Rethinking Primitivisms in the Modern Art of Asia-Oceania

Deadline: Jan 15, 2023

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Special issue of "World Art".
Guest editors: Yvonne Low (PhD, University of Sydney) and Phoebe Scott (PhD, National Gallery Singapore).
This issue critically explores how “primitivism” has been mobilised by modern artists from the Asia-Oceania region. The term “primitivism” is used here to refer to the appropriation, within modern art, of forms or subjects derived from cultures that were perceived as being “non-modern” or “Other .” Within Western art history, modernist primitivism has been subjected to a stringent critique, noting its underlying presumptions of a racist cultural hierarchy, and its embeddedness within various colonial systems. To what extent is this critique also applicable to modernisms in Asia and the Oceania, often produced at a time when artists in the region were grappling with the histories and ongoing politicisation of Indigenous and other so-called ‘peripheral’ identities? How relevant is the term “primitivism” itself to modern artists from this region? Can the formal and conceptual modes that seem to resemble modernist primitivism be attributed to stylistic and intellectual transfers from Western modernism, or do they have alternative sources and thereby signal broader more plural engagements with formalist concepts and visual modalities? This issue seeks to prompt a critical re-thinking of modern art in Asia and the Oceania, by looking at the discourse of primitivism beyond stylistic definitions, to also consider wider hierarchical and dialectical relations occurring internally, regionally or intra-regionally. What specific relation do these developments bear on the broader history of primitivist modernism, and what was their meaning and critical function when engaged in the Asia-Oceania region? This special issue can be the occasion for a more nuanced consideration of terminology, reception and context – including the intersection of factors like regionalism, nationalism, diaspora and post-coloniality. Anchored in the arts of Asia-Oceania, the issue will have broader implications for the de-centered writing of modern art history in the Global South.
We invite scholars to submit original papers (6000 words including notes, captions and references) for inclusion to this World Art special issue to be published in 2024 (with print and online versions). Please direct all proposals (500 words) and enquiries to the guest editors no later than 15 Jan 2023 (Email: yvonne.low@sydney.edu.au and phoebe.scott@nationalgallery.sg). Please send all completed manuscripts to the guest editors by 15 April 2023. Accepted manuscripts will need to be formatted according to World Art’s guidelines (https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rwor20) and submitted online through the journal’s submission portal by 1 June 2023.

Reference:

CFP: Rethinking Primitivisms in the Modern Art of Asia-Oceania. In: ArtHist.net, Nov 26, 2022 (accessed Nov 2, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/38014>.