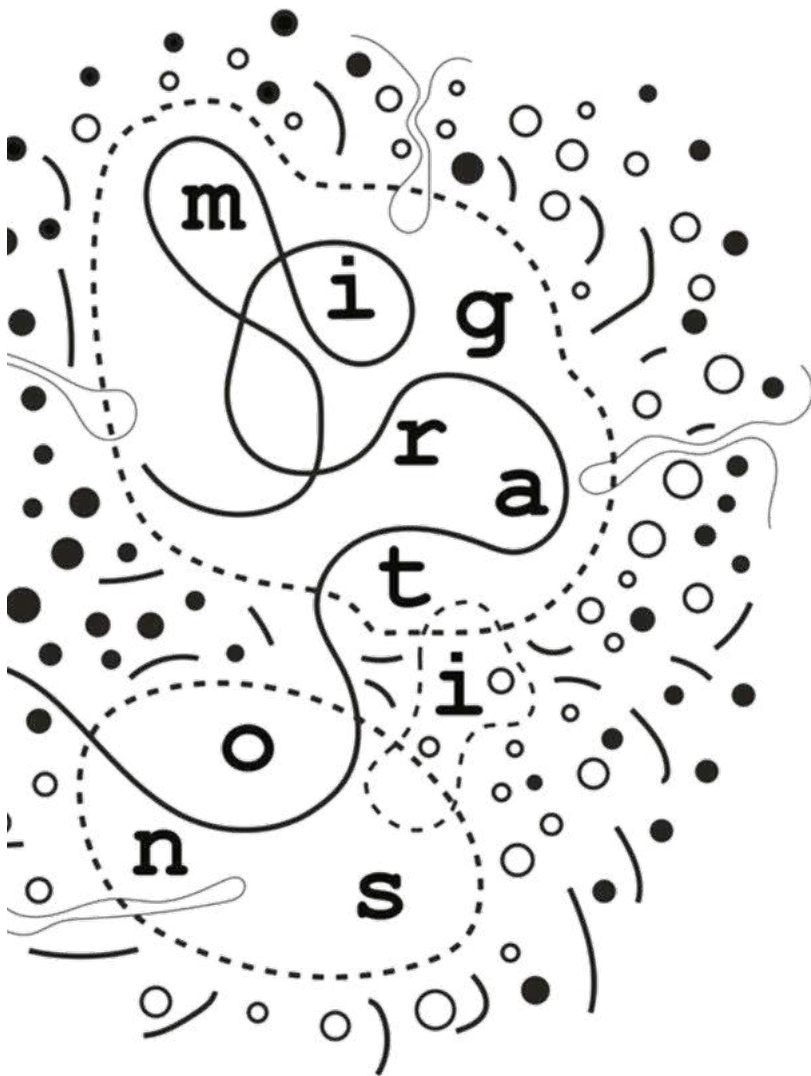


Home and Hospitality

Session 14



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Home and Hospitality

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Home is a newly vital term in our field. Yet art historians and curators have long deemed origin and provenance as essential markers and as determinants of character, meaning, and value. We ask where is an object, a maker, an iconography, or a concept from and where has it been? But we seldom analyze the strategies by which artistic and art historical practices, indeed art objects, lay claim to belonging to a particular place or culture. The repatriation of looted objects and the right of return of people from exile suppose integral, historical, and even natural bonds. Migration, exile, and displacement often presume that the migrant has been uprooted, that their presence at home has been unnaturally severed, as if home is otherwise assumed and continuous. Home would seem to be on the side of possession, permanence, and immutability, and opposed to the dispossessed and the transient, although some might demure.¹

As our session's contributors demonstrate, house and home have their own aesthetics, iconography, and architecture, and may function as symbols and agents of affinity or of a-partness, regarding everything from gender and family to the community and the polis. Home is integral to the discussion of migrations, if only because it is where the migrant object, person, or concept once began. The broad theme of this CIHA, migration, presupposes the concept of home, for it is from there that migration is set in motion. In ancient Greece, *ethos* meant the place where a person lived. Home was *ethos* itself.

Who is at home and who should be allowed in? Jacques Derrida advocated for unconditional hospitality. When a stranger knocks at the door, we are obliged to host them, no questions asked, because, he reasoned, all homes are already based on a prior seizure. Derrida's universal illegitimacy

of at-homeness cuts in multiple ways: it would seem to require welcoming without friction any migrant, art, or art history arriving from somewhere else. At the same time and uncomfortably, it would seem to delegitimize the indigenous and the exiled claim to a homeland. And yet again, Derrida's postulate might unburden art history's genealogies that are supposed to guarantee meaning and status. Migration, like empire and hospitality, force the question of who and what is at home here, who belongs there, and to whom does a place and culture belong. While Derrida's postulate warns us of nefarious notions of possession, belonging, and power as based on blood and soil, it would also seem to undermine objections to alienation brought on by colonial dispossession. Ubiquitous in our discipline, until recently home has gone mostly unquestioned, but, when questioned, few issues are as vexing.

Let us consider a story that starts with thievery, attempted genocide, and the displacement of indigenous people in colonial history and museum practice, one that ends with survival and resilience, artistic invention, and a charge to curatorial caretaking. Living along the coastal areas of what is today Brazil, the Tupinambá people resisted the genocidal onslaught of colonial invasion and occupation. They were not eliminated. In the 1980s, they began the RETOMADA, the reclaiming and actual retaking of lands, resettling in the ancestral lands of the Serra do Padeiro in what is now Bahia. Accordingly, during the early 2000s Redescobrimento festivities, some of them came to Sao Paulo to behold the Manto Tupinambá, one of twelve ceremonial cloaks of their ancestors that were plundered and now reside in European collections.

The Tupinambá came to the exhibition in Sao Paulo, on the grounds of the Bienal, to reclaim the mantle. Although only two, Nivalda Amaral de Jesus, age 67, and Aloísio Cunha Silva, age 41, were able to see the Manto, they did not forget. A long saga ensued in which the Brazilian government refused to entertain their claim to reclaim, and the Danish National Museum quietly refused to lend the cape to the other venues of the Mostra do Redescobrimento. While the Tupinambá did not win back the singular museological object, they did set course for another chapter in their flourishing.

The Tupinambá came to see that they had never really given up the mantle, and they redeveloped the know-how to make them again. Many still knew how to make the required armature. For the cloth they relearned where to cultivate the fibers, when to harvest them, and how to weave them. They discovered again that bee wax was necessary to protect the fibers and make the capes resistant. In wonderful testimony, Celia Tupinambá recounts that, in the process of regenerating the land, their plumed collaborators returned to the area, sometimes leaving feathers by windows and doors, making them easier to gather.

Today the Tupinambá are no longer demanding that the eleven capes dispersed in European collections be returned. They realized the Mantos never left. The ones that were taken to Europe, as gifts, war trophies, and inglorious plunder, must remain with their takers. Colonizers have the burden to look after them. The takers can have the “pena,” the feather, which in Portuguese also means pity and obligation. The Mantos will always have their home in the Brazilian territory, but, while living abroad, they must be welcomed with hospitality and care, as if they were forever hosted with the respect that any outsider, alien, or *other* by all rights should be granted. These are ethics to pursue in our session and to maintain long after.

The aim of CIHA and the aim of this session is to contribute to a generative and hospitable field and practice. This is to our knowledge the first CIHA session dedicated to the work of emerging scholars. Thirteen researchers come from seven countries, five continents, and twelve different institutions, both museums and universities. We come together on a broad topic of shared interest, and, yet, the practices that we see and hear may be inflected by diverse and divergent geographies; methodologies; and national, linguistic, and institutional traditions.

Our goal is not to make a single way of doing art history, but to hear, savour, and learn from differences, the very intellectual richness of our field and our practice. To respect and learn from our alterities, from our accents and inflections, knowing that few are speaking their first language and, consequently, they may feel as though they are wearing someone else's clothes. Even if Brazil and Portuguese and English are not your home, and the time zone makes you suffer, gives you headaches or dizziness, we

respect that and want to make this a safe space for you to speak, have fun, discuss, listen, and share.

Collectively, our diverse cases took us from seventeenth-century Rome, Macau, and Mughal India to nineteenth-century New Orleans and Argentina. We considered colonial, imperial, Republican, and contemporary Brazil; Rome and Milan in the 1960s and 1970s; as well as contemporary Ghana, Germany, and China. Media under consideration included film and ivories; textiles, paintings, prints, and public monuments; performance art; and architecture of many kinds, including sacred building, prefabricated containers for housing, and refined maquettes, as well as an artist's own home and studio as site of creativity and display.

Through our happy cacophony, three recurring themes were sounded. First, the home as private abode: we saw the identification of the artist's body with the building; the home as sacred refuge for migrant and diasporic communities; works of art that hide who is at home; others that isolate and exclude; still others that spotlight the phoniness of home as private, as if not political, sphere. Second: there is a recurring interest in materials and ways of making that welcome and incorporate techniques and motifs from the outside while remaining recognizably from home and at home via an ethics of bringing in and weaving in; and, yet, there are other examples in which the importation of certain forms and iconographies from elsewhere are naturalized as if belonging to their new place, even as they force a potential absurdity by their foreign pedigree. Thirdly, and in a close echo of the CIHA general theme, migrations of form are also a recurring interest.

In our session, by putting the emphasis on home, we confront the dis-placement of subjects, artists, and artistic interests. These histories are not figured as smooth passages from one place to another but of dis-placement from here to there. But is displacement even the right word? Do we really want to suggest that everything that is un-displaced or not-yet-displaced is rightfully or naturally at home, as if placedness is natural and without question, and only ends when people and things are dislodged, thrown out of their homes. Our presenters lent nuance and analysis to the questions. As our presenters turn their attention to home and hospitality, their subjects do not so reliably guarantee security, harmony, and naturalness, but, instead, they risk provoking anxiety about legitimacy and

about belonging, about relations between here and there, and-- to the extent that these entities exist— also between *le nous et les autres*.

Brazilians enjoy welcoming people to their homes. They share their culture, food, spaces, music, dance, and conversation. The caipirinha, the moqueca, the mucura, the feijoada, the dabucuri, the barreado, and not only meals. If family, if friends, if colleagues, invite you to their homes and to meet their loved ones, do not take it for granted. You are being invited into their most precious universe.

Like many other things, we learned hospitality from native Brazilians. More than five million Indigenous peoples lived on this land before us, and more than a million are amongst us today. They come from three hundred nations and speak three hundred languages. It is the best kind of Babel from which we have much to learn. In Pirantininga (Sao Paulo), we acknowledge the land and the waters of the Guarani-Mbya, Tupinikim, Tupinambá, Kaiapó, Guayanás and Guarulhos people, as well as the Pankararu, Pankararé, and many other nations who came and settled. We welcome and we are welcomed.

Endnotes

1. Work for this session has been informed and enriched by: Pitta and Naine Terena's "Retomando narrativas: a Mostra do Redescobrimento e o protagonismo indígena," in P. Miyada, ed., *Bienal de São Paulo desde 1951* (São Paulo: Bienal, 2022). By the 2022 College Art Association sessions, "Claims on Home: Figures of Unbelonging," and "Claims on Home: Museums and Art's History Unbound," co-chaired by Porterfield and Kirsten Scheid; as well as by research undertaken for Porterfield's "Home and Alienation in the Colonies: Auguste Renoir in Algiers, Jean Renoir in India," in A. Dombrowski, ed., *A Companion to Impressionism* (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2021).

Hosting the Ship of Salvation in India and East Asia, ca. 1600

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ABSTRACT

This contribution focuses on the reception and remediation of a 1580 Roman print showing Christ as the pilot of the Ship of Salvation in Mughal India and East Asia. The Jesuits adapted an earlier iconography of Fortuna so that, in place of the fickle Roman goddess, the Christ child now steered the ship of life. An Indian painter reproduced this allegorical ship in the border of a folio from the Gulshan Album for the Mughal prince Salim, and an East Asian ivory carver, to whom the image of the Christian god would have looked utterly strange, figured the clouds at Christ's feet in an auspicious Chinese form. This essay examines the cultural logics at work in these acts of remediation of a print in painting and sculpture, respectively, and, it proposes a new way of thinking about the antisociality of images within their political contexts using an anthropological vocabulary of hosting and hospitality.

KEYWORDS

Jesuits; Gulshan Album; Ivory; Transmediality; Allegory.

This essay focuses on two objects containing the same image of a young Christ on the Ship of Salvation. One is a leaf from the Gulshan Album, a group of folios assembled for the Mughal emperor Jahangir (r. 1605–27) from about 1599, and so begun while he was known as Salim (fig. 1). The other is an ivory plaque, measuring 13 by 9.8 centimeters, carved either in Macau or Manila by a Chinese artist (fig. 2).

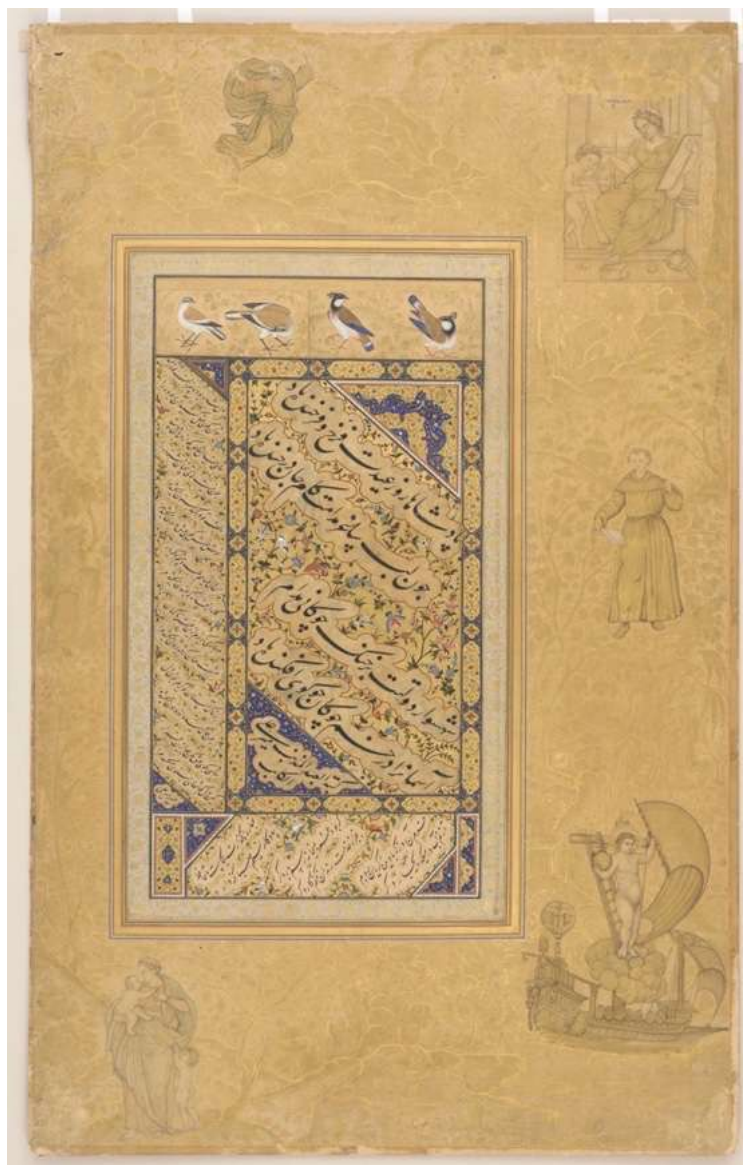


Fig. 1. Unknown artist (Mughal), Decorated border with *God the Father*, *Geometry*, *Anthony of Padua*, *Ship of Salvation*, and *Charity*, ca. 1600. Ink, watercolor and gold on paper, 42.5 x 26.5 cm. Calligraphy by Mir ‘Ali (d. 1559–60). Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



Fig. 2 Unknown artist (Chinese), *Christ as Pilot of the Ship of Salvation*, ca. 1600. Ivory, 13 x 9.8 cm. British Museum, London.

My purpose is to assess (1) the extent to which the reception of this particular image in Mughal and East Asian cultural contexts parallels the reception of Christian religion in these places; and (2) how the reception of the European image in these two objects relates to the reception of European art forms in these contexts.

In some sense, this is an ideal image with which to analyze these two issues within a conceptual framework of hosting and hospitality, being that it shows the Christian god coming or going (depending on how you look at it). This is essentially to say that the hosting of this allegorical image can be investigated as an allegory of the hosting of European culture in India and East Asia.

The image of Christ at the mast derives from the Renaissance imagery of the goddess, or in the Christian universe personification, of Fortuna. This imagery was itself an adaptation of ancient Roman prototypes. It is an iconography where the nude female figure is shown holding a sail in her hand so that, as seen in a well-known relief at Palazzo Rucellai in Florence, her

body acts as a kind of mast.¹ This secular image is in turn adapted in the sixteenth century into a quintessential Counter-Reformation allegory of the Church militant. The main figure is no longer capricious Fortune but the dependable, if young, Christian God. It seems almost superfluous to say that the power of this allegory came from its topicality and intuitiveness; the image of the Christ child sailing around on the Ship of the Church to deliver salvation to all mirrored what was actually happening out in the world, where Jesuit and other missionaries were going out in numbers to proselytize, disseminating and circulating products of European visual culture as they did so.

The actual print on which these two images are based is lost, but we know that it was Italian and issued in 1580 from two inscriptions copied onto the border of the Gulshan leaf. Under the stern of the ship one finds the inscription 1580, and, under its prow, ROME.² These were copied directly from the source print by an artist unaccustomed to the Latin alphabet.

The woodcut used on the frontispiece of the tract *Navegación segura para el cielo* by Spanish Capuchin Gerónimo de Segorbe (published 1611) is clearly derived from the same source, though here we have a Franciscan friar inserted kneeling at the feet of Christ.³ This tract is all about a metaphorical journey toward perfection.

Jahangir's interest in European art predates his accession to the Mughal throne and is fairly well known.⁴ In the Gulshan Album, he not only had his artists reproduce the compositions of prints, as occurs in the border that concerns us, but he also had them integrate European prints themselves inside ornamental frames.⁵

Before his accession, Jahangir spent much of his time in Allahabad as well as in the northern capital of Lahore. Jesuit priest Jerome Xavier, who brought images to Lahore as a missionary, observed the Mughal prince directing two of his painters to trace out and then paint with colors an image of the Deposition, which may be a painting from the Large Clive Album now at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. The avid Mughal prince even commandeered a Portuguese artist that the Jesuits had brought with them;

Xavier says that this man had no time for anything except painting images of Christ and the Virgin for Salim.⁶



Fig. 3. Title page of Gerónimo de Segorbe, *Navegación segura para el cielo*, Valencia 1611. Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid.

Unsurprisingly, Salim's extraordinary appetite for Christian images got the Jesuits very excited, because it made them think they had a chance of converting the future emperor to Christianity. This excitement was premised, however, on a misunderstanding. As emperor-to-be and then Mughal emperor, his patronage of Christian imagery was fundamentally rooted in a conception of universal sacred kingship which carried with it an ideal of absolute peace, *sulh-i kul* صلح كل, among all of the king's subjects.⁷ This policy was convenient for an empire where the ruling elites were not only different in ethnicity but also in religion from the majority of the population. Some of the Hindus that they conquered converted to Islam, but millions of others kept their religion. And so there was a significant practical dimension to the Mughal kings' lofty vision of an empire in which religions could coexist under

the headship of a Muslim leader. Already Jahangir's father Akbar had established a kind of syncretic lodge at Fatehpur Sikri where Sunni, Shiite, Hindu, Jain, and Christian wise men could debate matters of religion, and Jahangir bragged in his own autobiography that in this period Christians could pray with Muslims and Jews in a single church.⁸ Therefore we should see the incorporation of European images into Mughal albums as an expression of the idea that this was a rulership that encompassed all faiths.

Whereas the album leaf was made for a Muslim prince, the ivory plaque most likely had a Christian owner. The presence, on the back of the object, of a hardened brown putty-like substance suggests that it was once mounted on some kind of wooden backing, which would have made it easier to append to a wall.⁹ This was clearly a personal devotional object that served a quasi-amuletic function for its owner (it was believed to protect the person from harm).¹⁰ The legible IHS monogram in the round medallion at the back of the ship may indicate Jesuit patronage or a Jesuit connection. This plaque is still catalogued by the British Museum as South Asian, but it seems evident from the shape of the clouds at Christ's feet--about which I will say more below--that the maker of the object was Chinese. This would lead us to think, in turn, that the object was carved in Macau or Manila by an able craftsman trained in Zhangzhou, where the Chinese ivory carving industry was centered, or an heir to this tradition.¹¹ Whether the owner of the plaque was a missionary or not, it was probably someone who was used to long-distance travel at sea, and, given the object's maritime iconography, it is likely that one of its talismanic functions was to protect its owner specifically while sailing.¹² This raises the tantalizing possibility that it was used on a ship--certainly the ivory is small enough to make this practical--and in any case we may wish to think of it as belonging to the same domain of culture as the prayers that were said by sailors and voyagers before weighing anchor and when they could not see land on the horizon.

What we are dealing with here is the remediation of a European print in a diasporic Chinese and colonial context. A famous letter of 1590 from Domingo de Salazar, Bishop of Manila, to Philip II praises the Chinese carvers living in the city and avers that they are indispensable for the production of

figural images for churches in the Philippines.¹³ The forms of these images are inflected by Chinese aesthetics generally. China had its own longstanding tradition of printmaking of which whoever made our ivory plaque was undoubtedly aware. Also, the period around 1600 was a fertile moment in which on the mainland Jesuits like Matteo Ricci were able to make deep inroads into Chinese culture, prior to the Ming clampdown starting in 1616. These Jesuits brought with them printed images like the ones in Jerome Nadal's *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines (Illustrations of the Gospel Stories)*, and the images in this book would eventually be re-carved by a local woodcutter for Giulio Aleni's Chinese version in 1637.¹⁴ In order to fully address the question raised at the beginning of this essay, namely, how this particular case study relates to the broader reception of Christian religion and the broader reception of European art forms, we need to analyze the ivory in relation to objects from a wider East Asian cultural context.

The gods of the Chinese pantheon are thought to be constantly flying around, interacting with each other and descending when summoned to participate in rituals, to exorcize, to enjoy entertainment, and so on. In other words, we can think of Chinese religion as a continual ritualized process of summoning, hosting, and sending off, with its gods in constant movement.¹⁵ In Chinese art the convention is to show clouds at the deity's feet and often also completely surrounding them. They are shown in this manner in a variety of media, from the brightly colored paintings of Buddhist ritual to sculpture to prints. A woodcut from the *Lie xian quan chuan* 列仙全傳, a collection of biographies of immortals, shows the female Immortal He Xiang 何仙姑 surrounded by such clouds, for example. The accompanying text tells us that when she walked it looked like she was flying, and that she was able to transcend earthly experience to become a deity.

In the ivory plaque at the British Museum, clouds presented in a distinctive Chinese style clump together under the feet of Christ, marking him out as the deity of the Christian faith. Seventeenth-century European sources refer to the missionary as cloud.¹⁶ The ivory asserts, by this logic, that the cloud-preacher carries Christ to Asian populations on the Ship of the Church. This way of thinking of person as cloud may seem unintuitive now,

but cloud is in fact eminently suitable as an allegorical motif because of its shapeshifting nature. It is mutable like allegory itself, a mode of figuration where a thing always means, and therefore becomes, something else.

The shape of the clouds is noticeably different from what we observe in the Mughal painting, and also from anything found in European art, such as in the woodcut *Ship of Salvation* reproduced above. The cloud of the ivory is a peculiarly Chinese form which resembles the *lingzhi* 靈芝 fungus. This type of cloud was seen as auspicious and had been in use for centuries; it was employed as an archaic reference already during the Song Dynasty.¹⁴ Importantly, it is a type of cloud which is figured principally through line in all media in which we see it.



Fig. 4. *He Xianggu*, from Wang Shizhen, *Lie xian quan chuan*, 1600. Woodblock print, 26 x 16.6 cm. Harvard-Yenching Library, Cambridge, MA.

Now of course this was but one of several approaches to representing clouds available to artists in the contact zones of late Ming East Asia. To give just one diametrically opposed example, in the painting *Shaded Dwellings among Streams and Mountains* of ca. 1622–25 by Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555–1636), the clouds that invade the composition at the left are actually composed of unpainted reserves of paper—in other words, the absence of line or brush.¹⁸



Fig. 5. Dong Qichang, *Shaded Dwellings among Streams and Mountains*, ca. 1622–25. Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 158.4 x 72.1 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Dong Qichang was an important theorist and art historian as well as a major painter in whose art and writing there has been almost continual interest since his lifetime. He seems to have been inspired by European prints at a climactic moment of Jesuit activity in China prior to the Nanking persecutions of 1616; he drew from those prints not in a slavish or unthinking way, but for his own purposes. In a 1997 article, historian of Chinese art Richard Barnhart, inspired by a proposition made by James Cahill about a

different painting of 1602 by the same artist, argued that the texture strokes of Dong's *Wanluan Thatched Hall* of 1597 were ultimately inspired by the crosshatching of European engraving.¹⁹ In 1597, Dong served as a court-appointed exam administrator in Nanchang at exactly the same time as Matteo Ricci was active in that city.²⁰ There is no textual evidence that the two met, but we do know that one of Dong's closest friends, Li Rihua, met the famous Jesuit. In a remembrance of the encounter, Li wrote that everyone liked Ricci, that Ricci showed him some strange things brought from Europe, and that the writer recognized some that were worth adopting.²¹

Those familiar with Chinese art historiography will know that Dong wrote extensively about the art of the past and what art should be like, and that his pronouncements became normative for later generations. Presently I would like to introduce two statements of his that I see as relevant to this essay. The first comes from a compendium called *Hua yan* 畫眼, *The Eye of Painting*. He remarks that, one day, while he is on a boat out on Dongting Lake, he looks up at the shapeshifting clouds, and this puts him in mind of paintings he has seen by the Mi family of painters from the Song period. Seeing the clouds helps him to understand the spirit of these paintings of mist-covered mountains, which he calls *mo xi* 墨戲, ink plays.²²

No surviving painting is attributable to the father Mi Fu 米芾 (1052–1107), but there is a small group of paintings that can be confidently linked to his son Mi Youren 米友仁 (1074–1151), who is known for his hazy mountain landscapes with almost no contour lines and blank passages for cloud and mist.²³

The second statement of Dong's that I wish to consider is a recommendation that he makes about painting clouds exactly in the hazy manner of the Mi family, without using contour lines. He refers to a disparaging comment made by Mi Youren about the otherwise revered eighth-century painter Wang Wei 王維 (699–759). Mi says that most of Wang Wei's works are unworthy of study because they are like "engraved painting," *ke hua* 刻畫.²⁴ The only exceptions are the ones by Wang of cloudy mountains, which are good because he does not use hard lines for the clouds. In Dong's time, Wang Wei was firmly part of the canon of important artists,

and the Ming-era painter was able to see a painting by this famed predecessor in the collection of a friend named Feng Kaizhi (1548–1605). Scholars believe this to be a handscroll now in the Ogawa collection, Kyoto; there are two related scrolls in Honolulu and Taipei.²⁵ Looking at these works it is clear why Dong associated Wang Wei's style, with its strong lines used to texture rocks, with engraving, or the lines of a woodcut.

The expression *ke hua* long predated Dong Qichang and was historically linked, therefore, to the pressed linearity of the Chinese woodblock tradition and not the European technique whereby crossed lines are employed to produce the illusion of volume and roundness. However, it stands to reason that, as a product of his encounters with European people and objects, Dong's understanding of what it meant for something to be carved took into account the nature of prints from this foreign tradition. This would be a logical extension of the argument by Barnhart, following James Cahill, that Dong's paintings evince awareness of, and respond to, European prints.

The term used to refer to carving as an art form from at least the fourteenth century was *diao ke* 雕刻.²⁶ This expression includes the character used to deride the print-like style of Wang Wei. *Ke* 刻 signals what is common to the making of print matrices and sculpture alike--to make a woodblock the woodcutter must carve away the areas that will not be inked. However, the visual effect of the Chinese print, generally speaking, is very different from the aesthetics of relief sculpture. Chinese prints tend not to have modelling, shading, or shadows, and this gives the images a certain flatness. This principle is nicely illustrated by a comparison of the *Nativity* engraving of Nadal's *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines* with the corresponding Chinese-made woodcut for the Aleni version. There is a considerable flattening out in the Chinese adaptation, a reduction of volume and depth. In the Aleni version, some of the clouds, too, have been remade in the Chinese idiom, with the result that they appear significantly less three-dimensional. This disparity in pictorial conventions explains why when European paintings and prints were shown to Chinese audiences they were sometimes described as being like sculpture--in other words, as having relief.²⁷ That a print of the

Ship of Salvation was converted into an ivory relief specifically is therefore charged with special significance in this transcultural context. It seems unproblematic to suppose, given the Roman origin of the lost source print, that its figures and objects had the roundness and volume of classicizing Italian art—that is to say, the appearance of relief sculpture.²⁸ In other words, the print looked to Chinese eyes like a familiar sculptural format, and this may have something to do with the decision to remediate the image in ivory.

I would now like to return to the two-pronged question that I raised at the beginning of this essay. Should we think of these acts of hosting this particular image in different media and contexts in Asia as acts of hosting Christian religion and European art-forms?

I wish to begin my summative response to that question by inverting it: what becomes strange, or skewed, in these acts of hosting? Is it possible to regard the attitudes of people in these scenarios, or the attitudes expressed through the objects, as inhospitable, alienated, or vexed? After all, we are dealing here with intersecting imperial and colonial regimes. China and Mughal India were empires, and Macau and the Philippines were Iberian colonies circa 1600. These powers were constantly jockeying with each other for position and often there was outright violence between them. The anthropologist Giovanni Da Col, in a recent issue of the journal *L'Homme* dedicated to hosting and hospitality, asserts that hospitality inhabits any concept of the social. The articles in the issue investigate what anthropology looks like if it takes hosting rather than the Maussian gift as the main conceptual framework for the analysis of human interactions.²⁹ A corollary of that argument, I would submit, is that colonial and imperial activity may be regarded as the antithesis of hosting. There is certainly nothing hospitable about invading, exploiting, settling, and imposing cultural norms and forms. Colonialism is best characterized, in this perspective, using analogies of forced hospitality, imposition, and parasitism. The important point is that colonialism and imperialism are, in any case, by Da Col's anthropological logic, fundamentally antisocial.

This, then, is the sociopolitical context in which these acts of artistic reception that I have been analyzing are situated. What would we see as the

markers of estrangement or alienation in them? First, Chinese audiences, including the Chinese carver himself, would not have been accustomed to seeing gods nude.³⁰ Secondly, Chinese deities fly around unencumbered--this Christian god, while not actually affixed to the Cross, seems nonetheless attached to and inseparable from the ship, clouds notwithstanding.

Although it is the Christ child that we see on the ship, the cross-shaped mast, the letters inscribed above it, the *arma Christi*, and the hands, heart, and feet on the sail refer unmistakably to the Passion, thereby linking the image also to the sacrament of the Eucharist. Though in English the word for the consecrated wafer is spelled the same way as the one for the person who receives a guest, the etymologies are in fact distinct: one comes from the Latin *hospes*, the other from *hostia*, victim or sacrifice. The Eucharist is a sacrifice ritually performed. However, there is also the notion that a person taking Communion is a guest at the altar table or *mensa*. When one accepts the Host into one's body, one is effectively hosting the Host. In doing so, however, the communicant becomes enrolled, or re-enrolled, into a universalizing Christian system of relations. Whether one is lovingly received into that cosmic order as a guest, or brutally as a victim, depends of course on one's point of view.

In the Indian example, there are no stigmata on the sail. Another difference is that the IHS medallion on the back of the ship is made up of little images of the Instruments of the Passion, doubling the larger ladder and cross on the ship and the column emblazoned on the sail.³¹ A Wierix print with the same motif on a larger scale clarifies that the monogram of the source image consisted of the Column of the Flagellation as the *I*; a ladder as the left vertical and spear and sponge as the right vertical of the *H*; and an *S* made up of coins and dice.³² In the Mughal painting, the representation of these letters-as-images has a maladroitness that is the result of the copyist not being a native user of the Roman alphabet. The Most Holy Name, believed to partake of the powers of God himself, here becomes a mere assemblage of images that is known by the painter to take the shape of the letter-forms of a foreign script. Given that it involves text presented explicitly as a set of

images, this case of remediation is especially eloquent as a reminder of the fact that when a foreign script is unintelligible what remains as significant is the visual form.³³

Looking at the painting, we might also say that the Christ Child is a little paunchy, with a generous set of hips. Perhaps this is deliberate. To find the strongest expression of antisociality, however, one need observe the bearing of the vessel. What is most striking about this image is that the Mughal painter has the Ship of Salvation sailing *away* from his coastline, charmingly rendered in luminous shell gold, whose only architectural feature is a centrally planned polygonal building with a cylindrical drum and a bulbous dome.

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Endnotes

1. See Cristina Acidini, "L'emblema della Fortuna," in *L'Uomo del Rinascimento: Leon Battista Alberti e le arti a Firenze tra ragione e bellezza*, ed. Cristina Acidini and Gabriele Morolli (Florence: Mandragora, 2006), 166–67.
2. This is observed in Teresa Morna, "Young Christ as the mariner on the Ship of Salvation" (no. I-10), in *Encompassing the Globe: Portugal and the World in the 16th and 17th Centuries. Reference Catalogue*, ed. Jay Levenson (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2007), 112.
3. See Pedro Hernández Cañizares, "La fuente grabada del 'Divino Piloto,'" in *Primer coloquio de arte valenciano* (Valencia: Universidad Literaria de Valencia, 1981), 78–80; and Margarita M. Estella Marcos, *La Escultura barroca de marfil en España: las escuelas europeas y las coloniales* (Madrid: C.S.I.C., Instituto Diego Velázquez, 1984), 337–38.
4. A good introduction to this topic is Susan Stronge, *Painting for the Mughal Emperor: The Art of the Book, 1560–1660* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2002), 110–41.
5. See, for example, Hana Knížková, "Notes on the portrait of Ibrahim 'Adil Shah II of Bijapur in the Náprstek Museum, Prague," in *Facets of Indian Art*, ed. Robert Skelton, Rosemary Crill, and Susan Stronge (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1986), 116–23.
6. Stronge, *Painting for the Mughal Emperor*, 111.
7. On *sulh-i kul*, see A. Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York, 2012), 130–69 and 178–79; and Ebba Koch, "Visual Strategies of Imperial Self-Representation: The Windsor *Padshahnama* Revisited," *Art Bulletin* 99, no. 3 (2017): 93–124. *Sulh-i kul* was officially the policy of Jahangir's father, Akbar; but it is clear through Jahangir's use of the label *mazhar-i kul* مظهر كل (Universal Manifestation) for himself that the son claimed the same spiritual status.
8. Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 131–33; Koch, "Visual Strategies," 93. The passage in Jahangir's memoir on Akbar's religious policy is Muhammad Hashim, ed., *Jahangirnama: Tuzuk-i Jahangiri* (Tehran: Intisharat-i Bunyad-i Farhang-i Iran, 1980), 22; and *The Jahangirnama: Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India*, ed. and trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1999), 40.
9. An example of a seventeenth-century ivory with a wooden frame and a metal fixture for hanging is described and reproduced in Bernardo Ferrão de Tavares e Távora, *Imaginária luso-oriental* (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 1983), 13.
10. I describe the plaque as quasi-amuletic because the term "amulet" is normally used to describe something worn; but the function is the same, i.e., to ensure well-being.
11. Gauvin Bailey suggests that the plaque was made in Macau in "Translation and Metamorphosis in the Catholic Ivories of China, Japan, and the Philippines, 1561–1800," in *Ivories in the Portuguese Empire*, ed. Nuno Vassallo e Silva (Lisbon: Scribe, 2013), 248; but there is more evidence for the ivory carving industry in Manila. See Stephanie Porras, "Locating Hispano-Philippine Ivories," *Colonial Latin American Review* 29, no. 2 (2020): 256–91.
12. Craig Clunas, *Chinese Carving* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1996), 17. There is also the possibility that it was for a Chinese Christian.
13. For a contextualization of the letter, see Porras, "Locating Hispano-Philippine Ivories."
14. A good study of the global reach of Nadal's images is Jean Michel Massing, "Jerome Nadal's *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines* and the Birth of Global Imagery," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 80 (2017): 161–220.
15. See Craig Clunas, *Empire of Great Brightness: Visual and Material Cultures of Ming China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 53–83.
16. Cornelius a Lapide, *Commentaria in Ezechielem prophetam* (Paris, 1622), 89: "Tropologice, nubes sunt Apostoli, & praedicatores Evangelii ob novem analogias"; Henricus Engelgrave, *Caelum Empyreum* (Cologne, 1668), 898: "hic in Ezech. cap. 18: Recte, praedicatores sancti,

- NUBES appellati sunt”; Filippo Picinelli, *Mondo simbolico formato d’imprese scelte, spiegate ed illustrate con sentenze ed erudizioni sacre e profane* (Milan, 1669), 71: “Predicadores nubes sunt.”
17. See Peter Sturman, “Citing Wang Wei: Mi Youren and the Temporal Dimensions of Landscape,” *Ars Orientalis* 49 (2019): 55.
 18. On the painting, see Maxwell K. Hearn, “After Tung Yüan’s ‘Shaded Dwellings Among Streams and Mountains’” (no. 57), in *The Century of Tung Ch’i-ch’ang*, ed. Wai-kam Ho, 2 vols (Kansas City, MO: The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 1992), 2:72–73. Hubert Damisch underscores the distinction between clouds figured using outlines and ones produced in other ways in *A Theory of /Cloud/: Toward a History of Painting*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 203–9.
 19. Richard Barnhart, “Dong Qichang and Western Learning: A Hypothesis,” *Archives of Asian Art* 50 (1997/1998): 7–16; citing James Cahill, *The Distant Mountains: Chinese Painting of the Late Ming Dynasty, 1570–1644* (New York: Weatherhill, 1982), 95.
 20. Barnhart, “Dong Qichang,” 8.
 21. *Ibid.*, 9.
 22. On *mo xi*, see Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting: Su Shih (1037–1101) to Tung Ch’i-ch’ang (1555–1636)*, 2nd ed. (Hong Kong: The University of Hong Kong Press, 2012), 70–72.
 23. See Eugene Wang, “Chinese Art: The Story of Haze (Part One),” *Orientalis* 49, no. 3 (2018): 73–85.
 24. Dong Qichang, *Hua zhi* 畫旨 (Hangzhou: Xi ling yin she, 2008), 17; on *ke hua*, see Damisch, *A Theory of /Cloud/*, 208.
 25. Wen Fong, “Rivers and Mountains after Snow,” *Archives of Asian Art* 30 (1976/1977): 6–33. The Honolulu painting is believed to be a Ming-era copy; Cahill argued that the Ogawa handscroll, too, is a sixteenth-century imitation. See James Cahill, *The Compelling Image: Nature and Style in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Painting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 47–49; and *idem*, *The Distant Mountains*, 91.
 26. Clunas, *Chinese Carving*, 4–5.
 27. Cahill, *The Compelling Image*, 71.
 28. For prints produced in Rome around 1580, see Michael Bury, *The Print in Italy, 1550–1620* (London: The British Museum Press, 2001), 121–69.
 29. Giovanni Da Col, “The H-Factor of Anthropology: Hoarding, Hosting, Hospitality,” *L’Homme* 231–232 (2019): 13–40.
 30. This is not to say that there was no sensual religious sculpture in China; it was possible to see figures like Guanyin wearing clingy draperies in Buddhist art. The situation is, of course, entirely different in India.
 31. A much less refined ivory at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (no. 267-1879) has the IHS monogram represented in this way, which suggests that this is how it looked in the source print.
 32. Marie Mauquoy-Hendrickx, *Les estampes des Wierix conservées au Cabinet des Estampes de la Bibliothèque Royale Albert Ier: Catalogue raisonné, Troisième partie (premier fascicule)* (Brussels: Bibliothèque Royale Albert Ier, 1982), 428 (no. 2138).
 33. Much has been written recently about script as image; see, for example, Brigitte Bedos-Rezak and Jeffrey Hamburger, eds., *Sign and Design: Script as Image in Cross-Cultural Perspective (300–1600 CE)* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2016).

Discovery of Landscape: Xu Bing's Woodblock Prints in the 1980s

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ABSTRACT

In the 1980s, Xu Bing's constant return to the village where he lived and worked during the Down to the Countryside Movement and his meticulous depictions of everyday rural scenes indicate that the zhiqing generation saw the countryside as their spiritual utopia when they faced difficulty in readapting to urban life. The artist's emotional connection with the countryside was in accordance with the return of humanism in the late 1970s and early 1980s. His small woodcuts of rural scenes show, on the one hand, his identification with Gu Yuan's humanistic portrayal of rural life; on the other hand, Xu's standpoint and composition, which are distinct from those of Gu Yuan, reveal Xu's inner detachment from countryside life and growing interest in formal experimentation, which can be seen as a prelude to his later experimental practices with prints.

KEYWORDS

Xu Bing; Woodcut Prints; Gu Yuan.

As a Chinese artist active in the global art world, Xu Bing is renowned for his experimental installations regarding the transformation between texts and images that first drew international attention to him in the late 1980s. *Book From the Sky* (1988), for example, situates the spectator in a world of 4,000 hand-carved, unreadable Chinese-looking characters, was indeed a milestone in his artistic career. Interestingly, currently as one of the most renowned artists at home and abroad, he was never considered a key figure of any art groups formed during the new artistic movement known as the '85 New Wave Movement that emerged in the mid-1980s. Unlike his contemporaries who were actively engaged in the new art wave, he traveled back to the village where he resided from 1974 to 1977 during the Down to the Countryside Movement, absorbing himself in making small woodcuts that depicted rural scenery. Even these works are not included in the school of Village and Soil, a group of artists depicting rural life and scenery active in the early 1980s. These small woodcuts, though treasured by the artists himself, have thus far been little examined by researchers or included in publications covering the general history of contemporary Chinese art.

Raised in an intellectual family that was dishonoured during the Cultural Revolution, Xu Bing was sent to the countryside at the age of nineteen in accordance with Mao Zedong's call that "Educated urban youth receive re-education from the poor and lower-middle peasants." His four-year-long stay in Shoulianggou Village in Hebei province, near his hometown of Beijing, and his ten years of training at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, one of the most prestigious art academies in China with a strong socialist tradition, had a long-lasting influence on his early and later works. One important influence came from his teacher Gu Yuan, one of the most distinguished printmakers during the Yan'an period, whose works Xu Bing had admired since childhood and which he has constantly mentioned in his writings and interviews. In this essay, I will investigate Xu Bing's early woodcut prints and his writings at that time and later examine how the artist, as one of millions of educated urban youth returning to the city after spending years in the countryside, views and depicts the village of Shoulianggou and rural areas in other parts of the country and the

complexities of his relationship with the countryside. By making comparisons between Xu Bing's and Gu Yuan's work, I will also attempt to analyze his affinity with Gu Yuan's art practice in rural areas relative to the intellectual and cultural contexts of the early and mid 1980s China, and, more importantly, his departure from the socialist realist tradition within the academic institution, which can be seen as a beginning point to his artistic experiments in the late 1980s.

Soon after Xu Bing was admitted as a student in the Printmaking Department at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 1977, he started to make small woodblock prints depicting mostly everyday rural life and continued until the mid-1980s, naming the series of works *Shattered Jade*. In 1986, a small book entitled *Xu Bing Small Woodcuts* containing 128 woodblock prints was published by Hunan Art Press, which was the first official publication of his works. In a 1981 article titled "I Draw What I Love" (*Wo hua wo xihuan de dongxi*), published in *Meishu*, at the time the most significant official art journal in China, he recalled the time he spent with a group of high school graduates and local peasants, and how he cherished his life experience in the small impoverished village of Shoulianggou. He said: "I don't know how historians would evaluate the Down to the Countryside Movement, at least I don't think there is anything wrong with the movement. If I hadn't experienced such rural life, I couldn't imagine what I would like to draw . . . after I left, I started to yearn for the life in that small village. I miss the people there. Sometimes during the holidays I go back and stay for a couple of days. The millstones, the dirt roads, the haystacks . . . All these ordinary scenes make me feel welcomed. Everything is so plain, so real, and beautiful. My heart beats fast every time I think of them. It is life. When the past calls you again, life experience in the past becomes more poetic, and the feelings get stronger."¹

In the *Shattered Jade* series, most of the pieces are square-shaped, and less than ten centimetres in length and width. In *Warmth* (1980), the artist delineates a mother pig crouching on the hay, with her eyes closed, breastfeeding little piglets. The dark hay underneath accentuates the bodies of the small creatures peacefully drinking the milk given by their mother. The

round-shaped contour of the mother pig and the square-shaped hay as the backdrop together build a stable and complete configuration of the scene. As in the excerpt from Xu Bing's article quoted above, the artist chose a familiar scene in rural life and gave the work the name *Warmth* with a symbolic meaning, not only to illustrate the tenderness of maternal love but also to indicate the harmonious relations among villagers. Another work from the same series is *Farmhouse* (1979), in which the artist captures the moment when dinner is just ready in a farmer's house, yet no family member is seated. The unadorned wooden dining table with four stools next to it is the only subject matter in this piece. The simple food, such as the steamed bread on the bamboo plate, reminds the artist of the modest life in the village. Just as Xu Bing mentioned in "I Draw What I Love," when one of his schoolmates said to him, "your eyes are only on the *kang* and stove," and he agreed. He said, "a small stove is not worthy as a subject matter for a whole oil painting. But for me, it is worthy of the effort because it has the trace of life."² From what he expressed in the article, we can see the artist remained obsessed with the scenery and local people even though he had left the village many years ago.

Interestingly, he also revealed his unwillingness to become a peasant and spend the rest of his life in the countryside. He said in "I Draw What I Love" that, although he misses the time spent in Shoulianggou Village, he knew that "fighting for food against the harsh climate shouldn't be the mission of my generation."³ The artist also implied in another essay, which was published around the same time, how hard and unbearable the rustic life is: "We [the educated urban youth—the author's note] left the village, but they [the peasants—author's note] have to remain."⁴ In a short memoir written in 2008 included in *The Seventies (Qishi Niandai)*—an anthology of a group of celebrated intellectuals of all fields recalling their youth in the 1970's—Xu Bing expressed his eagerness to leave the small village and enter the Central Academy of Fine Arts in order to fulfill his childhood dream to be an artist. His heart sank when he didn't get any news from the Academy about his application, and when it was finally confirmed that he was admitted to

the prestigious art school in 1977, he couldn't wait to pack his things and leave, though the local peasants still considered him as a member of their village.⁵

Here arises the question: why was Xu Bing obsessed with making small woodcuts depicting rural everyday scenery? Why did he keep going back to the small village of Shoulianggou after returning to the city and entering the art school he dreamt of since childhood?

In 1996, two months after Gu Yuan's death, Xu Bing wrote an essay "Gu Yuan in My Heart" (*Wo xinzhong de Guyuan*) commemorating this most prominent of printmakers during the Yan'an period. In this essay, Xu Bing expresses how much, since childhood, he has appreciated Gu Yuan's work and how hard he has attempted to understand the secret of his greatness. In 1990, Xu Bing moved to the United States because he wanted to see what was happening in the centre of the contemporary art world. After six years away from China, at his studio in East Village, New York, Xu Bing felt he finally understood Gu Yuan and found "a real spirit of avant-garde" in his teacher's work. The Yan'an artists' socially engaged art practices, as Xu Bing puts it, demonstrate "the sensitivity to social and cultural circumstances and methodological innovation of the past art practices,"⁶ and, for Xu Bing, that is the real spirit of avant-garde. Interestingly, what Xu Bing probably didn't know is, almost half a century earlier, in the April 1945 issue of *Life* magazine, Gu Yuan's work was used to illustrate new life under the Communist rule in Yan'an.⁷ In the same year, three of Gu Yuan's woodcuts were included in a collection of Chinese prints entitled *China in Black and White*, with an introduction by the American writer Pearl S. Buck, known for her novels depicting Chinese village and peasant life.⁸

Originating from a peasant family in Guangdong, Gu Yuan went to Yan'an in 1938 at the age of nineteen. After one year's training at *Luyi* (Lu Xun Art and Literature Academy), he was sent in 1940 to Nian Village to become a clerk for the local government in accordance with Mao Zedong's call that artists should leave the "small *Luyi*" and embrace the "big *Luyi*."⁹ In his later years, Gu Yuan repeatedly recalled that the one year spent in Nian Village was a valuable experience for his artistic career. Clerical work gave him a chance to learn about real peasant life and how to make his artwork more appealing

to the taste of local people.¹⁰ Looking at Gu Yuan's early works from around 1940–42, I indeed find similarities between teacher and student, although Xu Bing was seldom directly taught by Gu Yuan during his years in the Central Academy of Fine Arts. They both were interested in depicting ordinary rural life, and Gu Yuan's first individual works, such as *Fetch Water* (1940), *Transport Straw* (1940), *A Flock of Sheep* (1940), *Cutting the Straw* (1940), and *Rural Scenery* (1940), are mainly portrayals of the everyday agricultural activities of peasants. Unlike his better-known later works, the style of these works, featuring heavy shading and dense lines, are associated more with the Leftist New Woodcuts, a movement initiated by the renowned author Lu Xun and active in the 1930s in major cities such Shanghai, Hangzhou, and Tianjin. The figures in the prints by Gu Yuan are either in profile or viewed from behind, with little revelation of their facial expression. The peasants are simply doing the same farm work day after day, as if they have been integrated into the background scenery, creating a tranquil and nostalgic mood, yet, at the same time, there is a sense of detachment. The peaceful yet isolated atmosphere in Gu Yuan's early works have comparisons with Xu Bing's rural woodcuts and sketches of the 1980s, although, as I mentioned earlier, the latter contains few figures.

During the Cultural Revolution, a time when it was extremely difficult to gain access to a diversity of books, Xu Bing, as a teenager, luckily received a collection of books belonging to Zhao Baoxu, an art enthusiast and colleague of his father. Among the books in the collection, *Northern Wood-engravings*,¹¹ with Gu Yuan's *Rural Scenery* on the cover, was one of main resources of Xu Bing's self-artistic cultivation.¹² This compilation includes twenty-three works by Gu Yuan, among which are the above-mentioned early pieces, as well as some mature works, such as the Yan'an prints school style he is known for.¹³ As Xu Bing commented, Gu Yuan's woodcuts are deeply engaged with the social and political shift, not only in terms of the modification of print styles that were more appealing to the local peasants of the communist run area, but also his choice of subject matter.¹⁴

If we go through the most successful works by Gu Yuan created between 1942–44, the peak of the school of Yan'an printmaking, it is not hard

to find clues about his preference of motifs. Even though most of his works during this time of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) were for propaganda use, essentially to promote military recruitment campaigns and boost a more solid morale, he avoided portraying brutal battle scenes that incited collective hatred against Japanese invaders. Instead, he concentrated on depicting a sense of warmth and harmoniousness between the communist army and the peasants. For example, *A Soldier Returns on Home Leave* (1942) represents a family gathering to welcome the young soldier returning home. While he is busy telling his parents and relatives news from the army, his younger sister is curiously looking at his armband, his younger brother trying on the soldier's army cap, implying that the younger generation is a future army reserve force for the Communist Party. However, recruitment promotion, the actual theme of the work, is hidden behind the portrayal of a joyful family atmosphere. Gu Yuan's work "presents the party line not with tired slogans but with warmth and intimacy."⁴⁵ Other works propagandizing the political social reform carried out by the Communist Party in the Yan'an base areas also have the similar characteristics. Take *Marriage Registration* (1942) and *An Appeal for Divorce* (1943) as examples, even though both are aimed at promoting the new marriage policy, the artist intentionally softens the intervention of administrative order into personal and domestic issues by situating the government official in a secondary position. In contrast, highlighting the protagonists of the marriage—the family and the fellow villagers—the artist also attempts to integrate the will of the party with rural conventions, individual emotions, and community life.

However, there are also several obvious dissimilarities between Xu Bing and Gu Yuan. For example, take a group of small woodcuts by Xu Bing between 1980 and 1982: *Field* (1980), *Pond* (1980), *Sounds of Spring* (1982), *Garden Patch* (1982), and *Winter Courtyard Scene* (1982). One can find a perspectival commonality in all of these works—the village scene in each piece is restricted to a closed space, either in a courtyard, or in a garden or a poultry farm with a fence around them. The shape is either round or square. In the foreword to *Xu Bing Prints*, Xu Bing explains that one of the reasons the print is a most suitable medium for his art making, especially woodblock

printmaking, is that it brings “an organic sense of completeness.”¹⁶ To fully cover the surface of the woodblock can be seen as a pursuit of “completeness.” Although almost all of these prints depict rural scenes in an outdoor setting, the scenes are separate from their surroundings. Each print constructs an independent, self-contained world enclosed by a kind of fencing, indicating an independent habitation of the area within.

In comparison with Xu Bing’s enclosed spaces, Gu Yuan’s representative works—for instance, *An Appeal for Divorce*—even though the print is set in the interior of a house, the the figures standing in the doorway makes the exclusive interaction between the wife and administrator extend to the outside, and can be seen as the symbol of community life. Another example is *Celebration of the Birthday of an Army Cook* (1944). A birthday celebration is usually a personal ceremony with friends and family. However, in this print, there are people in silhouette sitting in the foreground as audience, with the army cook, the main character, standing in the centre and receiving birthday gifts from the people on the right side coming in from the outside. Among this group of people are both local farmers and army officials. On the left side, several people playing musical instruments add a joyful atmosphere to the party. All these compositional arrangements make the army cook’s birthday celebration a stage show, and although it largely takes place in an enclosed indoor space, it connects the individual with the collective, expanding personal ceremony to a semi-public experience.

What is more, Xu Bing’s prints cited above are seen from an aerial viewpoint. This allows the artist to observe the entire landscape without anything blocking his view. For instance, in *Sounds of the Spring*, all the chicks are arranged without any overlap. At the same time, they are reductively depicted, with only the black silhouettes suggesting their different shapes and movements. Similarly, in *Garden Patch*, the three patches where different vegetables grow are fully represented as well as the laundry hanging on the fence and the three chicks in front of the fencing. However, the rural scenes in these prints are not panoramic. Each work in this series shows only one fragmentary aspect of rural life—either it is a piece of land, a small pond, or a vegetable garden. In addition, seen from a bird’s-eye view, everything is

foreshortened. For example, in *Stone Roller*, the stone roller and the horse equipment are widened and flattened as if they are seen through a wide-angle lens. What is more, in *Field*, the foreshortened crops have lost their entire volume and are reduced to only two-dimensional dots and lines. Like the vegetable garden in *Garden Patch*, the viewer can clearly see how the various field patches are horizontally and vertically arranged. Also, the well is reduced to a geometrical shape, with only a few details indicating what it actually is. In this way, the simplified approach to depiction makes the print nearly abstract, almost like a diagrammatic map.

Interestingly, Xu Bing's writings throughout the 1980s are associated with the basic dogma of socialist aesthetics—the close relationship between art and the people. In addition, even until 1996, after he had exiled himself from the Chinese art world and the socialist tradition during his six years in the US, Xu Bing's interpretation and appraisal of Gu Yuan's work still in accordance with the main thoughts of Mao Zedong's *Talks at the Yan'an Forum on literature and Art*—art must be engaged with social change; artists must be integrated with the people. Therefore, there is a contradiction between his artist statement on the relationship art and the people and his visual expression.

In order to address this contradiction, I want to refer to the concept of symptomatic reading put forward by the French philosopher Louis Althusser (1918–1990) in his book *Reading Capital* (1970, co-authored by Étienne Balibar), a rereading of Karl Marx's monumental *Das Kapital*. In this book, Althusser asserts that Karl Marx has two ways of reading a text. The first type of reading is the standard one, which focuses on the immediate visible part of the text; the second reading is called symptomatic reading, a reading strategy focusing on the invisible part of the text, the meaning that is “excluded” and “forbidden.” As Althusser puts it, “The invisible is defined by the visible as its invisible, its forbidden vision: the invisible is not therefore simply what is outside the visible (to return to the spatial metaphor), the outer darkness of exclusion—but the inner darkness of exclusion, inside the visible itself because defined by its structure.”¹² Althusser asserts that a symptomatic reading is “a reading that might well be called ‘symptomatic’ (symptomale),

insofar as it divulges the undivulged event in the text it reads, and in the same movement relates it to a different text, present as a necessary absence in the first. Like Marx's first reading, his second reading presupposes the existence of "two" texts and the measurement of the first against the second. But what distinguishes this new reading from the old one is the fact that in the new one the second text is articulated with the lapses in the first text."¹⁸ That is to say, although being absent, the invisible and unspeakable part of the text leaves traces that can be brought to light by the reader.

In this respect, I would argue, in Xu Bing's case, "the first text" (the visible) and "the second text" (the forbidden) are somehow separate. Xu Bing's writings, mostly in accordance with the socialist aesthetic thoughts, can be considered the "first text," and his small woodcuts and sketches the "second text." Reading his artist statements published in official art journals, especially those written in the early 1980s, shortly after the Cultural Revolution, we can see that as a young man coming from a disgraced intellectual family, who was lucky enough to have a chance to be selected as a worker-peasant-soldier student, enter a prestigious art college, and have a stable position in the academic institution, Xu Bing was fully aware of what he was expected to express in public, and he actually uses his writings as a chance to declare where he stands—with the people (especially the peasant), with collectivity, and with socialist realist convention. However, when it comes to pictorial expression, which can be more ambiguous than textual ones, the artist lets down his guard and unwittingly reveals symptoms of his inner emotions and thoughts, which may have been silenced by ideological convictions. Such repressed symptoms, camouflaged by conventional motifs and socialist realist techniques, represent Xu Bing's longing for individuality and self-consciousness as an independent artist.

A sense of isolation that is evident in Xu Bing's work implies the distance between the viewer and the picture, as well as the artist's inner self and outer world. In his article "The Discovery of Landscape," Japanese philosopher and literary critic Karatani Kōjin argues that there is "a link between landscape and an introverted, solitary situation. . . . it is only within the inner man, who appears to be indifferent to his external surroundings,

that landscape is discovered. It is perceived by those who do not look outside.”¹⁹ In Xu Bing’s case, the rural scenery he depicts is distanced, but at the same time, internalized, becoming integral to the artist’s spiritual and emotional territory. The people who are of no consequence recede into the landscape in the background yet become part of it, which Karatani describes as the eccentric “people-as-landscapes.”²⁰ In Xu Bing’s small woodcuts, the villagers are largely invisible, almost completely dissolved into the rural context, with their existence suggested only by the presence of farming and domestic equipment. Even in *The First Lunar Month* (1982) and *Harvest End* (1982), two of Xu Bing’s few woodcuts that include figures and include colour, are not so different from the non-figurative works analyzed above, the artist again presents a bird’s-eye viewpoint and compositionally sets the gathering scene within a closed space. The villagers in *The First Lunar Month* congregate in a circle and watch a lion dance performance, but, at the same time, the high viewpoint indicates the observant eye of the artist standing above, who is overlooking the whole scene as landscape. Similarly, in *Harvest End*, the hay stacks around the crowd form a semi-circle, which suggests the grain has been harvested, and the peasants have free time to watch an open-air movie. All the villagers, including the movie projectionist, with their back towards the audience, are attentively watching the movie, projected on the curtain in the far background. Only the artist, who commands a panoramic view, absorbs everything, the stars, the moon, the haystack, and the people in his own yard.

The people as romantic landscape in Xu Bing’s work are obviously different from “the people” in Gu Yuan’s work, who are both the artist’s subject matter as well as the receivers of propaganda. One thing is for sure, in both Xu Bing and Gu Yuan’s work the people (the peasant) are delineated as a whole; the difference is, Gu Yuan attempts to select “typical characters under typical circumstances,”²¹ (a basic rule of socialist realism) to represent the whole peasant population, to absent the artist himself and draw the audience into the depicted scene. By contrast, in Xu Bing’s work, such as *The First Lunar Month*, the composition is completely decentralized. There is neither a main figure nor minor figure. All the figures are either unseen, obscured, or

integrated as part of the landscape.

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1. Xu Bing, "Wo hua wo xihuan de dongxi," *Meishu* no. 5 (May 1981), 18.
2. *Ibid.*, 19.
3. *Ibid.*, 18.
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5. Xu Bing, "Yumei she yizhong yangliao," in *Qishi Niandai*, eds. Bei Dao and Li Tuo (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing, 2009), 25-26. For the English translation of the essay, see Xu Bing, *Xu Bing Prints* (Beijing: Culture and Art Publishing House, 2009), 206-219.

6. Xu Bing, “Wo xinzhong de Guyuan,” *Meishu yanjiu* no.1 (1997), 17.
7. “Woodcuts Help Fight China’s Battles,” *Life* (April 9, 1945), 57–60.
8. *China in Black and White: An Album of Woodcuts by Contemporary Chinese Artists* (New York: The John Day Company, 1945). The collection of woodcuts are selected by the China Woodcut Association and the Chinese Ministry of Information.
9. Gu Yuan, “Dao daluyi qu xuexi,” *Meishu* no.3 (1962), 9. Going to “The big *Luyi*” basically means that artists should leave their small intellectual circle and blend into local peasants’ life.
10. see Gu Yuan, “Yaolan,” in *Yan’an sui Yue: Yan’an shiqi geming meishu huodong huiyilu*, eds. Sun Xinyuan and Shang Dezhou (Xi’an: Shaanxi People’s Fine Art Press, 1985), 67–71.
11. *Northern Wood-engravings* (Shanghai: Gaoyuan Bookstore, 1947). The compilation includes 122 pieces created during wartime by twenty-eight printmakers from the northern and northwestern China. Many of them come from the Communist-held Yan’an, such as Li Hua, Wang Qi, and Wo Zha.
12. Xu Bing, *Xu Bing Prints* (Beijing: Culture and Art Publishing House, 2009), 9.
13. Felicity Lufkin describes the Yan’an print school style as “bold, uncluttered outline-and-silhouette” largely developed by Yan’an printmakers Gu Yuan along with Yan Han and Hu Yichuan. The style draws on the folk style of popular prints as a response to peasants’ criticism of the New Prints style, in accordance with Mao Zedong’s “Yan’an Talk” (1942) that artists should meet the taste and needs of local people. Felicity Lufkin, “Folk Art in Modern China, 1930–1945” (Phd diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2001), 304.
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19. Karatani Kōjin, “The Discovery of Landscape,” in *The Origin of Japanese Modern Literature*, translated and edited by Brett de Bary (Durham: Duke University, 1993), 25.
20. *Ibid.*, 24.
21. “Realism, to my mind, implies, besides truth of detail, the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances.” Friedrich Engels, “Letter to Margaret Harkness, Beginning of April 1888,” Marx and Engels on Literature and Art: A Selection of Writings, eds. Lee Baxandall and Stefan Morawski (New York: Telos Press Publishing, 1973), 114.

Appropriation of Migrant Art Genres into the Asante Kente Home Craft: A Symbol of Unconditional Hospitality

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ABSTRACT

Mobility and migration of various art genres in different cultures have impacted significantly the production of the Asante Kente in the late 20th and early 21st century in Ghana. Appropriation of the philosophy, materiality, and design elements of these migrant art genres, specifically embroidery and screen printing into the production of the Asante Kente has opened up a dialogue on whether or not this is healthy for the growth of the prestigious indigenous cloth of the Asantes of Ghana. This qualitative descriptive phenomenological study was conducted between June 2020 and March 2021 at Bonwire in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. Qualitative data of Asante Kente weavers, Asante Kente traders, and elders who are custodians of the Asante Kente craft were garnered via extensive personal and focus group interviews and analyzed thematically. The findings reveal that the appropriation of migrant art genres into the Asante Kente has positive ramifications for the preservation, appreciation, marketing, and sustainability of indigenous cloth. Amongst other things, the reception of the migrant art genres is a reflection of the unconditional hospitality of the Asante people; assisted in meeting the differing tastes of Asante Kente consumers; increased its patronage among those with minimum living standards to patronize the cloth; increased the creativity and innovation of the Asante Kente weavers.

KEYWORDS

Asante Kente; Appropriation; Embroidery; Ghana; Hospitality; Migrant Art; Screen Printing

Introduction

The Asante is the largest and dominant ethnic society among the Akan-speaking ethnic societies in Ghana. They are located largely in Kumasi, the second capital city of Ghana, and are predominantly scattered in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The Asante kingdom was formed in the 17th century following the military alliance of ten independent Asante states to wage war against the Denkyira.¹ The independent Asante states include Kwaaman, Juaben, Kuntanase, Nsuta, Kumawu, Mampong, Ejisu, Kokofu, Bekwai, and Asumegya. The formation of the new Asante kingdom in the 17th century was cemented with the appointment of their first king, Otumfuo Osei Tutu I, and the enchantment of a golden stool² from the sky by a powerful traditional priest who became the most trusted ally of the first king by the name Okomfo Anokye.



Fig. 1. Map of the Study Area



Fig. 2. Golden stool (*Sikadwa Kofi*)

The Asante kingdom since its inception in the 17th century has become one of the most powerful and most sustainable kingdoms in Ghana. It is not surprising that the Asantes have a vibrant artistic and cultural heritage. Amongst the numerous age-long artistic innovations with cultural significance is the Asante Kente. The Asante Kente is the most cherished and valued African indigenous clothes. The traditional cloth is woven in narrow strips on a traditional loom called *Nsadua Kofi*.³

After that, the narrow strips measuring 7.5 cm to 11.5 cm wide are sewn together to get the large fabric. The specification for men is 300cm-360cm long while the specification for women is 180cm long. Thomas Edward Bowdich describes how the Asante Kente is worn by men, that it is wrapped around the shoulder like the Roman Toga.⁴ On the other hand, the women sew the fabric into a skirt and a blouse or a straight dress. The weaving of the Asante Kente is traditionally a craft for males. Women were culturally prohibited from weaving the cloth on the loom. It is believed among the Asantes that the menstruation of women defiles their purity and as such renders them unfit to sit on the *Nsadua Kofi* loom to weave the Asante Kente. Their roles in the Asante Kente production have been traditionally restricted

to the preparation of the yarns such as spinning the yarns and winding them onto weaving accessories for the men to weave on the looms, sewing the narrow strips together to form large fabrics, and marketing the Asante Kente clothes. This underscores why the Asante Kente is seen as a sacred cloth often worn for sacred events among the Asantes, such as the swearing-in of new chiefs, the performance of ancestral veneration, traditional festivals, rituals, and rites.



Fig. 3. *Nsadia Kofi*

Issues on appropriation often resulting from various consumption patterns, mobility, trade, and cultural exchanges date back to many centuries in human history.⁵ This explains the appearance of the same or similar designs in different cultures and locations across the globe. Kristin Lunde mentions that in the area of textiles, the appropriation has largely focused on the transfer of symbols, motifs, and decorations from other societies. Adom and his colleagues aver that due to globalization, technology, as well as mobility, and migration, the Asante Kente has undergone various

transformational changes in its materiality, philosophy, production, and finishing.⁶ This has resulted in the appropriation of some techniques and design elements in the migrant art genres of other cultures into the Asante Kente. The dominant migrant art genres that have been appropriated into the Asante Kente are embroidery and printing. Essel and Opoku-Mensah have attributed symbol creation and other decorative techniques particularly embroidery, in the Asante Kente by the Asantes as a skill learned from Egypt due to migration and mobility around the 10th century.⁷ It is possible that the trade relations that made it possible for the spreading of the hand-made embroidery affected other countries in Africa. Adiji and Ojo opine that among the Nupe and Hausa ethnic societies in Nigeria, the hand-made embroidery has a long history dating between 200 A. D.-500 A. D. though they agree it is not indigenous to Nigeria.⁸ In Ghana, the hand-made embroidery technique is known as *Nwomu* (piercing through something) learned through trade and migration has been appropriated into the Asante Kente.⁹ The creativity of the Asante Kente weavers has resulted in the diversity of the technique, giving birth to the *Kukrubuo* (linear patterns) and the *Kawo* (centipede patterns) of the *Nwomu* hand-made applique embroidery. Today, most Asante Kente weavers have embraced machine-made embroidery which is less time-consuming, unlike the *Nwomu* hand-made embroidery. Also, the machine-made embroidery gives high precision to the designs incorporated into the Asante Kente.

Another significant migrant art genre that has affected the production of the Asante Kente is screen printing. This printing technique became dominant in the 20th and 21st centuries in the indigenous textile industries in Ghana. Allison Joan Martino attributes the popularity and appropriation of the screen-printing technique into indigenous textile production (*Adinkra* cloth and Asante Kente) to Ablade Glover, a retired professor at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana.¹⁰ Glover learned the screen-printing technique while studying at the Central School of Art and Design, London, and introduced it to the indigenous cloth makers at Ntonso, a community famed for the production of the *Adinkra* cloth in the 1970s. Gradually, screen-printing was incorporated into the Asante Kente woven

clothes. The reception and hospitality of the Asante Kente to these dominant migrant art genres have resulted in a high level of cross-cultural pollination, interculturalism, and cultural hybridity. Scholars such as Susanna Gristina and Paulette Young have taken a stand that the value of traditional clothes has been heightened following their hospitality to the appropriation of elements from migrant art genres. For instance, Gristina mentions that appropriation is relevant in promoting the sustainability and creativity of traditional clothes. Embarking on the “Kòrai x Kente” Project that combines the craftsmanship of Sicily, Italy with the traditional Asante Kente of Ghana, she affirms that appropriation of migrant art genres into local textiles promotes social inclusion, interculturalism, and innovation. In a similar vein, Paulette Young asserts that the appropriation of the Dutch wax print into a local textile cloth by redefining the migrant wax print through local naming and assigning Ghanaian cultural meaning has given a new visual voice to creative expression.¹¹ Yet, other scholars such as Okyere and Denoncourt have raised issues on the loss of identity of the Kente and the reduction of its quality which they assert is being adulterated from its originality because of its acceptance to migrant art genres and as such requires an international property right.¹²

Therefore, this empirical study in Bonwire, the largest traditional community for the production of the Asante Kente in the Ashanti Region of Ghana was carried out to scholarly investigate the level of acceptance or hospitality appropriation of various art genres on the Asante Kente. A qualitative descriptive phenomenological study was used for this study. The study participants included seven Asante Kente weavers who were personally interviewed extensively. Likewise, five Asante Kente traders and 12 elders who are custodians of the Asante Kente weaving in the study area were involved in extensive focus group interviews to shed light on the phenomenon under investigation. They were selected purposively based on the distinctive characteristics that they had which made them knowledgeable in the phenomenon under investigation. The personal interviews and focus group interviews were conducted using a well-designed and pre-tested interview guide that was developed based on the study's objectives. Written and oral

consent of all the study participants was sought before they were recruited for the study. The data from the interview were audio-recorded, transcribed, and vetted for accuracy by eight members of the sample from each of the three categories of the sample. Descriptive observation of the materiality, philosophy, production techniques, and finishing of the Asante Kente produced in the past five years (2016-2021) that significantly show the influence of the migrant art genres specifically, printing and embroidery were done using a well-developed observation checklist. The final data were analyzed using the procedural steps in the thematic data analysis.

Results

Appropriation of migrant art genres in the design and production of Asante Kente to meet customers' preferences and taste

The Asante Kente weavers revealed the influential migrant art genres and reasons why their appropriation into the production of the Asante Kente is significant. Their views indicate that the appropriation of the migrant art genres is largely driven by customer preference:

'Customers have their preferences, some like the Asante Kente which has been embroidered, some prefer the Asante Kente which has incorporated some prints, while others do not want any incorporation of the prints. Asante Kente has changed on the good side because it tries to have different types of art genres incorporated in it which caters for each person locally and also internationally' (BON-AKW-PI, Personal Communication, November 4, 2020).

The Asante Kente traders equally made favorable remarks on the incorporation and diversification of products from the Asante Kente as a result of the influence of the migrant art genres. In an FGD interview, they told the researcher:

'Some customers prefer *joromi* (embroidery designs) intermixed with the hand-woven Asante Kente. Some designs cannot be created on the *Nsadia Kofi* loom but can be easily produced using the *joromi* (embroidery).

This makes the final cloth very unique' (BON-AKT-FGD, Personal Communication, November 11, 2020).



Fig. 4. Design appropriation of embroidery patterns in Asante Kente.



Fig. 5. Design appropriation of screenprints in Asante Kente.

However, it should be noted that the Asante Kente weavers have incorporated the techniques in these migrant art genres but have tactfully utilized them in producing designs and patterns that reflect the culture of the Asantes. The Asante Kente weavers disclosed:

‘We incorporate Asante cultural symbols such as Adinkra symbols into the already woven strips of the Asante Kente in either printed (Using silk screens) or embroidered forms. The colors we select also reflect our philosophies of color. The information we want to use in the final cloth in communication has not changed. We have only accepted and appropriated the migrant art genres because we are hospitable people and want to satisfy the preferences of our customers, both local and international’ (BON-AKW-FGD, Personal Communication, November 8, 2020).

Appropriation of migrant art genres is a result of the unconditional hospitality notable of the Asantes

The views expressed by the elders and family heads interviewed at Bonwire are similar to the position of the Asante Kente weavers. They revealed that they are not against the diversification of products using the Asante Kente. In an FGD interview, the elders remarked:

‘Asantes do not like discrimination. Culturally, Asantes are instructed to be hospitable and accommodating. That is the reason why we don’t see the introduction and incorporation of the migrant art genres as a threat to the value of the Asante Kente. It is rather popularizing the cloth and making people know of our rich cultural heritage’ (BON-E-FGD_I, Personal Communication, November 11, 2020).

The Asante Kente weavers told the researcher that due to the hospitality of the Asantes, they also welcome people from different ethnic societies into Bonwire. These migrant groups and persons travel to Bonwire to find greener pastures since the place is a big trading center for the Asante Kente. Some of them travel to Bonwire to learn the skills in weaving the Asante Kente weaving as a professional craft. Others already know the weaving craft but hail from other areas in Ghana but seeks employment at Bonwire. The dominant ethnic group where Kente weavers traveled from is in

the Volta region of Ghana. Krammer reports that since the 1950s, the Ewe Kente weavers from the Volta Region of Ghana started to appropriate the use of rayon yarns in contrasting colors to weave non-figurative weave patterns, a distinctive Kente weaving technique characteristic of the Asante Kente. Thus, these Ewe Kente weavers easily find themselves jobs whenever they settled in traditional Asante Kente weaving communities in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. Interestingly, some Ewe Kente weavers learn the distinctive characteristics of the Asante Kente when they settle in the Ashanti Region while the Asante Kente weavers equally appropriate the Ewe figurative weave patterns into the Asante Kente. Thus, mobility and migration contribute to the cross-cultural design appropriations within the two significant indigenous weaving communities in Ghana.

Appropriation of migrant art genres has heightened the value and appreciation of the Asante Kente

The Asante Kente weavers were not perturbed because there are wholly printed forms of the Asante Kente weave patterns on the market. These printed Asante Kente clothes are cheaper when compared to the original hand-woven Asante Kente cloth. Yet, the Asante Kente weavers mentioned that they applaud their desire to wear the Asante Kente, though they do not have the financial strength to purchase the original. They remarked:

'It is not everyone who can afford the cost of the hand-woven Asante Kente cloth. As such, it is not wrong for our people to purchase the printed Asante Kente cloth. Their desire to wear the hand-woven Asante Kente-inspired prints must be lauded. After all, the weave patterns, color, and culture they are portraying are still Asante and Ghanaian. People can easily tell the difference between the hand-woven and printed versions so there is no cause for worry. For such customers, when the desire for the Asante Kente heightens, they will save money to purchase the original hand-woven Asante Kente eventually. Everyone values the original (hand-woven Asante Kente clothes) and not the fake (printed Asante Kente clothes)' (BON-AKW-FGD, Personal Communication, November 14, 2020).

Numerous products are today produced using Asante Kente either the hand-woven or printed forms. These include flying and bow ties, dressing bags, picture frames, T-Shirts, and many others.

Discussion

The study's findings revealed that the presence and acceptance of the Ewe weavers to reside in the Bonwire vicinity is an indication of the hospitality of the Asantes, allowing the Ewe weavers to stay to be able to learn (as I noted in some home-based weaving centers at Bonwire) and make a living and not as a result of the Ewes teaching the Asantes how to weave because they have authority over the weaving skills.¹³ Courtney Micots reports that when the Ewes were under the rule of the then Asante King, Otumfuo Osei Tutu I, they learned the weaving skills from the Asantes to appropriate their weaving skills.¹⁴ Thus, migration and mobility have made possible the learning of the weaving craft and aspects from each other, nourishing and improving the weave patterns produced among the two ethnic societies. According to the Asante Kente weavers interviewed, they admitted that they employ Ewe Kente weavers who have the basic skills in weaving and teach them how to patiently weave the Asante patterns for their clients. Evidence from the field shows that some Asante Kente weavers have appropriated the Ewe designs into the Asante Kente to meet the differing preferences of customers, some of them who want the figurative elements notable in the Ewe Kente tradition.

The Asante Kente cloth and items produced by borrowing and/or incorporating migrant art genres are given as souvenir items to visitors and tourists. Though this acceptance and diversification of the Asante Kente are seen as a threat and a drain on the pocket of the Asante Kente weavers as Okyere and Denoncourt alluded, the findings of the study suggested otherwise. The hospitality of these migrant art genres and products according to this study has rather enhanced the sales of the Asante Kente as it has made it possible to satisfy the design preferences of customers. In her *Kòrai x Kente* project in Sicily in Italy, Gristina emphasized the acceptance of migrant art genres in the diversification of Kente into various products such as Sicilian hats, bags, wooden objects, and earrings. She added that it is a creativity and

sustainability step that enriches the value of traditional cloth without compromising its local identity. This agrees with the views expressed by the study participants. The findings of the study agree with the observation of Adom and his colleagues that the designs that embody the Asante philosophies have been maintained despite the hospitality of the Asante Kente to the influences of migrant art genres. Therefore, the hospitality received by the migrant art genres, which is a reflection of the Asante cultural heritage of hospitality is a good step to promote and enhance the marketability of the Asante Kente.

Conclusion

This study adopted the descriptive phenomenology in probing how the reception of the migrant art genres and cultures into the production of the Asante Kente reflects on the unconditional hospitality ingrained in the Asante culture. The findings revealed that the migrant art genres, particularly, embroidery and printing have greatly influenced the production of the Asante Kente and there has been an increase in the diversification of the products produced with the Asante Kente. Asante Kente's reception to the migrant art styles is to satisfy the preferences of both local and international customers which issues from the Asante culture of hospitality that frowns on discrimination. The Asante Kente's hospitality to the migrant art genres and cultures has raised the market value of the Asante Kente, increased its popularity; intensified creative products from the Asante Kente. The incorporation of the techniques in the migrant art genres has been tactfully utilized in producing designs and patterns that reflect the culture of the Asantes. The study contends that appropriation of the elements in migrant art genres into indigenous art and craft could be healthy as it offers great avenues in heightening the value of the indigenous products and widening their patronage. Based on these key findings, the study recommends that the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture should partner with Art and design institutions to train Asante Kente weavers to enhance their understanding of the migrant art genres and build their capacities on how to incorporate them

more creatively into the designing and production of the Asante Kente to meet the demands of the current market.

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Endnotes

1. The Denkyira kingdom existed before the 1620s and originated from the Bono state and resided mainly in Agona. The Asantes were a tributary and served the Denkyiras until 1701 when the Asantes waged war (The Battle of Feyiase) against them and became victorious. They

captured their king, Ntim Gyakari and since then the Denkyiras became the servants of the Asante Kingdom afterward.

2. The Golden stool, known in the Asante language as *Sikadwa Kofi*, is a sacred stool that *Okomfo* Anokye, the traditional priest for the first Asante King, Otumfuo Osei Tutu I conjured from the sky after he performed some rituals. Among the Asantes, the stool is believed to be a repository of all the souls of Asantes. Owing to this, it is believed to be the sacred artifact that unifies all the Asantes.
3. The weaving loom referred to as *Nsadia* in the Asante local language is a wooden structure that is operated with the hands. The loom was developed by Ota Kraban, an indigene of Bonwire on a Friday. Hence, the wooden device for weaving is referred to as Kofi, the name for a male child. It is revered as if it was human, explaining why it is given a human name.
4. Bowdich Thomas Edward, *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee* (London: Routledge, 1966), 624.
5. Scheel, "Ancient, Indigenous and Iconic Textile Motifs", 1093.
6. Adom, Bonsu and Kissi, "The influence of European elements", 41-46.
7. Quaicoo and Opoku-Mensah, "Pan-African artistic reflections", 30-41.
8. Adiji, *Assessment of Embroidery Production on Textile Garments*, 421.
9. Amissah, Amoako, and Essel, "Nwomu: Hand-Made Embroidery", 500-511.
10. Allison Joan Martino, *Stamping History*, 331.
11. Paulette Young, "Ghanaian Woman and Dutch Wax Prints", 305-327.
12. Okyere and Denoncourt, "Protecting Ghana's intellectual property rights", 415-425.
13. Frimpong and Asinyo, "A comparative study of history", 1-18.
14. Micots, "Kente cloth."

Orientalism in a Tropical Empire: Orientalist Artistic Models and Pedro Américo's Artworks in Rio de Janeiro

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I will approach the presence of orientalist artworks and artistic models in the nineteenth century art in Brazil. This text was developed in three steps: at the first moment I will present what I found to be the assessment of a canon of orientalist painting since the nineteenth century, focusing on the establishment of the *Société des Peintres Orientalistes Français* in France. In the second part, focusing on Brazil, I will inquire the presence of orientalist artworks in Brazilian museums, art exhibitions and historiography. Finally, I will present what I found to be the tour de force of orientalism in the Brazilian Empire: the presence of Pedro Américo's artworks at the 1884 "Brazilian Salon", the last general exhibition held by the Imperial Academy prior to the Proclamation of Republic in 1889.

KEYWORDS

Art in Brazil; Nineteenth Century; General Exhibitions; Léonce Benedite; *Orientalismo na pintura*.

Creating genealogies, establishing a canon: *Première exposition retrospective et actuel des peintres orientalistes français (1893)*

The category of “orientalism” or “orientalist art” is a familiar one in art history. It can be found on labels in permanent collections in museums such as the Musée d’Orsay, in specialized department at auction houses such as Christie’s and Sotheby’s or in art history exhibitions and publications. When we talk about orientalism in nineteenth century art, we expect the listener to recall specific artists and artworks. Eugène Delacroix and Jean-Léon Gérôme are on the top of the list when we refer to what Linda Nochlin called the *Imaginary Orient*. Nonetheless, we should ask ourselves: when and how exactly did this canon enter art history?¹

It is important to understand the emergence of orientalism and its definitions during the nineteenth century, when the category started to be used, to situate the reception or the definition of orientalist art in Brazil. Looking into the history of the category in France, we observed that some art critics writing French Salon reviews noted the frequently depicted “trend” of the oriental imagery, trying to trace its roots within French production. Ernest Chesneau² claims that Egypt's campaign opened the Orient to French artists. Jules Castagnary³ argues that orientalism began with the insurrection of Greece and the death of Lord Byron, renewing itself with the conquest of Algeria⁴.

However, it is not until the *Exposition d’Art Musulman* shown at the Palais d’Industrie between October and December of 1893 that one finds a precise configuration of an art historical canon composed of orientalist paintings in an exhibition. The first part of the exhibition catalogue was dedicated to the *Première Exposition d’Art Musulman*⁵, with an introductory text and the list of the pieces exhibited grouped according to their owners. The following part of the publication presented the *Première exposition retrospective et actuel des peintres orientalistes français*. This second section was also followed by an introductory text signed by Léonce Benedite⁶, curator of the Luxembourg Museum. The list of artworks was then split in three categories: the retrospective part including 17th and 18th century art; deceased artists from the 19th century; and current production. We can

imagine that the objects in the first section of the catalogue were familiar to the public due to their representations in Salon paintings and print reproductions. Therefore, they were not only offered as single objects to the viewer, but also confirmed the precision with which they had been represented by French orientalist artists in their paintings.⁷ It is important to note that among the owners lending objects to the exhibition were renowned orientalist painters, such as Félix-August Clement, Jean-Léon Gérôme, Ferdinand Cormon, Etienne Dinet, and the architect Henri-Jules Saladin.

At the same time, by referring to artists that represented the Orient in past centuries, these artists were also inscribing themselves in a specific tradition, which included artists such as Van Loo, Boucher, Liotard, Fragonard, Girodet, Decamps, Marilhat, Delacroix, Chasserieu, among others. It is not unusual to find echoes from this selection in recent museum exhibitions or art history publications on orientalism. The exhibition also marks the founding of the *Société des Peintres Orientalistes Français*, as shown by Stéphane Richemond⁸.

In the words of Benedite, the painting's curator and leader of the *Société*:

This little exhibition therefore has its own moral. It proves that the Orientalist School is not an artificial and arbitrary group; it establishes its genealogy, made up of glorious names over several centuries, and affirms its *raison d'être*. It is an undisputed fact that the Orient has taken a special place among the inspirations that drive the contemporary art movement.⁹

One can say that the *Première exposition retrospective et actuel des peintres orientalistes français* was a *manifesto* of the society and established a canon of orientalist art. In January of the following year, Ary Renan published *La Peinture Orientaliste* in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*¹⁰. In 1895, when the second exhibition of the French orientalist painters was opened at the Galerie Durand-Ruel, Benedite published *Les Peintres Orientalistes Français* in the periodical *L'Artiste*¹¹ and the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* reviewed

the exhibition in their supplement¹². Finally, in 1899 Léonce Benedite wrote *Les Peintres Orientalistes Français* at the Gazette¹³. All these publications were associated to exhibitions organized by the society that annually dedicated a solo retrospective exhibition for an orientalist “master”.

Many exhibitions in the last decades have shown the impact of the Society on the development of the concept of orientalist art. However, little is known about the relation of this canon with the arts in Brazil.

To collect, discuss and display: orientalist artworks in Brazil

The presence of orientalism in Brazilian museums and collections is significant. It can be found displayed in public and private collections, such as the *Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo* or *Museu Mariano Procópio* in Minas Gerais. Although we can associate many art objects with orientalist models, there is a lack of information about how these objects were incorporated in the Brazilian collections or how they can be inscribed in the writing of art history in Brazil.

The first article entirely devoted to orientalism in Brazilian painting was written by Bernardete Dias Cavalcanti, in 1988, under the title *Orientalism in the nineteenth century and Pedro Américo's work*¹⁴. After that, there was no significant research dedicated to orientalist artworks in Brazil until the publication of my own master thesis in 2018¹⁵, although some art historians, such as Madalena Zaccara¹⁶, Ivan Coelho de Sá¹⁷, Marcela Formico¹⁸, Fernanda Pitta¹⁹ and more recently Camila Dazzi²⁰, touched on the subject in their work. If a larger survey on orientalism in Brazil is absent in the bibliography, maybe the exhibitions can help elucidate some of this history.

The path that we tried to follow here starts with perhaps the only Brazilian exhibition dedicated to orientalism, held in the National Museum of Fine Arts (*Museu Nacional de Belas Artes*), heir to the collections of the Imperial Academy and National School of Fine Arts. As I was investigating some little-known artworks maintained in the museum, such as *Arab praying* (*Árabe em prece*, 1888), painted by the French Eugène Alexis Girardet, I found a note mentioning that the painting had been exhibited in an exhibition

called *Orientalism in painting (Orientalismo na pintura)*. There were, however, no institutional registers on such an exhibition. Not a mention in the list of exhibitions held in the museum or in the historical archives, nor the presence of a catalogue in the library. However, I was able to find some information in the newspapers of the time.



Fig. 1. Eugène Alexis Girardet. *Árabe em prece* (Arab praying), 1888. Oil on wood, 32,0 x 22,0 cm. Coleção Museu Nacional de Belas Artes/Ibram, Rio de Janeiro.

The exhibition opened in December 1998 with the Brazilian president and political figures of Mercosur inaugurating the so called “Room of special artworks” (*Sala de obras especiais*)²¹. A more detailed notice revealed that: “‘Orientalism in painting’ is the name of the exhibition that the National

Museum of Fine Arts (Av. Rio Branco, 199) is hosting until January 10th. There are 10 medium-sized canvases from the museum's collection, produced in the 19th century. Among the artists, the French Alexandre Cabanel and Auguste Petit and the Italians Fabio Fabbi and Atanásio Natale stand out”²².

The files of artworks in the museum confirmed that, besides Girardet's painting, previously mentioned, Cabanel's *Arab* (*Árabe*, unknown date) and Auguste Petit's *Arab* (*Árabe*, 1898) were also exhibited. Among the Italian painters, it seems safe to guess that the works exhibited were Fabio Fabbi's *Woman of Algiers* (*Algeriana/Argeliana*, c. 1893) and Natale Attanasio's *Harem's interior* (*Interior de Harém*, 1895).



Fig. 2. Natale Attanasio. *Interior de harém* (Harem's interior), 1895. Oil on canvas, 40,0 x 24,5 cm. Coleção Museu Nacional de Belas Artes/Ibram, Rio de Janeiro.

Although the exhibition had little repercussion in the press and did not have any consequences for the institution, or for the historiography, it seems important to bring the artworks to light, since they help us trace the

previous history that made their exhibition at the National Museum of Fine Arts possible. Among the five identified works, three are dated to the 1890s. According to their provenance, all of them were donated, either by the artist himself (Auguste Petit's case) or by private collectors (Viscondessa de Cavalcanti, Luiz de Resende, Artur Índio do Brasil, Almirante Câmara²³). All five paintings fall into the category of genre painting, three of them being "type figures paintings" (Girardet, Cabanel and Petit), focusing on ethnic and cultural characteristics – costumes, customs, environment and physiognomy –, and the other two (Fabbi and Attanasio), a type of orientalist studio's fantasy, in which the attention falls on the creation of an oriental atmosphere. Tapestries, hookah and recognizably oriental objects are some of the presented elements, all in vogue since the beginning of the century as markers of the Orient, as presented in Ingres' *La Grande Odalisque* (1814). These objects, as previously showed, were collected by painters and their public, to the point where they started to be produced in European territory.

All the mentioned paintings found their way to Brazil and into the National School collections during the Republican period, which invites us to ask about the circulation of orientalist models before that in Rio de Janeiro, during the Empire.

Showing oriental scenes in a Tropical Empire: orientalist episodes in Rio de Janeiro's public exhibitions

The principal venue for showing artworks during the Empire in Brazil was the General Exhibition of Fine Arts held by the Academy in Rio de Janeiro. According to Carlos Roberto Maciel Levy between the years of 1840 and 1884 there were 26 editions of the General Exhibition, involving approximately 516 artists and 3315 artworks²⁴. Within that universe, only eight works were presumed orientalist paintings²⁵. It is in the decade of 1880, however, that orientalist artworks really start to be displayed in Brazilian exhibitions. As Fernanda Pitta has shown, it is around this period that artists trained in Rio de Janeiro start to travel to Europe more frequently, resulting in the introduction of new art references in the Brazilian art scene²⁶.

In the last exhibition of the Empire in 1884, orientalist scenes pave their way specially through biblical paintings. Pedro Peres exhibits his *Flight into Egypt (Fuga para o Egito, 1884)*, in which the holy family is clearly represented in an oriental landscape. He was probably inspired by the success of Luc Olivier Merson's *Rest on the Flight into Egypt (1879)*. José Ferraz de Almeida Junior, who had returned from Paris two years before, showed *Judas' Remorse (O Remorso de Judas, 1880)* and *Flight into Egypt (Fuga da sacra família para o Egito, 1881)*. The oriental clues are more subtle in Almeida Junior's paintings. Even though the Judas is not presented with oriental characteristics and clothes, we can see in the background the reminiscence of Gêrome's *Consummatum est...* (1867). Both artists are giving us different point of views of the Crucifixion, which is taking place in an oriental setting. It is also in a discreet oriental setting that Almeida Junior's holy family is portrayed, with an obelisk, sphinx, and pyramids in the background. Rodolpho Amoedo, a government financed student in Paris, sent a study for his historical piece *Christ in Cafarnaum (Jesus em Cafarnaum, 1884)*, in which the clothing, the background and city details are orientally inspired. We can compare his composition to Edmond Dupain's *The Good Samaritan (Le Bon Samaritain, Salon 1877)*.

Pedro Américo's oriental(ist) fictions for the 1884 General Exhibition: biblical history paintings through the lenses of contemporary genre painting

Pedro Américo's paintings offers us the best entrance to discuss uses of orientalism in Brazil. His genre paintings, such as *Arab Lunch (Colação Arabe, 1879)* and *Arab Fiddler (Rabequista Arabe, 1884)*, were produced in the same period as the history paintings *David and Abishag (Davi e Abizag, 1879)*, *Judith and Holofernes (Judite e Holofernes, 1880)* and *Moses and Jochebed (Moisés e Jocabed, 1884)*. It is the latter group of artworks that reveal his daring choices, which aimed at a renewal of history painting and biblical scenes.



Fig. 3. Pedro Américo de Figueiredo e Mello. *Davi e Abizag* (David and Abishag), 1879. Oil on canvas, 171,5 x 215,5 cm. Coleção Museu Nacional de Belas Artes/Ibram, Rio de Janeiro.

These works were exhibited amidst a set of fifteen paintings comprising mostly historical genre paintings related to the history of Europe. The 1884 event marks the last relevant participation of Pedro Américo in a General Exhibition. At that point, Pedro Américo was a consecrated artist, having received the most important academic prizes. Since he started his artistic training, Pedro Américo managed to travel to Paris at the expense of the Emperor. He was appointed professor at the Academy, moved to Florence and paved his way as one of the greatest Brazilian artists and history painters – sided by Victor Meirelles. Pedro Américo attracted attention mostly through his controversial actions, aiming at establishing a name for himself and for his large-size national historical paintings, such as *Battle of Campo Grande* (*Batalha do Campo Grande*, 1871) and *Battle of Avaí* (*Batalha do Avaí*,

After establishing his reputation as an artist in Brazil, Américo continued to reside mainly in Florence, travelling across Europe. The paintings presented at the 1884 Academy exhibition all belonged to the long period after 1878 when Pedro Américo was away from his native country. It is important, therefore, to acknowledge that we are speaking of artworks made in Europe by a consecrated Brazilian artist.

Pedro Américo's biblical depictions are constituted by elements of an orientalist visual culture, mostly shaped by genre scenes. In the painting representing Abishag warming up King David, he uses elements of odalisques and harems representations, such as warm tones, animal furs, jewelry, tapestries, and exotic patterns. For his *Judith and Holofernes*, for example, he worked with the representation of Egyptian dancers, *almées*, including patterns, tapestries, oriental costumes and objects in the scene. For this text, I would like to detain myself on the analysis of another painting from this group: *Moise and Jochebed*. This painting presents an intriguing scene and setting, which are commonly overlooked. Some critics described the main character of the picture as a “white marble sphinx”, an “Egyptian woman” or “the type of Hebrew race”.



Fig. 4. Pedro Américo de Figueiredo e Mello. *Judite e Holofernes* (Judith and Holofernes), 1880. Oil on canvas, 229 x 141,7 cm. Coleção Museu Nacional de Belas Artes/Ibram, Rio de Janeiro.



Fig. 5. Pedro Américo de Figueiredo e Mello. *Moisés e Jocabed* (Moses and Jochebed), 1884. Oil on canvas, 151,2 x 105,5. Coleção Museu Nacional de Belas Artes/Ibram, Rio de Janeiro.

Jochebed is depicted when she is about to leave her son, Moise, in the Nile River. We see a monumental woman, holding Moise in a basket with the river right behind her. Her long dark hair is barely tied by the striped tissue around her head. The earthly tones of her clothing match the natural setting, as do the applied shells that outline her cleavage. Américo's choice of clothing was not accidental or naive, as he created his composition with a clear image in mind: the depiction of the *femme fellah*.

The fellaheen women were a present element in nineteenth century French visual culture, as we can see it discreetly placed in Léon Cogniet painting for the decoration of the Musée du Louvre. According to an article in

the *Le Magasin Pittoresque* focusing on the *fellah* women, “the word fellah, in Arabic, means cultivator. Thus, the fellah woman is properly the Egyptian peasant woman”²⁷. In the idyllic description, we can sense the binding of this figure to their belonging territory: “the life of female fellahin flows quietly like the water of their Nile”²⁸. Américo chose to represent Jochebed, a woman by the Nile, just like a fellah in her “natural environment”. We can find their images in engravings from travel literature, in colonial and ethnographic photography, as well as in Salon paintings, such as Léon Belly’s *Femme fellahs au bord du Nil*. Commonly represented carrying large vessels of water by the river or simply holding their small children, they are just the perfect match for the making of Jochebed. It was possibly because of this great fitting that some critic observed, in addition to the parallels with a sphynx, that: “Jochebed's picture is a vigorous composition; the main figure is that of a truly biblical woman”²⁹.

However, despite Américo’s *coup de maître*, orientalist genre scenes and biblical episodes were not exactly what the critics were expecting, especially from an artist like Américo. We can sense a disappointment of some critics about his choices of subject. A decade later, Oscar Guanabario, an enthusiast of the new Republican regimen, compared the so-called first Republican general exhibition of 1894 with the last Imperial one held in 1884, “the best one that the old empire was able to achieve”:

[...] Historical painting, so recommended and demanded, always presented historical facts, which had no relation to our lives. Pedro Americo, professor of archeology, falling into constant errors in this matter, gave us Joan of Arc, Moysés, Judith, Heloise and Abelard, Voltaire, and many other paintings of foreign subjects, when our history was still, as it is, unexplored; and as this painter was the one who ‘called the shots’ at that time, all the others followed him in the waters and there came the biblical collections, in which S. Jeronymo did not fail. At the moment an art appears which, if it is not frankly national, clearly accentuates the tendency towards it. [...]³⁰

We could say that Guanabarro's point of view was the one that prevailed ever since – or, at least, for a century. It was precisely the dialogue with European productions and themes that devalued, for a long time, nineteenth century painting in Brazil. The art praised was the one portraying national themes. Nineteenth century art was not only not modern, but it was also not considered national. Too academic and too international, completely out of time and out of place, just like Pedro Américo's proposal for the renovation of Brazilian art – or, at least, for the renovation of his image as a Brazilian artist. His artworks presented in 1884 invite us to look to other places, to Europe or to the Orient, in another time, Medieval and Modern for the former, Biblical and Contemporary for the latter. The question that remains is: can we inscribe these views in our “national landscape”? Can we leave biased opinions aside and cease to ignore “non-national themed” nineteenth century paintings maintained in Brazilian collections? It shall be a way to assess the global aspects of art history in Brazil.

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Endnotes

1. The research that resulted in this text was developed with FAPESP support, grant 2016/01908-4, São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP).
2. Ernest Chesneau, “Le Salon Sentimental,” *Revue de France*, 1874.
3. Jules Castagnary, “Salon de 1876,” in *Salons (1857-1870)*, T. 2 (Paris: Bibliothèque-Charpentier, 1892).
4. It is by the same time that Paul Mantz refers to Horace Vernet’s artworks as the introduction of “the fanfares of orientalism” in the Bible representations, as Vernet considered that “a trip to Algeria was enough to explain the Old and the New Testaments”. See Paul Mantz, “Le Salon III,” *Le Temps*, May 23, 1877, 1. On Vernet and his orientalist propositions for biblical history painting, see Fabriccio Miguel Novelli Duro, “‘Costumer la Bible, c’est la détruire’: a recepção crítica das proposições orientalistas de Horace Vernet para a pintura bíblica na França,” in *Caiana. Revista de Historia del Arte y Cultura Visual del Centro Argentino de Investigadores de Arte (CAIA)* 16, (2020).
5. One of the objectives of the exhibition was to regroup and classify examples of Muslim Art scattered in museums and private collection. See George Marye, “Première Exposition d’Art Musulman,” in *Exposition d’Art Musulman* (Paris: Imprimerie A. Bellier et Cie, 1893), 13.
6. The first two parts of the introductory text were already published in 1888, in an article dedicated to the death of Gustave Guillaumet. Léonce Benedite, “La peinture orientaliste et Gustave Guillaumet,” *La Nouvelle Revue*, 1888, 326-343.
7. As the curator pointed out – “qu’elle est le commentaire en quelque sorte vivant de notre réunion de monuments islamiques, qui ne peut, par sa diversité même, que laisser deviner le pittoresque de la civilisation musulmane”. Marye, *Art Musulman*, 14.
8. Stéphane Richemond, “Histoire de la Société des Peintres orientalistes français,” in *La Société des Peintres Orientalistes Français: répertoire des exposants et liste de leurs oeuvres 1889-1943*, edited by Pierre Sanchez. Dijon: Editions de l’Échelle de Jacob, 2008.
9. “Cette petite Exposition a donc sa morale. Elle prouve que l’Ecole orientaliste n’est point un groupe factice et arbitraire ; elle établit sa généalogie, formée de noms glorieux à travers plusieurs siècles et affirme sa raison d’être. C’est un fait indiscuté que l’Orient a pris une place spéciale parmi les inspirations qui dirigent le mouvement de l’art contemporain”. Léonce Benedite, “1^{re} Exposition rétrospective et actuelle des peintres orientalistes,” in *Exposition d’Art Musulman* (Paris: Imprimerie A. Bellier et Cie, 1893), 167.
10. Ary Renan, “La Peinture Orientaliste,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, January 1, 1894.
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22. "Outras telas; em cartaz," *Tribuna da Imprensa*, December 15, 1998, 6.
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25. *A turkish (Hum turco, 1844 General Exhibition)* by the French Emma Gros de Prangey, *A Street in Cairo (Uma rua no Cairo, 1860 G. E.)* by the French Eugene Philastre, *The Ship Algiers in the port of Smyrna and Smyrna and the French station (Navio Algiers no porto de Smyrna; Smyrna e a estação franceza, 1875 G. E.)* by the Italian Edoardo de Martino. Those paintings were enlisted in the exhibition catalogue as presented by the artists themselves. On the other hand, we also noticed some orientalist paintings shown by their owners in 1879 General Exhibition: the collector Friedrich Steckel presents an *Odalisque (Odalisca)* by Menotti, presumed Italian painter, while other collector, E. Callado, exhibited three paintings by the French Paul Delamain: *Arab camp (Acampamento árabe)*, *Travelling bedouins (Beduínos em viagem)* and *Bedouin travelers (Viajantes beduínos)*.
26. Pitta, "Almeida Júnior".
27. "Le mot fellah, en arabe, signifie cultivateur. Ainsi, la femme fellah est proprement la paysanne égyptienne". "La Femme Fellah," *Le magasin pittoresque*, 1838, 182.
28. "La vie des femmes fellahs s'écoule tranquille comme l'eau de leur Nil". "Fellah", 182.
29. "O quadro de Jocabed é uma composição vigorosa; a figura principal é de uma mulher verdadeiramente bíblica [...]". F. F. [Felix Ferreira], "Bellas-Artes. A Exposição Geral de 1884. X," *Brazil*, October 5, 1884, 1.
30. Oscar Guanabarino, "Artes e Artistas. Escola Nacional de Belas Artes. Exposição Geral," *O Paiz*, October 1, 1894, 2. Some of Guanabarino texts on the General Exhibitions were

transcribed by Fabiana Guerra Granjeia, see
http://www.dezenovevinte.net/artigos_imprensa/guanabarino_1894.htm#_edn1.

“Nationality Is The Homeland”, Is It? Argentine Artists In Rome Between The Late 19th And The Early 20th Century

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ABSTRACT

Between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century an important contingent of migrant people left Europe to go to America, mainly to find a better lifestyle. Italians represented a significant front, especially in South America. In Argentina, their growing presence in society caused particular feelings of concern. In artistic discourses, cosmopolitanism represented a danger for the formation of an “Argentine soul” and, consequently, for a national artistic language. In parallel, the country was consolidating its national system of art and it was therefore necessary to encourage European stays for artistic education through government pensions. The artists who could travel were recognized in their country, but they were foreigners living in unknown geographies where they could emerge with difficulty. “Nationality is the homeland”, wrote Arturo Reynal O’Connor about the Argentine poets and the risks of the immigration for the “Argentine race”. This paper proposes to consider the multiple dimensions (artistic, political, social) of the Argentine artistic field between the late 19th and the early 20th century focusing on some travelling artists, to discuss the feeling of belonging to a single place (coincident with their nationality). Through the case of Argentine painters and sculptors who lived in Rome, the goal is to present the networks of relations that they formed with other Ibero-American artists as a response to the marginalization that implied their status as foreigners.

KEYWORDS

Argentinian Artists; Rome; Nationality; Integration Strategies; Late 19th-Early 20th Century.

The immigration issue

The question that entitles this paper was inspired by a quote included in an article written by Giuseppe Parisi in an important Italian newspaper published in Argentina, called *La Patria degli Italiani*.¹ The author was a journal correspondent, and he dedicated several articles to the artistic news from Italy through the section “Lettere Italo-Argentine”. In August 1908, he reported his visit to some Argentinian sculptors who were living in Rome, with the aim of pinpointing the necessities to improve national art in Argentina.²

In fact, at the beginning of the article he mentioned the lack of great names of Argentinian artists and, to introduce his argument, he quoted the words from writer Arturo Reynol O'Connor: “The Argentine race and especially the *porteña* one [...] disappears due to migratory flows, and the race is the nationality [...], and the nationality is the homeland (and the empty houses remain, converted into a simple building that foreigners occupy transforming it into a *conventillo*)”.³ Through a metaphor between homeland-nationality and the typical Italian-migrants house building (the *conventillo*), O'Connor expressed his concern about the loss of Argentinian cultural identity because of immigration and, especially, the Italian one.

O'Connor's fears were not isolated, but were indeed shared by most Argentinian artists, writers, and intellectuals since the last quarter of 19th century.⁴ The first Centenary of Independence Revolution in 1910 amplified them, as many foreign artists were commissioned the production of celebratory monuments and decorations. An example of this was the contest for the Independence monument, which was awarded to two Italians, Gaetano Moretti (1860-1938) and Luigi Brizzolara (1868-1937), while Argentinian Rogelio Yrurtia only won the second place. The public opinion was thus divided between those who believed that a national monument had to be commissioned to a national sculptor and those who thought that there was not one that was good enough for such endeavor yet.⁵

A similar discussion arose regarding the European journeys of Argentinian artists: the Argentinians who travelled to study in Europe were educated in a cosmopolitan environment, which, according to a part of the

public opinion, complicated the creation of a pure Argentinian identity. At same time, the European artistic trip was necessary because there was not a fully developed national artistic system yet. It is important to mention that in Argentina a national art academy in 19th century did not exist, only a private school of art called Sociedad Estímulo de Bellas Artes was founded in 1876, and was converted into National Art Academy in 1905.⁶ Resuming Parisi, it should be noted that he quoted O'Connor ironically, as he strongly believed - in opposition to the writer - that immigration could be a valid contribution for building the cultural identity of a young country. In fact, Parisi drew attention to the negligence of the Argentinian state to show interest in the young artists who were studying abroad, especially in Italy.

These discussions lay on the background of different artistic experiences between the late 19th and the early 20th century. Therefore, it can be productive to focus on some aspects of these experiences and question whether these discourses influenced the stays of Argentinian artists in Rome. Using the O'Connor correlation quoted by Parisi ('nationality' equals 'homeland' equals 'home/house') I will address the case of the Argentinian community in Rome so as to examine whether their nationality was an aid or an obstacle when it came to establishing a temporary home in the city that hosted them. I propose to focus on some travelling artists with the aim of analyzing the feeling of belonging to a single place (coincident with their nationality) and, in some manner, to put in discussion the very concept of nationality.

Although since the middle of the 19th century several Latin American artists began to travel to Europe to perfect their studies, few Argentinians traveled before 1900. Most of them were divided between Italy and Paris; however, particularly in Rome from 1890, a colony with Uruguayans was formed.⁷ Interestingly, the colony recognized itself as Rioplatense, which is yet another element that brings into discussion the idea of nationality and homeland.⁸ As Figure 1 (fig.1) shows, between 1890 and 1915 around forty-five artists from the Río de la Plata lived in Rome. Among them, Uruguayans represent a small percentage that was concentrated in the last years of the 19th century. Hence, such convergence enabled the consolidation of

friendships and connections amongst artists, which also set up some of the social and cultural dynamics of the original nucleus of the colony. I will continue analyzing more specifically the case of some Argentinian artists, but I think it is important to keep in mind that Argentinians and Uruguayans in Rome were linked almost as compatriots.⁹

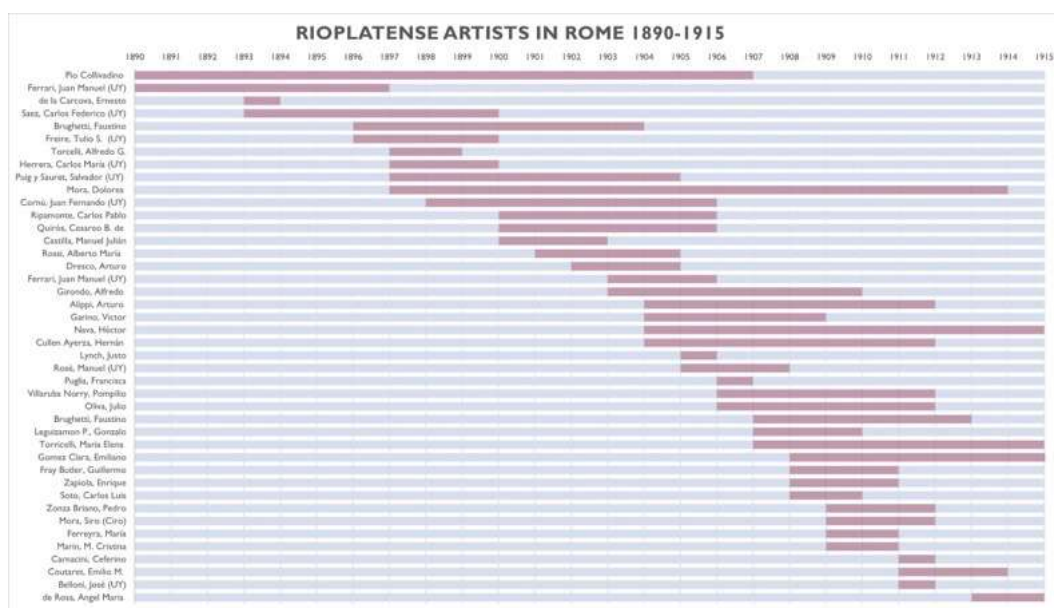


Fig. 1 Presence of Rioplatense artists in Rome between 1890 and 1915. Graphic elaborated by Giulia Murace

National feeling at the temporary home

The young Argentinians who travelled to study immediately became aware of their peripheral position in the European artistic society, not only because of their geographical origin, but also because of their artistic and visual background. The case of Pio Collivadino (1869-1945), an Argentinian painter who settled in Rome from 1890 until 1906, is representative. He admitted in a later interview:

When I was 21 years old, I went to Rome. I was ready to be better than Raphael, Michelangelo ... to conquer the Pope's friendship... Oh! As soon as I visited the museums and talked with some painters, I understood that all the

artistic wealth that I brought from Buenos Aires was *humo de Tabaco criollo*.¹⁰

Collivadino acted up by attending the Regio Istituto di Belle Arti (the governmental fine arts academy in Rome) for six years, completing its curriculum (fig. 2). It is important to highlight that the prolonged frequentation of this training space helped him in two ways: not only did he formed a solid technique in different fields of art,¹¹ but he mainly created various connections, meeting masters who involved him in important commissions and a number of young artists that became his friends. He expanded his networks to a large number of international artists, thanks to this, and by attending another important sociability space in Rome: the Associazione Artistica Internazionale: a center founded in 1870 to gather the international community living in the eternal city and, moreover, to connect the Roman artistic scene to an international system.¹²

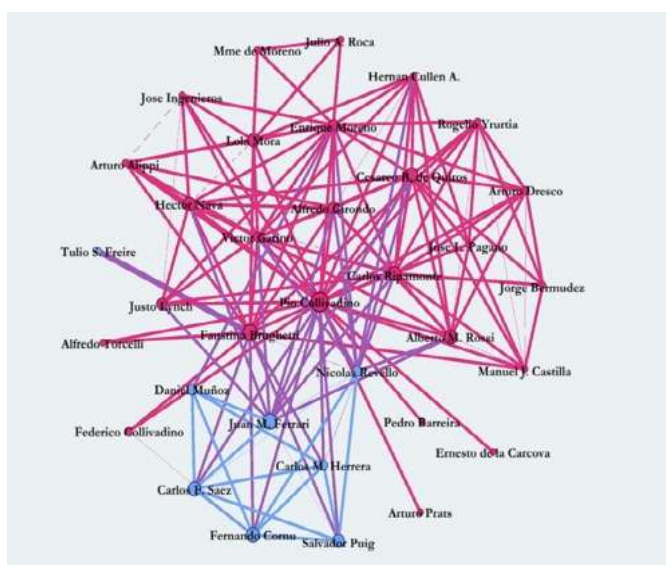


Fig. 2 Network of Rioplatense people in Rome between 1890 and 1905. Graphic elaborated by Giulia Murace with the Gephi software. The tree mayor value of betweenness centrality are Pio Collivadino (205), Faustino Brughetti (64), Enrique Moreno (51).

Both spaces were fundamental for the integration of Rioplatense artists within Roman sociability and to surmount their marginal position.¹³ The formation of a colony can be read under this light, and, as further consequence, it fostered the consolidation of a national feeling among Argentinian and Uruguayan artists. In this sense, Collivadino is a significative reference because he was undoubtedly one of the most successful Rioplatense artists of this period in Italy and he was a key figure for the functioning of the colony and for the insertion of other artists in the Roman context. Such connections are clearly illustrated by Figure 2 that shows Collivadino's networks during his Roman stay (1890-1906) and how central he was in that network.¹⁴

Collivadino was a popular figure among the young artists living in Rome in this period and he integrated perfectly into the Roman environment. Often, critics (both Argentinians and Italians) recognized in him a certain Roman identity that can be observed/noticed in his works. For instance, the painting he presented at the 1901 Venice International Exhibition, *Vita Onesta* (1901, Udine, Casa Cavazzini-Museo d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea), is closely linked to the Roman intimists and to social painting with sentimental tones.¹⁵ The Italian pavilion in the first editions of the biennial was organized with the criteria of "regional schools";¹⁶ and since Collivadino lived in Rome his submission was accepted as part of the Roman room but the Argentinian sent a rectification: "I wish to belong to the international section as a citizen of the Argentine Republic".¹⁷ This demonstrates the tension between the concept of national/regional identity and the sense of belonging and evinces that national identity almost gets stronger for artists while abroad, rejecting the aforementioned hypotheses of many Argentinian critics who believed that cosmopolitanism was a threat for it. Collivadino's parents were Italian, but even though he was aware of his Italian heritage, he could already be considered as the son of a new, young, and fully Argentinian generation.

In the Venetian work, as in many others made during his stay in Rome, such as one of his early masterpieces, *Ora di pranzo* (1903, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Argentina) or the very Roman *Via Appia* (fig.3), Collivadino is in line with the artistic orientations prevailing in Rome at the turn of the

century. Nevertheless, following the previous argumentation, it could not be read these artistic decisions just to insert him into a local artistic tradition, as often prevailed in traditional art history historiography. Furthermore, during his Roman stay Collivadino was already thinking about the future and his return to his homeland. On one hand, still in Rome, alongside some compatriots, he started to design Nexus, a group that was to become representative of a new generation of artists in Buenos Aires who were thinking about national art. On the other hand, Collivadino was a key figure in the process of modernizing the art system in Argentina with his appointment as director of the National Academy of Fine Arts in 1908, just one year after his return.¹⁸



Fig. 3 Carlos Ripamonte in his studio in Rome, 1905 ca., photography, Archivo General de la Nación, Photographic Department, inv. 80239.

In these experiences, Collivadino was assisted by another Argentinian painter who lived in Rome from 1900 until 1905, sharing a lot of years, places, and friendships with him: Carlos Pablo Ripamonte (1874-1968). It can be

argued that Ripamonte's Roman stay can be analysed in the same terms as Collivadino's. In 1903 he claimed his preference for Rome because its history, landscapes, lights, and colors offered him greater inspiration than its "glorious artistic tradition", and he stated: "I deeply love that it [Rome] materially resembles my homeland".¹⁹ If we observe the paintings in Ripamonte's Roman atelier (fig.4), we can notice many landscapes of the *Campagna romana* (the countryside around Rome) and of folkloristic types. More so, when we compare them with a painting from his mature and fully Argentinian years like *El boyero (the drover)* (1920, Galería Zurbarán, Buenos Aires), we could draw the same conclusions as for Collivadino. All the paintings, the landscapes, the ruins, and the characters seen in Rome were models of inspiration for shaping an artistic identity that potentially could coincide with one's national identity. In this view, I would like to quote the definition of a cultural artistic identity given by Ariane Varela Braga and Thomas Leo True: "Cultural artistic identity is now more clearly understood as the product of complex, conflicting and ever-changing processes of negotiation, evolution and recreation in a shifting panorama of artistic geographies".²⁰



Fig. 4 Pio Collivadino, *Via Appia*, albumen photography, 17,5 x 25,4 cm, Colección Museo Pio Collivadino, Universidad de Lomas de Zamora, Buenos Aires, inv. 2.7.1/263

The cosmopolitanism of Rome

The dichotomy between the identification of the Argentinians in the Eternal City as foreigners and the assimilation of an ideal Italian and/or Roman character becomes the very essence of these travelling artists and, in a certain sense, their weapon to characterize themselves as a cohesive group, thanks to which they can integrate themselves in the foreign context.

In another article from “Lettere Italo-Argentine” Parisi reported: “one of the best virtues of Argentines living abroad is without any doubt the *amor patrio* [the love for their homeland]”. In this occasion the little Argentinian colony in Rome celebrated the national Independence Day (July 9th) together: female painter Elena Torricelli organized a dinner with artists, writers, and political figures at the studio of the Italian painter Umberto Cacciarelli.²¹ A similar group gathered in 1909 to celebrate another national day, the Día de la Revolución de Mayo (May 25th).²²

However, there are also cases that did not manage to feel completely “at home” in Rome, such is the example of sculptor Pedro Zonza Briano (1886-1941), who came to the city in 1909 after winning the Europa Prize. Unlike Collivadino, he arrived well prepared thanks to his training at the new National Fine Arts Academy of Argentina and for this reason he decided to avoid attending the academy in Rome. He stayed in the city for about two years, exhibited his works in some expositions and was very well received by critics. For example, in the *Rivista di Roma*, an article complained that the Italian State did not buy at least one of Zonza Briano’s groups among those exposed at the Amatori e Cultori di Belle Arti of 1910.²³ Another article written by Enrique Gómez Carrillo (1873-1927) in 1911 stated that Italian critics said that Zonza Briano was: “the most profound of our artists”, and by our he referred to Italy. Yet he later remarked:

what they don't say [...] is that the artist is not Italian, but Argentine. And when I say Argentine, I do not mean that he was born in Buenos Aires, in the bosom of a foreign family, and that later he uprooted himself [...]. No. He is Argentine in soul, Argentine in ideas, Argentine in character. Even in

Rome, which, if I am not mistaken, is the birthplace of his grandparents, he feels, according to his own confession, like an exile.²⁴

This excerpt provides a double information: the sculptor was praised by Italian critics as an artist of their own, which confirms his integration in the Roman artistic system; but, at the same time, the Argentinian's feeling of exile, who said that he had not found his environment while in Rome, perhaps pushed him to move to Paris. Furthermore, these words confirm that in spite of Zonza Briano's Italian descent, his patriotic feeling was deeply Argentinian. This source also clarifies what has been stated about identity defined as a set of multiple factors.

To conclude, it could be interesting to add a final aspect to analyze the integration of Argentinian artists in Rome: most of them managed to feel "at home" also thanks to the cosmopolitanism of the city, which has always been its identity character.²⁵ Since the 17th century there was a large foreign presence in the city and this characteristic did not change with the end of the Papal State. One of the first artistic institutions born after the Unification of Italy, in 1870, was the already mentioned Associazione Artistica Internazionale. In its statute it rightly claimed the internationality of Rome and the importance of the Associazione as a place where "everyone can meet and reciprocally enlighten themselves, because the arts are not the privilege of a single epoch, nor of a single country".²⁶

This feature of Roman artistic sociability allowed artists to feel part of a community, even for those who were coming from the most peripheral places. Although the creation of a network of relations between Argentinians (and Uruguayans) worked as a response to marginality, the integration of these artists was successful thanks to the cosmopolitan character of the capital of Italy. Rome was everyone's ideal homeland. In Rome, Argentinians often felt even more Argentinian, but they also identified with Italians, found a temporary home and, at the same time, they thought about projects for the future of their homeland.²⁸

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Endnotes

1. About the importance of this journal of Italian migrants in Argentina Weber 2014. About Italian immigration in Argentina see Fernando Devoto, *Historia de Los Italianos En La Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2006); Fernando Devoto and Gianfausto Rosoli, eds., *La Inmigración Italiana En La Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2000).
2. Giuseppe Parisi, 'Lettere Italo-Argentine. Gli Artisti Argentini in Italia', *La Patria Degli Italiani*, 5 August 1908.
3. Original quote: "La razza argentina e specialmente la portegna, che ha dato più poeti, sparisce per il flusso dell'immigrazione, e la razza è la nazionalità, che trascina nell'evoluzione politica, sociabilità, storia e tradizioni proprie. E la nazionalità è la patria (e la casa vuota resta convertita in un semplice edificio – che gli stranieri occupano, trasformandolo molti in un 'conventillo')". All translations were done by Giulia Murace with the help of Milena Gallipoli, to whom I am deeply grateful.
4. The massive Italian immigration caused a really stereotypization of Italian as rude and ignorant people Luciano Gallinari, 'Tra Discriminazione e Accoglienza. Gli Italiani in Argentina Da Luigi Barzini a Tribuna Italiana', *RiMe*, June 2010.
5. Miguel Ángel Muñoz, 'Un Campo Para El Arte Argentino. Modernidad Artística y Nacionalismo En Torno al Centenario', in *Desde La Otra Vereda. Momentos En El Debate Por Arte Moderno En La Argentina*, ed. Diana Wechsler, Archivos Del CAIA 1 (Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Jilguero, 1998), 43–82; Miguel Ángel Muñoz, 'Obertura 1910: La Exposición Internacional Del Arte Del Centenario', in *Tras Los Pasos de La Norma. Salones Nacionales de Bellas Artes (1911-1989)*, ed. Marta Penhos and Diana Wechsler (Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Jilguero, 1999), 13–40; Academia Nacional de Bellas Artes, 'Las Artes En Torno al Centenario. Estado de La Cuestión (1905-1915)', *Temas de La Academia*, 2010; Laura Malosetti Costa, 'Arte e Historia En Los Festejos Del Centenario de La Revolución de Mayo En Buenos Aires', *Caiana. Revista de Historia Del Arte y Cultura Visual Del Centro Argentino de Investigadores de Arte (CAIA)* 1 (2012), http://caiana.caia.org.ar/template/caiana.php?pag=articles/article_2.php&obj=2&vol=1.
6. About Sociedad Estímulo de Bellas Artes and the formation of an art field in Buenos Aires see Laura Malosetti Costa, *Los Primeros Modernos. Arte y Sociedad En Buenos Aires a Fines Del Siglo XIX* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2021). About the nationalization of Academy of Buenos Aires see Matías Zarlenga, "La Nacionalización de La Academia de Bellas Artes de Buenos Aires (1905-1907)" En *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 76, Núm. 3, Julio-Septiembre, Pp. 383-411, 2014. About the system of art between the late 19th and early 20th century in Buenos Aires see María Isabel Baldassarre, 'Between Buenos Aires and Europe Cosmopolitanism, Pensionnaires, and Arts Education in Late 19th Century Argentina', in *Academies and Schools of Art in Latin America*, by Oscar E. Vázquez (New York: Routledge, 2020), 17–32. In this work Baldassarre also addressed some notices about the concerns of Argentinian government in relation with the pensionnaires.
7. I use the term "colony" in the sense of Oxford dictionary transmits: "a group of people from the same place or with the same work or interests who live in a particular city or country or who live together". <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/colony?q=colony>
8. I studied the artistic travels of Rioplatense artists to Rome in my PhD thesis entitled "Roma desde el Río de la Plata: artistas argentinos y uruguayos en viaje (1890-1914)", discussed in March 2022 at Universidad Nacional de San Martín. In this work I argued the importance to analyze

the consolidation of the systems of art in Buenos Aires and Montevideo in connected perspective.

9. A reference to examine the strategies of integration of a stranger community in Rome is Christine A. Dupont, *Modèles Italiens et Traditions Nationales. Les Artistes Belges En Italie 1830-1914*, Institute Historique du Belgique (Bruxelles-Roma, 2005).
10. Juan José De Soiza Reilly, 'Toda Una Vida Consagrada al Culto de La Belleza Artística: Pío Collivadino', *Caras y Caretas* 1819 (12 August 1933). Original quote: "A los 21 años me fui a Roma iba dispuesto a enmendarle la plana a Rafael y a Miguel Ángel. Iba dispuesto a conquistarme la amistad de los Sumos Pontífices... ¡Ay! Tan pronto como visité los museos y hablé con algunos pintores, comprendí que todo el caudal artístico que yo llevaba de Buenos Aires, era humo de tabaco criollo"
11. Laura Malosetti Costa, *Collivadino*, Ateneo (Buenos Aires, 2006).
12. Giulia Murace, 'Artista Geniale e Amico Di Tutti', in *El Taller de Pio Collivadino*, ed. Nora Altrudi and Carolina Vanegas Carrasco (Buenos Aires: Unsam Edita, 2019), 106–37; Teresa Sacchi Lodispoto, 'L'associazionismo Artistico Romano (1870-1878)', *Roma Moderna e Contemporanea*, 1999; Valentina Moncada di Paternò, ed., *Atelier a via Margutta. Cinque Secoli Di Cultura Internazionale a Roma* (Torino: Allemandi, 2012).
13. I refer at the Natalia Majluf concept of "marginal cosmopolitans", that defines the travelling artists from Latin America to Europe in the 19th century. Natalia Majluf, "Ce n'est Pas Le Pérou", or the Failure of Authenticity: Marginal Cosmopolitan at the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1855', *Critical Inquiry*, 1997.
14. The graphic shows the values of betweenness centrality which is the amount of influence a person has over the flow of information in a network.
15. Anna Maria Damigella, Paola Frandini, and Gianna Piantoni, *Aspetti Dell'arte a Roma Dal 1870 al 1914* (Roma: De Luca, 1972); Manuel Carrera and Jolanda Nigro Covre, eds., *Secessione Romana 1913-2013. Temi e Problemi* (Roma: Bagatto Libri, 2013); Manuel Carrera, Niccolò D'Agati, and Sarah Kinzel, eds., *Tra Oltralpe e Il Mediterraneo. Arte in Italia 1860-1915* (Berna: Peter Lang AG, 2016).
16. Jean Clair and Giandomenico Romanelli, *Venezia e La Biennale. Percorsi Del Gusto* (Milano: Fabbri Editori, 1995).
17. Pio Collivadino, application form n. 14Ce115, folder "Roma", box "Attività 1894-1944", n. 14, series Scatole Nere, Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee (ASAC), Venice. Original quote: "desidero appartenere alla sezione internazionale essendo cittadino della Repubblica Argentina".
18. About Nexus and Collivadino as Academy director, see Malosetti Costa, *Collivadino*, 69-79; 133-155. In another paper with Larisa Mantovani, we have hypothesize about the importance of Collivadino Roman journey for the modernization of Argentine National Academy, and in particular in relation with his attention to the education in Decorative and applied arts. Larisa Mantovani and Giulia Murace, "Enseñar En Las Fábricas El Amor a Lo Bello". Artes Industriales y Academia a Comienzos Del Siglo XX En Argentina', in *Modelos Na Arte. 200 Anos Da Academia de Belas Artes Do Rio de Janeiro*, ed. Ana Cavalcanti et al., *Anales Electrónicos Del VII Seminário Do Museu D. Joao* (Rio de Janeiro: EBA/UFRJ, 2017), 372–87.
19. Carlos Ripamonte to Eduardo Schiaffino [mail], Anticoli Corrado 12/07/1903, Archivo Schiaffino, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (Buenos Aires), Armario III /E1/ BVIC4d8. Original quote: "Amo la naturaleza del suelo italiano, y, aunque no dedique mis pinceles a buscar en sus gloriosas tradiciones artísticas lo que llaman inspiración [...]. Amo mucho que se parece materialmente a mi patria".
20. Ariane Varela Braga and Thomas-Leo True, 'Studying Foreign Artists in Rome', in *Roma e Gli Artisti Stranieri. Integrazione, Reti e Identità (XVI-XX s.)* (Roma: Artemide, 2018), 15.
21. Giuseppe Parisi, 'Lettere Italo-Argentine. Come Gli Argentini All'estero Amano La Loro Patria - Commemorando Il 9 Di Luglio - Una Nota Acerba', *La Patria Degli Italiani*, 11 August 1908.

22. 'El 25 de Mayo En Roma', *Caras y Caretas* 560 (26 June 1909).
23. Giacinto Stiavelli, 'LXXX Esposizione Internazionale Di Belle Arti in Roma', *Ars et Labor* 65, no. 5 (May 1910): 338–46.
24. Enrique Gómez Carrillo, 'Un Gran Artista Argentino. El Escultor Zonza Briano', *Elegancias*, 1 September 1911, 272–73. Original quote: "los críticos, unánimemente, dicen: - es el más profundo de nuestros artistas. Pero lo que no dicen, no sé si porque lo ignoran o porque no tienen empeño en propagarlo, es que aquel artista no es italiano, sino argentino. Y cuando digo argentino, no quiero indicar que nació en Buenos Aires, en el seno de una familia extranjera y que luego se desarraigó de la tierra del azar de su raza. No. Es argentino de alma, argentino de ideas, argentino de carácter. Aún en Roma que, si no me equivoco, es la cuna de sus abuelos, se siente, según confesión propia, como un desterrado".
25. On this same feeling, Stefano Cracolici recently wrote in a text in which he investigated epistolary correspondences between foreign artists living in Rome. Stefano Cracolici, "Costoro Non Vogliono Malinconie": Il Registro Brillante Nelle Lettere d'artista (Primi Sondaggi Su Carteggi Eteroglossi a Base Italiana); in *Lettere d'artista: Per Una Storia Transnazionale Dell'arte (XVIII-XIX Secolo)*, ed. Giovanna Capitelli et al. (Cinisello Balsamo (Milano): Silvana Editoriale, n.d.), 16–39. About the cosmopolitan identity of Rome see at least Giovanna Capitelli, Maria Pia Donato, and Matteo Lanfranconi, 'Rome Capital Des Arts Au XIXe Siècle. Pour Une Nouvelle Périodisation de l'histoire Européenne Des Capitales Culturelles', in *Le Temps Des Capitales Culturelles. XVIIIe-XXe Siècle*, ed. Christophe Charle (Seyssel: Champs Vallon, 2009), 65–99.
26. Sacchi Lodispoto, 'L'associazionismo Artistico Romano (1870-1878)', 297. Original quote: "Roma da secoli è il luogo di convegno a numerosi artisti di ogni Nazione. È quindi facile di costituire una *Associazione Artistica Internazionale*, dove a ciascuno sia dato d'incontrarsi e d'illuminarsi scambievolmente, perché le arti non sono il privilegio né di un'epoca sola, né di un solo paese".
27. In this same direction went the projects of creation an Argentinian (and next a South-American) Academy in Rome, about which I wrote in the proceedings of the first part of the 35th CIHA Motion-Transformation that took place in Florence in 2019. Giulia Murace, "Engaged in an Undertaking of the Highest Artistic Culture": Two Projects for a South American Academy in Rome (1897-1911); in *Proceedings of the 35th CIHA World Congress-Transformation* (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2021), 123–26.

Migrations Between Rio and Paris: Architecture in the Work of Lygia Clark

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ABSTRACT

Often recognized for her *Bichos* (1960–1966) and *Caminhando* (1963), Lygia Clark is a pivotal figure in modern and contemporary art because she encouraged viewers to expand beyond the visual to physically interact with her works. Less acknowledged in scholarship are her depictions of the home and how Clark's changing geographies altered ideas of space and place for the artist and participants. This paper investigates how Clark's changing residences in Rio de Janeiro and Paris reflected her evolving construction of the home and increasing interest in architecture. Using social art historical analysis, this paper finds that varying geographic contexts inspired Clark whether through her training with landscape designer Roberto Burle Marx and painter Fernand Léger or contexts of modernization. While living in Rio de Janeiro, the home became a symbol for inclusion as seen through *Build Your Own Living Space* (1960), suggesting that choosing a home's layout was an act of choice. In Paris, the home embodied more of a collective identity as evidenced in *Live Structures* (1969), where participants' bodies gave shape to a web of elastic bands and plastic sheets. This installation achieves new meaning when contextualized with student protests in May of 1968 in Paris. Through such connections, this study emphasizes that Clark's migrations articulated her evolving representations of the home, while also informing enduring legacies of her native country and abroad.

KEYWORDS

Lygia Clark; Architectural Maquettes; Architecture; Home; Brazil.

Introduction

As one of postwar and contemporary art history's most important artists, Lygia Clark (b. 1920 Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais–d. 1988 Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro), had a prolific career that intersected with painting, sculpture, and therapy, and as this article demonstrates, to architecture and the home. Well-known both within her country and abroad, her works are part of museum collections around the world, such as the Gilberto Chateaubriand Collection at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro, the Patricia Cisneros Collection at MoMA in New York, and the Tate Modern in London. Her works cover a large variety of subjects and styles that can be divided into various periods, beginning with her abstract paintings and her association with the Grupo Frente in the mid-1950s and later affiliation with Neo-Concretists in Rio. By the 1960s, much of Clark's works were participatory. After her return to Rio from Paris in 1976, she focused on her relational objects employed during therapy sessions.

Clark's career has been the subject of scholarship by long-time interlocuters such as Guy Brett, Yve-Alain Bois, and Suely Rolnik in addition to art critics Mário Pedrosa and Ferreira Gullar. More recent scholarship by Mónica Amor, Adele Nelson, Sérgio B. Martins, and Geanine Gutierrez-Guimarães has also accounted for Clark's re-interpretation of the art object and confrontation of medium-based classifications in art history. Clark's career has been documented in recent solo exhibitions at the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao (2020), Luhring Augustine Gallery in New York (2017), and the Museum of Modern Art in New York (2014). Most recently in 2021 and 2022, the Pinakothek Cultural de São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro in collaboration with the Associação Cultural Lygia Clark hosted the exhibition "Lygia Clark (1920-1988) 100 anos," curated by Max Perlingeiro. Selected as the top retrospective of the year by the São Paulo Association of Art Critics (APCA), this exhibition brought together 100 works, some of which were made available to the public for the first time.¹

While Clark's legacy has been extensively researched within contexts of painting and sculpture, her connection to architecture remains overlooked by her more popular works, such as her *Bichos*, geometric paintings, and

relational objects. The “home” underlies many of Clark’s representations of architecture as evidenced in paintings and drawings from 1951, architectural models from 1955 and 1960, and installations and propositions from 1968 and 1969. Using these works as case studies, this paper investigates how Clark’s interest in architecture and varying portrayals of the home facilitated Clark’s migration(s) between media within multiple cities of Brazil and Clark’s multiple stays in Paris. It is through the lens of the home, that Clark’s legacy expands to understudied contexts of modernization and modernist elements of the home.

This article first contextualizes Clark’s early stages of her career with landscape designer Robert Burle Marx and painter Fernand Léger. These formative years are of particular interest because they involved Clark’s early introductions to architectural thinking and an integrative approach to the arts. After investigating Clark’s early years, this text then examines Clark’s architectural maquettes, *The House* (1955), and *Build Your Own Living Space* (1960) within larger contexts of car culture, elements of the modern home, and consumerism. The final portion of this article analyzes Clark’s forms of architecture through a variety of media such as the installation *The House is the Body: Penetration, Ovulation, Germination, and Expulsion* (1968) and the propositions *Biologic Architecture* (1969) and *Live Structures* (1969).² This article posits that it is through such works that architecture becomes a form of communication, action, and bodily structure. I find that such works achieve new meaning when contextualized with the unstable politics of Brazil’s military dictatorship (1964–1985) and larger contexts of student activism in the 1960s.

In Roberto Burle Marx’s Workshop and Beyond: Clark’s Studies of Staircases

Clark’s early interest in architecture began alongside one of her earliest mentors: landscape designer Roberto Burle Marx during her study in Rio from 1947 to 1949. During her training with Burle Marx, Clark painted compositions with curvilinear and organic shapes that resembled some of Burle Marx’s layouts of gardens, as evidenced in Clark’s *Composition* (1948)

and Burle Marx's *Garden Design* for Sáenz Peña Square in 1948. Both compositions display asymmetry, solid sections of color, and curving shapes. Such affinities emphasize a synthetic approach to the arts.³

Similar to Burle Marx, who began his career in painting and later shifted to designing landscapes, Clark also moved between media and encouraged collaboration between artists and architects.⁴ It is also speculated that Clark collaborated with architect Oscar Niemeyer on his Conjunto Kubitschek in Belo Horizonte and Leopoldo Teixeira Leite for a school in Itatiaia in Rio de Janeiro.⁵ While the details of these collaborations require further scholarship, such connections propose that Clark hoped to expand beyond architectural models to contribute to the built environment.



Fig. 1. Lygia Clark, *Ateliê* (Studio) “1951;” ref. no. 01892, photographer: André de Arruda Pimental; Number of archiving 737/ Certificate Number 000821, Courtesy of – “The World of Lygia Clark” Cultural Association

While working with Burle Marx, Clark painted *Staircase* (1948), which shows a curving staircase, much like the layout of Burle Marx's gardens that resist the modern grid with their amorphous shapes. Burle Marx's interest in botany also surfaces in Clark's charcoal drawing *Staircases* (1951). For example, *Staircase* (1951) reflects the texture of leaves and foliage from Burle Marx's drawings of the Gardens of Casa Forte City Hall in Recife in 1935. *Staircases* (1951) was one of the many staircases that Clark made that year. Another charcoal on paper from 1951 shows Clark's shift towards a more realistic portrayal of a staircase. For example, she included spiraling individual treads rather than a more organic form that looks like the wing of a bird. In her oil on canvas work, her commitment to built forms grew as she placed a staircase within identifiable elements that comprise a room: a floor, walls, and a railing.

Painted during the same period as her staircases during her first stay in Paris between 1950 to 1952, Clark's *Studio* (1951) shows her workshop. A linear staircase leads to the floor above, eventually disappearing behind a wall. In this painting, the artist used stairs to expand the picture plane beyond the frame, emphasizing that a frame could not limit space. In this painting, Clark emphasized an easel that supports a large and small canvas. It takes up most of the composition and stands at the center of the plane. The larger canvas leans against the easel with its frame lining up with the post of the easel, mimicking its supports.⁶ This mixture hides the canvases behind it and accentuates a large blank canvas, destabilizing the assumed hierarchy of painting as a medium. In *Studio* (1951), this canvas essentially loses its function and instead visually performs and assumes the role of architecture.

Moving Beyond the Frame: Clark's Architectural Maquettes in 1955 and 1960

Similar to Clark's earlier mentor Burle Marx's integrative approaches, her other teacher, Fernand Léger, also experimented with design and painting. In doing so, Léger sought to blend art and architecture through concepts such as living walls, inhabitable rectangles, and elastic rectangles.⁷ For example, Léger's mural paintings in the 1925 Pavilion of the New Born Spirit at the

International Exhibition of Decorative Arts in Paris operated as an example of “living walls” through their function as an example of his interest in fusing art and architecture into the architecture of a pavilion.⁸ For this exhibition, Léger incorporated mural paintings into the wall of the pavilion by painting vertical and horizontal bands for a wall, rather than staying within the limits of a frame. He wrote, “pure colors and geometric forms are not compatible with easel painting. Abstraction requires large surfaces, walls. There one can organize an architecture and a rhythm.”⁹ Three years after leaving Paris, Clark began her making her architectural maquettes or models in 1955, which helped to transition her geometric paintings into three-dimensional objects. For example, the walls of her models looked like compositions of prior abstract paintings.¹⁰

Clark’s architectural models also bear importance because of their connections to contexts of modernization, particularly in the 1950s when Brazil witnessed shifts in its economy from agriculturally focused to more industrial sectors. This shift encouraged new working methodologies based in new materials and methods to develop new ideas, which this paper posits surfaced in Clark’s architectural maquettes from 1955.¹¹ For example, in an interview about her modulated surfaces from 1955 and 1957, Clark mentioned that she used a nitrocellulose paint, which was used in the fabrication of cars.¹² While this interview postdates Clark’s initial architectural maquette production in 1955, her choice of materials in her models suggested her interest in non-traditional materials also occurred in her architectural maquettes.

Clark’s use of enamel paint—which is still used today on cars, planes, and boats— for her architectural maquette, *Maquette for Interior* (1955), places her within a Brazilian economy that underwent stages of modernization instigated by industrialization in the 1950s. It was not until this decade that local production of steel and products such as gasoline, asphalt, and plastic became readily accessible. Because of this increasing emphasis on modernization, ten car factories opened in Brazil by the end of the 1950s. The growing presence of the automobile spurred government investment in motorways, facilitated the growth of travel agencies, and

created a need for the Brazilian Motel Club, which provided information about lodging in the country. As a result of this enthusiasm, some construction laws in Brazil were updated to require some homes to have their own garages.¹³

An increasing interest in cars also appeared in the new capital Brasília, which opened in 1960, just five years after Clark's first maquette. A car aficionado, then President Kubitschek made sure that Brasília had garages for apartment buildings and that the streets were conducive for those traveling by car. These details suggest that Clark's use of automobile paint coincided with the increasing enthusiasm of both car production and ownership in 1950s Brazil. Brazil was not alone in its dedication to car ownership and production. In secondary scholarship about the rising popularity of the automobile in the postwar era, Kristin Ross writes, "In the middle of the century the automobile industry, more than any other, becomes exemplary and indicative; its presence or absence in a national economy tells us the level and power of the economy."¹⁴

Clark embarked on her most intricate undertaking into building design in the maquette, *The House* (1955), which shows multiple rooms. Its length of 19 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches made it one of her longest maquettes, just slightly longer than *Maquette for Interior* (1955) mentioned prior. *The House* (1955) also includes a flat-cantilever roof with a hole in the center that perhaps existed for viewers to peer inside at its contents. The maquette is one floor and includes a compartment in the center with small wooden panels that extend out past the roofline. To the left of the central compartment is a wooden table attached to the wall. The roof overhangs both the left and right side of the maquette. While sloping and butterfly roofs were the most popular style in modern homes in 1950s and 1960s Brazil, flat roofs also were also present in smaller numbers.¹⁵ Examples of this type of roofing occur in neighborhoods in Belo Horizonte, such as Pampulha. These details suggest that Clark used her maquettes to engage with local examples of domestic architecture and modernist elements of the home.

Clark continued her engagement with modernist elements of architecture in her later architectural maquettes. In *Build Your Own Living*

Space (1960), Clark used a drawing board as a foundation for a grid layout. This model employed the grid as a manipulatable floor plan with movable rectangular compartments and slidable partitions. For example, in her description of the model, Clark wrote, “The house would be made very simply, and I thought of making the project myself. So I then made a drawing in which there was a fixed nucleus around which one circulated during the day, and, at night four compartments were closed in.”¹⁶ As such, this changing organization challenges the usual connotations of the grid such as geometry and order and the antireal and antinatural.¹⁷

An October 1955 advertisement from the magazine *Casa e Jardim* contextualizes Clark’s *Build Your Living Space* (1960) with larger ideas of consumerism. In an advertisement for the paint brand Cai lux, a female consumer gestures towards a dining area. This scene appears in the shape of a paintbrush, mimicking the outline of a handheld mirror, reinforcing that the home reflects a sense of identity and one’s place in society. To the left of this section is another consumer painting a wall, which implies a sense of choice in decorating their homes, a similar notion in *Build Your Living Space* (1960). Clark’s collaboration with architect and furniture designer, Sergio Rodrigues, when designing *Build Your Living Space* (1960), suggests her interest in interior design and the home as a “canvas” for the possibilities of home design.¹⁸ For example, Clark largely left each compartment empty in the maquette.

Not Just a Structure: Architecture as Action

Shortly after completing *Build Your Own Living Space* in 1960, Clark continued her interest in participatory expressions as seen in her handheld *Matchbox Structures* (1964). In this proposition, a participant could move the *Matchbox Structures’* diminutive drawers, which created varying configurations. Their varying appearances draw comparisons to a chest of drawers or skyscrapers when put on their sides. While making her *Matchbox Structures* (1964), Clark recalled feeling a sense of imprisonment because of her ailing health.¹⁹ It can be suggested that the compartments that slide within their shell reflect a sense of confinement when enclosed and the

opposite sensation when pulled out. These ideas also draw a parallel to the political climate of Brazil building up to the start of a military dictatorship that began in 1964, the same year as Clark's *Matchbox Structures*.

The military dictatorship began after a coup of leftist-leaning president João Goulart (1961–1964). During the backdrop of the Cold War many nations feared that some Latin American countries would succumb to communism, which led to Goulart's exit from politics and a tumultuous time in Brazil's history. It is within this period that torture, censorship, and decrees such as, *Ato Institucional Número Cinco* (Fifth Institutional Act) "AI-5," went into effect. For example, on December 13, 1968, "AI-5," suspended *habeas corpus* and Congressional actions. Within this context of repression, many artists, like Clark, used their work as a form of expression through the incorporation of participants' bodies.²⁰

Clark's *The House is the Body* (1968) was first displayed at the Museu de Arte Moderna in Rio de Janeiro and then at the Venice Biennale in 1968. In this installation, Clark connected the home's layout to different processes of the body. Overall, the installation measured twenty-six feet long with four small rooms for each bodily stage: penetration, ovulation, germination, and expulsion.²¹ The penetration section was completely dark and destabilizing for the viewer. Ovulation was the same dimensions as the previous section, but had helium filled balloons. The remaining two rooms contained other elements such as "hairs," balls, and a deformed mirror.²² As such, this installation encouraged a tenuous and uncontrollable relationship to its environment, similar associations for some who lived under dictatorship.

Following *The House is the Body* (1968), Clark intensified her incorporation of participants' bodies in the proposition *Biologic Architecture* (1969). Functioning as a freely chosen and participatory act, rather than an orchestrated performance, this proposition incorporated the body of participants by using tubing and plastic sheets as a form of shelter. Dissolving the separation between object and subject, the tubing and sheets became extensions of the body by adopting the role of a collective tissue or skin. In this instance, *Biologic Architecture* (1969) became a communal body in the form of a moving and "living" piece of architecture. Attaching the bodies not

only in physical ways, this piece also encouraged participants to think about the psychological connections that formed between them. In this case, architecture became more than a shelter, but also an opportunity to connect to others. Similar ideas regarding the body, movement, and architecture also surfaced in Clark's *Live Structures* (1969).



Fig. 2. Lygia Clark, *Arquitetura Biológica* (Biologic Architecture) “1969”; Ref. no. 22828; Photographer Alecio de Andrade; Courtesy of “The World of Lygia Clark” Cultural Association.

Live Structures (1969) constructed in Paris and later used during her class at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1972, activated ordinary objects like rubber bands through bodily movements. As such, this proposition proposes that corporeality can give shape to structures by molding space. The form of the structure relies on the intricate layout of the bodies' limbs, which is dependent on the others; one's hand does not act alone, but rather functions in relation to the other parts. For example, stimuli from the environment stimulates the brain to signal to nerves and muscles to move the hand. Connecting rubber bands to varying limbs facilitates bodies to work together.

If one arm of a person moves, the other limbs of the other bodies will react, which requires people to communicate and interact with others to problem solve and react.

Clark's incorporation of students operated within larger contexts of activism in Paris. In May 1968, seven to ten million students and workers went on strike to protest unjust levels of authority in family life, school systems, and politics. These events disrupted everyday life: blockades limited streets' accessibility and the president vanished from public appearances.²³ Photographer Serge Hambourg captured many of these events in Paris from May 1968. Some pictures show students at the Sorbonne campus — where Clark taught in 1972 — sitting against a statue of Louis Pasteur. On the pedestal of Pasteur's stature reads "Free Expression" in black graffiti paint. A horizontal image of the student leaders: Alain Geismar, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, and Jacques Sauvageot with their arms crossed emphasizes solidarity. These images suggest the historical context in which Clark worked and lived. As such, it can be suggested that her *Live Structures* (1969) and *Biologic Architecture* (1969) reflected a continuation of the ideals presented by the May 1968 protest, where many young people joined together to make a difference by communicating and questioning their world.

Conclusion

Offering a revisionist history, the present article has demonstrated a more nuanced understanding of Clark's career evolution where architecture and varying representations of the home connect her oeuvre's seemingly disparate stages. It is through such avenues that Clark migrated between media, engaged with her changing residences, and narrated individual and collective identities. As a result of these findings, this paper further develops Clark's legacy as one not just grounded in issues of participation and discourses of painting and sculpture, but also that of architecture, modernization, and modernist elements of the home.

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Endnotes

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7. Paulo Herkenhoff, "Lygia Clark," in *Lygia Clark* (Barcelona, Spain: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 1998): 36, 37.
8. Gutiérrez-Guimarães, "Lygia Clark: Painting as Experimental Field," 29.
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10. Refer to Julia Kershaw, "At Home in Twentieth-Century Brazil: An Analysis of Lygia Clark's Models of Homes and Architectural Interiors," *studies in History and Theory of Architecture*, no. 9 (2021): 209–223. <https://sita.uauim.ro/article/> for more information about the connections between Clark's architectural models from 1955 and her earlier abstract paintings.
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12. Diário de Notícias, "Prémio 'Diário de Notícias' na IV BIENAL," *Revista Feminina - Jornal Diário de Notícias* (13 October 1957): 9; Giulia Giovani et al., "The Use of Industrial Paint on Wood by Lygia Clark," *Studies in Conservation* 61 (2016): 292, primary source reproduced in article.
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14. Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1995), 19.
15. Fernando Luiz Lara, "Modernism Made Vernacular: The Brazilian Case," *Journal of Architectural Education* 63, no. 1 (2009): 46.
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23. Anne Sa'adah, "Challenging Authority: The Students Protests of May 1968 and the Transformation of French Society," in *Protests in Paris 1968*, Photographs by Serge Hambourg (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 2006), 13.