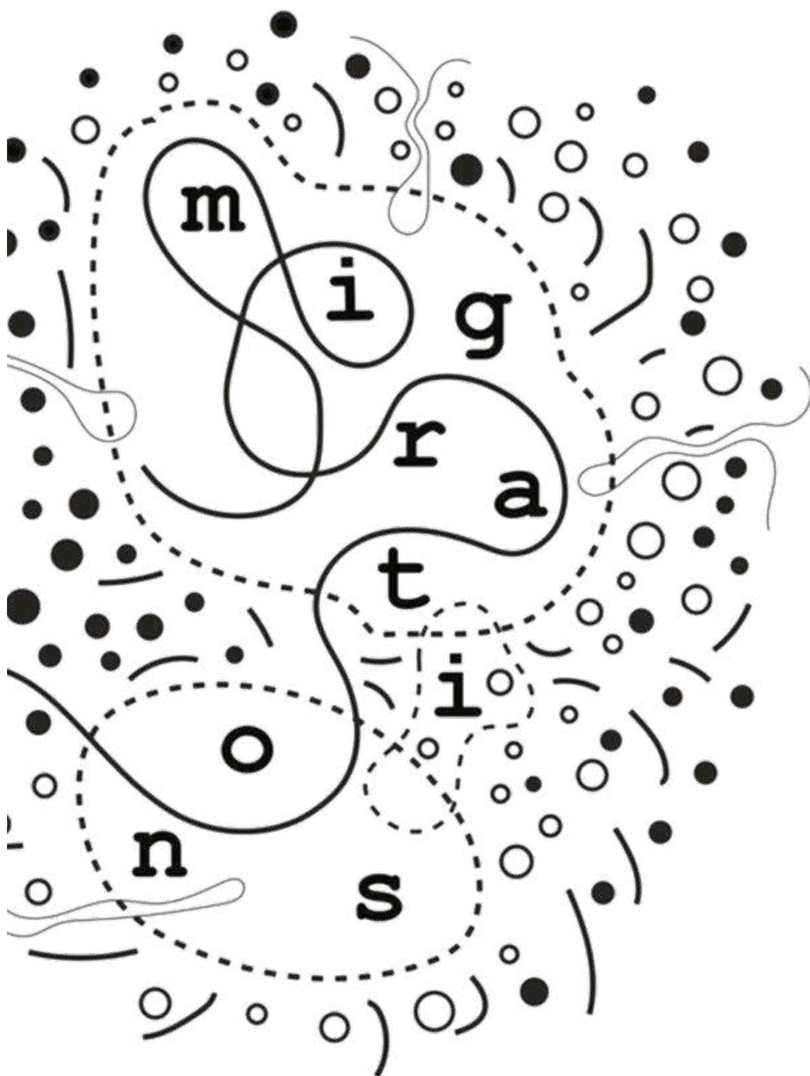
Artisanal Epistemologies as a Transcultural Category

Session 1



Session 1
Artisanal Knowledge as a Transcultural Category: Introductory Remarks

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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.[1]

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.[2] 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.[3] 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 identity 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.[4]

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."[5]

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.[6] 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 visuality, 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.

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-at-staggering-milestone-of-100m-says-un).
2. We read Tim Ingold, "Rethinkng the Animate, Re-animating Thought," *Ethnos* 71/1 (2006): 9-20, DOI: 10.1080/00141840600603111; and Tim Ingold and Elzabeth Hallam, "Creativity and Cultural Improvisaton: 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).

"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"[1] and artist-inventor[2], 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)[3]. 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[4].

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[5], Inimitable Papers[6], 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 visuality, 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[7]. 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 Guatós. 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[8] 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[9], 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: "*Penétré de la beauté des dessins que presente la chambre obscure, je me suis dit: n'y aurait-il pas um 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?*" [10] . 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-Sillabas would result in overall savings in the printing process. The investigation of Tipo-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.

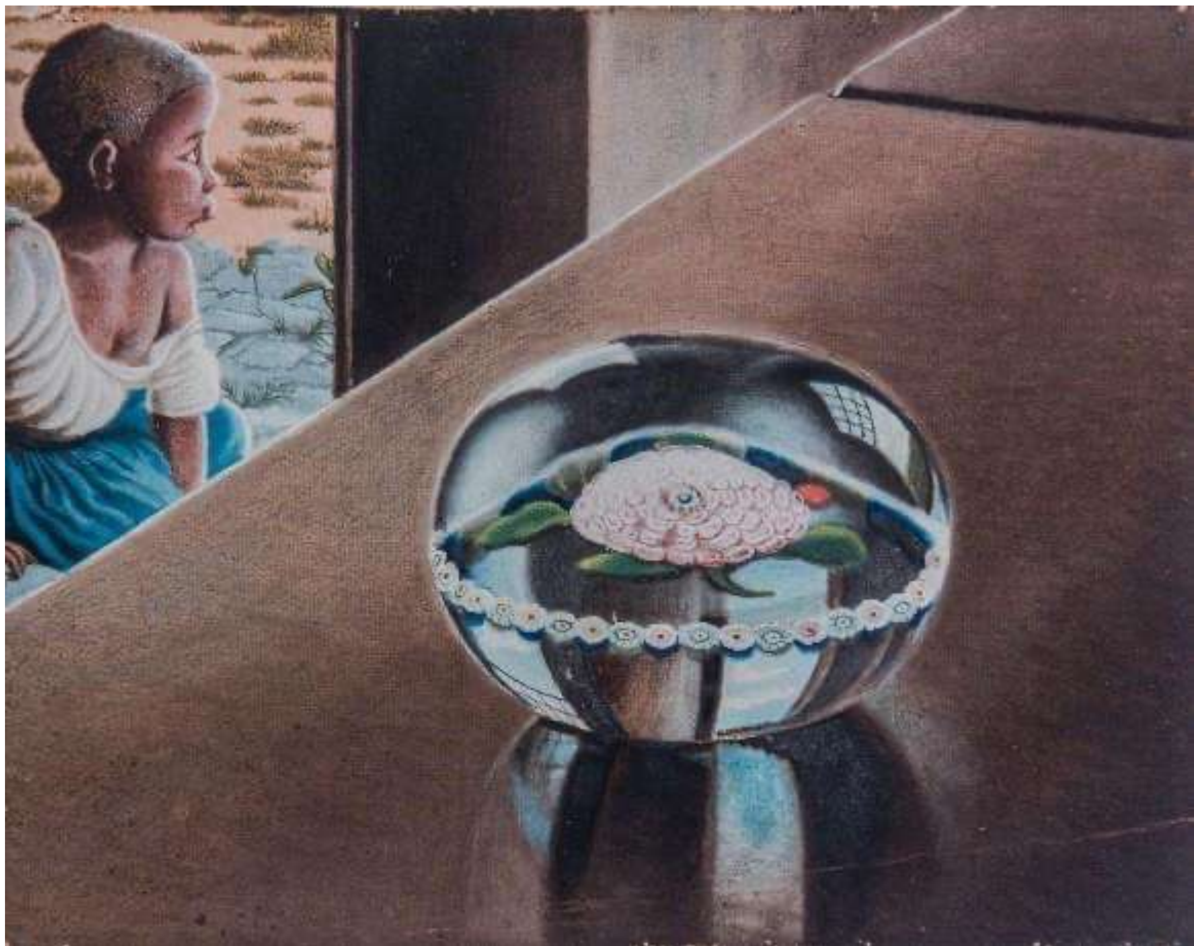

Fig. 5. Retrato de Sara, In FLORENCE, 2009, p. 121

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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5. The reader can view these image categories on the website https://ims.com.br/titular-colecao/hercule-florence/. Accessed May, 1, 2022.
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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.[1] His oeuvre is labeled by the term and principle of self-construction (autoconstrucción).[2] 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.[3] 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,[4] 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".[5] 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 configurating 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.[6]

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 19th 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 21st 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 ingegno– 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.[7] 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 21st 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.[8] 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[9] 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 ingegno* 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.[10]

Imperfection has attractive sensorial qualities generated by failures, defects, and resistances, a key issue raised by Cruzvillegas' writings.[11] 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).[12] 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"[13]. 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.[14]

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[15]; creativity has an "improvisational dynamic"[16], 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 21st century.

Epistemic potential

Due to a lack of empirical research in visual sociology on the images and imaginaries of slums[17], 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," [18] 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[19]: 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.[20] 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),[21] where Cruzvillega in 2015/2016 had erected a garbage wall [fig. 4] – denouncing that protected wilderness,[22] in this case with a high level of geo and biodiversity, commonly is getting debased as a none-site for garbage.[23]

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)[24], 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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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[1]. Mr. Wanambi was to be my co-author, but he sadly and unexpectedly passed away[2]. 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

[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-dictionery.pdf

[2] 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[3].

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.

[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

Introduction

Deliberately referencing in its title an environmental manifesto that emphasizes circular economies,[4] 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, Clare 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,[5] 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.[6] 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[7]. 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.[8] Mr. Wanambi's first paintings appeared in 1998, part of the transformative Gapu-Monuk ~ Saltwater collection,[9] with one work, *Bamurrungu*, winning a national award.[10] 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.[11]

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*.[12] 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.[13] Most recently, he became the first of two Yolŋu to sell non-fungible tokens to aid the purchase of artwork for his community museum.[14]

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.[15] 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.[16]

In 2019, Mr. Wanambi, along with The Mulka Project, exhibited work at the contemporary arts festival Tarnanthi.[17] 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.[18] 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'.[19]

> 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.[20]

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.'[21] 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.[22] 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.[23] 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.'[24]

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 Dhuyuwininy 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'.[25] 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'.[26] 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 Dhuyuwininy 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.'[27] 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.[28]

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'.[29] 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.'[30] 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! … gaḏayka (stringybark tree) is pieces of me. I am gaḏayka … When they chop the gaḏayka 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, l̲arrakitj (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 gaḏayka, they should talk to me.[31]

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.[32] 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 gaḏayka (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,[33] 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;[34] 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. Gaḏayka (stringybark tree), eucalyptus tetrodonta, 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.[35] 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.[36] They have also been

able to work out that bark paintings were made close to where the ochre was collected.[37] 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.[38] 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'.[39]

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.[40] 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, Bininj 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 through the songlines.[41] 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.[42] 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.[43] 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.[44] In the central pages of the book, he

goes into great detail about the many different meanings and words for 'gifts'.[45] 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.[46]

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.[47] 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'.[48] 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.[49] 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…”[50]

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-dictionery.pdf
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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,[1] 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),[2] 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.[3] 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.[4] 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,[5] 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,[6] 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.[7]

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.[8] 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.[9] 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." [10]

Fig. 2 Husuni Kubwa, 14th century, Kilwa Kisiwani

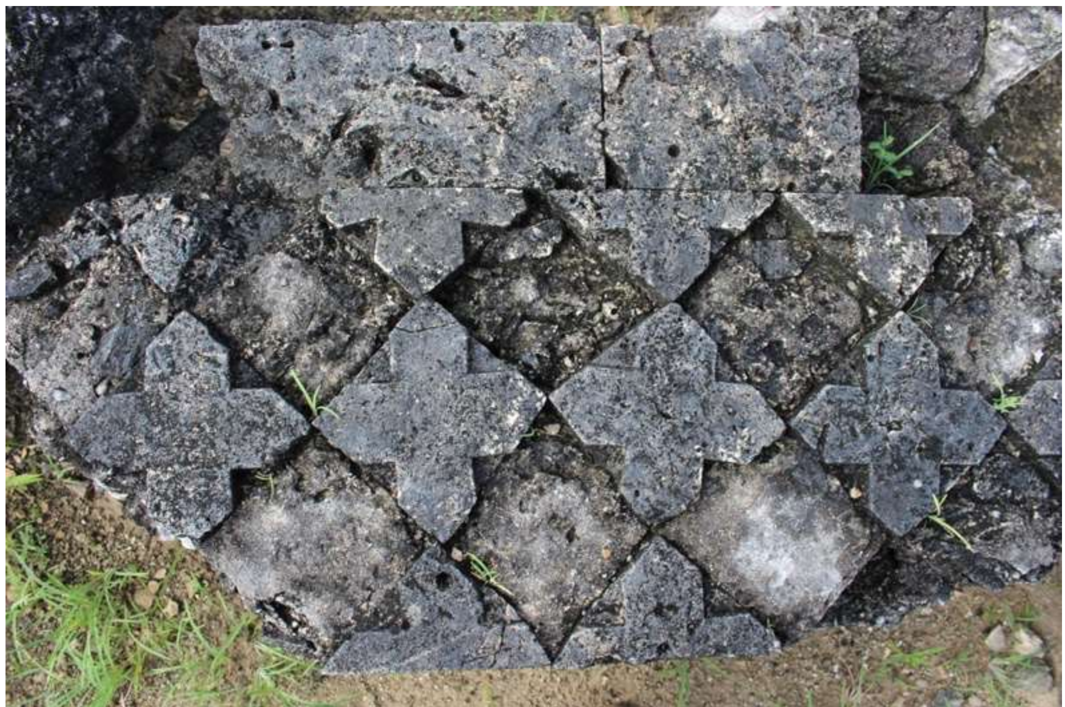

Fig. 3 Dado zone fragment from Husuni Kubwa, 1330s, Kilwa Kisiwani

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.[11] 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.[12] 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.[13] 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.

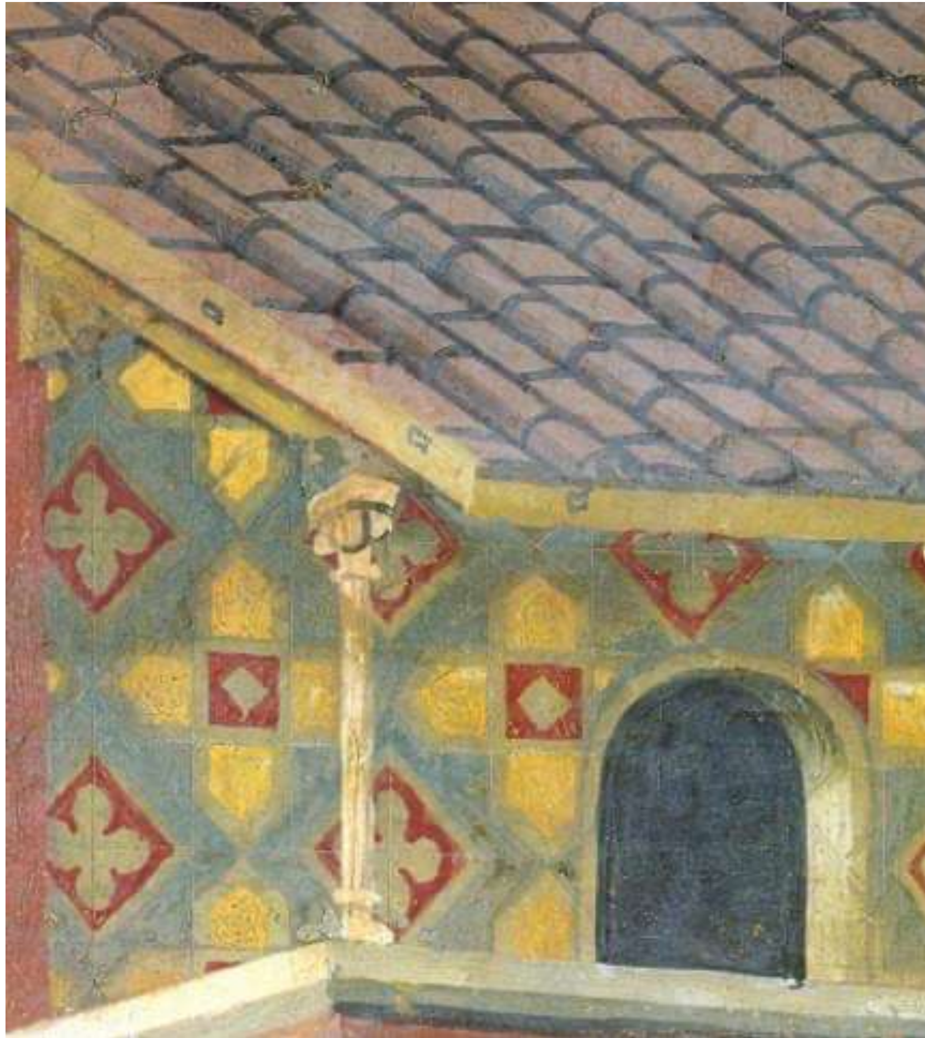

Fig. 5 Detail from Ambrogio Lorenzetti's Allegory of Good Government, 1338-1339, Siena, Palazzo Pubblico

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,[14] 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.[15] 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,[16] 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.[17] 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.[18]

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.[19] 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.[20] Moreover, numerous Swahili monuments, such as a tomb in the Lamu archipelago in Northern Kenya,[21] 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.[22] 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.[23] 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.[24] 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"[25]: 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.[26] 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," [27] 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," [28] 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.[29] 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.[30] 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.[31] 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,[32] 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",[33] 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, Bandyaopadhyay 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*.