

What is Global Art?

Does globalization – which began as a merely economic development – have an impact upon artists and the production of art? Do we see the beginning of a mainstreaming in art production, the emergence of a global iconography, a “global art”? Does this development imply an equal participation of artists around the world in the processes and structures of the art market? And what are potential consequences for the discipline of art history and for curatorial practices respectively?

All these various aspects of globalization and its consequences for the art world were broached by an international two-days symposium¹ organized by the Austrian and Swiss sections of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA) and the Salzburg International Summer Academy of Fine Arts.

Presentations and discussions centred on the big and yet ambiguous notion of global art and the challenges it poses on conventional discussions, perceptions and structures. The core question was if there really is something like a global art occurring at these times, if there are in fact new qualities and what kind of concepts might be related to this phenomenon. The speakers and panellists have been invited to analyse and scrutinize the term global art from their respective point of view and to reveal – if possible – connected relations to the history of images, to established structures and a common visual language. Another essential aspect within this context is the interrelation with the post-colonial discourse. The dichotomy West/non-West or North/South respectively could be one among other notions, which may become more and more irrelevant, if something like global art is developing. Global art could represent the wish and possibility to reach a multicentric perception of the world, of traditions and current developments and break the boundaries of cultural hegemony open to discussion.

As the organizers phrased it in their invitation: “For art, globalisation means first of all the end of western hegemony and the beginning of a world trade market. With globalisation, more and more artists enter the global art market, followed by galleries and collectors from a variety of cultures and regions. The influence of globalisation is beginning to emerge clearly in the themes of the artworks. When can we speak about global art? Does global art refer generally to art created no longer from the standpoint of western cultural superiority, but from the experience of globality and under the conditions of globalisation?”

The talks and panel discussions have been structured around three topical sections: What is the history of global art of international relations between different art worlds and what is global art history? What is global art, are there new qualities? What is the relation of global art to regional developments?

Hans Belting² focused on the different terms used within art history. Global art and world art are sometimes used synonymously. He stated that world art is an old idea complementary to modernism and mostly to be found in Western museums. It can be viewed as a colonial notion for the art of “others” under the condition of excluding it from modern mainstream art. The idea of world art as a world art heritage, Belting further argued, is held together by an art concept that is based on Western modernism’s universalism. It encompasses most cultures beyond the West whose heritage was preserved in empire type museums as a witness from colonial times. World art relates to modern art via the term primitivism, which has been in use until the early 1980ies.

Global art on the other side differs profoundly from world art in that it is always created as art to begin with, that it is synonymous with contemporary art practice and it eliminates the other-ness. It also brought with it a shift in terminology and concept as it entered the art world

as “World Art” but with a new meaning. Especially during the 1980ies and the early 90ies there has been a considerable confusion with these terms, notions, and definitions. The art of the Australian Aborigines for example at first was labeled indigenous art, but from 1993 on was called contemporary. In the end, all these terms carry a specific meaning that also depends upon the respective political, economical, cultural frame. Therefore Belting calls it essential to consider within this context who uses which terminology for which purpose.

For the discipline of art history, the crisis began with contemporary art when artists deliberately positioned themselves outside the master narrative of art history. Globalization of art continues this exodus. According to Belting art history faces new problems and borders in this context: world art history as a world wide competence of art history for every part of the world, as a Western discipline versus local practices of art history that do not follow a single model. On the other side the notion of global art history, which cannot be understood as a history of global art. Counter-narratives increasingly replace narratives of Western modernism. The discussions in art history are changing anyway, switching to the notion of “contemporaneity in art and history” or talks about periodizing contemporary art (early and late contemporary art!) leaving contemporary art as a battlefield of narrative and history.

Monica Juneja³ posed the question whether there can be a global art history, taking into consideration this discipline evolved with western art and its Eurocentric concept it thus inscribed into it. This fact is also mirrored in the little extent to which non-Western art has been present in academic discourses or exhibition spaces in the West until the 1990ies. Now there is an ever-increasing mobility of art with a range of publics across the globe, allowing for permanent encounters with diverse visual cultures.

In this context she also referred to the “curatoriat”, a term by John Clark, describing the power of curators in defining and selecting contemporary or global art, thus determining access and establishing international canons. Whereas world artistry seems to be on a route of never-ending expansion, institutionalizing discourses always include exclusion through selection processes. Also the interrelation between the global and the local, sometimes seen as an incongruity, has to be re-considered. Artists are engaged in a global art world, have to deal with the existing logic (and logistics) of the globalized art world and to subtly indicate their contemporaneity e.g. through transcultural mobility. At the same time they take recourse to the local as a space of authenticity.

Juneja is observing a gap between this existing plurality of art forms and practices and visual cultures on the one side and the established concepts within the discipline of art history that always had a focus on the geographically discrete definitions of culture on the other side. The mobility and global connectivity of the contemporary art world as well as the collapse of canonical certainties challenge art history to develop new paradigms to be able to address e.g. issues of multiple locations or processes of transcultural configuration, she stated. Art history has to question its values, its own mechanism of inclusion and exclusion and to overcome the notion of viewing national cultures as units to be compared to each other. Any potential new master narrative of a global art history as transcultural has to go beyond the principle of additive extension, beyond the dichotomy of the West and the non-West, so Juneja emphasised, and look instead at the transformatory processes that constitute art practice through cultural encounters and relationships. It is not about mere inclusion, it is about a necessary shift of paradigm and thus values.

In her talk **Nancy Adajania**⁴ stated that the changes talked about within this symposium took place outside the Western world and outside traditional institutions. As early as 1968 the first Triennial India in New Delhi demonstrated a global conscience outside the Western world and that internationalism is not an exclusive right of the West or the USA. It was an important

step to overcome their hegemony as well as the ideology of modern propriety connected with imperialism.

There is a generation of new regional histories, therefore it is time to re-stage world. The basis of this re-staging is a critical engagement with globalization, through a mode that Adajania calls “globalism” which is not an outcome of a specific Western economic or other logic. This happened already e.g. with the Moguls, the Qing dynasty or the Safavids. The very recent notion of globalism started already with the generation of the non-aligned countries in the 1950ies. Globalism is a deliberate gesture of recovering the potentialities of the lattices of globalisation from neo-liberal doctrine. To the neo-liberal, globalism refers to a nation-state's policy of treating the entire world as a market and source of goods and services. One could see it as a continuation of the Cold War. To Adajania globalism is a transcultural, collaborative, multi-participatory mode of performing ideas and conducting projects, with the emphasis on ethical responsibility and a transformative aesthetics. The objective is a society based on exchange and mutuality. While neo-liberal globalism is an extension of old first world geo-politics, her perspective on globalism shifts the locus to the global South and to activities of resistance. With this shift post-colonial theory is out-dated, instead a critical trans-regionality becomes important.

Therefore a new mapping is suggested, continents of affinity, a new field, where conventional labels such as “post-/modern”, “post/colonial” or “traditional” or the reduction to a nationality are useless. This field takes beyond post/colonialism, and beyond the dichotomy of the self and the other which also represents exhausted Euro-US debates of the 20th century. Instead, it offers space for active exchange, for intersubjective encounters and cooperation and thus lays the ground for transcultural mutuality. The architecture of belonging cannot be static, and experimental aesthetics of belonging is also part of it. Adajania talks about a “shift from the outcome of structures to choices of agencies”. As a consequence curators have to provide new spaces for these processes, and new modes of understanding and critique within this field have to be developed. Traditional institutions, methods of art history and also exhibition formats like biennials will be put into question.

Gerardo Mosquera⁵ emphasized that the relationship between contemporary art, culture and internationalization have been dramatically transformed in the last fifteen years. The key issue for contemporary art today is the tremendous expansion of its regional and global circulation. This change contributes to the development of ever-increasingly globalized art scenes while concurrently stimulating the production of new contemporary art locally in areas where it didn't exist before. Usually these artworks are not bound to nationalistic modernism or to traditional languages even when they are based on vernacular cultures or specific backgrounds. Contexts themselves are becoming more global. But these processes still respond to remaining colonial configurations and segregations, and to economic and structural disproportions that determine the power to legitimate art.

Globalization is not as global as it appears. Mosquera sees a radial system still in place extending from diverse centers of power into multiple and highly diversified economic areas with large zones of silence. At the same time national, ethnic and religious separatisms tend to Balkanize the globalized world. Globalization has certainly dynamized and pluralized cultural circulation. Yet it has reproduced the structures of power, while maintaining a deficit in “horizontal” interactions. It is necessary to democratize these circuits and spaces, while also connecting the “zones of silence”. Horizontal networks subvert the control axes typical of the radial scheme. Only a multidirectional web of interactions will pluralize our definitions of “international art”.

These developments have brought about a new paradigm. Rather than appropriating and critically re-functionalizing the imposed international culture - as artists in postcolonial situations had done until recently - now artists are actively involved in the firsthand creation of a global

metaculture, a shift from creative incorporation to one of direct international construction. Cultural globalization tends to configure an international hegemonic set of codes multilaterally, instead of appearing as a multifaceted structure of differentiated cells. Difference is increasingly constructed through specific plural modes of creating artistic texts within a set of international idioms and practices, and not by means of representing cultural or historical elements characteristic of particular contexts. This inclination opens a different perspective that opposes the cliché of “universal” art in the centers, derivative expressions in the “peripheries”, and the multiple “authentic” realms of “otherness” in traditional culture. Artists have to express themselves in an “English” of art that has been hegemonically constructed and established. It makes intercontextual communication possible, but simultaneously indirectly consolidates established structures.

Last not least, Mosquera explained that institutions dealing with contemporary art seem to have difficulties answering these challenges. He suggested a major shift in their practice, one that will lead from the prevalent space-centered routine to a more dynamic endeavor. The “museum-as-hub” of artistic activities entails a decentralized institution that would conceive, curate, and/or participate simultaneously in a diversity of projects in different places worldwide. The focus would lie upon collaborations with other institutions, space would tend to disappear, since the museum would function more as international network of increasingly global and decentralized activity.

Jitish Kallat⁶ posed questions around the geographical “tagging” of artworks, e.g. is the embedded metadata of its creation such as location and time of its making, ideally recognized by the viewer or do artworks rather deserve a degree of location-neutrality, so that they are not trapped in an over-emphasis on the socio-cultural backdrop of the place they come from? And does this apply to art that is produced anywhere in the world? He connected this to the consideration how an artist anywhere in the world develops his or her own unique form of looking. Can the dialogue about the local and the global and their dynamic interpenetration be carried to the very complex site of the artist’s gaze? In this connection it would be necessary to also talk about the predicament of these times, the speedy, nomadic forms of viewer ship, because there is this rapid movement of art across borders with its meanings re-administered as it journeys through various national borders, institutional spaces and audiences.

To highlight these aspects one could for example take a look at the accompanying texts of so-called ‘survey exhibitions’ that mostly presents contemporary art from India, China, Iran etc. This kind of “assisted reading”, as Kallat calls it, labels artworks through foregrounding local information that often becomes the overall framing device. Of course it is counterproductive to ignore local particularities in a drive to create a ‘flattened form of universalized articulation’. Such homogeneity would be totally undesirable. But it could be supposed that art works from certain parts of the world are more susceptible to a form of over-summarized and hurried prefixing of local specificities where at the same time they are granted a “compromised global-mobility” through a projection of provinciality.

Kallat further gave several examples for an interaction of the global with local in India: around the mid-nineties the international came flooding into one’s living room with international TV channels thus plugging urban India into the reservoir of global culture. A universal lexicon of images and ideas began to unsettle the established glossary of national signs, disturbing identity stereotypes. This new sound and visual detonation was something young artists began to absorb and respond to. When MTV India first came in, it simply tried to relocate Western pop music in India and apparently faced heavy rejection until it finally localized its content. This can hold as a small example for merger and assimilation of the global within the local. Another example is the interpenetration of the international with the Indian art scene through biennales and artist initiated workshop networks as the first one-to-one exchange without mediation by a Western organization. Starting with the Asia Pacific Triennale in

Brisbane in 1993 a non-Western Asian network emerged in the 90ies. The formation of the artist-initiative 'Khoj India' in 1997 (an off-spring of the Triangle Artist's Network) was one of the key developments with others in Pakistan (1999), Sri Lanka (2000) and Bangladesh (2002) to follow. All this developed and fostered a south-south axis and formed a hugely generative space for peer-to-peer exchange and approbation across the region.

Bassam El Baroni⁷ brought in the term of "universality", which for him represents one of the major problems of most of contemporary art practices. Under the pretext of the multicultural logic, "discursive" art is produced, a "paradoxical universality" is created that is very different from the universality of modernism. Within this context El Baroni discussed the differences between fine art and contemporary art.

The majority of works of fine art is usually defined as 'commercial', or 'kitsch' by contemporary art, thus one rarely sees a work of fine art in a contemporary art exhibition. While for El Baroni contemporary art has successfully adopted the paradoxical universalism of multiculturalism, fine art has not. For fine art, art history is a catalogue of artist characters, methods, styles, symbols and socio-political indicators and it is not meant to produce knowledge but to reincarnate previous knowledge. Consciously or unconsciously artists had to somehow insert themselves into this script called linear art history. Universality here is linked to this catalogue and to the artistic self as the source from which universality emerges. One of the crucial differences between fine art and what has been labelled as contemporary art is the function of art history which in contemporary art is perceived as a non-linear extensive archive of images, facts, subjectivities, etc. – all of which can be renegotiated, faked, deconstructed. According to El Baroni, universality in contemporary art is linked to the archive, the grand "global" culture of many cultures, the "global economy", and in the end one can replace this universality with another more pragmatic term, "multiculturalism", the dominant universality today. It asserts that its core is outside the individual and invites what it perceives as identities, cultures to formulate a "plural" universality. The problem is that it has to first define them as identities and cultures in order to allow them to form its core, thus full control is achieved. He also claimed artists working in an artificial time zone cut off from the past and the future.

The imperialism of today is about structuring a strong global environment where everyone can participate but where the results of this participation are to an extent shaped and predicated by this environment. The terms 'Globalization' or 'Glocalization' in art and culture refer only to this structural environment. Imperialism is no longer then an enemy or a culture outside of us but the actual environment one has to adapt to in order to produce something that has some form of capital and power. This can also be called "the market". This new type of imperialism is an internalized imperialism and not an externalized one. Fine art still understands the imperial as an external other.

An essential strategy out of this dichotomy would be the construction of a third universality. El Baroni sees the global system coming closer and closer to this same territory where these routes converge. One way out of this bi-polar dilemma of failed old local systems and failed current international systems can be found in the idea of a reformulated well-structured universality, something that needs to be desperately brought to the drawing table on both a local and international level.

The artist and social activist **Senam Okudzeto**⁸ called herself a product of kind of a proto-globalization, as she has a Caribbean, Black-American, African background. One of her concerns lies in getting people to take multiple positions, to provide people with different understandings of artworks. At some times she as an artist felt increasingly unimportant, as she had been invited to exhibitions as a woman, as someone black or as African. In 2007 she founded "Art in Social Structures" (AISS), an NGO for cultural education and

preservation in Ghana, run and funded by artists. She wanted to prove that art simply can happen, also without huge amounts of money or big structures. The activities of AISS are fuelled by the conviction that the role of art is fundamental to civil societies and that it is a basic building block in forming social structures. Projects aim at encouraging discourses about contemporary life, at preserving a community's creative resources, at supporting visual culture as well as educational activities.

One of AISS' projects Okudzeto described in more detail, it is workshops in critical writing about art and culture for journalists. As Ghana has a remarkably free press this initiative brought several advantages in its wake: critical writing stimulates local initiatives, it creates rising interest in visual culture, the newspaper becomes kind of a museum, frequent writing automatically generates an archive of artistic or cultural activities and, last not least, these journalists then educate others. Besides these effects this project supports society in Ghana to develop their own values and style and not just import it from the global culture scene. Another project is the documentation and preservation of heritage sites in Ghana that are like markers in history, witnesses to a rich past whereas Western visitors are used to see only slums. These existing different aspects is something Okudzeto also wants to show in her artworks. To her, there is lack of representation of joy, of celebration as Africa is mostly associated with famine and poverty. As AISS is also connected to global networks and positive experiences with the World Bank exist, Okudzeto stressed that the global does not always have to be looked at as something oppressing.

What **conclusions** can be drawn from these two days of presentations and panel discussion? Altogether a lot of positions and approaches have been discussed in-depth, a lot of questions been raised, some answers been given, a couple of starting points to proceed from identified. The term global art could refer mostly to what formerly was called international art which as a notion was corrupted because it was meant to be only Western art. But in a sense viewpoints on global art and its potential consequences and challenges depend mostly on the position one is arguing from: as art historian, as curator or critic, as artist etc. Let's take a summarizing look at some of these fields.

Somehow **art history** seems to have come to end already with the notion of contemporary art, all the more with global art (however this term maybe defined) or global development in the art world. It has been critically remarked that the art historical frame is very thin and not universal, thus creating a theory for the global would only be self-referential if it is done within the borders of art history. Integration of the social, the media etc. is necessary. Then again, since its very beginning art history was confronted with dramatic changes in the meaning, the social and/or political importance and the respective production modes of art. And it still is there, albeit somewhat helpless at the moment. This becomes evident through the necessity to "borrow" the terminology of cultural theory or post-colonial discourses. But on the other side art history is in itself a certain structure, it is not something stable, so it may still have the potential to just change along the way.

Whereas this topic poses quite some challenges for the methodologies, approaches and academic discourses especially in art history, it seems to be of almost no importance for **artists**. They are used to getting invited with a "label", e.g. as woman, as climatic artist, as being from a special region etc. Altogether these notions of global or of contemporaneity do not have any importance when it comes to art practice. With categorizing as well as with theorizing, an artwork itself tends to recede, it is only of secondary or even tertiary importance then. Artworks are not global themselves, but stem from a location, travel the world and create local reactions. It remained open if art becomes global through its travelling.

Curators and critics, on the other side, definitely have to respond to the term global art and to the vast amount of contemporary art being produced. Curators need to demonstrate that they are familiar with all potential art niches and have criteria on hand with which to

distinguish or define global art. In times of a powerful (and already vanishing?) curatoriat they are in the position to award this label to artworks. Yet, these practices and exhibition formats as well as their prevalence need to be scrutinized. Art critics seem to be in a somewhat blurry position: is conventional art critic still relevant in a globalized art scene?

Do art critics therefore face the same challenges as art historian, i.e. being in the need for new instruments and methodologies?

The current big exhibition formats together with the connected **art market**, galleries, and collectors seem to be a catalyzer for creating new categories and labels. So in this connection and in times of ever-faster changes the term global art – which is rather unimportant for the artists as mentioned above – quickly becomes a different meaning, a promise for the new, and the un-discovered. If the greed for something new cannot be satisfied with products then maybe new labels work as well with artworks and events being categorized in a new way.

It should be bared in mind that the (colonial) structures of power, control and selection, and the vertical axis are still in place and horizontal exchange is still not really organized. To achieve a truly global diffusion and evaluation of culture a multi-directional web of interactions is necessary which then includes overcoming the dominant structures and the development of South-South circuits.

Emphasis has been laid on the statement that the global is not a style (like impressionism) rather it is a condition. It has become evident that these current cultural developments on a global scale require new approaches of being analysed, conceptualized, presented, valued – be it in academia, in art projects, in exhibitions etc. However unclear the term “global at” remains, there is the need to go beyond the post-colonial, the self and the other and instead to move towards a transcultural position. Awareness has to be raised to not mistake the transcultural for transnational; e.g. if a Western expert wants to hold a conference on a Hindi topic in Mumbai this would just be a transnational activity, nothing more. The challenge therefore lies in thinking diversity and international culture not as a kind of mosaic where the pieces are not interconnected but as something to build jointly based upon the dialogue between different subjects.

Alice Schmatzberger, August 2011

¹ July 29-30 2011 in Salzburg, Austria. Concept by Sabine B. Vogel, curator, art critic, president of AICA Austria and Hildegund Amanshauser, art historian, curator, author, director of the Salzburg International Summer Academy of Fine Arts.

² Art historian; professor emeritus at the State University of Arts and Design, Karlsruhe.

³ Art historian; holds the Chair of Global Art History at the Cluster of Excellence “Asia and Europe in a Global Context”, University of Heidelberg.

⁴ Cultural theorist, art critic, independent curator; co-artistic director of the 9th Gwangju Biennale, 2012, based in Mumbai.

⁵ Independent curator, critic, art historian; artistic director for PhotoEspaña 2011–2013, Madrid. Based in Havana.

⁶ Artist, based in Mumbai.

⁷ Curator, art critic; co-founder and director of the non-profit art space Alexandria Contemporary Arts Forum (ACAF). Based in Alexandria, Egypt.

⁸ Artist, writer, activist; founder of Art in Social Structures, an NGO for cultural education and preservation in Ghana.