

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Endnotes

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