

New Worlds: Frontiers, Inclusion, Utopias



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Whose History? Why? When? Who Benefits, and Who Doesn't?

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The opportunity to speak at this conference encouraged me to think together three of the main categories that partition the discipline of art history into subdisciplinary formations: geography, periodization, and collective identity.¹ As recently as ten years ago, attempts to conceive a world art history assumed that continents like the Americas were an obvious and relatively uncontroversial way to organize the discipline in an expanded field. However, geography, as cultural geographers such as Derek Gregory and Irit Rogoff insist, is neither natural nor neutral.² Geography is a concept, a sign system, and an order of knowledge established at the centers of power, an epistemic category grounded in issues of positionality. By occupying new positions, we can introduce questions of critical epistemology, subjectivity, and spectatorship.³

Edward Said and many others since have urged scholars to examine the history of our inherited nineteenth-century European categories as part of our studies by taking the subaltern position of the culturally dispossessed subject. My own interest in world art history initially sprang from disenchantment with existing approaches, which in principle hold much promise for the future of art historical studies. This is not to imply that all the contributions to such a rethinking of disciplinary practices

- 1 The following paper, originally presented at the 2015 CIHA conference in Rio de Janeiro is the product of years of thinking and writing about these issues. The argument developed from a shorter paper presented at the Renaissance Society of America annual conference, Berlin, 2015, which will appear in print as "The 'Global Turn' in Art History: Why, When, and How Does It Matter," in *The Globalization of Renaissance Art: A Critical Review*, ed. Daniel Savoy (Leiden: Brill Press).
- 2 As feminists and cultural geographers such as Henri Lefevbre, Trin Min-Ha, Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak, Derek Gregory, Irit Rogoff, and many others have been articulating for decades, by retelling the narratives we alter the very structures by which we organize and inhabit cultures. Sociologist and museum studies expert Tony Bennett affirms our efforts as academics to change the *status quo* in his recent book, *Making Culture, Changing Society* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013) in the following terms: cultural commentary is itself a directly political act in view of its capacity to reshape the discursive ground on which relations between identities are shaped.
- 3 (Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture*, 2000). In practice, however, the prospect of training future generations to think differently is hindered because amassing expertise in even one longstanding specialization of art history requires many years of study, and broaching new intercultural subjects frequently requires extensive language training, as well as knowledge of the historiography of each contributing subdiscipline organized along the lines of a monolithic cultural formation. The sheer volume of studies that pre-date the current turn of attention toward identity formation and away from essentializing myths of identity is daunting. Even more fundamental obstacles are the epistemological structures that underpin our vast storehouses of knowledge. How does one navigate the primary and secondary sources without also absorbing the values in these sources that may no longer be tenable? That is a fundamental question that deserves to be raised and widely discussed.

are wrongheaded—far from it—yet the schemes for a “world art history” currently on offer fall short in many ways. Many presuppose their subject of study, assuming that the category “art” requires no historical framing. Other versions of global art history are entirely presentist in orientation, thus avoiding the problems of narrating history altogether. The process of classification is a challenging activity if one wants to target essentializing categories. What Byzantinist Robert Nelson in 1997 called the “gerrymandered divisions of art history” has commanded considerable intellectual attention from scholars working at the margins of western European art, such as northern, central, and eastern Europe; Latin including South America; Byzantium; and Islamic societies ringing the Mediterranean, some extending far into Asia.⁴ Their concerns are relevant to the discipline as a whole. Of these, Latin Americanists were among the first to question such categories as “art,” “nation,” “culture,” “style,” “period,” and “canon” presumed to be universally valid by those who established the modern discipline in the nineteenth century during the era of modern nation-state formation.

4 At a CAA session of 1992, I first heard Byzantinists consider critically the modern construction of Byzantium and its chronological and geographical neighbors as the “Orientalist Other.” Chaired by Annabel Wharton, “The Byzantine and Islamic Other: Orientalism in Art History,” College Art Association Annual Conference, Chicago, February 1992. The speakers, in addition to Wharton, were Robert Nelson, Alice Taylor, Barbara Zeitler, and discussant Rifa’at Ali Abou-El-Haj. An understanding of the interrelationship between the Renaissance and Byzantium, wrote Anthony Cutler a few years later (“The Pathos of Distance: Byzantium in the Gaze of Renaissance Europe,” in Farago, ed., *Reframing the Renaissance*, 24), requires the recognition of our own theoretical attitude towards such accounts, which depends on an awareness of the historiographical matrix on which our present stance is grounded. Oleg Grabar is credited with launching a similarly motivated critique of Islamic Studies in the late 1970s, to which a number of leading scholars have recently contributed, notably in a 2012 issue of the *Journal of Art Historiography* that features essays by Avinoam Shalem, Gulru Necipoglu, Nasser Rabbat, Finbarr Barry Flood, Sheila Blair, Jonathan Bloom, and seventeen others. The volume edited by Eva Hoffman, entitled *Late Antique and Medieval Art of the Mediterranean World* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007) resonates strongly with what I regard as the most salient epistemological issues for the cross-cultural study of art and artifacts, regardless of time period. Among medievalists, as among Early Modernists, longstanding sub-disciplinary specializations are one of the main obstacles to re-envisioning the field in terms of cultural interaction. Hoffman writes that she conceived her volume to promote an integrated study of art and culture in the lands surrounding the Mediterranean from the third to the thirteenth centuries which are routinely separated, spatially and temporally, by traditional subcategories within Medieval art such as Early Christian, Byzantine, Romanesque, and Islamic - a situation that results in the study of these periods, places, and peoples in isolation, and divides antique from medieval; East from West; Christian, Jewish and Muslim; and so on. These inherited categories are founded on hierarchies of knowledge whose rationales are far from transparent or obvious, Hoffmann writes, so she organized her anthology as a series of linked, conceptual categories rather than chronologically or by medium, culture, patronage, or any other traditional nomenclature. In her own words, this reorganization presents a strategy for remapping the art of the Mediterranean that opens up political, religious, and stylistic boundaries for sake of a more holistic understanding (p. 1).

A pressing need, still, is to revise disciplinary practices at an epistemological level. Latin Americanists such as Serge Grusinki, Cecelia Klein, Carolyn Dean, Tom Cummins, Dana Leibsohn, and Janet Favrot Peterson; Donna Pierce, Susan Verdi Webster, Clara Bargellini, Edward Sullivan—the list goes on—distinguished themselves methodologically by attempting *partial* recovery of the culturally dispossessed during the early contact period and its viceregal aftermath. Treating provisional findings as a valid research outcome ran counter to the positivistic epistemology that still rules much of art history. The political, historical, and ethical urgency of telling history differently, using different sources, rescuing the voices of the culturally dispossessed, exploring difference and heterogeneity within those sources, interrogating received categories, defining new questions for investigation, and so on, certainly infuses new life into the humanities. Furthermore, this work potentially contributes to society beyond the academy by resisting notions of fixed truths in favor of understanding “truth” as something to be negotiated, to be debated, something that remains relative and particular, rather than fixed and universal. This is a redemptive but also always a provisional project tied to concrete situations and subject positions, including our own as part of the same historical continuum (with all its fractures, switchbacks, unexplored potentialities, and unrecognized privileges) as the subjects we study. This shift toward relativity and the inclusion of new subject positions entails a multi-faceted understanding of dynamic historical processes such as identity formation, and it articulates historical alternatives to monolithic ideas of “culture.”⁵

I have drawn up a short list of *desiderata* from recently published self-critiques of Byzantine, Islamic, and Latin American art, as well as Mediterranean studies, which is not intended as

5 Edward Said's call to address Eurocentric practices is not discussed by Renaissance art historians, even though many scholars are acting on his critique in framing cross-cultural studies. Why this reticence to explore the methodological and epistemological implications of a de-centered Renaissance? In a widely cited volume recently co-edited by James Elkins and Robert Williams, entitled *Renaissance Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2008), I was the only one of five roundtable participants to advocate, as I had more a decade earlier in *Reframing the Renaissance* (1995), that Renaissance art historians not remain isolated from debates regarding anachronistic and ethnocentric cultural and aesthetic values that interfere with our ability to understand the complexity of artistic interactions during the time identified with the term “Renaissance.” Elkins, 193-201, discussed me an “outlier” – a move that collapsed my identity as a person/scholar into my arguments for re-conceptualizing disciplinary practices. The extent of discrimination in our disciplinary debates is long overlooked and also deserves attention.

a comprehensive literature review, but rather to provide a fair idea of what is sought by leading scholars who specialize in the subdisciplines of Europe's Others as conceived in Orientalizing schemes. A short, widely shared set of practices would avoid or, better, eliminate altogether:

1. The use of binaries, and principally East and West, center and periphery, and art versus artifact.⁶ The evidence overwhelmingly indicates that there were many interwoven centers and varied peripheries operating in porous networks of trade.

2. The monolithic treatment of collective identities such as Byzantium and Islam, which is an effect of the Eurocentric binary of Us and Others.⁷The purported "unity," religiosity, and timelessness of Islamic art are a widely discussed case in point. The problem of imagining monolithic identities is compounded by their compres-

6 Instead of occluding the entangled histories of colonialism, capitalism, and the canon that such unequal binaries promote by turning objects into object lessons to illustrate social relations, Islamicist Finbarr Barry Flood writes, 'From Prophet to Postmodernism? New World Orders and the End of Islamic Art,' *Making Art History: A Changing Discipline and its Institutions*, ed. Elizabeth Mansfield, London: Routledge, 2007, 31-53 (reprinted in *Journal of Art Historiography* June 2012), it is essential to explore the ways in which these imbrications are manifest in the practices of collecting and representation through which the field of Islamic studies was initially constituted (*Journal*, 44). Furthermore, often the margin takes the leading role, as in the case of Norman Sicily's important role in distributing Fatimid styles of artistic production.

7 In 1978, nearly 40 years ago, Oleg Grabar identified the need to encompass the entire cultural breadth of Muslim societies, rather than restricting the field of study to religious contexts. It is pure fiction to speak about Islam using one sole, monolithic and global term, argues Arnold Hottlinger in *Die Lander des Islam* (2008, cited by Avinoam Shalem, "What do we mean when we say 'Islamic art'? A plea for a critical rewriting of the history of the arts of Islam," *Journal of Art Historiography*, June 2012). Consider Qatar painting of the 1860s, or art produced in many places around the world characterized not on its own terms but as incompetent copies of second-rate European prints and engravings. One of the most harmful, Eurocentric projections is the myth of the unity of Islamic art, a monolithic projection of Islam that has been used by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Similar critiques can be made about other heterogeneous and diverse cultural formations that have been subsumed under monolithic constructs. Yet it is also important to note that all of these arguments are dependent on their specific contexts of use. In 1976, the Islamic Arts Festival held in London, promoted a pan-Islamic identity for the purpose of interrupting existing conceptions of Islam as unchanging – an orientalizing and Romanicist reductive view. Grabar was an active participant in the London festival, discussed as a turning point in public perception of Islamic culture by Monia Abdullaj. "A 1970s Renaissance: The Arts of Islam and Arabian Culture," in the session entitled *Back to Arabia: Arts and Images of the Peninsula after 1850*, chaired by Eva Maria Troelenberg and Avinoam Shalem, College Art Association Annual Conference, Washington, D.C., February 2016. Such strategic essentialisms have been effectively employed by many indigenous activists.

sion to a specific span of time that harmonizes with what Islamicist Avinoam Shalem calls the “grand history of Western artistic evolution.”⁸

3. Hegelian universalist history that casts Europe as the culmination and Asia as the beginning of a linear trajectory. It seems almost impossible to avoid this teleological narrative in universal survey texts, as Robert Nelson demonstrated in the 1997 article already cited, entitled “The Map of Art History,” as Carol Duncan and Allan Wallach had earlier exposed hierarchies of viewing embedded in the layout of art museums.⁹

4. Hierarchies of genre and medium that are invalid in the context of the arts of many other cultural configurations. The label “minor arts” treats what are sometimes dominant art forms such as textiles, metal, glass, and ceramic objects as marginal.¹⁰ The fault is in the application of criteria that are largely irrelevant to the

8 What does not fit the paradigm, such as the later history of Mughal and Ottoman artistic production, is ignored. Conversely, what aids this narrative, such as Umyyad art, is regarded as a branch of Classical art – but one that illustrates the degeneration of ancient aesthetics. Avinoam Shalem, “What do we mean when we say ‘Islamic art’? A plea or a critical rewriting of the history of the arts of Islam,” *Journal of Art Historiography* 6 (June 2012): 1-28.

9 Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, “The Museum of Modern Art as Late Capitalist Ritual: An Iconographic Analysis,” *Marxist Perspectives* (Winter 1978): 28-51, was one of the first critical studies of museums; see further, *Grasping the World: the Idea of the Museum*, ed. Donald Preziosi and Claire Farago (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004). For Islamic studies, see Gulru Necipoglu, “The Concept of Islamic Art: Inherited Disources and New Approaches,” *Journal of Art Historiography* June 2012, 1 – 26, reprinted from *Islamic Art and the Museum*, ed. Georges Khalil et al. (London: Saqi Books, 2012), based on papers presented in 2008 and 2010, as cited in her essay. There is no opportunity in this brief paper to engage with her detailed arguments advocating periodization, but the sequencing of objects and their historical contextualization within a disciplinary formation, porously envisioned, is not the focus of my own argument on how to connect such formations without imposing a universal or master narrative on world culture. Necipoglu is concerned with mapping Islamic studies, not the broader issue of art history as a discipline, and she does not take issue with Renaissance or Western art per se.

10 European biases extend to the type of image or decoration: inscriptions were incised and carved into diverse objects and incorporated into architecture in ways comparable to images: that is, what we call iconography was not limited to the meanings of images, as Irene Bierman, *Writing Signs: Fatimid Public Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), argued the case for calligraphy, but encompassed material aspects of artefacts such as substance, color, and shape (on which see Shalem, *op. cit.*). What holds for Islamic objects and architecture also holds for Inka stonework; see, for example Carolyn Dean, *A Culture of Stone: Inka Perspectives on Rock* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); and Tom Cummins and Bruce Mannheim, “Editorial: The river around us, the stream within us: The traces of the sun and Inka kinetics,” *Res* 59/60 (Spring/Autumn 2011): 5-21.

objects under scrutiny.¹¹ It is often difficult to distinguish the point of origin or authorship of manufactured items such as ivory sculptures, lacquer boxes, ceramics, and textiles, but that does not make them any less worthy of study.¹²

If the global turn of art history is to succeed in including the views and material culture of many different constituencies, it needs to take into account cultural productions that have been historically sorted into the separate disciplinary and subdisciplinary practices of art history, archaeology, and anthropology. A practical problem arises because everything and anything manufactured by humans potentially becomes a legitimate object of study. How is this immense object domain to be organized in the art history of the future?

At this point, to establish order in an ever-expanding domain of material objects and beliefs and practices about them, we are faced with a lot of basic questions about who is allowed to look, to what purposes, and how that looking is legitimated. The center-periphery model is inadequate to this task, stretched beyond its capacity to deal with complex, ricocheting patterns of exchange that are involved in the circulation of objects. A “pluritope” model of interchange, to cite Islamist Eva Hoffman, involves more complex notions of causality because it proceeds in many directions, continuously changing and connecting objects with makers and users in dynamic networks extending over vast areas of space and time.¹³ A promising alternative to existing schemes of world art, part-

11 Which leads to the exaltation of questions of minor significance over those of central importance, writes Anthony Cutler, “The Pathos of Distance,” 34. For example, conventions used by Byzantine writers to describe objects as “classical,” “lifelike,” or “naturalistic” have misled art historians to think that the Renaissance European understanding of terms derived from ancient art criticism is valid in this Greek Orthodox context. Cutler advises that similarities between icons of very different dates should be seen as the “embodiment of a sort of intertextuality,” a reference to an exemplary ideal at odds with European expectations of innovation and originality.

12 Christian, Jewish, and Islamic workers were employed in the same workshops that shared a common repertoire of motifs and techniques. Norman Sicily is a foremost example of the complex, multi-cultural, poly-linguistic places that once operated. In short, the signifying properties of any work of human artifice require acknowledgement of the way meaning is determined at the point of reception, whereas conventional classifications assume a single place, time, and culture of origin are universally valid and mutually exclusive categories. See Avinoam Shalem, *The Oliphant: Islamic Objects in Historical Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

13 Eva R. Hoffman, “Pathways of Portability: Islamic and Christian Interchange from the Tenth to the Twelfth Century,” *Art History* 24/1 (February 2001): 17-50.

ly inspired by the new materialism, is suggested by current research initiatives that study trading networks. Trading networks are by nature porous, open-ended, and heterogeneous rather than bound entities imagined to be homogeneous and governed by some underlying unity.

Trading networks historically enabled the circulation of raw materials, manufactured goods, people, and ideas. Many new and ongoing projects on maritime trading networks and other long-distance exchanges are fundamentally reshaping inherited understandings of cultural transmission and exchange. The understanding of history emerging from the study of regions defined by trade is very different from modern conceptions of culture configured in terms of land masses such as continents and nation-states. Coastal regions, islands, and other geographical features define important points of exchange in trading regions.¹⁴ A topographical approach to world culture organized in terms of trading routes and networks also avoids hierarchical distinctions such as Western versus non-Western art, or art versus artifact, and many similar categories that have historically privileged certain types of cultural production and excluded many others.

What is at stake for the future of art history? To lose sight of the simple fact that the meanings assigned to the material world not only differ across different audiences but also collide, often violently, when different societies come into contact would deprive art and valued things and practices more generally of any historical significance whatsoever. How material things come to have significance, and how the same object or concrete manifestation can have multiple meanings for its users is a timely and appropriate subject for historical investigation. Because the works of art and other cultural artifacts that art historians study are irreducibly multivalent—that is, all images, and all material things for that matter, by their nature refuse absolute meaning—they can enable individuals with different beliefs to coexist in the same heterogeneous society. Images and objects with multiple cultural resonances are not necessarily synthetic products of cultural interaction, however. In fact, they are often

14 Historians Martin S. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen, whose book, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), advocates discarding the commonplace notion that continents denote significant biological or cultural groupings.



1. Oliphant, Fatimid style, 11th and 12th century. Berlin, Museum of Islamic Art, inv. n. K3106. Photo courtesy of the museum.

just the opposite—meaning one thing to one person or group and something quite different to other users.

It is imperative to rethink our subdisciplinary formations from an historically informed point of view if we really want an emphasis on cultural interaction that gives voice to those marginalized in our inherited schemes. There is no doubt that a capacious form of organization is required—I am certainly not advocating that all art historians study trading networks! My argument is about how to rethink our subdisciplinary formations in a manner that favors the study of cultural difference and interaction. Take, for example, a class of object that defies conventional categorization: ivory oliphants (Fig. 1), known at least since the tenth century in northwestern Europe. Oliphants were once considered highly prestigious gifts presented to kings and the Catholic Church on special occasions, such as when conferring land tenure. Oliphants were considered extremely precious, and for this reason they were often reused as reliquaries, as were rock crystal and other extraordinary containers. Oliphants are documented in the inventories of many church treasuries, including the cathedrals of Bamberg, Speyer, Prague, London, Westminster, Salisbury, and Winchester, which had eight oliphants by 1171. Some can be directly connected with gifts offered to the Church by returning crusaders. Alexandria was the main port of entry into the Mediterranean Sea for goods coming from the east and the south, part of a complex trading network connected to the east coast of Africa and inland further south in Zimbabwe, the regions that initially supplied African elephant ivory.¹⁵ Several centuries later, ivory oliphants shipped from the west coast of Africa were recorded in the inventories of Europe's most re-

15 With the founding of the Fatimid Caliphate in northern Africa and Egypt in 909 ce, a new Mediterranean market for east Asian riches opened up. See Shalem, *Oliphant*.



2. Oliphant with coat of arms and devices of Manuel I King of Portugal (reigned 1495–1521) and his successor João III (reigned 1521–1557) of House of Aviz, Portugal. After Bassani and Fagg, *Africa and the Renaissance*.

owned *wunderkammers*. Several oliphants from this era suggest they were commissioned as gifts or tribute in that they bear the mottoes and coats of arms of the House of Avis, which ruled Portugal from 1385 to 1580 (Fig. 2).¹⁶

Modern photography does not do these impressive objects justice because they are viewed in our books as if they were on the same scale as intricately carved, small ivory containers; whereas in actuality, the tusks of African elephants, the preferred material for oliphants because of their greater size, whiter color, and the higher sheen of the polished enamel, can measure as large as 3.75 meters in length and weigh 100 kilograms.¹⁷ The majority of surviving carved oliphants measure from 50 to 70 cm in length, or roughly two feet, and many were prepared for display with hanging devices.¹⁸

16 Including those of the Grand Duke of Tuscany Cosimo I de' Medici, Archduke Ferdinand of Tyrol whose famous collection remains at the Schloss Ambras, the great Jesuit polymath Athanasius Kircher in Rome, and Holy Roman Emperor Rudolph II, who amassed one of the largest *wunderkammers* of all, in Prague, intended for scientific study as well as for royal display. For provenance, see Ezio Bassani and William Fagg, *Africa and the Renaissance: Art in Ivory*, ed. Susan Vogel (New York: Center for African Art, 1988), cat. nn. 87 (Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg), 88 (Musée National des Themes et de l'Hotel de Cluny, Paris), and 128 (National Museum, Prague).

17 See Shalem, *Oliphant*, fig. 2, reproducing a photograph, c. 1895, of a giant elephant tusk carried by four porters (Photo: National Archives of Zanzibar).

18 One of three large smooth oliphants still in the Vatican treasury once hung over the main altar of St. Peter's. The practice is documented in a drawing attributed to the School of Raphael, *The Donation of Constantine to Pope Silvester*, Sala di Costantino, Vatican, 1520, reproduced in Shalem, *Oliphant*, fig. 86.

The size and weight of oliphants made them difficult and expensive, but not impossible, to transport long distances. According to current schemes of classification, oliphants of medieval date reside in the province of Islamic studies; their possible connection to the later group of oliphants, classified as Afro-Portuguese or Luso-African products of cultural interaction, is unrecognized. Luso-African ivories were made in conjunction with Portuguese slaving on the west coast of Africa since the late fifteenth century and bear African imagery as well as motifs of European origin, sometimes combined on the same object.¹⁹ The scholarship on medieval oliphants also emphasizes their mixed cultural origins. Even though they are classed as Saracenic or Byzantine according to their type of embellishment (ornament and artifice), there is a general consensus that many of the seventy-five surviving medieval oliphants were the product of workshops in the western Mediterranean basin, where they were carved with Fatimid animal motifs as well as narrative hunting scenes derived from textiles and other sources. The carved ornament appears to be related to more than one geographical area or religious-cultural domain.²⁰

19 There is no doubt that some of these Afro-Portuguese or Luso-African objects were made for export to European destinations, but the most recent scholarship suggests that people of mixed ancestry on the west coast of Africa who regarded themselves as Portuguese and lived in cities that served as meeting points between merchants and African rulers who supplied the slave trade, also prized such objects for display in their opulent, European-inspired homes; see Peter Mark, "Portugal in West Africa: The Afro-Portuguese Ivories," in *Encompassing the Globe: Portugal and the World in the 16th and 17th Centuries*, exh. cat., ed. Jay A. Levenson (Washington, DC: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, The Smithsonian Institution, 2007), 131-163.

20 According to Avinoam Shalem, the current leading authority on Islamic oliphants (*Oliphant*, 2004), it is particularly interesting to consider that some examples now in western and northern European collections were re-carved with roundels typical of Fatimid imagery (such as one in Edinburgh, Royal Scottish Museum) and Byzantine hunting scenes (such as one now in the Berlin, Skulpturensammlung and Museum für Byzantinische Kunst). The later group of oliphants imported from west Africa also includes hunting scenes and animal imagery, also derived from portable sources such as printed books. These two bodies of art historical scholarship are unaware of one another. Indeed, the oliphants which survive are separated by two centuries, although Sarah Guérin has recently made a compelling case that the availability of ivory increased in mid-thirteenth century France due to the alteration of medieval trade routes along the Atlantic coast of Europe, enabled by the development of hardier vessels equipped with both sails and oars that could get through the treacherous Strait of Gibraltar and then bypass tariffs charged if they were transported overland. ("Avorio d'ogni ragione": the Supply of Elephant Ivory in Northern Europe in the Gothic Era," *Journal of Medieval History* 36 [2010]: 156-174). My thanks to Eva Hoffman for drawing my attention to this article and discussing ivory trade in the Mediterranean with me. See also Eva R. Hoffman, "Translation in Ivory: Interactions Across Cultures and Media in the Mediterranean during the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries" in *Siculo-Arabic Ivories and Islamic Painting, 110-1300: Proceedings of the International conference, Berlin, 6-8 July 2007*, ed. David Knipp, Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 2011, 99-122. Guérin postulates that ivory shipped by sea since the mid-thirteenth century came from Alexandria and Maghreb ports that distributed ivory obtained from western savannah elephants, a region that had not previously been har-

Nonetheless, from the standpoint of how and what ivory oliphants signified in Europe, the formal differences in design may have mattered less than other factors, such as the similarities of subject matter, reference to Islamic origin, symbolic value of the white ivory, prestige of the precious material, wondrousness of the tusk itself, associations with cornucopias signifying abundance, and so on.

None of our traditional taxonomic categories appear to be of much use to understand these magnificent objects historically: the point of origin of carved oliphants is often impossible to determine and does not correspond with any of the usual, mutually exclusive, essentializing categories such as Islamic, Byzantine, Portuguese, Sapi, Benin, and so forth. They do not obey period or style classifications, nor are they associated with known individual makers. Nor were carved oliphants a species of the “minor arts” at the time of their manufacture and greatest prestige.

Oliphants are peripatetic objects whose charge changed over time. The precious ivory, more highly valued than gold, was embellished by skilled artisans who organized the surface with visual motifs drawn from a variety of sources. Thus, oliphants are “transcultural” in a double sense. They participated in social interactions in a relational field not delimited by modern categories of nationhood, culture, geographical territory, period, or style, although for at least 800 years they circulated in an international network of trade and exchange in the Euro-Mediterranean-African region.

One important aspect that has so far remained invisible even in the current transcultural framing of oliphants and related ivories involves longstanding traditions for carving and collecting these magnificent objects. The oliphant phenomenon is conso-

vested, at a time when the main source of supply from African elephants in east Africa had been exhausted. The Atlantic sea route enabled larger amounts of Flemish cloth to be sold in Majorca to merchants who transported the material to eastern Mediterranean ports and returned with large shipments of alum, used as mordant in the flourishing international textile industry based in Flanders. According to this recent study of shifting trade routes and documented shipments of ivory, raw and carved, there is probably no chronological gap in the European history of collecting ivory oliphants as the taxonomic schemes of our subdisciplinary categories might imply, although the differences between Church treasuries and the collections of secular Christian rulers cannot be discounted, nor different points of origin of the ivory itself – when the supply from the east coast of Africa was exhausted, new sources from the Savannahs of northwestern Africa were tapped as early as the mid-thirteenth century.

nant with an art history focused on networks of trade in which coastal regions, islands, and other geographical features defined important points of exchange in the medieval as in the early modern era. Such an approach to organizing art history seems to me in keeping with the widely shared desire to include products of cultural interaction in the general problem of art historical description. How do we account for the appearance of these once very prestigious objects? To what kinds of relatedness or unrelatedness do they attest? The next step would be to understand the interrelationships among peoples within Africa during the long period of their manufacture and use. What about carved ivory tusks that were not made for export or those that were manufactured after the period of the oliphants' greatest prestige in European *wunderkammers*?²¹

There is no doubt that the first period of intensive global contact developed in the sixteenth century. However, the situation is complicated—our period designations, as the example I have just given attests, also deserve to be examined epistemologically and historically. In her important book, *Before European Hegemony: The World System AD 1250–1350* (1989), Janet Abu-Lughod argues (*contra* Wallerstein, Braudel, and other theorists of world systems) that failure to begin the story of a world system of trade early enough has resulted in a “truncated and distorted causal explanation for the rise of the West.” In her view, events affecting a trading network in which manufactured goods were central that stretched from China to northwestern Europe between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries made Europe's rise possible.²²

21 Consider the carved tusk, meant to be displayed on an altar honoring ancestors, Minneapolis Institute of Art, accession n. 56.33, the history of which is known: it was commissioned by Ekeneza in 1775, the year this Benin official became *ezomo*, or military commander under King Akengbuda (reigned 1750–1804), according to information published on the museum's website, accessed February 12, 2016, at: <http://collections.artsmia.org/art/1312/tusk-edo>.

22 Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350*, New York: Oxford UP, 1989, citing Robert Gottfried, *The Black Death: Natural and Human Disaster in Medieval Europe* (New York: Macmillan, 1983); William Hardy McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (Garden City [NJ]: Anchor Books, 1976). By c.1300, the old world was linked into a common commercial network of production and exchange beyond the subsistence economies of all the participating regions. In fact, as widely recognized, this large and complex network in which surplus goods circulated was built on the foundation of an earlier system that existed by the second century ce. One research finding that Abu-Lughod identifies as striking is that similarities between trading partners in the thirteenth century far outweighed their differences: among Asian, Arab, and Western forms of capitalism, to use her categories and terminology, manufactured goods were dominant, land and water pathways were longstanding, recognized currencies were in use, independent merchants were powerful, and a labor force was utilized to produce

In the international trade economy Abu-Lughod examines, the Middle East was the heartland region linking the eastern Mediterranean with the Indian Ocean by both sea and land at a time when Europe was a peripheral economic region.²³ It is important to bear in mind that Abu-Lughod avoids a center-periphery model by charting the circulation of raw materials, trade goods, and people. She argues that the rapid increase in agriculture, mining, and manufacturing in northwestern Europe during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries must be attributed, at least in part, to the expansion of its horizons and heightened opportunities for trade generated by the Crusades.²⁴ An economic collapse in the mid-fourteenth century followed the plague that spread from Caffa in the Crimea by way of Venetian and Genoese ships, but the establishment of a trading system spanning the globe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries would not have been possible without the robust international trading network that preceded it in the thirteenth century and the network of pathways in existence since the second century CE.²⁵

Abu-Lughod's critique of modern understandings of an East/West divide does not imply that the trading network was equally developed in all places, or that all manufactured goods participated equally in it. The immediate implication for anyone seeking to incorporate the American continent in a global history of art is that if we fail to examine the longer history of world trade when Europe was not at the fulcrum of events, we could fall into the very trap of Eurocentrism that de-centering the field by

goods for foreign trade. The most cataclysmic event to disrupt that network was the spread of the plague between 1348 and 1351. The sudden contraction of the population had complex economic effects that fragmented the system so that many parts of it went into simultaneous decline. Abu-Lughod argues that fragmentation and decline created fluidity in world conditions that facilitated radical transformations, among them the rise of European hegemony.

23 This trade system was not global in the sense that all parts were evenly articulated with one another - a situation which does not exist even today, Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*, 32, notes, but by the thirteenth century there were subsystems defined by trading enclaves within larger circuits of exchange. The Crusades from the end of the eleventh century established regular trading exchanges on the preexisting circuits of commerce that joined Europe with the Middle East with India and China since the second century ce.

24 Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*, 45.

25 This network included navigation by Arab and Indian ships around Africa centuries before the Portuguese "discovered" the same alternate route to Asia that de-centered the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Citing G. R. Tibbetts, trans. and intro, *Arab Navigation in the Indian Ocean before the Coming of the Portuguese: The Kitab al'fasa'id fi usul al'bahr wa'l-qawa'id of Ahmad B. Majd al'Najdi* (London: Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, 1981).

expanding its reach to a global context was intended to avoid. The American territories, particularly the viceroyalties of New Spain and Peru, played a crucial role in establishing transoceanic trade in luxury objects from 1565, when the first galleon bound for Manila set sail, until 1815, when the last galleon left Acapulco for the Philippines, yet this new commerce of unprecedented scale also benefited from long-established maritime trade routes in Southeast Asia. Excavations of shipwrecks show that bulk trade in ceramics from China, for example, began in the early ninth century, with fluctuations in intensive trade cycles due to changing political regimes. When the Portuguese and Spanish arrived in Southeast Asia in 1511 and 1521, respectively, they entered the region during a cycle of increased trade.²⁶ Land routes and waterways have linked the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean trading networks since the most ancient times of human settlement. Roman gold coins have been excavated in Pudukottai, India: one coin shows Caligula (31–41 CE) and two coins portray Nero (55–88 CE) (both London, British Museum).²⁷ Indian imitations of a Roman coin of Augustus, first century CE, have also been found in India (London, British Museum).²⁸ Long-distance commercial relations are documented in settlements on the east coast of Africa since the first century CE. An array of exotic imports from the ninth to the fourteenth century have been excavated, including ceramics and glass beads as far inland as the fourteenth-century city of Great Zimbabwe, located 300 miles from Mozambican coast, capital of a twelfth-century state that controlled large gold fields which made it important to Indian Ocean trade.²⁹

26 Roxanna M. Brown, "Shipwreck Evidence for the China-Manila Ceramics Trade," in *Asia & Spanish America: Trans-Pacific Artistic and Cultural Exchange, 1500-1850*, ed. Donna Pierce and Ronald Otsuka (Denver: Denver Art Museum, 2009), 59-68.

27 Accessed on line, February 12, 2016, at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Roman_gold_coins_excavated_in_Pudukottai_India_one_coin_of_Caligula_31_41_and_two_coins_of_Nero_54_68.jpg.

28 A silver Denarius of Tiberius 14 ce – 37 ce, found in India; an Indian copy of the same coin, 1st century ce; and a coin of Kushan king Kujula Kadphises copying a coin of Augustus: accessed on line, February 12, 2016, at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Silver_denarius_of_Tiberius_14CE_37CE_found_in_India_Indian_copy_of_a_the_same_1st_century_CE_Coin_of_Kushan_king_Kujula_Kadphises_copying_a_coin_of_Augustus.jpg.

29 Other commodities were exported: cotton textiles in exchange for silk and other luxury fabrics; iron, steel, stone vessels, gold, ivory, tortoise shell, rhino horn, frankincense, myrrh, ebony and other hardwoods, and slaves; see G. Pwiti, "Trade and Economies in Southern Africa: the Archaeological Evidence," *Zambezia* 18/2 (1991): 119-129.

Considering the global trading network established in the sixteenth century in a longer historical context effectively de-centers the dominant role attributed to Europe in the making of American art history centered on the era of colonialism. Entangling history by reimagining lines of transmission that go in multiple directions; treating geographical and period boundaries as porous, heuristic categories; reading canonical works against the grain; and bringing to the fore important cultural artifacts marginalized by our inherited nineteenth-century categories also leads to new considerations of “family resemblances” or gradations of interrelatedness at large scale both in and beyond the Americas. Trade routes differ in nature and scope in the Americas from connections in Asia, Africa, and Europe. Several Mesoamerican societies had connections that led to exchanges of goods over a long period of time. The great kiva of Chetro Keytl at Chaco Canyon in northwestern New Mexico, active between 900 and 1150 CE, shares many characteristics with the interior of a cave temple at Malinalco, Mexico, while the temple-topped pyramids that once stood around ceremonial plazas at Cahokia and other sites of the Mississippian culture show a generic relationship to Mesoamerican structures, signaling connections that are further suggested by their common reliance on maize, squash, and beans, as well as copper that was carried from the woodlands of North America to South America.³⁰

A groundbreaking exhibition organized by Richard Townsend at the Art Institute of Chicago, entitled *The Ancient Americas: Art from Sacred Landscapes* (1992–93), is one of the few attempts to date to study these longstanding “familial” resemblances stretching the entire length of the American continent.³¹ Could

30 These examples are taken from Richard F. Townsend, ed., *The Ancient Americas: Art from Sacred Landscapes*, exh. cat., Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago and Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1992). The National Historical Museum in Rio de Janeiro, where this paper was delivered, includes a display of early indigenous cultures 500 centuries before first contact with Europeans that also stresses degrees of relatedness across a wide geographical area. The permanent display, accessed on February 12, 2016, can be seen on line at: <http://www.museuhistoriconacional.com.br>.

31 As Townsend et al., *Ancient Americas*, describes, sedentary Ecuadorian villages established by 4000 bce are documented to have Pacific connections, partly through the appearance of the Spondylus shell found only in warmer Pacific waters near Mexico, which were first excavated in ritual contexts around 3000 bce and served as currency after 700 bce. Around 1000 bce, Olmec jade was traded from what are now Costa Rica and Guatemala in the south to the Mexico Valley in the north. Around 1500 bce, the appearance of maize along the Peruvian coast suggests connections with Mesoamerica, where maize was first domesticated. From the first century bce until the eighth century ce, Teotihuacan was part of a wide trading network that linked Mesoamerican cultures: obsidian, for example, has been found widely

we imagine our shared investment in the Americas as a basis for writing new narratives in which contacts among peoples on the American continent are treated with the same concern as contacts among regions within Europe or across the Mediterranean? The *Picturing the Americas* project presented at the CIHA conference in Rio de Janeiro is a major contribution on a specific genre of painting in this vein, and Margit Kern's project to link portraiture in North and South America is another.³² Treating first contact with Europeans as the initiating event of Latin American cultural history continues to reproduce a chronology centered on European events. Studying forms of relatedness over the *longue durée* also raises further research questions for anyone interested in establishing an overview that ties the local to regional, continental, and global history: how the different *scales* at which American-ness operates are interconnected is a research question for the future.

The practices and protocols by which we divide our objects of study from the present are always those of the present. It follows that history itself is not a fact of the world that is more or less accurately represented, but rather that it is but one way for a society to constitute the past and establish a relation with it, a certain way to conceive of and be in the world, a certain practice of subjectivity.³³ If history writing is to be an ethical rath-

distributed, and the Mayans traded in salt, hard stone, and pottery. Exchange routes were established along the west coast of South America by c. 1000 bce, brought under control by the Inkas in the fifteenth century, who administered over 23,000 square miles of territory ranging over a complex assortment of ecological zones. Northern routes from Teotihuacan extended into presentday Arizona and New Mexico, where Mesoamerican feathers, gold, and cacao beans were traded for turquoise along routes that moved as far east as Oklahoma and Arkansas, where Toltec traders from the mid-eighth to the twelfth century went in search of alum, salt, incense, and raw copper. Mississippian cultural sites occupied from the seventh to the fourteenth century, with a great center at Cahokia along the Mississippi River near presentday St Louis, Missouri, controlled trade in raw materials such as seashells, copper, flint, and mica drawn from Lake Superior to the Gulf coast shoals of Florida, from the Appalachian Mountains to the plains of the Dakotas and Nebraska. They also manufactured goods for export including tools, jewelry, and ceremonial goods, linking much of what is now the southeastern United States more than 500 years before European contact.

32 *Picturing the Americas: Landscape Painting from Tierra del Fuego to the Arctic*, ed. Peter John Brownlee, Valéria Piccoli, and Georgiana Uhlyarik, exh. cat. (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario; São Paulo: Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo; Chicago: Terra Foundation for American Art, and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015); Margit Kern, " 'Provincialising' Portrait Painting in the Americas in the late 18th and early 19th Century: The Political Semantics of Plain Style," paper delivered at the CIHA Congress XXXV, "New Worlds: Frontiers, Inclusions, Utopias/ Novos Mundos: Fronteiras, Inclusão, Utopias," Museu Nacional de Belas Artes, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, August 27, 2015.

33 Kalahari bushmen, postcolonial theorist Sanjay Seth observes, do not do anthropologies of the white man: Sanjay Seth, "Reason of Reasoning? Clio or Siva?," *Postcolonial Traces*, ed. Brent Hayes Edwards, special issue of *Social Text* 78 (Spring 2004): 84-101. Seth advocates writing history as a "translational" exercise.

er than an imperial practice (I quote the postcolonial theorist Sanjay Seth), this needs to be recognized and its implications explored. The unthought ground between the categories nature and culture, cast as an opposition between innate capacity (biology) and acquired content (culture), has become a major topic of discussion among anthropologists and sociologists in a way that bears directly on the issues I have been discussing. It is more productive to think of ourselves as becomings, social anthropologist Tim Ingold recommends, treating the domains of the social and the biological as inextricably intertwined, like a rope twisted from multiple strands that are themselves twisted from multiple fibers.³⁴

In any case, my subject position as critic and historian needs to be considered *within* the framework of the interpretation: I am part of the same historical continuum as my subject of study. If my vested position remains outside the framework of discussion, the most significant epistemological and ethical issues will remain unarticulated and unaddressed. Articulating the ways in which one is entangled with the imperatives of one's profession is no easy matter, however. The categories of "art," "nation," "culture," "style," "period," "canon," "genius," "masterpiece" and so on remain entrenched not only in academe but also in the commercial world of the art and culture industry—in museum exhibitions, commercial galleries, international biennales, general education, popular culture, and so on. Another model of identity or cultural memory is needed, one that recognizes that multiple identities or cultural memories are simultaneously possible, that identities and diverse cultural memories can coexist without being commensurable or reducible one into another.

In the current political climate in the United States, Brazil, and elsewhere, the extent of our responsibilities as academics and intellectuals to link museology, history, theory, and criticism to contemporary social conditions is an urgent and painfully obvious question. Collaborative approaches that require institutional support and networks of exchange that share data *before* publication is increasingly used in the sciences when it comes to subjects like biodiversity and climate change that are highly time-sensitive. Since any synthetic account of cultural history

34 Tim Ingold, "Prospect," in *Biosocial Becomings: Integrating Social and Biological Anthropology*, ed. Tim Ingold and Gisli Palsson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 22-41, citing pp. 18-19.

depends on accumulating many individual case studies to build a larger picture, such a collaborative approach could greatly enhance the speed and quality of our research outcomes too by integrating regional studies into an international network of scholarly connectivity, as facilitated by our conference at the Museu Nacional de Belas Artes in Rio, and the publication in which you, readers, are reading this essay.

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New Worlds:
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