

Theories and Methods for the "Global" Modern (New York, 8 Apr 16)

Art Department, The City College of New York, Compton-Goethals Hall, Room 249,
160 Convent Avenue (140th Street and Amsterdam Ave), Apr 08, 2016

Joshua Cohen

Theories and Methods for the "Global" Modern
2016 Art Department Symposium
The City College of The City University of New York

Today's "global" turn in art history and museum curating is spurred by recent escalations of economic and cultural globalization. Many publications and museum interventions accordingly emphasize contemporary art, celebrating diversity and inclusivity in the art world. Does the new "global" field especially encompass the 20th-century and the contemporary, even though globalization as a phenomenon is nothing new? Indeed, since at least the 15th century, when trade networks grew truly worldwide, and since the 19th century, when modern imperial systems expanded, the "global" has become historical. Centuries of far-ranging artistic exchanges can now be examined through historical documents and other forms of evidence and inquiry. This symposium throws "global" modern artistic phenomena open to the widest possible understanding of modernity, considering early modern through contemporary eras. The symposium seeks to grapple with "global" modern art history as an emerging field—including its core methodologies and concerns, exciting possibilities, and potential pitfalls.

SYMPOSIUM SCHEDULE

3:00- 3:10 – Introductory Remarks: Joshua I. Cohen, Assistant Professor, African Art History, CCNY

3:10 - 4:10 PANEL 1 – MODERNISM IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Clare Davies

Assistant Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art – Middle East, North Africa, and Turkey,
Metropolitan Museum of Art

"In the Beginning, after the End: The Origins of the Modern Egyptian Art Object"

This paper describes the emergence of traditions of oil painting and figurative sculpture in Egypt in relation to 19th- and early 20th-century transformations in the urban fabric of Cairo and the establishment of Islamic art as a discipline within both the academy and the museum. Not only does the occlusion of so-called modern and contemporary works of art produced outside of Europe and the U.S. represent a constitutive blind spot of "the field," I argue, but this blind spot

relies on a second omission in the historical record: that of the mutual construction of fields of Islamic and modern art in the region. Ultimately, it is in re-examining the historical interdependence of these fields that we are best positioned to challenge the convention of defining recent practices in the Middle East or Arab world as a Western import displacing "authentic" ethnic, religious or cultural forms of expression, as well as the more recent museological trope of "contemporary Islamic art."

Anneka Lenssen

Assistant Professor – Global Modern Art, University of California, Berkeley

"Sight/Sensation: Global Modernism in the Arab East"

To bring art into life. This is the avant-garde project by which we have come to judge twentieth-century production. But what of the world modernisms that never entailed an aestheticist disengagement of art from life, nor produced tradable commodities? My talk engages with painting practices from the Arab East (including Syria, Lebanon, and other areas of the Mediterranean Basin) that began from notions of expansive and globalizing life. Between 1930 and 1960, radical nationalist intellectuals in the Arab world located the authority of painting beyond the merely visual, in sensation. The painting offered both artists and activists a catalytic interface of color, line, and rhythm by which to address, and move, collective energies. I discuss the globalizing work of these paintings—how they placed spectators beyond the confines of the nation-state and into an experience of superfluity—and their relationship to the other vitalist modernisms of the twentieth century that refused to take the enframed object as a given end. Might we take this model of the art object as globalizing sensation as a meaningful counter-model to our market-driven histories of alienated (and alienating) objects?

4:10 - 4:30 Coffee Break

4:30 - 5:30 PANEL 2 – ASIA & BEYOND

Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann

Frederick Marquand Professor of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University

"Ranges of Response: Asian Appropriation of European Art and Culture"

Asian responses to cultural elements taken immediately or mediated from Europe varied widely, ranging from rejection through selective appropriation to emulation. In Japan, after the most successful and widespread process of proselytization in early modern Asia, Christianity was rejected, symbolically by stomping on fumi-e. Despite e-fumi and the exclusion of foreigners, eighteenth-century Japanese artists and intellectuals responded to books and objects imported from Europe, sparking a rage for things Dutch, and transforming visual culture. In comparison, artists in Mughal India adapted Netherlandish prints brought by the Dutch East India Company and the Jesuits, and used them for imperial aggrandizement. But the early eighteenth-century Rajput ruler Jai Singh found European know-how offered by books and Jesuit visitors of little help when he came to design astronomical observatories. The Jaipur Jantar Mantar contains large devices resembling those in Timurid Samarkand. In contrast, while the Dutch failed to gain much ground in China, emperors found the Jesuits useful as technicians and scientists. But Father Verbiest equipped the old Beijing observatory with devices like Jaipur's, albeit smaller and with new mounts. How much European pictorial methods were of interest in China before the mid-eighteenth century (e.g. with Castiglione) remains a matter of debate, however.

Kavita Singh

Associate Professor – Arts & Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

"Another's Modernity"

Today as museums proliferate in places such as China and the oil-rich Arab nations, critics question the appropriateness of having these modern institutions in states that have not engaged with the social and political ideals of modernity. Legitimate as this critique may be, it also seems to foreclose the possibility of museums having an authentic meaning anywhere but Europe. Against the backdrop of contemporary controversies about museums beyond the West, this paper excavates the history of some lesser-known museums from colonial India that suffered a similar discursive fate. Created by the Indian "princes" or native rulers who ruled their kingdoms under British supervision, these museums have been dismissed as derivative and spendthrift "vanity" projects. But a closer and more sympathetic reading of these museums shows the remarkable interventions they made within their historical and political contexts. How can such histories be lost? And what is at stake as we make efforts to recover them? In engaging with museums in princely India and in showing how they are a forgot- ten part of a history of India's claiming modernity for itself, this paper asks us to re-examine the stories we tell ourselves about museums "here" and "there."

5:30 – 6:30

Respondent comments from Eugene Wang (Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Professor of Asian Art, Harvard University)

Panelists discussion, Q&A

Symposium organized by the Art Department at The City College of New York, with support from the Division of Humanities & Arts, the Simon H. Rifkind Center for the Humanities, and The Martin and Toni Sosnoff President's Fund for Excellence in the Arts.

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