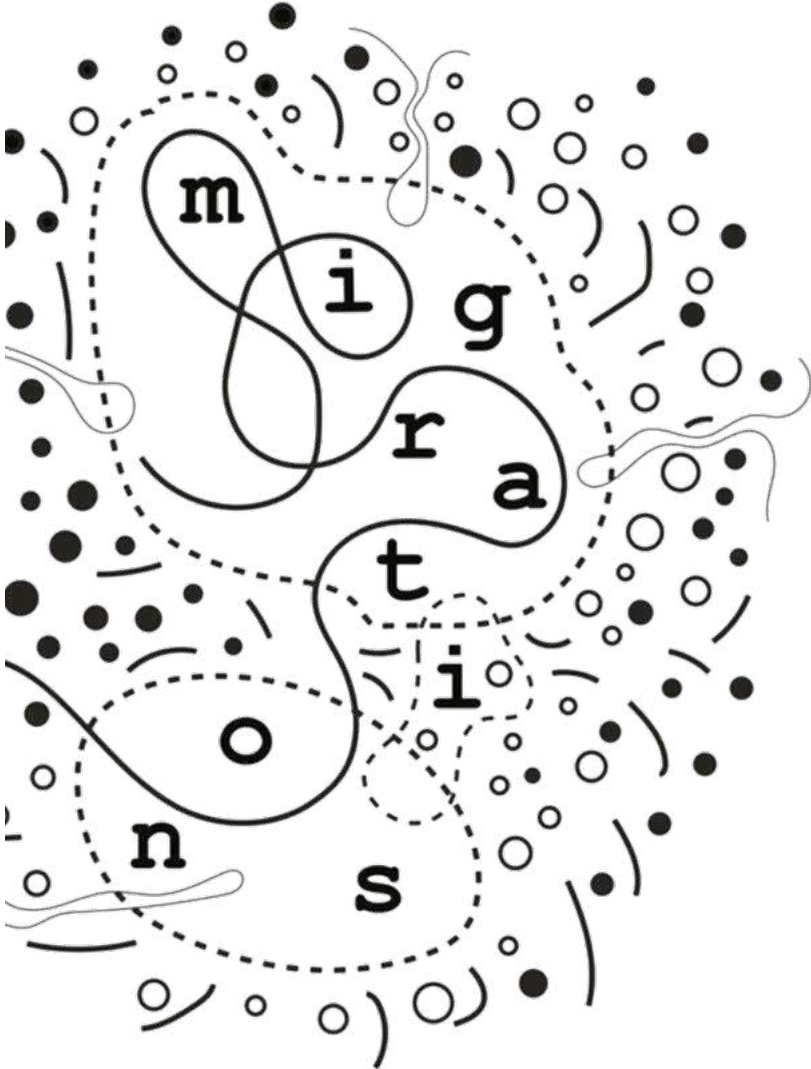


# Migration of Media

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## Session 11



## Session 11

# The Flight of "Yellow Macaw"

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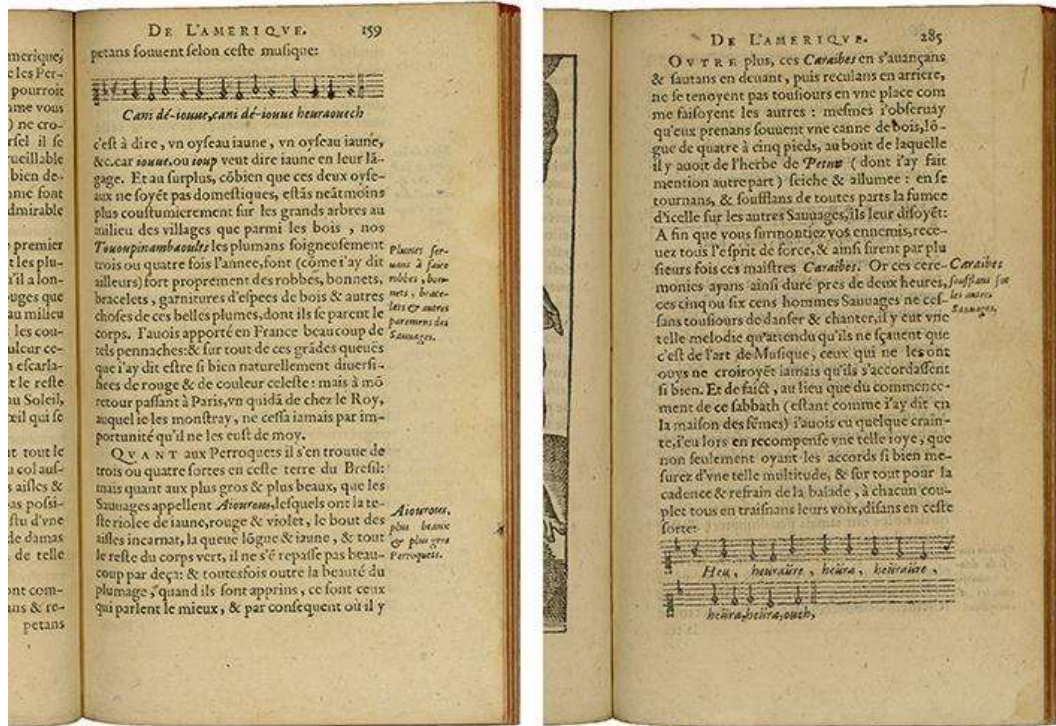
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In March 1557, Jean de Léry arrived in Brazil. He was part of a Genevan Calvinist mission to Antarctic France, a French settlement on an island in Rio de Janeiro's Guanabara Bay. The settlement did not last long. Léry headed back across the Atlantic ten months later, in January 1558. Two years after that, Antarctic France fell to the Portuguese.<sup>1</sup>

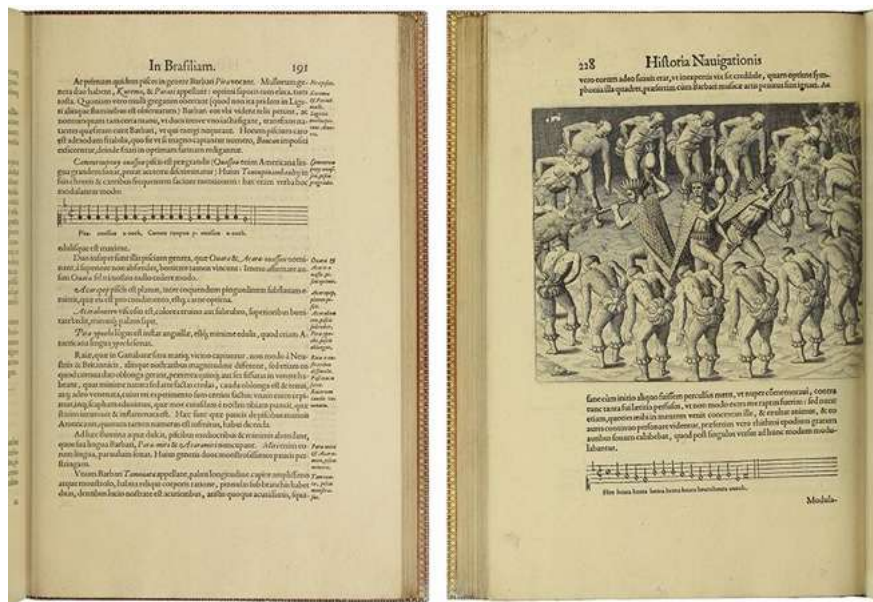
The would-be settlers returned to a Europe bloodsoaked by the first decades of what would become over a century of religious warfare—violence between Catholics and Protestants, of course, but also among rival Protestant groups. Léry was caught up in these conflicts and the horrors they unleashed. Perhaps because he witnessed French-on-French cannibalism during the Catholic siege of Protestant Sancerre in 1573 (an account of which he published in 1574), Léry returned to his memories of Brazil and the Tupi people he encountered there two decades before.<sup>2</sup> In 1578, in Geneva, he published the first edition of his *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Bresil, autrement dite Amerique*. Famously, its pages recall the haunting music that Léry had heard on the other side of the Atlantic: "Whenever I remember it, my heart trembles, and it seems their voices are still in my ears."<sup>3</sup>

The *Histoire* sold well: its publisher brought out a second Geneva edition in 1580, and a third edition in 1585. Crucially, in that third edition the music Léry remembered was not simply evoked. Léry included musical notations and lyrics for five of the songs he supposedly heard: "Canidé louue" (Yellow Macaw), "Camouroupouy-ouassou" (Large Sardine), and three chants from a Tupi ceremony Léry curiously describes as a witches' sabbath.<sup>4</sup>

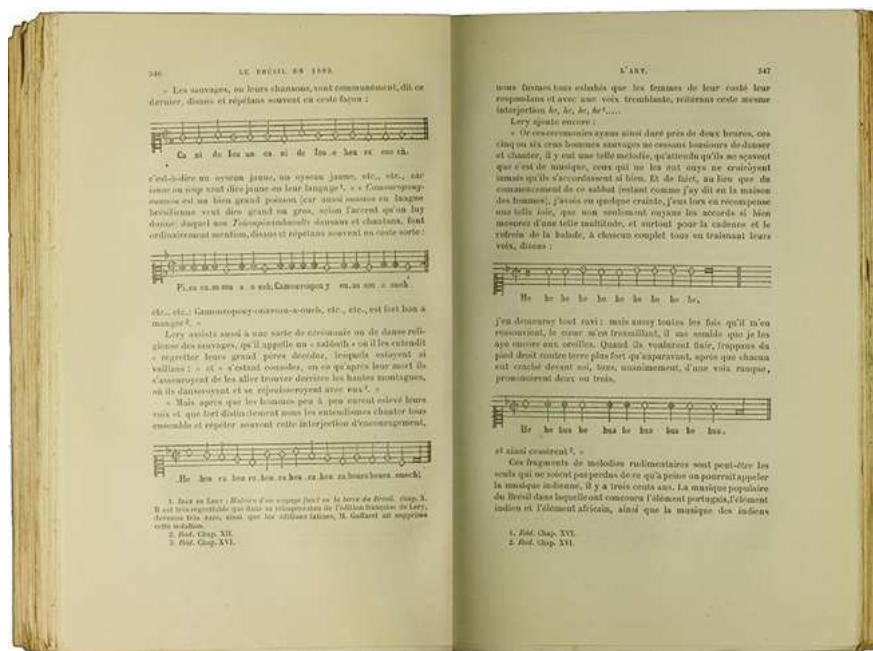


**Fig. 1.** Words and music for "Canidé louue" and one of the supposed-sabbath chants as published in the 1585 edition of Jean de Léry's *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Bresil* (pages 159 and 285). Image courtesy of the Bibliothèque de Genève.

These songs were republished in further editions (as well as Latin translations) over the next two decades.<sup>5</sup> Most important for our story is the richly-illustrated 1592 Latin translation printed in Frankfurt by Theodor de Bry. There, the thirteen notes of Léry's "Canidé louue" were increased to fourteen (a penultimate note was added at the end), and the fourteen notes of Léry's second "sabbath" song were increased to sixteen—and its lyrics were expanded as well.<sup>6</sup>



**Fig. 2.** Words and music for "Canidé loue" and one of the supposed-sabbath chants as published in Theodor de Bry's 1592 *Americae tertia pars* (pages 186 and 228). Image courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.



**Fig. 3.** Words and music for Jean de Léry's five Tupinamba songs, as published in *Le Brésil en 1889* (pages 546–547). Image courtesy of the University of Toronto Library.



Four hundred years later, de Bry's transformations served as sources for reprinting the songs again (in Paris this time) for a book that was part of Brazil's contribution to the Eiffel Tower-inaugurating 1889 Exposition Universelle: *Le Brésil en 1889*. Therein, Eduardo Paulo da Silva Prado's chapter about "L'Art" included all five of Léry's songs, based on de Bry's versions—but, once again, transformed. Some notes have different values than in de Bry, and the Tupi words were broken up so that one syllable corresponded to each note (a correspondence left ambiguous in the earlier publications).<sup>7</sup>

Nearly forty years after that, in 1927 (and once again in Paris), Brazilian composer Heitor Villa-Lobos (a *Carioca* who lived in the French capital from 1923–24 and 1927–30) performed his just-written *Tres poêmas indigenas*. The first movement was based on two of Léry's Tupi songs...as they had been transformed and published by da Silva Prado.

The image shows a page from a musical score titled "TRES POÊMAS INDIGENAS (TROIS POÈMES INDIENS)" by Heitor Villa-Lobos. The specific piece is "CANIDE IOUNE - SABATH", which is a "CANÇÃO ELEGÍACA" (Elegiac Song) based on the "AVE AMARELLA" (L'aveux jouat) from the Tupi language. The score is for voice (CANTO) and piano (PIANO). The tempo is marked "Mouvé de Marche lente" and "Movimento de Marcha lenta". The lyrics are in Tupi: "Ca - ni - de", "iou - ne heura uo", "échi - Ca - ni - de iou -". The score includes musical notation for both parts, with dynamic markings like *f* and *ppp*. At the bottom, it is published by ÉDITIONS MAX ESCHIG, 48 rue de Rome, Paris, with a copyright notice for 1929.

**Fig. 4.** The opening "Canidé Ioune" section of Heitor Villa-Lobos' *Tres poêmas indigenas* (published in Paris by Éditions Max Eschig in 1929). Image courtesy of Harvard University's Loeb Music Library.



mediums across time and space, with a comparative perspective and a critical approach to cultural processes in the visual arts. The use of theories from media archaeology and the analyses of experiences and reflections already published in this field provided points of departure, offering the possibility to reframe classic art historical concerns related to movement and transfer.<sup>9</sup> Media studies have revealed hybridizations of forms and contents in the visual arts to be processes in constant movement—such as from local to global or eternal to ephemeral (and vice-versa)—processes that illuminate not only a multiplicity of vocabularies, supports, uses, and reuses, but also attendant prejudices, exclusions, and destitutions that are not always so evident. The political dimensions of media and its migrations across time and space, as well as the aesthetic possibilities and cultural implications of these processes in our contemporary world, were topics of particular interest for this session.

In our call for papers, a number of epistemological questions were proposed to inspire discussions of media migrations. What happens when an object created and cared for in one time and place is transferred to an entirely different environment? How are specific artistic media transformed when taken to places (and times) different from the ones in which they originated? What happens when artworks, performances, and/or practitioners from a specific time and place are turned into *records* (visual and alphabetic descriptions, in various media), which are themselves then transported for consumption to other sites? What happens when an older image is used to make a newer image, in a different time and place or in a different medium? How do these migrations of media relate to other forms of migration?

Overall, the essays of this session created broad dialogues across space and time, exploring the deep genealogies (both continuous and disjunctive) of practices involving the transfer and transformation of ideas, objects, and images. Over the course of two days, through presentations given both in-person and online, our conversations ranged from prehistoric wheels to modernist dust to 70s Super 8 to contemporary algorithmic photography; from Zacatecas circa 1706 to Beijing in the 1920s to a world tour in the 1930s to New Delhi in the 2020s; and from medieval Bominaco to Renaissance Rome to postwar Brazil and Italy to early third-millennium Rio.

Read together, what conceptual-theoretical unities can be drawn from these various studies?

One emergent theme considers the infrastructural-medial conditions of possibility that generated specific artifacts and their descendants, from the clash between modernist urban planning and the environment of Brasilia's dry plateau (Heeren); to the now-vanished roadways that would have made wheeled transport possible in the ancient valley of the Danube (Vukovic); to the steamships that enabled a round-the-world photo-documentation of the effects of the 1929 crash (Paiva de Toledo); to the role of UNESCO and high-quality reproductive image technologies in galvanizing theories (as well as mobile practices) of midcentury "museums without walls" based on good reproductions (Vitali, Pozzoli).

Another thread reveals how newer media technologies can call into question the assumptions formed by older media technologies: from eyeball-determined versus algorithm-determined photographic images (Rossi); to performer versus audience perspectives on live performances of theatrical texts versus their video-recorded incarnations (Bathwal); to emergent artistic and theoretical practices that muddy older constraints presumed by the problematic binary of white cube versus black box (Hosni); to how the trauma of occupation and iconoclasm could push artists to consider the advantages (and difficulties) of painting on stone as opposed to the traditional but more fragile supports of plaster and canvas (Kobo); to the challenges of ephemeral performance art for standard museological assumptions about archive and exhibition—challenges now being met in innovative ways (Horta).

Finally, a third (possible) strand interrogates the deep history of transcontinental circulations and transformations of media formats, looking at how books printed in Victorian Britain might inspire a magazine article and then a painted pavilion in Republican China (Teng); or how mystical visions of transatlantic travel from Spain to New Spain inspired a mimetic flow of texts and images east to west across the Atlantic, a flow that in turn generated new kinds of images and devotions (Saylor; keyword: bilocation!); or how Sasanian textual sources were used in the 1930s to propose an iconographic nomination which may (or may not!) actually connect to a widespread and well-documented pan-Eurasian circulation (indeed,



returning to our opening example, migration!) of various wingèd hybrid beasts in artworks from Sasanian Persia to medieval Gerona to nineteenth-century Bulgaria (Trudu).

Many other connective itineraries could be generated across these rich and fascinating studies. We hope you will imagine your own!

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## Endnotes

1. Whatley, "Translator's Introduction"; Berbara, "Catholic and Protestant Martyrdoms."
2. Léry, *Histoire memorable*, 291-292; Porras, "Copies, Cannibals, and Conquerors," 262, 269n28.
3. Quoted and discussed in Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, 16.
4. Léry, *Histoire d'un voyage*, 159, 173, 279, 285, 286. Our starting point for tracking the following musical history was Chelsea Burns' excellent "*Musique cannibale*," a just-published study of Villa-Lobos' use of Léry (and other sources) in his *Tres poemas indígenas*. Burns notes that it was unclear how Villa-Lobos "accessed the two scores he used for this song ["Canide Ioune - Sabath"] or which versions of them he saw" (95). We hope our essay provides a useful appendix to Burns by clarifying this history of transmission. All of the pieces to that puzzle were provided by Corrêa de Azevedo in his classic (and still impressive) article on "Tupynambá Melodies" from 1941; thanks to archive.org, we had a much easier time tracking down (and comparing) books and scores published across four centuries than he did eighty years ago. For a broader look at Villa-Lobos' "indigenous style," see parts 1 and 2 of Ferrão Moreira, "O Estilo indígena." In terms of Léry's song titles, on the *canindé* as a kind of macaw (Portuguese *arara*), and the *camurupy* as a fish from the Clupeidae family (of which the Brazilian sardine, *Sardinella brasiliensis*, seems to be the most important in the waters off the southeast coast of Brazil), see see Caldas Tibiriçá, *Dicionário*, 80, 79; as well as Moreira, Paschoal, Dias Cezar, and Luque, "Occurrence," 616.
5. The key study of this history of publications and transformations is Corrêa de Azevedo, "Tupynambá Melodies."
6. de Bry, *Americae tertia pars*, 186, 191, 226, 228, 229.
7. Silva Prado, "L'Art," 546-547.
8. Not incidentally for our project overall, this recording was made in 1940 onboard the SS Uruguay, part of a larger South American musical documentation project organized by Leopold Stokowski (part of which was released on a shellac gramophone disk as *Native Brazilian Music* in 1942): Quarteto do Coral Orfeão Villa-Lobos - Canidê Ioune: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oXqUnvtVYNc&list=PL878DD79A14280741&index=24>. See also <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/native-brazilian-music-80th-anniversary-museum-villa-lobos/WgXB2-gLJSxsJQ?hl=en>
9. We can hardly provide a complete overview of works in media archaeology here, but key points of reference for proposing this session and its theme include McLuhan and Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage*; Clanchy, "Tenacious Letters"; Crary, "Techniques of the Observer"; Clanchy, "Reading the Signs"; Latour, "Drawing Things Together"; Hutchins, *Cognition in the*

*Wild*; Turazzi, Rio de Janeiro 'panorámico'; Gruzinski, *Mestizo Mind*; Stallybrass, Chartier, Mowery, and Wolfe. "Hamlet's Tables"; Roberts, "Copley's Cargo"; Harwood, *The Interface*; Otero-Pailos, "Ambivalence of Smoke"; Kittler, "Rock Music"; Mosco, *To the Cloud*; Siegert, *Cultural Techniques*; Peters, *Marvelous Clouds*; Hamann, *Translations of Nebrija*; Hamann, "Counterfeit Money"; Russell and Vinsel, "After Innovation"; and Turazzi, *The Oriental-Hydrographe and Photography*.

# Moving Images in Exhibition Design: Questions About the Passage of the Black Box to the White Cube

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## **ABSTRACT**

Audiovisual works in the exhibition design require special attention regarding the means of production of the original media and how it is shown to the contemporary art public. For the viewer, who sees a projected work in a secluded room, the image brings greater immersion in the large dimension of the screen. But if the exact artwork is presented on a monitor with headphones, it is clear that the image size is more familiar, similar to the television, the well-known apparatus in our house. Considering the different ways an artwork could be exhibited in contemporary art events, we aim to assess the tension of the relations between the moving image in the exhibition design, bringing to light aspects of the audiovisual media. Finally, the concept of Gray Zone is suggested instead of the "passage of the White Cube to the Black Box," a term used at the beginning of the 2000s.

## **KEYWORDS**

Audiovisual; Exhibition design; Contemporary Art; Installation; Video Art.



Audiovisual works, included in the wide range of time-based media artworks, are known for having certain specificities regarding the exhibition. Among them are luminosity, sound, and issues about the original format of the work and its consequent transposition to other formats. These are essential aspects that can influence the fruition of the spectator in the exhibition space. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the expression "passage from the White Cube to the Black Box" became widely known in contemporary art, referring to many works with moving images in museums, galleries, and biennials. However, despite the validity of its use at that moment, today, we can bring other references to the debate, proposing new reflections to think about the audiovisual in exhibitions. The concept of the White Cube has been widely referenced since the famous text of Brian O'Doherty, in 1976. As it is known, the White Cube addresses the seek for neutrality concerning any external interference. Although the term is wrongly associated with the white walls of the exhibition design, it is essential to highlight that the concept problematizes a way of exhibition related to the modernist values of the 20th Century. It is a concept that emerged in the 1970s, questioning some foundations of modernism. O'Doherty mentioned that the White Cube isolates the work of art in its own time and space, thus making it a timeless and sacred piece. In this temple, the exhibition, he says, any mundane external aspect is secluded, such as the presence of architecture and the spectator's body.

The term Black Box has several meanings, depending on the field. One reference to the Black Box mentions the experimental theater. It was introduced during the 1960s, with black walls and simple scenic lights bringing a sense of proximity between the actors and the audience, making the play - usually small productions - more intimate.

A second reference to the Black Box has a technical aspect, alluding to aircraft boxes that carry input/output information that can only be accessed under certain circumstances. The use of this device is the basis for *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, written by the philosopher Vilém Flusser. In this book, widely known in communication programs, he reflects on the

photographic industry, but the ideas are vast and associated with image production.

The third Black Box reference, which interests us the most, concerns its use in the exhibition design. It is typically represented as a closed room, usually painted in black to avoid refraction of light, with only one way to enter and exit. The construction is temporal and is a well-controlled space for light and sound. The projector is on the ceiling, and the environment has specific isolation from other works in the exhibition. It is worth mentioning that in all three references, the Black Box is a dark place, like a cave that allows the spectator to be immersed, whether through a narrative artwork or not. The apparatus avoids possible distractions from the surroundings, controlling the light so that the spectator's attention focuses on the screen.

The dichotomy White Cube, Black Box, brings certain subjects: attention and distraction, mobility, and immobility, usually mentioned in theories of dispositive. They seem to be antonyms when placed next to each other. However, when it comes to the relationship between the spectator, the moving image artwork, and the exhibition design, a fine line demonstrates any definition's fragility.

In the early 2000s, the expression "passage from the White Cube to the Black Box" was used by critics and curators to talk about exhibitions flooded with dark rooms, filled with the artificial light of the projectors, which sure caused discomfort among the spectators. On the one hand, there were defenders to the entry of this technological device, bringing more moving image artworks into the exhibition space. Still, on the other hand, there was some resistance (is it cinema or not?), and there were also cases of opinions that changed over time. When we talk about image, it is crucial to consider the exhibition design and how the spectator perceives the work based on the artist's intention. How the artwork is displayed considers several questions. The projected image in the museum is heterogeneous by nature, converging, in the exhibition environment, different trajectories of artists and filmmakers.

Regarding how the work is displayed to the spectator, the consensus is that both models, the White Cube and the Black Box, seek a way of control by

indicating a particular perception for the viewer. Claire Bishop argues that both modes correspond to the bourgeois disciplining model of monitoring and controlling the spectator's body (2018, 30). In exhibition places, the body or the interaction between the spectators becomes a possible measure of discomfort in the space. If in the modernist gallery, any conversation or noise could interrupt the sublime moment in front of art, the same occurs in the cinema, with a popcorn noise, in the dark coming from someone sitting in the next chair.

In exhibitions that concentrate on a large number of audiovisual works, the leaking of the sound component is one of the elements that worry the most both the artists, the curatorial team, and the spectators. Although it refers to the characteristics of cinema – the darkroom with its beam of light projected on a wall or other surface, like a suspended screen – the exhibition space does not have the same technical competence as the cinema device.

#### **Different media, different technological needs**

Considering the exhibition design, moving image artworks have special needs regarding how they will be shown. It involves how the artwork is produced, if in film, telecined video, or digital; what is the original format, and how is the best way to exhibit it. For example, viewing artwork on television sets in old-school cathode-ray tubes brings particular attention to the history of video art.

From the 1960s onwards, the artworks exhibited on televisions became a regular practice in contemporary art. The mass communication medium as a tool of expression, rooted in domestic furniture, brings the video art to the center of a debate about how the spectator perceives the moving image during the time. In Brazil, for instance, in the 1970s, critics and the public viewed this new medium in exhibitions with suspicion, as seen in some events like the São Paulo Biennial.



**Fig. 1.** Video Art Center. 16ª Bienal de São Paulo (1981).  
Arquivo Histórico Wanda Svevo - AHWS

The work of Brazilian visual artists who, since the 1970s, have done investigations in the video is widely known in Brazil as the so-called “pioneer video art generation” (Machado, 2007). Despite all difficulties in getting access to technology, groups of artists from São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro as well as institutions like MAC-USP (Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo) and MAM/RJ (Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro) promoted essential initiatives, especially considering the context of curtailed individual liberties by the civil-military dictatorship then in power. For the critics, videoart was seen with skepticism since the new media was not yet established in the realm of the arts. Walter Zanini remarks that critics saw video art as an “imported” and “colonized” art. He states that “the critic, almost always conventional in attitude, generally welcomed these investigations with disinformation or coldness, assimilating little or nothing or already offering a dazzled epitaph” (2010, 90).

Frederico Morais noticed that public reception was generally prejudicial: “They consider it monotonous due to the exhaustive repetition of

the same image, to its static feature (opposing the dynamism of conventional broadcast TV), and, at last, to the discomfort, which is actually more psychological than real, in face of the relaxed and easy way we watch TV at home” (2010, 74).

Neither the public seemed favorable to the use of the new media: “Avoid the North American section because it is all just television, ok?”, (Folha de São Paulo, 1975) was the comment by a spectator that made the news on the occasion of the 13th São Paulo Biennial.

In the 1980s, video art had a more familiar scenario for artists, spectators, and critics. It was common to present video works in special rooms, like a living room, showing one artwork after another, linearly, in a previously defined schedule. It was economical and, in a way, presented video artworks with a sense of temporality similar to that of movies. However, the content was completely different. Video artworks could also be exhibited freely in the exhibition space. This media has the advantage of being a source of light that can be shown in constant flux with the lights on. It doesn't need a dark room, as they can be arranged alone - in totems, with a base or pedestal, individually - or in videowalls, or even arranged with other elements.

On the one hand, works in a video presented on television have the luminosity needed to be free in the exhibition space, but, on the other hand, they lose in scale. Compared to a projection on a wall, the television seems like a small square in a sea of images.

If in the 1970s, projectors such as Advent, used by artists like Peter Campus, had certain limitations, such as the lack of definition; in the 1990s-2000s, the use of digital projectors in the exhibition space became frequent. Consequently, for many works, the famous black boxes were a solution. The secluded room also favored better soundproofing.

One factor favoring the growth of moving image installations is undoubtedly the improvement in digital technology since the 1990s, which, as a consequence, allowed artists to create more efficiently, through video and non-linear montage, and within the scope of the exhibition, with the use of projectors in the exhibition spaces. The miniaturization of electronic devices and the increased data storage capacity made equipment lighter and more



portable. Video is one of the tools that, due to the ease of transposing time and space and enabling the spectator's immersion, helps the process of audiovisual consolidation.



**Fig. 2.** *In-Out* (Antropofagia). Video Room, Museu de arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (2019)

Works projected in dark rooms indeed attract greater attention from the spectator due to the visual-sound isolation from other exhibition aspects. Artworks such as *In-Out (Antropofagia)*, by the Brazilian artist Anna Maria Maiolino, filmed in Super-8 and later telecined, revealed significant differences whether the work is projected in a dark room or displayed on an LCD monitor. In Maiolino's 1973/1974 film, the camera focuses on different mouths moving on the screen, performing actions such as exhaling smoke, pulling in, and chewing colored wires. For the viewer, who sees the projected work, it is clear that the larger the screen, the greater the immersion, as if the repetitive movement of the mouths turned into something else, an

anthropophagic internal/external channel, as mentioned by the title of the work.

In contrast, if the same work is presented on a monitor with headphones, the image size is more familiar, similar to the apparatus in our houses. The immersion of the darkroom is displaced, but the video gains in dialogue with the exhibition design and other surrounding works of art.

As every media has pros and cons, deciding to show a video in a cathode ray tube, an LCD television, or a projection room depends on the occasion, artwork, and curatorial proposal. Despite that, a space in-between the White Cube and the Black Box can offer a more accessible way to see moving image artworks. As Giuliana Bruno mentioned, there is something between spatial perception and bodily motion. For this plurality of readings in the exhibition design, a Gray Zone is suggested instead of the “passage of the White Cube to the Black Box.”

### **Gray Zone, a space in-between the White Cube and the Black Box**

The idea of a Gray Zone emerged as a way to think about audiovisual exhibitions, crossing fields such as architecture, film studies, and visual arts (Hosni, 2021). Seeking the fluidity between spaces, allowing a plurality of readings between the artworks, the Gray Zone avoids forms of isolation, especially in large-format exhibitions, such as biennials. Inspired by the ideas of Paul Klee and Claire Bishop, the color gray is located in the middle of the chromatic scale, avoiding opposition. What interests us, above all, is this point of contact, friction, which is mobile, flexible, and raised by different agents. Thus, the Gray Zone is where conflict happened, for instance, in the Venice Biennale, in 2001. In the event, many moving image installations were located in the Arsenale. The lack of budget, time, and tiredness of the curator, Harald Szeemann, created a remembrance of this problematic exhibition.

In this way, the Gray Zone considers the exhibition's architecture and the dialogue between the artist and the curator as all equal parts searching for better audiovisual solutions. After 2010, other ways, different from the Black Box, appeared, for instance, in the 32nd São Paulo Biennial, in 2016. This edition, curated by Jochen Volz, was named Live Uncertainty. On the

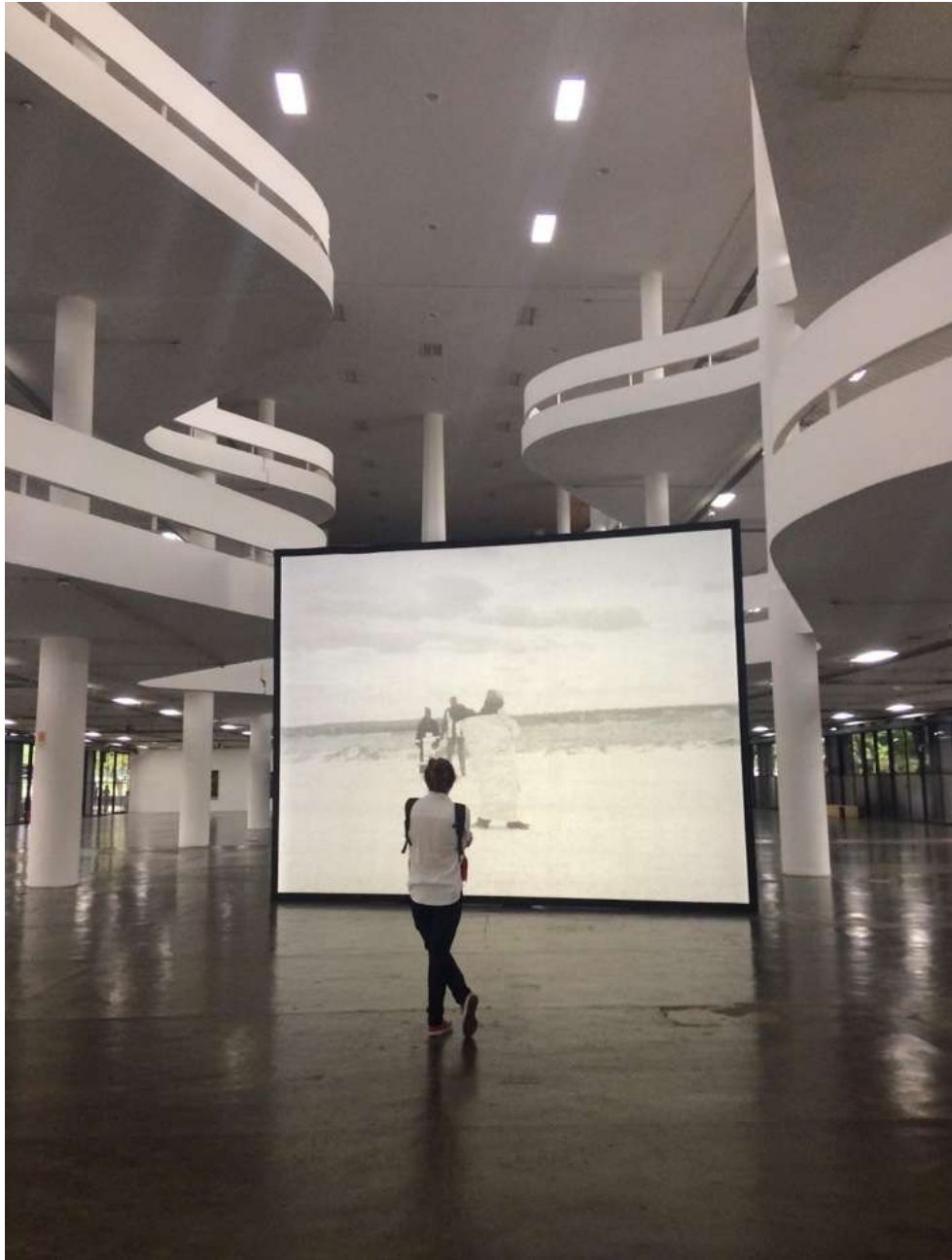
pavilion's top floor was the moving image artwork *Everything and More*, by Rachel Rose. In the video, a training center for an astronaut appeared, as well as hyper-realistic details of organic forms that overlapped, approached, and distanced themselves in a sensory montage journey. The image was projected on a large translucent screen that occupied the entire height of the wall. In the background, the spectator could see Ibirapuera's Park. Depending on the brightness of the day, the foliage of the trees could be seen - the background blending with the images captured by Rose. The experience of watching it in the morning, at night, or on a cloudy day differs significantly with this permeable screen. Rachel Rose, who prefers to work with natural light rather than indoors, achieved significant impact in uniting the moving image's characteristics with the Biennial Pavillion's architecture.



**Fig. 3.** *Everything and More*, 32<sup>o</sup> Bienal de São Paulo (2016)  
Arquivo Histórico Wanda Svevo - AHWS

From this perspective, regardless of when the viewer arrived on the installation, he was hooked by the images, sitting on the gray carpet of the room. In addition, there was a recurrent presence of people watching the video lying down, using their cell phones, in a kind of attention/distraction very close to the relationship with television. This room, a carpeted area next

to an access ramp, also offered a break for those who would walk through the pavilion.



**Fig. 4** *Wind*, 33ª Bienal de São Paulo (2020)

Another example relevant to our reflections occurred at the end of 2020, in the exhibition *Wind*, shown in the pavilion that integrated the 34th edition of the Biennial. Among the 21 works spread out in the exhibition space, *Wind*, from 1968, by Joan Jonas stood out, occupying the central span, thus being visible from afar. The dancing and walking of people facing the wind gained a new dimension due to the wide projection. The exhibition appears to indicate a move towards recent large-format exhibitions, choosing a few works that establish a dialogue with each other and resonate with the spectator – valuing, above all, the experience of being in the place. A smaller amount of works, but with a better audiovisual perception of the environment, could direct the sensitivity of the spectators to the moment.

After the pandemic restrictions, an exhibition will hardly insist on a closed room, having no control of the public or circulation of air. Moreover, in the contemporary sanitary perspective, artworks that are exposed in dialogue with other works, with the architecture, like porous structures, are valued. Thus, in the current scenario, it is possible to glimpse the future of the Gray Zone when moving image installations can be viewed in other exhibition contexts.

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# Media Migration to the Digital: The Case of Algorithmic Photography

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## **ABSTRACT**

The paper discusses migration of photography into the digital as one of many examples of media migration through the means of language, an object and an art medium.

Language is a living entity. It can act as an interface in a continuous process of translation and transcoding through a metamorphic shift from the physical to the virtual space. Under this perspective, to consider the language of photography means to address the old medium (photography) embedded into the new one (algorithmic language).

Algorithmic photography has a specific linguistic dimension. It is language because it is generated by software, or more precisely, by the language of software that generates the “space” of photography and affects its internal dynamics. Algorithmic photography also leads to a paradox: the fact that photography, as means of reproduction, is produced by language, which can only be related to ‘production’, assuming that it lives in ‘a continuous state of re-configuration and re-mediation’.

Algorithmic photography, and the linguistic play that enables the migrating of photography into the digital, is the starting point of a journey that guides us along the migration of media and culture in the digital world. Works by Marco Cadioli, Peter Ashton, Luigi Pagliarini, John Rafman, Joanna Zilinska, Clement Valla, as well as images of the Black Hole, will help demonstrate the various ways in which code migrate reality into the digital realm, with a particular focus on photography.

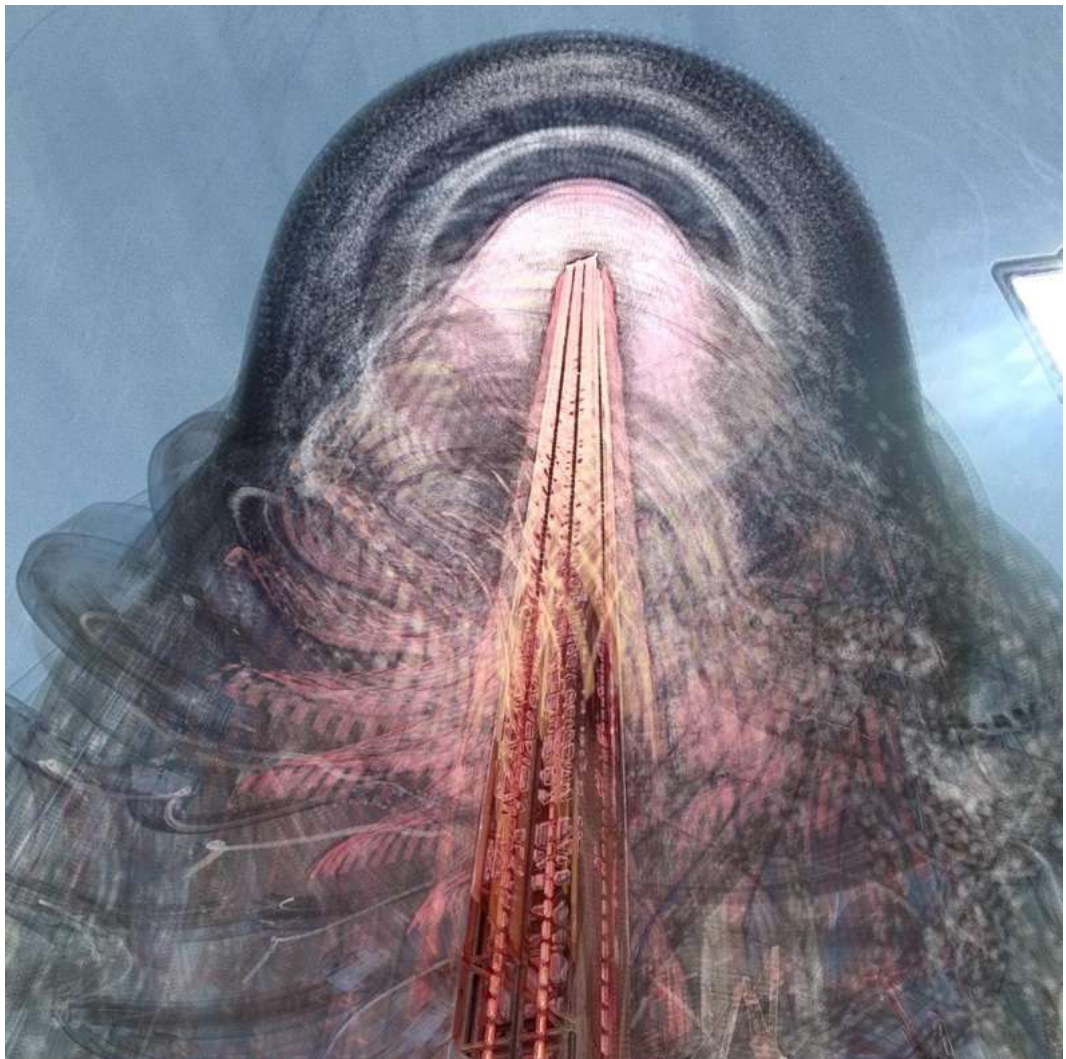
## **KEYWORDS**

Photography; Language; Software; Transcoding; Remediation

When considering the migration of photography into the digital realm we need to consider many aspects, on the first place: shots as a product of an algorithmic process on the first place, the production of a digital image that shapes from the newborn (digital) matter, and the many spaces that separate our eye from the portrayed subject.<sup>1</sup>

Images are generated by the language of code “they exist as mathematical data which can be displayed in a variety of modes - sacrificing colour, spatial or temporal resolution.” This was put forward by Lev Manovich in the early Nineties in an essay dedicated to the ‘paradoxes of digital photography’, when digital use did not greatly separate the lens from its subject but indeed set up a process of scanning the image which trans-codified it into the world of the screen, triggering the “annihilation of photography and the solidifying and glorifying of the photographic.”<sup>2</sup>

The migration of photography into the digital takes another step with the work by British artist Alex May. The image is not simply scanned. Instead, the portrayed subject crosses the screen through a process that combines traditional photographic techniques with algorithms. The migration of the image into the digital is achieved using Fugio, a software written by May in 2014 and released in 2016 as open-source that enables to compress the time of events preceding and following the event into one single frame that contains thousands of frames. The pinhole camera that belongs to the traditional chemical photography is replaced by a viewfinder-less GoPro, and photographic film is substituted by an algorithm. It is possible to view the image develop in its ‘dark room’ software. Each algorithm is designed to capture specific information, from bold swathes of colour as people travel through the shot, or subtle movements in nature that are too slow or small to be perceived by the human eye, such as the movement of clouds, raindrops, and insects. His algorithmic photographs migrate the captured subject into the digital while unfolding the event in time.



**Fig. 1.** Alex May, *Their screams of laughter burnt bright trails into the evening sky* (detail), 2019, algorithmic photography. Courtesy the Artist

**Photography, media migration and the eye. Non human Vision:  
Joanna Zilinska, Jon Rafman, Marco Cadioli, Clement Valla**

In investigating what it means to photograph in an age in which ‘technical reproducibility’ flows into ubiquitous distribution, the task of further relocating the author’s role is added to that of redefining the landscape. The question of the eye separated from the camera, already widely discussed in analogue photography, becomes more complex at the instant in which the eye is

transferred into the body of the machine.

Non-human vision becomes a point of observation from where to turn our perspective perception upside down toward all its nonhuman entanglements. “The concept of ‘non human photography can help us see and understand, in a new way, both the photographic medium and ourselves as partly constituted by this medium’. And still “Most of the historically important functions of the human eyes are being supplanted by practices in which visual images no longer have any reference to the position of an observer in a “real”, optically perceived world. If these images can be said to refer to anything, it is to millions of bits of electronic mathematical data.”<sup>3</sup>

In a series of her work, part of the series *Active Perceptual Systems*, images were captured by an automated intelligent wearable camera (*Autographer*), conceived as a mnemonic device to aid Alzheimer’s affected people. She wore the camera in various everyday situations: on a city walk, in a holiday resort, in an art gallery, in lecture theatre. Her decision to open the camera was coupled by the one of the camera on what to photograph and when. The machinic behavior was anyway influenced by her body movement (for instance, by stopping in an immersive gaze and so encouraging the camera to become active in that moment).

Jon Rafman, an artist who explores the contemporary technological through a variety of means, has been capturing images from *Google Street Views* when this tool was just emerging on the market (he started in 2008 and *Google Street View* was introduced as a feature of *Google Maps* in 2007 when there were only a selection of streets in the United States). Rafman was interested in the automatic eye of the camera and in its relationship with the content revealed in certain situations. He frames unaware subjects who happened to enter Street Views field of vision, highlighting and indulging in the unsettling ethical implications of making images of individual people’s lives accessible and useful to all users. By placing the images in art contexts, Rafman called into question the role of artists in relation to the rise of automated forms of cultural production.

Marco Cadioli brought himself beyond the screen as a net-photographer since the early 2000s, when he published the “Net



Photography Manifesto”. He has been producing reports from online war games, Second Life, as an “embedded” photographer and has published reports from virtual worlds on various mainstream international magazines. “*I am using a software whose icon is a camera.*”, states Cadioli in his *Net Photography Manifesto* in 2003, *I can capture screen slices. They are web page snapshots. The Cut&Paste operation is allowed in the new media, it is the natural development of photography into digital spaces.*“<sup>4</sup>

As part of the series *Living in a Computer Simulation* (2015), his photographs of Edolo, in the region of Val Camonica in Northern Italy, were taken from Google Earth and manipulated on smart phone through filters that were employed in order to bring back the shots in time, to artificially reproduce the nostalgic feeling of the film with its imperfections.



**Fig. 2** Marco Cadioli, *Living in a Computer Simulation*, 2015.  
Courtesy of the Artist

In his works there are many other media migration that would deserve attention into another session as he, as an artist, is very careful on how to translate these works back into the physical space. It is the case of his *Abstract Journeys*, a screen capture series from Google Earth that explores the different surfaces and forms which have been transformed by man's work in an abstract geometric composition that he printed on metal, or simulated polaroid format offered by online services (as in the aforementioned series *Living in a Computer Simulation*) or others.

Snapshots are also the ones that belongs to *Postcards from Google Earth* by Clement Valla, a collection of stills extrapolated from his navigation on Google Earth, the software for geographical reproduction of the globe. The artist's curiosity was captured by the encounter with images of the Earth's surface which were incongruous with regard to what we expect from the idea of a representation of the physical world, supposed as hyper-realistic: to upside-down buildings, liquefied bridges and roads. On closer analysis Valla realized that it wasn't a case of glitches but rather the logical outcome of the image production process in the software used by Google, *The Universal Texture*. They are an edge condition – an anomaly within the system, a nonstandard, an outlier, even, but not an error", notes Clement Valla, "These jarring moments expose how Google Earth works, focusing our attention on the software. They are seams which reveal a new model of seeing and of representing our world – as dynamic, ever-changing data from a myriad of different sources – endlessly combined, constantly updated, creating a seamless illusion."<sup>5</sup>

Valla's snapshots are moments in a space-time process that lives within the image and manifests itself in its function of interface. So it is not a question of a 'fragment of landscape' but rather the existence thereof within a processual [therefore interfacial] dimension that lives in the screen and takes form in its continuous updating. Another time, the eye that guides the lens of the camera is governed by the Google Earth algorithm, which is also the author of the qualitative criteria that dictate the adoption or otherwise of an archive document image (criteria that favor, for example, images free from climatic interferences that might penalize sharpness).

All this involves a revolution in the very concept of reality. First and foremost we have to consider all those invisible strata of information (including those of the social networks) that structure (in physical and concrete terms) this new landscape, delineated in its very mutability and coincident with the image. Landscape and image are alive, they are born and they evolve in their interfacial nature and function, “processes that effect a result of whatever kind”<sup>6</sup>. This means muffling the certainty that the object portrayed “was certainly, indisputably present...”<sup>7</sup>

“Since the organism’s technological extensions in the broader sense are expanding and transforming the very concept of reality,” as Adam Berg expresses this revolution, “then is inevitable that our ontology is not grounded in either math or perception but in how the two are mutually transformed throughout a shared ‘logic’ of transcoding.”<sup>8</sup> This logic of constant trans-codification from one state to another (format or whatever) is root and condition of the landscape for how we are framing it with our lens. This means that digital photographic (re)production coincides with the ‘production’ of images that take form in their algorithmic mutability, the same as the landscape photographed.

The passage from the real to the liquid world, beyond the screen, is dissolved in the coexistence of image and landscape on a selfsame spatial-temporal plane. The dimension we inhabit is no longer ‘impressed’ but ‘expressed’ as interface, at the crossroads of visible and invisible. “Interfaces themselves are effects,” explains artist and theoretician Alexander Galloway, “in that they bring about transformation in material states. But at the same time interfaces are themselves the effects of other things, and thus tell the story of the larger forces that engender them.”<sup>9</sup>

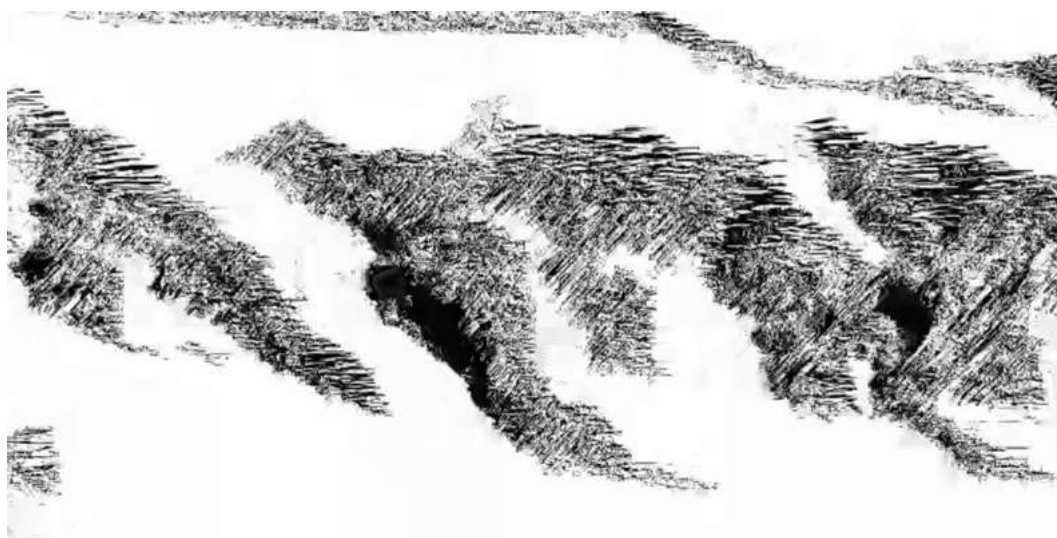
The correspondence of structural and processual logics between universal and particular is by now well known and has also been encountered recently in the study of quantum physics; micro- and macro-world therefore find themselves in a play of correspondences. Thus, we can imagine landscape repeated also within the photographic instrument. Everything is contained in the whole that lives in its very same continuous change, the one that shapes a kaleidoscopic world.

**Photography, media migration and digital matter: Peter Ashton, Luigi Pagliarini**

In the liquid world matter has its own consistency and it follows its own behaviors and dynamics. Peter Ashton reveals digital matter setting out from the [inevitable] processes of trans - codification to which the images are subjected, multiplied and accelerated in the practices of sharing on the social networks. His work *Sitting in Stagram* is a portrait of the composer Alvin Lucier and of what happens when his image is compressed and decompressed to be reposted ninety times on Instagram. The portrait of Alvin Lucier and its title – *Sitting in Stagram* – evoke *I am sitting in a room*, Lucier's 1969 experiment in which, closed in a room, he recorded his own voice and subsequently rerecorded it on tape a great number of times until all that remained of his words was an indecipherable noise. Its magnitude, intensity and compass were dictated by the reverberation of frequencies in the room. Spatial characteristics (large, small, full, empty), thus, found their sonar translation and correspondence. In the case of Ashton's work, Instagram applications subject images to a series of format conversions aimed at optimizing them to favor circulation on the web. The repeated action renders visible the inevitable process of deterioration of the image. The degenerative process of the portrait in Ashton's work made Instagram visible as a room built 'for' and 'in' the sharing of images. It also made evidence the existence of matter in digital space.

Luigi Pagliarini visualizes the behavior of digital matter through his *Energies Visualiser*, a software developed in 2004, based on the dynamics of Artificial Intelligence of which Pagliarini was a pioneer supported by a background in neuro-psychology. Photographs, as well as any other images, paintings, screenshots, are transformed into an algorithmic video or infinite painting. Each pixel is treated as an atom and behaves as such. By adopting the *principle of proximity* as model of the flux of energy, which establishes that any pixel can only influence the one next to it, Pagliarini and his team could establish how to measure forces within the pixel and how to activate them toward a perpetual motion that moves the image from abstraction to

figuration. Everything that exists within an image, any fixed image, is returned to the idea of 'perpetual motion', a creative approach that Pagliarini developed even before 2004. This work and research conceived with an Eventualistic approach in order to focus on the "existing relations amongst conceptual and figurative art in a perspective that involves several aspects of Art Psychology"<sup>10</sup>, reveals media migration under other important perspectives, the ones related to the energies of (digital) matter.



**Fig. 3.** Luigi-Pagliarini, *Energies, Visualiser*, 2004. Courtesy of the Artist

### **Revealing the Black Hole in one 'shot'.**

Moving away from art, we make a brief step on the image of the Black Hole revealed in 2019 and from most of the media (including scientific media) was celebrated as a photograph or a shot.

This image was the result of a combination of data and other sources, most of which belonged to a translation of spatial frequencies into pixels, a process that took years of work, years of gathering and elaborating different data. Whereas many sources of the media call it 'shot' or 'photograph', we cannot really talk about them as such. It is, in fact, the result of a long process of collaborative, interdisciplinary work. Not only do data belong to different sources, but also the visual result is the translation of wave frequencies in pixels.

Katie Bouman, a young researcher at the Harvard Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, has been working for six years to the algorithm that allowed to visualise the black hole. On the occasion of her talk at TED in 2017, two years before the release of the image, titled 'how take a picture of a black hole', she forecasted at the time that it would have taken two years (added to the other four she was working on the project) in order for the image of the black hole to be proven and revealed.

The image of the Black Hole represents, at the best, the power of image in current times, a power that manifests in its nature of evidence, of proof of existence of something that no human eye is able to see: what we see is the translation, in pixels, of wave frequencies, little dowels that are recomposed by algorithms into an image that much likely corresponds to the 'object' as it is really is.

### **Conclusions**

Alex May has shown possible ways of migrating photography into the digital, while compressing the time before and after the event into one single frame. Marco Cadioli, Jon Rafman and Clement Valla, as artists, enter the landscape shaped by algorithmic language and extrapolate images as shots or *ready mades*, embodying the eye of the software. The fact that they are received as photographs and postcards is the result of the language used. Joanna Zylinska's theories and works have guided us in this direction. Photography is non human, vision is non human. Nevertheless, language combined with imagination and perception is still a *magma* which shapes reality.

Peter Ashton opens our gaze to the consistency of digital matter by using time, specifically by accelerating transcoding processes, witnessing the process of obsolescence. In contrast, Luigi Pagliarini visualises the energies that regulate matter.

These works prove the need to adjust our gaze to an extra-perspective vision - possibly a non-human one - that, right now, is shaped by a combination of many different views and perspectives belonging to this multifaceted and fragmented nature of time-space dimension. The world of Walter Benjamin's 'reproduction' has shifted towards one of 'algorithmic

production'. *Ways of Seeing*, to quote John Berger and his popular program from the Seventies where he showed viewers (through television) the way media and reproduction can give meaning and substance to reality, has moved to another phase. It is all a matter of migration from one state to another, one that is referred to by the word 'transcoding'.

This leads to a further conclusion, involving the start of a new multi-faceted discourse. If it is understood that algorithmic photography materializes in the digital realm through language, the language of code, this concept can be applied to the larger field of reality. If this is true when algorithmic photography is treated as a case study for talking about the migration of media into digital space, then the migration of culture at large can also be considered in the same way, homologated into a common language. We should probably consider the migration of culture into the digital as it returns to the physical dimension and all the resulting circular exchanges between worlds, through the means of Artificial Intelligence.

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# The Image of Senmurv Between Orient and Occident

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Senmurv is a fantastic animal from Iranian mythology. Its image, resulting from head's dog, bird's wings, clawed paws and peacock's tail, originated in Iran during Sasanian dynasty (III-VII s. A.D), related to Zoroastrian faith. It holds a protective and positive value, being related to good luck and prosperity. It is a cosmological symbol, representing the union between sky and earth, and is related to the life of tree. It can be found in numerous mediums: architecture, sculpture, metals, coins, ceramics, fabrics. It became a royal symbol, adopted from Sasanian dynasty.

From Iran, the iconography is spread in Islamic and Christian arts, in a territory expanded from Asia to Middle East to Europe.

In Iranian and Islamic cultures, the Senmurv is related to the power, being represented in Sasanian and Omayyad dynasties' rock sculptures and palaces. In Christian world the iconography of Senmurv is related to the sacred sphere, being mainly represented in churches. It can also present a fish's tail. The assimilation of the iconography in Christian art was probably favoured by the presence of composed animals in classical Greek art, in particular a hybrid animal, similar to hippocampus. Senmurv is assimilated with the aquatic animal of Jonas' story. It is adopted in Christian art in the frame of Jonas' story, symbol of redemption and salvation, going through a process of acquisition of a new meaning. It gains a bigger expansion, being found in Caucasus, in Byzantine, Mozarabic, Longobardian and Romanesque arts, knowing diffusion in most European countries.

## **KEYWORDS**

Persian art; Islamic art; Christian art; Cross-cultural assimilation; Resignification

The image of Senmurv is assumed to have originated during Sasanian dynasty, that ruled Iran from 224, year of foundation by Ardashir, to 642-651, period of the end of the dynasty due to Islamic invasion of Iran.

The Sassanid Empire extended over the entire Iranian plateau, corresponding to the present-day states of Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, west part of Pakistan and northern part of Mesopotamia. It was a very large area, extended from the Caspian sea to the Persian Gulf. At his greatest extent the Empire stretched from Mediterranean regions to China and Far East.

Besides that, there were also different regions, such as Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, constantly disputed with the Byzantine Empire, that were subjected to its influence.

The Sasanian Empire did not have fixed borders, but they were constantly changing depending on different times and war events. It is important to notice the ability of expansion of Iranian culture, the fact that Sasanian empire was able to exert an influence also on other areas, such as for example Sogdiana, that corresponds to modern southern Uzbekistan and west Tajikistan. This ability to exert an influence and radiate and spread its own culture is particularly evident in the artistic field: we can see the influence of Sasanian art in Asia and in Far East as well as in European medieval art.<sup>4</sup>

Our knowledge of Iran during Sasanian dynasty and, in particular, our knowledge of Sasanian art are very limited and fragmentary due to the presence of few written sources, first of all inside Iran. The vast majority of written sources are Byzantine and Arabic: this fact poses problems concerning their reliability.

On the other side, there are also problems concerning material culture. Although it is abundant in certain fields, such as numismatics and fabrics, the majority of objects came from casual findings or clandestine excavations, that means out of the context of scientific archaeological excavation. This creates a lot of problems in order to determine a precise chronological framework and place of origin of material culture. This is also the case when we study the iconography of Senmurv and the material culture related to it.

The name Senmurv referred to the composite animal that we can find in archaeological documentation was imposed in literature since the thirties of XX century, following the research of Camila Trever, Russian scholar who proposed the identification of Senmurv, as it is mentioned in iranic written sources, with the animal that we can see in material documentation. The scholar considered some written sources of Pahlavic or middle-persian literature, the *Dādistān-i Menog-i Xrad* and *Bundahišn*, two texts related to Zoroastrism, in which the name of Senmurv is referred to an animal, a bat of triple nature, composed of dog, bird and mouse parts. Then, she proposed the identification between the animal known in material culture and the name of Senmurv.

Since that, this identification has been accepted, until recent times, when this hypothesis has been discussed, because written sources are ambiguous: in certain sentences Senmurv is indicated as animal of triple nature, while in other passages it is indicated as a bird, and the *Bundahišn* contains texts dated to Islamic Abbaside dynasty (IX-X). It is a literature created by Zoroastrian communities that were resisting the Islamization in order to preserve their traditions and culture, so it is a literature created after the first images of the animal.

More recent studies consider the name Senmurv as referred to a bird.

However, Senmurv is the name that continues to be used in literature, in some cases preceded by the indication of “so-called”.

Besides the complex relationship with written sources and the most recent disquisitions about the name, on the base of the iconographical analysis we can see that Senmurv, or so-called Senmurv, presents the union between the terrestrial element of the dog and the acrian part of the bird, configuring itself as an animal of cosmological meaning, representing the union between earth and sky.

If we consider the meaning of the image, at the base of its iconography there are probably the funeral costumes of Iran. Dogs and birds were sacred animals, playing the role of psychopomp animals, related to afterlife and immortality. Because the bodies of deceased were not buried or cremated but deposited on *dakhma* or silence towers, funeral costumes contemplated

exposition to dogs and birds. The peacock, whose image originated in India, is also attested as psychopomp animal.

Other hypothesis concerning the meaning of Senmurv can be found in cosmological and astronomical conception and it is related to the written sources in which Senmurv is told to be seated on the tree of many seeds, that is the tree that contains the seeds of all plants, an idea related to the concept of the tree of life. Senmurv plays a role in the process of dispersion of the seeds in the world: it makes them fall from the tree, helped by Tistar, who disperses them, through the rain water. Senmurv should correspond to Aquila constellation, while Tistar should correspond to Sirio, the brighter star of Canis Mayor constellation. The rise of Tistar-Sirio is related to the season of rain in Iran: the process should be related to rain and fertility.

It is also worth considering that in the process of the creation of the image the influence of composite animals very common in east culture, such as the Lion-griffin, the snake dragon and the Greek hippocampus, probably played a role.

The composite animal known as Senmurv should be also the symbol of *xvarnah*, the concept of Iranian glory and good luck. *Xvarnah* is a term in ancient iranic (farr is the name in middle and neo-persian) related etymologically to *xvar/n*, sun, with the meaning of glory, brightness, splendor and good luck and prosperity.

This is the most likely hypothesis concerning the meaning of the Senmurv, and seems to be supported by the association in some Arab-Sasanian coins (coins created during the first phase of Islamic occupation of Iran, from 636 to the beginning of VIII century, by Islamic authority, perpetuating the same images and inscriptions of Sasanian coins) of the image of the animal with the written PRN, sogdian term that means *farr-xvarnah*.

The Senmurv, then, as animal related to the idea of good luck and prosperity, apotropaic symbol, beneficial and with protective status.

This association can be seen on a copper coin, dated to 671-742, from Fars or Kuzestan, preserved at the American Numismatic Society, New York,<sup>2</sup>

and also on other silver coins, preserved in private European collections, in Germany and France.<sup>3</sup>

The Senmurv is employed as royal symbol, related to Sasanian dynasty, as we can see in the rock sculptures of Taq-i Bustan. The monument is located in the north-west of Iran, near the city of Kermanshah, and it is one of the most known triumphal monuments of all the country.

Taq-i Bustan is very important for the study of Senmurv because it is considered a chronological landmark. Almost all of the images of Senmurv cannot be dated with certainty. Although there are hypothesis that relate Taq-i Bustan to the end of V century, it is generally and likely dated to the end of VI and the beginning of VII century.

Inside the cave, different scenes related to Sasanian royalty are represented. On the left, there is the scene of boar hunting. The king, represented two times, is wearing the caftan with images of Senmurvs.

Other example with a fairly accurate date can be found in Sogdiana, outside the borders of Sasanian empire, in Afrasiab, the most ancient core of Samarkand.

In the Ambassador Hall, whose name derives from the 42 figures, interpreted as ambassadors, depicted on its walls, we can see in particular three figures, interpreted as ambassador-dignitaries of Iran: one of them is wearing a caftan decorated with Senmurvs. The most plausible date is 660.

Among the objects presenting the image of Senmurv, there are some showing the particular relationship of the fantastic animal with the tree of life.

An ewer, whose proposed datation is VI-VII century A.D., from Pavlovk, Ukraine, preserved at Hermitage Museum, is decorated with the lotus flower,<sup>4</sup> other representation of the tree of life. An analogue decoration is in a silver cup from North Caucasus and in a silver plate from India. In the plate, the Senmurv presents Iranic palms in the tail and the tongue that seems to transform itself in a plant stem.

In another Sasanian vase we can also see the relation with a female figure; the face of a woman, surrounded by vegetal patterns, probably Ameretat, goddess of vegetation.

The image of Senmurv is adopted in Islamic art. We can see it in the Desert Castles, buildings related to the Umayyad dynasty, the first Islamic dynasty, that ruled from 661 to 750. They are located in Syria, Palestine, Jordan and Iraq and dated to VIII century. In particular the image of Senmurv can be found in the palaces of Khirbat al-Mafjar, Qasr al Hair-al Gharbi and Mshatta.

At Khirbat al-Mafjar, in Palestine, the Senmurv is found in a niche-head in the bathroom, represented again with a woman, and in some pictorial fragments.

At Mshatta, in Jordan, the Semurv is represented in one of the triangles of the decorative band, that encircles the exterior of the building, nowadays preserved at the Pergamon Museum in Berlin.

In this case Senmurv is represented together with the griffin; the association between the two animals can be also noticed in other contexts, such as a bronze plaque.<sup>5</sup> The Senmurv and the griffin share some symbolic aspects; they are cosmological animals, related to the tree of life.

In the first Islamic art, produced at the time of the Umayyad dynasty, and characterized by a continuity with the art of precedent periods, there are not iconographical changes.

A first change in iconography can be remarked in Abbasid era (751-1258), as we can see on the octagonal plate from Iran, preserved at the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin, dated to IX-X century.<sup>6</sup>

Here we can notice a geometrization, stylization and simplification of the image. The animals along the edge do not present the peacock's tail anymore, as it was a misrepresentation of the image; there is a continuous repetition of the subject, that could suggest an ornamental and decorative use of the image, perhaps a loss of the original meaning.

Another change in Islamic art can be seen from XIII century, when Senmurv transforms itself in Simurgh, a fabulous bird of long multicolour feathers, through the contact with Chinese phoenix, an iconography arrived in Iran as a result of Mongol invasion.

The Simurgh, whose name is the neopersian version of Senmurv, is the fabulous bird of *Shâh-nâme* or book of Kings, Iranian epic poem written by Firdousi at the beginning of XI century, that tells the history of Iran from the creation of the world until Islamic conquer. First miniatures are dated to XIII century. It is important to notice that Simurg is the tutelary genius of the heroes of the Iranian poem, Zal and Rostam; it holds a beneficial and apotropaic value, likewise the Senmurv.

In Islamic art Senmurv knows a limited spread and it is essentially related to secular art. It can be seen on buildings related to the Umayyad dynasty, but there is also a more general presence in society, as demonstrated by copper coins.

In Christian world Senmurv knows a wider diffusion, spreading in Byzantine, Lombardian, Mozarabic and Romanesque art in all Europe and it is essentially related to the sacred sphere. In fact, we can find the image primarily in churches, on plectrums and ambo.

Furthermore, in Christian art we can notice a transformation of the iconography, as we can see on the southern wall of the Church of Holy Cross, in Aghtamar, in Armenia. The church is a central plan building, realized between 915 and 921 on a small island in the middle of the lake Van, in south Armenia, in an area that is today part of Turkey's state.

On the southern wall we can find the representation of the history of Jonah, with several scenes.

According to the Biblical story, Jonah had not obeyed the divine order to go and preach in Niniveh and he instead embarked for Tarsis. During the crossing, a sudden storm broke out, Jonah understood to be guilty for having unleashed the divine anger. He is then thrown overboard by his comrades and swallowed by a whale.

In the following scene, Jonah is rejected from the animal after three days spent in its belly, after which he has rejoined salvation and wisdom. In this scene the animal is not represented as a whale anymore, but instead as Iranian Senmurv: the only difference is that it does not show the peacock's tail, but at this place we can see a fish's tail.



The anterior part of the body is then identical to iranic Senmurv, while the tail is that of a fish.

This double iconographic configuration, whale and Senmurv, holds a correspondance in literature, because the Armenian version of the Bible distinguishes two animals: fish and vishap-fish.

The history of Jonah is one of the most represented themes in Christian art as symbol of salvation and resurrection.

Here the Senmurv is configured preminently as saving creature. It is inside the animal that the process of salvation of the prophet takes place: the fact of resting inside the animal for three days makes possible the salvation of the prophet.

Christianism adopts and employs the image of Senmurv, in particularly in the frame of the Biblical story of Jonah, adapting and fitting it to the peculiar exigences of its own faith, carrying out a process of resignification, but at the same time preserving the positive value the Senmurv has always had since its origin in Iranic world.

The reception of Iranic Senmurv in Christian world in the frame of history of Jonah was probably favoured and facilitated by the existence of another hybrid animal similar to hippocampus, that presents a fish's tail, analogous to the tail adopted by Senmurv in Christian world, and that was already represented in the history of Jonah in late antiquity (an example is on an ivory panel at the National Museum in Ravenna, Italy, dated V-VI century<sup>2</sup>.)

This hybrid animal probably functioned as substrate for iranic Senmurv.

The transformation of the iconography seems to have happened in Armenia, area continuously disputed between East and West: between Byzantine Empire and Sasanid Empire before, and between Byzantium and Islam afterwards; an area of cross-cultural encounter and contamination. At the time of construction of the church of Agth'amar, Armenia was a subordinate state of Muslim caliphate; but at the same time there was a certain degree of freedom and the preservation of the Christian faith was permitted. Armenia was, therefore, a place of encounter between Christian culture and Sasanid-Islamic cultures.

The iconography of Senmurv with fish's tail in the frame of the history of Jonah can be also found in Southern Italy, in Romanesque sculpture. There are numerous examples, particularly in the region of Campania: on the ambo of the Cathedral of Ravello, on the fragment of the panel from Capua at Museum of Campania (also considered as Pre-Romanesque), on the slab attributed to the ancient Cathedral of Sorrento.

In these examples the entire history of Jonah, depicted in several scenes in Aghtmar, has been reduced to the only scene where the animal throws out Jonah, the rest of the history being omitted.

A further synthesis of the iconography is found in Central Italy, in the region of Abruzzo, in a pluteus inside the church of San Pellegrino in Bominaco (the proposed datation is XI century, although an earlier production cannot be excluded).

Here Jonah is not represented anymore; the Senmurv with fish's tail appears as extrapolated from the context of Jonah's history and it is represented isolated, recovering in this way the ancient mode of representation of Senmurv in Iranic world.

In this case, it is meaningful that Senmurv is represented again with the griffin, as well as in Islamic art. In Bominaco the animals are represented, facing each other in a symmetrical pose, on the pluteus forming the iconostasis, the architectural structure that marks the boundary between the nave and the sanctuary, showing the access and make possible the access to the presbiterial area, the most sacred space inside the church.

The diffusion of the iconography of Senmurv with fish's tail goes on in XII century and beyond; there are numerous examples in Italy, France, United Kingdom.

Different examples of Senmurv can be seen in civil European architecture and its image has been used until recent times. There are examples on churches' portals in some villages in Bulgaria in XIX and XX centuries and on the portals of civil buildings, in Spain and Sardinia (Italy).

This use on the portals of the buildings, on a medium between inside and outside (that in the case of churches defines also the boundary between

secular and sacred space) can be probably explained as referred to a protective and apotropaic value, confirming once again the continuity of positive meaning of the iconography in different culture and times.

Coming back to medieval times, the church of Aghtmar does not explain all the examples of Senmurv with fish's tail found in west contexts.

The pluteus in Pavia, ancient capital of Longobardia Major, in Northern Italy, from the church of the Monastery of Santa Maria Teodote, is dated to VIII century.<sup>8</sup>

The pluteus was part of the presbyterial enclosure of the church. Two Senmurv with fish's tail are shown facing a tree of life in the shape of *wak wak*, the talking tree, whose branches end with animals heads, a tree that originated in the East and especially popular in Arabic traditions.

The pluteus should belong to a period of time preceding the realization of the church of Aghtmar. As a consequence, not all the examples of Senmurv with fish's tail can be explained through the reference and mediation of Aghtmar, but the situation is more complexed, and we have probably to think to different and multiple paths and ways of transmission through which the iconography of Senmurv with fish's tail could form and spread.

Besides the transformation of Senmurv with fish's tail, in Christian world it is also attested the iranic Senmurv with peacock's tail.

There are two examples in Northern Italy, on two floors: in Cividale del Friuli (VIII) and on the mosaic from the Abbey of St. Hilary in Venice (IX).

Senmurv is also found in Mozarabic miniatures, the miniatures realized between X and XI century in Christian kingdoms of Northern Spain and characterized by Islamic influences.

We can see it in two Beatos, illuminated manuscripts with the text of the Commentary on the book of Revelation: Beatus of Girona and Beatus of Facundus.

It is interesting to notice that iranic Senmurv and Senmurv with fish's tail are equally represented.

Beatus of Girona, from the monastery of S.Salvatore of Tabara, León, preserved in Girona and dated to 975, presents a stronger oriental influence.

Iranic Senmurv is depicted staying above one of the small trees; on the right side we can see an eagle that holds between its paths a gazelle.

It is the transposition of the same subjects and of an identical scene, that we can see on a Sasanian vessel preserved at the Hermitage Museum and dated to VI century.

It is an image with astronomical meaning: the eagle as symbol of the sky and of the sun that wins over horned animal, symbol of the moon.

The transposition of this image shows the strong influence of Sasanid culture on the art of Iberian peninsula. (The same image, apart from the Senmurv, can be also seen on the lid of two ivory vessels from Cordoba).

In Beatus of Girona the image is accompanied by the latin inscription "Coreus et aquila in venatione": "Coreus (corvus-crow? - referred to the Senmurv-) and eagle to the hunting."

In Beatus of Facundus, from the kingdom of León, preserved at the National Library in Madrid and dated to 1047, Senmurv is instead represented with fish's tail, together to other fantastic animals, and it is one of the animals of Noah's Ark. It is portrayed among the animals saved from the Great flood, a probably evidence of the importance attributed to it.

The Senmurv is a subject particularly represented in fabrics, that are considered the principal medium through which the iconography of the animal could be spread over a so large area, from East to West.

It is also interesting to notice that a lot of fabrics with Senmurv were found in European churches. They were probably used as bargaining chip, a gift among princes, but they were also brought in Europe by pilgrims coming back from holy places in the East: they were used to envelop holy relics or to line boxes that preserved holy relics.

As a consequence, the fabrics are a very interesting material to study the diffusion of the iconography and the relations among different cultures.

I will consider some examples of fabrics with Senmurv.

A first example is a fabric from the church of San Leu and Saint Gilles, Paris. It has been the object of different hypothesis of datation spanning from

VI to IX century, but it is generally considered as realized in Iran in late Sasanian era because of the duotone and the motifs of *rotae*, crescent moon, small palm above the animal and for the presence of vegetal elements, representation of the tree of life, all typical of Sasanian art.

In another fabric from the Cathedral of Verdun, France, it is possible to notice the geometrization and absence of duotone, proof of a probably post-sassanide Byzantine production.

In the Reliquarius of St.Pelagius, from the church of St. Isidore, León, generally considered as a product of Al-Andalous, the Muslim-ruled area in the Iberian peninsula, and consequently post-sassanid-Islamic (XI century), we remark further changes: Senmurv is represented with other animals and the dimension of the parts of the body are different from Sasanian shapes. It is an interesting example highlighting the relations among different cultures: an Iranic subject on a fabric realized in Islamic area and used and found in Christian area.

The Cushion of St.Remi (France), used for the relics of St.Remi, is the only example with a certain date of production, 852, as reported on an inscription on the fabric, that is monochrome, analogue to that of the so-called chasuble of St. Mark Pope. In this case a fabric with Senmurv has been used to produce the chasuble, the liturgic vestment the catholic celebrant wears during religious functions, masses and processions.

According to the tradition, the chasuble belonged to St. Mark Pope, who lived in IV century. According to an inscription on the vestment, and because of the analogy with other fabrics, it should really have belonged to Pope John VIII (872-882), who had crowned Charles the Bald, emperor of Carolingian Empire.

This fabric with Senmurv was then used to produce the liturgic vestment of the highest religious authority in Christian sphere. We can infer the importance attributed to the Senmurv in the Christian world. Considered that the vestment was seen by the faithfuls, it should have been attributed a particular meaning to it, likely a beneficial one.

Finally, another image of Senmurv can be also seen on a belt buckle from unknown place from the island of Sardinia, Italy, preserved in Colonia.<sup>9</sup>

It is an *unicum*: for the iconography, because among others presenting animals, it is the only one with the Senmurv, and for the material, because it is the only one realized in gold, a precious material, while the others are in bronze or brass.

In addition, it is also singular for the shape and for the tecnic of realization.

The gold material, that expresses a greater value and prestige, should suggest that the object belonged to an individual related to a higher social class.

The plate of the belt buckle belongs to Syracuse typology, widespread in Mediterranean and in Northern Europe, and dated between the end of VI and the middle of VII century.

It is a datation based on the typology of the medallion because we do not have elements referred to archaeological excavations.

According to the datation based on the typology, the belt buckle from Sardinia is the oldest evidence with the image of Senmurv in West area.

In conclusion, we can probably individuate different ways and paths of the transmission of the iconography from East to West, realized through Islam and Byzantium mediations.

The expansion of the iconography and its adoption from other cultures besides that of its origin is emblematic of the interactions among different cultural systems, showing how they are engaged in a continuous dialogue.

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# Performances and Archive: Márcia X, Mabe Bethônico and Marina Abramović in Migration

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper presents three case studies on performances that operate under the concepts of displacement and migration: *A Cadeira Careca* (The Bald Chair, 2004), by Márcia X; Marina Abramović's *Rhythm O* (1975, printed in 1994) and Mabe Bethônico's *museumuseu* (2006).

*A Cadeira Careca* by Márcia X (1959-2001) was donated to the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (MAM/RJ), on the occasion of her death. The passage between Márcia X's performance and its exhibition allows us to reflect on the ruptures that are created when an ephemeral work of art becomes a vestige. In *Rhythm O*, Marina Abramović invited visitors to Studio Morra, in Naples, to interact with her body for 6 hours, using 72 objects, which included a pen, a hammer, a chain, knives and even a loaded gun. Mabe Bethônico's *museumuseu* articulates collections, activities, texts and images, constituted by the continuous practice of research, accumulation and classification of objects and documents shifted from their original context. In 2006, the project was transported for exhibition at the 27th São Paulo Biennial, thus migrating its archives to a physically accessible presentation.

The migrations in space and time identified in these case studies are presented as instruments for reflection on the transformation of ideas, objects and images that occurred during the transit of these works from their creation until their exhibition to the public.

## **KEYWORDS**

Performance art; Mabe Bethônico; Márcia X; Marina Abramović; Rhythm O.

### **Introduction**

To understand why we still don't collect performance art in Brazil as much as we produce them is the main goal of my doctoral research. Therefore, I have been trying to identify how some performance art migrates from reality to a static, imagetic support, visible by the public at any time. In this trajectory, the way performance artists work the concepts of displacement and migration seem to emerge more and more.

In this article, I will present how three artists - Marcia X., Mabe Bethônico and Marina Abramović - work the concept of migration in their work. I will try to demonstrate how this concept relates to the transfer between the individual performing the action and the work, to a displacement that seeks to bring visibility to a place or a subject, and to the attempt to archive and exhibit the performance. Above all, we will discover how the concept of migration in these cases maintains a curious relationship with the spectator.

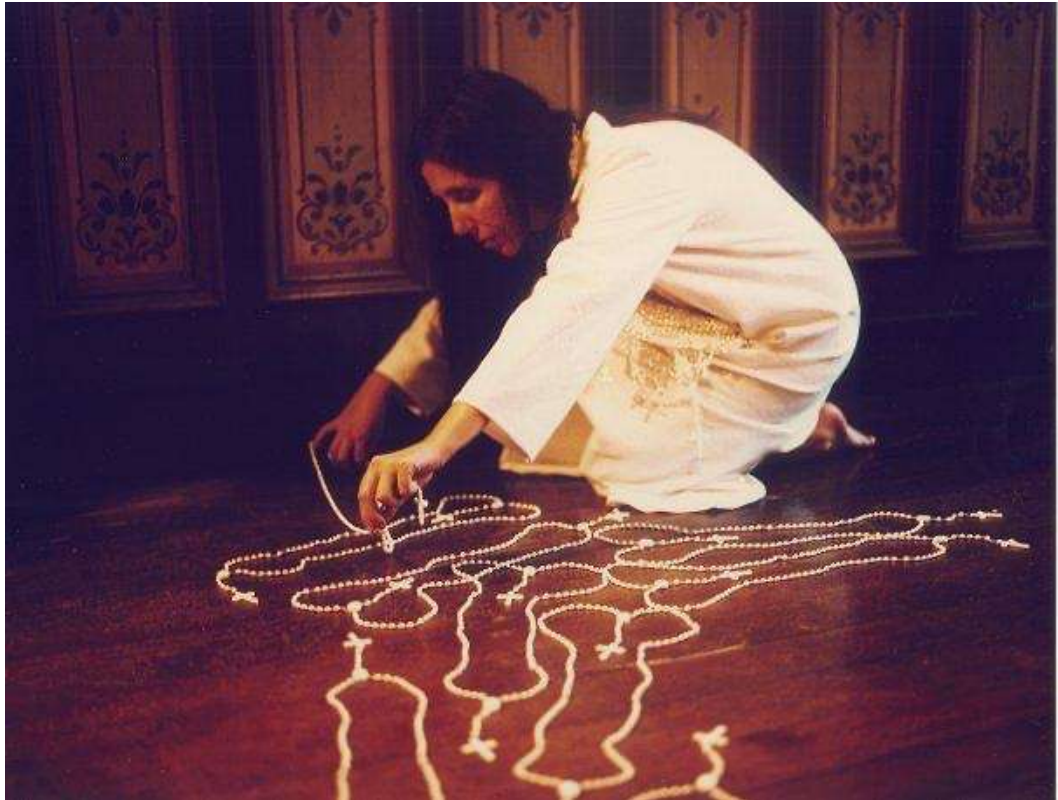
### **Márcia X**

Márcia X was an artist from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, who worked from the 1980's on on the themes of sexuality, childhood, and religion. This was a combination that, in many moments, shocked the public. She worked especially with assemblages and performance art. Here, we will address this second category.

In the period between 2000 and 2003, Marcia carried out several times the performance *Drawing with Rosaries* where, wearing a white nightgown, she used rosaries to draw penis shapes on the floor.

It is notable how the artist was concerned with assuring the permanence of her works, even if for a short period of time. Several of her performances had the classification "performance/installation", given by the artist herself, which indicated that the residues of a performance should remain in place, on display, for a period after the action. In this aspect, we can also highlight the way writing was involved in her work. Márcia used to write instructions about her performances, as well as keep thorough records and documentation about the whole process of conception of her works. In

addition, she was known to debate in printed media vehicles, through letters that dealt - generally - with her own artistic production.



**Fig. 1.** Márcia X. *Desenhando com terços*  
Performance/installation, 2000-2003.

As one of the results of this performance, the artist created the work *Drawing on rosaries*, which was a photograph in which two rosaries are used to draw the phallic shape over a black background. In 2006, after the artist's death, this work was included in *Erotica - the Senses in Art*, an exhibition held by the Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Brasília.

In Rio, it was the target of several complaints, including the filing of a criminal notice by a congressman who declared that it was an "outrage to the Catholic Church". All this resulted in its censorship and removal from the exhibition, under the bank's claim of "respect for freedom of speech"

(Figueiredo 2006). The decision was even taken in the absence of the curator, Maria Ignez Mantovani.



**Fig. 2.** Márcia X. - “A Cadeira Careca”  
Performance, 2004.

The work *The Bald Chair* was Marcia's last performance, and was held in November 2004. With the participation of her husband, the artist Ricardo Ventura, and Aimberê César, the proposal linked the Gustavo Capanema Building, former headquarters of the Ministry of Education and Health, in the early capital of Brazil, Rio de Janeiro, and the *chaise longue*. Both had Le Corbusier's participation in their projects - the chair had the architect's design and the project for one of the first public buildings of modernist architecture in Brazil had his consulting services. Both conferred to the work of the Franco-Swiss architect a sense of permanence. The permanence so longed for the artist in her "instructions" and performances/installations.

During the performance, Ricardo Ventura, wearing a white lab coat, shaved the fur off the chair around Marcia, who was wearing black - the artist was facing lung cancer - dying three months later. Tired, she left the performance in an ambulance. Brazilian art critic Lauro Cavalcanti, in his essay "The bald chair or the artist was wearing black" refers to the "celebration of the permanence of ideas and the impermanence of people and objects" (Cavalcanti 2005).

*The Bald Chair* was donated, along with her entire collection, to the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro after Márcia X's death. The migration between Márcia X's living performance and her exhibition allows us to reflect on the ruptures created in imagination and visuality when an ephemeral work of art becomes a remaining.

At this point, I would like to propose that we reflect on how it was exhibited after the moment of action. Was it accessible to the general public?

As I mentioned before, *The Bald Chair* was the artist's last performance, and it was presented by a Marcia X. already exhausted by a long treatment against lung cancer. Perhaps because of this, and because it has her body engraved on its surface, the "Chair" has become both a reminder of her presence and a strong souvenir of her absence.

An example is this photograph that illustrates the article in "O Globo" newspaper of November 10th, 2005, about the exhibition "Márcia X. Revista", which opened nine months after her death, at Paço Imperial, Rio de Janeiro. We can see the curator Claudia Saldanha, the artist's widower, Ricardo Ventura, and other artists and employees posing for a portrait with the chair, as if it were there to somehow stand in for Márcia just for a moment.

In some pictures it is possible to grasp a part of the display of "Márcia X. Revista" exhibition. There, we can see that the "Chair" welcomed the visitor who walked into the exhibition. I believe that they also make us think about how Márcia, in a very sensitive and poetic way, appropriated her own destiny to inaugurate, still in life, the first chapter of her memories.

The concept of migration in *Drawing with rosaries* and *The Bald Chair* can be identified when we think that her performances immediately became installations when the artist left the scene. When she created a photograph to

register and to make available to the public a record of her phallic drawings, in a new support, Márcia X. puts migration at the request of the permanence so desired in her work. This is exactly the goal she achieves when she finally transfers her silhouette to her own work, in the last months of her life. Just like the creator of the chair and the building, Le Corbusier, Márcia X. made her mark in history.

Soon after, the work was featured in the exhibition "Constellations: the portrait in the Museum of Modern Art of Rio collections", which took place between 2018 and 2019, curated by Fernando Cocchiarale and Fernanda Lopes.

In this exhibition, photos and a video were presented along with the chair, which also had more complete information. A relevant point is that the subtitle of the show itself, "portrait in the MAM collections" is already useful information in the task of unraveling its layers, especially if we think that, after her death, the work was in fact exhibited almost as a portrait of the artist.

### **Mabe Bethônico**

Brazilian artist Mabe Bethônico approaches performance through speech and works with the concept of research-based art. In this sense, her "conferences" or "performed narratives", records of episodes and negotiations that take place in the course of her research, and which are enunciated personally during her exhibitions, eventually become ephemeral, in the face of an immense archive of processes that dismember into exhibitions, publications, and objects sold in the gallery that represents the artist - and that end up financing the survival of her work.

Born in the state of Minas Gerais, which can be translated into English as "general mines", a state marked by the action of mining companies, and which is currently experiencing yet another tragedy resulting from this exploitation, Bethônico seeks, in her work, to discuss this and other themes in a political way. Therefore, as a result of a vast research carried out from Switzerland, where she currently lives, she has created the exhibition "Extraordinary Mineral Stories" which, through tales that seem to mix reality

and fiction, explores many different angles of a theme which interest is based on the artist's origins.

With the work *The Collector*, started in 1996, Mabe Bethônico creates a character who establishes a logic for his collection and follows a very detailed "acquisition policy". Even after being acquired by the collection of the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo in 2014, this character, created and embodied by the artist, keeps collecting and assembling newspaper clippings on four themes (destruction, corrosion, construction and flowers). So as he did during his stay in exhibitions in many institutions, where an employee was always assigned to collect images in local newspapers and to add them to the collection.

The creation of this institutional dialogue dictates the survival of this character, the continuity of the process, and the permanence of the artist's performance as the character who compulsively collects newspaper clippings on subjects that also outline his peculiar personality.

It is worth noting the artist's concern with the methods of organizing, documenting, and exhibiting this collection, which, according to her, migrated to an institutional collection as a way of ensuring the integrity and promotion of this work, which became more accessible to researchers and other institutions that might want to include it in some sort of exhibition.

One of the platforms for publicizing this character's collection is the newspaper "museumuseu", a project printed and distributed by the artist. In "museumuseu", Mabe Bethônico creates a network of connected works that together constitute her "museumuseu" - a collection of collections that assumes different formats at all times. Furthermore, Mabe incorporates his processes into works and exhibitions through his performative lectures, talks through which she shares with the attending viewers fictions that taint visible objects with multiple hidden meanings. "The Collector", begun in 1996, is one of his many collections.

Launched by Mabe Bethônico in 2000, "museumuseu" is characterized as a structure that articulates collections, activities, texts and images, consisting on the ongoing practice of research, accumulation, collection, categorization and creation of new systems from objects and documents



displaced from their original context. The project deals with the boundaries between fiction and reality, documentation and construction, questioning the transformation of factual information into selected narratives.

In 2006, the project was transported for exhibition at the 27th São Paulo Biennial, thereby migrating her archives to a physically accessible presentation. By including an issue of the "museumuseu" newspaper in her Biennial module, entitled "Arquivo Wanda Svevo Campaign", the artist once again underlines her intention to give access and bring to the center of the discussion matters and agents sometimes made invisible.



**Fig. 3.** Mabe Bethônico - Campanha Wanda Svevo installation at the 27th São Paulo Biennial, 2006



The Wanda Svevo archive is the place where the memory of São Paulo Biennial is kept, and it is located in the same building where the Biennial takes place. Active since 1955, the archive holds photographs, correspondence with artists and curators, promotional documents, and published catalogs, in addition to a library specialized in contemporary art.

Within the *museumuseu* project, the artist proposes an interface between art and memory, transforming the small but extremely relevant Archive into part of the Biennial exhibition circuit, by presenting a fiction of her own authorship. The artist pushes the boundaries between the Archive and the Biennial Pavilion, taking to the exhibition space schematic drawings that show the organization of the documents that make up its collection, seeking to present the space to the general viewers.

The struggles and peculiarities faced in the negotiation process with the Archive in order to execute this work were portrayed by Mabe Bethônico in performative lectures. These narratives made it clear how the archival practices still reflect today the relationship between private interests and public patrimony in Brazil. In a intersection between History and Bethônico's work, the São Paulo Biennial itself suffered, during the nineteen sixties and seventies, strong repression and censorship by the military dictatorship instated in the country.

Mabe Bethônico's initiative of migrating the Wanda Svevo Archive to the 27th São Paulo Biennial, through the imagnetic representation of the Archive in the Pavilion, through mediated visits and lectures by her, brings a hint of challenge to the rules and the silence imposed during the period of repression in Brazil that, by interfering in the way the archives were constituted and consulted, intended that the history of an entire country be told through its lenses.

Mabe Bethônico uses a periodical as a way to circulate her works, projects and collections among the public. By migrating her works from her private collection to institutional collections, as well as to the Wanda Svevo Archive for the São Paulo Biennial, she intends to transform the private into the public, granting access to her work.

### **Marina Abramović**

Marina Abramović is a Serbian performer who lives and works in New York and is probably one of the world's most recognizable artists in activity. She believes that performance exists only when in a live situation. According to her, even when we think about the permanence of performance beyond the original action, we must be able to create an environment for that project to be unfolded by individuals, not photographs or videos.

The artist works with the concept of reperformance - a staging that seeks to make available to a new audience the live experience of a performative action that has already taken place. Usually in contexts, locations, and with performers other than the original ones. In her Institute - the itinerant Marina Abramovic Institute - she coaches young artists to participate in and to re-enact performances. She claims that there are many institutes to teach actors, and many artists who use actors in their performances. However, there was not, until then, a school for performers. She says that nowadays an artist can contact her and ask for a performer, and she will find, among her students, the ideal one. Her works reperfomed in "The artist is present", her 2010 retrospective at MoMA, included these "students" in her "cast".

Another motto widely promoted by the artist is that "Performance is a time-based art." In other words, one must have time to attend a performance and one must endure time to present it.

I will need to go back and forth in time to build my argument. Let's start with the performance "Imponderabilia," which Abramovic presented in 1977.

Marina Abramović and her then-partner, Ulay, performed "Imponderabilia" at the Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna in Bologna, Italy. The action consisted of the two individuals, naked, standing facing each other, with a distance of approximately 30 cm (or 1 ft.) between them. Any visitor interested in entering the Galleria could only do so by squeezing between these two bodies. Each individual found his or her own way to perform this action, in order to find the least awkward way out. Marina and Ulay remained in silence, without making any eye contact with the public.

Only after choosing which of the two to face during the passage through the door, the visitors, already on the second floor of the museum, found themselves observed, as they came across two monitors that displayed the entrance door live.

At the time, Abramović stated that: "If there were no artists, there would be no museums, so we are living doors."

An hour and a half after the start of the performance, two officers arrived at the Galleria, passing through the entrance facing Marina, and returning with two Museum employees who informed Abramovic and Ulay that the performance should be stopped because it had been considered obscene by the police.

Marina Abramović thinks of performance as an artistic manifestation that only makes sense while alive. So, for the retrospectives "The artist is present", at MoMA, in 2010, and "The cleaner", at Palazzo Strozzi, in Firenze, in 2018, she made sure that some of her students would stand, naked, in a doorway, taking turns from time to time. However, in these cases, the visitor could choose whether or not to pass through the door in question, unlike in the initial proposal. We can also think that, knowing the proposal of the work and how it originally unfolded, the audience could have other ideas of how to behave in the situation, which would not have occurred to the unaware ones who came across it by surprise, in 1977. However, it is an undeniable fact: the performance happened again, live.

That exhibition presented also a huge photograph of the performance, and a text about it, which, besides going against Abramović's speech, can lead us to question again the somewhat theatrical content of a performance re-enactment in this context.



**Fig. 4.** Marina Abramović and Ulay - *Imponderabilia* Original performance from 1977, as it was presented at *The Cleaner* exhibition Palazzo Strozzi, Firenze, 2018

Since *Seven Easy Pieces*, an event in which, for seven hours of each of seven consecutive days, Marina Abramović has re-enacted performances by five artists, concluding with a reperformance of her work "Lips of Thomas" (1975) and an original performance ("Entering the other side"), Abramović reports that several other artists have requested her authorization to re-enact some of her performances.

One of those performances authorized by Abramović was Eva and Franco Mattes' *Imponderabilia*, in the virtual environment Second Life. According to her, Second Life is a completely different medium, it is something that does not compete with live art.

In the iconic performance that gave the title to Marina Abramović's 2010 MoMA retrospective, "The artist is present," she sat in a chair, in silence, for eight hours a day, throughout the three-month exhibition, face to face with over a thousand visitors, for as long as each of them wanted.

She also authorized the display of "The artist is present" in the exhibition "Marina Abramović: The Cleaner", in Italy. On that occasion, the exhibition had a scenario that showed video footage of the original performance and the furniture used at MoMA. In addition to having central focus in the room, we can observe that there is also a spotlight on the chairs and the table, which gives an almost sacred atmosphere to the furniture.

But the main object of this analysis is the famous performance "Rhythm 0", which took place in 1974 at the Studio Morra gallery in Naples, Italy. At that time, Marina thought that artists who worked with performance were often over the top and decided to create a situation that would let the public go as far as they could go when the artist herself was doing nothing. So she created a performance in which she was exposed, as a mixture of mannequin and puppet, to the action of everyone present, who could use a total of 72 items laid out on a table to interact with her body. Among them were everything from a knife to a rose - to a gun loaded with a bullet.

Throughout the work period, the artist lost her clothes - which were cut off with a knife -, had a lit cigarette placed in her mouth and a loaded gun placed on her hand and pointed to her head, with her finger on the trigger. Through the entire time, she looked at a fixed point, so that facing the individuals would not turn her, too, into an individual. At the end of the six-hour performance, when the gallery owner announced that it was over, Marina left the condition of an object and walked towards the public, who immediately left the place. According to the artist, when she stopped being a puppet and became an individual, people no longer knew how to act in her presence.

*Rhythm 0* was then presented at the retrospective "The artist is present", which took place in 2010, at MoMA, in New York. On that occasion, the artist, together with the gallerist Sean Kelly, chose to exhibit photographs of the action and a table with the 72 objects available at the time. However, by her choice, these were not the original objects used in 1974. It was more important that the public could see the potential of each one of them in the presented action than to cover them with a fetish aura for having been used during the original action.



**Fig. 5.** Marina Abramović - *Rhythm O*. Original performance from 1974, as it was presented at “The artist is present” exhibition MoMA, New York, 2010

So, although she is a strong advocate for reperformance, Abramović believed that it would not be possible to re-enact that work, even with artists trained by her, given the emotional charge and violence involved in that action. In addition to holding a loaded gun pointed at herself, the artist claimed she was not a rape victim just because it was a performance attended by a large audience.

Thus, the most effective way to communicate to the public the extremes reached with the inclusion of certain objects in the action was to use photographs of moments in which the integrity of the body and the individual were compromised. Although Marina states that, in the absence of the possibility of reperformance, video works better than photos because it can “capture the time and energy of life”, there are no videos of this performance, only photographs, commissioned by the artist herself.

Together with photographs projected on the wall, the presence of the table with the arranged objects allowed the MoMA public to suddenly find itself involved in that event and to imagine for a moment what it would do if it were, on that day in 1974, in the Galleria Studio Morra in Naples.

Marina Abramović's early performances were recorded only in black and white photographs and descriptive texts. In this image we see a photograph of a specific moment of the performance "Rhythm o", when Abramović has her breasts exposed, still holding a rose. A man is standing in front of her, with one hand on her arm, and it is not possible to identify what action is about to unfold. Below this framed photograph is a listing of the objects used in the performance. To the left, in another frame, is the text in which Abramović presented the instructions for the performance.

In 1994, Marina Abramović selected and edited a series of photographs among the most representative of her work, one of which became part of the collection of the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 1998, also under the title "Rhythm o." MoMA also owns this work.

As we have seen, the artist is constantly involved in discussions about the commercialization of ephemeral works and is responsible for the term "reperformance", which includes both the reinterpretation of other artists' performance works and the presentation of their performances by her or other artists, duly prepared to do so at her institute. Both the image editing process and the reperformance promote the displacement of her work.

The point here is not to unmask how certain statements and principles of Marina Abramović contradict each other when it comes to the circulation of her works. What we wanted to expose is how attempts to displace their bodies or a subject into the medium of their work, attempts to archive and record performances, and the seek of making them accessible to the general public often result in controversy, for artists, gallerists, curators... There is no standard for dealing with these works, and ultimately the most that can and has been done is to always seek the best alternative available, in a given context, to make these works accessible to those who were not there at the time of their original presentation.

Throughout the course of my doctoral research on the subject, which has already lasted a few years, I could only have contact with the vast majority of the performances I researched through images and textual reports. I believe that this has not diminished the meaning or the pleasure of getting in touch with these artistic proposals.

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# Colour Reproductions for Modern Art. Venturi and the Print Exhibitions in Post-war Italy

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## **ABSTRACT**

In the spring of 1946, the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in Rome opened the exhibition "Mostra didattica di riproduzioni di pittura moderna", a display made by colour reproductions of modern paintings supported by the Ministry of Education and conceived by the museum direction under the guide of the art historian Lionello Venturi, who came back after the exile years during Fascism spent between France and the United States, where he published his crucial researches on Cézanne and the history of Impressionism.

On the background of the Postwar cultural climate, the initiative reflected a reference horizon that included it within a wide network of coeval events aimed at experimenting similar strategies of art narratives, thus consecrating the international arise of an exhibition paradigm, alongside the diffusion of Malraux's concept of "musée imaginaire".

Focusing on the investigation of Venturi's operation from such unprecedented historiographical perspective, this paper aims to explore the migration of new models of dissemination through images in a crucial moment for the international historicization of modern art. The growing calls for bringing people closer to art languages – successfully evoked in the slogan "art for everyone" – contributed to redesign the status of photo-reproduction, its forms and consumption practices. A revolution made possible through the material and symbolic features of colour.

## **KEYWORDS**

Art reproduction; Colour; Modern art; Travelling print exhibition; Lionello Venturi.

### **Context and protagonists**

In 1946 the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in Rome (GNAM) opened a colour print exhibition titled “Mostra didattica di riproduzioni di pittura moderna”, one of the first projects dedicated to the spread of European modern artistic culture in the Postwar Italy<sup>1</sup>. The climate was that of the Reconstruction, a background still marked by the suffering of the war and the occupation years but facing the future and crossed by great intellectual fervor, by the reopening of institutions, diplomatic relations and places of culture, including public and private art venues<sup>2</sup>.

The GNAM, the most important public museum dedicated to modern art in Italy, had reopened in December 1944 after dramatic years dedicated to an intense activity of defense and rescue of the works of art<sup>3</sup>. The reopening was accompanied by the decision to update the museum set-up and functions, the activity of the gallery according to modern criteria, with the desire to overcome the backwardness of the Italian artistic situation<sup>4</sup>. Its director Palma Bucarelli led the process by creating an eminent network of interlocutors. Among these, the most influential was Lionello Venturi, who took on the role of a mentor.

The art historian had returned to Italy from political exile in 1945 and resumed the teaching of art history by moving to the chair at the University of Rome<sup>5</sup>. Bucarelli promptly contacted him a few weeks after his arrival. A letter of March 1945, in which she asks for advice and support in the complex work of reorganizing the museum, gave rise to a long and fruitful collaboration that would have led, among the first and most experimental projects, to the print exhibition of modern painting<sup>6</sup>.

Venturi was indeed received with deference and great participation by the Italian cultural circles. The intellectual authority of the scholar went hand in hand with the moral one of the man who rejected Fascism. The art historian engaged in an intense dissemination activity, among the most progressive and incisive manifestations of the European culture of the time, thus contributing to the rebirth of the country. Through interviews, conferences, newspaper articles he devoted himself to the diffusion of topics such as the education to modern art, the role of artistic institutions and the

social function of museums, in line with a vision mindful of pragmatism and Deweyane pedagogical theories on the democratic vocation of art achieved during his stay in the United States<sup>7</sup>. These issues were welcomed by Bucarelli, who was inspired to imagine the GNAM to become a living institution, a place of openness, updating and education to modern art values. For them, in the name of an advanced museology conception, knowing how to shift the attention from the work of art to the man, the public was intended to be the great protagonist. A public not only of aficionados or insiders, nor mainly of students from art schools and academies – who nevertheless Bucarelli personally worked to involve<sup>8</sup>–, but the mass audience facing to the new democratic society: it was such enlarged public, above all, that the 1946 exhibition addressed. Evidence of this is the strong media battage orchestrated through press, of which the countless newspaper and magazine clippings kept in the GNAM’s archives are traces<sup>9</sup>.

### The exhibition

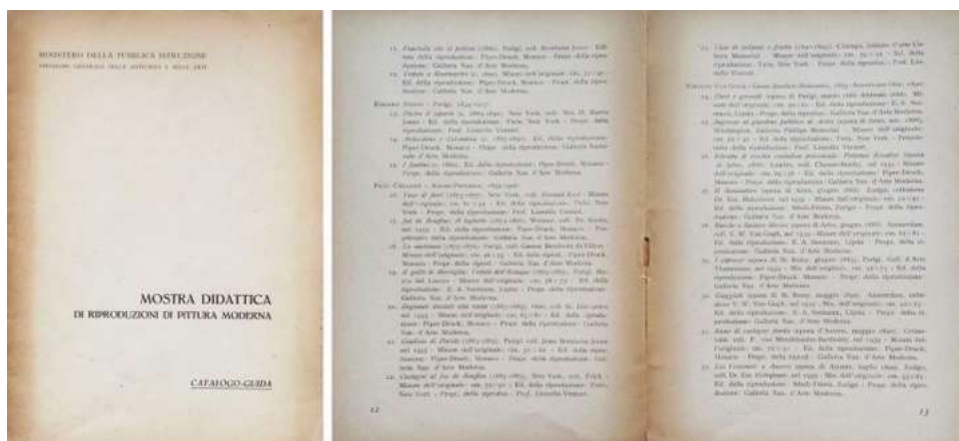


Fig. 1. “Mostra didattica di riproduzioni di pittura moderna”, exhibition catalogue

The “Mostra didattica di riproduzioni di pittura moderna” inaugurated on April 9, 1946. It was set up in the central hall of the GNAM and remained open about a month, every day from 10:00 to 18:00, with free admission<sup>10</sup>. It brought together 81 large-format colour reproductions of masterpieces by modern masters, from Manet to Picasso, and 5 original works loaned by

Lionello Venturi<sup>11</sup>, from whose collection also came part of the printed images.

At the exhibition closing, on May 8, the art historian held a lecture titled *The origins of contemporary painting*. Quoting his words, it investigated not so much the sources, which “are lost over the centuries”, but the historical origins of contemporary painting by isolating two crucial moments defined as revolutions: the crisis of impressionism (from 1880 to 1890) and the avant-garde (from 1905 to 1914). The conference was a great public success and a version of it was published in newspapers in the following weeks<sup>12</sup>.

The art reproductions on display, all of them in colour and in large format, were presented as follows: about half in facsimile were framed and set up on the walls, the others were arranged in special display cases, depending on the importance, the quality and the dimensions of the printed materials<sup>13</sup>. Reproductions were accompanied by captions, short biographical notes of the artists and, in some cases, also by commentaries on single works, as for those of Vincent van Gogh which were depicted by excerpts from his letters<sup>14</sup>.

**Fig. 2.** Frames from “Roma: alla Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna i capolavori della pittura straniera”, Notiziario Nuova LUCE / NL011, 1946, courtesy Archivio



LUCE

The exhibition was organized in economy of means. The living costs for the GNAM were only 27.000 lire, that is to say less than 10.000 dollars, if we rely on current monetary revaluation tables<sup>15</sup>. This can be deduced from the documents preserved up to now, which unfortunately are few, and it is

not only true about administrative and organisational materials or correspondence, since the visual documentation is practically absent.

A significant exception is represented by a short video taken from a newsreel of the time that have been traced in the archives of the Istituto LUCE<sup>16</sup>. The frames give us an idea of the environment, the set-up solutions, the relationship between the reproduced artworks and the visitors. Regrettably, the key element of the project is missing. It is colour, a feature on which instead the reviews widely insisted by speaking of “admirable”, “perfect reproductions” made with “special graphic processes” by the best foreign companies<sup>17</sup>.

In parallel, by crossing press and archival informations with the catalogue-guide<sup>18</sup>, it is possible to get a more precise idea of the exhibition contents, choices and occurrences. As already mentioned, part of the reproductions were loaned by Venturi: it was essentially one-third of the framed facsimile, while the other two-thirds came directly from the GNAM’s collections<sup>19</sup>. Their publishers were international: the German Piper and the American Twin were the most frequent, followed by the Swiss Stehli and the Parisians Braun and Quatre Chemins<sup>20</sup>. The reviews agreed that the American prints – all from Venturi’s own archive – appear clearly superior, technically enviable<sup>21</sup>.

About the artworks, most of them were in the hands of private collectors or dealers from Europe and the United States, whereas a smaller percentage belonged to public collections, especially American museums, MoMA in the lead<sup>22</sup>. The artists represented were 20 for 81 reproductions. The most reproduced were Matisse with 13 paintings, Picasso with 10, Bonnard and Van Gogh with 9 each and finally Cézanne with 8. The other names were, in order of catalogue, Manet, Monet, Pissarro, Sisley, Renoir, Degas, Gauguin, Seurat, Dufy, Derain, Braque, Rouault, Chagall, Mondrian, Miro<sup>23</sup>.



**Fig. 3.** One of the reproductions on display: Edgar Degas, *Jockeys*, Piper-Druck no. 39, courtesy GNAM

The exhibition presented a synthesis of modern art tendencies respondent to the in the course of canonization scheme Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Avant-garde. If the Impressionists counted on about 15 reproductions dedicated and the Post-Impressionists, starting from Cézanne, about 20, the leading role was entrusted by the exponents of the Avant-garde, including the artists of the École de Paris, with more than half of the occurrences. But going beyond these arbitrary definitions, it should be considered the dating of the artworks for decades, which is a really interesting matter. In fact, despite the massive preponderance of artists from the Avant-garde ranks, it wasn't the first and second decades of 20th century to rule it, but the '40s, or rather the present, represented by almost half of the total reproductions. The other decade to have a weight was the '80s, that of

the crisis of Impressionism, with a quarter of the pieces, while the years from 1900 to 1930 showed irrelevant numbers<sup>24</sup>.

Matisse paintings, for instance, like *Odalisque. Harmonie bleu*, 1937 or the seated women of the early '40s, were almost entirely recent<sup>25</sup> and so those of Picasso, who was exclusively represented by female portraits and still lifes of the biennium 1941-42: 10 reproductions of pieces from parisian leading galleries of the war years, Jeanne Boucher and Louise Leiris, that were particularly attentive to the world of art publishing and print images<sup>26</sup>.

From a historical point of view, there was not a rigorous proposal behind the choices. The reproductions on display didn't provide an exhaustive picture of the developments of modern painting. The gaps appeared numerous and so the asymmetries, with a sort of polarization around the great starting premises – the pioneers of modernity – and some very recent events.

After all, the selection of the works probably depended, alongside Venturi's choices, on contingent reasons dictated by the not guaranteed adequate availability of printed reproductions. At the same time, it is correct to suppose that the organizers' intentions were not aimed at completeness, or to give an exhaustive and rigorous panorama of modern art, but rather to make public familiarize with its expressions.

The reviews highlighted this aspect by welcoming the exhibition<sup>27</sup>. There was no lack of criticism by the most conservative observers, who expressed a skepticism largely related to the opportunity of using photomechanical reproductions instead of originals, with resulting accusations of demagogy and populism<sup>28</sup>, but except for these voices the consensus was practically unanimous. The exhibition aroused great interest and was hailed as a success, so much to be repeated, after the closure, in other Italian cities.





**Fig. 4.** The exhibition's travelling edition in Cagliari, 1948, installation view, courtesy Archivio Bioiconografico GNAM

The “Mostra didattica di riproduzioni di pittura moderna” thus became a travelling exhibition circulating throughout Italy to symbolically restitch the country after the wounds of the war. The show touched the big cities but also and especially the smaller centers, with pedagogical dedication, by giving shape to a non-stop tour of 3 years accompanied by many events: guided tours, conferences, debates, concerts<sup>29</sup>. And the audience didn't fail to answer in large numbers. Documentary reports prove a large attendance: in a peripheral city like Cagliari, for instance, there were more than 14.000 visitors and 2.000 catalogues sold in only 3 weeks of opening<sup>30</sup>.

The success of the initiative led the GNAM to organize a permanent educational structure producing travelling vocation projects. The turning point took place in 1949, with the starting of an avant-garde activity that would become a school for decades to come<sup>31</sup>.

In 1950 the UNESCO magazine *Museum* published a contribution titled “Circulating and educational exhibitions in Italian museums” by Giulio Carlo Argan, where the art historian – whose interest for such topics would in parallel find a synthesis in the translation of Herbert Read’s *Education through art* for the Italian public<sup>32</sup> – presented the most recent experiences and made a first assessment<sup>33</sup>.

### **Networks and models**

That of 1946 represented a pioneering experience being the first travelling print exhibition in Italy. The press did not fail to note this unprecedented aspect when speaking of a “new genre” exhibition<sup>34</sup>. It was in fact an unknown concept, introduced for the first time by Lionello Venturi himself few months earlier in an article of September 1945 where he cited the example of the traveling exhibitions held in the United States, which – he argued – “were helping to solve the problematic relationship between public and modern artists”<sup>35</sup>.

After all, among the possible models of the Italian project, the American one certainly had a weight. Suffice it to recall the experience of the New York Museum of Modern Art, with its extraordinary influence on the construction of an international narrative of modern art. Since the early 1930s, MoMA had started designing print exhibitions and inaugurated a special department dedicated to circulating shows that made of them a leading sector by launching a long and successful series of projects<sup>36</sup>, starting from “A brief survey of modern painting” (1934), strictly in colour<sup>37</sup>.

MoMA was also publisher of art reproductions made with advanced photomechanical processes and put on sale<sup>38</sup>. It wasn’t something unusual for the time, but a widespread practice shared by the major international museums, especially in France, birthplace not only of the so-called pioneers of modern art but also of a glorious print publishing tradition related to the reproduction of works of art with a strong role of the institutions. In 1940, on the occasion of the Triennale International Exhibition in Milan, in Italy, for its national section France chose to present a display of modern art

masterpieces colour prints released in facsimile format by the Chalcography of the Louvre<sup>39</sup>.

Similar experiences led the progressive spread of such exhibition trend into the Postwar years. To give just an example, in 1947 the Museu de Arte de São Paulo inaugurated with a print exhibition. It was the first of a series of educational projects – having different subjects and graphics – conceived under the guide of the museum director, Pietro Maria Bardi, who had arrived to Brazil from Italy in the October of the previous year, a few months after the opening of the Venturi exhibition, which he certainly had occasion to visit<sup>40</sup>.

Aggregator of these practices was a key player of the Postwar cultural's dynamics, UNESCO, that since the early years of its foundation worked on the creation of an archive of colour photomechanical prints of world's chefs-d'oeuvre<sup>41</sup> – sort of ideal museum – to promote, in turn, shows of reproductions such as the famous “From Impressionism till today”, held in Paris in 1949<sup>42</sup>. A few years later, in 1953, UNESCO would publish the *Manual of travelling exhibitions* for the use by all artistic institutions of the world<sup>43</sup>, thus definitively institutionalizing this exhibition paradigm of increasing popularity recognized as a powerful tool of cultural dissemination, education and soft power propaganda<sup>44</sup>.

### **The centrality of colour**

These events can be read as an expression of the growing interest for reproduced images and facsimile. UNESCO counted on an acquired understanding of the value of art reproduction in relation to the expansion of visual culture, its potential of diffusion in the game of migration among the media. And it openly identified the centrality of colour in the process: “we are returning to a civilization full of colour”, was one of the slogans of its project<sup>45</sup>.

For the latter, since 1947 the organisation set up a special committee of experts, the so called “Colour Commission”, which included, among others, Jean Cassou, director of the Museum of Modern Art in Paris, René d'Harnoncourt, director of the MoMA, and Lionello Venturi<sup>46</sup>. In 1952 the

Italian art historian signed the introduction to the second edition of the *Catalogue of colour reproductions of painting* dedicated to modern art by highlighting not only the continuous technical improvements of photomechanical colour reproduction – the quality of the images available on the market, their fidelity to the originals – but the value of colour, that was presented as “the only way to entirely return the artwork”<sup>47</sup>.

The introduction of colour photographic film in the second half of the '30s had in fact made possible for the first time direct shooting in color (or rather without the mediation of filters, as was previously the case, for instance, of the trichromatic process), thus obtaining at last natural intensity and chromatic resolutions<sup>48</sup>. In addition, it offered many advantages, particularly the absence of grain allowing high enlargements without losing detail, even during the photomechanical translation of the images. The quality, the fidelity ensured by colour film promised to give an unprecedented answer to the crucial issue of the reproduction of works of art, which until then to the imbalances and saturation of the three-colour process had preferred the reassuring black and white strictness tending, by definition, to enhance plastic and linear values. This subverted the problem of color by presenting it as a great modern possibility, a form of realism. The progressive achievements in the application to different printing processes did the rest by experimenting unprecedented ways of representing art able to modify the very identity of reproduction through the materiality of the images, and consequently perception and consumption practices.

The communicative potential of colour played a crucial role in popularization, in bringing the public – a more and more wide public – closer to art. And art, through reproduction, gained a new place in society. The images reproduced were preparing to become an important consumption object in the rising cultural industry of mass society, in parallel to the increasing expansion of the art publishing sector, its products and market. In this regard, it should be emphasized that there was a sort of natural mutual identification between colour and the modern languages, as also noticed in the debate<sup>49</sup>. Briefly, modern art was the uncontested protagonist of this process, in the name of a common modernist utopia. And it remains to be

asked how much, and how, colour influenced the development of a canon of modern art in a period considered a pivotal historiographical laboratory.

Returning to the “Mostra didattica di riproduzioni di pittura moderna”, it could be interesting to mention a review focusing on the importance of photomechanical processes’ technical issues in relation to the perceptual aspects of printed images and, finally, to the relationship between reproductions and public. The author, Gino Visentini, wrote: “in front of some facsimiles of Cézanne, I must say, I experienced the same optical and tactile sensations that the thickness and the texture of the painting had raised me many years ago at the Louvre. In front of the reproductions of Van Gogh, one can count the dense and minute brushstrokes and feel where the material is greasy or glazed and inflated by solvent and where it is dry. [...] In front of the three Degas one feels the velvet and soft powder of the pastel under the fingertips. Of those three reproductions I also own one, and I assure you that sometimes I wonder if there really is a difference with the original”<sup>50</sup>. It’s a crucial point in understanding the event, since it considers the topic of reproduction fruition, its value as an experience.

It would suffice to think of the Italy of 1946, the still present rubble of bombings, their greyness emblem of the wounds of war and 20 years of Fascist dictatorship. Let’s imagine the significance of an exhibition of color reproductions of the great works of the European modernity for a wide audience, for everyone, also as an element of civil participation in a country undergoing reconstruction<sup>51</sup>. After the ruins, the light, the colours, the pleasure of painting: the joie de vivre of the Impressionists – with the suggestions recalling the coeval French cinema, such as that of Jean Renoir, son of the painter – and besides the formal experimentations of the contemporary masters. A huge symbolic charge, which disrupted perception refounding modernity in chromatic memory, defining its figurative sources looking at the painting of the second half of the 19th century and not at the ancients, as in the past. The one conveyed by reproductions wanted to be a collective imagination metaphor of freedom, of belonging to a common European culture.

As mentioned, the reviews confirmed the euphoria of the public, its participation, and spoke of a popular initiative. No different, however, were the intellectual expectations evoked in contemporary artists by the confrontation with the visual documents of the great modern painting. Years later, the young Piero Dorazio will remember: “In 1946 Lionello Venturi came back to Italy and set up at the Galleria d’Arte Moderna an exhibition of colour reproductions of the most representative works of the century, from the Impressionists to Chagall. It was the elixir for modern art in Italy because it was visited and discussed by all artists, from Palermo to Milan, and presented works and plastic problems of which no one had ever known the existence”<sup>52</sup>.

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Palma Bucarelli's Archive, Central State Archive, Rome

#### Endnotes

1. The exhibition is widely cited in art historical literature. Among the most pertinent studies are those dedicated to museology and the educational activity of GNAM, which, however, have never addressed a critic reconstruction of the event. See, in particular, Laura Fanti, "La didattica alla GNAM negli anni di Palma Bucarelli," *Nuova museologia* 15 (November 2006): 16-20; Rita Camerlingo, "Non ho mai lavorato per gli artisti o per i critici, ma solo per il pubblico: Storia della didattica in Galleria (1945-1975)," in *Palma Bucarelli. Il museo come avanguardia*, ed. Mariastella Margozzi (Milan: Electa: 2009), 64-71; Stefano Marson, "Su alcuni musei d'arte moderna in Italia aperti e rinnovati," in Maria Cecilia Mazzi, *Musei anni '50: spazio, forma, funzione* (Florence: Edifir, 2009), 157-79.
2. On the Roman art scene see the coeval chronicles: Marcello Venturoli, *Interviste di frodo* (Rome: Sandron, 1945); Libero De Libero, *Roma 1935* (Rome: Edizioni della Cometa, 1981); Palma Bucarelli, *Cronache indipendenti. Arte a Roma fra 1945 e 1946*, ed. Luigi Cantatore (Rome: De Luca, 2010).
3. The related documentation is held in the GNAM's Historical Archive (GNAM-HA), Depositi temporanei fuori sede per cause belliche, Ricoveri, Protezione antiaerea 1932-1952. See also Palma Bucarelli, "Opere d'arte alla macchia," *Mercurio*, December 1944, 148-151.
4. See Margozzi, *Palma Bucarelli*.
5. See Laura Iamurri, "Lionello Venturi in esilio," *Ricerche di storia dell'arte* 67 (1999): 59-68; Stefano Valeri, "Lionello Venturi antifascista 'pericoloso' durante l'esilio (1931- 1945)," *Storia dell'arte* 101 (2002): 15-27.
6. Palma Bucarelli to Lionello Venturi, March 1, 1945, published in Bucarelli, *Cronache indipendenti*. 9. On their partnership see also Ercole Maselli to Palma Bucarelli, May 9, 1946, Central State Archive, Rome, Palma Bucarelli's Archive, folder 7.
7. See, for instance, Lionello Venturi, "Il museo-scuola," *La Nuova Europa*, September 9, 1945, 7.
8. See GNAM-HA, folder 1, file 7 "Attività didattica. Mostre 1946".



9. The press review gathered about 129 articles. See GNAM's Bio-Iconographic Archive (GNAM-BIA), "Attività didattica", folder 51.
10. As indicated in the Press release, GNAM-HA, folder 1, file 7 "Attività didattica. Mostre 1946".
11. The original pieces were a watercolor by Cézanne, one by the northamerican artist John Marin, a painting by Chagall (*Abraham*, 1931) and two by Rouault (*Bust of a woman* and *Sea of Galilee*, 1939).
12. See Lionello Venturi, "Le origini della pittura contemporanea," *L'Indipendente*, May 21, 1946.
13. The quotation above is taken from the article. In this paper, all the translations from Italian are by the author.
14. See Palma Bucarelli, "Le manifestazioni didattiche nella Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna," *Bollettino d'arte* 2 (April-June 1952): 185-189.
15. See GNAM-HA, folder 1, file 7 "Attività didattica. Mostre 1946"; Palma Bucarelli to the Ministry of Education, April 10, 1946.
16. "Roma: alla Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna i capolavori della pittura straniera", from *Notiziario Nuova LUCE / NLo11*, 1946, Istituto LUCE's Historical Archive, Rome.
17. See, in particular, Fortunato Bellonzi, "Mostra di riproduzioni artistiche alla Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna," *Domenica*, April 14, 1946; Guglielmo Peirce, "Mostra didattica di arte moderna," *L'Unità*, April 14, 1946; Gino Visentini, "Alla Galleria d'Arte Moderna: pitture francesi riprodotte," *Fiera Letteraria*, April 25, 1945.
18. See the list of the pieces on display in GNAM-HA, folder 1, file 7 "Attività didattica. Mostre 1946". It corresponds with the one in the catalogue-guide, *Mostra didattica di riproduzioni di pittura moderna: catalogo-guida* (Rome: Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, 1948), that was published years later, on the occasion of the exhibition travelling edition, with an introduction by Corrado Maltese.
19. A small group of reproductions from GNAM's collections on display during the exhibition has been found in the museum storages: Alfred Sisley, *Les bords du Loing à Moret* (inventory no. 4288); Vincent van Gogh, *Portrait of an old farmer* (inventory no. 4289); André Derain, *Landscape* (inventory no. 4290); Edgar Degas, *Jockeys* (inventory no. 4296).
20. Alongside Seemann (Leipzig) and Graphic Society (New York). See *Mostra didattica*.
21. See, for instance, Bellonzi, "Mostra di riproduzioni"; N.O., "Fotografie di quadri moderni," *Espresso*, April 23, 1946.
22. See *Mostra didattica*.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. With the exception of *The blue window*, 1913, from MoMA's collections.
26. Except for *Seated woman*, 1941 and *Woman with a hat*, 1942, from the painter's collection, and the 1941 destroyed *Still life*. On Jeanne Boucher and Louise Leiris galleries during the war years see *L'art en guerre. France 1938-1947* (Paris: Paris-Musées, 2012): 161-82, 353, 408-9.
27. See the press review in GNAM-BIA, "Attività didattica", folder 51.
28. For a summary, see Bucarelli's answers published in *Fiera Letteraria*, May 2, 1946 and the later testimony Bucarelli, "Le manifestazioni didattiche".
29. L'aquila, July 1946; Naples, August-September 1946; Bari, October 1946; Cosenza, November 1946; Reggio Calabria, December 1946; Catania, February 1947; Palermo, April 1947; Messina, July 1947; Cagliari, January 1948; Sassari, February 1948; Genoa, April 1948; Turin, May-June 1948; Milan, July 1948; Mantua, November 1948; Verona, December 1948-January 1949. For the related documentation see GNAM-HA, folder 1, file 7 "Attività didattica. Mostre 1946"; for press review and public program materials see GNAM-BIA, "Attività didattica", folder 51. After the first tournée, a second one was undertaken towards smaller cities from 1950. The few documents on the subject do not allow a reconstruction.

30. See GNAM-BIA, "Attività didattica", folder 51, "Relazione sulle edizioni di Cagliari e Sassari della Mostra didattica di pittura francese moderna".
31. See Bucarelli's testimony: Bucarelli, "Le manifestazioni didattiche" and Palma Bucarelli, "Funzione didattica del museo d'arte moderna," in *Il museo come esperienza sociale*, ed. Pietro Romanelli (Rome: De Luca, 1972): 85-90.
32. Herbert Read, *Educare con l'arte*, trans. Giulio Carlo Argan (Milan: Edizioni di Comunità, 1954).
33. Giulio Carlo Argan, "Expositions itinérantes et éducatives dans les musées d'Italie," *Museum* 4, no. 3 (1950): 3.
34. Ercole Maselli, "Una mostra (utilissima) di nuovo genere," *Avanti!*, May 5, 1946.
35. Venturi, "Il museo-scuola".
36. See "Circulating exhibitions," *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 7, no. 5 (September 1940): 2-14.
37. Alfred H. Barr, ed., *A brief survey of modern painting* (New York: MoMA, 1934).
38. See "Museum color reproductions on view" in the press release no. 45306-10 "New Technique of Multiple Circulating Exhibitions on Display at the Museum of Modern Art", March 6, 1935, New York, MoMA's Administrative Records and Papers Archive.
39. See *VII Triennale di Milano. Guida* (Milan: SAME, 1941).
40. In the same years, exhibitions of art reproductions were staged by the Art Section of the Biblioteca Municipal de São Paulo too. See Helouise Costa, "Educating About the Modern: Between the Library and the Museum," in *MAM 70: 1948-2018* (São Paulo: Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, 2018): 257-63.
41. See "Art treasures to be put within reach of all," *UNESCO Courier* 1, no. 8 (September 1948): 6. The first archive's catalogue was published in 1949. See *Catalogue of colour reproductions of paintings from 1860 to 1949* (Paris: UNESCO, 1949).
42. See the catalogue *UNESCO Travelling Print Exhibition: From Impressionism Till Today* (Paris: UNESCO, 1949), with an introduction by René Huyghe. See also the article "Colour reproduction: UNESCO's first travelling exhibition," *UNESCO Courier* 2, no. 7 (August 1949): 12.
43. Elodie Courter Osborn, *Manual of travelling exhibitions* (UNESCO, 1953).
44. On the project and the UNESCO visual policies see Rachel E. Perry, "Immutable Mobiles: UNESCO's Archives of Colour Reproductions," *The Art Bulletin* 99, no. 2 (August 2017): 166-85.
45. See Jean Leymarie, "Introduction," in *Catalogue of colour reproductions of paintings from 1860 to 1955* (Paris: UNESCO, 1955): 12-16.
46. Venturi's activity for UNESCO is documented in his archive at Sapienza University in Rome. For the writings see folder 152, dossier 16; for the correspondence, folder 296, dossier 11; for other documents, like reports, folder 294, dossier 13.
47. See Lionello Venturi, "Introduction," in *Catalogue of colour reproductions of paintings from 1860 to 1952* (Paris: UNESCO, 1952): 11-14.
48. For an overview on the colour reproduction processes see the standard contribution by Antony Hamber, "Communicating colour: advances in reprographic technology 1840-1967," *Visual Resources* 15, no. 3 (1990): 355-370.
49. See, for instance, the interesting article by Jean Leymarie, "Masterpieces you can now buy," *UNESCO Courier* 8, no. 7 (1955): 21-26.
50. Visentini, "Alla Galleria".
51. In the same years, a parallel rethoric was used for the promotion of contemporary Italian art abroad. See Raffaele Bedarida, "Operation Renaissance: Italian Art at MoMA 1940-1949," *Oxford Journal* 35, no. 2 (June 2012): 147-69.
52. Piero Dorazio, *La fantasia dell'arte nella vita moderna* (Rome: Polveroni e Quinti, 1955), 142-43.

# Titian and the Circulation of the Oil Painting on Stone: Beyond Sebastiano del Piombo's Slate Painting Technique

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper analyzes the slate oil painting *Ecce Homo* and the marble oil painting *Mater Dolorosa* (both in the Museo del Prado, Figs. 3 and 4) that Titian created for the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V in 1547 and 1555, respectively, examining the historical role of Titian's pendants in the spread of the new medium of oil on stone in Europe during the late 16th century. In addition to mural paintings, the technique of painting directly on stone slabs cut flat and thin for tableaux is said to have been newly developed by Sebastiano del Piombo, who was active in Rome around 1530. Why did Titian choose to use Sebastiano's slate oil technique for *Ecce Homo* instead of the more common wood panel and canvas? And why did he choose marble, an even more unusual medium, instead of slate for the *Mater Dolorosa* eight years later? In this article, I will examine the significance of stone slab painting in the Renaissance, compare the techniques Titian used in his pendants with those of his contemporaries, and discuss the historical significance of the two works in the diffusion of the new medium of oil on stone slab painting.

## **KEYWORDS**

Oil on Slate Painting; Oil on Marble Painting; Titian; Sebastiano del Piombo; Habsburg Court.

### **Slate Oil Painting by Sebastiano del Piombo and *Ecce Homo* by Titian**

The pioneer of the technique of oil painting on thin stone slabs (polished until they become flat) is Sebastiano del Piombo who experimented with this technique around 1530<sup>1</sup>. Although he had already gained experience in oil painting murals in churches such as San Pietro in Montorio in Rome, it is said that his exploration of oil painting on stone slabs was directly motivated by the Sack of Rome in 1527<sup>2</sup>. Shocked by the destruction of so many works of art, he searched for a more durable support for paintings than wood or canvas and ended up with stone slabs<sup>3</sup>. In 1530, Vittore Soranzo, who was like Sebastiano at the service of Pope Clement VII, sent the following letter to the humanist Pietro Bembo, informing him of the technique of oil on stone slabs developed by Sebastiano:

You should know that our Sebastiano Veneziano has found the secret to using the most beautiful oil pigments to paint on marble, which will make painting nothing less than eternal. As soon as the colors are dried, they are united to the marble in such a way that they are almost petrified; he has tested it in every way, and it is durable. He made an image of Christ and showed it to Our Lord<sup>4</sup>.

Soranzo wrote that Sebastiano had developed the "secret" of marble oil painting: in fact, it was not marble, but thinly cut slate that the artist later used to create portraits of popes and tragic religious paintings of the Passion of Christ. Marble, which was widely used for sculpture and architecture (especially Carrara white marble) was a high-grade stone suitable for works of art, and would have made an excellent support for paintings for those painters who were aware of the "paragone" with sculptural art. However, as Giorgio Vasari later noted in his "Introduction to the Three Arts of Designs" in his *Lives* (1568), slate from the Lavagna coast near Genoa was generally considered the ideal support for oil paintings on stone slabs at the time<sup>5</sup>. Slate, which is made of mudstone or shale that undergoes consolidation and cleaves into thin sheets, has excellent waterproofing properties, so it is still used today as a building material for roofs and floors. During the Renaissance, slate was also often used for oil jars. The slate's fine stone

composition allowed it to absorb pigments well, with relatively little risk of flaking, and its cleavage characteristics made it suitable to be cut into tableau-shaped pieces and be polished flat. According to Vasari, Renaissance painters also experimented with other fine-grained stones such as marble, serpentine, and porphyry, but the less shiny and moderately dry stones such as slate were better suited for adhering oil pigments<sup>6</sup>. Sebastiano was probably attracted by these practical advantages to begin exploring the technique of oil painting on slate instead of marble.

The rough texture of black slate from Lavagna reflected light diffusely, enabling a new style of pictorial expression with a unique dull black background<sup>7</sup>. It was an ideal support for Sebastiano, who often painted portraits against a black background. The study for a head (c. 1531) in the Museo Capodimonte, Naples, is an example of Sebastiano's use of slate as an expressive medium, a technique that was firmly established from the beginning. The head of Pope Clement VII emerges from the darkness, with the frontal part illuminated and deep shading around the sunken eyes and from the right side of the head to the neck. The depth of the shading and the minute changes in the gradation show that the artist's brush was more careful and meticulous than when he was working on the canvas. The deep wrinkles superimposed on the dark shadows around the eyes seem to emphasize the pope's exhaustion and sense of helplessness in the face of the Sack of Rome. In the finished work in the Getty Museum (Fig. 1), the artist did not pursue the same thorough shading as in the study, but he beautifully realized the bright crimson and furry texture of the pope's zucchetto and mozzetta instead. The natural drooping of the white alb and the detailed decoration of the ring and red chair were also carefully rendered, showing that the artist's expressive ability was greatly deepened from the oil on canvas from the Capodimonte Museum (1526), depicting the same subject.



**Fig. 1.** Sebastiano del Piombo, *Portrait of Clement VII* (c. 1531); Getty Museum, Los Angeles. Oil on Slate, 105.4 x 87.6 cm.

Sebastiano preferred slate oil paintings, which lend themselves to shading and miniature expression, even for tragic subjects related to the Passion of the Christ. In the *Christ Bearing the Cross* (1532-35) from the Museo del

Prado, Sebastiano used the rough texture of black slate to create a detailed depiction of Christ walking alone in the darkness, his face contorted as he struggles with the weight of the cross. The light hitting the front of Christ's head, the gradation of shading on the left side of the head, and the wood tones of the cross show that the expression practiced in the portrait of the Pope was effectively transferred to religious paintings as well. Sebastiano created several variation paintings of the *Christ Bearing the Cross* in oil on slate, but as he progressed into later years, the backgrounds became more complex and varied. Instead of applying a uniform undercoat to the black slate, he set up a light source and painted gradations of light and shade on the slate<sup>8</sup>. In the *Christ Bearing the Cross* (c. 1535-40, Fig. 2), in the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, Christ's anguish is rendered more naturally by the light surrounding Him and by the somewhat rougher yet more vigorous brushwork.



**Fig. 2.** Sebastiano del Piombo, *Christ Bearing the Cross* (c. 1535-40); Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest. Oil on Slate, 157 x 118 cm.





**Fig. 3.** Titian, *Ecce Homo* (1547); Museo del Prado. Oil on Slate, 69 x 56 cm.

Sebastiano was known for his generosity in teaching the technique of slate oil painting to the artists around him, and many of them, including Francesco Salviati, followed his examples in the 1540s. Although there is no record of it, Titian, who painted *Ecce Homo* in slate oil in 1547 in the Prado Museum (Fig.



3), probably learned the technique from his old acquaintance Sebastiano when he visited Rome between 1545-46. Vasari recalled that during his stay in Rome, he had presented *Ecce Homo* to Pope Paul III, but had been severely criticized by the Roman artists, which may have motivated him to create the Prado version:

And after Titian had rested for several days, he was given quarters in the Belvedere so that he could set his hand once again to doing a full-length portrait of Pope Paul along with those of Cardinal Farnese and Duke Ottavio, all admirably executed to the great satisfaction of those lords, who persuaded Titian to paint, as a gift for the pope, a half-length picture of Christ in the form of an *Ecce Homo*, but this work, either because it suffered in comparison to the works of Michelangelo, Raphael, or Caravaggio or for some other reason, did not seem to other painters (although it was certainly a good painting) to possess the excellence typical of many of his other works, especially the portraits<sup>9</sup>.

The *Ecce Homo* presented to Paul III at this time is not believed to be extant, so we cannot be certain what kind of work it was. Given that there is no specific reference to the support, it is assumed that it was an ordinary oil on canvas. Being aware of the unfavorable publicity for the Roman version of *Ecce Homo*, however, Titian may have sought revenge for the unfair publicity by creating another work on the same subject for Emperor Charles VI<sup>10</sup>. In doing so, in addition to the novelty of the support, he was attracted to the deep shadows developed by Sebastiano for which he decided to re-paint *Ecce Homo* in slate oil. Like Sebastiano's later works, *Ecce Homo* in the Museo del Prado depicts Christ with a light source in his front and the darkness of the background weighing down his shoulders. Interestingly, the brown lines on Christ's right shoulder, which represent the marks of a whipping wound, seem to blend into the darkness of the background. Also, on the left breast and right neck, blood dripping from the head covered with a crown of thorns is clearly but casually depicted. As Pietro Aretino commented, the artist did not pursue the external effect of painfully expressing Christ's wounds in this

work, but rather, he infused the entire painting with an atmosphere of resignation, so that the viewer's attention would be focused on the somber expression of Christ's face<sup>11</sup>. This is precisely the kind of expression that Sebastiano pursued in his slate oil paintings and, with this work, Titian became a faithful successor of Sebastiano<sup>12</sup>.

When Titian left for Augsburg at the invitation of Charles V in December 1547, he presented Aretino with a copy of *Ecce Homo* and brought the original slate oil painting to the emperor himself. The masterpiece, an oil on an usual support, was immediately well received at the Habsburg court, prompting orders for copies from the emperor's chief advisors, including Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle<sup>13</sup>. Thus, Titian's *Ecce Homo* is historically recognized as an example of how the new medium of slate oil painting, which had been stayed around Sebastiano in Rome, was brought across the Alps, and made popular on an European scale.

#### **Diversification of Oil on Stone and Titian's Marble Oil Painting *Mater Dolorosa***

Sebastiano died of illness in Rome in 1547, and the slate oil paintings he initiated began to diversify when he was still alive or shortly after his death. For example, *David and Goliath* by Daniele da Volterra (around 1550 now in the Louvre), is a rare example of oil painting on both sides of a slate panel. As is well known, during the Renaissance, there was a great deal of debate in Italy about the superiority between painting and sculpture (*paragone*). Those who argued for the superiority of sculpture over painting claimed that sculpture could be viewed from various angles and in three dimensions, and that its solid stone material made it durable and suitable for representing human figures with a sense of substance<sup>14</sup>. In the letter by Vittore Soranzo quoted above, the emphasis on the eternity and durability of marble paintings reflected not only the fresh memory of the Sack of Rome, but also such Renaissance "*paragone*" discussions. Daniele da Volterra's double-sided slate oil painting is an example of the attempt to challenge sculptural art from the viewpoint of three-dimensionality. The David attacking Goliath is

flipped left and right on both sides, each with its thorax and abdomen and back facing forward in opposite directions. Thus, by switching back and forth between the front and back, the viewer can grasp the scene of the fierce battle in three dimensions. While double-sided canvas paintings were also created during the same period, as for instance Bronzino's *Nano Morgante* (Palazzo Pitti, Florence, 1552), which was intended to be three-dimensional, Daniele da Volterra used the slate stone material to ensure the solidity of the work and the realism of the figures, which means he was certainly aware of the rivalry with sculptural art. Thus, from the period that preceded and followed Sebastiano's death, the practice of attempting to create stone slab oil paintings, out of a different interest than his exploration of shading, began to emerge in various parts of Italy.



**Fig. 4** Titian, *Mater Dolorosa* (1555); Museo del Prado. Oil on Marble, 68 x 53 cm.

Titian's 1555 marble oil painting *Mater Dolorosa* (Fig. 4) is another example of the diversification of oil on stone slabs that was occurring. In 1553, as a pendant to the slate oil painting *Ecce Homo*, he proposed to Charles V an oil on panel painting, *Mater Dolorosa* (Museo del Prado), which he completed the following year<sup>15</sup>. However, upon receiving the oil on panel, the emperor, through his ambassador to Venice Francisco de Vargas, ordered the artist to create a stone slab painting of the same subject, so that it would be a suitable pendant to the *Ecce Homo*. There is no record of whether the emperor specified the material for the support, but according to a letter from the ambassador to the emperor in March 1555, Titian replied that it would be difficult to find a suitable stone<sup>16</sup>. The stone was eventually obtained in the same month, although it was not slate, as in the *Ecce Homo*, but white marble, commonly known as "imperial marble," which was probably quarried from a pedestal in an ancient Roman residence<sup>17</sup>.

The reason why Titian or Charles V chose white marble as a support in this case is the subject of much speculation. First, there are few, if any, examples of oil marble paintings from the same period, and the possibility that these works may have been the inspiration for the artist's choice is worth considering. For example, *Portrait of Banker Bindo Altoviti* (Fig. 5) in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, is a marble oil painting that has recently been attributed to Girolamo da Carpi rather than Francesco Salviati, and it was executed around 1550-53<sup>18</sup>. The background is entirely painted black, and the lighting and composition of the work is well calculated to illuminate the dignified face of the banker, who was renowned for his artistic patronage. Girolamo, shortly after his return to Ferrara from Rome, was intent on applying to marble the same style of portrayal of the figure in Sebastiano's slate oil paintings. The green curtains in the background and the gloss of the red cushions are highlighted by the glossy surface of the marble, but the artist's brushwork is restrained throughout, perhaps wary of the slippery nature of the surface, which is particularly evident in the depiction of the banker's furs. However, in contrast with Girolamo, Titian's marble oil painting *Mater Dolorosa* relies on a brisk brushstroke, and considering the stylistic differences between the two works, it seems likely that Titian was

working from the beginning to establish his own style of painting, independent of any previous examples on marble.



**Fig. 5.** Girolamo da Carpi, *Portrait of Banker Bindo Altoviti* (c. 1550-53), Private Collection. Oil on Marble, 88 x 73 cm.

In the oil on panel painting of the same subject completed the previous year, Titian depicted the Virgin with her hands clasped tightly, staring sternly into

the void, and holding still in grief over the loss of Christ, full of a sense of tension. In contrast, the Virgin in the marble oil painting seems to express the motherhood of a living woman who is not shy about expressing her raw emotions, with tears streaming down her cheeks and her whole body weakened by grief over the loss of her beloved child. It has been speculated that this new marble version of the Madonna with open arms may have been inspired by drawings of Netherlandish painters or Greek icons sent by Charles V<sup>19</sup>. However, even if Charles V gave specific instructions regarding the iconography, the receptive expression of the Virgin with open hands, as if about to welcome the suffering Christ of the pendant *Ecce Homo*, is supported by the natural touch of the brush, which is rough and less forceful, obtained by the moderate gliding of the brush on the marble surface. It is also interesting to note that the blue mantle of the Virgin in lapis lazuli, so impressive in the previous oil on slate, was recreated in the marble version without losing its luster. In general, it was difficult to preserve the blue color of lapis lazuli well on black slate, and because of such color issues, Titian seems to have been reluctant to create the *Mater Dolorosa* in oil on slate. This may be why, when asked by the ambassador to create a stone slab oil painting, he replied that it would be difficult to find suitable stone material.

As has been pointed out several times in this paper, marble was originally considered a more ideal support for oil paintings than slate by Renaissance painters, who were aware of the rivalry with sculptural art. However, because shiny marble was more technically difficult than slate in terms of oil's adherence to it, few artists, except for Girolamo da Carpi, attempted marble oil paintings before Titian. In response to a challenge from Charles V, Titian turned again to marble, the once largely neglected support for oil paintings, and asked to cut out a portion of a pedestal left over from an ancient Roman villa. Cutting stone from ancient monuments was not necessarily unusual at the time, and it was probably the only solution to quickly complete the paintings ordered by the emperor, but Titian may also have intended to stimulate the archaeological interest of Charles V<sup>20</sup>. In addition to sculpture, Titian, considering the rivalry with ancient art, chose white marble as the support for *Mater Dolorosa* and, with his skillful

brushwork, he created a new style of expression in oil on stone that differed from Sebastiano's.

As mentioned above, Sebastiano del Piombo generously taught the technique to his friends, and Giorgio Vasari recommended the use of Lavagna slate for oil painting in his *Lives*. Thus, Lavagna slate became the basic support for oil on stone slabs and was widely used in Rome, Verona, Prague, and other European cities. Titian's *Ecce Homo* is known to have remained in the collection of the Spanish court even after the death of Charles V, fascinating artists who visited the Spanish court in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, and possibly stimulating their creativity. For example, Sofonisba Anguissola, a female painter from Cremona who was invited to the court of Madrid in 1559-73, painted one male portrait in slate oil, probably after her return to Italy. This highly finished portrait depicts a young man looking somewhat melancholic and lost in thoughts against a brownish-black monotone background, reminiscent of Sebastiano and Titian's slate oil paintings. Although she may have had the opportunity to view slate oil paintings in Sicily and Genoa after her return to Italy, it is also probable that she came across Titian's *Ecce Homo* during her 14-year stay in Madrid, and Titian's work may have been one of her sources of inspiration. Also, in the late 16th century Venice, several painters created masterpieces in slate oil painting, including Simone Peterzano, who claimed to be Titian's pupil, and Leandro Bassano, who was under Tintoretto's influence. The memory of Titian's slate oil paintings may have long passed down through the generations of Venetian artists.

On the other hand, Titian's richly colored white marble oil painting with free and vigorous brushwork in his *Mater Dolorosa* was not necessarily followed by everyone, resulting in fewer successors than the slate oil paintings. However, in 1564, Federico Zuccari painted a masterpiece of marble altarpiece, the *Adoration of the Magi*, in the Grimani Chapel in the Church of San Francesco della Vigna in Venice. Although the oil paint has peeled off in some points, like Titian's *Mater Dolorosa*, the blue of the Virgin's cloak and the sky painted with lapis lazuli are brilliant and striking, making it an impressive grand altar piece. It is possible that Titian, who was still alive,



was consulted for the creation of this piece.

The technique of oil on stone slabs was then carried on throughout Europe until the 18th century, and oil painting was practiced on a variety of stone materials in addition to slate, marble, serpentine, and porphyry<sup>21</sup>. For example, Giuseppe Cesari's *Perseus Rescuing Andromeda* (St. Louis Art Museum), oil painted directly on a small piece of lapis lazuli, has fascinated art lovers both for the rarity of its support and the brilliance of the blue background. In the 17th century, more and more works in stone with unique stripes, such as marble, alabaster and onyx, were used to depict supernatural phenomena in religious subjects, leaving the patterns as they were. These works, in which it is difficult to determine where the paint is applied and where the original stone pattern begins, are typical examples of the development of stone slab oil paintings toward the acquisition of playfulness in the Baroque period. Looking back to the subsequent history of the diversification of oil painting supports, Titian's pendants *Ecce Homo* and *Mater Dolorosa*, show respectively the path of inheritance of Sebastiano's technique and the path of new attempts to overcome it, as if they were at a turning point in art history when the new media became widespread on a European scale.

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## Endnotes

1. The technique of oil painting spread from the Netherlands to Italy in the 15th century, but even before that, there are traces of attempts at tempera painting on tableau-shaped stone slabs that occurred sporadically. For example, in Santa Maria in Via in Rome, there is a slate tempera painting of the Virgin, also known as the *Madonna of the Well*, which dates to the late 14th century. Cennino Cennini's *Libro dell'arte*, written around 1390, introduced the technique of oil painting, which was then becoming popular in the Netherlands, and stated that it was possible to paint with oil on iron and stone. Cennini, *Libro dell'Arte*, 97-98, 102-103.
2. After the introduction of oil painting in the 15th century, for example, Domenico Veneziano, Andrea del Castagno, and the Pollaiuolo brothers attempted to create oil on wall paintings in Florence. However, according to Giorgio Vasari, their works had constant problems such as darkening and fading soon after completion. It was Sebastiano del Piombo who solved these problems by devising and practicing a unique technique for producing high-quality oil paintings. Vasari, *Vite*, V, 97-99.
3. According to Giorgio Vasari, Sebastiano del Piombo established the technique of oil on copper plate in addition to stone slab, but slate oil paintings are by far the most numerous extant examples of his work on supports other than wood plate or canvas. Vasari, *Vite*, V, 97-99. See the following monographs on Sebastiano. Baker-Bates, *Sebastiano del Piombo*; Barbieri, *Sebastiano del Piombo*; Bertling Biaggini, *Sebastiano del Piombo*; Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo*.
4. Bembo, *Lettere da diversi Re*, 110.
5. Vasari, *Vite*, I, 137-39. Although Vasari did not mention Sebastiano's name in the "Introduction," as Angela Cerasuolo pointed out, the slate oil painting technique described in the "Introduction" is clearly consistent with that invented by Sebastiano del Piombo. Cerasuolo, "Un nuovo metodo", 153-55.
6. Vasari, *Vite*, I, 137-39. Although oil paint adhered better to slate than to other stone materials, slate was also a support material that was not immune to the risk of paint loss over time. To ensure the adherence of the paint, Sebastiano scored the surface of the slate to create minute irregularities. For more information on Sebastiano's scoring technique, see the following. Reifsnnyder, "Preparation Techniques", 80-81.
7. Slate's ability to diffuse light and prevent illumination also made it suitable as a support for large altar pieces. There are many examples of large slate altar pieces in Roman churches, such as the *Nativity of the Virgin* (Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome), completed by Francesco Salviati, who took over the conception of Sebastiano del Piombo in his last years; the *Martyrdom of St. Lawrence* by Federico Zuccari (c. 1580, Santa Lorenzo in Damaso, Rome); the *Assumption of the Virgin* by Scipione Pulzone (1585, San Silvestro al Quirinale, Rome).
8. Even the backgrounds of slate oil paintings, which at first glance appear to have been painted uniformly in solid colors, are known to have been painstakingly primed by Sebastiano. For example, it is known that in the *Portrait of Ippolito de' Medici* (private collection), first a vermilion and then a white layer were applied under the plain gray background, which was painted uniformly. The texture of the vermilion undercoat, which appears in places, gives a subtle change to the gray background. Ballarin, "Un nuovo ritratto", 71-80; Cerasuolo, "Osservazioni sulla tecnica", 81-86.
9. Vasari, *Vite*, VI, 163-164.
10. Upon his arrival in Augsburg in early 1548, Titian presented Charles V with a slate oil

painting *Ecce Homo* and an unidentified "Venus," the latter being announced to the emperor by the artist on December 8, 1545, while in Rome. Therefore, both *Ecce Homo* and "Venus" were probably conceived during Titian's stay in Rome in 1545. As to whether the *Ecce Homo*, which was so criticized in Rome, was in fact a poor work, there is a completely different record, with Carlo Ridolfi, in his *Maraviglie dell'arte*, describing it as a masterpiece that "drew tears from eyes and commiseration from hearts". Titian's visit to Rome was a great threat to the artists who were working for the Pope at the time, such as Perino del Vaga, who was hostile to Titian during his stay in Rome. It is quite possible that the Roman version of *Ecce Homo* was subjected to more criticism than necessary. Tiziano, *L'epistolario*, 124-25; Vasari, *Vite*, V, 156 (Perino del Vaga); Ridolfi, *Maraviglie dell'arte*, I, 178.

11. Letter of thanks from Pietro Aretino for the copy of the *Ecce Homo*, received from Titian at the end of 1547. Tiziano, *L'epistolario*, 140.

12. The following article and book discuss Titian's *Ecce Homo*, focusing on the history of the development of oil on stone slabs and the inspiration for the "Ecce Homo" iconography. Nygren, "Titian's Ecce Homo", 33-36; Nygren, *Titian's Icons*.

13. As for the copy ordered by Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle, although the correspondence between the artist and the client makes it certain that the work was completed, there is no entry for the work in the Granvelle family inventory, and it is unclear whether it is still extant. Tiziano, *L'epistolario*, 155-57, 163-64, 167-68, 174-77.

14. The 1546 Lectures by Benedetto Valchi, a treatise that attempts to find a settlement of the "paragone" controversy in fairness to both painting and sculpture, argues that where the superiority of sculpture is emphasized, it is closer to recreating the "essence" rather than the "appearance" of the human figure than painting. Varchi, "Maggioranza delle Arti", 5-58.

15. Between 1553 and 1555, there were various exchanges between Charles V and his ambassador in Venice Francesco de Vargas, concerning the two *Mater Dolorosa* by Titian, including reports on their production status, and letters urging the artist to complete them. It is thought that the first painting mentioned in 1553-54 is the oil on panel version in the Museo del Prado. Titian asked the emperor through his ambassador to send him the dimensions of the slate oil painting so that it could serve as a suitable pendant to the *Ecce Homo*. Mancini, *Tiziano e le corti d'Asburgo*, 223, 227-30, 232-33.

16. Mancini, *Tiziano e le corti d'Asburgo*, 236.

17. Mancini, *Tiziano e le corti d'Asburgo*, 237. The following article analyzes the white marble used for the support of the *Mater Dolorosa*, which was probably cut from the pedestal of an ancient Roman villa. González Mozo, "Materiales y Técnicas", 47-101.

18. Falciani et al. *Vasari per/for Bindo Altoviti*, 22-23.

19. Many scholars, including Charles Hope, have previously claimed that the marble oil painting of the Virgin with open arms was based on a drawing by Rogier van der Weyden, sent by Charles V. However, no similar examples have been found in Rogier's drawings. Recently, Ana González Mozo has suggested that a Greek icon may have been Titian's inspiration. Hope, *Titian*, 122; González Mozo, "Materiales y Técnicas", 47-101.

20. The 2018 exhibition on Italian stone slab paintings at the Museo del Prado also revealed the reverse sides of Titian's *Ecce Homo* and *Mater Dolorosa*, of particular interest because, in *Mater Dolorosa*, Titian had painted the reverse side red brown to resemble red marble. The reasons for this choice were perhaps that he thought red marble would be appropriate for the emperor as well as to disguise the thick, uneven white marble surface cut from an ancient Roman pedestal. González Mozo, *In Lapide Depictum*.

21. In 2022, the Saint Louis Art Museum held an exhibition that presented a voluminous study on the 170-year history of the development of oil on stone slabs in Europe, from the attempts of Sebastiano del Piombo around 1530 to the end of the 18th century. For the catalog, see the following. Mann, *Paintings on Stone*.

# Media Transformation in a Transcultural Perspective: A Portrait of Muhammad in a Chinese Public Park in the 1920s

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper presents a case study about an anonymous engraving of the Prophet Muhammad, transferred from the Western world to China at the beginning of the 20th century. It was transformed into a poster for nationalist and patriotic education. The whole process of image migration across time and space involved shifts of multiple media including engravings, books, magazines, illustrated newspapers, posters and photographs. Its significance changed, while different media also brought complex messages for re-narrating Muhammad in the Chinese context. This paper traces back all versions of the image and its derivatives, analyzes the changings of various media as well as the political stances based on the historical and cultural background of the transfer. It emphasizes how the media carried travelling images from the West to China, and how the Western depiction of Muhammad was adapted to a Chinese context, subsequently becoming part of the political strategy of China's own modern identity. The study offers a distinct case to discuss the theory of "image vehicles", "Bilderfahrzeuge" (Aby Warburg), migrating in the modern global network. Moreover, methodologies of "political iconography" and "archaeology of media" are crucial for the analysis of this case study.

## **KEYWORDS**

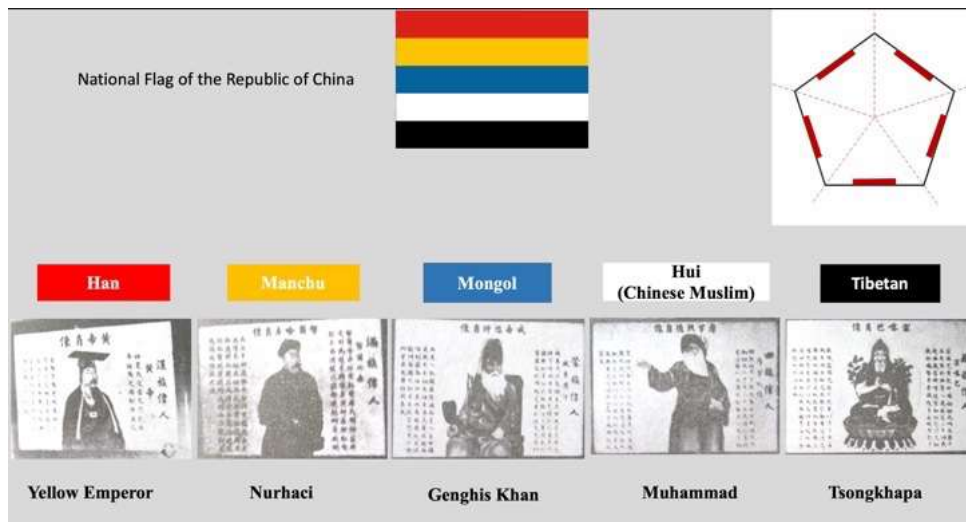
Early 20th-century China; Muhammad; Nationalism; Bilderfahrzeuge, Political Iconography

In 1925, thirteen years after the Republic of China (1912-1949) overturned the last imperial dynasty and established itself, a public park opened in Beijing. The park was named “Jingzhao Park” (京兆公园), after the Capital District of the Republic of China, which served as the administrative unit including the capital city of Beijing and the surrounding region from 1912 to 1928. It was the result of the modern urban renewal movement, which transformed an imperial temple (the Temple of Earth). Many experimental measures were used in the design of this park to construct a meaningful place for patriotic education. The park only existed for three years under the name Jingzhao (the capital region) before being renamed. Due to its short existence, few records remained, with the exception of the only book, the *Report on Jingzhao Park* (京兆公园纪实) which gave a systematic introduction to the place.<sup>4</sup> The book was compiled at the request of the Prefect of Jingzhao District, Xue Dubi (薛笃弼, 1892 - 1973), to document his accomplishment of transforming the Temple of Earth into a public park before he left his job. A special facility, a pentagonal pavilion called the “Gonghe Pavilion” (共和亭), was set on the new center of the park in order to replace the status of the imperial altar. Gonghe Pavilion embodied the national policy of “*wuzu gonghe*” (五族共和, Five Nationalities United in the Republic), which was the main principle that the park tried to convey. The five sides of the pavilion were each painted with a different color to represent the five official ethnic groups of the Republic, and the five colors correspond to those on the national flag: red for the Han, yellow for the Manchu, blue for the Mongol, white for the Hui (Chinese Muslim) and black for the Tibetan. Inside the pavilion, five portraits were hung on beams, one on each side. The portraits presented five “great men” who were famous historical heroes to symbolize their relevant nationalities, including the Yellow Emperor (Han), Nurhaci (Manchu), Genghis Khan (Mongol), Muhammad (Chinese Muslim), and Tsongkhapa (Tibetan). The modern statement of “five nationalities” was a political creation, and it was one of the most popular themes of propaganda, frequently appearing in the form of images in all kinds of media. An example is a banknote on which portraits of five women in distinguishable dresses acted as observables to represent different nationalities; yet their identities could not be used to

identify their nationalities from a political perspective.<sup>2</sup> On the contrary, the five male figures in the park were emperors of old dynasties or religious leaders, and they were bracketed together as “great men”, comparable to the Italian tradition of the *uomini famosi*. The concept also aligned with Thomas Carlyle’s “Great Man theory” which was well-known in China since the late Qing dynasty.<sup>3</sup> Among the five great men, the Prophet Muhammad, who was used as the representation of the Hui nationality, appears a little weird, because the founder of Islam, who was unquestionably a non-Chinese, was fabricated as the symbol of a Chinese ethnic group (Chinese Muslims). Obviously, this statement here confounded the two concepts of *Huizu* (回族, the Hui nationality) and *Huijiao* (回教, the religion of Hui, that is Islam, although the term “Islam” was rarely mentioned during its development in ancient China). In the park, the figure of Muhammad was involved into the narrative framework produced by the republican China under the slogan of “Five Nationalities United in the Republic”, and it helped to construct the identity of the modern nation-state.



**Fig. 1.** Venice Gonghe Pavilion, from Xue, Dubi, ed., *Report on Jingzhao Park* (京兆公园纪实, *Jingzhao Gongyuan Jishi*), Beijing, 1925. photo no.44.



**Fig.2.** A sketch by the author: The five sides of the pentagonal pavilion were each painted with a different color to represent the five official ethnic groups of the Republic, and the five colors correspond to those on the national flag. Portraits presented five “great men” of five nationalities were hung on the beams inside the pavilion, one on each side. All the photos are from Xue Dubi, 1925, photo no.48-52.



**Fig. 3.** The portrait of Muhammad in the Gonghe Pavilion, from Xue Dubi, 1925, photo no.51.

Why was Muhammad chosen to represent the Hui? It must be explained via the evolution of the Hui in China. For a long time in Chinese history, the term “Hui” or “Huihui” referred to all Chinese-speaking communities with Muslim ancestries who were of various origins, but lived far from the Muslim world. They are always thought to be culturally closer to the Han majority than other minorities in China. Sun Yat-sen, the founder of the Republic of China, defined the Hui people as one of the Chinese nationalities. It was a political creation as well as a revolutionary tool for uniting the people. Sun Yat-sen announced in his *Inaugural Address of the Provisional President*:

The root of the nation lies with the people. The land of the Han, Manchus, Mongols, Muslims, and Tibetans is one country; and thus, the Han, Manchus, Mongols, Muslims, and Tibetan nations are one people. This is a united “race”.<sup>4</sup>

Sun also made an announcement:

All ethnic groups in the Republic of China are equal. The Hui people have suffered the most from China’s dynasties. The more the suffering, the greater the possibility for revolution. As a result, it is important to rouse the Hui people and enlist them in the national liberation effort. Around the world, the Hui faith is widely recognized for its bravery and willingness to sacrifice. The awakening and involvement of the Hui people must be a solid guarantee of the revolution’s triumph. [...] In a word, China’s national revolution cannot achieve ultimate success without the participation of the Hui; the aim of destroying imperialism cannot be realized without the cooperation of the Hui.<sup>5</sup>

This doctrine goes far beyond ethnic issues but concerns the territory and borders of China: the Han inhabited the central part, while other four non-Han communities took up four frontier regions. The Hui are prevalent in Northwestern China, but communities may be found across the country.



Through a dialogical process of governmental recognition and self-examination, the Hui officially became a nationality, playing a role in the discourse of a Chinese “nation”.<sup>6</sup> In the example of the Gonghe Pavilion, the symbol of the entire Chinese Muslim community was chosen by the park designer, who was the Prefect of the capital area and also a representative of the Han government’s perspective, to narrate how the Hui was defined. Due to a lack of publications in Chinese, knowledge of Islam was not disseminated to the non-Muslim circle in China. Chinese Muslim intellectuals, on the other hand, interpreted and localized the knowledge by integrating their identities into both mainstream Chinese culture and Islam. They also converted the prophet into the Chinese concept of a sage. Muhammad was referred to as *zhisheng* (至圣, most sagely), and some Chinese scholars attempted to link him to Confucius in order to validate his sagehood.<sup>7</sup> Even if Muhammad’s legend had reached the non-Muslim social environment, ordinary people had little opportunity to view Muslim-themed imagery in their lives, let alone portraits of Muhammad. According to Islamic doctrine, the *Quran* castigates the worship of idols. Muhammad’s portraits were likewise few in number, although the *Quran* and *Hadith* do not really ban portraits.<sup>8</sup>

In China, people’s curiosity about the appearance of the figure can be felt in folklore. They described Muhammad’s portraits as “un-seen”:

P. Dabry de Thiersant quoted a story from the *Daogu Tang Anthology* (道古堂文集) which was composed in the 18th century by a Han scholar, *Hang Shijun* (杭世骏, 1695-1773). It says in the year of 587, the Tang Emperor dispatched an envoy to invite Muhammad to China, Muhammad didn’t come but gave his portrait as a gift to the Emperor. The portrait was drawn with some special material, and it completely faded once the Emperor saw the Prophet’s looks.<sup>9</sup>

The story reflected that the common perception of Muhammad’s appearance was “un-seen”. In another story, Muhammad was imagined to have typical features associated with men from “the Western Regions” (西域).

People had a general idea that Muhammad should not look like the Chinese of the Central Plains. According to a tale in *Huihui yuanlai* (Origins of the Hui), Tang dynasty emperor Tai Zong (626–49) dreamt about Muhammad and described his appearance: “The man wore a green robe, and a white turban was wound around his head. He had a towel draped over his shoulder and a water kettle in his left hand. He had deep eye sockets, a high nose bridge, and a brown face.”<sup>10</sup> To this point, the Chinese discourse is similar to Euro-American discourses which have been all too keen to focus on Islam’s “differential” character—that is, what makes it “other”.<sup>11</sup> Chinese people tried to interpret the figure within their own cultural context. There is an example in the Chinese encyclopedia *Sancai Tuhui*:

This is the very place where the local god *Maxia* (麻霞, i.e., Muhammad) was born. In that country, they call the gods (神) as buddhas (佛), and every year all the people go there and worship. Behind the temple lies the god’s tomb which emits light from day to night, and no one dares to approach it.<sup>12</sup>

The image used to illustrate this entry of Mecca depicts a balding man with curly hair and a significant amount of hair on his chest and feet; he is dressed in an ample robe and is walking barefoot. The figure in the illustration functions as a depiction of the Prophet rather than an ordinary pilgrim of Mecca. This curly hair and body hair, together with the robe, were stereotypical markers in China and Japan denoting men from India, the Middle East, and Central Asia. This figure also shares similar facial features and robes with portraits of *Buddha Śākyamuni* and the Zen patriarch *Bodhidharma*. Furthermore, this image also influenced illustrations in a Japanese encyclopedia *Wakan sansai zue* published around 1712. Images depicting a man from Mecca, whether in Chinese or Japanese versions, are strongly influenced by contemporaneous East Asian iconographical codes of sainthood.

### **The Image of Muhammad in the Gonghe Pavilion**

Given the historical background and previous visual tradition, the Gonghe Pavilion offers a rather remarkable and unique example of a public display of Muhammad's picture as the symbol of the Hui nationality. Both the words and image on the billboard presenting the great man reflect the mainstream understanding of Muhammad, Islam, and Hui history. The figure was depicted with a distinct exotic appearance, far from the Chinese iconographical tradition, in contrast to the style of Buddha or Chinese sage. There must be some extrinsic model from which the poster-painter learned how to create the image. It begs the issue of where the visual style originates from or what the original image looks like. An engraving (lithograph?) of Muhammad's full-length portrait resembles the one in the park. The picture initially appeared as the frontispiece of *The History of the Saracens*, published in London in 1847.<sup>13</sup> The book was written by Simon Ockley (1678-1720), a British Orientalist at Cambridge University. On the page below the picture, two names, "Duflos" and "Hinchliff", are written, referring to the designer Pierre Duflos (1742-1816) and the engraver John James Hinchliff (1805-1875). Ockley's book, for a long time, was regarded as the standard history of Muhammad and his eventful period. The only illustration in the book, like other pictorializations of Muhammad motifs, was more expressive than the texts themselves.<sup>14</sup> It's not farfetched to think that the Chinese poster has relevance to the European engraving. Many aspects of both pictures are strikingly similar, such as the outline, dress, gesture, and even the wrinkles in the clothes (e.g., each figure is painted with a thin white line on the part of the right sleeve near the elbow). However, it is almost impossible that the painter learned the image directly from Ockley's book since it was not translated into Chinese and was not widely circulated in the society of China. Even if the book was taken into China by missionaries or merchants, the probability of a local painter reproducing an illustration from an English book is quite unlikely. Thus, other sources should be used as references, such as the illustrated paper.



**Fig.4** The portrait of Muhammad in Simon Ockley, *The History of the Saracens: comprising the Lives of Mohammed and his Successors, to the Death of Abdalmelik, the Eleventh Caliph. With an account of their most remarkable battles, sieges, revolts, etc. Collected from authentic sources, especially Arabic mss.* London, 1847.

The earliest illustrated papers in China had a tradition of reproducing pieces from foreign materials. According to this clue, one illustration from a Chinese newspaper was found, which might be a bridge connecting images in the British book and the Chinese park. It was published in one of the most influential comprehensive publications in China in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The picture of Muhammad is one of the three illustrations of the 1914 article (*The Observation of Today's Islamic Countries*), which was translated from the Japanese newspaper *Tokyo Daily News*.<sup>15</sup> This fact also serves as a reminder that Japan was instrumental in introducing new learning to China. The 1914 illustration is clearly based on the 1847 engraving in every detail, including not only the main figure, but also the building and armed people in the background. The copy was not created using photographic techniques, but it should be reprinted with a new plate made by some local engraver. When the three pictures are juxtaposed, it is reasonable to speculate that the poster-painter may have borrowed the method of drawing from the 1914 illustration, but not the original one from 1847, based on the proportion, outline, shading, and color. The comparison of the three images demonstrates how the image evolved from 1847 to 1925, as well as from the British publication to the Chinese poster. The basic features have been preserved, but some parts have been distorted. Despite the fact that many other pictures were being replicated at the time, the one from the 1847 book appeared more frequently than others and was picked to be displayed in the park. This figure must precisely correspond to the propagandistic aim of the park, thus, it was chosen. But why? First, the 1847 engraving carried on the eighteenth-century tradition of depicting Muhammad as a great man, portraying him as a hero and a revolutionary who shaped history with his extraordinary leadership abilities. Learning from the building, the Kaaba in Mecca, the most sacred Muslim pilgrim shrine, the scene in the picture depicts “Muhammad leading his people to capture Mecca and take power.” This topic may allude to the Republican China’s path to revolutionary victory. Thus, the image, along with the introduction, gives the audience a clear and direct impression of the figure of a leader. Secondly, the figure also corresponds to the general public’s imagination of Muhammad, which is the

stereotypical image of him “holding the Quran in his left hand, but a sword in his right” (左经右剑). This is a misunderstanding in which Muhammad used violence to accomplish missionary work, but the incorrect saying has spread extensively, even in China.<sup>16</sup> In this picture, the gesture of Muhammad “holding the Quran and sword” had acquired a widespread consensus in society, allowing people to recognize the figure.



**Fig.5** The illustration titled “The Hui Hierarch Muhammad” (回教教主摩訶末) comes from “The Observation of Today’s Islamic Countries (translated from *Tokyo Daily News*)” (回教國現勢之探察[譯日本東京日日新聞]), *Dongfang Zazhi* (东方杂志), vol.10, no.11, 1914.



Apart from image appropriation, the figure of Muhammad was also modified to resemble a Chinese man, most likely to avoid deviating too far from Chinese visual tradition, because using an exact foreigner's portrait to represent a Chinese nationality may confuse the targeted visitors. The portrait on the poster is painted in a typical Chinese painting style, combining image and text. This pictorial composition can be traced back to the visual conventions of Chinese memorial portraits, such as eulogies of portraits, pictorial biographies, and cyclopedias of pictures. Moreover, the figure of Muhammad in the 1925 poster resembles a Chinese person rather than a foreigner because of his beard. His beard is not curly, but it appears to be more manageable. In traditional Chinese art, beards are used to distinguish between Chinese and outsiders. For example, in Yan Liben's (阎立本, 601-673) famous painting, *Emperor in a Sedan Chair Receiving a Tibetan Envoy* (步辇图), the beard is one of the key features on the face that differentiates the Chinese Emperor from the foreign envoy. The 1925 poster also resembles the typical profile with *changran* (长髯, long beard) in Chinese art, which is a conventional iconographic code depicting the elderly wise man, such as Confucius, or the brave warrior, such as the God of Gate, which always appears in woodcuts. Artificial beards are also used by actors in traditional Chinese operas, and the gesture of holding the long beard with one hand, which shapes the beard to shrink at the tail, is a stylized position on the stage. It can be guessed that the poster-painter mimicked the convention of the beard from the visual tradition and employed the Chinese-style beard to depict Muhammad, making him appear like a Chinese sage.

### **Brief Summary**

The poster at the Gonghe Pavilion in Jingzhao Park reflects a complicated background in which the Hui were defined as a nationality belonging to the Chinese nation under Republican China's modern nationalist building. Meanwhile, Muhammad, the prophet and founder of Islam, was selected as the symbol of the newly formed Hui nationality. The figure was not chosen by the Hui people, but was re-narrated by the Han (majority nationality)

government as a hero and revolutionary in the modern perspective of nation and state construction. The image in the poster was adapted from a British engraving but modified for the Asian context to assist in the introduction of knowledge about the Hui origins and Muhammad's accomplishments. It underwent Sinicization and became a new figure that was readily accepted by the local Chinese. This case proves the existence of a transformed image of the 1847 engraving that spread throughout China. The example shows how, around the turn of the twentieth century, illustrated papers served as a medium for transferring Western images to China (perhaps via Japan), enhancing Muhammad's popularity in China. It also demonstrates that image transmission was a prominent trend at the time, with knowledge and information diffusing across cultures through the migration of images and their carries. The whole process of image migration through time and space involves various media shifts, including engravings, books, magazines/illustrated newspapers, posters, and, eventually, photographs. The printing technique facilitated the image's global dissemination. When the image was expressed via different media, the form was adjusted for new functions and the significance changed, while various media also provided complex meanings for re-narrating Muhammad in the Chinese context.

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# The First European Wheel: A Prehistoric Instrument of Indo-European Migrations and its Reflections in Croatian Contemporary Design

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## **ABSTRACT**

The first Indo-European migrations and occupation of the territory of modern Croatia occurred on the banks of the second largest European river, Danube. Innovation that occurred in the Danube valley was the first wheeled vehicles - wagons and carts. Its appearance marked the landscape and caused the transition from the traditional agricultural economy to the animal husbandry, as well as the first appearance of the social stratification.

The impact of the first Indo-European migrations and the occupation in the territory of Croatia can be studied through the wheels in its material and symbolic aspects. Moreover, the remains of the wagons and carts and the finds of its clay models open the perspective of comparison with the contiguous cultures on the same technological stage of development.

It is fascinating that more than 5000-year-old migration still has an impact on contemporary creativity. The purpose of this paper is to point out the persistence of the idea that has been transferred from archeological remains and preserved through the timeline until the modern days.

## **KEYWORDS**

Indo-European Migrations; Vučedol Culture; Wheeled Vehicles; Prehistoric Design; Contemporary Jewelry

Wheels emerge around 3500 BC almost simultaneously in different areas of the world.<sup>1</sup> The evidence can be divided into direct and indirect indicators for the knowledge and usage of the wheel; direct being represented by actual wheel or axle finds and indirect evidence being derived from models, petroglyphs, pictograms, etc.<sup>2</sup>, with a third distinction to make: Vehicles with four wheels are called wagons, vehicles with two wheels carts. Belongings of the Baden Culture can be divided into two phases. The first wagon models from the Budakalász phase of the Baden Culture are rectangular vessels with fish bone decoration and loops for wheels or lugs.<sup>3</sup> Some of them show protome that broke off in old times but probably depicted the draught animals. In the second, classical phase of the Baden Culture highly decorated wagon cups are found in graves.<sup>4</sup> Also, present are paired burials of bovids which might be symbolic for the burial in a wagon.<sup>5</sup>



**Fig. 1.** Wheeled wagon model from Vučedol

J. Maran has emphasized the connections between Baden culture and the earliest wheeled vehicles.<sup>6</sup> The perhaps two most significant innovations of the Late Copper Age (3600/3500–3000/2800 BC) were the invention of the wheel and of wheeled vehicles, which sparked further major inventions in this early period.<sup>7</sup>

Croatia is situated in the southeastern part of the European continent, having maritime border with Italy on the Adriatic Sea and eastern border on the banks of the long and wide river Danube.

The river Danube is the second-longest river in Europe, after the Volga in Russia. It flows through much of Central and Southeastern Europe, from the Black Forest in Germany into the Black Sea. Since ancient times, the Danube has always been a traditional trade route in Europe. The Danube River basin is home to many fish species and as such, it has always been an important source for a food and water supply.

Once a long-standing frontier of the Roman Empire, the river passes through or touches the borders of 10 countries, including Croatia. Just here in the Croatian Danube valley in the third millennium BC was established one prehistoric culture.

The bearers of that culture were the people of one Indo-European tribe for which homeland was proposed to be the area of south Ukrainian and south Russian steppes. It was supposed that one branch of Indo-European tribes, migrating from its homeland to west passed the Danube and settled in today's eastern Croatia, assimilating the indigenous population living on the crop and animal husbandry. Gradually, this area became the center of a flourishing culture, named after Vučedol, eponymous archeological site near modern town of Vukovar.<sup>8</sup>

Indo-European herders, moving in that migration, were using wagons with wheels. In the Museum of Vučedol culture there is ideal reconstruction of one of such wagons, made after the clay wagon model, possibly a children's' toy. Testifying the importance of such artefact there is one wheel from Vučedol now kept in Vienna's Naturhistorisches museum.<sup>9</sup>

When they finally came and inhabited Croatian Danube valley, they gradually developed their culture and moved their borders. Maximal area of

distribution of Vučedol culture was from Adriatic Sea and Mediterranean world on the south to far to the north all the way to the Czech capital Prague. It is obvious that in the third millennium BC it occupied a much larger area, encompassing the territories of many of today's Central European countries, than the area of today's Croatia.<sup>10</sup>

The former prehistoric settlement of Vučedol has occupied the area of today's vineyards and cornfields, of which archaeologists have excavated just over 10%. Thanks to its excellent position on the banks of the river Danube and fertile soil, it was possible to draw resources. The life and economy of culture flourished, and the situation in that area is similar today. The migrations were carried out not only by wheeled wagons, but also by water. In the museum there is an ideal reconstruction of an oval-shaped Vučedol house, divided into a living room and a bedroom, with a fireplace and lamp-vessels.<sup>11</sup>

Because of the importance of the site and culture, in 2014 a brand-new museum of Vučedol culture was built and opened to the public. The authors are the architects of the architectural bureau Architecture Workshop, headed by the architect Goran Rako. The museum building connects the valley along the Danube riverbank and the archeological site of Vučedol, which is located on the top of a hill. That is why the Museum is in the shape of a serpentine. Climbing these "serpentine", which are placed on a slight slope, which according to the standards allows people in wheelchairs to move around the space, visitors get familiar with everything that is of importance for the rich Vučedol culture. And finally, at the end of the museum exhibition, they exit in the authentic location of Vučedol, the origin of Vučedol culture. Outside, the museum is lined with natural material - brick, and together with the grass roof is perfectly integrated into the natural environment.<sup>12</sup>

In the immediate vicinity of Vučedol, the town of Vukovar has been developed from the Middle Ages, and it also gravitated towards the Danube River. In 1991, very soon after Croatia declared the independence and left the Yugoslavian socialist federal state, the town was attacked by its eastern neighbor Serbia. The town was severely devastated and occupied, and the population fled.

Nowadays, on the anniversary of the fall of the city of Vukovar, November 18<sup>th</sup>, every year it's held a commemoration dedicated to the victims of the Vukovar tragedy. The town of Vukovar became a symbol of that war. It took years and years for the city to recover. The symbol of the city, Eltz Castle, has been restored. The sufferings of war belong to the past today, the industry is rising and with it the need to strengthen the identity, given that the Danube is still the border with the state that attacked the city 30 years ago.

The identity is sought in the Vučedol culture famous for its ornamented ceramics. Two examples, one vessel with the presentation of the constellations, considered to be the oldest Indo-European calendar, what was important because this culture was depending on agriculture. And second, the cult vessel, a bottle in the shape of the bird. There are objects that became two symbols and let's say trademarks of the Vučedol culture, but also an inspiration to the Croatian contemporary design.<sup>13</sup>

Vučedol vessel with solar motifs served the young Croatian designer Goran Raukar to develop the visual identity of the Vučedol Culture Museum.<sup>14</sup> Julijana Rodić Ozimec, jewelry designer, known as JoR, was inspired by that motif for her necklace.



**Fig. 2.** Vučedol museum visual identity by Goran Raukar

The JoR pseudo name stands for distinctive art jewelry made by Julijana Rodić Ozimec, a jeweler. Every piece she makes is characterized by a

specific synergy of shapes, materials, applied jewelry making techniques and inspiration. JoR's artistry is visible in shapes and selection of specific materials as well as in technically and artistically demanding surface treatment (polishing, sandblasting, engraving). The magical synergy they create is a material, non - verbal manifestation of the transcendental, powerful and unique. JoR's openness to the world of nature, to the abundance of the human heritage, intimate experiences, and civilization values is reflected in her inimitable artistic expression.<sup>15</sup>

The shape of triangle of this logo of the Museum of Vučedol culture does not exist in the material remains of the culture. It is a brand-new design of young designer Goran Raukar. But he filled it with the ornaments inspired by the similar ornaments in Vučedol culture vessels. On the other hand, the triangular logo itself was the inspiration for an original souvenir – guitar pick.

The clay vessel from Vinkovci site is the calendar, particularly its symbols representing constellations on the winter sky in the norther hemisphere, like Orion, Swan, Pleiades, Sun, Gemini, Pisces-Pegasus and Cassiopeia were furthermore inspiration for the artistic jewelry shaped and developed by the JoR designer.<sup>16</sup>

The shoe factory Borovo in the village Borovo in Vukovar neighborhood, founded 1931 and demolished during War for the Yugoslav succession during 90s', when it was closed, found new strength and investment most recently, becoming one of the engines of the new prosperity of the whole region. Designers of the factory were inspired by the symbols of the constellations which were put as a pattern in one of the most popular Borovos' sneakers among the young people. That is how the old symbol become part of new national identity.<sup>17</sup>

When talking about shoes, it should be mentioned that according to the material remains, the people of Vučedol culture were making and wearing leather shoes. They developed very sophisticated and advanced technology – the shape of shoes was different for both left and for right foot. On the examples of the clay shoe model, possible children's toy, we can see the traces of incrustation representing rich ornamentation.<sup>18</sup> There is the sawn



ideal reconstruction that is exhibited for the museum exposition, and again, the model itself was inspiration for the pendant jewelry by JoR.

One clay figurine from the Vučedol culture excavation in the town of Vinkovci is modelled like it was dressed.<sup>19</sup> M. Milićević proposed the possible look of the clothes of the Vučedol women, and T. Karavidović sewed it, which is now exposed in the new museum of Vučedol culture.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, applied artist and designer J. Kosanović puts the symbols and ornaments on her unique women bags.



**Fig. 3.** JoR pendant inspired by the Vučedol dove

Vučedol culture knew how to extract a metal from the ore, producing axes of so-called arsenic bronze, even using mold for a serial production.

Despite of being recognized as a stereotype male weapon, one fan-shaped axe became an inspiration for this unique earrings and necklaces by JoR design. the clay vessel in the shape of bird dove or partridge is the most iconic symbol and famous artefact of the whole Vučedol culture. Excavated between two world wars, now is kept in the Archeological Museum in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia. On her neck we can see motif of clepsydra, or labris, double axe, possibly connected with the Minoan Crete.<sup>21</sup> It was also an inspiration in JoR jewelry for pendants and bracelets.

The designers of Vupik, an important Croatian agricultural company for food and wine, found the inspiration for their trademark in the Vučedol Dove as well as the style ornaments from the wings.<sup>22</sup>



**Fig. 4.** Vupik company visual design

The project #dovetales was the successful idea of archeologist Ana Solter for an interactive souvenir. Little colorful plastic doves are produced in the three-dimensional printer device, and they travel around the world with their owners that take photos with it and upload it to the concrete social media pages, promoting the culture itself as well as symbolically sharing peace among the people.<sup>23</sup>



**Fig. 5.** An example of the #dovetales project at final stage

At the end of the third millennium BC, Vučedol culture was replaced by another culture, and slowly disappeared and been forgotten for centuries,

until almost one hundred years ago hardworking archaeologists revealed it on the light. Most recently, it became the source of inspiration for the artists and designers for making something new, fresh, and attractive. And that is how it is reborn again through its ornaments and symbols.

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