rome was a fundamental stage in their training but also in their subsequent role within the Brazilian artistic school. An example of this comparison with the cosmopolitan reality of the city is, for example, Agostino José de Motta's frequentation of the French painter Benouville in Rome, where he resided from 1851 to 1859. He was therefore in close contact with the artistic environment of the Academy of France at the Villa Medici, directed at the time by Jean Alaux, and with the cosmopolitan community of landscape painters present in the city, as is well testified by the

painting, the *View in Rome* today in RdJ clearly related to the contemporary landscapes of Benouville himself.<sup>11</sup>



**Fig. 1.** Agostino de Mota, *Vista de Roma*, 1851–55, Rio de Janeiro, Museu Nacional de Belas Artes

However, among the cases mentioned above, I would like to focus in particular on Victor Meirelles, a well-known artist whose influence as a teacher of history painting in Brazil was to last until the early decades of the 20th century and on whom research by Jorge Coli and Luciano Migliaccio, among others, has already contributed to clarifying the importance of his Italian sojourn.<sup>12</sup>

But the training path of this artist, who won the Prix de Rome for travelling in Europe in 1852, allows us to reflect on the theme of interest in this paper in a number of ways. As mentioned by the first biographers, after entering the Academy of Fine Arts in Rio de Janeiro in 1847, Meirelles moved

to Rome in 1853, where he studied under two of the main masters active in the papal capital; figures of reference for the cosmopolitan community of artists present in Rome, also due to the academic and institutional positions they held: Tommaso Minardi and Nicola Consoni. They both were among the most influential figures in the city, with key roles as professors at the Accademia di San Luca; Minardi at the height of his prestige, in 1854 had been forced to leave teaching at the Accademia and move his studio from the Palazzo Colonna to the Palazzo Doria following a stroke of apoplexy but by 1858 he had received the important role of Inspector of Public Paintings and further important government appointments. But many of the teaching posts had passed to Nicola Consoni, the 'new' Raphael, who had his studio in via dei Pontefici and was active in all the major artistic projects patronised by Pope Pius IX.<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, it should be noted that the name of Minardi as Meirelles' first master is part, as recalled by Andre Tavares, of the long duration of the diffusion of what could be called Roman Artistic Taste and its impacts on the Portuguese and Brazilian context. An example of this is the fact that the Portuguese painter Domingos Siqueira, who died in Rome in 1837 as a member of the Accademia dei Virtuosi del Pantheon and whose funeral eulogy was delivered by Tommaso Minardi himself, took root in Rome from the 1820s in Minardi's circle. The fact that the image of the Minardi alumnus was already canonised within the walls of the Academy of Rio de Janeiro in the formative years of the young Meirelles is also proven by the presence in the academic collections of the Portrait of Tommaso Minardi painted by the artist Francisco Nery from the original at the Accademia di San Luca by Gaspare Landi, to which I will return shortly.<sup>14</sup>

It is interesting in this regard - and this is also a phenomenon of "migration" - what image of the "Roman school" was conveyed by the 19th century Brazilian historiography dedicated to the construction of a history of national painting. Gonzaga Duque in 1888, for example, described Tommaso Minardi as "a lover of drawing, an idolater of line". Meirelles, Gonzaga Duque continues, attended Nicola Consoni's classes and was recognised as one of his most regular students: "he devoted himself to the study of art with the

enthusiasm of a fanatic. Drawing... drawing was his greatest concern, his love! He was always studying: in museums, at the academy, in his free time. Minardi and Consoni educated him rigorously".<sup>15</sup>

It is a biographical model, that which we derive from these words, truly canonical: it could have been written in Rome by a Giovan Pietro Bellori and two centuries earlier: in fact, we find therein expressed the same, and persistent, idea of Rome as the city of "drawing" and academic study. First-hand sources, mentioned in recent studies by Jorge Coli and Sonia Gomes Pereira, allow us to take a closer look, however, at what the Academy intended the Roman stay of an Academy pensioner like Meirelles. This document is also worth rereading because the instructions not only provide for the practice of drawing and then colouring in very precise stages, but also for the opportunity to travel to Rome to "network", as we would say today, i.e. to take advantage of the possibilities offered in the city from the point of view of cultural sociability: the student is advised to attend some particular academies, sessions of literary societies, schools and libraries.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, Rome is also seen as the starting point for excursions outside Rome in the summer months (June to September): in the first year it is recommended to go to "Naples, Pompeii, Herculaneum", while in the second year, in the same months visits to artistic cities to the north of Rome are urged, probably Florence and Venice, and finally a stop in Paris before returning to Brazil. This training itinerary closely mirrors that proposed to the boarders of the French Academy in Rome in the same years. But it is also reflected, above all, in the debates on the need to increase training in colouring outside Rome, at the Accademia di San Luca, as pointed out in the essay by Melchiorre Missirini, former secretary of the Academy, published in 1838: *Del colore della pittura e specialmente del colorire della scuola veneziana*. As early as the 1820s, the problem of the shortage of models available in the museums and collections in Rome, including the Academy's own collection, which were necessary for training in colouring, arose.<sup>17</sup> There were essentially two reasons for this: the first was clearly expressed by Gaspare Landi, as professor of painting, and by Missirini himself in 1819 to the Camerlengo, Cardinal Pacca, sent to urge a renewal of the academic

collection. Landi wrote: "The lack of originals to be given to young people is such that (without exaggeration) the school of painting, which is undoubtedly one of the best in Rome, would be closed if I did not lend them some of my own" and the problem was taken up by Missirini who stressed how Landi was in some way forced to give the students of the Academy "works of arts of his own hand" and how the master "cannot conceal the damage that has come to him as a result of not being able to sell his said works, despite having had the most favourable feedback".<sup>18</sup> The two missives can therefore perhaps offer us a further interpretation, not only canonical and ideal of the city of "drawing and rigorous study", and therefore also of the presence of that copy of Minardi's portrait in Rio de Jainero's collections: evidently to be understood more as one of those works "of his own hand" that the painter Landi was forced to copy by his students, than a "truly" selected "ideal" model.

Secondly, the reactions of the artists to the new regulations imposed by the Pontifical Museums, especially from the 1820s onwards, as recorded in the correspondence and licences already mentioned, tell us of practices that are far more complex than copying, compared to the idea of Rome conveyed by historiography. In fact, starting with the regulation of the Pontifical Museums in 1822, the days of access reserved for artists were considerably reduced in favour of opening to the public of travellers and tourists. This led to a congestion of requests, which was not without difficulty on the part of the artists of all nationalities present in Rome, as was recalled by the painter Luigi Durantini in a letter-petition to Antonio d'Este, director of the Pontifical Museums, in 1823, in which he begged, on behalf of a group of copyists, to allow artists access to the Gallery on Saturdays: an extra day was in fact considered indispensable, following the opening of two days a week for visitors, which substantially reduced to only three days the possibility for artists to access the museum and work of arts there to paint their copies<sup>19</sup>.

What were the consequences for artists of such new models of museum visiting practices? First and foremost, the fact that artists had to look elsewhere for their models for "colouring": in private pictures galleries, but even here access could prove complicated due to the much greater congestion of these spaces compared to previous centuries, as Andrea

Appiani Jr. reminded Tommaso Minardi in a letter of 1836 regarding "the Tiziani" in the Galleria Borghese that he wanted to copy but "unfortunately" found them all occupied ("disgraziamente tutti occupati", he wrote). An alternative, apart from moving outside Rome, could be the academic picture gallery, which had been made more suitable to the needs of colour training after the renovation of the 1820s and 1830s and which was open all week on weekdays and with less respectful regulations for copyists<sup>20</sup>.

This is the reality of Rome that Meirelles experiences. And let us check, at this point, the copies he painted as a *pensionaire* of the Academy in Rio de Janeiro in the light of what has been said above. The list of copies that can be traced from the documentation shows a selection of models by Meirelles that are entirely in line with the training proposed in those years at the Accademia di San Luca and at the studios of Consoni and Minardi.

On the one hand, the archival documents refer to a copy made by Meirelles from Guido Reni, the *Hope*. It brings us back precisely to what, in the same years, was returned to us by the requests for copies signed for their students by Nicola Consoni and Tommaso Minardi who both urged the study of Guido Reni alongside Raphael and Domenichino as essential stages in the comparison with the classical ideal. This is also evident from the copies, also probably commissioned in Rome in these years, which are now in the collections of the San Carlos Academy in Mexico City.<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, the strong increase of Venetian models to which the copies mentioned from famous paintings by Titian, Veronese, Paris Bordone, among others, are in line with the neo-venetism pursued at the Accademia di San Luca in the same period. This was also reflected in the increase in requests to study Venetian paintings in Roman museums, such as those in the Capitoline Museum, and which also affected Minardi's and Silvagni pupils in those years. The copy by the painter Gerolamo Viscardini, now in Mexico (Santiago de Querétaro, Museo de arte de Querétaro), must be connected with the same environment, as it was executed in Rome, as the request in the same years testifies.<sup>22</sup>



**Fig. 2.** *Salomè* (from Guido Reni), first half of XIX c., 134.5 x99 cm, Mexico City, Museo Nacional de San Carlos, SIGROA 10049

A further reflection is possible, however, and this is what I am concluding with, if we look at the places to which the models chosen by Meirelles refer and which lead us almost exclusively to polarise the Brazilian artist's practice of copying, as it occurred within academic collections. Is this a well-considered choice or an obligatory necessity, we should ask ourselves in the light of what has been said?



**Fig. 3.** V. Meirelles, *Tarquinio e Lucrecia* (copy from Cagnacci, formerly attributed) 70,3x92,8 cm , Acervo Museum D. João , Rio de Janeiro

The beautiful copy of the *Tarquinio e Lucrezia*, already attributed to Guido Cagnacci, a painter from Emilia who trained at the school of Guido Reni and Guercino, but actually by the Florentine Felice Ficherelli, is unusual for these years, but it is a painting that had entered the academic collections in San Luca in the 1830s and from that moment on had aroused interest, especially among the students of the Academy of France. In the guide to the

Academic Gallery of St. Luke published at the end of the century, which referred to the last rearrangement curated by Tommaso Minardi, the painting was exhibited in the so-called "Sala della Fortuna" (Room of Fortune), named after Guido Reni's painting with the same subject and which followed the room of "Raphael".<sup>23</sup>

In this way, it was therefore a very appropriate model for the training of a historical painter but also as a source of study on colouring. This is demonstrated by the exact reproduction by Meirelles, who made an oil painting slightly smaller than the original.

The copy from Titian's *Amor Sacro e Amor profano* suggests one think of those "Titians all busy" in the Borghese Gallery that Appiani mentioned to Minardi in the above-mentioned letter and, on the other hand, the detail chosen by Meirelles may also suggest the hypothesis that the copy did not take place in front of the original in the Borghese Gallery. In fact, in the 1840s, a painting by Domenico Pellegrini, trained between Venice and London, a partial copy of Titian's *Amor sacro e amor profano*, which is still in the collection, had arrived in the academic picture gallery. The detail chosen by Meirelles is the same and, on the other hand, Pellegrini's canvas was intended to meet an urgent and eminently practical need: to provide students with a famous Venetian reference model (albeit a copy).<sup>24</sup> A model that could easily replace the (original) but more inaccessible one by the Borghese. The detail became canonical in the Brazilian school, if, some time later, Zeferino de Costa chose the same detail for his copy dating from the 1860s.<sup>25</sup>

The other paintings executed by Meirelles and sent to Rio de Janeiro, from the *Presentation of the Virgin at the Temple* by Titian to the *Miracle of St. Mark* by Tintoretto, the *Supper at Levi's House* and the *Holy Family with St. John the Baptist and Saints*, also by Veronese, and the *Presentation of the Ring to the Doge* by Parsi Bordone, also belong to an important academic collection, that of the Gallerie dell'Accademia in Venice, renewed after the return of the works of arts from France in the aftermath of the Napoleonic requisitions. Some of these paintings entered the Academy's collection after 1815 following the Napoleonic suppressions and were placed in the room dedicated to the 'glories' of 16th-century Venice together with Titian's

*Assumption*, also returned from France, and where John Ruskin also saw them<sup>26</sup>.



**Fig. 4.** D. Pellegrini, *Amor Sacro* (from Tiziano), XVIII c., Rome, Accademia di San Luca. V. Meirelles, *Amor Sacro* (from Tiziano), 1853-59, 107x 88.5 cm, Acervo Museum D. João

The choice of Meirelles, who, as stated in the *Istructiones*, must have gone to Venice in the penultimate year of his Italian sojourn, is therefore oriented first and foremost towards easily accessible works, while interpreting in the selection of the works the requirements of the academy of origin; moreover, even in this case, the choice of formats, all considerably reduced compared to the originals, recalls the practice of colour "sketches" that, for example, Giuseppe Silvagni suggested to his students in the same years. (including, I recall, the Mexican Primitivo Miranda).<sup>27</sup>

It is to that "idea" of Rome as an exemplary city of study that Meirelles' copies are traced once they arrive in Rio de Janeiro and are exhibited in the annual academic exhibitions documented in the Catalogues published in subsequent years.

Here they are in fact remembered as all "feita em Roma" even when, clearly, the models speak of a comparison with Venice.<sup>28</sup>

Their being useful subjects for the construction of a notion of historical painting that the Academy of Rio de Janeiro intended to found, makes them, in a certain sense, "Roman". Beyond the difficulties and perhaps even the discontent encountered by artists in gaining access to the originals in the Museums, the idea of Rome continued to convey.

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## Endnotes

1. On the role of Copies in academic culture between the 18th and 19th centuries, see: Mazzarelli, *Dipingere*.
2. On cosmopolitan Rome in the age of Restoration analysed from a transnational perspective see most recently at least: Capitelli, Cracolici, *Roma en México*. Capitelli, Donato, Mazzarelli et al, *Lettere d'artista*.
3. See: Mazzarelli, *Gli artisti a Roma*.
4. Quoted in Mazzarelli, *Dipingere*. 158
5. Ivi. 157-158.
6. Ibidem.
7. See: Gonzaga-Duque, *Arte brasileira*.
8. See: Migliaccio, *Arte brasiliana*. Coli, *Come se deve escrever*.
9. Félix-Emile Taulnay, *Discurso* (1834) in Migliaccio, *Arte brasiliana*. 34
10. Dazzi, *Meirelles, Zeferino*
11. Migliaccio, *Arte brasiliana*. 43.
12. See: Turazzi, *Victor Meirelles*. Coli, *Victor Meirelles*. Pereira, *Victor Meirelles*.
13. Coli, *A linha e a mancha*. 34-35
14. Tavares, *Displayng*.
15. Gonzaga Duque, *Arte brasileira*. 144-145. See Coli, *A linha e a mancha*.34
16. Pereira, *Victor Meirelles*. 50-52.
17. Missirini, *Del colore*. See Mazzarelli, *Dipingere*. 254-264.
18. See: Mazzarelli, *Dipingere*. 154-155.
19. See: Mazzarelli, *Dipingere*. 186-187.
20. See: Mazzarelli, *Dipingere*.260-261.

21. Mexico City, Museo Nacional de San Carlos. See the entry in *Roma en México, México en Roma*, I.2. 154-155 (C. Mazzarelli).
22. Mazzarelli, *L'esemplarità di Roma*. 68-69.
23. Pereira, *Victor Meirelles*. 46-53. See also *Guida per visitare la Galleria*.
24. Mazzarelli, *Dipingere*. 260.
25. Migliaccio, *Arte brasiliana*. Dazzi, *Meirelles, Zeferino*.
26. Pereira, *Victor Meirelles*. 53-60. See also: Ruskin, *Guida*.
27. Mazzarelli, *Dipingere*. 261-264; Mazzarelli, *L'esemplarità di Roma*. 64-70.
28. Quoted in Pinto da Silva. *Victor Meirelles*. 180-181.

# The *Extraordinary International Congress of Art Critics (1959): Argan, Dorfles, Dorazio and “The New City: Synthesis of the Arts”*

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## **ABSTRACT**

During the 5th Bienal de São Paulo in 1959, The Extraordinary International Congress of Art Critics was consecrated to the theme of “Brasília: The New City-Synthesis of the Arts”. It focused on architecture, urbanism and their connections with plastic arts. While it extended the scope of the exhibition’s debate on Abstract expressionism, Tachism and Informal Art, it left an unprecedented record of the discussions.

Gomes Machado — director the São Paulo Biennial at that time — in contrast with Mario Pedrosa, criticized the 5th São Paulo Biennial as “a tachist and informal offensive” (“*uma ofensiva tachista e informal*”). Mário Pedrosa, a Marxist and Trotskyist activist, was mainly interested in “surprise by valuing abstract art and the problems of perception of form” (“*surpreendeu ao valorizar a arte abstrata e os problemas de percepção da forma*”).

While Anglo-Saxon countries emerged as promoters of Abstract expressionism, Italy and Brazil shared a similar approach to art, toward a peculiar interpretation of abstraction. By examining archival material, as well as conference talks made by Mário Pedrosa, Carlo Giulio Argan, Gillo Dorfles and Pietro Dorazio, this article aims to shed new light on cultural exchanges between Italy and Brazil, art criticism congruity and diversity, and the way critics and artists meant abstraction at the end of the fifties.

## **KEYWORDS**

Abstract Art; Synthesis of the Arts; Carlo Giulio Argan; Piero Dorazio; Gillo Dorfles.

In September 1959 took place the "Extraordinary International Congress of Art Critics" in Brazil, touring three different cities: Brasília, São Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro. The Congress was organized in parallel with the 5th Biennial of São Paulo, extending the scope of the exhibition's debate on art, and leaving behind an unprecedented record of discussions on the themes to some degree raised by the Biennial itself, which was mainly focused on post-Surrealism, Abstract expressionism, Tachism and Informal Art. Mario Pedrosa, the general secretary of the Brazilian Congress organizing committee and one of the founders, in 1947, of the International Association of Art Critics (IAAC), in contrast with Gomes Machado, who directed the São Paulo Biennial at that time, criticized the 5th Biennial as a tachist and informal offensive.<sup>1</sup> Pedrosa, a Marxist and Trotskyist activist, was mainly interested "in assessing abstract art and the problems of form of perceptions."<sup>2</sup> This ambivalent approach on abstractions basically characterized the critical debates of that time, not only in Brazil but also in Italy; a dichotomy which clearly appeared in the 1959 Brazilian Biennial and Congress. By putting the congress in dialogue with the Biennial, in particular analyzing conference talks made by Mário Pedrosa, as well as Carlo Giulio Argan, Gillo Dorfles and Pietro Dorazio, my essay aims to shed new light on cultural exchanges between Italy and Brazil, art criticism congruity and diversity, and the way critics and artists intended abstraction at the end of the fifties.

### **"Brasília: The New City-Synthesis of the Arts"**

In a still unfinished Brasília, the Congress was consecrated to the theme of "Brasilia: The New City-Synthesis of the Arts," focusing on architecture, urban planning and their connections with plastic art. It brought together talks by architects, art historians and critics who explored the experience of Brasília as a new city with its significance in Brazilian architectural culture and its expression in the national territory. The political involvement emerged clearly in the papers of speakers invited to participate to the event. From the Brazilian delegation, besides Mario Pedrosa as organizer, we also find leading figures in architecture, such as Lucio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer, and art critic

Mario Barata. Among the international names, the program mentioned Meyer Schapiro, Herbert Read, Sérgio Milliet, André Bloc, as well as Italians, Carlo Giulio Argan, Piero Dorazio, Gillo Dorfles, and Bruno Zevi. While the Biennial of 1959 emerged as a promoter of Abstract expressionism and Art informel, the discussions at the congress seemed to veer toward a peculiar interpretation of abstraction in art, which actually has its main theoretical idea in the concept of "Synthesis of the Arts".

The seven thematic sessions developed this central theme through interdisciplinary angles (the city; urban planning; technique and expression; architecture; visual arts; industrial arts; education; and finally, the situation of the arts in the modern age). The Brazilian magazine *Habitat* pointed out that the Congress main topic of the new city and the synthesis of the arts had coherence with the problems that the city of Brasília posed, stating that "There is no doubt that such contributions go to the heart of a modern question, namely, the integration of the arts in all their scales, at the service of man, in a planned, detailed construction."<sup>3</sup> Pedrosa anticipated the Congress theme in an article emblematically titled "Crisis," published in the *Jornal do Brasil*, just one month before the opening of the event.<sup>4</sup> In Pedrosa's view, the two fields deeply affected by that crisis are painting and sculpture; while architecture and urbanism, thanks to their public and social nature, managed to revitalize the aesthetic and artistic values of modern civilization. From Pedrosa's introductory talk at the Congress, the city of Brasília emerged as a work of collective art, a new experimental approach to urban planning, architecture, and collectivity. Pedrosa defended its connection between utopia and planning, actually an important problem in aesthetic thought at that time. In the light of that crisis, he stated that the city offered the opportunity for collective action. Moreover, by reflecting on Brasília, he dealt with a new conception of art, which had to be objective and collectively centered on the community.

The social role of art and architecture was an approach shared by many art critics and historians invited to the Congress, including Italian Giulio Carlo Argan, who was vice-president of the International Association of Art Critics, and appointed chairman of the Brazilian congress of 1959. In

his paper, entitled “Tradition and materials of the past in architecture”<sup>5</sup>, Argan focused on the attitude of the architect and the modern artist in the face of tradition, stating that the most original artists and most vital movements built up their position of forms by way of a critique of the past, and he concluded pointing out that modern art can be made in a true phase in continual historical development that should not be paved with a technical end, or even worse, stylistic revivals, but rather, involve a profound critical study of the old techniques, considered like so many other methodologies of the invention of forms. This topic was at the center of Argan’s reflection at that time, so much so that he dealt with the theme also at the previous International Congress of Art Critics, held in 1957 in Palermo (Italy), where he stated that the technique of art is not separate from the technique of production, and as a consequence, “the relationship between technique and production must be one of integration and not of contradiction.”<sup>6</sup>

Argan had long been interested in architecture – in Italy he brought new attention to the Bauhaus, publishing in 1951 the book *Walter Gropius e la Bauhaus (Walter Gropius and the Bauhaus)*<sup>7</sup> – and on the Brazilian architecture as well. Commenting on the exhibition *Architettura Brasiliana (Brazilian Architecture)* held at the National Gallery of Modern Art in Rome in 1954, Argan showed his deep knowledge of the topic, observing that Brazilian architecture “was born by addressing the problem of large organizational centers, and ‘descended’ to the problems of the house, social housing, and urban planning only at a later time.”<sup>8</sup> One point that characterizes Brazilian interest in Argan’s works, as scholar Luiz Renato Martins explained in his recent book *The Long Roots of Formalism in Brazil*, “is the fundamental role attributed to the connection between work as experience and reflexive formation.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, contrary to the idea that a work of art presents a precious asset with intrinsic value that is foreign to a common work, which still permeates most art studies in various forms, Argan’s research is based on an opposite premise, namely, that art is a way of producing value (especially social value), among other things. In this condition art is, above all, a paradigmatic form of work in the collectivity.

Pedrosa and Argan had several theoretical ideas in common,

specifically with regard to the role of art in society and the idea of artistic abstraction, so much so that in the following decades they collaborated in several occasions;<sup>10</sup> a common approach that certainly stems from their militant role in the arts.

Pedrosa's article "Abstraction or figuration or realism?" published in the *Jornal do Brasil* in 1957, is emblematic of the meaning that abstract art had for him. He challenged the definition of "Abstract art" provided by the French avant-garde theoretician and artist Michel Seuphor in his *Dictionnaire de la peinture abstraite*, published in Paris in 1957. According to Pedrosa, Seuphor considers just one of the effects but not the essential cause of abstraction when he labels as abstract every painting that does not identify with an objective, constituent reality of life. If seen from that point of view, the specificity of this approach involves a refined aesthetic awareness that captures, as Pedrosa wrote: "expressive elements of line, color, and composition, regardless of the subject in question or any representation of nature or external reality."<sup>11</sup> By insisting that the subject of a work of art is of secondary importance, Pedrosa claimed that naturalist or socialist realism is in a marked state of decline since it is supported solely by an extra-artistic discipline. Thus, discussing the conventional view of figurative or abstract art (in terms of a work that may or may not illustrate an external reality), Pedrosa relied on an approach based on the perception of the intrinsic values of the work of art itself, something that we also find in Argan's art theories at that time. The conception of the "Synthesis of the arts" was for Pedrosa (and Argan as well), a way to correct individualist art, and to quote Pedrosa, "a way to go against the very fashionable romantic and expressionist temperamental impulses."<sup>12</sup> Therefore, from this point of view, it was an instrument for reintegrating the artist into an objective social mission. In line with this approach, we find the position taken by the second invited Italian speaker at the Brazilian congress: art critic and painter Gillo Dorfles.

In Italy, Dorfles played an important role in the affirmation of an industrial aesthetics and in developing the Concrete Art Movement in Milan (known with the acronym MAC). In his talk at the Congress, entitled "The industrial arts in the new city," he defended an axiology based on the value of

industrial objects and their ability to generate transformations in cities as well as in the very conception of art.<sup>13</sup> The lecture explained Dorfles's belief that cities could emerge from industrial production: from domestic objects to buildings. In his opinion, the industrial aesthetics played an important role in the formation of popular tastes. He pointed out that a civilization founded on – what he called – “aesthetic pleasure” needed serial art, the only one that allowed for obtaining freedom of form. Dorfles also believed that obsolescence of objects is a positive thing because it leads to a greater variety of forms and innovations, producing a constant urban transformation. Back in Italy, he reviewed the congress in *Domus*, an Italian journal specialized in architecture and design.<sup>14</sup> This number of the magazine opened with a cover by Bruno Munari, one of the founders with Dorfles of the Concrete Art Movement in Italy, and forerunner of Programmatic Art. In his article Dorfles presented Italian readers with the main focuses that emerged from the Brazilian Congress. With regard to the “Synthesis of arts” he maintained that in contemporary society the synthesis would be possible by integrating art creativity with technique and industrial elements, while to aim at the synthesis of the other major arts was, in his view, an anachronism. Dorfles had addressed the theme of the synthesis of the arts in a previous article he published in *Domus*, in which he reviewed the book *Art in European Architecture. Synthèse des Arts*, published in 1956 by architect Paul Damaz, with a preface by Le Corbusier. Dorfles criticized the book's illustrations and claimed that Damaz failed in his aim to synthesize the arts, stating that “While we look with pleasure at Fontana's Spatial Concepts, Le Corbusier's Unité d'habitation, Max Bill's works, and Basaldella's Fosse Ardeatine, many of the other examples included in this book are simply bad, and painting does not seem to really enter into the spatiality of modern architecture”.<sup>15</sup> The concept of space was a central point for understanding the ideal of the synthesis of arts for Dorfles. In 1954, in a conference consecrated to the figurative and abstract art held at the Giorgio Cini Foundation in Venice, Dorfles explained, from an historical point of view, that the space in images was strictly link to perception, and therefore, to the social and ethical values of society.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Synthesis of “Plastic Arts”**

The topic of synthesis of the arts with regard to plastic art was presented at the Congress by several figures: André Bloc, Reymond Lopez, Meyer Schapiro, Georg Schmidt; additionally, the program mentioned Italian painter Piero Dorazio, who took part in the same session of Dorflès, with a paper entitled “Color as an element of visual integration in the urbanistic space.” Unfortunately, Dorazio's abstract – like many others as well – was not included among the texts published in the journal *Habitat*, nor does his archive preserve a draft of the talk. However, for Dorazio it was not the first he took part in an International Congress of Art Critics, as he also participated to the 1948 edition in Paris.<sup>17</sup> In 1959, the artist was reflecting on color as a tool of visual integration also in his paintings, hence the decision to prepare a speech on color is not surprising at a time when he was experimenting with the space on the canvas in relation to colors and its optical and sensory impact on the viewer. From the very beginning of his artistic career, color played an important role, as clearly emerged, for example, in his canvas *Tutta Praga (All Prague)*<sup>18</sup>, painted in 1947, when he was part of the Italian art abstract group called Forma 1 (Form 1): colored lines are painted in dialogue with the wider colored surfaces in order to create a new compositional space. Dorazio's interest in space and its relationship with environment and people dated back to the very beginning of his formation. He studied architecture in Rome at La Sapienza University, and right from the start he took part in the debates concerning the synthesis of the arts in Italy. In 1952, he published the article “Towards a Synthesis of Plastic Arts” in the Italian art magazine *Arti Visive*, the journal of Gruppo Origine. In this text – in which, for example, he published the reproduction of the library of Viipuri designed by architect Alvar Aalto – Dorazio explained that it was not a question of introducing painting and sculpture into the pre-established space of architecture, but rather, of conceiving the plastic expression of our culture in a synthesis of form and style. “We are building a new civilization for a new society;”<sup>19</sup> he wrote, “Painters and sculptors must intervene on the reality that is the all-encompassing problem of architecture, urban planning of new

cities, new suburbs, and new factories. It is a collective activity, a program for a total reconstruction.”<sup>20</sup> According to these words, the participation of Dorazio in the Congress ideal in Brasília should not surprise. The years from the date of the congress, 1959, to 1963 were significant for Dorazio's new pictorial experiments.

In 1959 he tried to exhibit his paintings at the 5th Biennial of São Paulo, but the selection committee failed to include him, the reason, as Umbro Apollonio wrote in a letter to the painter, being that his last paintings simulated Mark Tobey's and Jackson Pollock's works too much.<sup>21</sup> These two artistic poles experimented by Dorazio at that time are well clarified by the two paintings *Carta Militare* (Military Map) (1958) and *Crack bleu* (1959), both exhibited in Berlin at the Springer Gallery in the Summer of 1959, almost in parallel with the 5th Biennial of São Paulo<sup>22</sup>. The introduction in the German catalogue was by Argan, who wrote with regard to Dorazio's paintings on display: “We may ask what the ultimate end of this kind of painting will be in our time, a time characterized objectively by the informal? Perhaps only this: if the informal tends to increase the occasions on which we encounter reality and furnishes us with the aesthetic 'revelation' of every ordinary and less qualified phenomenon, Dorazio's painting will, on the contrary, tend to develop our capacity for aesthetic evaluation of phenomena, increasing our attitude for more rigorous aesthetic values and finally, steering the activity of our conscience in a direction which should also be aesthetic.”<sup>23</sup> The dichotomy between Art informel and Dorazio's abstractions pointed out by Argan, entails basically the same problems discussed at the Brazilian Congress and 5th Biennial of 1959, which merely focused on clarifying the difference between these two kinds of abstractions.

### **Informel Abstractions vs Concrete Abstractions**

This problem had been at the center of many debates since the mid-forties, not only on the Italian art scene, but also in Brazil. Several Brazilian exhibitions and art journals (such as *Modulo*) had found consensus on the fact that art, in order to be modern, should be abstract. A rich series of interventions in *Modulo* reaffirmed in Brazil, over the years 1957-1959, the

sylogism that modernity is abstractionism, until the second half of 1959, when abstractionism, in the Brazilian artistic context, became neo-concrete art.

In his review to the 5th Biennial, Pedrosa, one of the major proponents of abstract concrete tendencies who spent the previous years campaigning for Brazilian Concretism and Neo-Concretism by organizing exhibitions on its leading figures, such as Lygia Clark, clarified his position with regard to abstraction. In this article, entitled “On the ‘informel’ and related misunderstandings,” Pedrosa disagreed with the use of the term informal art, as he found it “vacuous”, with “no meaning.”<sup>24</sup> He believed it would be more appropriate to use the prefix “anti,” but never “in.” “Antiform,” he said, would be “an appropriate aesthetic concept within the art fields.”<sup>25</sup> Terms such as informal art, Tachisms, and lyrical abstraction were circulating widely in the fifties in Brazil, referring to painting characterized by dabs of paint and graphic symbols, employed not only by international artists but also by Brazilian painters, such as Antonio Bandeira, Tomie Ohtake, Flávio Shiró, and Manabu Mabe, among others. Pedrosa, who thought that the term informal distorted the concept of form, wrote: “Form is the initial element of perception and without it, it would be impossible to perceive anything [...]. A stain is the first form that is seen within the perceptual experiences observed by Gestalt.”<sup>26</sup> The discussion about abstraction at that time mostly concerned the conflict between subjectivity and objectivity. Pedrosa addressed this issue in the text “From abstraction to self-expression,” published immediately after the congress in Brasilia in the *Jornal do Brasil*.<sup>27</sup> Pedrosa (as Argan) relies on Gestalt’s psychology of form and on the idea of an aesthetic perception. In this text, he once again rejected Informal abstraction, accusing it of sacrificing “the psychic distance between viewer and artist in favor of an explicit hedonism that seeks to transform the work into an individualized person that can only project its sentimental anxieties and the neurosis of its private life.”<sup>28</sup> In opposition to Pedrosa’s direction was the path followed by the 5th Biennial of São Paulo under the direction of Machado, who chose to exhibit mostly Abstract Expressionism and Art Informel paintings. The vogue for the so-called Informel was an international trend in the fifties, so much so

that starting from 1948 it characterized several editions of the Venice Biennials as well.

In view of the above, we can understand the decision made in 1959 by the Biennial of São Paulo selection committee of not including Dorazio in that edition: Dorazio's paintings, in fact – as clearly explained by Argan in the exhibition catalogue of Dorazio's German show – were not informal art. The Italian session was in fact dedicated to abstract artists whose paintings were mostly characterized by automatic and gestural signs. Umbro Apollonio, who curated the session, wrote that the artists exhibited: “showed a true *spiritual* rigor”.<sup>29</sup> The ones included at the 5th Biennial of São Paulo were former members of abstract groups such as Fronte Nuovo delle Arti, then Gruppo degli Otto, with paintings by Renato Birolli, Corrado Cagli, Mattia Moreni, Ennio Morlotti, Emilio Vedova, and those of Gruppo Origine, like Alberto Burri and Giuseppe Capogrossi, who, with different languages, were elaborating a peculiar response to Art informal. Dorazio was not interested in automatism and gestural paintings at all. Indeed, he centered his research almost only on color, light, structures and perception, as emerged from his new paintings exhibited at the Venice Biennial in 1960, in a solo room. He had to wait until 1963 before seeing these last works accepted by the Biennial of São Paulo, basically when the organization committee had completely changed, becoming an autonomous foundation endorsed by Brazilian president (Jânio Quadros) and his secretary of culture, Mario Pedrosa. Argan was the curator of the 1963 Brazilian Biennial Italian session; he exalted Dorazio's effort “to represent the compositional space as unitary and continuous.”<sup>30</sup> He stressed the rigorous and coherent path of the “structure of perception” of Dorazio's works of art, structures that the critic read as “an act and a state of consciousness.”<sup>31</sup> In so doing, he finally placed Dorazio on the opposite side of the Informal trends. The phenomenological turning point that characterized Dorazio's work at the beginning of the sixties, was explained in an article published in the Italian art journal *Metro* by German art historian Will Grohmann – who, like Dorazio and Argan, also took part in the Congress of Brasilia in 1959. In an article entitled *Piero Dorazio, Or the Return to Quality in painting*, Grohmann effectively described Dorazio's

paintings:

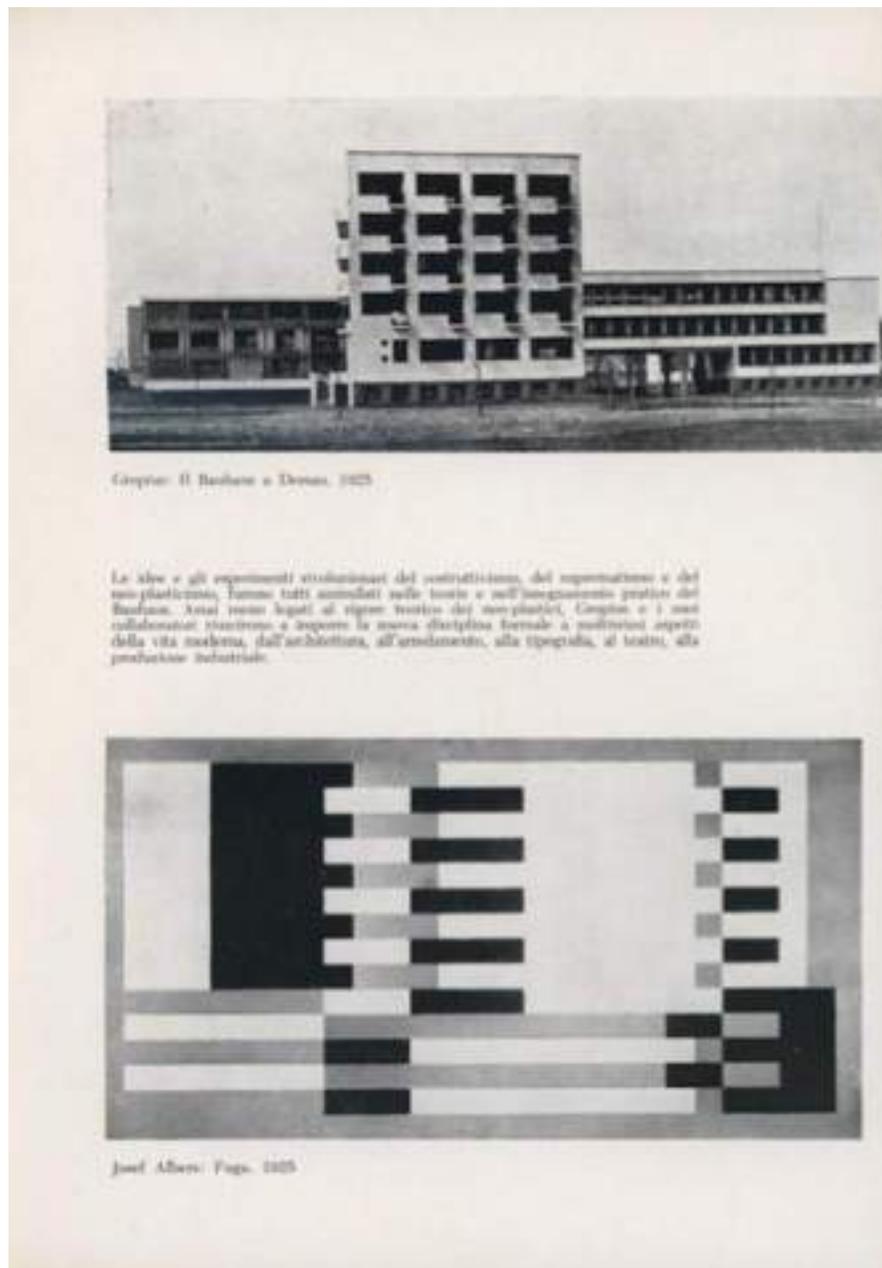
The nets are either narrow or ample, rigid in their geometricity or vibrant, according to whether the quality of the color is restricted or fluid, and sometimes he presents them even in contrast with the linear system, and then the scheme takes on dissonant tones. Or else it becomes 'disturbed' when, for example, a stripe runs down the canvas. [...] The space of the poet, if in research into the unknown we were only concerned with contacts with the elements. What would the poetic spirit be if it did not result from the simple fact of working with such refined qualities as light and color, with such absolute postulates as the many linear systems, and with such fantastic definitions of a pictorial space in itself?<sup>32</sup>

Structures, though – as Gillo Dorfles pointed out in 1962 – became a "necessary" element of Dorazio's pictorial composition.<sup>33</sup>

To conclude, discussions on abstraction reached a climax at the 5th Biennial of São Paulo and the International Congress of Art Critics of 1959. Opposing Abstract expressionism and Informel to geometrical oriented Concrete Art groups, the two Brazilian events gave voice to the dual poles of abstractions running in the fifties. Brasília as a "Synthesis of the Arts" project, with its temporary scaffolding built up of reticular structures, as well as Oscar Niemeyer organicist buildings, most likely impressed the imagination of international critics, architects and artists who had the opportunity to visit the city during the Congress. Dorazio, who used to compare the forms of architecture to pictorial shapes, as he did in his book *La fantasia dell'arte nella vita moderna* (The fantasy of art in modern life)<sup>34</sup> (fig. 1), possibly found a source of inspiration in Brasilia's social utopian urban projects, buildings (fig. 2) and unfinished structures (fig. 3), in particular with regards to the grids he started painting in the early-sixties: in both cases we are facing structures from and for life.

Considering the above, the Congress closed with the affirmation of a certain specific type of abstractionism which was seen as representative of the modern artistic languages and, above all, of collectivity. In this perspective, the construction of Brasilia as a "Synthesis of the arts" seems to

conclude a path of acceptance of a non-figurative language, that in Brazil became neo-Concrete abstract art, while in Italy the new research on communication and perception was to open to different artistic experimentations, including the trends of Programmatic and Gestalt art.



**Fig. 1.** Bauhaus building and a painting by Josef Albers in Piero Dorazio, *La fantasia dell'arte nella vita moderna* (Rome: Polveroni e Quinti editori, 1955), n.p.



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## Endnotes

1. Mário Pedrosa, "A Bienal de cá pra lá," in *Política das artes: textos escolhidos*, eds. Otilia Beatriz Fiori Arantes and Mario Pedrosa (São Paulo: Edusp, 1995): 263. I am greatly indebted to Valentina Sonzogni of the Pietro Dorazio Archive (Milan) for her assistance during my research. I am grateful also to prof. Maria Grazia Messina for reading a draft of my paper and making insightful suggestions, most of which I have incorporated with thanks.
2. Aantonio Cândido, "Um socialista singular", in *Mário Pedrosa e o Brasil*, ed. José Castilho Marques Neto (São Paulo: Editora Fundação Perseu Abramo, 2001): 13.
3. Mário Pedrosa, "Introdução ao tema inaugural: A cidade nova, obra de arte," *Habitat* 10, no. 57 (1959): 11-13.
4. Mário Pedrosa, "Crise nas artes individuais," *Jornal do Brasil*, August 19, 1959.
5. All Congress talks are listed in the program, which was published also in *Habitat*, no. 57 (1959). The complete copy I consulted is stored in the Roland Penrose Archive (Edinburg).
6. 6° Congres International des critiques d'art (Fonds Mário Barata, Archives de la critique d'art, Rennes).
7. See Giulio Carlo Argan, *Walter Gropius e la Bauhaus* (Turin: Einaudi, 1951).
8. Giulio Carlo Argan, "Architettura Moderna in Brasile," *Comunità* 8, no. 24 (1954): 52
9. Luiz Renato Martins, *The Long Roots of Formalism in Brazil*, (Bristol-Leiden: Brill, 2017): 205-206.
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11. Mario Pedrosa, "Abstração ou figuração ou realismo?," *Jornal do Brasil*, August 10, 1957.
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14. Gillo Dorfles, "II Congresso di Brasilia," *Domus*, no. 361 (1959): 29-74.
15. See Romy Golan, "La doppia scommessa dell'Italia dalla *sintesi delle arti* all'opera aperta," *Il Caffè Illustrato*, (July-October 2006): 60-72.
16. Gillo Dorfles, "L'incomprensione dell'arte moderna e il nuovo problema dello spazio," in *Arte figurativa e arte astratta* (Venice: Sansoni, 1955), 143.
17. Claudio Zambianchi, "Ritratto dell'artista da giovane: Piero Dorazio da Forma ad *Arti Visive*," in *Piero Dorazio. Fantasia, colore, progetto*, ed. Francesco Tedeschi (Milan: Electa, 2021), 15.
18. The painting is digitalized and visible on the Piero Dorazio Archive website: <http://archiviopierodorazio.it/opere/>
19. Piero Dorazio, "Verso una sintesi delle arti plastiche," *Arti Visive*, no. 3 (1952): n.p.
20. Dorazio, "Verso una sintesi," n.p.
21. Umbrio Apollonio's letter to Piero Dorazio (Dorazio Archive, Milan).
22. See Giulio Carlo Argan, *Pietro Dorazio* (Berlin: Springer Gallery, 1959): n.p.
23. Argan, *Pietro Dorazio*, n.p.

24. Mário Pedrosa, "Do *informal* e seus equívocos," in *Mundo, homem, arte em crise*, eds. Mario Pedrosa and Aracy Amaral (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1986), 33-34.
25. Pedrosa, "Do "informal," 33-34.
26. Pedrosa, "Do "informal," 33-34.
27. Mário Pedrosa, "Da abstração a auto-expressão," *Jornal do Brasil*, December 19, 1959, 4-5.
28. Pedrosa, "Da abstração," 4-5.
29. Umbro Apollonio, "Introduction to Italian Session," in *5th Biennial of São Paulo* (São Paulo: Museu de arte moderna), 509.
30. Giulio Carlo Argan, "Introduction to Italian session," in *7th Biennial of São Paulo* (São Paulo: Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, 1963), 288.
31. Argan, "Introduction," 288.
32. Will Grohmann, "Piero Dorazio, Or the Return to Quality in Painting," *Metro*, no. 4-5 (1962): 46.
33. Gillo Dorfles, "Piero Dorazio," *Quadrante*, no. 8 (March 1962): n.p.
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# Brazilian Modernism and Italian Paradigm. The Commemorative Exhibition of the 50th Anniversary of Official Immigration

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## **ABSTRACT**

The present paper gives a vast panorama about the Exhibition Commemorating the Fiftieth Anniversary of Official Immigration, which took place at the Palace of Industries of São Paulo in 1937. I propose an analysis of the Italian pavilion that was divided in three sections: Il Salone d'Onore, dedicated to the imperial propaganda resulting from the invasions in Ethiopia and the fascist political and social achievements; La Mostra Merceologica that exhibited Italian art crafts and books; and La Mostra d'Arte with 47 paintings, 18 sculptures and 39 engravings of diversified artists that collaborated also with other fascist exhibitions in Italy and abroad. The focus of the analysis is directed to the fascist propaganda within San Paolo's modernism and Italian immigration contexts, proposing to instigate reflections on the concept of modernism itself and on the role attributed to immigrants by imperialist politics.

## **KEYWORDS**

Immigration; Diaspora; Modernism; Tradition; Fascist propaganda.

From May to September 1937 the Commemorative Exhibition of the Fiftieth Anniversary of Official Immigration, took place at Parque Dom Pedro II in São Paulo. The Minister Guido Romanelli, designated to supervise the Italian participation, published a detailed account of it. In the introduction, Romanelli clarifies that one of the main motivations for the Italian participation was: "l'atteggiamento assunto dal Brasile nei confronti dell'Italia durante la guerra Etiopica, per non essere associato alla sleale politica delle sanzioni".<sup>1</sup> Brazil, thus, was a oasis for the Italian political horizons, since it did not joined the economic boycott established by the League of Nations as a reaction to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, in 1935.

We propose here to present the Italian participation in the 1937 Exhibition, analyzing its fascist propaganda within São Paulo's modernism context and within the Italian immigration context. Let us start with the following open question: in the context of the nationalist policies of both Italian fascist imperialism and the Brazilian era of Getúlio Vargas, what is the meaning of an exhibition in honor of the immigrant? As appropriately noted by Jorge Coli, the ideological myth that defines Brazilians is based on the harmonious miscegenation of the three races - Indian, African and Portuguese . This would be reinforced in 1936 in *Raízes do Brasil*, by Sérgio Buarque de Hollanda, and in 1995 in *O povo brasileiro*, by Darci Ribeiro. Of this myth that gained much strength during the nationalist context of the 1930s, Coli observes: "Essa síntese matricial exclui, por suposto, todos os 'estrangeiros': os imigrantes italianos, japoneses, alemães, coreanos, etc., que chegaram ao Brasil no final do século XIX e remodelaram completamente a geografia humana do país ao longo do século XX".<sup>2</sup>

On the Italian side, it is also worth remembering the political opinions on the topic of the immigrations of the 19th and 20th centuries. This was divided between those who believed that the departure of the emigrants was a loss for the nation and those who believed that they were instruments for Italian international policy. Mussolini, in 1924, would speak about it in the following terms: "L'emigrazione è un male, perché impoverisce la nazione di elementi attivi che vanno all'estero per diventare i globuli rossi di anemici

paesi stranieri. Questo male può essere minimizzato con l'organizzazione e tramutato in un peso a nostro favore a livello Internazionale".<sup>3</sup> For this reason the following is really an open question: how was an exhibition in honor of the immigrant possible in this context?

Romanelli refers to the 1937 Exhibition in this historical context as a contrast between the international scene and the unnoticed Brazilian event. The first is described by Romanelli as "un fermento di eventi in rapida successione di importanza trascendente per l'evoluzione politica, economica e sociale del mondo". And the second is pronounced as "manifestazione indetta dallo Stato di San Paolo per commemorare un cinquantennio della sua vita nazionale".<sup>4</sup> The Minister, as we can see, made a very clear distinction between the international scene and the commemoration of immigration, which he interpreted as a Brazilian issue. While acknowledging that the 1937 Exhibition was not intended to be an international event, Romanelli criticizes the hedonism and selfishness of nations with little interest in that Brazilian commemoration. Italy, instead, would have placed itself differently because it represented the largest number of emigrants in Brazil and had contributed to the development of São Paulo with about thirty percent of its population.

Although Romanelli's report was intended to emphasize Italy's greater attention, compared to other countries, the Italian participation in the 1937 Exhibition does not seem to have been driven by Italy's attention to its compatriots. In the Archivio Centrale dello Stato di Roma, we find several letters written both by the Brazilian representatives of the 1937 Exhibition and by the Italian consular authorities in Brazil, offering free conditions for Italian participation. These documents contain not only invitations, but also insistent requests for responses from the Italian authorities. Francesco Pettinati, general commissioner of the 1937 Exhibition, wrote to the art critic and gallery owner Giuseppe Sprovieri, soliciting a response from the Italian government to the Brazilian invitation, in the following terms:

“Il motivo per cui ti scrivo non è semplicemente quello di annoiarti [sic] ma per dirti che a suo tempo ho inviato comunicazione ufficiale al Ministero della Stampa e Propaganda e alla Direzione degli Italiani all'Estero

dopo aver fatto tutte le pratiche possibili e immaginabili presso il Regio Consolato di qui il quale ha informato minuziosamente di tutto e su tutto il Patrio Governo. Non chiedevo sussidi né favori di sorta: limitavo ad offrire gratis al Governo Italiano l'area per un padiglioncino nel quale possibilmente, suggerivo una mostra simbolica, fotografica e sinottica delle opere del Regime. Facevo la richiesta avvertendo che i Governi del Giappone e della Germania, seguiti da altri Governi, erano in trattative con noi per la partecipazione dei rispettivi paesi in forma tutt'altro che gratuita. Ho rotto le scatole al povero Console, ho scritto e telegrafato ma senza costrutto. Ne sono umiliato! Neanche un rigo di risposta anche per dirmi vada a farsi friggere..... Niente. E dire che il Governo dello Stato, mi ha nominato Commissario! Fai tu le deduzioni che vuoi".<sup>5</sup>

The Italian participation in the 1937 Exhibition, therefore, does not seem to have been immediately motivated by the authorities, as we should imagine by Romanelli's speech. Nor does it appear in "Relazione sull'attività svolta dalla Direzione Generale per i servizi della propaganda durante l'anno 1937-XV" of the Ministero della Cultura Popolare, where we read the list of Italian cultural participations abroad, counting documentary exhibitions in more than eleven cities and seven art exhibitions in more than twenty cities around the world. No mention of the 1937 Exhibition of São Paulo.

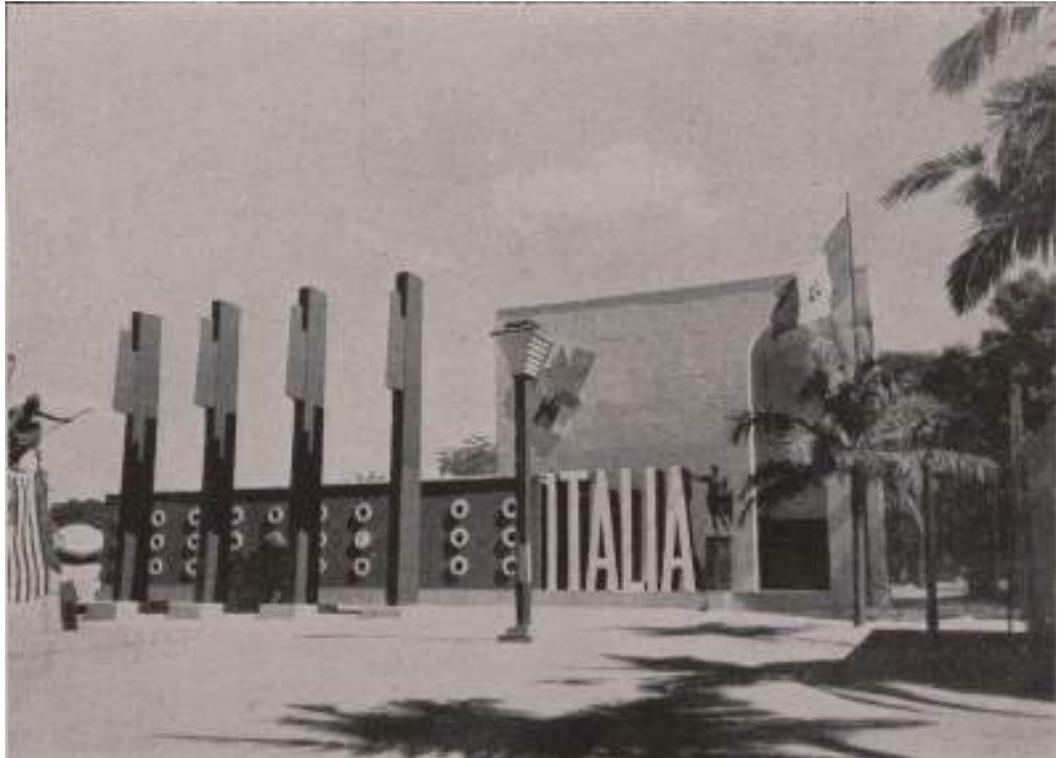
When Romanelli wrote that it was foreseeable that the appeal of the promoters of the São Paulo Exhibition would not find resonance, he was referring to the other countries (without naming a single one), thus concealing Italy's delayed interest in the Brazilian event. It was the Italians of Brazil who insisted for the official participation of Italy in that Brazilian event, in search, perhaps, of official support that would give meaning, form, and representation to their still young national identity. Pettinati, for example, son of an Italian and born in São Paulo, in his letter to Sprovieri confessed to him that he had never been to Italy and sighs: "ardo di conoscere". For the Italians in Brazil, the Italian participation in the 1937 Exhibition seemed to be more than a simple Brazilian event, but instead mainly as an attempt to

concretize an idea of their homeland that was still too abstract. They committed themselves not only to insisting on the official participation of Italy, but also to asking for a symbolic donation to the city of São Paulo, proposing "una mostra di carattere 'spirituale'", as defined by Consul G. Castruccio: "con opere del Regime, navigazione, turismo, bonifiche, città universitarie e 'qualche gagliardo campione della nostra grande industria con un potente motore d'aviazione, o una 'Littorina'".<sup>6</sup>

The Consul's proposal seems to have been accepted on February 2nd during the presidency of Ambassador Amedeo Giannini at Palazzo Chigi, when, according to Romanelli, it was decided to pervade the spiritual concept of the exhibition and to reserve the great part of the pavilion to figurative and documentary representations, limiting the *Mostra Merceologica* to few sections, such as art, culture and handcraft.

After crossing the external area of the Italian pavilion, where the visitors were greeted by the statue of *Augusto di Prima Porta*, and entering through the main door, shaped like a triumphal arch, the spectator would reach the *Salone d'Onore* dedicated to the imperial projects of the regime. The large panel decorating the entrance, entitled *Fede Volontà Vittoria*, suggested a sense of historical continuity between the ancient monumentality represented by the elements of the pavilion's facade and the fascism monumentality represented by Mussolini's gesture associated with Augustus' gesture. In this same section, several other panels dedicated to the imperialist propaganda in Africa and its military, social and urban organizations in Italy decorated the walls of the room. Ending the tour of the pavilion, the spectator would reach the *Mostra Merceologica* that exhibited Italian books and handicrafts of Enti Nazionale delle Piccole Industrie (ENAPI). Between the first and the last sections there was the *Mostra d'Arte*, surrounded by panels dedicated to tourism and agriculture, and to the Italian-Brazilian collaboration from 1499 to 1937, together with a panel on the work of the Italians in the State of São Paulo and a few photographs of fascist architecture in Italy. Composed by 47 paintings, 18 sculptures and 39 engravings the *Mostra d'Arte* was curated by the painter Orazio Amato that was Segretario Interprovinciale del Lazio del Sindacato Belle Arti, and set up

by Roberto Vighi, Ispettore di Belle Arti del Ministero dell'Educazione di Roma. According to Romanelli the works of art were chosen with the criterion of “soddisfare il ricordo nostalgico dell'esule”.



**Fig. 1.** La Partecipazione Italiana all'Esposizione di San Paolo del Brasile. Bibliotheca Hertziana.

Among the paintings and engravings there was a predominance of landscapes representing countryside and urban panoramas with its emblematic architectures. Those landscapes, that operated both as postcards for Brazilians and as souvenirs for Italian immigrants, were intended to represent ichnographically the attribute of *italianità*. The same applies to the illustrations of Italian's festivities such as in *La Corsa di Sant'Andrea*, celebrating the patron of Amalfi, and to the representations of the Italian costumes and physiognomies as in *Pastore Sardo* and *Rurale di Littoria*, that exemplified the builders of foundational cities, instigating a sense of *italianità* through regionalist traditions.

Alongside the ordinary man, praised for his work in the field and for his connection with native culture and for the continuity of tradition, there were also historical characters celebrating both the regime and the common *latinità* shared with Brazil, as we can see in the sculpture *Cristoforo Colombo*, *Il Re Imperatore*, *La Regina Margherita* and *Il Duce*, which suggested a natural imperialistic and fascist continuity with Latin roots.

It is not possible to distinguish fascist art strictly through its aesthetic qualities. It is, though, possible to recognize some fascist artists through their engagement to the regime. The definition of a fascist aesthetic goes back to 1922, during the formation of the group *Novecento Italiano*, whose first exhibition, in 1926, at the Palazzo della Permanente di Milano, was organized by Margherita Sarfatti who defined the artists as "italiani, tradizionalisti, moderni" (M.Sarfatti, *Storia della pittura moderna*, Rome, 1930, p. 126). Among them was Orazio Amato, that curated the *Mostra d'Arte* at the 1937 Exhibition and also contributed to it with two paintings, Anselmo Bucci, Francesco Messina, Arturo Tosi e Leonetta Cecchi Pieraccini.

In addition to the presence of artists of the group *Novecento Italiano*, the 1937 Exhibition was also showing works of artists who exhibited at the *II Quadriennale di Roma* in 1934, and at the Venice Biennials of 1934 and 1936. The mapping of the trajectories of these artists will not fit the time of this presentation. What is valuable, though, is to point out the consequences of the *Mostra d'Arte* in São Paulo's modernist context. The documentation of the Italian participation was more restricted to Italian newspapers published in Brazil, such as *Fanfulla*. Among the Brazilian newspapers, we found mentions of the events connected to the exposition and to its great popularity, guaranteed also by an amusement park among the pavilions and gastronomic events, such as the wine tasting in the Italian cantina. What remained preserved in public archives of São Paulo were a few documents that will lead our next considerations.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> December 1937 the Mayor of São Paulo, Fabio Prado, received a letter commenting the "very interesting Italian exhibition on contemporary fine arts" and suggesting the government the "acquisition of some works of art that enrich their artistic heritage, remember the festive

celebration, while at the same time practicing a gesture of good political kindness”.<sup>7</sup> It would be an ordinary comment if it wouldn’t have been written by Mário de Andrade, one of the most important names of Brazilian modernism that during the dictatorship of Getúlio Vargas endorsed his critical thinking as a social and political responsibility.

In 1935, during the Mayor management of Fabio Prado, the Department of Culture was created with the scope of gathering several cultural institutions under its sole responsibility and with the aim to democratize the access to artistic and cultural manifestations. In the same year of its creation, Mario de Andrade was invited to collaborate with the Department of Culture as director; a position that he embraced as an opportunity of social investment in Brazilian culture education. With the implementation of Estado Novo, achieved with the coup d’état of Getúlio Vargas and the consequent replacement of Mayor Fabio Prado by Prestes Maia, Mário de Andrade was removed from his position in May 1938. As director, the request to Fábio Prado in the letter written in December 1937 may have been one of the last actions, preceding his Folklore Research Mission financed by the Cultural Department in the North and Northeast of Brazil, in February 1938. In that letter, Mario de Andrade requested two sculptures from the 1937 Exhibition, as we can read:

“[...] considerando que ao govêrno da Cidade de São Paulo não pode passar ignorada a exposição italiana, o Departamento de Cultura propõe a V. Excia. a compra de algumas esculturas italianas da referida exposição. Toma ainda a liberdade de sugerir a V. Excia. fiquem de propriedade municipal o delicioso bronze ‘Polledro’ de Sirio Tofanari e a admirável cabeça de mármore ‘Giovine Donna’ de Francesco Wildt”..<sup>8</sup>

Both sculptures were acquired. Tofanari's bronze is today kept at the City Hall and Wildt's marble at the Cultural Center of São Paulo (CCSP). It is possible that such acquisitions were associated with the Cultural Department's ambition to create a municipal museum dedicated to "active teaching", as defined by Mario de Andrade in a letter written to Paulo Duarte,

in September 1937. It was a new conception of a museum, with a different constitution, regulated by central governments. Andrade described it as follows: "They must contain everything. They should be archaeological, folkloric, historical, artistic museums as well as museums of the outdoors and of industry". We, in turn, could associate the "museum of everything" with the old cabinets of curiosities, but it was associated, instead, with the democratic thinking of Mario de Andrade and the social engagement of his projects especially during the 1930's. In 1937, for example, National Historical and Artistic Heritage Service (known as SHPAN) was created with parameters based on Mario de Andrade's preliminary project, which foresaw the expansion of the concept of monuments and material goods and the incorporation of the concept of movable traditions. These changes would bring about an expansion of the very concept of culture, since the political criteria for safeguarding it would also consider more popular manifestations that did not endure in time and space, such the popular festivals and songs of the Northeast of Brazil.



**Fig. 2.** La Partecipazione Italiana all'Esposizione di San Paolo del Brasile. Bibliotheca Hertziana.



**Fig. 3.** La Partecipazione Italiana all'Esposizione di San Paolo del Brasile. Bibliotheca Hertziana.

Also in 1937, the Minister Gustavo Capanema commissioned Candido Portinari to create a mural for the Ministry of Education and Health in Rio de Janeiro. A work whose studies resonated within Mário de Andrade's critics as one of the main *topoi* of modern Brazilian painting celebrated as "a collective triumph of labor", in the words of the critic.

It is curious to note in this period the participation of artists and critics of the left, such as Portinari and Mario de Andrade, in Vargas' government. Tadeu Chiarelli analyzed this curiosity, justifying it as a "oportunismo de esquerda dentro de um regime de direita"<sup>4</sup> and suggests to conjecture "a possibilidade de participar na área artístico-cultural de um governo conservador, sem uma política definida para o campo das artes

plásticas, poderia ser a oportunidade ideal para forçar a criação de um imaginário que glorificasse o povo brasileiro".<sup>10</sup>

Returning to the letter addressed to Fabio Prado we come across two brief descriptions by Mario de Andrade of the sculptors whose works he suggested to be acquired by the Mayor: Siro Tofanari and Francesco Wildt. The former, Andrade describes as an animalist celebrated in several Italian and foreign museums. And the second is presented as follows:

"De Francesco Wildt seria quase ocioso falar, tanto o seu nome é hoje universalmente conhecido. Milanês, nascido a primeiro de março de 1868 e morto a 12 de março de 1931, Wildt consagrou-se por toda a parte tanto pela grandeza e consciência de sua técnica como pela originalidade de sua arte, profundamente impregnada de valor humano. As suas pesquisas escultóricas tornaram-no também um dos estalões da arte moderna. A sua *Giovine Donna* é o último trabalho que criou, antes de morrer – obra de uma pureza admirável de linha e duma intensidade esplendida de expressão".<sup>11</sup>

What we must notice from this description provided by Mario de Andrade is that the critic describes the sculptor erroneously. Francesco Wildt was actually born in 1896 and in 1931 he did not die, but started teaching at the marble school in Brera, after leaving the studio of his father, Adolfo Wildt, with whom Francesco collaborated until his death. Andrade, presents Francesco describing Adolfo, a legitimate misattribution which can be justified by the son's own way of living on his father's shadow, as Paola Mola mentions in the article *Miscellanea wildtiana*:

“Che Francesco non si occupasse di smentire e che potesse anzi favorire l’equivoco, è molto probabile: vissuto nel culto della personalità paterna doveva essere intimamente contento dell’errore [...]. É

significativo che Francesco usasse firmare in modo identico al padre, con il cognome in stampatello preceduto (ma non sempre) dall'iniziale del nome".<sup>12</sup>

Adolfo Wildt, in turn, was one of the main Italian sculptors internationally associated with fascism. In 1923 he sculpted the bust of Mussolini, which was extensively used within the propaganda of the regime, such as in the Italian pavilion in 1925 Paris Exhibition, in the Mostra del Novecento Italiano in 1926, and on the cover of the Italian version biography *Dux*, written by Margherita Sarfatti.

We can understand Chiarelli's interpretation of a "left-wing opportunism". However, it is difficult to extend this interpretation to Mario de Andrade's interest in the fascist exhibition. We can draft a clarification taking into consideration the following arguments: first, although the Italian pavilion in the 1937 exhibition leaves no doubt as to its fascist identity, Mario de Andrade makes no mention of the political character of the exhibition in his request to the mayor Fabio Prado. Second, it must be acknowledged that taking into consideration the set of works exhibited, Mario de Andrade points out perhaps the most "neutral" ones, shunning the works which themes could be associated with representations of *italianità*.

Returning to the "museum of everything", we can indicate two main axes in Mario de Andrade's description. The first one concerns the definition of culture itself proposed to be understood in a broader sense, materially and immaterially, mirroring his preliminary project for SPHAN: "Se num edifício canal do município se guardam um tronco de escravos, umas cestas trançadas, uns desenhos-cópias de petroglifos existentes na região, uma cadeia de jacarandá entalhado, uma bandeira da Guerra do Paraguai um quadro de boa pintura e uma cópia de Fídias, haverá também um jardim com pariris ameríndios, taipas caipiras, pinguelas, porteiras seriação progressiva de cultivo dos vegetais da região, etc. E também não esquecer as indústrias do município".<sup>13</sup>

The second one concerns the didactic engagement of the museum as Andrade suggests that it should contain: "“visitas obrigatórias, em dia de trabalho, de operários, estudantes, crianças, etc. Visitas vivas, sem

conferência de hora, mas acompanhadas de explicador inteligente. Sem isso não haverá museu, mas cemitério. Sem isso, sem o auxílio do povo, esclarecido, jamais conseguiremos nada de permanentemente eficaz contra vandalismos e extermínios”.<sup>14</sup>

This didactic engagement of the “museum of everything” was also expressed in the diversified nature of its objects - archeological, folkloric, historical and artistic - and referred to Mario de Andrade's praise of the social character of Portinari's paintings. Chiarelli defined this praise as “uma arte mais compreensível ao povo [...] alheia a qualquer malabarismo estético que anuviasse a mensagem do assunto tratado, para que se tornasse mais compreensível e mais direta”.<sup>15</sup> In the text on Portinari, written between 1942 and 1944, for the Argentine publishing house Losada, Mario de Andrade differentiates the artist's social didacticism from the revolutionary experimentalisms of the early twentieth century that taught “um espírito de insatisfação coletiva, e de repúdio às ordens sociais dominantes”<sup>16</sup> Portinari's experimentalism, in turn, would teach a social conscience without being revolutionary, without being political.

The acquisitions of Tofanari's and Wildt's sculptures could therefore be contextualized in Mario de Andrade's project for the Department of Culture to create a popular museum, whose didactic and social qualities should not be overshadowed by the political aspect of the works, as declared by Andrade to Paulo Prado: “Quanto aos objetos do museu, não haverá município que não ofereça o que possui de arqueológico, de folclórico, e mesmo de histórico ou de artístico, em benefício e glória do seu município. Talvez seja apenas necessário mudar de vez em quando de partido na Prefeitura, pois desconfio que muitos prefeitos só receberão ofertas de seus correligionários, ah, política!”.<sup>17</sup>

Besides the prevalence of social quality over the political aspect of the work, the acquisition suggested by Mário de Andrade can also be associated with his predilection for movable traditions, “ou seja, pelos bens culturais que se transformam ao longo do tempo”,<sup>18</sup> as analyzed by Pedro Fragelli in the article *Tradition and Revolution: Mario de Andrade and the Brazilian cultural heritage*. The debate surrounding the demolition of Sé, the historic city center

in Bahia, led Mario de Andrade to defend himself in his writings from accusations of being a "futurist barbarian". Clarifying his considerations between the pros and cons of the demolition that ultimately did not happen, Andrade differentiates two types of traditions: the movable and the immovable. Regarding the former, exemplified in songs, poetry and popular dances, he states that it is necessary to safeguard them "talqualmente estão, porque elas se transformam pelo simples fato da mobilidade que tem".<sup>19</sup> As for the second ones, Andrade affirms that they don't evolve by themselves, and can even be harmful, and concludes: "Algumas são perfeitamente ridículas que nem a 'carroça' do rei da Inglaterra. Destas a gente só pode aproveitar o espírito, a psicologia e não a forma objetiva".<sup>20</sup>

This was an anti-traditional conception of tradition that "inclui tanto o passado cultural quanto a liberdade em relação a ele", as written by Fragelli quoting Robert Schwarz perception.<sup>21</sup> In light of such reflections we can ponder whether such freedom would not also be part of a de-contextualization of Tofanari's and Wildt's sculptures. Just as an African tribal object in the European context of the 1920s had its mystical content corrupted when put to question the academic and cultural aesthetic vices of the West, Tofanari and Wildt's sculptures, in the Brazilian context of leftist intellectuals, were dissociated from their propagandistic objectives in the 1937 Exhibition, which were described as follows by Valerio Mariani in the bilingual catalog of the *Mostra d'Arte*: "Comunque se attraverso questo semplice saggio d'arte nostra, il visitatore saprà riconoscere alcuni fondamentali aspetti dell'anima italiana, e se italiano sentirà la nostalgia del suo paese, se straniero sarà afferrati dal fascino della forza, della schiettezza, dell'accogliente dolcezza d'una terra che forse non conosce ancora, la rassegna di queste opera avrà raggiunto il suo più alto scopo".<sup>22</sup>

It was, therefore, an exhibition whose propaganda could not make without the immigrant. Without representing it or even its contemporary reality, the *Mostra d'Arte* invested in representations of a land where the immigrant did not live, of an ideal nation different from the one he had abandoned not more than fifty years before for Brazil. Such nostalgia, thus, was a rhetorical discourse, without social scope, an adaptation of fascist

propaganda to the Brazilian social context, a strategic resource that would lead the regime to better understand its international policy and that would help consolidate the Estado Novo in Brazil. On December 20, 1937, shortly after the coup d'état of Getúlio Vargas and the end of São Paulo Exhibition, the department of *Propaganda Presso Gli Stati Esteri* received a letter sent from Brazil requesting Italian journalists who could favor the propaganda of the newly installed regime, assuring the nature of this govern: "è quanto di più concretamente fascista si poteva realizzare nelle condizioni ottocentesche del Brasile e secondo le realtà interne ed internazionali." <sup>23</sup> Two years after the São Paulo Exhibition, one can notice a change in the Italian interest in Brazil, if one compares it with the initial slow and disinterested adhesion of the Italian pavilion at the 1937 Exhibition. A report addressed to the Minister of Cultura Popolare, Alessandro Pavolini, and signed by Cesco Tomaselli about his trip to Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil, focusing on Italian immigrants and travelers, dates from December 4, 1939. In this report, Tomaselli indicates in South America a large number of "Italiani morti", referring to the immigrants without Italian identity: "Come Dante nell'Inferno incontra i trapassati, coi loro corpi che paiono sostanza viva e sono invece ombre, che la luce attraversa, così io, pellegrinando nel Nuovo Mondo, mi sono imbattuto in esseri che avevano origine, caratteri, cognome italiani, spesso bellissimi cognome, ma udendo echeggiare sulle mie labbra la favella natia rimanevano sordi, interdetti, indifferenti, confusi, qualche volta ostili". <sup>24</sup> In Brazil, though, Tomaselli indicates a hope of reversing this situation because of the greater number of "italiani ricuperabili" and suggests the foundation in São Paulo of a newspaper published in Portuguese that could amplify the propaganda made by Italian journals such as *Fanfulla* on which he ponders: "chi sono i lettori di Fanfulla? Sono i connazionali che non hanno bisogno di essere fertilizzati". <sup>25</sup>

To conclude, let us return to the consideration left open at the beginning of this presentation: how was an exhibition in honor of the immigrant possible in the aforementioned Italian and Brazilian historical and cultural contexts? Although it is not possible to answer this question with a single answer, I ponder on the element of nostalgia being a valid key for

reading it. On the Italian side, it was a rhetorical nostalgia, used by fascist propaganda in the process of national-building within the imperialist ambitions of the regime. On the Brazilian side, in turn, it was a “reflexive nostalgia”, which Svetlana Boym defined as a questioning attitude of truth, which praises the fragments of memory and temporalizes space. Two nostalgias that, despite being different, proved to be compatible in the 1937 Exhibition, integrating Italian imperialist program with the Brazilian colonialist culture.

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6. Archivio Centrale dello Stato. Propaganda presso gli Stati Esteri. Busta 35. G. Castruccio to Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 19<sup>th</sup> January 1937.
7. Mario de Andrade. Ofício 368, 1937. Arquivo do Centro Cultura de São Paulo
8. Mario de Andrade to Fabio Prado, 28<sup>th</sup> December 1937. Arquivo do Centro Cultural São Paulo.
9. Chiarelli, “Pintura”, 278.
10. Chiarelli “Pintura”. 277.
11. Mario de Andrade. Ofício 368, 1937. Arquivo do Centro Cultura de São Paulo
12. Mola, “Miscellana”, 158.
13. Andrade, “Mario”, 152.
14. Andrade, “Mario”, 152.
15. Chiarelli, “Pintura” 272.
16. Guido, “Portinari”, 68.
17. Andrade, “Mario”, 152.
18. Fragelli, “Tradição”, 150.
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20. Andrade, “O turista”, 297
21. Roberto Schwarz, *Sequências brasileiras: ensaios*. (São Paulo, 1999: p. 48)
22. Mariani, “Mostra”, no-paginated.
23. Archivio Centrale dello Stato. Propaganda presso gli Stati Esteri (1930-1943). Busta 37. Dott. Mario da Silva to Dott. Casini. 20<sup>th</sup> Dicembre 1937.
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25. Archivio Centrale dello Stato. Propaganda presso gli Stati Esteri (1930-1943). Busta 37. Cesco Tomaselli to Pavolini. 4<sup>th</sup> December 1939.

# Far Beyond the Work of Art: Migrations of Knowledge Between Brazil and Italy in the 1950s: Danilo Di Prete and Bramante Buffoni

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## **ABSTRACT**

The article will discuss the artistic careers of the Italian artists Danilo Di Prete (Viareggio) and Bramante Buffoni (Milan) after their immigration to São Paulo, Brazil, in the post-World War II. This discussion will not address the plastic and artistic solutions applied by them in their artworks, but instead how their immigrant condition contributed to their fluency in the art system in Brazil.

By means of the analysis of the complex relationship established by these artists and the cultural agents operating in São Paulo at that time - many of whom also Italians - we will approach the difficulties and solutions proposed by them in their performances in Brazil and how their immigrant condition contributed to the configuration of an expanded artistic performance, which included not only painting or sculpture, but also a list of various activities such as: organizing and setting up exhibitions, acting in the field of decoration, poster design and illustrations, among other productions. In this sense, we will approach a field that still remains neglected by Brazilian historiography about the relevance of these artists in the construction of a broader sense of modernity, something that, in a way, had a great impact on the Brazilian art scene in the 1950s.

## **KEYWORDS**

Italian Modern Art; Bramante Buffoni; Danilo Di Prete; knowledge migration; art system in São Paulo

### Introduction

It is well known and discussed in art historiography in Brazil the strong contribution given by descendants of Italians and by some Italians who migrated to São Paulo during the interwar period and after World War II, such as Fulvio Pennacchi (1905-1992)<sup>1</sup>, Galileo Emendabile (1898-1974)<sup>2</sup>, and many others<sup>3</sup>. The subjects of studies, articles and exhibitions are mostly artists who worked in the field of painting and sculpture, and also those who marked the system of arts - such as Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho (1898-1977)<sup>4</sup>, known as Ciccillo, and the couple Pietro Maria Bardi (1900-1999) and Lina Bo (1914-1992)<sup>5</sup>. Also in this system, there is the presence of several dealers such as the couple Anna Maria (1913-1994) and Pasquale Fiocca (1914-1994)<sup>6</sup>.

There are, however, some other Italians who impacted our artistic milieu and require further study. The silence around their names can occur for many reasons, among which we could list: 1. the absence of their works in public collections and consequently their absence in retrospectives or solo exhibitions; 2. the small reproduction of their works in publications addressed to the general public or academic field; 3. the lack of an institute that gives support and visibility to the artist; 4. the existence of an archive safeguarded by a museum or an institution; 5. the small circulation of their works in the secondary market and the low prices achieved at auctions; 6. a more heterogeneous plastic solution applied in the artworks in terms of quality; or even, heterogeneous in terms of supports used, that is, not exclusively within the known axes of the so called “Fine Arts”, but those understood as belonging to the “Applied Arts”<sup>7</sup>.

Bearing these aspects in mind, the goal of this article is to discuss two Italian artists, who migrated and settled in São Paulo, about whom there has been a certain silence for decades, due to the reasons just mentioned, but others that we will try to point out. They are Danilo Di Prete (1911-1985) and Bramante Buffoni (1912-1989), who arrived in the city in 1946 and 1953, respectively. In those years, as it is known, an art system in São Paulo was still being developed<sup>8</sup>, which meant for both artists to start building their careers

from scratch, in an artistic milieu very different from the one they were used to.

However, our idea is not to approach their artistic processes exclusively from the point of view of their production in the support of painting, but rather, from their multiple activities, which include the field of the “Applied Arts”. Working in other fields was possible due to the full knowledge and experience they had of the Italian artistic system, in which modernity was understood in a broader sense<sup>9</sup>. Being modern was not just about working with “Fine Arts”, but also acting on various fronts such as graphic arts, advertising, decoration for public and private spaces and the elaboration of sets and costumes for shows. It was also working with furniture, photography, creating jewelry and prints for clothing and contributing to fashion. Furthermore, it was to promote their work and themselves.

We will start the discussion by presenting some notes on their career, production and reception in São Paulo. Lastly, we will conclude by addressing some insights on how our approach to the career and production of these artists can contribute to the debates in our field of study.

### **Di Prete**

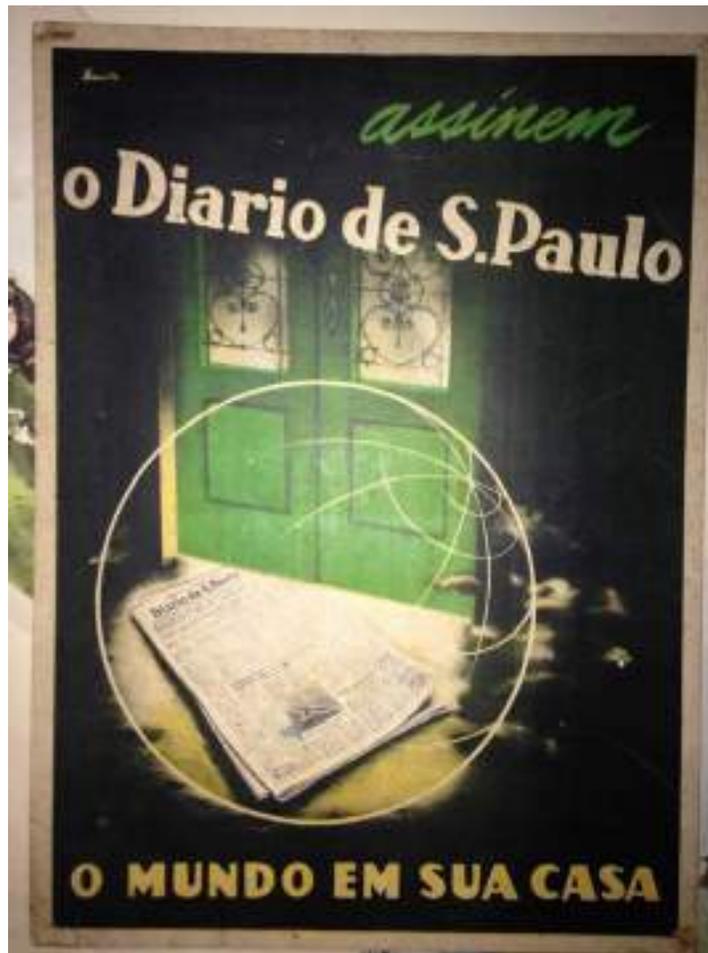
Danilo Di Prete spent his youth working as an artist in the coastal city of Viareggio. His artistic education would not occur in a formal academy, but through the active contact with other painters, the habit of visiting exhibitions, and also assembling shows and constructing floats for the city’s carnival<sup>10</sup>.

He displays his own paintings in shows, which took place during the fascist regime. As it is known the regime fiercely commanded the exhibition system, which comprised a great number of exhibitions organized by the Union of Fine Arts, aside from the Quadrennials of Rome and the Venice Biennial<sup>11</sup>. Di Prete was familiar with this exhibition system, and took part in all exhibition types, with the exception to the Venice Biennial.

During World War II, he took part in as an artist and a soldier. With its end, he found himself in a terrible financial condition which made him move

with his family to São Paulo, where he already had a relative, who had a stable economic situation.

When he arrives in the city in 1946, soon realizes that although it was experiencing broad economic growth and development, the exhibition artistic system was incipient compared to the Italian one. Then, he starts to establish relationships with the members of the Santa Helena Group and the São Paulo Artistic Family<sup>12</sup>. At the same time, with these limited exhibition opportunities, Di Prete painted walls for a living, and from 1947 onwards, worked with the creation of illustration for magazines<sup>13</sup>, newspapers, books and also of ads and posters for important advertising agencies<sup>14</sup>.



**Fig. 1.** Danilo Di Prete. Ad for the newspaper *Diário de S. Paulo*, 1947.

The development of commercial and institutional posters would benefit the artist, who was granted with many awards and recognitions<sup>15</sup>. Then, he started to advocate in favor of posters as something not "minor" in relation to painting. He makes this move here, at the same time he publicizes it in his Viareggio through correspondents<sup>16</sup>, stating that he was pioneering the debate about the boundaries between the so-called major and minor arts in Brazilian lands.

As it is known, the cultural scene in São Paulo changed by the end of the 1940s with the creation of the Museum of Art of São Paulo by Assis Chateaubriand and the former Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo by Ciccillo<sup>17</sup>. And it is with the latter that Di Prete tries to bond. According to testimonies provided by him from the 1970s onwards, they met in 1949 and he suggested to Ciccillo the creation of a show in São Paulo that would follow the model of the Venice Biennial<sup>18</sup>. However, Ciccillo had already been thinking about an event of this type since 1948, but foresaw it for the year of 1954, along with the celebrations for the 4th centenary of the city of São Paulo<sup>19</sup>. Thus, Di Prete's role was to push Ciccillo to accomplish something he had considered previously.

The first São Paulo Biennial was carried out by Ciccillo and Yolanda Penteadó (1903-1983) in 1951, under the organization of the former Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo. Di Prete does not participate in any negotiation in the holding of the show, but before its opening, he works in the production from wall painting to assembly, and after it, welcoming the Italian delegation when it arrives.

But the artist's connection with the São Paulo Biennial would go beyond this organizational issue. He was present in thirteen of its editions in which he won two prizes for first place of national painting (1st and 8th editions, in 1951 and 1965, respectively<sup>20</sup>), designed catalog covers (2nd edition in 1953) and a poster (7th edition, 1963), had two solo special rooms (6th and 9th editions, in 1961 and 1967, respectively) and won several acquisition awards.



**Fig. 2.** Danilo Di Prete. Poster and cover for the catalog of the 7th São Paulo Biennial, 1963. Fundação Bienal de São Paulo/ Arquivo Histórico Wanda Svevo.

Thus, his circulation in the artistic milieu and creations are deeply linked to the history of the São Paulo Biennial and Ciccillo, with whom the artist has always maintained a close relationship according to Giuliana Di Prete's testimonies to the author.

Bearing this background in mind, it is not by chance that Di Prete has been left at a margin, mainly situated in footnotes in academic papers or

treated in a pejorative way by the critics and by the historiography of art in Brazil<sup>21</sup>. A possible sponsorship of Ciccillo in gratitude for his undisputed collaboration has always been considered in articles by the time and, even later, in compendiums that discussed the history of the show.

Nevertheless, if we get rid of this negative judgment, it becomes evident that Di Prete's contributions to the artistic milieu in São Paulo were significant and in different fields. And these contributions incorporated knowledge and practices from his country of origin, expressed in a more or less perceptible way. At first, regarding the field of advertising<sup>22</sup>, for which he made an effort to speak in favor of an elimination of the hierarchy of the arts. With this operation, he seems to import the assumptions of the futurist Italian artists who had already preached the importance of advertising, such as Fortunato Depero and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, which he knew.

Secondly, his contribution related to the São Paulo Biennial, as explained.

Finally, there is a contribution to the concept of the construction of an artist's career that he applied to himself. Di Prete had already been consciously acting in this regard even before his arrival in Brazil, when he started archiving materials that documented his activity as an artist<sup>23</sup>. Living in São Paulo, he continues this practice. In addition to that, he delivers public pronouncements about his role as the creator of the São Paulo Biennial<sup>24</sup>, which demonstrates his worries on the place he would occupy in the pantheon of the arts in Brazil.

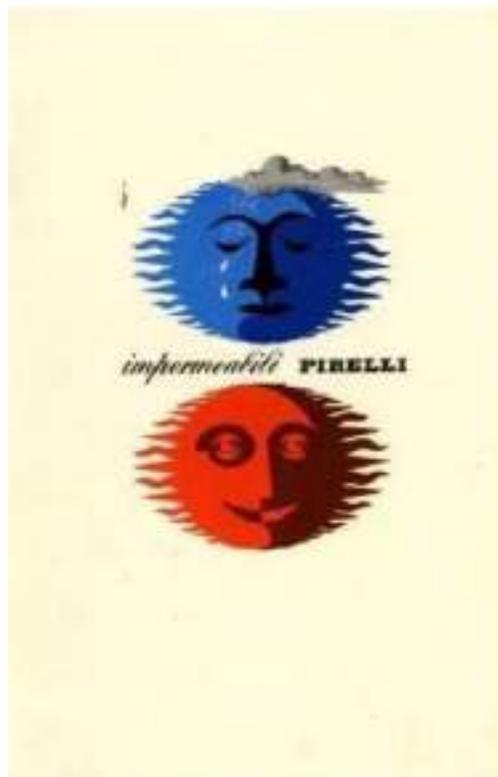
It is in the act of publicizing himself as a product, in São Paulo and in his Viareggio, that seems to be a greater combination between what he brings from his country and what he learns in São Paulo. Because if, on the one hand, from Italy he carries the memory of how an artist could build his career by climbing steps within a system of arts, from São Paulo, he perceptively understands, based on his work in advertising, that aside from selling products, it was possible to advertise himself in a constant and fresh way, making use of a powerful exhibiting vehicle, such as the Biennial.

### Buffoni

Like Di Prete, Bramante Buffoni did not have a traditional background in Fine Arts. The artist attended the Superior Institute for Industrial Arts in Monza, beginning his studies in 1929. The Institute was modeled on the Arts and Crafts schools that emerged in the early 20th century, with classes in decoration, ceramics and graphic arts<sup>25</sup>.

During his years at this school, Buffoni devoted himself primarily to the study of decoration. In this environment, the artist was able to produce and exhibit his first works, in addition to forming a social network that helped him in his professional insertion in Milan.

From the 30s to the 50s Buffoni had a fruitful participation in industrial art fairs, that took place majorly in Milan. Involving several modern artists, these events were intended to showcase the latest in arts, science and technology in Italy. They also served to demonstrate its economic power and its place in the civilizational and imperialist narrative. They worked as a way to associate modern Italian design with the idea of a nation in progress.



**Fig. 3.** Bramante Buffoni, Pirelli logotype for raincoat, 1949. Courtesy of the Pirelli Foundation.

Buffoni's participation in these fairs showcased mainly his production as a muralist and a graphic designer. He presented murals for the decoration of dining rooms, as well as scenographies for stands of textile producers. Also important was his presentation of posters, which classified him as one of the most significant modern graphic artists working in Milan at that time. This recognition was relevant to Buffoni, as he was beginning his collaboration with Olivetti and Pirelli, in the field of production of posters <sup>26</sup>.

In 1953, in the peak of his career in Milan, Buffoni decided to come to São Paulo with his son, Giovanni. It is possible that the success of his compatriots in South America served as a parameter for his decision to migrate to Brazil. The artist may have received information about possible job opportunities, or he may have been planning to collaborate with companies such as Pirelli and Olivetti in São Paulo. The fact is that the network of contacts formed by Italian artists, architects and intellectuals who arrived in Brazil after World War II was fundamental for his establishment in the city.

In a letter written in June 1953, Buffoni gives us important clues about the circumstances of his arrival in Brazil, including an extensive commentary on the importance of other Italians in his adaptation:

[...] as soon as I disembarked I saw Bardi who runs the Museum of Modern Art (sic) with adjoining school. He welcomed me along the way and the reason I understood later. Anyway, he is thinking of a great article with photos of works in his magazine ABITAT (sic) like Domus, he created a graphic arts course for me, which I will start in August (...). Then, through Palanti and a friend of his, a scenographer painter [...] with whom I associated myself for some works, I [put] myself to work. Finally, at his request I went to Matarazzo, who is the president of the international exhibition that will open in São Paulo in June 1954. He welcomed me well, declaring his pleasure to have me here and making me work proposals<sup>27</sup>.

One can point out three Italian names that were very important to Buffoni in those years: Pietro Maria Bardi, Giancarlo Palanti (1906-1977) and Ciccillo. The first one, Bardi, migrated to São Paulo with Lina Bo Bardi in 1946 and was working as director of the newly founded Museum of Art of São Paulo. Also, alongside Lina, they managed the Contemporary Art Institute and the magazine Habitat. Buffoni quickly began working with the Bardis, first as a graphic art professor, and then as graphic artist for the Museum. He also worked on joint projects with Bardi, such as the book “The artist and the machine”, published by Olivetti, with texts by Bardi and graphic design by Buffoni. Bardi's support demonstrates Buffoni's recognition as a strong contributor to their agenda in favor of the “Industrial Arts”, represented by some of the Museum exhibitions, and their actions in the Institute and Habitat magazine<sup>28</sup>.



**Fig. 4.** Bramante Buffoni, decorative panels for the headquarters of the Olivetti office in São Paulo (OISA Olivetti Office in San Paolo, Brasil), 1957. Olivetti Historical Archive Association, Ivrea – Italy.

The second name mentioned by Buffoni was of the Milanese architect Giancarlo Palanti. Palanti had been in São Paulo since 1946 and enjoyed a comfortable position as responsible, among other things, for Olivetti's architectural projects in Brazil. Together with the architect, Buffoni designed several murals, including the panels for the Olivetti headquarters in São Paulo<sup>29</sup>.

Buffoni's proximity to Ciccillo Matarazzo – the third name mentioned by the artist – expresses his particular interest in working on the exhibition for the city's anniversary, organized by the industrialist. Although there are no records of the artist's participation in the 1954 fair, Buffoni remained close to Ciccillo, having participated in the Third Biennial of São Paulo, in 1955, and, in the same years, sold a painting to Matarazzo, that is currently part of the collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art of the University of São Paulo.



**Fig. 5.** Bramante Buffoni, *Untitled*, n.d. Oil on varnished wood, 50 x 70 cm. Collection Museum of Contemporary Art of the University of São Paulo.

In 1955, Buffoni's name was mentioned many times in newspapers, including a note of reproval, mentioning that Buffoni had not been "taken advantage of", since he was an artist with such a background in industrial fairs<sup>30</sup>. The news that Buffoni was an underused talent was in line with several critics in the press valuing the artist as an excellent decorator. In 1954, the critic Quirino da Silva wrote that "Buffoni is, above all, a decorator aware of his craft", and also was "first of all a craftsman"<sup>31</sup>.

Buffoni asserted himself in the artistic milieu of São Paulo less through painting than through what he identified as "industrial arts". Both in his letters and in the critical reception of his works, there was a very clear concern with the dimensions of his craft. This can be understood a way of dialoguing and inserting himself in an established Italian community in São Paulo. One can highlight that this attitude reflects a certain clarity on the part of the artist, who made an informed choice to work with the decorative arts, in temporary exhibitions and architectural projects. This argument tends to oppose the usual idea that he has followed this path for "lack of choice", or for a negative evaluation of the Brazilian art scene.

### **Final considerations**

While working in Italy, many modern artists developed tools and strategies to deal with the various agents of the system, creating works from which they could make a living, and still working on their images to consciously build their careers for the future.

When immigrating to Brazil, some of these artists realized how incipient the artistic system was compared to the Italian one organized by the regime, both in relation to the amount of exhibitions, and also how the artists managed their activities and connected to the various cultural agents. However, the immediate postwar era was a turning point in São Paulo, which was at full development and expansion, hosting the opening of art museums and important spaces for dissemination and circulation, especially of modern art. This scenario attracted foreigners, mainly Italians, as those two discussed in this article.

We can thus observe that for both Di Prete and Buffoni, it was fundamental that an operation of immigrating knowledge and models from the Italian environment be introduced and reframed by them as they began to act in the Brazilian art system.

One can notice that although they did not know each other in Italy, they were completely aware of its art system in a broader sense. Also, while living in São Paulo they had the same interlocutor, Ciccillo, and made use of the São Paulo Biennial as a platform to give more visibility to their productions.

They also had three major points of convergence, in which they operated. The first one was training. Both had a hybrid training, in non-traditional contexts and schools. The second one, within the exhibitions. After their training period, they actively participated in different kinds of exhibitions in Italy (Applied and Industrial arts), not only to exhibit their works, but to specialize in what they understood as an "exhibition system". The third one is regarding what we call as a circulation of knowledge. Both migrated to Brazil because they envisioned the possibility of growing professionally and upon arriving here, they identified opportunities not only as painters, but as artists within this "exhibition system" encouraged by the 50s in São Paulo. An important aspect is that in general, this choice is identified as a "lack of choice", as a way out of an environment in São Paulo that had no market to absorb the painting production of these artists. Although this argument may have validity, based on the observation of Di Prete's and Buffoni's experiences, one can add to it the idea that this choice made by the artists, and especially in the case of Buffoni, was deliberate, and came from a clear analysis of the best ways to act in São Paulo at the time. It also came from an artistic moment of expansion of what was understood to be artistic activity in the city.

In the case of Di Prete, he inserted himself into this system with the support of a net of social relationships, extrapolated the limits of painting and also made a systematic effort in favor of his career. All these strategies and knowledge migrated with his coming to Brazil.

We started this article highlighting some of the hypotheses regarding the silence in our historiography on Buffoni and Di Prete. In general, we can state that it is difficult to discuss their varied productions and activities within the frameworks and the canonized discourses of Art History in Brazil.

We believe the approach we make represents a historiographical contribution because the idea is not to make an effort to include them in the greater narrative. But rather, to use them as examples to question these greater narratives in favor of more open and transversal discourses. The best ways to bring these (and many other) artists and narratives to light from a historiographical point of view, remain as open questions. A solo show for each of them only displaying paintings or even articles addressing especially their "Fine Arts" creations, for example, would not be enough.

From our point of view, along with these artworks, at least three things are mandatory: 1. that their other productions in the "Applied Arts" and "Advertising" fields to be displayed and discussed as not being a minor or collateral activities, but rather, creations in the same level of importance of their paintings; 2. a deeper discussion on their broader activities and migration of knowledge should be done<sup>32</sup> ; 3. their activities should be discussed in other fields of knowledge: communication, marketing and advertising; design; psychology; archival science; amongst others. These are just some initial ideas on how we could approach their trajectories thoroughly and comprehensively, and thus, contribute to a shift in sight to historiography.

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## Endnotes

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6. On the couple and the activities of the gallery, please see: Silva, José Armando Pereira da. *Artistas na Metrópole: Galeria Domus, 1947-1951*. São Paulo: Via Imprensa, 2016.
7. The use we make here of the distinction between "major" and "minor" arts is exclusively due to the current use that has been made by the historiography of art for decades, but it does not imply that the authors themselves agree with this distinction. On the contrary, as we will try to demonstrate in this essay, we believe this separation is arbitrary and sterile. This topic was discussed in the exhibition curated by the authors and a team of researchers on modern art called: Design for modern daily life in Brazil: 1920-1960 at MAC USP from aug. 2021-aug. 2022. See the exhibition catalog: *Design for modern daily life in Brazil: 1920-1960*, edited by Ana Gonçalves Magalhães. São Paulo: Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo, 2021.
8. On the topic, see: Durand, José Carlos. *Sociologia da Arte: Arte, Privilégio e Distinção*. São Paulo: EDUSP; Perspectiva, 1989.
9. In this regard, we can mention the beliefs and activities of the Italian futurist artists, especially those carried out by Fortunato Depero. His activities are broadly discussed by the historiography of art. A significant discussion on him can be found at: Center for Italian Modern Art, New York. "Fortunato Depero", 2015. <https://www.italianmodernart.org/journal/issues/depero/>
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14. He created for companies such as: Diários Associados; Clipper clothes; Silverware Wolff; Jockey Club races, amongst others.
15. Such as the poster he created for the newspaper Diários Associados in 1947. Its image can be seen in our dissertation, previously mentioned.
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18. He states that on many occasions from 1969 onwards. One of them was given to the Matarazzo Foundation. Its transcription can be found both at: Arquivo Wanda Svevo / Fundação Bienal de São Paulo; the artist's daughter Giuliana Di Prete Campari archive (in São Paulo).
19. As it can be seen in the article: Martins, Ibiapaba. "Duas Entrevistas Oportunas." *Correio Paulistano*, São Paulo, November 14, 1948.
20. It is important to highlight that Di Prete was in charge of assembling the space for Brazilian representation. See the exhibition catalog: *VIII Bienal de São Paulo* (São Paulo: Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, 1965): p. 17.
21. There are many examples of both approaches. One of them is: Francisco Alambert and Polyanna Canhête, *As Bienais de São Paulo: Da Era do Museu à Era dos Curadores (1951-2001)*, (São Paulo: Boitempo Editorial, 2004), 37-38.
22. His creations for ads and posters were diversified and complex (images can be found in our dissertation). His partnership with advertising agencies of the time - Standard and J. W. Thompson- was very fruitful.
23. As mentioned above, this archive belongs to Giuliana Di Prete Campari.
24. Such as the one mentioned, and also another one in 1979 to a broad audience on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the former Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo on October 9, 1979 (consulted at Arquivo Multimeios – Centro Cultural São Paulo).
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30. "Bramante Buffoni e a arte na rua", *Correio Paulistano*, June 11, 1955, 7.
31. Quirino da Silva, "Notas de arte", *Diário da Noite*, December 22, 1954, 4.
32. We have been working in this direction. In the case of Buffoni: the exhibition of the modernist house curated by one of the authors, Patrícia Freitas, was conceived in a documentary format - it exposes the trajectory and not objects. As for Di Prete, a publication about him that will come out this year by the author, Renata Rocco, in which an attempt is made to not work with the format of a traditional artist biography, but to present Di Prete as someone who produces his paintings and work for many other media. Aside from that, he

publicizes all these creations and publicizes himself as an artist/ product. Nonetheless, we strongly believe that more research and debate should be carried out on the two artists discussed. Not only them, but also other immigrants that remain on the margins of the canonical discourse in Brazil.

# Waldemar Cordeiro and Grupo Forma: The Roman Road to São Paulo Concrete Art

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper<sup>1</sup> presents the relations of the Italian Brazilian artist Waldemar Cordeiro, leader of the concrete art group from São Paulo, with groups of abstractionists that emerged in Rome, immediately after the end of the Second World War.

## **KEYWORDS**

Waldemar Cordeiro; Abstraction; Concrete art; Forma group; Associazione Artistica Internazionale Indipendente Art Club.

In a text written by Waldemar Cordeiro and published by the São Paulo newspaper *Folha da Manhã* on 21<sup>st</sup> January 1948, the Italian-Brazilian artist describes his reencounter with old friends, such as the Italian painter Giulio Turcato, a member of Grupo Forma at the *Associazione Artistica Internazionale Indipendente Art Club*, with which Cordeiro had been involved in since it was founded in 1945, in Rome.

Rome, January – . . . I paused in front of the door to the Art Club's new office; it opened, revealing a room with framed paintings hanging on the walls. There were many new faces, but those who were old friends recognized me at once. After the sorts of gestures that are spontaneously produced by mutual fondness, I sat down among them. The electricity of a lively controversy still hung in the air. Rekindling the discussion would have been the best way to find my way back to my dear friends, and forget the period of absence...

First, I heard Turcato's voice, and then those of several young people, unknown to me. Although I was soon able to identify the opposing camps, I still didn't understand. I was lacking some kind of crucial knowledge. The lively discussion continued; the arguments were solid, divergent, and new to the people I had known.<sup>2</sup>

Cordeiro was born in Rome and lived in that city until 1946, when he moved to São Paulo to meet his father, who lived in Brazil. There he began working as an art critic, publishing texts that echoed the lively nature of the Roman artistic debate following World War II. From September 1947 to mid 1948, Cordeiro returned to Rome to settle his personal affairs. In 1948 he returned to São Paulo as a representative of the Art Club, tasked with expanding the association's activity in Brazil.

Like other Italian artists of his or earlier generations, from a very young age, Cordeiro viewed theoretical reflection as an activity that was both complementary to and inseparable from the pictorial practice. He began his professional life in newspapers. After studying at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Rome and, as an adolescent, visiting the studios of the city's artists, Cordeiro began publishing caricatures in the newspaper *Petiroso*. During the

same period, he exhibited them at Funny Face Shop, a store selling satirical drawings that had been opened by Federico Fellini in 1944. When he moved to São Paulo in 1946, he found work as a journalist at the Italian newspaper *Diário Latino*, where he continued publishing caricatures and art reviews. He began contributing to the newspaper *Folha da Manhã* and, eventually, to the newspaper *A Noite*. Cordeiro wrote about artists, reviewed exhibitions, and also critiqued other reviews. His writing was candid, without any equivocation, and thus often controversial. This was swiftly recognized by those in São Paulo, establishing his public persona in Brazil. He often engaged in polemics with other critics working in the city, particularly with the sociologist and art critic Sérgio Milliet. His texts defended abstract art within an environment that was still reactive to the movement, at a time when the debate was focused on the opposition between abstractionism and figurative art. Guided by the thinking of the German aesthete Konrad Fiedler, he argued for the autonomy of the visual elements, vehemently rejecting the idea of art as an expression of content unrelated to its own visuality. Together with Mário Pedrosa he became known as one of the primary advocates of abstractionism in Brazil and, beginning in 1952, as a leader of Grupo Ruptura, whose inaugural exhibition was held at the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo in 1952.

This paper examines Waldemar Cordeiro's contact with associations that played a central role in the circulation of abstractionism in postwar Italy, in particular the Rome Art Club and Grupo Forma. The texts by Cordeiro that were published in São Paulo newspapers between 1946 and 1952, several of which were specifically about modern art in Italy,<sup>3</sup> reveal that he closely followed new developments in the Italian art scene. This set of texts, as well as Cordeiro's work promoting exhibitions for the São Paulo Art Club in 1949 and 1950, are presented here as the strongest evidence of his connection with the Italian art scene in the 1940s and 1950s.

The Rome Art Club was created in 1945 with the aim of cultivating avant-garde art and activating connections between the Italian artistic milieu and the international landscape. Through exhibitions, debates, and the publication of a newsletter, the association proposed to promote the idea of

art as a universal value. Following years of fascist interference in Italian cultural life, the club sought to distance and protect itself from new government interventions: “The Art Club shall be a brotherhood of free artists, independent of all official influence, in an international climate. The Art Club is an apolitical association.”<sup>4</sup>

Following the war, the Rome Art Club brought together artists from the Scuola Romana and Corrente, as well as members of groups created after 1945, such as the Fronte Nuovo delle Arti<sup>5</sup> (New art front), Forma,<sup>6</sup> and Origine;<sup>7</sup> despite their differences, they all rejected the the status quo of modern Italian art mainly identified with the Novecento. Although the Art Club did not identify with a single political party and its members had a range of political views, several of them were members of the Italian Communist Party. From an aesthetic point of view, despite its diversity, the Art Club primarily attracted artists linked to exploring abstractionism, which also reinforced its international nature.

The club emerged from the confluence of Italian and foreign artists who had been in Rome since the city’s liberation in 1944, many of them as Allied soldiers. It was founded by the Italian painter Enrico Prampolini, a former Futurist with ties to the international artistic landscape, specifically the French group *Circle et Carré*, and the Polish painter Józef Jarema, who arrived in Italy as a sergeant in the Polish II Corps, a Polish resistance force that fought along with the Allies in Italy. From Futurism, the Art Club inherited the synthesis of theory and practice, as well as an internationalist and experimental inclination. The Art Club had a presence in a number of Italian cities, as well as in other countries, including Austria, Belgium, France, Holland, England, Israel, Egypt, Turkey, South Africa, Australia, Japan, Uruguay, and Brazil. Until 1955, the association had as many as 600 members and organized 93 exhibitions on different continents.

Waldemar Cordeiro was involved in the formation of the Art Club in 1945, when he was still living in Rome. After his visit to Italy, from September 1947 to mid-1948, the artist returned to Brazil as a representative of the Art Club, tasked with creating the São Paulo Art Club, in April 1949, of which he became vice president.<sup>8</sup>

The Polish painter Leopold Haar and the Hungarian sculptor Kazmer Fejer, also members of Grupo Ruptura from 1952, passed through the Associazione Artistica Internazionale Indipendente before settling in São Paulo. Haar arrived in Italy in 1944 as a “war official artist” in Anders’s Army (he developed design projects to the army), alongside Joseph Jarema. He was part of the Art Club’s inaugural exhibition in 1945, as well as other exhibitions of Polish artists that Jarema organized in Rome during the same period.<sup>9</sup> He immigrated to Porto Alegre, a city in South of Brazil, in 1946 and had a solo exhibition of drawings and paintings the following year, in which he presented himself as a founding member of the Rome Art Club, according to the brochure of his solo show. Kazmer Fejer was involved in founding the Budapest Art Club and participated in the association’s exhibitions in Vienna in 1947 and Turin in 1948. That same year, before moving to São Paulo, Fejer lived in Uruguay, where he was also a member of the Montevideo Art Club, alongside Joaquín Torres-García.<sup>10</sup>

In the article “Os pintores italianos buscam a verdade,” (Italian painters seek the truth) cited at the beginning of this text, the truth for Waldemar Cordeiro would be the series of initiatives to revitalize artistic language that emerged in Italy immediately following the war. The artist mentions the Forma group for the first time, remarking on recent developments in the Italian art scene. Waldemar Cordeiro mentions the artists whom he believed were encouraging a “revitalization” in contemporary Italian art: Renato Guttuso, Giulio Turcato, and Antonio Corpora, in Fronte; the Forma group of “abstractist” painters, promoted in Rome by Turcato, and the “valiant figures” Enrico Prampolini and Gino Severini.

Immediately following the war, despite the emergence of initiatives opposed to Novecento, the Italian art scene continued to have strong ties to figurative art. For Luciano Caramel, during that period, the attempts to make Italian art more contemporary, many of which were identified with neo-Cubism, were mostly restricted to an “abstractionism with a historical memory”; in other words, one still dialoging with figurative art.<sup>11</sup> Between 1930 and 1940, the first Italian abstractionist group appeared in Milan and included Lucio Fontana, Atanasio Soldati, Osvaldo Licini, Mario Radice,

Fausto Melotti, Manlio Rho, and Mauro Reggiani, among others. Closely related to the Movimento Italiano para a Arquitetura Racional (MIAR) (Italian movement for rational architecture), these artists were nourished by international movements with a constructivist tendency, even as they assimilated aspects of Italian metaphysical painting. Nonetheless, for Caramel, the Italian experiment with geometric abstraction in the first half of the twentieth century can be regarded as isolated, entering the country slowly and laboriously.<sup>12</sup> Following the war, the exhibition *Arte astratta e concreta* (Abstract and concrete art) at the Palazzo Reale in Milan, in February 1947, had a strong impact; it was organized by the Swiss painter and designer Max Huber and the architect Lanfranco Bombelli, with the help of Max Bill, and included artists from Italy, France, Germany, and Switzerland. Among them were Bruno Munari, Ettore Sottsass Jr., Luigi Veronesi, August Herbin, Vordemberge-Gildewart, Richard Paul Lohse, Walter Bodmer, Camille Graeser, Max Huber, Max Bill, Paul Klee, Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Jean Arp, Wassily Kandinsky, and Georges Vantongerloo. The exhibition brought together a large number of abstractionists in Italy for the first time, particularly Swiss artists chosen by Max Bill. With texts by Kandinsky, Vantongerloo, and Bill, the catalog didactically introduced the debate over the difference between abstract and concrete art. The former was presented as a new romanticism and the latter as the pure manifestation of the intellect, lacking any ties to the world of appearances.

The Forma group was created in Rome in 1947 mostly by young artists in their twenties, several of whom were associated with the Rome Art Club and interested in abstractionism as a way to make Italian art more contemporary within the postwar context. Its members — Carla Accardi, Ugo Attardi, Pietro Consagra, Piero Dorazio, Mino Guerrini, Achille Perilli, Antonio Sanfilippo, and Giulio Turcato — were part of the group until approximately 1950, all becoming prominent names in Italian abstract art beginning in the 1950s. According to Caramel, the Forma artists did not see the exhibition *Arte astratta e concreta* in Milan, but they did come into contact with its catalog. It would have undoubtedly influenced the editorial process for the magazine *Forma 1*, published in April 1947,<sup>13</sup> alongside the group's first exhibition at the

office of the Rome Art Club. Enrico Prampolini, who at the time was interested in abstractionist practice and theory, as well as in encouraging formal study that distanced itself from neo-Cubism, offered support and was a key reference for the group.

The cover of the magazine *Forma 1* displayed a manifesto that synthesized the ideas presented in other texts within the publication. First, the manifesto stands firmly against the Communist Party's critiques of avant-garde art, labeled as bourgeois and decadent, and against socialist realism:

We declare ourselves FORMALISTS and MARXISTS, convinced that the terms Marxism and formalism are not irreconcilable, particularly today, when progressive elements of our society must maintain a REVOLUTIONARY, AVANT-GARDE position, rather than becoming comfortable in the misunderstanding of a dead, conformist realism, which the most recent attempts in painting and sculpture have shown to be a narrow, limited road.<sup>14</sup>

According to Achilli Perilli, in his book *L'Age D'or di Forma 1*, the manifest reflected a utopian reading of the relationship between early twentieth-century avant-gardes and the Russian revolution.<sup>15</sup> Several *Forma* members were left-wing activists and were involved in other groups that defended art with political and social content. Turcato and Consagra were affiliated with the Partito Comunista Italiano, Dorazio was tied to socialism, and Perilli was linked to Trotskyism. Dorazio and Perilli had participated in exhibitions organized by the Social Art Group, known as GAS, which received support from the Italian Socialist Party, and contributed to the first and only issue of the magazine *La Fabbrica*, published by the GAS, with poetry, stories, and illustrations that exalted Rome's peripheral and working-class neighborhoods. In addition to their activities in *Forma*, Corpora and Turcato were involved with the Fronte Nuovo delle Arti, which strongly espoused the idea of art as a social protest. In the *Forma* manifesto these same artists

proposed a new type of political activism, which would not be irreconcilable with their abstractionist explorations.

The group's solution was the assertion of new aesthetic attitudes, capable of fashioning a wholly different society than the one that had created the war. Only a new art and a creative process, absolved of any obligation to express social or psychological content, would be able to map out the future. As well as positioning itself against the Novecento and neo-realism, the group also turned its back on the expressionism present in the Scuola Romana and, with a Picassoan tendency, in the Corrente and Fronte groups.

Different pieces made by the group were also reproduced throughout the pages of the magazine *Forma 1*: paintings and sculptures that to some extent still had figurative characteristics, which might be described as abstractions retaining the "memory" of human bodies and still lifes. Most of the works reproduced in the magazine were out of step with the radical discourse in the manifesto, as well as the other texts, which proposed the work's complete formal independence from any type of subject matter unrelated to its own visual reality: "In art, all that exists is the traditional and inventive reality of pure form", states the manifesto.<sup>16</sup>

Caramel understands the remnants of figurative art present in Turcato, Dorazio, Guerrini, Sanfilippo, and Accardi's works during their *Forma* years, from 1947 to 1950, as a formative stage for young artists who were steadily moving toward an abstractionist simplification.<sup>17</sup> For Caramel, *Forma*'s main contribution was taking up futurism's confrontational stance, leading to a rupture with the status quo of modern Italian art that had prevailed in the thirty years preceding the movement.<sup>18</sup>

When Waldemar Cordeiro lived in Rome, in early 1940s, he moved in the same circles as Enrico Prampolini, Giulio Turcato, and Piero Consagra. As with the young *Forma* artists, Cordeiro's espousal of abstractionism was marked by a contradiction between theory and practice. Particularly in 1947, Cordeiro experimented with a style of painting that involved quick gestures, bright colors, and angular aspects. These works can be seen as belated gestures toward Expressionism and Cubism, which he would go on to harshly criticize. Beginning in 1948, after he met the *Forma* artists in Rome, his

painting underwent a formal simplification: his brushstrokes became more measured, while the planes are clearly defined. In 1948 he produced a series of abstract paintings that continue to refer back to still lifes, such as *Sem título* (Untitled). In 1949 he was primarily interested in studying the pictorial plane through neo-plasticist experiments, which proved to be crucial in his development toward work wholly disconnected from any type of figuration. His total departure from the figurative universe began to take shape around 1951, and seems to have been complete in 1952, when Cordeiro produced a series of spatial studies made using a compass, which he showed at Grupo Ruptura's inaugural exhibition.

Paradoxically, at the theoretical level, Cordeiro had been assertively arguing for the autonomy of form since early 1949, when he published the texts “Abstracionismo” and “Ainda o abstracionismo” (“Still more abstractionism”), in the magazines *Artes Plásticas* and *Revista dos Novíssimos*, which contain several of the key ideas that would underpin Grupo Ruptura's manifesto: “Abstractionism is a nodal point. It is a qualitative leap determined by a ‘rupture,’ which seeks to reclaim the real language of the visual arts”.<sup>19</sup> From that moment on, there is a perpetual opposition between “the old” (any and all remnants of figuration) and “the new” (autonomous abstraction), which will structure the manifesto of 1952, as well as its vehement criticism of the idea of art as expression, with arguments similar to those used by the Forma artists: “Only by objectivizing, by depersonalizing a form, can you make it a matter of reflection... But it is impossible to objectivize when you are engaged in expression.”<sup>20</sup> Cordeiro evaluated the arguments of other critics, as well as works by Brazilian and international artists, positioning himself against impressionist, expressionist, and cubist styles in painting, which he considered to be outdated languages, disconnected from the present. The artist thus understands the influence of the Paris School on his contemporaries as a regression in the evolution of modern art.

With Cordeiro's support, the São Paulo Art Club held its first exhibition in 1949, which included artists based in Brazil, from different generations and movements, such as Clóvis Graciano, Mário Zanini,

Francisco Rebolo, Flávio de Carvalho, Maria Leontina, Milton Dacosta, Mário Gruber, Aldemir Martins, Samson Flexor, Lothar Charoux, and Alfredo Volpi.<sup>21</sup> In the text “O significado da exposição de pintura do *Art Club*” (“The meaning of the Art Club’s painting exhibition”), published in *Folha da Manhã*, Cordeiro harshly criticized several artists in the show that he himself had helped to organize. According to the artist, the exhibition facilitated a panoramic view of the development of modern art in Brazil, which, on an evolutionary scale, would move from old to new. At the extremes of this scale were Clóvis Graciano, whose work expressed “a feeling aligned with the old,” “the obsolete quality of art” and, on the opposite side, representing the most “advanced” stage of Brazilian art, the abstractionist Lothar Charoux, who would be part of Ruptura group.

In 1950 the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo presented an exhibition on the Rome Art Club, which included Enrico Prampolini, Józef Jarema, Giuseppe Capogrossi, Antonio Corpora, Alberto Burri, the members of the Forma group, and Mimmo Rotella, among others. On that occasion, Cordeiro published a text in the exhibition brochure, also reproduced in *Folha da Manhã*,<sup>22</sup> in which he broadens his analysis of Italian modern art, from the 1920s to the contemporary landscape, emphasizing the importance of the innovations in language proposed by the generation that emerged following the war, and particularly by the Forma group. In this text, he set out and clarified the arguments he had presented two years earlier in “Os pintores italianos buscam a verdade.” Cordeiro began his analysis with a critique of the Novecento—an “autarchic” art, representing fascism, which had opposed futurism—while the Scuola Romana, as well as Giorgio Morandi, Gino Severini, and Enrico Prampolini, had an attitude of resistance, which assured the positive developments in Italian art that flourished following the end of the war. Once again, Cordeiro believed that “the hasty and inadequate work following in the footsteps of *Guernica*,” namely, the neo-cubism of the Corrente and Fronte groups helped to pave the way for abstraction, even though they had not promoted innovations in the Italian artistic language. Cordeiro argued that Forma had “a ‘moral’ attitude.” For him, the formal explorations in the works of Prampolini, Turcato, Dorazio,

Guerrini, Ugo Sterpini, Consagra, and Perilli “develop the different aspects of that truly artistic, truly human drama.”

One year later Cordeiro returned to the subject of Italian modern art in the text “Um consórcio das formas da visualidade estética moderna,” in which he analyzed different national delegations at the first São Paulo biennial.<sup>23</sup> After mentioning the Italian artists in the exhibition, he suggested that the next edition of the biennial would bring a number of works to Brazil, including those by Anastasio Soldati and Lucio Fontana, precursors of abstraction in Italy, as well as Gino Severini and the Forma artists: Turcato, Guerrini, Dorazio, and Consagra.<sup>24</sup> In that same text, Cordeiro recognizes abstract expressionism (which he also called “romantic abstractionism”) and concrete art as central movements in the contemporary landscape. He sees the works presented by the Swiss delegation as the most cohesive group at the biennial, emphasizing the importance of Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Richard Paul Lohse, and Bill.<sup>25</sup> Unless I am mistaken, Cordeiro had not written about Max Bill before that point. He had not commented on Bill’s retrospective at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo in March of that year, nor on the activities of the Instituto de Arte Contemporânea, which was the first design school in the country, inaugurated by the Museu de Arte de São Paulo at the same time as the Swiss artist’s exhibition.<sup>26</sup> The text also marks the moment when Cordeiro begins to refer to Gestalt theory. It is interesting to highlight that the terms *concrete art* and *concretism* had occasionally appeared in articles from 1951, although not in reference to his own work, which he described as a “neo-plasticist abstractionism.”<sup>27</sup>

The discussions about abstractionism in Rome were certainly not the sole reference for Waldemar Cordeiro’s reflections on abstractionism and concrete art in Brazil. The artist’s theory and practice had other sources—such as suprematism, neo-plasticism, and the theory of pure visibility—that are abundantly cited by the literature. Beginning in 1951, Cordeiro was also in contact with Tomás Maldonado and the group of Argentine concrete artists. However, the abstractionism practiced by the young artists in Forma, as well as the abstractionism practiced by Cordeiro until approximately 1951, did not approach the geometric precision of

concrete art. Rather than a definitive concept of concrete art, his contact with the Italian group provided Cordeiro with terms and ideas that nurtured the first phase of his defense of abstractionism in Brazil.<sup>28</sup> It is also possible that the Forma manifesto inspired parts of the Grupo Ruptura manifesto, which Cordeiro wrote in 1952. In particular, the Brazilian text rejects the “mere negation of naturalism, that is, the ‘wrong’ naturalism of children, of the insane, the ‘primitive,’ the expressionists, the surrealists, etc.”<sup>29</sup> while the Forma manifesto denies “any tendency toward inserting human details into the free creation of art through deformations, psychologisms, and other contrivances.”<sup>30</sup> Cordeiro’s encounter with his Italian friends of the same generation during his time in Rome, in 1947 and early 1948, was a germinal moment for the artist from a theoretical and formal standpoint. Although the Italian-Brazilian painter broadened his theoretical references related to concrete art in the following years, his connection with Rome marked his choice of abstractionism, as well as the content and assertive nature of his discourse in Brazil.

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## Endnotes

1. A version of this text, translated from Portuguese to English by Audrey Young, was published in Heloisa Espada, “Waldemar Cordeiro and Grupo Forma: The Roman Road to São Paulo Concrete Art,” in Gilbert *et al.*, *Purity is a Myth: The Materiality of Concrete Art from Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay*, 46-65.
2. Waldemar Cordeiro, “Os pintores italianos buscam a verdade,” São Paulo, *Folha da Manhã*, January 21, 1948, in Cordeiro (Ed.), *Waldemar Cordeiro: Fantasia Exata*, 44-45.
3. Waldemar Cordeiro, “Escola Romana,” *Folha da Manhã*, São Paulo, no month or day, 1948, in Cordeiro (Ed.), *Waldemar Cordeiro: Fantasia Exata*, 33-34; Waldemar Cordeiro, “A luva de De Chirico,” *Folha da Manhã*, São Paulo, no month or day, 1950, in Cordeiro (Ed.), *Waldemar Cordeiro: Fantasia Exata*, 37-40; Waldemar Cordeiro, “Os pintores italianos buscam a verdade,” São Paulo, *Folha da Manhã*, January 21, 1948, in: Cordeiro (Ed.), *Waldemar Cordeiro: Fantasia Exata*, 44-45; Waldemar Cordeiro. “A atividade da nova e novíssima geração levará a arte italiana ao plano da linguagem mundial,” *Folha da Manhã*, São Paulo, June 25, 1950, in Cordeiro (Ed.), *Waldemar Cordeiro: Fantasia Exata*, 90-92.
4. Conte and Simongini (Eds.), *Art Club 1945-1964. La linea astratta*. Parma: Galleria d’Arte Niccoli, 102.
5. The Fronte Nuovo delle Arti was a group that formed in Milan in 1947 and 1948 that included former members of Corrente, such as Birolli, Cassinari, and Guttuso, as well as Giuseppe Santomaso, Emilio Vedova, Antonio Corpora, and Giulio Turcato, among others. Fronte primarily became known for practicing a kind of cubism with an expressionist tendency, linked to the expression of social content, taking Picasso and *Guernica* as key references.
6. I will introduce the Forma group below.
7. Origine was an association of abstractionist artists founded in Rome in 1951 that published the magazine *Arti Visive* (1952-56). Origine included artists linked to the Rome Art Club, such as Prampolini, Carla Accardi, Achilli Perilli, Piero Dorazio, Giuseppe Capogrossi, and Alberto Burri. It was common for Art Club members to be involved with several groups at the same time.
8. . The president of the São Paulo Art Club was the translator and journalist Edoardo Bizzarri, who was then the Director of the Instituto Cultural Brasil-Itália.
9. “Exposição Leopold Haar,” exhibition brochure (Porto Alegre, 1947), n.p. Mira Haar’s archives, São Paulo, Brazil; “Mostra di Pittore Polacchi,” *Art Club: Periodico d’informazione dell’Associazione Artistica Internazionale Indipendente* II: 5.
10. “Comitati direttivi degli Art Club all’estero”, *Art Club: Periodico d’informazione dell’Associazione Artistica Internazionale Indipendente* 19-20: 4.
11. Caramel, *Arte in Italia 1945-1960*, 57.
12. Caramel, *Arte in Italia 1945-1960*, 58.
13. The second issue of the magazine, *Forma 2*, was published in Rome in May 1950, in honor of Wassily Kandinsky.
14. Accardi et al., in Perilli, *L’Age D’Or di Forma 1*, 43.
15. Perilli, *L’Age d’or di Forma 1*, 36.
16. Accardi et al., in Perilli, *L’Age d’or di Forma 1*, 43.
17. Caramel, *Arte in Italia 1945-1960*, 65.
18. Caramel, *Arte in Italia 1945-1960*, 65.
19. Waldemar Cordeiro, “Abstracionismo,” *Artes Plásticas*, I, no. 3 (January-February 1949), in Cordeiro (Ed.), *Waldemar Cordeiro: fantasia exata*, 49.

20. Waldemar Cordeiro, “Ainda o abstracionismo,” *Revista dos Novíssimos*, no. 1, (January–February 1949), 27–28, in Cordeiro (Ed.), *Waldemar Cordeiro: fantasia exata*, 48.
21. Waldemar Cordeiro, “O significado da exposição de pintura do *Art Club*,” *Folha da Manhã* (São Paulo), December 6, 1949, in Cordeiro (Ed.), *Waldemar Cordeiro: fantasia exata*, 41-43. The text does not mention the location of the exhibition.
22. Waldemar Cordeiro, “Atividade da nova e novíssima geração levará a arte italiana ao plano da linguagem mundial,” *Folha da Manhã*, São Paulo, July 25, 1950, in Cordeiro (Ed.), *Waldemar Cordeiro: fantasia exata*, 90-92.
23. . Waldemar Cordeiro, “Um consórcio das formas da visualidade estética moderna...,” *Folha da Manhã*, São Paulo, December 22, 1951, in Cordeiro (Ed.), *Waldemar Cordeiro: fantasia exata*, 166-175.
24. Grupo Forma was dissolved in 1950.
25. The latter was not actually part of the Swiss delegation, but applied to the event as an independent artist, receiving the grand prize for sculpture with the piece *Unidade Tripartida* (Tripartite unit).
26. Waldemar Cordeiro, “I Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna,” *Folha da Manhã*, São Paulo, December 22, 1951, in Cordeiro (Ed.), *Waldemar Cordeiro: fantasia exata*, 170.
27. . Waldemar Cordeiro, “As formas da nova estética,” São Paulo, *Folha da Manhã*, December 24, 1950, in Cordeiro (Ed.), *Waldemar Cordeiro: fantasia exata*, 64.
28. Adrian Anagnost also indicates the importance of Italian references in Cordeiro’s intellectual and artistic development. According to Anagnost, the mathematical procedures for the artist’s first concrete works, made in the early 1950s, are related to the work of the Milan-based poet-engineer Leonardo Sinisgalli. I encountered Anagnost’s unpublished research during the Scholar’s Day meeting on Waldemar Cordeiro, 28 March 2019, at Princeton University, organized by Rachel Price and Natalia Brizuela.
29. Lothar Charoux et al., “Manifesto Ruptura,” in Cordeiro (Ed.), *Waldemar Cordeiro: Fantasia Exata*, 208.
30. ACCARDI et al., in Perilli, 43.

# Modernity Abroad: Italy at the Bienal de São Paulo, the Early Years

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## **ABSTRACT**

The first Bienal Internacional de Arte de São Paulo was inaugurated on October 20, 1951. At that time, it was the first modern(ist) exhibition outside the well-established geographical axis between Western Europe and United States of America. It was also the second exhibition in the world after the Venice Biennale (founded in 1895) to present itself as a long-term project, as the very term “biennial” implied.

That Venice could be considered either a model or a sort of archetype was not the only tie with Italy. A strong migratory current had brought to Brazil, between the end of 19th century and the beginning of 20th, a significant number of Italians. Over the years a part of these had also taken on significant social roles, such as the president of the Bienal de São Paulo, Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho (who had personally organized the first Brazilian participation at the Venice Biennale in 1950), and other members of both the executive council and the board. Moreover, recent immigrants like Lina Bo and her husband Pietro Maria Bardi were gaining visibility.

It was therefore almost obvious that Italy – the new antifascist and republican Italy – was treated as a special guest along with France and United States, and that Italian section was among the largest. My aim is to show the artistic and political implications of the Italian presence at the early editions of the Bienal de São Paulo, and to investigate the specificities of the relationship between the two countries linked by a migratory current in the changing framework of international politics.

## **KEYWORDS**

São Paulo Biennial; Venice Biennial; Post-war Italian art; Italian emigration; Modernity

### **The Beginnings**

The Bienal Internacional de Arte de São Paulo was founded by Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, also known by his nickname Ciccillo, the Italian-Brazilian industrialist who, only a few years before, in 1948, had set up the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo. That very year he began negotiations with the Venice biennial to establish a Brazilian participation to the international exhibition; this project was eventually realized for the following edition of the Biennale, in 1950, with two galleries in the Italian central pavilion reserved to Brazilian artists.

Meanwhile, Matarazzo was working on another, more ambitious project: the Bienal de São Paulo, or more exactly the Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, the second great international exhibition in the world and the first in the southern hemisphere. The model of the new initiative would have been of course the Venice Biennale, so the exhibition was meant to result chiefly from a series of national participations; a film festival was also planned, while the exhibition of architecture preceded that of Venice by almost thirty years.<sup>1</sup> The history of this close relationship between both the two biennials and the two countries can be quite extensively written thanks to the documents conserved in the Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee (ASAC). The historical archive of contemporary arts of the Venice biennial preserves correspondence between the two institutions and with governments, minutes of meetings, projects, lists, budgets. Of course, it would have been interesting to complete the study with the documentation in São Paulo, but the recent events have made it difficult to schedule a research trip to Brazil. However, we can rely on the correspondence in Venice, as the secretariat of the biennial has always kept the minutes.

This is an almost exclusively male story: the female figures that appear are very few, and even when they occupy roles of great prestige, such as Palma Bucarelli, the Soprintendente of the National Gallery of Modern Art in Rome, letters sent to her begin with the formula “Gentile Signorina Bucarelli” (Dear Miss Bucarelli), instead of “Gentile Dottoressa” (Dear Dr. Bucarelli), with a clear underestimation of her professional role.

The first official communications between the biennials show that it was largely expected that the Italian Government would have entrusted the Venice Biennale with the organization of the national participation, because the Biennale was acting as a sort of office for artistic diplomacy from the times of the fascist regime,<sup>2</sup> and there was no reason to stop this practice in postwar republican Italy. Moreover, the importance of every initiative aimed at strengthening relations between Italy and Brazil was very clear to the Italian Government, as we read in an official letter sent from the Foreign Ministry to the Biennale:

Having regard to the relationships, due especially to our emigration, which bind Italy to Brazil and particularly to the state of São Paulo, center, as is well known, of one of the most numerous and flourishing Italian communities, it seems in any case indispensable that participation in the 1st Biennale d'Arte, if decided – and it would be very painful if economic reasons were to prevent it – be fully worthy and such as to give Italy, in comparison with other nations, the place that it deserves in the world of the arts.<sup>3</sup>

São Paulo, along with New York and Buenos Aires, was in fact home of one of the largest communities of Italians outside Italy. Among these immigrants there were intellectuals like Pietro Maria Bardi, the director of the MASP, Lina Bo, later the celebrated architect of the same museum building, or Adolfo Celi, the co-founder in 1949 of the Teatro Brasileiro de Comédia,<sup>4</sup> of which he was also the first artistic director; and very wealthy entrepreneurs, like Ciccillo Matarazzo and many others, that formed an influential *élite*: a large audience interested in all that could arise from Italy, and ready to decree the success of the cultural initiatives. Nonetheless, as Matarazzo pointed out in a letter to the secretary general of the Venice Biennale Rodolfo Pallucchini, it was rather France that carried out “an intelligent propaganda”, increasing cultural exchanges, sending artists, professors, journalists. “I would see with great pleasure that Italy did the same and maybe more”, writes Matarazzo, “for example an exhibition of half a century of Italian art from

1900 to 1950, would meet with enormous success”.<sup>5</sup> Both Italian governments and cultural organizations, although motivated by political interests, do not seem to have been as prompt in the realization of projects, and the definition of the participation in the Brazilian biennial proceeded with exasperating slowness.

Despite the delays in the communication of information requested over and over again by the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (list of artists, number of selected works, details about measures, texts for the catalogue), the Italian selection had an excellent location, at the center of the temporary pavilion set up at the Trianon, on the ground where the MASP was later built. As evidence of his preferential relationship with Italy, Matarazzo used to write personally in Italian on the letterhead of the Museu de São Paulo, both to Pallucchini and to the President of Venice biennial Giovanni Ponti. In fact, all the correspondence between the two biennials, even the letters of the secretary of the Bienal de São Paulo Arturo Profili, was written in Italian, an uncommon language in international relations that underlines, in these circumstances, the special relationship between the two countries, or at least between the two organizations.

### **Modernity in question**

What was at stake, in the launching of the São Paulo biennial, was the idea to promote modern art, and – as the artistic director Lourival Gomes Machado put it in his introduction to the catalogue of the first edition – “to put modern art of Brazil not simply in proximity but in living contact with the art of the rest of the world” and “for São Paulo to conquer the position of international artistic center”.<sup>6</sup> This necessity to affirm modern art is clearly stated in one of the first letters sent by Raniero Pacileo, a lawyer acting as a broker between Matarazzo and Italian institutions, in which he recommends “the ‘modern’ character of the works that will be sent”.<sup>7</sup> In fact, the selection of Italian artists was made by a committee that did not seem the most suitable for a resolutely modern choice: it was composed of two art historians, Roberto Longhi and Costantino Baroni, two artists, the sculptor Marcello Mascherini and the painter Gino Severini, and a representative of the Foreign Ministry, Fernando

Corsi. The initial recommendation of the president of Venice biennial, to limit the selection to four painters, one sculptor and two engravers, was largely disregarded and the final numbers were of forty artists and two hundred and eleven works, and so it was for the request about the 'modernity' of the works, equally ignored.



**Fig. 1.** Alberto Magnelli, Avec mesure (Com Medida), 1950, oil on canvas, cm 100x80,6, Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo.

The oldest among the painters was Carlo Carrà, a former futurist, here represented by paintings from the interwar years as well as by more recent works. The youngest was Sergio Vacchi, not yet thirty. Most of the painters had made their debut under the fascist regime, most of them remained within a kind of figurative painting, with the remarkable exception of Afro, Corrado Cagli, Osvaldo Licini, Mario Reggiani, Emilio Vedova and Alberto Magnelli, the latter awarded with a second prize for painting and purchased by the Museu de Arte Moderna (Fig. 1).

Among the others, Filippo De Pisis and Giorgio Morandi were probably the best known, but it should not be forgotten that a few years earlier Matarazzo had purchased seventy-one works by Italian painters for the collections of the then newly founded Museu de Arte Moderna. As Ana Magalhães has shown in a recent article, with Margherita Sarfatti acting as a broker, the painters were – not surprisingly – largely the same that had been promoted during the fascist regime,<sup>8</sup> but for the new and modern Biennial something new was absolutely needed. Hence the young painters, and the decision to present old and new abstraction in the same years in which the debate between realists and abstract painters was very harsh in Italy.

It is worth noting that in the early lists of artists we find even the name of Mario Sironi, that is the creator of the image of the fascist regime, the author of some of the most important mural paintings in public buildings, the artist who had remained loyal to fascism until the end.<sup>9</sup> This comes with no surprise: Pallucchini would have wanted to exhibit works by Sironi since the first post-war Venice Biennale, in 1948, and failed just because of the artist's refusal. In 1951 he sent Marco Valsecchi, a Milanese art critic that eventually would act as deputy curator of the Italian section, but not even he was able to convince the artist to send his works to the biennale, and after an exchange of letters with the artist his report was the same as the previous attempts: "Sironi is adamant".<sup>10</sup>

It may appear quite odd that the artistic institutions of republican Italy continued to seek out the artist who most of all had represented the regime. Nonetheless, at the second biennial, we find seven paintings by Sironi, all of them painted in the last three years: Gino Ghiringhelli, owner of Il Milione

gallery, had been essential to persuade the artist, who was always reluctant to send works to official collective exhibitions. From a confidential letter sent by Matarazzo to Pallucchini we know that the Brazilian patron had expressed the desire to see Sironi's works at the Biennale,<sup>14</sup> and eventually two paintings were sold by an artist that was now, at the beginning of the Fifties, one of the few Italian artists included by Michel Tapié in his highly influential book *Un art autre*.

### Converging interests



**Fig. 2.** Umberto Boccioni, *Forme uniche della continuità dello spazio*, 1913, plaster, cm 119,7 x 89,9 x 39,9, Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo

The second Bienal de São Paulo was, in the words of art historian Adele Nelson, “an enviable temporary museum of modern art”;<sup>12</sup> that is an extraordinary successful exhibition of the international actuality with an important series of historical sections: there was a Picasso exhibition, with 51 works including *Guernica*; Germany dedicated a retrospective to Paul Klee, Belgium to James Ensor, the Netherlands to Piet Mondrian; France brought 60 cubist works from 1907 to 1917, and Italy organized a retrospective on Futurism, with 40 works from 1910 to 1915. About this exhibition, the dates show the will to separate futurism from any subsequent compromise with fascism, as had already been done in Italy that same year, when one of the members of the new Italian committee, Giulio Carlo Argan, had curated the first important exhibition dedicated to Umberto Boccioni after the end of the war.<sup>13</sup>

Oddly enough, the idea of the futurist exhibition in São Paulo didn't come from Argan. It was Matarazzo to suggest it to Pallucchini, confidentially revealing that the French committee had proposed a Cubist exhibition.<sup>14</sup> Matarazzo was not just fond of his Italian origins. The kind of courtesy and confidentiality he dedicated both to Pallucchini and to the staff of the Venice biennial was also closely related to a national interest: as mentioned above, Brazil's first participation in the Venice exhibition dates back to 1950, but its pavilion was not built until 1964. Therefore, for each edition a negotiation to obtain a good location was needed. On another level, in a letter of December 1953, Matarazzo suggests to finding an agreement between the two institutions so that the most prestigious international prizes are not assigned to the same artists.<sup>15</sup> In short, the history of Italian participation in the São Paulo biennial is also a history of diplomatic relations crossing all topics, from the selection of artists to the purchase of works either for private or public collections; from the awarding of prizes to the serene coexistence between the only two great international exhibitions of the time; from commercial and political relations to the weight and value of the Italian community and its expectations. Pallucchini, on his part, was able to reassure Matarazzo about the consideration that the Italian committee had for the Brazilian wishes, as shown in a letter sent in the spring 1953:

After a wide discussion about the opportunity to choose either all new names or to bring back also some artists who had been very appreciated in São Paulo, the principle of keeping to a mixed list prevailed: so we will bring 8 artists who have not yet exhibited there [...], 8 exhibitors at first Bienal de São Paulo [...], 6 sculptors between old and new [...]; moreover an exhibition of engravings by Giorgio Morandi (25 pieces).<sup>16</sup>

This time too, Italy was among the countries with the best and greatest exhibition space (along with France, United States and Brazil). The 1953 exhibition coincided with the celebrations for the 400 years of the city of São Paulo, and was hosted in the new buildings designed by Oscar Niemeyer at Ibirapuera Park, with a division between the American countries in the Palace of States and the other countries in the Palace of Nations.<sup>17</sup> It may seem odd, but after so much effort to bring Sironi's works there, no one notices them even in the extensive press review.<sup>18</sup> It was Morandi in fact to attract the attention and interest of everyone, and eventually was awarded with the first prize for engraving, the only major prize given to an Italian artist in this edition. Nevertheless, a number of press clippings shows how Marino Marini, at least for the press and the public, was also one of the successful artists of the exhibition.

At the third edition Italy shows at last a stronger modernist trait, with Alberto Burri and Giuseppe Capogrossi, along with other ten painters and Pietro Consagra and Mirko among the sculptors. The selection was the consequence of the usual balance between “masters” and young artists, and between artists already exhibited and others never seen in São Paulo: Enrico Prampolini (never exhibited before), Massimo Campigli and Alberto Magnelli had ten paintings each, the younger Burri, Capogrossi, Renato Guttuso and Antonio Corpora had four or five paintings each. The Brazilian counterpart appreciated this effort, as secretary Arturo Profili wrote: “the Italian ‘picture’ is really a success, and it warmly meets the desires of local critics, artists and collectors”. The impression, Profili continued, was that Italy was focusing especially on sculpture, but “there is certainly no lack of chances for the

rest”.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, two Italian artists won the major prizes on this occasion: Mirko was awarded with the first prize for sculpture and Magnelli, winner of a second prize in 1951, was awarded with the first prize for painting, while engraver Mino Maccari and sculptor Pietro Consagra had purchase awards.



**Fig. 3.** Pietro Consagra, *Colloquio*, 1955, bronze, cm 93,1 x 77,3 x 30, Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo.

While it is clear that the new, more decidedly modern, direction of the Italian choices met with the favor of the Brazilian organizers, it is worth revealing an awkward aspect of the 1955 edition: during the selection of the artists in Italy, an objection was raised about the name of Renato Guttuso;

this objection, as Argan wrote to Pallucchini, came from political circles, and was clearly related to the artist's well-known communist militancy.<sup>20</sup> The paradox was that artists who had been part of the fascist regime, such as Sironi or even Maccari, did not arouse complaints of any kind, while an artist who was a militant in an antifascist party represented in the parliament of republican Italy could be subjected to an attempt at censorship.

### **Towards a new governance**

Guttuso was invited again in 1957, this time with ten drawings. For that edition the São Paulo secretariat would have wanted a retrospective of Scipione and one of Lorenzo Viani, along with an exhibition on *pittura metafisica*,<sup>21</sup> but the unofficial requests were not granted, and indeed the real event of the fourth biennial was the exhibition of 30 paintings by Giorgio Morandi, awarded with the newly established Grand Prix in an edition hosting wide retrospectives of Jackson Pollock, Marc Chagall and Ben Nicholson, making clearer and clearer the biennial's interest in welcoming modern art not only in its actuality but also in its decades-long history.

1957 edition was also marked by the launch of the brand new biennial of the arts of theater, on which we cannot dwell here; and by the move in biennial's present home, the Industry Pavilion at Ibirapuera Park. In this edition for the first time Matarazzo's direction is questioned. In the Venetian papers, of course, there is no trace of these controversies, but it is true that his letters become rare, and that the correspondence seems to be entrusted to Profili more than in the other editions. Last but not least, at the 1957 edition for the first time, two women were invited in the Italian selection, Gina Roma and Anna Salvatore (and for the latter, a Brazilian newspaper entitled *Um pintor que se chama Anna*).<sup>22</sup>

The following editions progressively show the beginning of a certain loss of interest on both sides, also due to the end of the partnership between the biennial and the Museu de Arte Moderna and to the consequent decrease of Matarazzo's role. Eventually, in 1961, he ceased to be the main patron of the biennial, with some inevitable consequences on the exhibition's budget. References to the relations between the two countries, to emigration and to

the community of fellow citizens in Brazil are also dropped on the Italian side, as if politics towards the communities of Italians abroad passed through other ways or as if the interest of Italian politics had shifted from the wealthy and cultured urban classes that attended and supported events such as the São Paulo biennial to the lower classes, to the emigrants who had not become part of the local elite. Contradictory tendencies emerge from the archives: the delay in providing information is such that Italian works did not appear in the first edition of the biennial's catalogue, but on the other hand we find an intervention by the Minister of Education, Giuseppe Medici, "to avoid an excessive univocity of tendencies", that is to avoid a too modern selection.<sup>23</sup> Of course, President Ponti had no choice but to reply that "the designations of the Italian committee experts were determined by the general direction of the Paulista exhibition, which, as the regulation specifies, expects foreign participants to give a notable contribution to the knowledge and development of new trends in contemporary creation".<sup>24</sup> So the Italian selection presented that year eleven works by Burri, eleven by Fontana<sup>25</sup> and twelve by Emilio Vedova, along with some retrospective of Renato Birolli, Corrado Cagli, Ennio Morlotti.

That year an exhibition of works by Burri, Cagli and Guttuso went to the Museu de Bahia, at the request of its director Lina Bo Bardi, and Francesco Somaini was awarded with the first prize for the sculpture, while the Rassegna Storica della Medaglia was widely appreciated. But the direct intervention of a Minister in the procedures of artists' selection was something new and disquieting.

Various changes both in Italy and in Brazil made it clear that a season had ended, that the biennial would continue, even with the difficulties of the years of the military regime, and that it would return to the importance of the beginnings, but with a sense and an idea of the relations between the two countries different from the very early editions.

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## Endnotes

1. See Agnaldo Farias ed., *50 anos de Bienal de São Paulo, 1951-2001* (São Paulo: Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, 2001); Isobel Whitelegg, "The Bienal Internacional de São Paulo: A Concise History, 1951-2014", in *Perspective*, 2/2013: *Le Brésil*, p. 380-386. The First Biennale di Architettura, directed by Paolo Portoghesi and dedicated to "The Presence of the Past", took place in 1980.
2. See Massimo De Sabbata, *Tra diplomazia e arte: le Biennali di Antonio Maraini, 1928-1942* (Udine: Forum, 2006).
3. All the documents cited in this article are kept in Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee, Biennale di Venezia, serie Mostre all'estero, sottoserie Biennali di San Paolo del Brasile 1950-1974 (henceforth referred as ASAC). See *Telespresso* n. 32/1099 sent by the Ministero degli Affari Esteri, DGRC, to Presidenza della Biennale di Venezia, Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, DGBA, February 26th, 1951, ASAC, segnatura b. 01 Biennale di San Paolo del Brasile del 1951, 1. Corrispondenza con i Ministeri. Unless otherwise specified, all translations are mine.
4. With the Brazilian actors Paulo Autran and Tônia Carrero. See *Adolfo Celi, Un uomo per due culture (A Man for Two Worlds)*, dir. by Leonardo Celi, 93', Celifilms 2006.

5. Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, letter to Rodolfo Pallucchini, São Paulo, June 1st, 1950, ASAC, segnatura b. 01 Biennale di San Paolo del Brasile del 1951: 4. Corrispondenza con il Museo di San Paolo e avv. Pacileo.
6. Lourival Gomes Machado, *Introdução*, in *I Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo: Catálogo*, (exh. cat., São Paulo, Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, 1951), São Paulo, 1951, p. 14.
7. Raniero Pacileo, letter to the Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, DGBA, Roma, 2 marzo 1951, ASAC, segnatura b. 01 Biennale di San Paolo del Brasile del 1951: 1. Corrispondenza con i Ministeri. In the same letter Pacileo announces the space given to Italy: 230 mt. for painting, an area suitable for 20 sculptures and 50 engravings.
8. Ana Gonçalves Magalhães, “The Italian Art World and São Paulo Museum Collections in the Aftermath of World War II”, *Römisches Jahrbuch der Bibliotheca Hertziana*, 44 (2019/2020), pp. 449-481.
9. The name of Sironi appears in various lists to be found in different folders: ASAC, segnatura b. 01 Biennale di San Paolo del Brasile del 1951: 3. Varie; b. 02 Biennale di San Paolo del 1951, 1951-1952: 3. Commissione per la mostra di san Paolo (sulla base del comitato internazionale di esperti). About Sironi in the postwar years see Claudia Gian Ferrari, Elena Pontiggia, *Sironi. Gli anni Quaranta e Cinquanta. Dal crollo dell'ideologia agli anni dell'Apocalisse*, exh. cat. Milano, Fondazione Stelline, 2008 (Milano: Electa, 2008).
10. Memo in a document titled “Opere da Milano”, in ASAC, segnatura b. 01 Biennale di San Paolo del Brasile del 1951: 3. Varie.
11. Matarazzo Sobrinho, letter to Pallucchini, São Paulo, February 21st, 1953, in ASAC, segnatura b. 03 2. Biennale San Paolo del Brasile 1952-1954, 2. Preventivi di spesa e corrispondenza relativa.
12. Adele Nelson, “Monumental and Ephemeral: the early São Paulo Bienais,” in *Constructive Spirit: Abstract Art in South and North America, 1920s-50s*, Mary Kate O'Hare ed., exh. cat. Newark, Newark Museum/Fort Worth, Amon Carter Museum, 2010 (Newark/San Francisco: Pomegranate, 2010), pp. 129-135 (133).
13. Boccioni was the first Futurist to be “rediscovered” not only, as it was, for the quality of his work but also because of his early death, occurred in 1916, six years before the fascist rise to power. Giulio Carlo Argan, *Umberto Boccioni*, scelta degli scritti, regesti, bibliografia e catalogo delle opere a cura di Maurizio Calvesi (Roma: Quaderni della Quadriennale nazionale d'arte, 1953).
14. Matarazzo Sobrinho to Pallucchini, San Paolo 28 dicembre 1953, in ASAC, segnatura b. 03 2. Biennale San Paolo del Brasile 1952-1954, 10. Rapporti con gli organizzatori della mostra.
15. Matarazzo Sobrinho to Pallucchini, San Paolo 8 June 1953. In a telegram sent shortly before (26 May 1953), Matarazzo had revealed to Pallucchini that France had asked for 300 linear meters for paintings. All the documents in ASAC, segnatura b. 03 2. Biennale San Paolo del Brasile 1952-1954, 10. Rapporti con gli organizzatori della mostra.
16. Pallucchini to Matarazzo Sobrinho, San Paolo 29 maggio 1953, in ASAC, segnatura b. 03 2. Biennale San Paolo del Brasile 1952-1954, 10. Rapporti con gli organizzatori della mostra.
17. Whitelegg, “The Bienal Internacional de São Paulo, p. 381.
18. See the press review folders in ASAC, Raccolta Documentaria Extra Biennale, Mostre all'estero, Biennali di San Paolo, 1-3.
19. Arturo Profili to Pallucchini, São Paulo, 18 novembre 1955, in ASAC, segnatura b. 05: 3. Biennale di San Paolo del 1955, 1954-1956, 17. Varie.
20. Giulio Carlo Argan to Pallucchini, Perugia, 17 marzo 1955, in ASAC, segnatura b. 05: 3. Biennale di San Paolo del 1955, 1954-1956, 17. Varie.
21. Umbro Apollonio to Pallucchini, Venezia, 26 marzo 1957, in ASAC, segnatura b. 06: 4. Biennale di San Paolo del Brasile 1956-1958, 9. Lettere interne.
22. *A Gazeta*, São Paulo, September 2nd, 1957.

23. Giuseppe Medici, Telegramma a Giovanni Ponti, 27 maggio 1959, ASAC, segnatura b.07: 5. Biennale di San Paolo del Brasile 1958-1960, 5. V Biennale di San Paolo del Brasile Elenchi artisti espositori e elenchi vari.
24. Draft of the telegram sent by Giovanni Ponti to Giuseppe Medici, undated but certainly referred to this affair, as shown by the punctuality of the reply and by the subsequent letter of June 13, 1959, in which Ponti develops his arguments extensively. All the documents in ASAC, segnatura b.07: 5. Biennale di San Paolo del Brasile 1958-1960, 5. V Biennale di San Paolo del Brasile Elenchi artisti espositori e elenchi vari.
25. Fontana was a case in point, because he was invited as a sculptor and sent "cut canvases". Fontana was explicitly defended by Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti and Lionello Venturi: all the documents in ASAC, segnatura b.07: 5. Biennale di San Paolo del Brasile 1958-1960, 6. Corrispondenza con i commissari.

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# **Teresa Cristina of Bourbon's Voyage. Art and Politics between Italy and Brazil**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper focuses on the cultural and artistic significance of the voyage of Teresa Cristina of Bourbon (1822-1889), who travelled from Naples to Brazil to become Empress and Consort of Pedro II in 1843.

## **KEYWORDS**

Teresa Cristina of Bourbon; Alessandro Ciccarelli; Eduardo de Martino; Naples; Brazil.

In 1843 Teresa Cristina of Bourbon (1822-1889) travelled from Naples to Brazil to become Empress and Consort of Pedro II. In 1857 Giovanni Cristini describes this event in his *Elogio funebre nella Sua Altezza Reale Maria Amalia di Borbone*. His emphatic comment was “travelling the Mediterranean, crossing the immensity of the ocean”.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, this episode is set at height of trade and political ties between the Kingdom of Two Sicilies and Brazil, after the proclamation of Brazilian independence.

In line with this context, a growing interest toward this part of Latin America is documented by various sources. In taking up here these texts, and the orientation of artistic patronage of the Royal Bourbon Court, my paper aims to investigate the connections with the context of Neapolitan art.

Teresa Cristina had grown up in a transitional phase of the Bourbon court.<sup>2</sup> His father Francis I (and then his brother Ferdinand II) were involved in a strong policy of reaffirmation of the government and the promotion of the arts. Take, for example, of official portraiture, such as the commissions addressed to neoclassical painters such as Giuseppe Cammarano, or the affirmation of the documentary landscape painting produced by Salvatore Fergola<sup>3</sup>, appointed court painter in 1829.

In the famous portrait of the royal family by Giuseppe Cammarano, *The King Francis I of Bourbon and his Family* (1820, oil on canvas, Naples, Museo e Galleria Nazionale di Capodimonte), dated 1820, among the children of Francis I, Teresa Cristina (born in 1822) and Luigi Maria Count of Aquila (born in 1824) are missing.

It will be Luigi (1824-1897) who will accompany Teresa Cristina on her journey to Brasil in 1843. The following year, he too got married with the Brazilian princess Maria Januaria, sister of Pedro II.<sup>4</sup>

To understand Teresa Cristina’s artistic entourage and taste, few brief details could be useful, starting from her family milieu. It is interesting to notice that the Count of Aquila was active as a dilettante marine painter, who received his first training in Italy from the landscape painters Filippo Palizzi and Gabriele Smargiassi.<sup>5</sup> As we will see shortly, he was also an art collector, and the first patron of painter and patriot Francesco Saverio Altamura, who called him “patron and a something of an artist”.<sup>6</sup>

In the official portrait by Giuseppe Cammarano is instead present Leopoldo, Count of Syracuse (born in 1819), who also, as his brother Luigi, received an education as an artist and practiced sculpture.<sup>7</sup> Leopoldo was designated the groom's proxy during the marriage ceremony in Naples.<sup>8</sup> The young princess herself had received, like her brothers and as a common custom at court, an artistic education. So, when she became Empress, she was able to play an active role in promoting the arts, as shown recently in an well-documented study by Aniello Angelo Avella, who rescued her, in this respect, from historiographical oblivion.

As it is well-known, Theresa Cristina married in 1843 Emperor Pedro II by proxy in Naples, an event documented by her first court painter Alessandro Ciccarelli (1811-1879) in *The marriage by proxy of the Empress d. Teresa Cristina* (1846, oil on canvas, cm 195 x 254, Museu Imperial/Ibram).<sup>9</sup>



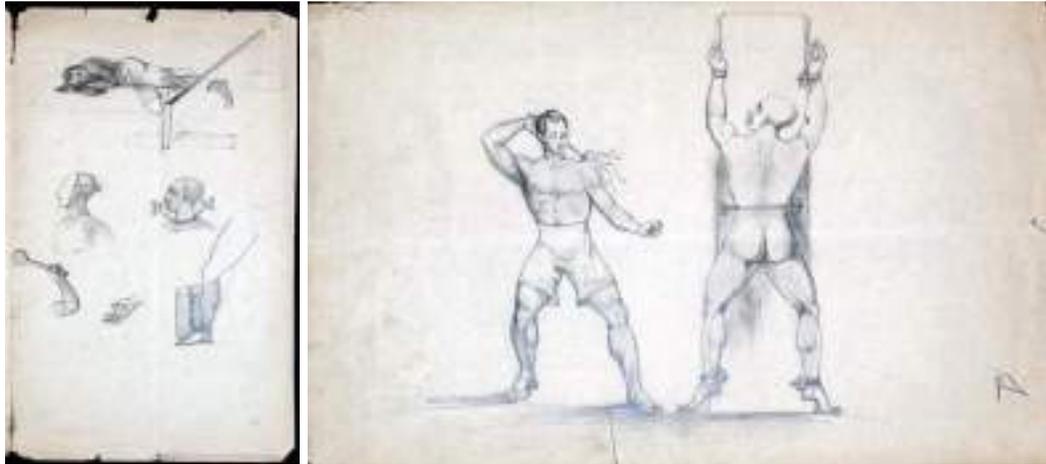
**Fig. 1.** Alessandro Ciccarelli. *The marriage by proxy of the Empress d. Teresa Cristina* (1846, oil on canvas, cm 195 x 254, Museu Imperial/Ibram)

Although documentary research is still in progress, I would like to anticipate here some neglected Italian sources about the painter and in particular one of his unpublished works that I was able to trace. Ciccarelli's presence in Rio de Janeiro is recorded in Naples by the historian Carlo Tito Dalbono, who defines him as a “valiant painter who did not imitate anyone”, described, together with another less-known Neapolitan painter, Luigi Stallone, defined as “living in the new world”.<sup>10</sup>

Before talking about these and other more or less famous Italian artists in Brazil, some documents help us understand the political ties and cultural interests between the two worlds.

In 1827, Count Ferdinando Lucchesi Palli,<sup>11</sup> consul general in the United States, moved to Brazil, in the role of first *chargé d'affaires* at the court in Rio de Janeiro. In 1828 he wrote a *Historical-geographical-political report on the empire of Brazil*.<sup>12</sup> Conceived in the wake of Brazil's independence (1822) and the formal recognition of the Brazilian empire (1826), this document is preserved in hand-written form in state archives of Naples and reflects the strong desire for knowledge towards a great country and its independence.

The second diplomat deserving special attention is Gaetano Merolla, who became in 1832 Consul General of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in Rio de Janeiro. Merolla wrote in 1840 an interesting pamphlet entitled *Report of the Consul General in Brazil on the trade of blacks*.<sup>13</sup> This text condemns slavery as a crime, emphasizing the cruelty to which slaves are subjected, against Christian precepts, and states: “This is the horrendous picture presented by the slave population in Brazil” and “We will never be able to advance the liberal and mechanical arts in Brazil while slavery exists”.<sup>14</sup> Probably intended for publication, the document is also accompanied by two pencil drawings.<sup>15</sup>



**Figs. 2 and 3.** ASN, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, G. Merolla, Memoria del Commercio dei Neri, e dei mali che dallo stesso ne derivano, Rio de Janeiro, 7 febbraio 1840, b. 3886 tav. I-II

Two further volumes were available in Naples about customs and traditions of the new Empire. I'm referring here to the *Historical - Physical - Political History Of The Empire Of Brazil*, by Gaetano Valeriani in 1844,<sup>16</sup> and the issue devoted to Brazil in the *Panorama dell'Universo* by Cesare Malpica (1804-1848).<sup>17</sup>

The latter, published after the author's death in 1855, is more interesting, for it is furnished with lithographs and written by an author familiar with the Neapolitan artistic environment. Malpica was a journalist and lawyer, who had opened in Naples since 1830<sup>18</sup> a private school that quickly became a place of reference for many young people, including many artists.

Unlike other documents mentioned earlier, Malpica pays some attention to the Brazilian artistic context, emphasizing the importance of the contribution of the French school, particularly Lebreton and Debret, and the birth of the local Art Academy. The presence of foreigners contributed to the decoration of the palaces that offered a new face to the empire.<sup>19</sup> However, except for a generic mention of a new Brazilian dawn, there is no explicit reference to the current government or of Italian, and especially Neapolitan, artistic presences. The narrative stops at Pedro II's ascent to the throne.

We are now better equipped to follow the journey of the fleet that sailed from Naples on 1 July 1843, with Teresa Cristina on board.

Two travel diaries are a tour disposal, but only one of them mentions the presence on board of a court painter. Both accounts are dedicated to Prince Luigi Maria of Bourbon, Count of Aquila, who was on board.

The first one is included in the life of Baron Raffaele De Cosa, admiral of the king's fleet, written by Gaetano Parrilli and published in 1856.<sup>20</sup> But the most interesting for our research is the second one: Eugenio Rodríguez's diary, published shortly after the events in 1844.<sup>21</sup>

The story begins with the arrival of the Brazilian fleet in the Gulf of Naples on May 23 and ends with its return home. There are many nautical annotations, observations of the fauna, and expressions of amazement at the unusual landscape. Among these, the power of nature dominates the view of:

bizarre and volcanic forms of the island of Porto Santo, which from the west is surrounded almost to the border by high rocks [...]. One of the other rocks described, is of very strange shape all composed of lava, called the Hawk, nor arbitrarily given that name, because in it that species of bird and the flock of seagulls nest. The waves breaking furiously against the base, thrust themselves to a great height, and precipitating cover the rock with thunderous foam, paying the roar of that bellow at some distance, almost forcing the inexperienced marine to keep away. I believe this crucially dangerous spot was painted by the court painter<sup>22</sup>, who was transporting H. M. the Empress; no doubt, for by the Admiral's will we remained a long time to the west of the island.<sup>23</sup>

First of all, the terms devoted to "wild nature" and "the power of a God" and "the power of the waves" in this and other pages connect to a romantic poetics of seascapes and storms, evoking the paintings of Horace Vernet and Théodore Gudin, seen and transferred in the context of the Bourbon court by the painter Salvatore Fergola.

It is evident that Luigi, count of Aquila, who had joined the navy when he was very young, had, as artist, a predilection for these subjects, as in *The Tempest* (s/d, oil on canvas, cm 95 x 128, Museu Imperial/Ibram).



**Fig. 4.** Louis of Bourbon, Count of Aquila, *The Tempest*, s/d, oil on canvas, cm 95 x 128, Museu Imperial/Ibram

He had been introduced to painting through this taste, with a reflection of the Posillipo school, as well as by the two landscape masters already mentioned, and so different from each other, such as Smargiassi (exponent of the most rigorous academic tradition,) and Filippo Palizzi (a champion of the anti-academic reform).

The figure of the collector and artist Count d'Aquila, the most liberal prince of the royal court, is as interesting as little investigated. His liberal position is reflected in the choices of taste towards a new generation of artists, in particular that already mentioned Altamura, which he helped to escape to Florence after a sentence in Naples for involvement in the

anti-Bourbon movements of 1848.<sup>24</sup> His first commission to the painter of the work *Nathan the Prophet rebukes David* (1847, Caserta, Prefettura),<sup>25</sup> reveals the orientation of the prince towards Roman purism.

In 1844 Luigi had married the imperial princess of Brazil, Maria Januaria, sister of Pedro II. After a difficult relationship with the emperor and the return to the Kingdom of Naples, Louis was condemned to exile because of his political conduct. So he moved permanently to Paris and never abandoned painting. Here he participated in the International Exhibition of 1878.

Returning now to Rodríguez's text, it is to point out his first exploration of the Brazilian landscape around Rio de Janeiro, which he calls "a living history".<sup>26</sup> He also describes the Museum, stressing however the poverty of the collections. This will be a central aspect in the active cultural policy of Teresa Cristina, in enhancing the archaeological heritage. As it is well-known, she was responsible for the large collection of finds from the excavations of Herculaneum and Pompeii, thanks to the policy of exchange initiated with her brother Ferdinand II.<sup>27</sup>

The court painter mentioned by Rodríguez is certainly Alessandro Ciccarelli. The activity of the painter in Brazil and Chile, where he arrived in 1848 as the first director of the Academia de Pintura, is known and has been investigated in recent contributions of great interest.<sup>28</sup> In the Italian art-historical studies he is instead a figure almost forgotten,<sup>29</sup> despite a promising debut reported by the sources to which I turn now: sources that will lead us to the identification of a work never recorded before.

But who was this painter in his early thirties and why did the choice of the official assignment fall on him?

Francis Napier, ambassador in Naples since 1848, already remembered Ciccarelli's presence in Brazil, even if he got the name wrong: "Report is more favourable to Giuseppe [*sic*] Ciccarelli, who followed a Neapolitan Empress to Brazil, and may be destined to the glorious office of disseminating the principles of Christian art beyond the Atlantic".<sup>30</sup>

Ciccarelli was a student of the Royal Institute of Fine Arts in Naples and he participated with continuity to the Bourbon exhibitions from 1830 to 1843, the year of his departure with Teresa Cristina.

In 1833 he received the silver medal for the first class of painting<sup>31</sup> and in 1834 he won the prestigious “Pensionato” in Rom, together with the painter Vincenzo Morani, with the Magisterium of Vincenzo Camuccini.<sup>32</sup>

From this moment on, the reviews dedicated to him are quite frequent in the “Annali civili”, with reference to his participation in the Bourbon exhibition, or in the Roman periodical “Il Tiberino”, in particular with reference to his participation in the yearly exhibitions in Palazzo Farnese organized by Camuccini.



**Fig. 5.** Alessandro Ciccarelli, Madonna of the Rosary with St. Dominic and St. Catherine of Siena, Monte Urano (FM), 1836, oil on canvas, church of Saint Rocco (from the church of St Michael the Archangel)

If in 1837 an article was dedicated to *Philoctetes*,<sup>33</sup> then in 1839 to *Telemaco e Termosiri* and to *Francis I King of France (or Francis I at the Battle of Pavia)*<sup>34</sup>. All these works were purchased by the royal court.

But already in 1836, in the same pages of the “Tiberino”, a long article described a *Madonna del Rosario* by Ciccarelli,<sup>35</sup> with emphatic tones. The same work was also mentioned in his biography published in “El Taller Ilustrado” in 1885.<sup>36</sup>

This work, one of Ciccarelli's little-known paintings, has been traced in the Marche, signed and dated. It is dated 1856, but I am convinced that there has been an error in reading the date: the correct one should be 1836. This hypothesis is confirmed in the mentioned article of the “Il Tiberino”, whose description coincides perfectly with the work. The review describes the landscape in the background, identified in Monte Urano, a town in the province of Fermo, for which the work was originally intended and where it is presently still located.

Browsing through the catalogues of the Bourbon exhibitions, the subjects treated by Ciccarelli fall within the genres of history painting and portraiture, greatly appreciated by the Bourbon court, showing an artist with a solid Roman training, also in the practice of copying old masters. His participation to the exhibition of 1833, for instance, is witnessed through a copy of Guido Reni's Saint Cecily and in 1837 with another copy after Raffaello.<sup>37</sup>

This Method is what he would propose again during the Chilean period, as we know not without controversy.<sup>38</sup> In Santiago, another Italian, the Tuscan Giovanni Mochi (1827-1892), found a welcoming environment in 1879, and devoted himself to portraits and landscape painting.<sup>39</sup> These two presences further prove how the figurative tendencies of Rome and Florence widely spread in South America during the 19th century, consolidating a transatlantic dialogue further reinforced by the training in Europe of Latin American artists.<sup>40</sup>

Ciccarelli became a perfect example of the practice of the academic training system at that time, which saw in the Roman sojourn its centre.<sup>41</sup> Ciccarelli's oblivion in later Italian historiography is probably due to the fact

that he never returned to Italy. Moreover, the painter left Naples too early, before the involvement of the newer generation of artists in the anti-academic reform.

This becomes evident in his landscape paintings. The famous view by Ciccarelli of *Rio de Janeiro* (1844, oil on canvas, Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo) <sup>42</sup> offers an apt example of the kind of the landscape painting established in the years of his training and then greatly appreciated by the Bourbon entourage. In a similar way, the *Marriage of Teresa Cristina*, completed in 1846, acts a manifesto of the documentary and celebrative painting of the Bourbons. It is a practice absorbed by the Kingdom and replicated by the Empire to build its own visual identity.<sup>43</sup>

An equally neglected passage in another contemporary source tells us that in addition to Ciccarelli, another Neapolitan artist left for Brazil, following the path opened by Teresa Cristina. This was Luigi Stallone (or Stalloni for the Brazilians). Stallone was a student at the Royal Institute of Fine Arts in Naples. He has fallen into oblivion in Italian historiography, despite the fact that the catalogues record 15 of his works presented at Bourbon exhibitions from 1826 to 1845<sup>44</sup>: one landscape and several portraits, including those of the King and of the Queen. The research on him is still in progress, but the hypothesis is that Stallone went to Rio de Janeiro after 1845, when he was Honorary Professor of the Royal Institute of Fine Arts in Naples and interrupted the participation in royal exhibitions, if not already in 1843 when he was registered at the 4<sup>a</sup> General Exposition.<sup>45</sup> He remained in Brazil until his death in 1878, specializing in views.

Pedro II favoured another painter from the Kingdom of Naples, who specialized in seascapes and the depiction of war fleets. This is Eduardo de Martino (Meta, 1836-Londra, 1912) who differs from the other examples in that he did not undertake regular artistic studies. While he was studying at the Nautical School, he attended the private studios of Giaginto Gigante and Domenico Morelli, as well as taking evening classes at the Royal Institute of Fine Arts in Naples, where he was appointed honorary professor in 1902.<sup>46</sup> In 1865, De Martino was in service in the Italian naval division in the Rio de la Plata and he soon came into contact with Italian-Brazilian cultural circles.

The meeting with Pedro II dates back to 1867. De Martino was commissioned to portray the recent naval victories of the Empire in order to build a new national iconography, as had already been the case for the Brazilian Victor Meirelles de Lima. The latter, trained at the local Art Academy, perfected his training in history painting in Rome in 1853.<sup>47</sup>

De Martino's works show a careful direct observation of the nature that he knows best: the sea. So, a large view of the harbor dominates the celebrative painting of *The arrival of Teresa Cristina of Bourbon* (1872, Museu Histórico Nacional, Rio de Janeiro).<sup>48</sup>



**Fig. 6.** Eduardo De Martino, *The arrival of Teresa Cristina of Bourbon*, 1872, Museu Histórico Nacional, Rio de Janeiro

When he left Brazil in 1875 and became a painter for the British Court from 1875 to 1912, he would be remembered as Imperial painter.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, in 1873 de Martino represents Brazil at the International Exposition of Vienna and in 1876 in Philadelphia.

Pedro II continued to look to Naples not only for painters, but also for sculptors. I am here referring to Luigi Pasquarelli, who was also a student at the Royal Institute, and who won the Pension in Rome in 1859 and in Florence in 1862.<sup>50</sup>

Pasquarelli participated in the Bourbon Exhibitions of 1855 and 1859, the National Exhibitions of Naples (1877) and Turin (1880). After the unification of Italy, in 1861, he was involved in the commissions celebrating the annexation of Naples to Italy. In 1872, with a fellowship of the Provincial Council of Naples, he went to Brazil at the invitation of Emperor Pedro II. It is remarkable how in Brazil, in a list published by Federica De Rosa,<sup>51</sup> we can find commissions for both the imperial house - among which also the commissions for the decoration of public buildings - and the Italian Ercole Foglia, of the Italian Society of Charity, for which Pasquarelli made a Bust of Garibaldi and one of Mazzini: therefore, he worked in the same time for the Bourbon Empress and the Italian immigrants in Brazil. Still in 1877, when the Emperor was in Naples and visited the National Exhibition, the magazine "Il Pungolo" described a meeting between Pedro II and Pasquarelli.<sup>52</sup>

Within the chronological span of my investigation (limited to the regency of Pedro II) other Italians arrive in Brazil, such as Nicola Antonio Facchinetti<sup>53</sup> from Treviso or other southern artists trained in Naples who sought the benevolence of the court: some of them unsuccessfully, such as Rosalbino Santoro.<sup>54</sup>

When Teresa Cristina arrived in Brazil in 1843, the impetus of the first generation of European artists who had ensured the foundation in Rio de Janeiro of the local Art Academy,<sup>55</sup> persisted. I think here of the French painter Jean Baptiste Debret (1768-1848)<sup>56</sup> and the landscape painter Nicolas Antoine Taunay (1755-1830).<sup>57</sup>

The arrival of Teresa Cristina contributed to consolidate the tradition of the voyage to Europe for Brazilian artists to complete their academic education: above all in Italy.<sup>58</sup> Her influence was exerted not only in the visual arts, but also in music, as can be seen from an episode recorded by the historian Avella, in which the empress imposed on her consort a preference for Italy rather than Germany for the young singer Carlos Gomes.<sup>59</sup>

In conclusion, the influence of Teresa Cristina and her choice of the court painter Ciccarelli chimes perfectly with what had already happened at the Bourbon court in Naples, establishing in Brazil the influence of Italian (and Roman) history painting. The journey of Teresa Cristina represents a transnational exchange that contributed to reaffirm a public image of the new court through celebratory painting, following the footsteps of what the official artist Fergola, the last court painter of the Bourbons in Naples, had done for her father Francis I and her brother Ferdinand II<sup>60</sup>.

Moreover, new room is made for the specialization of landscape painting, in a context in which emerges Luigi count of Aquila would emerge as a figure of extreme interest. Teresa Cristina should be mentioned among other princes of the Neapolitan royal family for the advancement of the arts<sup>61</sup> as a patron and collector in the fields of painting, music, archaeology, and photography, including her important legacies bequeathed to Brazil by Pedro II<sup>62</sup>.

On the connection between Italy and Brazil, as centres of political power when the two countries were building their national identities, I would like to share one last reflection.

While in 1843 the Italian Princess Teresa Cristina of Bourbon became the "Mother of the Brazilians" (Naples, 1822-Porto, 1889), just a few years earlier, in 1839, the Brazilian revolutionary Ana Maria de Jesus Ribeiro da Silva (1821-1849) became Anita Garibaldi, giving rise to a myth in the Italian patriotic symbolism, in illustrated popular press and paintings<sup>63</sup>.

Many events linked Italy and Brazil in the 19th century. The two countries have long enjoyed a fruitful cultural relationship, where women were much more active than historiography has recorded to date.

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16. G. Valeriani, *Cenno storico - fisico - politico dell'Impero del Brasile, compilato su quanto abbiamo a stampa fino al giorno d'oggi su questa vasta porzione dell'America, aggiungetevi anco le recentissime notizie recateci particolarmente da viaggiatori e da amici* (Naples: sn, 1844), 10-II.
17. C. Malpica, *Panorama dell'Universo. Storia e descrizione di tutti i popoli, delle loro religioni de' loro costumi delle loro arti della loro industria ec., con figure litografiche*, vol. 6, *Brasile* (Naples: Stabilimento Tipografico-Litografico dell'Ateneo, 1855).
18. A. Carrannante, *Malpica, Cesare*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 68 (2007), *ad vocem*.
19. Malpica, *Panorama dell'Universo*, 103.
20. G. Parrilli, *Vita del barone Raffaele De Cosa* (Naples: Libreria strada Toledo, 1856), 84-92.
21. E. Rodríguez, *Descrizione del viaggio a Rio de Janeiro della flotta di Napoli* (Naples: Presso Caro Batelli e comp.º, 1844).
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23. Rodríguez, *Descrizione del viaggio*, 16-17.
24. L. Martorelli, "L'artista e il patriota. L'impegno nell'età del Risorgimento", in *La Patria, l'Arte, la Donna. Francesco Saverio Altamura e la pittura dell'Ottocento italiano*, edited by C.F. Sperken, L. Martorelli, F. Picca (Foggia: Claudio Grenzi Editore, 2012), catalogue of an exhibition at the Palazzo Dogana and Museo Civico, Foggia, November 10, 2012 through January 12, 2013, 63-70: 64.
25. F. De Rosa, catalogue entry in *La Patria, l'Arte, la Donna*, 55 no. 1.5; A. Irollo, *Ferdinando II e la promozione delle arti a Napoli*, in Capitelli, *Mecenatismo pontificio*, 232-233, fig. 161.
26. Rodríguez, *Descrizione del viaggio*, 58.
27. Avella, *Una napoletana imperatrice ai Tropici*, 108-139.
28. *Vinculos artísticos*; Lima and Quiroga, "Ciccarelli: paisagem em contradição".
29. Martorelli, *La pittura dell'Ottocento*, 383, 389 footnote 142.
30. F. Napier, *Notes on Modern Painting at Naples* (London: J.W. Parker, 1855), 51.
31. *Annali civili del Regno delle due Sicilie*, III, May, June, July and August, 1833, 47, 58.
32. C. Lorenzetti, *L'Accademia di Belle Arti di Napoli 1752-1952* (Firenze: Felice Le Monnier, 1953), 463.
33. G.F., "Sopra alcune opere di pittura ed architettura messe in mostra il dì XXX di maggio dell'anno MDCCCXXXVII", in *Annali Civili*, fasc. XXX, November and December 1837, 127-142: 137, no. 2. According an article (T. Patera, "Arte contemporanea", in *Arte in Italia*, IV, August, 1872, VIII, 116-120: 118). See also: N. Cinelli, "Le qualità tutte personali e troppo ardite di quelle pitture erano di esempio pericoloso. Alessandro Ciccarelli in Italia y el *Filoctetes abandonado* (1830-1843)", in *Atenea* no. 523, I Sem. 2021, 119-138, <http://dx.doi.org/10.29393/atat523-413ncqt10413>.
34. G. Checchetelli, "Alessandro Ciccarelli", in *Il Tiberino*, no. 30, V, May 25, 1839, 117-119; V. Torelli, *Cenno sull'Esposizione di Belle Arti aperta nel Real Museo Borbonico nel 30 maggio 1839* (secondo articolo) (Naples: Presso L'ufficio Dell'Omnibus, 1839), 4-6; S. Susinno, "Napoli e Roma: la formazione artistica nella "capitale universale delle arti", in Id., *L'Ottocento a Roma. Artisti, cantieri, atelier tra età napoleonica e Restaurazione* (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana Editoriale, 2009), 263-279: 270. On the painting *Telemaco and Termosiri* see also: G.F., "La mostra di Belle Arti del 1839", in *Annali civili del Regno delle Due Sicilie*, XXXIX, May and June, 1839 (Naples: Dalla Tipografia del Real Ministero degli affari Interni), 131-152: 141. On the

- painting *Francis I at the Battle of Pavia* see: L. Martorelli, catalogue entry in U. Carughi, A. Porzio, and L. Martorelli, *Il Palazzo della Prefettura*, (Naples: S. Civita, 1989), 104 no. 97.
35. I.F., “Di un dipinto di Alessandro Ciccarelli”, in *Il Tiberino* no. 32, August 13, 1836, 125.
36. in *El taller Ilustrado*, December 13, 1885.
37. A. Ciccarelli, *Santa Cecilia, copiata dall'originale di Guido*, in *Catalogo delle opere di Belle Arti del Real Museo Borbonico* (Naples: Stamperia Reale, 1833), 15 no. 86; A. Ciccarelli, *Coronazione di Maria Santissima con Cristo, e diversi Angioli, copiata da Raffaello della grandezza dell'originale*, in *Catalogo delle opere di Belle Arti del Real Museo Borbonico* (Naples: Stamperia Reale, 1837), 66 no. 22.
38. de la Maza, *Duelo de pinceles*, 219-228.
39. On Ciccarelli and Mochi, first and third director of the Chilean Academy see the exhibition at Instituto Italiano de Cultura in Santiago, curated by Robinson Avello, *Arte italiano, una hiela en Chile*, March 1 through March 26, 2016.
40. As Stefano Cracolici shows us in his article S. Cracolici, “Uncovering a Common Heritage: Latin American Academies of Fine Arts in the Century of the Independence”, in *Why Latin America Matters: A Collection of Essays*, edited by S. Garcia-Ferrari, H. Egil Offerdal, and M. A. Kania (Edinburgh: Centre for Contemporary Latin American Studies, 2021), 46-62.
41. On this subject see G. Capitelli, and S. Cracolici, “Apostar por Roma: arte en México en el siglo de la Independencia”, in *Roma en México. México en Roma. Las academias de arte entre Europa y el Nuevo Mundo, 1843-1867*, edited by G. Capitelli and S. Cracolici (Roma: Campisano editore, 2018), 19-56, catalogue of an exhibition at the Museo Nacional de San Carlos, Ciudad de México, December 6, 2018 through April 28, 2019.
42. Lima and Quiroga, “Ciccarelli: paisagem em contradição”.
43. However, Ciccarelli received an unflattering review regarding a previous painting depicting a royal scene, exposed in 1841 (G. Quattromani, “Saggio sopra alcune opere di Belle Arti messe in mostra il dì 30 maggio dell'anno 1841”, in *Annali civili*, fasc. L., March and April, 1841, 133-253: 138-139). The painting was: A. Ciccarelli, *Sua Maestà il Re N.S. in compagnia di S.A.I. l'Arciduca Carlo, e seguito da diversi Generali passa in rassegna le truppe al Campo*, in *Catalogo delle opere di Belle Arti del Real Museo Borbonico* (Naples: Stamperia Reale, 1841), 12 no. 117.
44. See the annual catalogo delle opere di Belle Arti del Real Museo Borbonico (Naples: Stamperia Reale): 1826, 44 no. 293, 24 no. 130; 1830, 40 no. 329-330, 36 no. 302, 8r; 1833, 23 no. 157; 1839, 5 no. 37-40; 1841, 45 no. 376; 1843, 51 no. 386; 1845, 20 no. 175. On the painter see also: G.F., “La mostra di Belle Arti del 1839”, 150; Lorenzetti, *L'Accademia di Belle Arti*, 231 footnote 1. See here footnote 10.
45. <https://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/pessoa24736/luigi-stalloni>
46. L. de Vito Puglia, *Eduardo de Martino. Da ufficiale di marina a pittore di Corte* (Monghidoro: Con-fine edizioni, 2012), 28. A first exhibition on the painter was organized in Brazil at Museu Nacional de Belas Artes (Mnba): *Demartino in Brasile*, June 17, through September 20, 2015.
47. Sartor, *L'arte latinoamericana contemporanea*, 47.
48. A description of the arrival of Teresa Cristina on the Frigate Constitution is in Parrilli, *Vita del barone Raffaele De Cosa*, 1856, 84-90.
49. See “Queen Victoria’s marine painter: Eduardo de Martino”, in *Rivista. The Journal of the British-Italian Society*, no. 201, September/October 1967, 5-6.
50. A first study on the sculptor is in F. De Rosa, “Prime ricerche su Luigi Pasquarelli, scultore lucano tra Napoli, Firenze e Rio de Janeiro”, in *Napoli Nobilissima*, VII, I, fasc. II-III, May-December 2015, 104-118, See also A. De Gubernatis, *Dizionario degli artisti italiani viventi. Pittori, scultori e architetti* (Firenze: Tipi dei Successori Le Monnier, 1889), 357 (in which his Brazilian activities are not mentioned).
51. De Rosa, *Prime ricerche*, 118.
52. De Rosa, *Prime ricerche*, 115.

53. *Facchinetti*, edited by C. Martins, V. Piccoli, M. Pace Chiavari (Rio de Janeiro: CCBB, 2004), catalogue of an exhibition at Centro Culturil Banco do Brasil, March 30 through June 6, 2004. The painter participated at the following Italian exhibitions: Turin, XLIII Esposizione (Generale Italiana), 1884, 30 no. 777; Genua, Società Promotrice di Belle Arti, 1889, 23 no. 345; I Esposizione Internazionale d'arte della città di Venezia, 1895, 89 no. 100; LV Esposizione (Prima triennale), Turin, 1896, 16 no. 83.
54. V. Cappelli, "Rosalbino Santoro in Brasile. Un 'pittore itinerante' a Rio de Janeiro, San Paolo e Taubaté", in *Rivista Calabrese di Storia del '900*, 2, 2014, 47-60. In Franco Cenni [*Italianos no Brasil: andiamo in 'merica* (São Paulo: Martins, 1958?, 52)] is mentioned an unknown sculptor Giovanni Castelpoggi, always in the retinue of Teresa Cristina, who then abandoned the artistic career for business (see also Avella, *Una napoletana imperatrice ai Tropici*, 143).
55. The Escola Real de Ciencias, Arte e Ofícios, from 1826 called Real Academia de Disegno, Pintura, Escultura e Arquitectura Civil (Sartor, *L'arte latinoamericana contemporanea*, 13).
56. See J.B. Debret, *Voyage Pittoresque et Historique u Brésil, ou Séjour d'un artiste français au Brésil depuis 1816 jusqu'en 1831 inclusivement* (Paris: Firmin Didot et Frères, 1834-1839, 3 voll.); Sartor, *L'arte latinoamericana contemporanea*, 13, 34 footnote 9.
57. E. Dias, *Paisagem e academia: Félix-Émile Taunay e o Brasil (1824-1851)* (Campinas, SP, Brasil: Editora Unicamp, 2009).
58. Sartor, *L'arte latinoamericana contemporanea*, 14.
59. Avella, *Una napoletana imperatrice ai Tropici*, 81.
60. See J.A. Davis, *Salvatore Fergola e Napoli all'epoca di Ferdinando II*, in *Fergola: lo splendore di un regno*, 15-21.
61. On the other members of the royal family see Irollo, *Il mecenatismo dei Borbone*, 286.
62. About Teresa Cristina see the recent *Da Napoli a Rio de Janeiro. L'Imperatrice Teresa Cristina di Borbone delle Due Sicilie e la fotografia*, exhibition at Galleria Candido Portinari - Palazzo Pamphilj, Rome, March 15 through April 22 April, 2022, curated by Evelyne Azevedo and Fernanda Marinho. This exhibition was followed by the Research & Field Seminar *Tra Pompei e Marajó: cultura materiale, patrimoni del passato e debiti del presente*, Rome, Embassy of Brazil - Rome, Bibliotheca Hertziana, Oct 25, 2022 (see in particular the contribution of Nadia Barrella on the Neapolitan context). I have not been able to take into account the outcomes of this conference, held after these CIHA proceedings were delivered, and made available on the Bibliotheca Hertziana website in final drafts.
63. About Anita Garibaldi see S. Cavicchioli, *Anita. Storia e mito di Anita Garibaldi* (Torino: Einaudi, 2017).

# A Painting in Motion Between Italy and Brazil: *Independência ou Morte*, by Pedro Américo

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## **ABSTRACT**

Investigating the biography of “Independence or Death”, painted by Pedro Américo de Figueiredo e Mello between 1886 and 1888, allows us to peruse Italo-Brazilian cultural and artistic exchanges at the end of the XIX century. Pedro Américo himself (1843-1905) may be deemed as a traveling artist, having as early as 1866, until the end of his life, continuously moved back and forth between Brazil and Italy. While a professor at the Academia Imperial de Belas Artes, in Rio de Janeiro, where he was frequently commissioned to paint large canvas artworks, he kept a studio in Florence, where he established himself for several years and did some of his most notorious historical paintings. One of such paintings was “Independence or Death”, which had its bulky 415 x 760 cm shipped across the Atlantic, and currently occupies an entire wall at the Museu Paulista of Universidade de São Paulo. The painting was originally intended to be displayed in one of the rooms at the building/monument, under construction at the time, erected to celebrate the Brazilian independence, designed by Italian architect Tommaso Gaudenzio Bezzi. Analyzing the trajectory of this painting, especially its conception and circulation, allows for an inspection of the connections established between Brazil and Italy and – as with the study of circulation of sculptors in America – allows contrasting the prevalence of French influence over the South American art scene.

## **KEYWORDS**

Historical Painting; Representation; Artistic Exchanges; Pedro Américo; Nineteenth Century

### **Introduction**

This presentation is the result of my Postdoctoral research at *Museu Paulista* of the University of São Paulo and financed by FAPESP<sup>1</sup>. The purpose of the research is to investigate and clarify fundamental matters pertaining to the creation, circulation, and critical fortune regarding the oil painting entitled “*Independência ou morte!*” [Independence or Death], by Brazilian artist Pedro Américo de Figueiredo e Mello. The painting is one of the most celebrated artworks of this notorious artist and its representation has helped erect the social imaginary surrounding Brazilian independence.

Today I will explore part of the biography of “*Independência ou morte!*”, showing how it allows us to understand Italo-Brazilian cultural and artistic exchanges at the end nineteenth century, since the artist and the oil painting traveled between Italy and Brazil. Pedro Américo himself may be deemed as a traveling artist because he continuously moved back and forth between Brazil and Italy. And we are interested in knowing the advantages of making a large-scale oil painting, like “*Independência ou morte!*”, in Italy, taking into account that the representation was of a specifically Brazilian theme.

### **Pedro Américo – an artist between Brazil and Italy**

Pedro Américo de Figueiredo e Mello was one of the main Brazilian painters of the nineteenth century and a great exponent of Brazilian historical painting. He studied at the *Academia Imperial de Belas Artes* in Rio de Janeiro and completed his studies in France at the *École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts*, financed by Emperor Dom Pedro II.

In 1866, he became professor at the *Academia Imperial de Belas Artes*, at Rio de Janeiro, but this did not stop him from continuing to travel to Europe, as he requested several medical licenses which allowed him to leave his work as a teacher and go to Italy, where he remained for many months.

These stays were often preceded by commissions for large historical paintings. Therefore, it was in Italy that he carried out major artworks with the battle theme, such as “*Batalha do Avaí*”, which he carried out between 1872 and 1877, which dimensions are 11m x 6m, and *Independence or Death*, which

he painted between 1886 and 1888 and which dimensions are 4m15 x 7m. Even the enormous dimensions of these artworks and the difficulties in moving them were not an obstacle for the artist to paint them in Italy and afterwards transport them to Brazil.

### **The biography of "*Independência ou morte!*"**

It was Pedro Américo who first suggested painting "*Independência ou morte!*", volunteering to execute a canvas representing Dom Pedro's cry at the banks of the Ipiranga brook, in São Paulo, symbolizing the rupture between Brazil and the United Kingdom of Portugal and the Algarve.

The independence of Brazil was a different process from that of Latin American countries, as it maintained the monarchical system and was led by the son of the king of Portugal, who became the first Brazilian emperor, Dom Pedro I. The date on which independence is celebrated today refers to an event that took place in São Paulo on September 7th, 1822. The emblematic event of that day would have been the cry saying "Independence or Death" uttered by Dom Pedro. In 1822, the passage of Dom Pedro through São Paulo and his cry for independence did not have much relevance, but later the event was converted at the moment that marks the break between Brazil and Portugal, becoming the date on which Brazilian independence is celebrated.

To reinforce the importance of the event and the site where it was held, the people from São Paulo decided to build a monumental building on the hill of Ipiranga. The building therefore had a celebratory function. It was designed by an Italian architect and engineer, Tommaso Gaudenzio Bezzi, born in Turin, who had settled in Brazil in 1875. He worked for the Imperial Court of Brazil in several Brazilian cities and also was part of Dom Pedro II's circle of friends. It was also an Italian, Luigi Pucci, who was responsible for the construction of the building. He was the constructor who built several residences for the coffee elite of São Paulo. Therefore, we can already note here exchanges between Brazil and Italy, since both the author and the constructor of the building were Italian.

In 1885, when the building was under construction, Pedro Américo proposed the painting. The artist defended his proposal saying that:

"[...] the painting is a monument more directly expressive than the stone building, mainly made by a son of this country, who is more grateful to its independence than the foreigner."#

He made this comment referring to Tommaso Bezzi, as he was a foreigner designing the building in honor of Brazil's independence. For Pedro Américo, the painting was more expressive than the stone building and should be done by a Brazilian. However, even the painting would maintain the connection with Italy, as we will see.

Pedro Américo obtained the commission for the painting, which was intended to be displayed in the main room of the Ipiranga's monumental building. Therefore, the painting would have a prominent spot and would be another opportunity for Pedro Américo to obtain recognition and consecration. He decided to make this gigantic artwork in Italy. Soon after signing the contract to make the painting, in 1886, Pedro Américo obtained another medical license for his teaching activities and went to Florence.

What justifies this displacement? Why go to Italy to paint the canvas?

### **Florence: an artistic city**

A first justification may be the meaning of having a studio in Florence. Italy, and particularly the city of Florence, was a place of artistic effervescence. Many artists lived there and kept their studio in the city.

In a book from 1896 entitled *Firenze d'Oggi*, there is a chapter dedicated to the artists of the city of Florence, in which the author, Ugo Matini, walks through some streets of the city mentioning the artists who had their studios there.# To get an idea, examining just a few streets in the city, the author indicates the existence of more than 70 artists' studios, including Italian and foreign painters and sculptors. Some of them are described as battle-themed painters.

Living in Florence allowed Pedro Américo to know the artistic production of contemporary artists, mainly because he was in contact with many of them, who had studios and exhibited their paintings in the city. This

provided contact and exchanges between artists. An example of this dynamic was mentioned by Ettore Ximenes; In 1920, the sculptor Ximenes won the international competition to erect the monument to the Independence of Brazil, also located in Ipiranga. In an interview to the *Correio Paulistano* newspaper, the Italian sculptor stated that he would have helped Pedro Américo in the execution of a horse from the painting "*Independência ou Morte*". He declared to the newspaper:

"I was a neighbor of Pedro Américo's studio and, on one occasion, when the Brazilian artist was in a phase of intense work, as he had the next visit from D. Pedro II, he asked me to model a small horse, showing me the way he wanted it. I made the horse and when the Emperor of Brazil arrived in Italy, Pedro Américo introduced the monarch to me".#

This passage demonstrates the existing exchanges between the artists. Florence was, therefore, the ideal city for a painter with great ambitions, who wanted to create a painting that would not be prominent only in Brazil. Having already conquered space and notoriety in his home country, Pedro Américo broadened his horizons, seeking to gain international recognition.

There was yet another fundamental aspect for Pedro Américo to choose to paint "*Independência ou morte!*" in Italy. There he would be in contact with an important artistic production of battle paintings, since at the late nineteenth century there was a large production of paintings and engravings dedicated to the theme of the Italian *Risorgimento* and the wars of independence. These representations served as a reference for the elaboration of other representations, because in academic painting it was common to quote great masters and contemporary artists. The use of this procedure was a way for the artist to demonstrate erudition and knowledge of artistic production.

Pedro Américo was an artist who used this procedure. He had already made many references in the painting "*Batalha do Avaí*", which was also painted in Italy, and "*Independência ou morte!*" was no different. He used as

reference Italian paintings, engravings and sculptures, quoting in several details of the painting.

### Italian references

"*Independência ou morte!*" (Image 1) is a tribute to independence and to the first emperor, father of Dom Pedro II, who was the Brazilian emperor when the artwork was painted.

The prince appears at the center of the representation, in the act of proclaiming independence. He is accompanied by his entourage, who wave hats and scarves. The Honor Guard quickly mounts their horses and raises their swords, following their leader's command. While the population, the civilians, just observe the scene, they do not participate.



**Fig. 1.** Pedro Américo de Figueiredo e Mello. *Independência ou morte!*, 1888. Museu Paulista da USP, São Paulo, Brasil.

As I have already mentioned, to create the painting Pedro Américo used many references, the most known being Ernest Meissonier's French paintings, mainly "*1807, Friedland*", which has a very similar structure to "*Independência ou morte!*". But in the details of the painting, in the position

of the horses, in the poses of the characters, there are many Italian references. I will show you some of them.

In Pedro Américo's painting, there is a guard who rips the ties off his uniform, which symbolize the union between Brazil and Portugal, evidencing the rupture, the independence. The character is in the foreground of the painting, with his back to the viewer and riding a brown horse. We can find parallels of this character's pose with several Italian works.

### **Honor Guard Character**

One of the main painters of the nineteenth century was certainly Giovanni Fattori, known for his paintings with the theme of the Italian *Risorgimento*. He was an important professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence and was active during the period when Pedro Américo lived in that city.

We see a similar horseman in his painting "Un episodio della battaglia di San Martino", which belongs to the Giovanni Fattori Civic Museum in Livorno. The character is in the middle of the canvas, and he is riding on a white horse.



**Fig. 2.** Giovanni Fattori. "Un episodio della battaglia di San Martin", 1868. Museu Civico Giovanni Fattori, Livorno, Itália.

In the same canvas, in the foreground, there is another detail of a Piedmontese soldier preparing to get on his brown horse, which bears a

resemblance to the painting by Pedro Américo. In "*Independência ou morte*" the Guard of honor is on the right side of the painting, in the background, next to the house and he is also preparing to get on a brown horse.

The same horseman mentioned first (the one who rips the ties off his uniform) bears a resemblance to the one that appears in the artwork of Vincenzo Giacomelli, entitled "La battaglia di Pastrengo". Giacomelli was a painter active in the north of Italy, mainly Venice, Turin and Milan, and also in Paris. The character is in the center of the painting, in the middle ground and he is riding a caramel-colored horse.

In addition to the paintings, we find points of contact with engravings on the Risorgimento theme. As an example, there is a lithograph by an unknown author depicting the Italian King Vittorio Emanuele II in a similar way. He is riding on a horse, with his right arm raised and holding a sword.



**Fig. 3.** Unknown artist. "Emmanuel II, le roi Guerrier," Second half of the 19th century, lithograph. Civica Raccolta delle Stampe Achille Bertarelli, Castello Sforzesco, Milano.

There is another engraving by Victor Jean Vicent Adam and Carlo Perrin entitled "La Guerra d'Italia nel 1860-1861 - attacco e presa di Perugia", made in 1864. In the middle of the scene, a character is also riding on a brown horse in a similar pose.

### **Character of Dom Pedro I's Entourage**

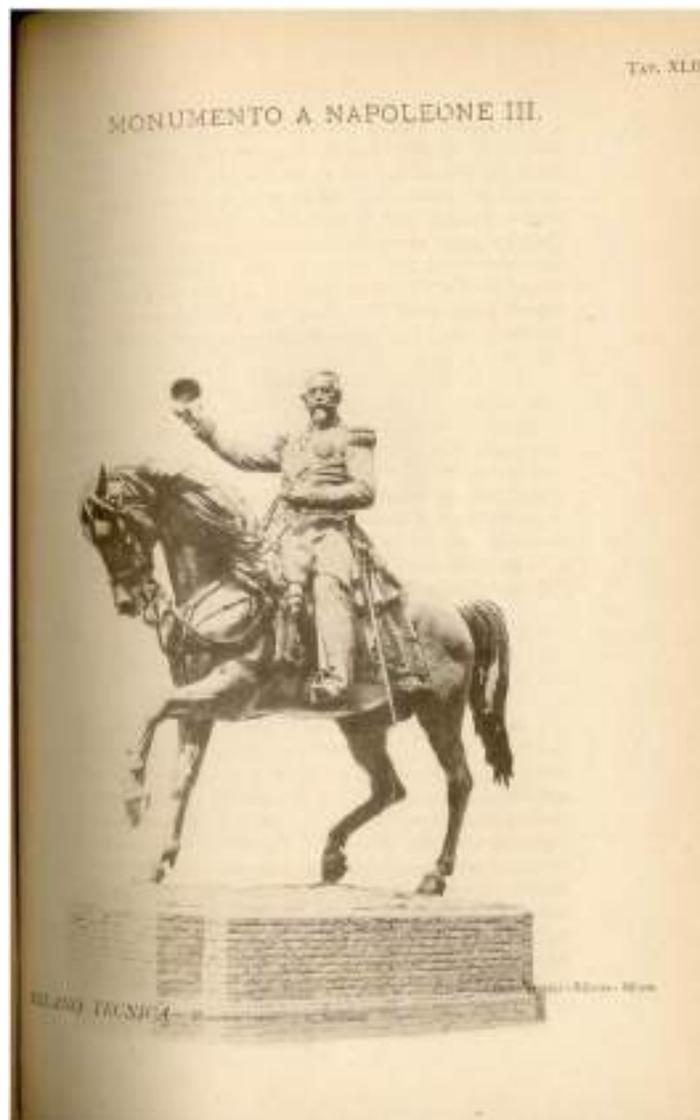
Another example of parallel between "*Independência ou morte!*" and Italian artworks can be traced by analyzing a character from Dom Pedro's entourage. From right to left, he is the second character of Dom Pedro's Entourage. He is riding on a black horse, he is lifting his hat with his right hand and his clothes are different from the other members of the group.



**Fig. 4.** Victor Jean Vincent Adam and Carlo Perrin. "La Guerra d'Italia nel 1860-1861. Entrata di Garibaldi in Messina", 1864, lithograph. Civica Raccolta delle Stampe Achille Bertarelli, Castello Sforzesco, Milano.

There are similar poses to this character in engravings of the *Risorgimento*, especially the ones depicting Giuseppe Garibaldi. In some of them, even Giuseppe Garibaldi's clothes are similar.

In an 1864 engraving entitled "La Guerra d'Italia nel 1860-1861 – Entrata di Garibaldi in Messina", by Victor Jean Vicent Adam and Carlo Perrin, Giuseppe Garibaldi is depicted as he enters Messina. He is being received by the population and waving his hat in a similar way to the character from Dom Pedro's entourage.



**Fig. 5.** Monumento a Napoleone III. Milano Tecnica, vol. 9, 1885, 308. Milano: Ulrico Hoepli Editore. Civica Raccolta delle Stampe Achille Bertarelli, Castello Sforzesco, Milano.

Another example is how Garibaldi was represented in the project that the sculptor Ettore Ximenes presented in the contest for the Monument to Garibaldi, which took place in Rome between 1883 and 1884. Ettore Ximenes did not win the competition for the Monument to Garibaldi, but his project was widely publicized in the Italian press of this period. In addition to being a very publicized image, it is worth remembering the possible connection between Pedro Américo and Ettore Ximenes, as mentioned earlier.

Another example of a monument in which this pose is figured is the monument to Napoleon III, by Francesco Barzaghi. He was a Milanese sculptor and his monument was widely publicized in the Italian press. The monument had its image reproduced in an engraving, which shows the monument being displayed in the Milan exhibition of 1881. It was also published in the magazine called “Milano Técnica”, in 1885.

Therefore, both the reproduction of this monument and the project by Ettore Ximenes, circulated in Italian journals on dates close to the execution of the painting "*Independência ou Morte!*". Barzaghi's monument was cast in bronze in 1880. The following year, it was exhibited in the Fine Arts pavilion of the Senate Palace, at the Milan Exhibition of 1881. Therefore, its implantation in the Sempione park, in Milan, was only in 1927.

These were some examples, among many others where I identified the mentioned procedure that Pedro Américo used to compose "*Independência ou Morte!*" from Italian references. Pedro Américo took advantage of his stay in Italy to expand his artistic knowledge. And by making reference to these artworks in "*Independência ou morte!*", he established a dialogue with his peers and proved to be a painter who knew the artistic repertoire and who had great mastery of the artistic technique. Painting was, therefore, a way of inserting Pedro Américo into the Italian artistic environment.

### **The painting exhibition - international recognition**

Another reason for Pedro Américo to settle in Italy was the possibility of obtaining international recognition for his paintings. Being in Italy allowed him to exhibit his paintings in Europe and, thus, having it analyzed by his peers and by European art critics.

The first exhibition of the canvas was held at the *Accademia di Belle Arti* in Florence, when it received the title "Proclamation of the Independence of Brazil". The Academy was one of the main centers of artistic education in Italy, which had professors of great prestige. Therefore, the place where the Brazilian painting was exhibited was the propitious environment for it to obtain the projection desired by Pedro Américo.

The date chosen for the exhibition was strategic, as it coincided with the period when foreign monarchs visited Florence. As the painting was a tribute to the monarchy, the presence of the Brazilian emperor and other European monarchs was significant.

The exhibition opened on April 8th, 1888 in the presence of the Emperor of Brazil, D. Pedro II, and the Empress of Brazil, Teresa Cristina, and the Queen of Serbia, Natália Konstantinović, with her maid of honor. The following day, the painting was seen by the Queen of England, Victoria, and her daughter, Princess Beatrice and the Prince of Battemberg, accompanied by General Ponsonby, the English Ambassador Sir Lumley.<sup>#</sup> The inauguration was also attended by professors, students and members of the *Accademia di Belle Arti*, politicians and members of the Florentine aristocracy. According to *L'arte* magazine, there was a crowd of guests. The columnist for *L'Arte* magazine (signed as G.P.) stated that Pedro Américo "before his great painting, among the sovereigns and princes of various countries and a select crowd of admirers, he must have felt totally satisfied".<sup>#</sup> Therefore, Pedro Américo managed for his artwork to be seen by important people, both from the artistic and political circles, a fact that allowed the event to be publicized in Italian periodicals.

The painting was mentioned, for example, in the newspaper *Il Corriere Italiano*, *L'Opinione Nazionale*, *La vedetta Gazzetta del popolo*, among others. *L'Arte* magazine devoted more than one article in 1888 to the painter and to "*Independência ou morte!*", which was described as "an artwork that alone is enough to assure great fame to an artist".<sup>#</sup> The painting was analyzed in detail by Otello Masini, who also praised it highly.

After the first exhibition in Florence, "*Independência ou morte!*" was shipped to São Paulo, though constant delays in completing the Ipiranga's

monumental building left it encased in a room within the São Francisco Law School building. The painting would only be allotted to its intended location in 1895, when the Ipiranga's monumental building, now turned into *Museu do Estado* [State Museum], was dedicated.

### **Painting circulation**

The good reception that the painting and the artist received in the Italian newspapers also favored the circulation of the image of the painting in Europe. Pedro Américo invested in good reproductions of the painting.

He commissioned Giacomo Brogi's studio to photograph his painting. A painting with gigantic dimensions such as "*Independência ou morte!*" was difficult to have a good photographic reproduction, especially in the nineteenth century. Brogi's studio specialized in photographs of artworks, such as paintings, sculptures, mosaics, frescoes and architecture. In the 1880s, the studio gained prominence with a series of illustrations of artworks by the great masters of Italian art, becoming one of the most renowned photographic companies in Europe in this specific department.

These excellent quality reproductions were used by Pedro Américo in publications, such as the Levasseur's *La Grande encyclopedia* published on the occasion of the Paris Universal Exhibition in 1889. But the photographs were also commercialized. Brogi's studio sold the photographs in several countries, and its catalog was written in French, with information also in English and German.

The photograph of Pedro Américo's painting is included in Giacomo Brogi's studio catalog of photographic reproductions, in the *Galleria Moderna* section, dedicated to artworks by contemporary painters. The commercialization of photography indicates, therefore, that the image of Pedro Américo's painting circulated in Europe. One of these reproductions is currently in the photo library of the *Kunsthistorisches Institut* in Florence.

The intention to make the painting internationally known would also be visible in the artist's attempts to expose it at universal exhibitions. In 1889, in Paris, the sending of the canvas was not authorized, so the preparatory drawings and photography of the painting were exhibited. But in 1893, the

painting was sent to the Columbian Exposition in Chicago, where it was exhibited in Brazil's Pavilion.

### **Final considerations**

Pedro Américo had many advantages executing his painting in Italy. It is important to note, however, that he did not settle permanently in Italy, most likely because he depended on the commissions he received in Brazil. Therefore, as soon as he finished a painting, he sought a new commission, so he could stay in Italy for a while longer. That's what happened when he finished "*Independência ou morte!*", as soon as those negotiations began to obtain a commission for a painting with the theme of liberation from slavery. In addition to financing his stay abroad, the commissions gave him the opportunity to produce large-scale paintings that gained visibility in Europe and increased the artist's recognition. That's why this transit between Brazil and Italy was so important to him.

This transit was not just Brazilians who went to Italy to complete their studies or to gain projection in their careers. There was also an opposite movement, that is, Italian artists who came to Brazil in search of opportunities to execute artworks of great proportions, such as monuments and public buildings. I have already mentioned the case of Tommaso Bezzi, the engineer of the Ipiranga monument building. But there are many other examples, mainly sculptors, such as Ettore Ximenes, Luigi Brizzolara, Amadeo Zani, Arnaldo Zocchi, among others. The large presence of Italian sculptors in Brazil (and throughout South America) at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, allows us to contrast with the French prevalence in the American art scene. France was certainly a reference, but the Italians also played a central role in public art in American countries.

In Brazil, an emblematic example is the *Monumento à Independência do Brasil* [Monument to Brazil's Independence], an artwork erected during the centenary of Brazil's independence, in 1922. After an international competition, the project by Ettore Ximenes and Manfredo Manfredi was chosen to be executed. There were artists from different parts of the world in

the competition, but Italians were the majority. It is interesting to note that Ximenes chose the painting "*Independência ou morte!*" by Pedro Américo to use as a reference for the high relief present in the monument and this was a prominent element in his project.

Ettore Ximenes was also an artist in transit between Italy and Brazil. In addition to the *Monumento à Independência*, he executed other public monuments in Brazil. He was not an exception; on the contrary, many other Italian sculptors obtained commissions for public sculptures, mainly in the city of São Paulo. Therefore, there were many travels by artists and cultural exchanges between Brazil and Italy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As we have seen, it was not a one-way street, but a rich and complex network of exchanges, which Pedro Américo, with "*Independência ou morte!*", knew how to take advantage of very well.

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## Endnotes

1. Michelli Cristine Scapol Monteiro is a postdoctoral researcher at Museu Paulista USP with a Research Internship in Italy at the Università degli Studi Roma Tre (2019-2020), financed by FAPESP (2018/17682-0; 2019/15797-8).

# Concrete Poetry: Exchanges between Brazil and Italy 1950-1980

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper aims to analyze the dense network of relationships between artists of Brazilian and Italian Concrete Poetry in the period of greatest expansion of the movement, between the early 1950s and the end of the 1970s. The idea is to critically evaluate the artistic and theoretical repercussions of the early Brazilian experience on subsequent experiments carried out in Italy.

In 1953, Carlo Belloli — leading exponent of the Second Futurism — visited São Paulo for the first time with the delegation of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, of which he was general secretary. Two years before Belloli's visit to São Paulo, some of his experiments had been exhibited at the Circulo Cultural Paulista (1951), and his work had become known in Brazilian avant-garde circles. In 1952, the brothers Augusto and Haroldo de Campos and Décio Pignatari, founded the group and journal Noigandres. Four years later, the group organized the National Exposition of Concrete Art of São Paulo, a wide-ranging show that made the Brazilian movement known in the international art scene. Both experiences had a strong and lasting resonance in Italy.

Through the study of archival materials, this paper analyzes the circulation and fortune of Brazilian Concrete Poetry in the Italian verbal-visual landscape, shedding light on a significant episode of the artistic exchange between Brazil and Italy.

## **KEYWORDS**

Brazilian Concrete Poetry; Visual Poetry; Noigandres Group; Post-War Italian Art; Neo-avant-garde.

Brazil and Italy, together with Switzerland and the German-speaking countries, are among the major centres of development and diffusion of Concrete Poetry, a transnational movement that focused, starting in the post-war period, on the intersection between literature and the visual arts, in the wake of Mallarmé's Symbolist experiments, the early Futurist and Dadaist avant-garde, and the poetry of Apollinaire, Pound and Joyce.



**Fig. 1.** Cover of the first issue of *Modulo*. *Rivista di cultura contemporanea*, 1966

A definition that is still valid today for this specific poetic line of research in the verb-visual area, close to but also different from Visual Poetry and Technological Poetry, is the one given by the physicist and philosopher Max Bense in the 1966 issue of the journal “Modulo”, directed by Arrigo Lora-Totino (also the ideator of the journal “Antipiugiù”, which came out from 1961 to 1966), whose editorial committee included, in addition to Bense, some of the most important art critics such as Umbro Apollonio, Gillo Dorfles and a young Germano Celant. The special issue was the first anthology of Concrete Poetry of international scope to be published in Italy, and was conceived as a response to the anthology on Visual Poetry edited in 1965 by the co-founder of Gruppo 70, Lamberto Pignotti, who had excluded authors ascribable to the Concrete trend in order to underline the distance between the two movements. Bense writes: “We speak of Concrete texts (or of Concrete Poetry) when linguistic elements are used in their triadic verbal, visual and vocal function at the same time and in a semantic as well as in an aesthetic way, when the text (in part or in full) identifies its linguistic world with its linguistic exterior world, or, one might say, when what the words express in reference to the content (with their morphemes or connections) is reflected in the visual adaptation and vocal reproduction.”<sup>1</sup>

In the pages of “Modulo” – as in many of Arrigo Lora-Totino’s later editorial and exhibition projects – ample space is given to the research developed in Brazil by the poets who gathered in 1952 (so at a very early date) around the journal “Noigandres” and the groups Invenção and Praxis, founded in São Paulo in 1960 and 1961 respectively, which Lora-Totino considered essential references for his work and more generally for the Italian and international Concrete Poetry scene. In the booklet, together with works by Ronaldo Azeredo, Augusto and Haroldo de Campos, Mario Chamie, José Lino Grünwald, José Paulo Paes, Luiz Angelo Pinto, Décio Pignatari and Pedro Xisto, the first Italian translation of the *Plano-piloto para poesia concreta* was published<sup>2</sup>, the manifesto of Brazilian concrete poetry by the de Campos brothers and Décio Pignatari that had appeared almost ten years earlier, in 1958, in the fourth issue of “Noigandres”. In “Modulo”, Lora-Totino also includes the artist and critic Carlo Belloli among the pioneers of

Concrete Poetry, an exponent of the second futurism, whose *Teste poème poème texte* (Gomringer Press 1961) is described as the “first experiment in Concrete Poetry carried out by an Italian”<sup>3</sup>. On this occasion, however, Lora-Totino did not mention either Belloli’s previous experiences in the field of visual poetry, which began in 1944 with the panels *Tipogrammi per Marinetti* and *Parole per la guerra*, or his repeated contacts with Brazil and the possible influence of his work on the Noigandres Group.<sup>4</sup> It is only since the 1990s that historiography has begun to examine this latter issue, thanks above all to the literary studies of Paola Rolli and Maria Gloria Vinci<sup>5</sup>. The lack of first-hand sources, however, still leaves some questions open: Belloli remains a “mysterious” figure<sup>6</sup>, due to the lack of studies and the difficulty in finding documents relating to his verbal-visual beginnings, starting with the single issue of the journal “Futuristi in armi” (where the panels cited above were published), not present in the Italian catalogue of periodicals, nor in the major collections of Italian Futurism, and whose content is only known thanks to later publications. The reopening of the Belloli collection at the Istituto Internazionale di Studi sul Futurismo in Milan (the International Institute for Futurism Studies), which is currently closed to the public, could perhaps help shed new light on his role and on his relations with the Noigandres Group. However, even the few examples I have just mentioned allow to say that the exchanges between Brazilian and Italian Concrete Poetry were intense from the earliest stages: this text will therefore reflect on the dense network of relations established between the two countries during the movement’s greatest expansion, between the early 1950s and the end of the 1970s. I will start by analysing Belloli’s experience in Brazil, and then trace an initial map of the circulation of Brazilian Concrete Poetry in Italy, in order to focus on the fortune and effects of this current in the Italian artistic scene of the 1960s and 1970s.

### **Carlo Belloli in Brazil**

In the anthology *Concrete Poetry: A World View* edited by Mary Ellen Solt in 1968, the author acknowledges Belloli’s pioneering role in the field of Concrete Poetry. In fact, she stresses how Belloli’s reflections, in the

introduction to TESTI-POEMI MURALI published in 1944 (edizioni “Erre”, Milan) with an introduction by Marinetti, anticipated the first theories on Concrete Poetry that were to appear in the following decade<sup>7</sup>. Solt, however, speaks of Belloli as an isolated figure and believes that at the beginning of the 1950s neither the Swiss Eugen Gomringer, a leading figure and theorist of concrete poetry, author of the successful collection *Konstellationen, Constellations, Constelaciones* (1953) nor the members of the Noigandres Group were aware of his work. Lora-Totino had also expressed a similar view two years earlier: in his opinion, the Brazilian group had in fact operated independently, “without entering into contact – at the beginning – with analogous European experiences.”<sup>8</sup> In *Piano pilota*, the de Campos brothers and Pignatari had identified a rich genealogy of predecessors that included, for poetry, Mallarmé, Pound, Joyce, Cummings, Futurism and Dadaism, Apollinaire and the Brazilians Oswald de Andrade and Joao Cabral de Melo Neto; for music, Webern, Boulez, Stockhausen; and for the visual arts, Mondrian, Max Bill and Albers. However, the fact that Belloli is not mentioned in the manifesto is not enough to rule him out as a possible source of the Brazilian group. In more recent times, Solt’s position has been questioned by critics who, despite the lack of documents attesting to direct contact between the Brazilian authors and Belloli in the early phases of Concrete Poetry, have nevertheless put forward the hypothesis of a link between the two events. According to the reconstruction proposed by Maria Gloria Vinci, in the mid-1940s Belloli met the future founder of São Paulo Concretism, Waldemar Cordeiro, who was a student at the Academy of Fine Arts in Rome. In 1946 Cordeiro moved to São Paulo, where he met the brothers Augusto and Haroldo de Campos and Décio Pignatari and where he founded the avant-garde group “Ruptura” in 1952.

In Rome, in the mid-1940s, Belloli was also in contact with Emilio Villa, whose collaboration with Pietro Maria Bardi for the Museo di Arte di San Paolo (MASP) is well known, as is his acquaintance with the Noigandres Group. In the same period in which Villa was in Brazil, Belloli exhibited his works in São Paulo for the first time: according to Vinci, in 1951 some pieces from the series *Corpi di poesia* (still to be identified) were exhibited at the

Círculo Cultural Paulista<sup>9</sup>. The exhibition would therefore precede the foundation of the journal “Noigandres” by one year and Belloli’s arrival in Brazil by two. In fact, the artist arrived in São Paulo for the first time in 1953 on the occasion of the fourth centenary of the city’s foundation, together with a delegation from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, of which he was secretary general. In São Paulo, at the Club Ipitiranga, Belloli presented a selection of verbo-visual works, dated between 1943 and 1951, belonging to the series *Parole per la guerra*, *Testi-poemi murali*, *Tavole visuali*, *Corpi di poesia*, accompanied by a recital of *Testi-poemi* at the Italian-Brazilian Cultural Institute.



**Fig. 2.** *Poesia visuale. Omaggio a Carlo Belloli*, exhibition catalogue and brochure, Studio Santandrea, Milan 1977.

Many years later, in 1977, the writer Lúcia Machado de Almeida, on the occasion of the exhibition *Omaggio a Carlo Belloli*, held at the Studio Santandrea in Milan, directed by Gianfranco Bellora, recalled the strong impact the 1953 exhibition had on the Brazilian avant-garde circles: “Carlo Belloli’s bodies of poetry, made of Plexiglas and transparent plastic materials, produced in numbered series by an American company, were sold at very high prices for the time by the book dealer and gallery owner Francisco Pignatari, destined for the libraries and salons of Paulist high society, for the fazenderos of southern Minas, but also for the many intellectuals who, like me, saved their money to buy them (...) Belloli’s poetry constituted an absolutely new and revolutionary phenomenon in the Brazil of those years.”<sup>10</sup>

Belloli’s relations with Brazil from 1957 onwards were further strengthened by his marriage to the sculptress Mary Vieira, whom he met at the beginning of the decade and who won the prize for Sculpture at the second edition of the São Paulo Biennale in 1953. Lacking further documents, as Matteo D’Ambrosi argues, it is difficult to ascertain a direct influence of Belloli on the developments of the Noigandres Group<sup>11</sup>; however, in my opinion the hypothesis is not only plausible, but also probable, given the close formal affinity between his panels and those of the Brazilian Concretists. In this regard, it is useful to compare two famous works: Belloli’s *Guerra* (1944) and Décio Pignatari’s *Terra* (1956). In both cases, these are works in which the transparency of the poetic text is challenged, the undermining of the referential function of graphic signs goes hand in hand with the use of precise structural solutions. The graphic space is understood as a structural element of the poetic composition and the alphabetical signs are arranged according to precise modules and visual patterns. A very limited number of words are repeated on the page, conceived as a spatial field, following a permutative logic. “Alphabetical letters, words, phrases and fragments of phrases are used in their printed form and for their visual and physical characteristics, aiming to make the poem a real (concrete) object.”<sup>12</sup> For Brazilians, concrete poetry is in fact the antithesis of individual

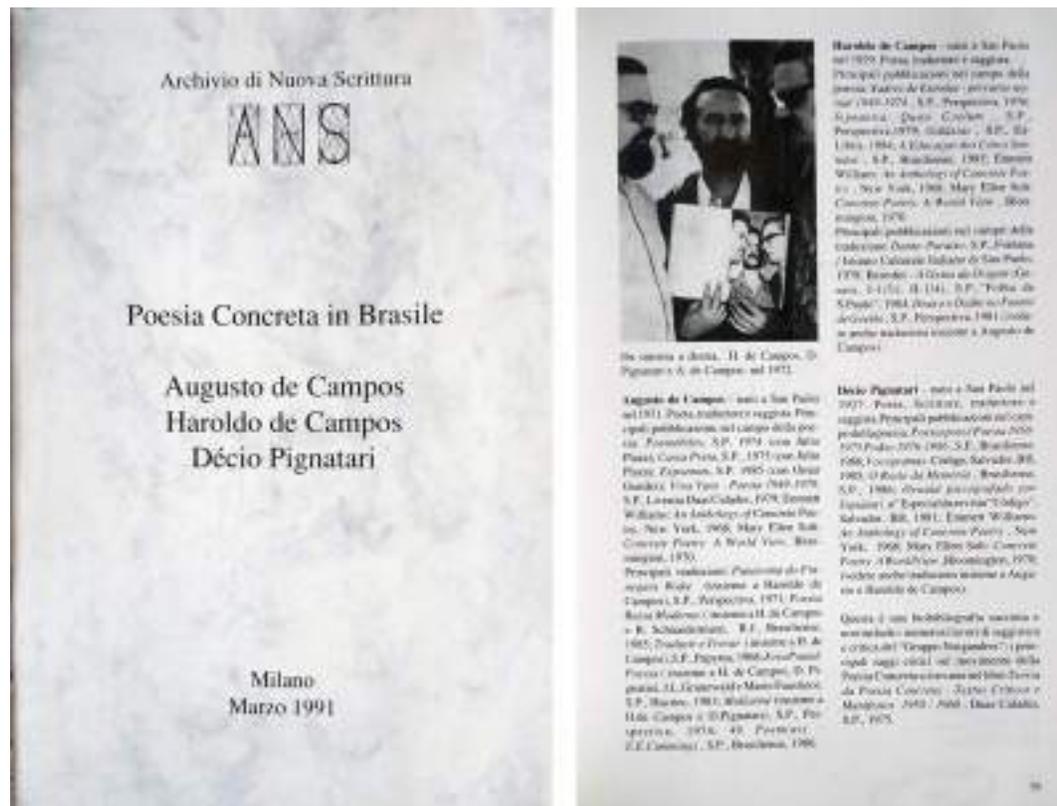
communication, it works against a poetry of subjective and hedonistic expression, the same way Belloli claims that “words are no longer means to communicate analogical images or psychic hiatuses, they become form-content.”<sup>13</sup>

### **The Noigandres Group in Italy**

In establishing a link between Belloli and the exponents of Noigandres in the 1950s, as we have seen, we are moving in the field of hypotheses and stylistic comparisons. On the other hand, numerous traces document the circulation of the works of Concrete Poetry in Italy starting from the following decade. The theoretical and artistic activity of the members of Noigandres had a significant and long-lasting resonance in Italy, culminating in 1991 with the exhibition *Poesia visiva in Brasile*,<sup>14</sup> curated by Lenora de Barros and Paola Mattoli at the Archivio di Nuova Scrittura in Milan, founded in 1988 by Ugo Carrega and the collector Paolo Della Grazia (now in part kept at the MART in Rovereto, in part at the Museion in Bolzano)<sup>15</sup>.

Thanks to artists such as Carrega himself, Adriano Spatola, Mirella Bentivoglio, Stelio Maria Martini, as well as the already mentioned Arrigo Lora-Totino, Brazilian Concrete Poetry circulated widely in anthologies, official journals, *esoeditoria* publications and exhibitions of Visual and Concrete Poetry throughout Italy. An unpublished letter written by Haroldo de Campos in response to Stelio Maria Martini, dated 2 December 1965, documents the first relations between the Noigandres Group and the Italian artists connected to “Linea Sud”, an avant-garde journal directed by Luca (Luigi Castellano), which appeared in Naples in 1963 taking over from the previous “Documento Sud” (1959-1961). In the letter de Campos accepts the invitation to collaborate with “Linea Sud”, of which he had already received a copy in Rome from Mario Diacono, at that time very close both to Martini – the two had been co-directors of the journal “Quaderno” (January-May 1962) – and to Villa, with whom he had founded “Ex” (1963-1968). De Campos writes:

I had our anthology *Noigandres / Dal verso alla poesia concreta* sent to you a week ago (by sea; unfortunately the postal air service is extremely expensive here...), which includes our *piano-pilota per la poesia concreta* (pilot plan for concrete poetry). Décio Pignatari will soon send you issue number 4 of our journal 'Invenzione'. You will be able to take what you want in the anthology and/or in the journal: most of the texts are unpublished in Italy. This is in answer to your invitation to collaborate with 'Linea Sud'. I believe that you may be interested in our *Teoria della Poesia Concreta (1950/1960. Testi critici e manifesti)*, which appeared this year.<sup>16</sup>



**Fig. 3.** *Poesia viva in Brasile*, exhibition catalogue, Archivio di Nuova Scrittura, Milan 1991.

Although the contacts between the Brazilian group and “Linea Sud” continued over time – as documented by another unpublished letter in the

Mart archives, sent by Pignatari to Martini, dated 24 January 1967<sup>17</sup> – the journal ceased publication in April 1967 without having hosted either the works or the posters of the “Noigandres”.



**Fig. 4.** *Poesia Concreta. Indirizzi concreti, visuali, fonetici*, exhibition catalogue, The Venice Biennale 1969

The exchange with the already mentioned Lora-Totino was more productive: one year after the release of the Concrete Poetry anthology in “Modulo” (where the *Piano pilota* had appeared) and after the publication of an article in “Graphicus” (December 1966),<sup>18</sup> accompanied by the image *Luxo-Lixo* by Augusto de Campos, Lora-Totino introduced the “International Exhibition of Concrete Poetry and Electronic Music” at the Salone Audizioni of the Teatro Donizetti in Bergamo<sup>19</sup>, together with Enore Zaffiri (a musician with whom he had founded The Aesthetic Information Studio in Turin), Belloli, Pietro Grossi and Lara Vinca-Masini. The exhibition, organised by Studio 2B, inaugurated in April of that year by two active supporters of Programmed and Kinetic Art, Lorenzo Boggi and Elio Cenci, included a great number of Brazilian artists: in the section dedicated to Concrete Poetry, in addition to the de Campos brothers and Pignatari, there were also José Lino Grünewald, Luiz Angelo Pinto, Pedro Xisto, Ronaldo Azeredo and Edgard Braga. The same group, with the exception of Pinto and Xisto, was presented in September 1969 by Lora-Totino in the exhibition *Poesia Concreta. Indirizzi concreti, visuali, fonetici*,<sup>20</sup> co-curated with Dietrich Mahlow at Ca’ Giustinian/Sala delle Colonne as part of the Venice Biennale; an exhibition that, due to the prestige of its venue and its international scope, can be considered the most significant on Concrete Poetry held in Italy during the decade.

The similarities between Lora-Totino’s works and those of the Brazilian Concrete Poets are many: in the modular structure of the “Verbotecture” – a neologism coined by the artist in 1973 – it is possible to trace the influence of the constructivist tendency present in Brazilian Concrete Poetry. The use of coloured letters in his *Cromofonemi* also follows in the footsteps of Augusto de Campos with his *Poetamenos (Poesie in tono minore, 1953)*, which, however, in Lora-Totino’s work, achieves more radical optical-perceptual results, bordering on Optical and Kinetic Art. From a stylistic point of view the connection with Adriana Spatola is not as close, although the latter was, together with Lora-Totino, among the most active promoters of exchanges with Brazilian poets: in the spring-summer of 1967, the first issue of “Malebolge” – the journal founded in 1964 together with Corrado Costa and Giorgio Celli, published by Scheiwiller with a graphic

design by Giovanni Anceschi – hosted the text *Poesia concreta brasiliana* by Haroldo de Campos, which opened with the quotation from Dante “esto visibile parlare, novello a noi perché qui non si trova” (from the 10th Canto of the Purgatory), and continued with a detailed explanation of the origins and the aims of the movement<sup>21</sup>.



**Fig. 5.** Augusto de Campos, *Profilograma 1, Pound/Maiakovski*, 1966, work belonged to Mirella Bentivoglio, courtesy Archivio Lettera\_E.

In the same period, the Brazilian group was invited to the exhibition *Segni nello spazio*,<sup>22</sup> co-curated by Spatola, at the Castello di San Giusto in Trieste (8/31 July 1967), where almost everyone of the Brazilian group was once again present (Braga; the de Campos brothers; Grünewald; Pignatari; Pinto; Xisto). On this occasion, Augusto de Campos and Pignatari exhibited, respectively, the aforementioned *Lixo-Luxo* (1966, *Spazzatura-lusso*) and *Cristo é a solução* (Christ is the Solution), both openly political and anti-capitalist, where the iconic quality of the image, of Pop derivation, has a greater weight than in the past, and the boundaries with non-concrete visual poetry become more blurred. In my opinion, these are the experiences that an Italian artist such as Mirella Bentivoglio looked at most closely. Her ties with Brazil were strong starting from the early 1970s, when she exhibited in a solo room at the 12th São Paulo Biennial in 1973.

The same edition of the exhibition featured the founder of the “Poema processo” group Neide Dias de Sá, who a few years later would be invited by Bentivoglio to the exhibition “Materializzazione del linguaggio” (Materialization of Language) at the 1978 Venice Biennale. The exhibition brought together for the first time in the Biennale’s spaces more than eighty women artists, including Anesia Pacheco E Chavez, then active in Brazil. Some of the works that Bentivoglio exhibited at the 12th São Paulo Biennial, including *Successo*, dated 1968, or works such as *La firma* (1973), reveal the influence of the works by de Campos and Pignatari we have just mentioned. But it is perhaps with the *Cuore della consumatrice ubbidiente* that the link with Pignatari’s earlier *Beba Coca-Cola* becomes more evident and highlights a similar ideological stance towards American consumerism. Bentivoglio acknowledged this influence on more than one occasion; in a self-presentation in 1996 she wrote: “I was among the followers of Concrete Poetry, a movement born in Brazil, which promoted a poetic analysis of language not only on the basis of the sound of the word but also on the basis of its form.”<sup>23</sup> Even more explicit is her introduction to the exhibition *Poesia concreta. Bentivoglio Lora-Totino Sandri Spatola*, held in 1977 at the Santandrea Studio in Milan, which in my opinion clearly expresses the importance of the Brazilian experience for Italian Concrete poets: “The

Rubicon of institutional literariness was crossed with the first manifesto of the founders of Concretism; or – to use a specific expression of theirs – with their pilot plan. They were Augusto and Haroldo de Campos, Décio Pignatari and the group gravitating around the Brazilian journal ‘Noigandres’. In São Paulo, more than two decades ago: the two decades of the new poetry.”<sup>24</sup>

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14. "Poesia Concreta in Brasile" exhibition (21<sup>st</sup> March to 21<sup>st</sup> June, 1991) Archivio di Nuova Scrittura, Milan, edited by Leonora de Barros and Paula Mattioli. On the occasion of the exhibition Augusto de Campos gave the "Non-conferenza" (Unconference) on Brazilian concrete poetry and its relationship with Italy The reading was repeated in Rome, at Palazzo Doria Pamphili, on the 25<sup>th</sup> November of the same year. It was introduced by Elio Pagliarani on the occasion of the second stage of the exhibition. The audio is a digitization of the audiocassette (Fuji ER Type I 60' model) containing the recording of the "Non-conferenza" preserved in the Archivio di Nuova Scrittura collection at the Archivio del '900 of the Mart in Rovereto, <https://archive.org/details/augusto-de-campos-non-conferenza-milano-archivio-di-nuova-scrittura-26-marzo-1991-audio> [accessed September 18th 2021].
15. On the history of the Archivio di Nuova Scrittura see: Daniela Ferrari, *Archivio di nuova scrittura Paolo Della Grazia: storia di una collezione / Geschichte einer Sammlung* (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana, 2012).
16. Unpublished letter sent by Haroldo de Campos to Stelio Maria Martini, dated 2 December 1965, Fondo Stelio Maria Martini, Archivio del '900, MART. The letter is written in Italian: "Le ho fatto spedire ormai da una settimana (per via marittima; purtroppo il servizio aereo postale è eccessivamente caro da noi...) la nostra antologia *Noigandres / Dal verso alla poesia concreta*, con il nostro *piano-pilota per la poesia concreta*, a corredo. Décio Pignatari le manderà, fra poco, il numero 4 della nostra rivista *Invenzione*. Lei potrà prendere ciò che voglia (sic) nell'antologia ed/o nella rivista: ci sono dei testi nella maggioranza inediti in Italia. Questo per ciò che riguarda il suo invito a collaborare con Linea-Sud. Credo che la (sic) potrà forse interessare la nostra *Teoria della Poesia Concreta (1950/1960. Testi critici e manifesti)*, apparsa appunto quest'anno".
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# Lionello Venturi between Italy and Brazil: from the CIHA Congress in Venice (1955) to the Sixth São Paulo Biennial (1961)

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## **ABSTRACT**

Lionello Venturi (1885-1961) returned to Italy from exile in 1945, begun in 1931 following the refusal to take an oath of loyalty to fascism. He resumed teaching at the La Sapienza University of Rome until 1955. In that year, as President of the Italian CIHA, he promoted the International Congress of Venice with the title "Venice and Europe". The Congress saw the participation of 115 scholars from all over the world, who placed the complexity of Venice's role in the arts and cultural relations with the European continent and beyond. In 1961, the year of Venturi's death, he was a member of the Organizing Committee of the VIth Biennial of São Paulo (september 1961).

This paper aims to investigate the figure and role of the great Italian art historian on the two international occasions mentioned. In particular, the rich documentation on the 1955 Congress will be taken into account: letters, organizational and scientific documentation, public and programmatic speeches, public and critical reactions to the event in the general framework of the role of art history in the second post-war period in Italy and in the rest of the world. The documentation regarding the São Paulo Biennale, although incomplete, due to the sudden death of Venturi on August 15th '61, is one of his last public documents to join an international project.

## **KEYWORDS**

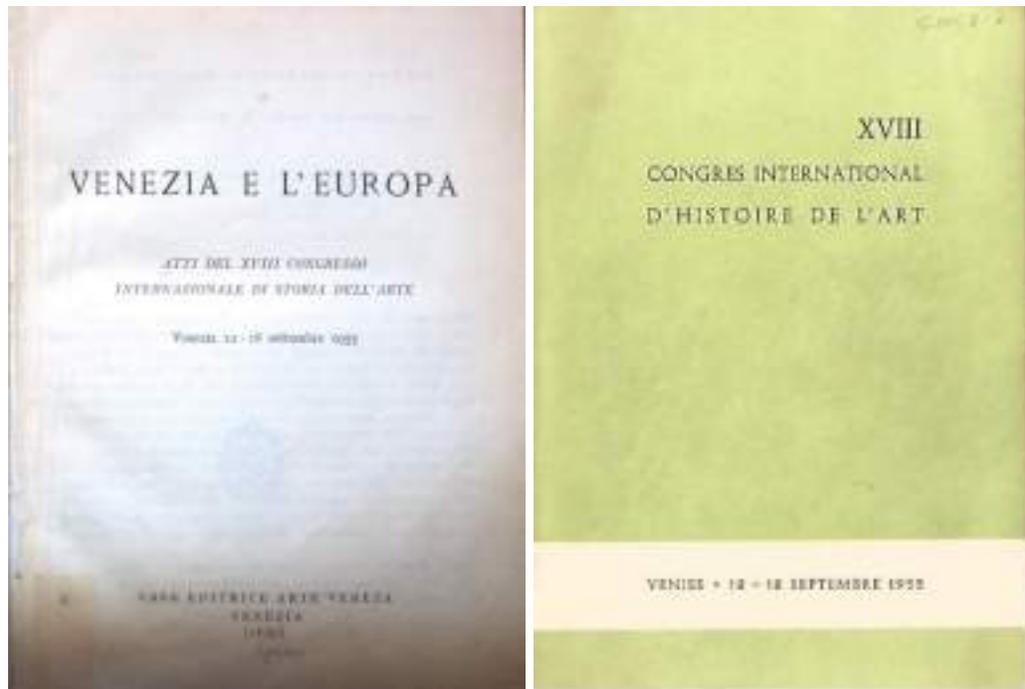
Lionello Venturi; CIHA; CIHA Venice Congress 1955; São Paulo Biennial 1961

The paper is a reconnaissance based on unpublished materials contained in three of the 428 boxes of the Lionello Venturi Archive kept at the La Sapienza University of Rome I have been able to consult and reproduce. These documents unknown even to those who have dealt with the history of the Italian and international C.I.H.A. in the past. I am thinking of the important works by Thierry Dufrêne, Jane Anderson, Claudia Cieri and Giovanna Perini Folesani, Jennifer Coke and recently Virve Sarapik<sup>2</sup>. The new documents allow for a greater completeness of information and knowledge of the international organisation and its role in post-war Italy.

Lionello Venturi (1885-1961) returned to Italy in 1945 from exile, which had begun in 1931 following his refusal to join the fascist party. After an absence of 14 years, he began teaching at La Sapienza University in Rome until 1955. In that year, as President of the Italian C.I.H.A., he directed the 18th International Congress of Art History held between the Cini Foundation in Venice, Vicenza and Grado. It was a congress attended by 115 scholars from all over the world, who focused their critical attention - for the first time - on the complexity of Venice's role in the arts and in political and cultural relations with the European continent and beyond. The volume of the proceedings was published the following year.

The second aspect I'll consider for my paper in the biography of the last seven years of Venturi's life, concerns the year 1961, when the Italian scholar was invited by the Brazilian art critic Mário Pedrosa, director of the Museu d'arte Moderna in São Paulo, and by the committee of the Sixth São Paulo Biennial, supported by the Italian-born industrialist and patron Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, to take part in the International Jury. The SPB, the second oldest Biennial after Venice, which was due to open on 4 September and close in December of that year.

The details of the trip, from Rome to São Paulo, were prepared in detail - as was Venturi's planned stay of over a month for visits and lectures in the country. Venturi - who had turned 76 on 25 April (the day that became the Italian national holiday for liberation from Nazi-fascism) - was unfortunately unable to undertake the trip because he suffered a fatal heart attack on 14 August of that year.



**Figs. 1 and 2.** Program Cover of C.I.H.A. Venice Congress 1955 (Archivio di Lionello Venturi, Rome; Title page of the proceedings of Venice Congress 1955, (Bibliotheca Hertziana, Rome)

My intention is to propose - in the light of a selection of documents - some characteristic aspects of the figure and role of this great Italian art historian whose international outlook was rooted in his decision to leave Italy during the twenty-year Fascist Regime.

I have considered the rich documentation on the C.I.H.A. Congress of 1955, consisting of about a hundred letters with international and national correspondents, scientific, administrative and accounting texts; manuscripts and typescripts of public and programmatic speeches, also other material from previous C.I.H.A. congresses in Amsterdam; last but not least the numerous critical and journalistic reactions to the event. These materials are a cross-section of the role of art history after the Second World War in Italy and the rest of the world.

The documentation regarding the São Paulo Biennial, although incomplete due to Venturi's sudden death, is to be considered the testimony

of the master's last public commitment to an international project. This Internationality and wide openness to the world of art and culture that Venturi developed with great scientific breadth and weaving of human relationships characterized the thirty years that dramatically began with his self-imposed exile.

The documentation is composed, also in this case, of numerous letters of invitation and description of the Sixth Biennial project by Pedrosa and Matarazzo; a series of very detailed typewritten "bulletins" regarding the structure of the event; handwritten notes by Venturi on the artists present and to be considered; a series of cables on the details of the trip, dated between March and June 1961.

I will return, in the conclusion to Venturi's non-participation in the Jury of the Biennale and his commemoration held by the Brazilian AICA in December.

Venturi's existential condition - from 1932 onwards - is that of a "Migrant" for reasons of political necessity. The self-exile he chose was the result of painful decisions induced by an unshakable coherence and ethical-political integrity. Lionello Venturi took a stand in order to affirm his freedom of thought and action, but also of method and interests. In fact, with his personal story Venturi traces the dynamic geography of 20th century art history, which moved from Italy to Paris, then to the United States (Baltimore and New York), to extend after the second World War to South America and India. This geography of travel and permanence is also a reflection of Venturi's scientific interests, spread over a chronological span of the discipline that saw no space-time boundaries: from the Italian Primitive painters to Caravaggio, Impressionists and Cézanne, and militant art criticism. The making of art history was never detached from the awareness of the need to create a historiography of criticism by dynamic definition of the discipline, which his father Adolfo had helped to found.



At a time when the Italian Academia was moving towards adherence to the regime, Venturi distanced himself from the public events identifiable with Fascism, even receiving a reprimand from the Minister of National Education Giuseppe Bottai and being suffering protests at the University of Turin.

In November 1931, university and college teachers were obliged by law to take an oath of allegiance to Fascism.

Of over 1251 Italian university professors, only 15 refused to take the oath, thus losing their professorships. In addition to Lionello Venturi, they included some of the most prestigious names in Italian scientific and academic culture: mathematician Vito Volterra, orientalist Giorgio Levi Della Vida, jurists Fabio Luzzatto, Francesco Ruffini and his son Edoardo, historian Gaetano De Sanctis, historian of Christianity Ernesto Buonaiuti, philosopher Piero Martinetti, chemist Giorgio Errera, surgeon Bartolo Nigrisoli and anthropologist Mario Carrara. Other intellectuals left Italy, such as the economist Piero Sraffa, who was very close to Antonio Gramsci, or Giuseppe Antonio Borgese, who was in the United States at the time.

The decision to reject the oath meant the loss of his chair, his pension and an endless series of persecutions and prohibitions. In a famous letter to the Rector of Turin University, rejecting the invitation to take the oath, Venturi wrote:

"it is not possible for me to commit myself to 'forming citizens devoted to the Fascist regime', because the ideal premises of my discipline do not allow me to promote any political regime in school".

After taking the oath without the loyalty clause to Fascism of 1926, Venturi refused to sign the ideological adhesion of November 1931 which foresaw submission to the regime and therefore the full identification, unacceptable to Venturi, between Fascism and the State. The scholar was released from service in February 1932, when he was already abroad. After refusing to take the oath of office and a brief stay in the United States to give a series of lectures at Harvard on the history of criticism, in 1932 Venturi settled in Paris

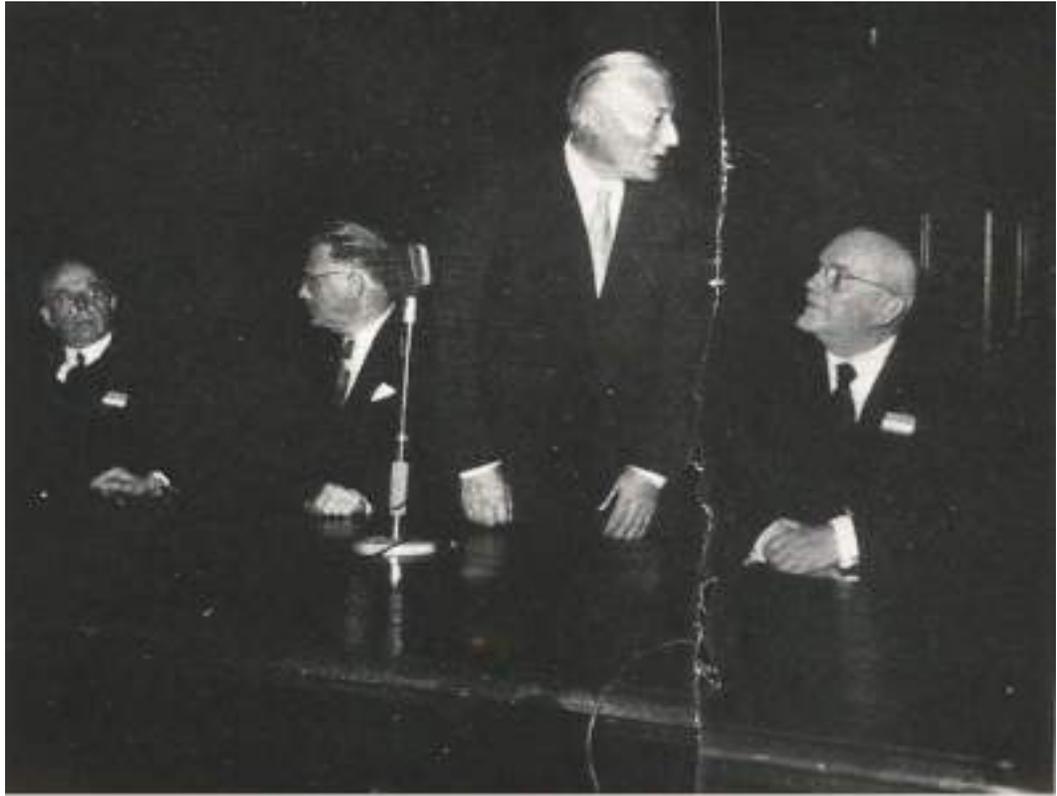
where he was joined by his family and closely watched by the local Italian consulate, which informed the regime's repressive apparatus of his acquaintances in Giustizia e Libertà circles. From the second half of the 1930s, the exile, which had been voluntary in the first phase, became de facto forced: Lionello's and his son Franco's anti-fascist activities were known to the police. An arrest order was issued against him, his mug shot was circulated and the fascist press wrote articles against him.

Venturi who was far from the communist left in terms of culture and education, struggled to find his feet even in the narrow liberal-democratic circles of exile, which merely proclaimed an anti-Fascism far removed from any concrete action and devoid of practical effect. With the arrival in France of the antifascist Rosselli brothers the concentration is hegemonized in the first half of the thirties by the movement of "Justice and Freedom".

Venturi's indignation at what was happening in Italy, and his consequent political commitment to denounce the crimes of the dictatorship, grew progressively during his exile. This was the context in which he promoted the Italian section of the International League Against Anti-Semitism (Lica) which, founded in 1927 as the Ligue contre le Pogroms, had the task of combating anti-Semitism. His indignation at the anti-Semitic laws convinced Venturi of the need to take a clear position on the regime's racial policy as well. On 18 March 1939 Venturi left Paris for New York at the outbreak of the conflict, and his appointment as professor at the University of Baltimore led him to remain in America. In America, his academic and research activities continued in prestigious universities and cultural institutes in California, Mexico City and New York, and he joined the Mazzini Society. In the USA Venturi was also the protagonist of another political initiative of international scope, destined, however, to have no particular success: the foundation of the Latin Union with the goal of bringing together Italian, French and Spanish exiles. In March 1944, together with illustrious Italian exiles including Arturo Toscanini, and at Salvemini's side, he was one of the six signatories of the appeal for the restoration of democratic freedoms in Italy published with great prominence in the magazine 'Life'.

After the liberation of Rome, in 1944 the Bonomi government

reinstated the university professors dismissed in 1931 and Venturi decided to return to Italy, asking to be assigned to the university of Rome where his father Adolfo had taught. In February 1945 he was recalled to university teaching. In Rome he was full professor in Medieval and Modern Art History for a decade. Immediately after the war, his vocation for travelling and studying abroad took him with renewed interest to the Middle East, Greece and Turkey, and again on numerous trips to South America, Brazil and Argentina, as far as India. In this climate, encouraged by Argan (the author of the Italian C.I.H.A. Statute), Venturi matured and led him to chair and organize the 18th C.I.H.A. Congress in 1955, after the one held in Amsterdam in 1952. So Venice in relation to Europe: origins, development and expansion of Venetian art. For example André Grabar discussed the relations between Venice and Byzantium, the early Renaissance to 18th century art with interventions on Vedutist painting and in general the relations of Venice with continental art observed by Rodolfo Pallucchini. Scholars from 26 countries were invited to discuss the subject, with a breakdown by nationalities, including: 150 Italians, 130 French, 60 Germans, 50 Belgians, 50 Norwegians, 40 Swedes, 35 Dutch, 35 Americans and 30 Swiss, the socialist countries were represented by 9 Yugoslavs and 8 Poles, even Japan had its own speaker. In addition, there were over 50 representatives from academies and universities. The Congress featured 7 main lectures and 90 scientific communications. There were over 800 participants in total. The two volumes of the proceedings of the impressive Congress remain, with 99 contributions published.<sup>4</sup> Numerous participants appear in the rich correspondence of the Archives. Particularly frequent among these is Venturi's exchange with Marcel Aubert (1884-1962), art and architectural historian, as well as official of important French museums, head of the Société française d'archéologie, and one of the pioneers of the teaching of art history in France. Another of Venturi's correspondents for C.I.H.A. congresses during his presidency was William George Constable (1887-1976), long-time director of the Courtauld Institute in London and later director of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.



**Fig. 5.** A.W. Byvanck and L. Venturi to the C.I.H.A. Venice 1955, CXIV, 1, 16  
(Archivio di Lionello Venturi Rome)

The papers in the Archive also contain interesting documentation regarding the preparations for the exhibition on Giorgione and the *Giorgioneschi* that was held in conjunction with the Congress.<sup>5</sup>

It ended with a triumphant concert by Arturo Toscanini in the presence of President Gronchi of the Italian Republic.

The Committee promoted meetings and institutional gatherings with the participation of Pietro Zampetti, and Roberto Longhi, Rodolfo Pallucchini, Antonio Morassi and Giuseppe Fiocco in the lively debate and exhibition proposals. Other temporary exhibitions were organized to coincide with the Congress: an exhibition of graphics art at the Cini Foundation, curated by Fiocco, and, at Palazzo Grassi, a vast anthological exhibition of paintings by Bernardo Bellotto from Polish collections. One of the days of the Congress was then dedicated to Palladio with a special session held in Vicenza with

papers by Argan and Nikolaus Pevsner. The activities of the C.I.H.A. in those post-war years were not limited to the organization of the Congresses. In his prologue Venturi recalled the solid scientific instruments sponsored by Unesco such as the *Repetorie d'Art et d'Archeologie*, directed by Marcel Aubert, and the 70 volumes of the *Corpus vitrearum Medii Aevi*, fifteen of which were published under the direction of Hans Hahnloser, until his death in 1974.

Lionello Venturi played a constant and primary role in the important international scene offered by the C.I.H.A. Committee. The Venetian congress probably represented his highest revenge of post-war cultural openness in Italy, after the closures, censures and exile he had suffered during the years of the Fascist regime.

As a migrant by necessity, Venturi acquired the typical characteristic of cosmopolitans in that he made his erudition one the many arrows in his bow rather than a narrow nationalistic perspective. Let us now to 1961.

To commemorate his death, shortly after the São Paulo Biennial, the 2nd Brazilian National Congress of Art Critics, held in December of that year on the theme "The Question of Contemporary Art", paid tribute to Venturi in a special session.<sup>6</sup>

Among the speakers at the session in which the posthumous homage to Lionello Venturi was paid were some of the most important Brazilian critics of the time: Antonio Bento, Mário Pedrosa and Lourival Gomes Machado were chosen to say a few words about the life and work of the Italian critic. Their tributes, expressed in an informal way, had a deep admiration for a man they considered a mentor, an intellectual who had always made himself available to the younger critics as they had been when they met him, and who was highly esteemed for his erudition and acumen. Bento and Pedrosa spoke casually about their encounters with Venturi and the aspects of his critical thought that had marked them. According to Pedrosa, Venturi understood that the work of art carries 'the whole universe and the whole of history in an isolated form'. The Brazilian critic praised Venturi's handling of the analysis of individual poetics, always taking into account the personality of the artist who historically participated in his time.

Pedrosa summarized Venturi's critical approach as a balance between organized ideas and the sensitivity which is essential for critical practice, though insufficient in itself as a means of objective evaluation.

Ideas that become too clear and distinct risk turning criticism into a list of laws and rules. At the same time, sensitivity can overcome those ideas to prompt the formation of new ideas, and in this dialectic there is a continuous and endless rhythm that governs critical judgement. The absence of either produces a critique that is either normative (all organization, no sensibility) or excessively subjective (no organization). Pedrosa also noted that formal interpretation, allied to observation of the surroundings, led to a criticism concerned with defining the fundamental meaning of a work of art "because, for [Venturi], all art criticism is life experience". Thanks to this "life experience", which Pedrosa also calls Venturi's "human behaviour", the Italian critic's work reveals a fundamentally ethical dimension. This agreement between Venturi's critical vision and Pedrosa's approach can be seen in many of the Brazilian critic's statements, such as when he says that art must reach sensitivity through the "dynamism of its forms" or that art must take place "in its own specific field" and according to "its own rules". Thus, while Pedrosa's position might suggest a strictly formalist approach to the artistic phenomenon, the result is actually a tempered formalism, that is, a formalist view according to which the work of art contains subjective meanings that connect it to the world, beyond the relationships between forms, colours and lines. The lay Venturi was trained in the exercise of a militant and practical anti-fascism, like the fighting anti-fascism of another central figure of post-war Italy, Carlo L. Ragghianti, 25 years younger, imprisoned by the regime. Both embodied the lesson of Benedetto Croce and grew up under the influence of Salvemini's socialist and liberal ideas, open to the comparison between cultures, always critical of illiberal regimes, as they observed in the USSR and the real socialist regimes. In 1961 Venturi wrote a to his friend Giancarlo Vigorelli a letter, which is preserved in the Venturi archive, that may appear as a sort of spiritual testament about the heritage of Fascism in Europe:

"Is fascism over in Europe?' Not by a long shot; it becomes more dangerous every year, because it has taught everyone to do as they please in spite of social life, and it takes time to repair such moral miseducation. It should be easier to fight the political force of fascism. It was born, has lived, and continues after death, on the basis of blackmail: the communist danger. Whoever accepts blackmail is a coward, and must be rejected, both by the strength of our faith in freedom and by the conviction that we belong to a superior civilization".<sup>2</sup>

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### Endnotes

1. It is my pleasure to thank the kind collaboration of my colleagues Prof. Claudio Zambianchi, Director of the Lionello Venturi's Archive, Prof. Stefano Valeri, who studied and produced the fundamental catalogue indexed on-line: Valeri, Stefano, *Lungo le vie del giudizio nell'arte. I materiali dell'Archivio di Lionello Venturi nella Sapienza Università di Roma*, (Roma: Campisano 2015); <https://saras.uniroma1.it/strutture/archivio-lionello-venturi>, and the researcher Michela Rossi, the current archivist who helped me in the research. For first study o the C.I.H.A. documents in the Archive see Casini, Tommaso, "Note su Lionello Venturi presidente del C.I.H.A. nell'archivio dell'Università La Sapienza di Roma", *Quaderno dell'Archivio Lionello Venturi*, 2, 2020, 57-62.
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  4. *Venezia e l'Europa, Atti del XVIII Congresso, Internazionale di Storia dell'Arte*, Venezia september 12-18 1955, (Venezia: Casa Editrice Arte Veneta 1956).
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  7. From a letter by Lionello Venturi to Giancarlo Vigorelli (director of *L'Europa Letteraria*) 16.06.1961, CCCX, 7 (Archivio di Lionello Venturi)
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