

MASTER'S THESIS  
MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART

**World Art Museum:  
Near future or mere utopia?**

A research into the theoretical possibilities of  
constructing a world art presentation

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## **Abstract**

One of the major challenges facing art history today is the issue of globalization with its cultural implications - both regarding retrospective historical narratives and contemporary methods. As scholarship and museum audiences alike are becoming more and more internationalized, a (self-)critical analysis of disciplinary standpoints seems more important than ever and is at the center of ongoing discussions within and beyond academia. World Art Studies, a concept and approach first proposed by Prof. John Onians of the Norwich University of East Anglia in 1996, aims to do what musicology does for music, linguistics for language and religious studies for religion: to approach its subject matter from a global perspective across time and space, and to study it from all relevant disciplinary viewpoints imaginable, ranging from evolutionary biology to analytic philosophy. In this thesis, I search for answers to why the art of the world is still scattered over a range of museums and whether World Art Studies could provide a basis for intercultural comparison in presentations. Therefore I will analyze the Dutch institutional discourse, followed by a look into the theoretical possibilities of constructing a world art presentation, and then close with an exhibition proposal.

# Introduction

Walking along a canal in Leiden to the train station on my way home one day in 2005, I passed several of its museums, and could not help asking myself:

“How can it be that in our age, in our time of globalization and freedom of information, there is still no place where the art of the world can be enjoyed in an interconnected way? <sup>1</sup> Why is it that the arts of the world are often still separately presented in (non-Western) ethnographic museums and (Western) art museums? <sup>2</sup> Is there no way to show art and its history in a global view, without a chosen ‘center’?”

These questions have not left my mind ever since, and would give rise to the thesis you are about to read. I was a graduate art history student at the University of Leiden, when I was truly inspired by the newly founded World Art Studies department there, lead by Prof. Dr. Kitty Zijlmans and Dr. Wilfried van Damme, combining their specialisms of modern and contemporary art and the anthropology of aesthetics. <sup>3</sup> Their aim is to question the singular Western point of view on art history and search for ways to methodically compare visual art and culture from different times and places in an intercultural way, ranging from small to global scale.

Globalization in art is a hot topic. Across the art world, the institutions and the academic world, historians and theoreticians not just from the arts but from a range of disciplines are engaging the challenge of questioning the dominant Western art discourse. Traditional ideas of collecting and presenting art and artifacts from different origins and ages have been put under pressure by shifts to a multicultural, multipolar and multicivilizational world. Where the contemporary globalized art production has caused for institutions to raise the question of where non-Western art belongs and how it should be presented, alongside the notion of a need for a theoretical framework for studying art as a worldwide phenomenon has arisen. The results of World Art Studies have up to now varied from opening up the subject of art history writing, to opening its scope. For this thesis, I would very much like to investigate whether World Art

Studies could provide useful theory for constructing a world art presentation.

Of course, questions and critique regarding the narrowness and range of subject matter of art history as it is generally practiced and taught throughout the West, are of course not a new phenomenon. World Art Studies could be considered to have sprouted from the ‘New Art Histories’ that came to rise in the late twentieth century, with its roots reaching back to the early years of that same century.

In the 1970s, influenced by French structuralism and post structuralism, the New Art Histories shifted the center of gravity from objects to social context and ideology; that is, to the structures of social power, and from there to politics, feminism, psychoanalysis, theory and the post-colonial era. (Ferne 1995, p. 18-21) <sup>4</sup> Today, it seems as if academics and the art world alike are torn apart between aesthetes and iconographers on the one hand (tending the shrines of genius) and revolutionaries on the other (overturning the temples of art), raising the possibility of the end of art history or art theory. (Ferne 1995, p. 21) Post-colonialism however, among the New Art Histories probably of the greatest importance to this thesis, tries not to end art history, but to clear space for multiple voices. It is not simply concerned with salvaging past worlds, but learning how the world can move beyond the colonial period together, towards a place of mutual respect.

But while accounting for and combating the residual effects of colonialism on cultures, the post-colonial theorists however ignored or straight out disregarded a part of art history from the colonial times of the early twentieth century, that could have provided interesting views for studying intercultural influences: the attempts to create a field called *Kunstwissenschaft* in German-speaking Europe. Even though the Western view and lack of knowledge of non-Western cultures plagued scholars of that time, they tried to establish *Kunstwissenschaft* as the humanities study at universities, through combining different fields of science: proposing that the study of art, in combining knowledge from other disciplines, could be the subject in which many if not all socio-cultural fields culminated. Where the field of Post-colonialism mainly focuses on matters of identity, gender, race, racism and ethnicity with the challenges of developing a post-colonial national identity, World Art Studies actually reaches back to *Kunstwissenschaft* for dealing with the urge for a new view of arts and art history.

To start exploring if World Art Studies could answer my questions whether theory for intercultural comparison was available and could provide the basic materials for my quest of creating a world art presentation, I was grateful to learn that in 2008 a substantial (referring to both size and importance) volume was published, edited by my two earlier mentioned professors, titled *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts*

*and Approaches*. (Zijlmans & Van Damme 2008) This book proved to be a major stepping stone and a great source of information and inspiration. Many of the active and most respected authors in the field have contributed to the volume, for example Ben-Ami Scharfstein, James Elkins, Richard L. Anderson, John Onians, Colin Rhodes and John Clark, thereby providing a respectable impression of recent stands on World Art Studies and its theory.

Of course, searching for theoretical possibilities is a main part of my quest. On the other hand, to answer why ‘art of the world’ is still mostly presented in separate institutions, and to find out if any changes in this respect have occurred or are still occurring, studying institutional discourse is a second major part of this thesis. I will focus on the discourse in the Netherlands, although some international background is included. For the questions of discourse amongst the different institutions and types of museums that try to deal with questions of in- and exclusion of non-Western art, I started to follow the still active debate course *Framer Framed* taking place in the Netherlands from 2009 on. Combined with other documentation on the debates and an analysis on a selection of recent exhibitions in the Netherlands that touch the subject, I try to point out what developments have taken place, and with my proposal in the last chapter, show how my view of a ‘world art presentation’ could be an additional step to these developments. The following topics will be covered with this outline for my thesis:

## I INSTITUTIONAL DISCOURSE

- I.1 The ‘white cube’ art museum versus the ‘contextual’ ethnographic museum
- I.2 Recent discussions of in- and exclusion of non-Western art in institutions in the Netherlands (1980s-2010s)

## II THEORETICAL DISCOURSE

- II.1 A historiography of World Art Studies
- II.2 Today’s World Art Concepts and Approaches

## III EXHIBITING: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

- III.1 Analyses of selected past exhibitions (2009-2011)
- III.2 Selection of world art theories as a base for a world art presentation
- III.3 Proposal for a world art presentation

Being well aware of the fact that my thesis will lack comprehensiveness because of the sheer size of its topic, my hopes for the findings and statements are to kindle growing interest, discussion and vigor amongst scholars and institutions alike to further explore possibilities on truly uniting the world's art - including myself. This thesis is a first step in creating a world art presentation that I someday hope to have the privilege to curate.

# Chapter 1

## Institutional discourse

### 1.1 The ‘white cube’ art museum versus the ‘contextual’ ethnographic museum

The separation of non-Western and Western art in collections has not always been as strict as we might think. The precursors to the first museums in Europe, the so-called *Wunderkammern*, *Schatzkammern* or ‘cabinets of curiosities’ - which could be found amongst royalty and bourgeoisie - displayed an array of different objects.<sup>5</sup> The classic style of cabinet of curiosities emerged in the sixteenth century, although more rudimentary collections had existed earlier.<sup>6</sup> By the end of the century, several aristocratic collectors had separated art from their other holdings in *Kunstkammern*, usually in independent structures. In 1587, Gabriel Kaltemarckt advised Christian I of Saxony that three types of item were indispensable in forming a *Kunstkammer* or art collection: firstly sculptures and paintings; secondly “curious items from home or abroad”; and thirdly “antlers, horns, claws, feathers and other things belonging to strange and curious animals”. (Gutfleish & Menzhausen 1989, p. 11) The highly characteristic range of interests represented in Frans II Francken’s painting of 1636 shows paintings on the wall that range from landscapes, including a moonlit scene - a genre in itself - to a portrait and a religious picture (the Adoration of the Magi) intermixed with preserved tropical marine fishes and a string of carved beads. Sculpture both classical and secular (the sacrificing Libera) and modern and religious (Christ at the Column) are represented, while on the table are ranged, among the exotic shells (including some tropical ones and a shark’s tooth): portrait miniatures, gem-stones

mounted with pearls in a curious quatrefoil box, a set of sepia chiaroscuro woodcuts or drawings, and a small still-life painting leaning against a flower-piece, coins and medals presumably Greek and Roman and Roman terracotta oil-lamps, curious flasks, and a blue-and-white Ming porcelain bowl (see figure 1.1).<sup>7</sup>



Figure 1.1: Franz II. Francken, *Kunst und Raritaetenkammer*, ca 1620/1625, oak wood, 74 x 78 cm. Source: Bilddatenbank Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna: <http://bilddatenbank.khm.at>, 18-2-2011

With the transition from *Wunderkammern* to *Kunstammern*, to private galleries and, eventually, to the first public museums in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in which the forming of local or national identity proved to be of great influence, a great urge to specialize and separate found its way into the institutions. After the first publicly accessible museums at the end of the eighteenth century started to take form (for example the Fredericianum at Kassel, the Louvre in Paris, the Glyptothek and Alte Pinakothek in Munich and the Altes Museum in Berlin), slowly the old masters and objects from around the world got separated from modern and contemporary art collections (the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam was founded in 1808, then presenting old and contemporary Dutch masters, followed by the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam in 1874 that took over for modern and contemporary art).

At the same time, Europe's colonization of the world boomed, creating yet another type of museum. In the Netherlands, King Willem I of the Low Countries founded the

first ethnographic museum in Leiden in 1837, the s-Rijks Ethnographisch Museum, to show his people the treasures from overseas.<sup>8</sup> In 1843 Philipp Franz von Siebold, who delivered the base for the museum with his collection from Japan, encouraged other Europeans to create ethnographic institutions in a similar fashion: “The importance of their creation in European states possessing colonies because these institutions could become a means for understanding the subject peoples and of awakening the interest of the public and of merchants - all of which are necessary conditions for a lucrative trade which benefits all.” (Carbonell 2004, p. 134)

With the relocation of works from their original religious or civic settings to specially built European art museums in the nineteenth century, a specific change in (re)presenting objects occurred. (Newhouse 1998, p. 9) Moving the objects to a structure conceived solely for exhibition purposes, divorced art objects from a lived experience and elevated it to the status of a secular religion in what Newhouse refers to as the ‘Museum as Sacred Space’. (Newhouse 1998, pp. 46-73) Their connotations as temples of culture notwithstanding, nineteenth-century museums imitated the palaces for which some of the art had been made: sky lit galleries whose proportions, colors, wainscoting and moldings provided a complementary framework for the art on exhibition. By the early twentieth century, new museums were replacing these architecturally articulated rooms with open space in which paintings were hung on flat white partitions, often illuminated only by artificial light. Brian O’Doherty describes in his essays ‘Inside the White Cube’ that first appeared in *Artforum* in 1976, this type of space as the birth of the ‘white cube’, “constructed along laws as rigorous as those for building a medieval church”. (O’Doherty 1999, pp. 7-9) The basic principle behind the laws, he notes, is that “The outside world must not come in, so windows are usually sealed off. Walls are painted white. The ceiling becomes the source of light. The art is free, as the saying used to go, ‘to take on its own life.’” O’Doherty compares the purpose of such a setting to that of a religious building - the artworks, like religious verities, are to appear untouched by time and its vicissitudes. The condition of appearing out of time, or beyond time, according to him, implies a claim that the work already belongs to posterity - that is, it is an assurance of good investment. He calls the specially segregated space a kind of non-space, ultraspace, or ideal space where the surrounding matrix of space-time is symbolically annulled: It is an attempt to cast an appearance of eternity over the status quo in terms of social values and also, in our modern instance, artistic values.” O’Doherty reveals the white cube to add power and context to art works within, as a social construction. It acts as a reshaped version of a holy place by:

- being exclusive to only a certain group of members;
- being closed (literally, no see through windows) to the outside world and its inhabitants;
- imposing rules of behavior;
- turning everything inside sacred and not-to-touch;
- creating contact to a higher world;
- stopping time, upholding universal never-changing rules of aesthetics.

Whereas in the white cube, art works seemed to transform and become timeless, the ethnographic collections, that partly started out contemporary in their age of birth, appear to have frozen in time, as well as (the perceptions of) the cultures they represent.<sup>9</sup> As the objects in ethnographic collections up to the last two decades have scarcely been regarded art objects in the Western sense (in its presentation there was no difference between for example ritual objects and objects of everyday use, they were placed right next to each other). How come our view of a typical African art object has never really diverted from masks, weapons or other ritual and decorative objects? Groeninger, who also provides a historiography of African Art in Dutch museums in his thesis of 2007 explains on page 7: “(Re)presentation of objects in art museums and ethnographic museums differ; whereas objects in art museums are mainly presented for their aesthetic value, in the presentation of objects in ethnographic museums the anthropological background will always remain leading. The anthropological approach, originating from the rise of anthropology as a science at the end of the eighteenth and start of the nineteenth century, framed the art production of non-Western cultures as representations of communities (as a whole). This results in ethnographic museums usually accompanying an object with a lot of information about its cultural context and falling short of mentioning the artist’s biographical notes.”<sup>10</sup> Mieke Bal describes this difference in (re)presentation between ‘artifact’ and ‘art’ as follows: “[...] artworks are viewed as standing for an aesthetic, and as such, they are considered metaphors, transferring their specific aesthetic to the one current sufficient to make the work ‘readable’, but readable as art, regardless of what it could tell us, also, about the culture it comes from. The ethnic artifact, in contrast, is first and foremost considered to be a representative of the larger context of the culture it comes from. Hence, it is not a metaphor but synecdoche. For synecdoche is the figure of rhetoric where an

element, a small part, stands for the whole simply by virtue of its being part of that whole.” (Bal 1996, p. 206)

From the 1970s, however, strong criticism of the public art museum that eventually became the ‘white cube’ (described by O’Doherty as a limbo, the museum as a mausoleum instead of a cathedral), has not left art museum directors and curators indifferent to possible change in their way of presenting objects.<sup>11</sup> A less authoritarian breed of directors and curators accompanied a physical opening up of museum buildings, and sometimes even a return to more ‘contextual’ architecture and interiors.<sup>12</sup> Groeniger comments that if the ethnographic institutions can show us one thing, it is that museums became ‘mirrors’ to our own values, traditions and prejudice: who is exhibiting who? Our way of presenting objects of other cultures merely reflects a correct image of ourselves. Even today a museum - no matter what it has on show - exceeds being a place to view objects. Its pre-eminent functions as an institution for creating a national identity in relation to other identities and, even as a space, remains subjective and influential to the way we experience the objects shown. (Groeniger 2007, p. 5) Whereas discussions of whether or not to include non-Western art in museum collections in the Netherlands has only relatively recently started for art museums, the discussion of how to (re)present objects - mostly contemporary - in ethnographic (Dutch) museums is not just of late. It was the ethnographic museums that, on their quest for a new mission after the death of the colonies, first started to substantially question the lack of acquiring and exhibiting contemporary non-Western art. In 1980 it was the Amsterdam Tropenmuseum that made the first attempt to historically frame and subdivide the African art movements with their exhibition *Modern art from Africa*. Paul Faver and Harrie Leyten presented a premiere and continued with a convention in 1985 called *Moderne Kunst in ontwikkelingslanden*, at which they invited the (modern) art museums and other, mainly ethnographic, museums to discuss which position they as institutions should take in presenting contemporary non-Western art. (Welling 2006, pp. 18, 19)

## 1.2 Recent discussions of in- and exclusion of non-Western art in institutions in the Netherlands (1980s-2010s)

During the convention in 1985, organized by Faber at the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, the agenda was to discuss the place of contemporary non-Western art in Dutch museums and possibly stimulate cooperation between art and ethnographic museums.

However, it soon became clear that then and there the art museums were of no intention to do any of the sort. Felix Valk, then director of the Museum voor Land en Volkenkunde in Rotterdam: “I remember last year’s discussion in the Tropenmuseum between the art and ethnographic museums as if it were yesterday. The art museums: ‘There is no such thing as art in the non-Western hemisphere, if any not of the quality that would belong to an art museum.’ Thank god, I thought, then enough highly interesting exhibitions remain for us to be made.” (Welling 2006, p. 35) It is actually not sure whether the art museums were that strict, but it was obvious the initiative of the discussion stayed with the ethnographic museums. After seven years, in 1992, one year after the *Africa Now* exhibition in the Groninger Museum and three years after *Magiciens de la Terre* in Paris, Faber and Leyten decided to rekindle the discussion with a symposium called *How to put it on the wall?*. The Royal Institute for the Tropics (KIT) published the outcome and contemplations of the get together in 1993 in a booklet called *Art, anthropology and the modes of re-presentation*. According to Leyten himself the main questions for the symposium were: (Leyten & Damen 1993, p. 5)

- 1 Is cooperation between modern art museums and ethnographic museums desirable or necessary?
- 2 To what extent should exhibitions of contemporary non-Western art in the US and Europe be organized by or with guest curators?
- 3 What is the museological interpretation of the art object? Does it represent something or stand alone? (resulting in a type of presentation: a lot or little of text and explanation, cultural context)

An abstract of the results of the 1993 symposium shows the following results:

- The modern art museums regard the criticism about their lack of attention for non-Western art unfounded: they claim to historically be European-oriented. Change should start with research institutes to establish universal criteria for quality.
- Ethnographic museums should continue to (re)present contemporary non-Western art as part of a culture (with plenty of background information as this type of museum has a mission to educate), whereas art museums maintain their selecting by ‘universal’ values (accompanied by a small amount of information, stimulate own interpretation of the viewer with his own knowledge and background).

- Ideas for a solution/ cooperation:
  - creating a new type of museum: the World Art Museum
  - create different departments within an existing museum, for example for 'migrant art' 2. The cooperation between a museum curator and a guest curator from the artist's country of origin is highly important (to translate the participants' views). 3.
- The styles of presentation should be flexible according to the type of art on display: for Aborigine art it would be inevitable to explain the symbols and shapes, politically charged art also asks for background information in order to convey the message. Kirsten Langeveld, a colleague at the Ethnographic Museum of Leiden at the time, adds that museums should not forget the context of the exhibition space and of the cultural background of its viewers.
- The representatives of the art museums agreed that the claimed autonomy of Western art in the art museums was unfounded. The then director of the Oxford Museum of Modern Art stressed the suppressed heritage and background of contemporary art: "The advent of a vigorous market in avant-garde art has fettered its products as unique examples of raw individualism while ignoring the specific ideas of historical lineage out of which they had been created." (Lavrijsen 1992, p. 500) Dorien Mignot of the Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam however represented a more general position of the art museums by claiming that artists all over the world have similar work methods and therefore could be presented together in a way which would mainly stress their individual qualities. Concluding the symposium with exclamations of good will and all museums having seemingly opened up to discussion and change (on the long term), one big obstacle was reported to remain: the lack of information and knowledge on contemporary non-Western art. A call was done upon educational and research institutions to address more attention to attaining knowledge on this subject. This would have to lead to a set of guidelines to assist the acquisition management of the art institutions that were absent up till then. Hopefully during the next years it would become clearer what the norms for quality should be and where the works of contemporary non-Western art should reside.

In 2001 the Anthropological Professional Society CASNWS organised a conference in Museum Bronbeek (Arnhem). With all of the transformations going on in the

ethnographic museums, the following question was posed: “Are there still ethnographic museums in the Netherlands?” Leyten answered this question with a firm “no”. To him the term ‘ethnography’ had become redundant, as the peoples it concerned did not exist in the present anymore.<sup>13</sup> In addition, most attendants were of the opinion that aesthetics played a growing role in non-Western cultures and that contemporary non-Western art should not be regarded as merely artifact, but as works of art. After the transformations that many ethnographic museums in the Netherlands have gone through, it seemed that the presentation of their ‘classic’ collections started to approach the aesthetic one of art museums (for example the Wereldmuseum in Rotterdam and the Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden): the objects on show have been cut back in number to leave only a few ‘treasures’, often presented with a spotlight, surrounded by a lot of space and an excellent climate conditioning. The information flow is becoming more and more passive, with digitalization playing a large role: the contextual way of presenting objects, as part of a culture, as artifacts, has shifted to the more visually oriented presentations we are used to finding in art museums, thereby changing the way the viewer perceives the objects. (Siebenga 2009, p. 13)

From 2009 a new debate series was started called *Framer Framed*, by amongst others Meta Knol (then director of the Centraal Museum in Utrecht), strongly supported by art critic and curator Wouter Welling (curator in both the Afrika Museum and Tropenmuseum in the Netherlands): a ‘Debate series on the western view of non-Western art. What is the role of museums in a multicultural and globalizing community? Artists, curators and scientists on the boundaries of art.’<sup>14</sup> Had anything changed since the last discussed symposium and conferences? It seems that many of the questions that were posed earlier, still linger on. The trend of increasing attention for non-Western art in different types of Dutch museums has continued.<sup>15</sup> The organizers ascribe this to a number of factors such as the growing globalization in the art world, the museological search for a new social relevance in a multicultural society, but also by increasing pressure from Dutch funds and the government to reach new, diverse composed audiences and to undertake inter-museum cooperation. Because different types of museums have gradually become more engaged in non-Western art, the functions and positions of art museums, ethnographic and historical museums have become increasingly overlapping. Currently, these types of museums still operate independently from each other. During the expert meeting and following workshops titled *Collecting Without Borders* held on October 22 2009, artists, curators and scientists picked up the discussion again of how the Dutch museum world should and could deal with these new developments: what place is there for the (post-colonial) art forms in future (Dutch) museum policy?

Organized by a mixed type of museums, consisting of the Centraal Museum (art and cultural history, Utrecht) in cooperation with the Afrika Museum (ethnography, Bergen Dal), Museum De Paviljoens (contemporary art, Almere), the ICN (Dutch state collection, mixed collection, The Hague), Stedelijk Museum (Modern and contemporary art, Amsterdam), Municipal Museum De Lakenhal (art and cultural history), Royal Tropical Institute (Tropenmuseum, ethnographic, Amsterdam), and the Van Abbemuseum (contemporary art), the objectives for the expert meeting and workshops were to exchange knowledge, experiences and insights in the area of presenting and collecting non-Western art in art museums, culture-historical museums and ethnographic museums. They also wanted to continue to explore opportunities for cooperation.

During the workshops on collection and presentation policy, a few interesting remarks and conclusions shed light on the current thoughts on the subject of the different types of museum in the Netherlands. For the workshop *Collection policy* the aim was to research how a collection of modern and contemporary non-Western art could take shape; which criteria should be used and to what aim; and how the interaction between the content of Western and non-Western art collections of art museums, culture-historical museums and ethnographic museums could be realized. It directly became clear that there was a big gap between the ethnographic and art museums. Whereas - traditionally - geography and cultural heritage has played a large role for presenting objects in ethnographic museums, for the art museums the artist as individual producer still remains the star. This for example led to (albeit justified or not) strong criticism of the monographic exhibition *The Dono Code* in the Tropenmuseum (10.09.2009 - 28.02.2010) with contemporary work from the Indonesian artist Heri Dono. "Did he not deserve an art podium?" was the question of the art museums, thereby exuding their dominant position in the museum hierarchy. "Can one view his work in the Tropenmuseum without the (Indonesian historical) context, free from value judgment?"<sup>16</sup> It is Dono himself who comments through his artwork on the traditional ethnographic museum as 'a box to store the tangible culture of the exotic other' (Musken 2010, p. 15). But when asking Dono to comment on whether he prefers to exhibit in certain types of museums during a tour with curator Wouter Welling on 13 September 2009, he answered me not to really have a preference, as long as the museum respected his work. Welling stressed that to him art is part of a culture and therefore does belong in the Tropenmuseum and even better that in a 'white cube': "We are no longer colonists, but we know we curate that history and that the history still plays a large role in the contemporary practice. The architecture reverberates a context that shapes the interpretation of the work."<sup>17</sup> Koos van Brakel, head of

collections there, comments: “Why should we reject modern art like that produced by Roy Villevoye if it fits in with our collection, our objectives and our building? This is not any old contemporary art, it is what is known as global art, art with roots in a particular culture but with a visual vocabulary that is recognized all over the world.” Then answering the question of whether presenting Dono makes the Tropenmuseum any different from a modern art museum such as the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, Van Brakel comments: “I do not think someone like Heri Dono would ever get into the Stedelijk Museum because he is not as much involved in the international art world of biennials and so on”, thereby turning the tables on the art museums again. (Muskens 2010, pp. 14,15)

Mirjam Shatanawi, curator of the Middle-East and North-Africa department of the Tropenmuseum, and speaker during the *Collecting without Borders* conference, in the KIT memorial book *Colonial Past, Global Future* of 2010, has her own clear view of how the Tropenmuseum developed and should the develop the coming years: The term ‘ethnology’ is now outdated. The current discipline of anthropology covers far more than just ethnology. Indeed, most of Europe’s former ethnological museums have made the switch and have become anthropological museums or museums of cultural history. [...] Over the past fifty years, the former ethnological museums have had to choose the direction they wanted to take. Broadly speaking, there were three possible directions. (Muskens 2010, pp. 117-123) She tells about the first, where one could incorporate the collection in another museum. That is what the Museum of Mankind in London did; it incorporated in the British Museum. The second is to become an art museum. One presents the old objects as works of art, which of course they are sometimes. The anthropological aspects are less important then; the works are judged according to their beauty. This is basically what the Wereldmuseum in Rotterdam does. The third option is to make the museum more topical. That is what they have done in Gothenburg. There they put on exhibitions about human trafficking, for example, or AIDS, using both the old collection and new material. That is really the most radical choice of the three. The Tropenmuseum has not really made a choice they do a bit of everything. But although they also show modern art, there is still a difference with a museum like the Stedelijk, Amsterdam’s modern art museum, in that they will always be concerned with the society behind the art. The Tropenmuseum is not interested in ‘art for art’s sake’ or art that is mainly a comment on itself. In the future they want to go further and become a proper ‘world museum’ where social phenomena and their interrelationships are shown: a constant process of mutual influences (including our own culture in that story). Shatanawi: The world is still compartmentalized. I

am not so interested in life within the compartments, my concern is what goes on between the compartments. The Tropenmuseum needs to become a museum without compartments. (Muskens 2010, p. 123)

The Rotterdam Historisch Museum thought of its own way of trying to unify Western and non-Western contemporary culture in their collection policy, by commissioning a Japanese artist to in his work reflect on the city of Rotterdam. The other museums agreed this is a successful formula. At the end of the workshop it was concluded that, even though the borders between Dutch museum collections are blurring, the most important is to define ones specific identity: to accomplish this, the emphasis has to shift from the objects to a story one wants to tell its audience. Supplementary, self-knowledge of the institution and its collecting history is essential. Prior to deciding whether or not to compliment their current collection with non-Western (contemporary) art work (if such a thing still remains), it has to be decided if it truly fits in with the collection. A strong example of this is the decision of the Tropenmuseum on buying two art works from Heri Dono, but to reluctantly relinquish another, because it had no real link to the current collection.<sup>18</sup> On the proposition made by the ethnographic museums to enhance clarity by appointing a (type of) museum that should collect contemporary non-Western art, the art museums had no intention of making that type of a decision on a national level. Instead, it was agreed that one should start to refocus from the division between Western and non-Western art to treating it as ‘international’ or ‘global’ art. The cooperation, as the art museums were concerned, would not extend further to exchanging knowledge and possibly joining financial forces on acquiring artworks, because of the ever increasing prices on the international art market. On the questions concerning presentation, conclusions were that there is not one single rule. Obviously, with as many different types of museums increasingly presenting non-Western contemporary art, the context in which it is presented has a big influence on perception. *Framer Framed* continues to follow current discussions online (<http://framerframed.nl>) and of course the Dutch and international museum societies are very active on reporting on the latest institutional discourse.<sup>19</sup> Besides maintaining institutional autonomy and developing a type of knowledge-exchange between (the different types of) Dutch museums, an important role was assigned to the Dutch academic art history education (by expanding their curriculum, raising more interest, theories and knowledge), and that maybe it was time to ‘catch some inspiration abroad’. New York and Paris were mentioned as home cities for institutions that are in the forefront of presenting and collecting non-Western contemporary art. But how about close neighbor Germany and the other German-speaking countries like Switzer-

land, where the origin of World Art Studies lie (see chapter 2)? As my residency has since January 2011 changed from Delft to Stuttgart, I could not resist quickly exploring the German (-speaking) institutional discourse. My first findings can be read in appendix A.

### Conclusions on institutional discourse

Regarding my questions for this thesis, two separate developments have been set in motion within the institutions in the Netherlands concerning respectively collecting and presentational policies.

First, the discussion, that was started in the 1980s by the Tropenmuseum, about the place of contemporary non-Western art (if there still is that clear of a division to be made anyway with globalization and migration in mind) in museums (both for collection and presenting) has been rekindled during the last decade. Even though it is mostly an increasing number of Dutch ethnographic (and cultural-historic museums) that have embraced the idea of collecting and presenting contemporary non-Western art as a continuation of their collection and reflection of current cultural developments, they face the same problems with lacking budget (the art market drives the prices for non-Western art up and up) and expertise (should a ‘Western’ ethnographer or art historian curate or a local representative, what are the standards for quality, and who decides?) play a large role in slowing down the process in practice. Both agreed, self-reflection concerning (the history) of their collection policies is needed to be able to make decisions on whether or not and how to fit the non-Western art works into their current collections.

The second development, that has been taking place in presentation within the ethnographic museums, is, that within temporary exhibitions a trend has been set to step away from organizing objects on a geographical or time basis, and present them in a thematic, more inter culturally connected way. The Dutch museums are only slowly picking up on this trend, whereas for example in the German-speaking countries, even the permanent exhibitions of ethnographic museums are changing into theme-based presentations.<sup>20</sup> The renaming of ‘Ethnographic’ or ‘Ethnological’ museums to ‘World’, ‘World Art’ or ‘World Culture’ museums of recent all over Europe can be considered a telltale sign of the current changes within these institutions. Where the ethnographic collections seem interested in crossing borders of time and space, the art institutions seem to move into the opposite direction, concentrating their presentations on the ‘new centers’ of a globalized art world, for example China, Brazil and the

Middle-East separately, and maintaining to present the artist as individuals, preferring aesthetics over context. Before trying to evaluate if the Dutch exhibitions of recent have already made real steps towards intercultural comparison from a global view, I first need to gather information on theory that would break down the complex matter and provides guidelines. Therefore I will use the book of Wilfried van Damme and Kitty Zijlmans, *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches* as a basis.



## Chapter 2

# Theoretical discourse

### 2.1 A historiography of World Art Studies

#### The origins and Principles of World Art History (1900-2000)

Before we can even start thinking about if or how it would be possible to meaningfully connect art of different ages and cultures, theory is needed, as has been pointed out in the introduction. Even though for for example literature and music as part of the humanities intercultural comparison has long since been deeply rooted (in linguistics and musicology), for the arts no 'artology' has ever seemed to develop. (Zijlmans & Van Damme 2008, p. 27) How did this come to be, was there ever such an attempt for the arts? Recent historiographical analyses make it increasingly clear that at the turn of the previous century, and especially in the German-speaking world, within the framework of *Kunstwissenschaft*, the study of the graphic and plastic arts was much more globally oriented and was more multidisciplinary in character than has previously been generally thought. (Zijlmans & Van Damme 2008, pp. 69-89) A small summary of the rise and fall of *Kunstwissenschaft* will follow in this chapter. But whereas for example *Musikwissenschaft* has since its origin remained multifaceted in intellectual unity (despite changing opinions), the study of the arts after a few decades started to crumble into epochal, regional, and disciplinary specialties whose practitioners now hardly seem to communicate with each other any more. (Zijlmans & Van Damme 2008, p. 27)

World Art Studies, a concept and approach first proposed and promoted by the art scholar John Onians in 1996, may be considered an attempt to remedy this situation.

(Onians 1996) In line with Onians, world art studies suggests doing for the visual arts what musicology does for music, or what linguistics does for language or religious studies for religion: to approach its subject matter from a global perspective across time and space and to study it from all relevant disciplinary viewpoints imaginable, ranging from evolutionary biology to analytic philosophy - studying art as a worldwide phenomenon (Zijlmans & Van Damme 2008, p. 27). All this will be discussed in the next chapter, but to find out how and why the split in art theory and presentation started, we have to go back in time to the turning of the nineteenth to the twentieth century.

Two of the most recognized textbooks on World Art History, David Summers's 2003 *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism* and John Onians' 2004 *Atlas of World Art* present themselves to be 'absolutely' innovative. (Zijlmans & Van Damme 2008, p. 69) This tendency to overlook older art historical research on the theme of world art is a characteristic displayed not only by Summers and Onians (not denying that there are excellent discussions of the history of the study of non-European art). Most of the products of art history and other disciplines, at least as practiced up to the 1970s, today appear to bear the stamp of colonial appropriation and Euro centrism, to such an extent that most research today can only proceed under the banner of 'post-colonial studies' - wanting to radically distance themselves from its forerunners. (Volkenandt 2004). That is probably why the ideas of German language writers about world art history, that originates in the 1880s when Germany started acquiring its colonies, are commonly overlooked. So how did this more interdisciplinary version of art research come about and why did it fail to become a part of the academic world and gave way to what we now know as the discipline of art history at most of the universities in the Western world?

### **Pre-1900 Central Europe: the upbeat to *Kunstwissenschaft***

In the decades around 1900 there was a fundamental crisis in German art history. It can be characterized summarily as a battle between *Kunstgeschichte* (art history) and *Kunstwissenschaft* (the science of art). Whereas in *Kunstgeschichte* the focus lied on studying and accumulating individual historical data, in *Kunstwissenschaft* they sought among these new data binding principles of art ('*Grundbegriffe*') and overarching rules governing its development - all on a strictly 'scientific' methodological basis, without falling back to the idealistic constructions of the 1800s or other traditions of deductive aesthetic and philosophical speculation. (Zijlmans & Van Damme 2008, p. 71) The

defenders of *Kunstwissenschaft* had to find a way to prove their scientific dimension and therefore welcomed the ideas of Charles Darwin in the mid-nineteenth century. His ideas had to be extended and complemented by a new anthropology of culture, a 'scientific program', to which history, religious studies, linguistics and the new human sciences (for example art history, prehistoric archeology, psychology) were eager to contribute.

This first lead to Gottfried Semper's art theories beginning with *Urformen* to try to explain the complex development of art forms and ornaments by their function in relation to materials, techniques and other social and cultural factors. (Mallgrave 1985) When this theory quickly came under fire, a second attempt in *Kunstwissenschaft* theory was made, based on 'empirical psychology' (based on Johann Friedrich Herbarth's ideas), which stimulated a growing interest in the natural sciences, historical anthropology and cultures worldwide. Matters of investigation were the origins of the imaginative, creative, moral and cultural potentials of the human soul and intellect on the one hand, and their evolutionary developments and different stages on the other (human psycho-history that manifests itself in the totality of cultural output of humankind). There were two aspects that made this theory so attractive to the *Kunstwissenschaftler*: firstly, psychology presented itself as the 'missing link' between human physiology and culture; there was no more separation between mind and culture (the 'subjective') and scientific law (the 'objective'). This started the development of 'physiological aesthetics'. Secondly, the quest for the human psyche to deliver a common anthropological basis that would provide objective scientific grounds for comparison (allowing for geographic or socioeconomic conditions or 'racial differences' to explain cultural and individual developments and deviations) was an exciting promise to the *Kunstwissenschaftler*. (Zijlmans & Van Damme 2008, p. 72) The assumption of a uniform mental capacity in all human populations led to the genesis of a further idea: if all peoples shared the same intellectual conditions in the first place, why should these varying cultures all follow the European model? And were they not so profoundly different from each other that they should be studied without applying preconceived Euro centric categories and evaluations? This step was taken up by the *Voelkerpsychologie* or 'psychic ethnology' during the 1850s and was based on systematic research into language, religion/mythology, art, and other similar systems of all peoples. (Zijlmans & Van Damme 2008, p. 74) Only these manifestations of collective genius seen in synthesis could provide the clue to the driving forces and governing principles of various historical trajectories. Adolf Bastian, the founder of German ethnology, took these ideas and created the idea of *Elementargedanken* or elementary

thought patterns which implied equal intellectual capacities and mental principles for all cultures (psychic unity of humankind).

Concluding: if it were natural for the human psyche to produce art, as the new anthropological research tried to demonstrate, only a consideration of all the products of art worldwide - the 'art of all times and peoples' - could deliver definite conclusions about the origins and fundamental principles of art in its entirety. This paved the way to a central motivation for world art history around 1900.

### **1900: The rise**

All these ideas had some radical implications for art history: quite a number of scientists and intellectuals (especially in Germany) started to acknowledge that 'the artistic impulse' was a kind of innate human universal and thereby granted the people known as primitives 'real art'. (Hirn 1900) This led to the problem that, if all cultures around the world produced 'real art' which adequately expressed the respective attitudes and claims in its own right, this made the existence of any obligatory canon of aesthetic norms redundant. The ancient European ideals of beauty, which had sought their legitimacy by referring to God, nature or classical antiquity, were robbed of their validity. Nonetheless, two aspects of the ideas of *Kunstwissenschaft* should have been very attractive to art historians: the enormous expansion of the range and objectives of the discipline and the presumed 'historiousness' among prehistoric and indigenous peoples (without written history only art and crafts products could provide information on the stages of their cultures). The *Kunstwissenschaftler* thought they could finally distance themselves from historical and philological research and reach methodological independence and security of 'form': to encompass what was genuinely 'visual' and 'artistic' and to become the leading 'human science' of the future.

In 1894 Ernst Grosse published *Die Anfaenge der Kunst* (The Beginnings of Art) in which he tried to found *Kunstwissenschaft* on a strictly objective and scientific basis as a kind of 'comparative ethnological method applied to art history'. He aspired not to make the analysis of 'individual manifestations' his primary goal, but to define the overarching cultural-historical, and socio-anthropological hypotheses in relation to the art forms of body decoration, ornament, sculpture, dance, poetry and music - all objects which he regarded as having been heavily determined by their socioeconomic functions. Using Darwin's evolutionist theory, he claimed that there are, for the human race at least, generally effective conditions governing aesthetic pleasure, and consequently generally valid laws of artistic creation. "The emotions represented in primitive art

are narrow and rude, its materials are scanty, its forms are poor and coarse, but in its essential motives, means and aims, the art of earliest times is one with art of all times". (Grosse 1894, p. 307) Between Grosse's publication in 1894 and 1925 many scholars engaged in either studying the 'art of the primitives' or refining the new ideas of *Kunstwissenschaft*.

In 1907 August Schmarsow took Grosse's book as a point of departure and linked it to the theories of Yrjoe Hirn (*The Origins of Art*, 1900) and Wilhelm Wundt (Voelkerpsychologie, 1900), thereby trying to devise a first systematic summation of the meaning of Voelkerpsychologie and anthropology for a new *Kunstwissenschaft*. (Zijlmans & Van Damme 2008, p. 80) August Schmarsow pleaded for an unprejudiced and general inclusion of all handicrafts from a culture, to avoid the problem of how to differentiate between art and other artifacts. Wilhelm Worringer's in 1907 published *Abstraktion und Einfuehlung*, based on the tradition of psychological formal aesthetics, changed the general acceptance of abstract forms of art radically, but still dismissed all prehistoric and indigenous arts as 'not yet really art'. The year 1923 brought a new climax: Herbert Kuehn published *Die Kunst der Primitiven*, which embraced the entire spectrum of prehistoric and indigenous art forms. As opposed to many other books from that time on 'art of all times and peoples', Kuehn refused the idea of a superior development of the arts from the *Kultur-Nationen*: "The art of the primitives is not in truth primitive - men of the time lived primitively - but their art is the purest expression of their world. [...] We must thus look at them from an entirely different point of view. Winckelmann and Goethe's concepts are no longer adequate for interpreting the art of aboriginal and indigenous peoples. A time when Greek antiquity and the Renaissance alone appeared to be the epitome of art and when every stylization seemed a corruption would have no understanding for an art of primitive peoples" (Kuehn 1923, p. 7).

In the same year Josef Strzygowski's *Krisis der Geisteswissenschaften* attempted to assert that a 'comparing/comparative art research' would be a leading discipline of the future human sciences: "If there were a science which would embrace the entire circle of the globe, mankind in the entire course of its existence, and in addition in all of its societal stratifications, and which would finally strive to understand its inner values as common to its universal character, it will show the way to the other disciplines in the humanities. This science, it seems to me, could indeed be the investigation of the arts". (Strzygowski 1901, pp. 2, 31)

Although sociologist Alfred Vierkandt presented arguably the best summary of the competing theories and problems in the new anthropologist-psychological art research

at the second *Kongress fuer Aesthetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* in Berlin in 1924, he did not draw attention to the implications for a new world art history. Instead, he only referred to ethnology, which may very well have been brought on by a contest that was taking place between art history and anthropology about which discipline had discovered ‘primitive art’ and whose task it was to investigate and document it.

*Kunstwissenschaft* at first seemed to be on the winning side with its “aims for a universal History of Art of all times and peoples [...] which will make possible the discovery of universal laws of artistic creation, the origin and change of style, as well as the conditions for the individual psychology, the sociology and culture of artistic creation.” (Vatter 1926, p. 7ff) So why and when did all the hope and intentions for *Kunstwissenschaft* started to fade and eventually give in to *Kunstgeschichte*, the more narrow study of art history and theory?

### 1930s: The fall

Pfisterer doubts that the fact, that most of the authors that were just mentioned above played a marginal role as figures in art history (specializing in other fields), could have been the real cause; some of their publications were very popular and widely spread and read. (Zijlmans & Van Damme 2008, p. 83) The *Voelkerschauen* (traveling exhibitions), the founding of ethnological museums, plus the growing demand for indigenous art in the antiquarian market, and the first exhibitions of non-European art, show that World Art certainly was flourishing in the early 1900s of Central Europe.

The first cause for *Kunstwissenschaft* never becoming a part of post-1930s academic research, Pfisterer argues the ideas never seemed to penetrate the Anglo-American realm from the start. He attributes this to a variety of theoretical and methodological differences with German-speaking Central Europe. In the late nineteenth century there was the uni-linear evolutionism (Tylor and Frazer), then came (German born) Boas with his historical particularism (*Primitive Art*, 1927). Finally, structural-functionalism by Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown started to dominate the Anglo-American view after the 1940s, and the German views never got a real chance to penetrate.

Secondly, the fire for World Art History in Germany was put out by the nation itself: in the 1930s the Nazis began to force a radical racism of research and insisted on a severance with all earlier liberal approaches and for example closed down Karl Lambrecht’s *Institut fuer Kultur- und Universalgeschichte* in Leipzig. After the second World War German historians simply avoided dealing with their recent past an

expunged world art from the art history curriculum. Instead the sub-field of ‘anthropology of art’ was established within the discipline of (cultural) anthropology/ ethnology. (Haselberger 1969)

But Pfisterer is not the only author in *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches* with a paper on the beginnings of World Art History in Germany. Marlite Halbertsma studied the era of 1900 to 1933 in Central Europe in this light as well and has her own explanation for the ending and what led up to this result.<sup>21</sup> She also claims that the attempts to establish world art history as a study at various German universities in the 1920s mainly shattered due to the economic difficulties in the Weimar Republic and the political and cultural breakdown after 1933. But she also finds a more ‘internal’ problem within the theoretical development of *Kunstwissenschaft* that brought it to a standstill: while critically reading Curt Glaser’s 1929 published volume *Die aussereuropäische Kunst* (part of the series *Handbuch fuer Kunstgeschichte*), a culmination of the most advanced art historical methods of the time, in which the various strands of the debated issue were drawn together and non-Western art forms were regarded as the equivalents of the art of the West, each with its own history and context, she reveals a lot of bias and contradictions. (Zijlmans & Van Damme 2008, p. 103)) While Pfisterer points out that the theories of German-jewish rooted Franz Boas prevented *Kunstwissenschaft* theories of breaking through to the Anglo-American realm, she mentions his influence as actually quite actively striking a fatal blow to *Kunstwissenschaft*. The authors of *Die aussereuropäische Kunst*, according to her, partially adopted his view that changes in form and technique in art were the outcome of interaction, not of evolution, impossible in isolation.

Although Glaser and his authors were the first to analyze non-European art using the same methods as European art, stepping down from using the word ‘primitive’, they clung to Boas’ theories of art not being able to develop without external influence. They were determined to connect all art forms together on a global scale, with changes or innovations only being caused by extraneous influences. The problem was that, aside from some pretty outrageous connections between cultures up to 1850, they could not accept European influences on non-European art after 1850: why could European art reinvent itself around 1900 by turning to non-European art, while non-European art died from the contagion of European art? They could not free themselves fully from the notion that non-European art was the opposite of European art: a story with a clear beginning and one end, against a story with an unclear beginning and many endings. They saw non-European art as an art with well-defined and permanent characteristics, which strongly collides with the idea of flux and borrowings. To Halbertsma, these

conflicting views brought the study of world art history in Germany to a theoretical halt, aside to the economic and political circumstances. She ends her paper by calling upon scholars to embrace the need for a fully new theory of art and art history, rethinking the production of artifacts “by recognizing the possibility that ‘art’ is not a given category of culture, but a process of labeling on the one hand and appropriation - in a literal meaning to - on the other.” (Zijlmans & Van Damme 2008, p. 103)

### 1970-2000: Second birth

In the beginning of the 1970s and 1980s interest in world art studies re-sparked. Our cultural historical and anthropological questions seem to remain unchanged to those of the early 1900s: what are the possible connections between and common principles in the objects of world art? Because without answering these questions what more is there than a accumulation and linear regimentation of art forms? To answer these questions we still take recourse to the ‘psychic unity of mankind’ and to human universals.

For example in Hans Belting’s *Bild-Anthropologie: Entwuerfe fuer eine Bildwissenschaft* from 2001 thoughts of death, memory and substitution form the foundations for all representations. Summers’ 2003 *Real spaces: World art history and the rise of Western modernism* the foundations are ‘real space’ (based on anthropological and human-psychology concepts) and ‘post-formalist art history’. For John Onians in his *Atlas of World Art* of 2004, it is nature as a set of resources and constraints, principally those embodied in the nature of the earth, of time and of man. (Onians 2004, p. 11ff)

“In other words”, Pfisterer says, “we are still wrestling with what has been the greatest problem ever since the initial European ideas about World Art, namely the ‘ennobling’ category of ‘art’ itself and the tensions between its deeply Eurocentric connotations contrasted with its potential the be understood as a human universal.” (Zijlmans & Van Damme 2008, p. 84) Another interesting parallel with the 1900 situation is the institutional conditions: originally *Kunstgeschichte/Kunstwissenschaft* had to establish itself in the university landscape. Today the traditional field of art history fights to survive in the context of newer, more interdisciplinary fields like visual and media studies.

## 2.2 Today’s World Art Concepts and Approaches

A small recapitulation: Van Damme in his introduction in the volume *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches* picks up where we last left with the defeat

of *Kunstwissenschaft* to *Kunstgeschichte*.<sup>22</sup> He reminds us of the fact that *Kunstwissenschaft* never developed into ‘artology’, whereas *Musikwissenschaft* did continue as an intercultural comparative study of music under the flag of (systematic) musicology, making use of sciences like acoustics, physiology, psychology and aesthetics. ‘Artology’ could have safeguarded scholars of the visual arts “from seeing their shared subject matter fragmented into epochal, regional, and disciplinary specialties whose practitioners hardly communicate with each other”, thus a scolding Van Damme (Zijlmans & Van Damme 2008, p. 27). Not ‘artology’ but ‘World Art Studies’, a concept and approach first proposed by professor John Onians of the Norwich University of East Anglia in 1996, should do what musicology does for music, linguistics for language and religious studies for religion: to approach its subject matter from a global perspective across time and space and to study it from all relevant disciplinary viewpoints imaginable, ranging from evolutionary biology to analytic philosophy, studying art as a worldwide phenomenon. Topics of World Art Studies as discussed in this volume, are research into the origins of art (meaning its appearance in human evolution), intercultural comparison, mutual artistic crossfertilization between two or more entities or cultures (letting go of the idea of Glaser’s 1929 idea that a non-European culture stopped developing after 1850), and interculturalization in the arts (or intercultural exchanges).

On page 157 of the volume, introducing the second part, Van Damme rephrases the discipline’s definition to: “World art studies proposes that we try to integrate the endeavors and results of various disciplines in order to thus enhance our understanding of the visual arts in human existence.” By way of introduction to this bold objective, he presents us a first idea of which academic fields might contribute to the development of world art studies “as a multi- and interdisciplinary, and ultimately an integrative, transdisciplinary field of study for a more systematic attempt to develop a transdisciplinary framework for the study of visual aesthetics worldwide.”<sup>23</sup> Selected are art history and visual studies, sociology, anthropology, geography and ecology, bio-evolutionary disciplines, psychology and philosophy. For each discipline he describes several authors and sources that have touched the subject in the past, and refers to the authors of the volume in the concerning sub-fields of research for World Art Studies.

## **Art History and Visual Studies**

Art Historians have developed various methodologies and sensibilities in dealing with questions that concern the development of style, iconography and subject matter in

art. Also the interpretation of the various aspects of the visual arts in their historical contexts in topics such as patronage, use, function and contemporary reception predominated in conventional art history until at least the 1960s and 1970s. This resulted in rich interpretations that remain close to the visual object, analyzing and contextualizing its multidimensionality in a manner that often combines form and meaning. Already archeology, which shares its historical roots with art history and the new comprehensive multidisciplinary fields of visual and media studies or *Bildwissenschaft* in the German-speaking world have adopted art historical methods. A World Art Studies scholar could research how the visual-semantic analyses of works of Western art could be applied to other cultures and related disciplinary contexts. Anne d'Alleva, a historian of Pacific art, has in some cases explored the value of applying more recent approaches to the study of art forms outside the West (for example Marxism, feminism, gender theory, psychoanalysis, deconstructionism and post colonial theory, collectively known as 'critical theory'). (D'Alleva 2005)

### **Sociology and (cultural) anthropology**

Marxism has played a large role for the field of art history (Arnold Hauser's 1951 *Social History of Art*). Conceptualizing art as a primarily social phenomenon, sociologists of art investigate the place and role of artistic practices in various societal configurations and in both historical and especially present-day Western settings. However, throughout the twentieth century, intellectual exchange between Western art students that were sociologically inspired and social anthropologists dealing with art outside the West was limited. That was left to cultural anthropologists. Of course there is considerable overlap between the concerns of social historians, sociologists and (cultural) anthropologists, sharing an interest in the sociocultural contextualization of art forms, their producers, audiences and institutions. In the last two decades topics of cultural identity, cultural representation and globalization have inspired art scholars that follow the trend of emphasizing sociocultural contextualization to pay increased attention to the field of anthropology.

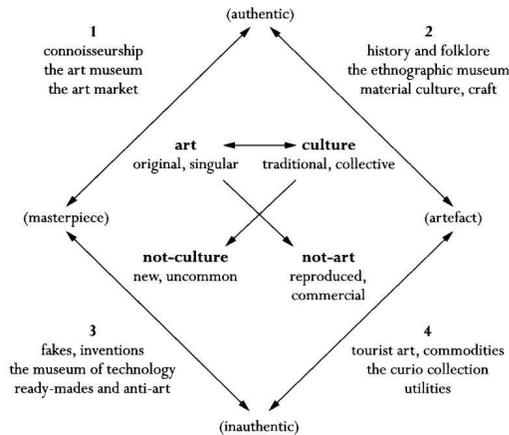


Figure 2.1: Visual schedule for James Clifford's framework for in- or exclusion along 2 axes. Chapter 5, James Clifford *On Collecting Art and Culture* (During 1999, p. 63). <http://books.google.nl>, 17-7-2011

Paula D. Girshick, represented with a paper in the same volume, for example discusses James Clifford's framework for conceptualizing 'the art-culture system' (in his 1988 seminal essay 'On Collecting Art and Culture') (see figure 2.1).<sup>24</sup> According to Clifford, 'tribal' objects that enter the Western system are classified along two axes: art/culture and authentic/inauthentic. Along the first axis are placed objects that are original and singular, which can therefore be considered 'art' - or traditional and collective and therefore labeled as 'culture'. Along the second axis objects are either authentic (art/artifacts) or inauthentic (fakes, tourist art, curios).

Interestingly enough each category has its own institutional setting (ethnographic museums, art museums, curio shops, etc.) and this is still the case, although many institutions are shifting their policies these days (see discussions of *Framer Framed* for example or the changing stands ethnographic museums take in presenting and collecting in the next chapter). Clifford claims objects can move across categories, but only in certain ways. For example, an 'authentic cultural artifact' as an Aboriginal acrylic dot painting can be reconceptualized as 'authentic fine art', because it fits the criterium of the modern art system. And commodities can become collectibles, like green glass coke bottles. On the other hand the shifts are often marked because of their functionality, despite being accepted as art because of formal appeal, by adding

words as ‘primitive’, ‘tribal’ or ‘non-Western’. I am inspired by the way Clifford tries to unravel the institutions ways of in- or excluding art objects from their collections - this can be a great help in revealing (im)possibilities for a change in the way Western and non-Western art objects are collected and presented in institutions.

### **Geography and ecology**

Geography may not be readily connected to the study of art, yet geographical considerations of raw materials and climate influencing art production have been around since Western writing on art from its beginnings in Greco-Roman antiquity. But social of cultural geography could also analyze the movements of people and study the resulting convergence of influences (for example diaspora art in the exhibition *Roots & More* in the Afrika Museum in Berg en Dal), both past and present. Onians’ *Atlas of World Art* (2004) for example has highlighted the influences of geographical and ecological circumstances on the production and circulation of art objects.

### **Bio-evolutionary disciplines**

Another trend in the ‘naturalistically based’ present-day studies of art is examining art-making and aesthetic response through bio-evolutionary disciplines such as neuroscience (‘neuroaesthetics’), sociobiology, ethology and evolutionary psychology. These approaches bring to realization that both creation and perception of art are inseparably tied to the evolved body and nervous system. This conceptualization leads to asking some fundamental questions whose answers could be of great relevance to world art studies. Van Damme:

- What bio-mechanical and cognitive-perceptual properties of human beings make the production and perception of art possible in the first place, and when and why did these properties evolve (hand-eye coordination, creating mental images and holding them in the mind’s eye, planning ahead, image-recognition, referential and associative thinking, etc.)?
- To what extent have human brains been programmed by evolution to respond stereotypically to certain visual stimuli (pleasure, repulsion, fear, awe)?
- What are the effects of making, using, and beholding art on the human brain?

The volume includes Ellen Dissanayake's contribution on the possible adaptive function of art ('The Arts after Darwin: Does art have an origin and adaptive function?' (Zijlmans & Van Damme 2008, pp. 241-263)), which has inspired me to find a fundamental dimension in which art of all times and origins can be studied and presented. Ernst Gombrich has published several books on visual perception. His cross-cultural investigation of ornament in *The Sense of Order: A Study in The Psychology of Decorative Art* of 1979, both interdisciplinary and globally oriented can be considered an pioneering study in world art studies. Naturalistic approaches with the shared cognitive, affective, and motivational heritage of humans as evolved beings, are now also being applied to architecture, music, and literature or fictional narrative.

### **Philosophy**

At the other end of the spectrum there is philosophy, coming to grips with the visual arts as a phenomenon in human life. The first present-day philosopher to systematically draw on data from a variety of cultures worldwide in his reflections is Ben-Ami Scharfstein (*Of Birds, Beasts and Other Artists: An Essay on the Universality of Art*, 1988). They can play an important role in the development of methodologies in world art studies as 'theoretical watch dogs'. Another contribution can come from scholars that study non-Western systems of thought concerning the arts and their qualities, known as 'comparative or transcultural aesthetics'.

### **Intercultural comparison**

While intergroup or intercultural comparisons must have been made throughout human history, there is generally very little known about the forms they took or the effects they had. As early as 450 B.C. in ancient Greece with its trade and outer wars, the thinker Protagoras, a contemporary of traveling reporter Herodotes, reflected on his own tradition or culture as merely one among many others, all equally particularistic - anachronistically to be labeled as a 'cultural relativistic stance'. The Renaissance with its rediscovery of these ancient cultures could be pointed out as the start for 'modern' Western interest in intercultural comparison. Models were provided for dealing with the increasing number and variety of foreign cultures, arts and crafts reaching the Europeans after they set out exploring the other corners of the world around 1500 A.D. Van Damme reminds us that this behavior of expansion and comparing different groups has also occurred in other parts of the world, for example by the followers of

Mohammed in the seventh and eighth century, the Mongol khans in the thirteenth century, the Chinese admiral Zheng around 1320 and the Incas in South America from 1438. He suggests that further examination and comparative analysis of the ways in which human groups worldwide have accumulated and compared information in other groups, artistic products included, would make for a fascinating and timely study. In Europe the ‘voyages of discovery’ left its mark on scholarly writings on what would today be called social sciences and humanities. Although the data coming from increasing parts of the world were often superficial, factually incorrect and presented through the lens of Christianity, scholars started to add an intercultural comparative dimension to their analyses of religion, social and political organization.

Among the first ‘intercultural’ publications, one could count costume books from around 1550 (De Las Casas), comparisons on architecture (Athanasius Kircher) around 1680 and Montesquieu’s examinations on the ideal political form for his *trias politicas* during the Enlightenment. As comparing visual arts from cultures outside Europe starts in the eighteenth century, the result was often of evaluative nature: systematic comparative methods from the field of anatomy and biology resulted with the cultural anthropologists in efforts to place cultural products on an alleged evolutionary ladder that led from ‘savage’ to ‘civilized’. In this mode of thought, traveling through space was like traveling through time, although most of the anthropologists used the growing collections of the new ethnographic museums. As many visually attractive objects were collected, interest for the visual aspect accordingly grew. Especially ‘ornament’ and designs from around the world were extensively studied for their origin and development. Attempts were made to compare them on a global scale and reveal a universal pattern (Schuster). Eventually intercultural comparison was incorporated in the systematic field of *Kunstwissenschaft*.

A subdiscipline was however never achieved, contrary to comparative musicology/ literature/ philosophy/ aesthetics. Sadly, comparison only took place between the non-Western cultures, with a strong focus on Oriental or Asian cultures. Today, the idea of intercultural comparison is associated especially with the Western discipline of cultural anthropology, frequently mentioned as a key characteristic in the definition of their field. Yet many of their scholars have expressed serious reservations about the project of comparing cultures or culture-traits, especially on a global scale. In his article in the *International Journal of Anthropology* Van Damme describes three types of anthropology, of which types A and B refer to the more traditional anthropological research (van Damme 2003, pp. 231-244):

1. Anthropology type A: Philosophic anthropology (describing human culture on a pan-human and pan-cultural level) Properties: empirical-inductive, generative, ideographic
2. Anthropology type B: Traditional anthropology (study of non-Western small-scale societies) Properties: contextual-deductive, descriptive, particularistic, ideographic
3. Anthropology type C: Intercultural comparative anthropology (global comparative analyses) Properties: sociocultural contextualization, comparative, generative, nomothetic

The first two types of anthropology deliver data and theory based on local research (whether as an ‘armchair anthropologist’ or as an actively collecting anthropologist through participatory observation), whereas the third type tries to collect data on the context through a chosen framework. This type attempts to bring the disciplines of art history, which usually only focuses on the visual object itself, and anthropology, that treats the object as a product or evidence of their main subject, together. Clearly showing a large overlap with the ambitions of World Art Studies, Van Damme describes this ‘Intercultural comparative anthropology’ concerning art as the comprehensive study of visual arts in human existence in which ‘non-Western’ art or ‘the other’ are no longer the main focus, but in which the context of why people all over the world chose to express themselves in a certain way in a certain period is the subject of research. The skepticism about comparative anthropology has various reasons.

First, it raises some thorny theoretical issues: What is meant by intercultural comparison? What would be the units between which to compare, or what would be its ‘*tertia comparationis*’? Can a conceptual apparatus that is neutral enough to let loose on likening phenomena from essentially different cultures or contexts ever be devised? And if intercultural comparison would indeed be feasible, then how would one practically proceed - choosing which data, meaning the number and type, and on what scale?

From an intellectual-historical perspective the thought of the ethnocentric, speculative endeavors of nineteenth-century evolutionist anthropologists (anthropology type A) still lingers. Up to today most anthropologists still follow the responsive idea of Franz Boas from the early twentieth century that *in situ* research, with an emphasis on cultures’ historical particularity (anthropology type B), is the only way to study living foreign cultures. In addition to this paradigmatic shift to local/ particularistic

research there was the influence of the twentieth-century movements of postmodernism and post-colonialism. These fields scholarly doubted the validity of cross-cultural data-gathering, let only generalizations on a grand scale. Actually it must be said that Boas actually never totally opposed to the comparative study of cultures, but as a scholarly ambition it could only be executed seriously if enough valid data were available on the world's many existing cultures. So maybe now the time has arrived as recently, for a group of anthropologists, the skepticism has turned into advocating rehabilitation of intercultural comparison, arguing the importance of cross-cultural generalizations as a legitimization for anthropology as the study of humankind and its sociocultural institutions. In order to avoid some of the shortcomings of earlier comparisons, it is suggested that, instead of analyzing likening but isolated culture-traits, scholars should proceed by comparing phenomena in their sociocultural contexts (adding value to primary data through secondary analysis).

Donald E. Brown and Jean M. Borgatti both devote their contributions in this volume to a cross-cultural study of portraits. Brown, an anthropologist, examines whether particular visual properties of portraits, specifically their naturalistic or stylized appearance, can be related to the sociocultural environment of their creation and use. Borgatti, who together with Richard Brilliant, pioneered the intercultural investigation of portraits in 1990 solves the problem of a lacking heuristic starting point by adequately defining her 'tertium comparationis' by conceiving of a portrait as any visual creation that references a specific human being. She created a cross-cultural classification or typology for portraits: Borgatti & Brilliant (1990)

1. Representational portraits (which present a physiognomic likeness of an individual)
2. Generic portraits (which may be individualized by various means, including context, personal belongings or inscriptions)
3. Emblematic portraits (which refer to an individual by way of characteristic emblems or attributes)

Both their essays provide an interesting starting point for what could be a comparison not only in theory, but also in practice in for example a presentation or exhibition. Van Damme sums up different authors that have touched the subject since 1971, mentioning Jacques Macquet, Robert Plant Armstrong, David Freedberg, Alfred Gell, Mary Helms, Hans Belting, David Summers, Nigel Spivey, Esther Pasztory, Bruce Trigger, and

Suzanne Blier, who directs the *Baobab Project* at Harvard University that investigates why innovation in the arts occurs more in some cultural contexts than in others <sup>25</sup>

Bio-evolutionary approaches to the visual arts are provided by Ellen Dissanayake, Nancy Aiken, Geoffrey Miller, Kathryn Coe, Ireneaus Eibl-Eibesfeld and Christa Suetterlin, Denis Dutton, Bedaux and Cooke, and Volland and Grammer. Besides portraits, numerous other topics could be interculturally compared, ranging from tangible to more conceptual: from raw materials and techniques, through visual appearance, theme or subject matter, use and function, producers and patrons, to aesthetic evaluation and philosophers of art. And aside from the topics to be investigated, intercultural comparison could take many forms, in terms of scope, method, and goal. The comparisons could be regional or global, synchronic or diachronic, or feature a combination of these. It could proceed inductively, when cross-cultural data are examined in order to arrive at generalizations, but could also be more deductive, when hypotheses concerning the visual arts are tested by tapping into available data from a variety of cultures. The analyses could bring to light differences, and even have the establishment of cultural specificity as its aim, but it could also search for commonalities on various levels of analysis, which is what most studies in this field in fact do.

### **Globalization/Interculturalization**

In her contribution to the volume, ‘The Discourse on Contemporary Art and the Globalization of the Art System’, Kitty Zijlmans addresses the influences of globalization on the rise of World Art Studies. (Zijlmans & Van Damme 2008, p. 135-150) As *Kunstwissenschaft* failed to set foot in Europe, everything non-European seemed to drop out of the art historical discourse under the influence of rigid modernist thinking: Western art dominated the canon and filled up the art museums, while the ‘Restern’, generally referred to as traditional and tribal art, was consigned to ethnological museums in Western Europe. This Euro-American bias manifested itself particularly clear as ‘modern art’ production started to emerge in the former colonies after World War II. Because of the inability to respond to this art production effectively (how should it be evaluated and whose responsibility is it to collect, document, research and present it?), the bias has become even more apparent with the (im)migration waves, as ‘immigrant-artists’ and indeed second generation immigrant artists are facing a vacuum in the art world. Often they are viewed upon as a synecdoche (presenting a whole nation) of the country of origin and their art is confined to their alleged ‘own culture’. Consequently, stigmatized by their ‘otherness’, these artists are left out of the dominant discourse

while being criticized for Western epigone (inferior imitation).

In the climate of globalization, visual culture studies seem to be the key to escape from this deadlock by offering equal treatment of all visual productions irrespective of their origin. However, replacement of the term 'art' by 'visual culture' seems too easy a way out. It would not change the fact that the narrowly defined modernist concept of art remains the point of reference. The change should come from acknowledging that modern art may have been born in the West, but is not exclusively Western. While from its birth the modern movement saw itself as international, the Western artistic system (galleries, venues, museums, collections) has not been keen to admit contemporary groups and movements from other cultures. What is lacking is the acceptance of the 'non-Western' contemporary artists' role in the construction of Modernism. Instead of seeing a multitude of sources and interconnected developments, one single development (taking place in Europe and the USA) has been isolated and presented as if it were autonomous or a universal value (worldwide hegemony of a specific culture). Trading the concept of art for that of visual culture completely ignores this issue, and endorses only the exclusion of the other participants of the field.

On the other hand, including instead of excluding, or simply incorporating 'the Other' into the existing discourse will not solve the problem of dominance either. The 'center' would simply devour the other modernities and ignore or deny its 'otherness'<sup>26</sup> With accepting that modern art did not emerge everywhere simultaneously and that it did not spring from one source, a start would be made. After that, every modern art movement could be studied with its own genesis, tempo, development process and own future. On a global scale, we can see a dissimultaneity of comparable processes which are relative to each other and are mutually connected.

### **Art as a social system**

In an attempt to grasp contemporary art as a global issue, Zijlmans presents the sociologist Niklas Luhmann's 1995 theory of social dynamic systems and related concept of art (which includes all art forms, ranging from the visual arts, design, architecture, literature and film to music and theater). (Luhmann 2000). Luhmann describes art as a social system (disconnecting art history from it as its *Wissenschaft* system observing it in the second and third order). As his work is substantial, containing multiple hundreds of pages, she can only touch upon the first ideas of it. The emergence of what Luhmann considers to be present-day modern society occurs when, in order

to be able to process the amount of information produced, society's ever-increasing complexity evolves into a differentiation into such functional systems as economy, law, politics, religion, education, science, media, and art. He based his theory of evolving social functional systems upon the research of Chilean biologists Maturana and Varela, which describes how living things evolutionary increase their capability of processing complex information. When social stability occurs, possibilities for variation and selection will then change these systems internally. All systems have operative closure and self-organization and are self-generating.<sup>27</sup> Each functional system portrays a particular operation and manifestation of society, is a specific 'function' and has a specific 'coded' communication that cannot be taken over by any of the other social systems. The 'code' that Luhmann sees to govern the art system is the binary opposition of 'beautiful/ugly'. However, the code is not fixed - with 'beautiful' it expresses that the (object of) expression is successful for the art system (which means evokes response be it negative or positive), and for 'ugly' it has failed. This system operates in a very contingent manner. Interestingly Luhmann claims that if art communication is taken as a political utterance, it becomes part of the system of politics.<sup>28</sup>

Zijlmans then connects the rise of a modern art production to the development of functional differentiation of societal systems worldwide. This does not happen everywhere at the same time or in the same way; in societies with a totalitarian political system (in which 'official' art usually could in Luhmann's vision be considered part of the political system and an art system could not take form, as it could never act and communicate autonomously) as the German Democratic Republic the (autonomous) art system is considered by other functional systems to intrude or as a mistake that needs to be corrected (another example: iconoclasm during the Reformation in the sixteenth century). In the post-Soviet era, the 'new' EU countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the art system started to recover as art museums were founded, national heritage monuments were listed and a national art history was written. Even though this was still often commissioned by the Government, content and selection was entrusted to art experts and historians, i.e. to an emerging *Wissenschaft* system. The art system functions as a creator of national cultural identity. In Japan the art system started to emerge in the 1880s, whereas in China the art system did not really grow until the government recently loosened its grip. The international art world however only decided to include Chinese artists after the Kassel *Documenta X* (1997) when Harald Szeeman catapulted them into the international art scene by presenting them at the 48th Venice Biennial in 1999. This shows how the art institutions have become a dominant authority within the art system; they decide what is to be included and hence

excluded from the dominant discourse.

This struggle for power between the art institutions (and increasingly the art market) in the art system and the *Wissenschaft* system (that observes the art system but is not a part of it) to determine what is to be included or excluded from the art canon is exactly what frustrates a world art presentation. As long as the institutions are not convinced of the strength and possibility of intercultural comparison in visual art as introduced by world art studies, it will remain very hard to change the dominant discourse of the Western art system and change the way in which art from the world is (re)presented to us in galleries and museums. Zijlmans mentions that for example “Even when such a major museum such as the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston recently opened permanent galleries devoted to the arts of Africa and Oceania in the early 2000s and increasingly African, Latin-American and Asian art exhibitions are included as part of museums’ programs, the dissimilarity between us/ them (Western/ non-Western) persists. (Zijlmans & Van Damme 2008, p. 148) Paradoxically both trying to remove the distinction, and stressing ethnic/cultural-specific distinctions (thereby equalizing its treatment), seem to have a negative effect: either way the Western dominant system enfoldes ‘the Other’ as victor - as no museums are called explicitly ‘Museum for Western (or Euro-American) Art’, but the Museum for African Art in New York, the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco and the Aboriginal Art Museum Utrecht have been founded. This way, culture-differences are still underscored and Euro-American definitions still prevail. Matters become even more complicated when contemporary art is concerned. Holland Cotter in an article in the *New York Times* in 2005: Where would a contemporary American Indian artist go? To the Museum of Modern Art or the National Museum for the American Indian in New York? Does (s)he wish to be in the National Museum and/ or would he be allowed into the MoMA? [...] [It would imply an] institutional acknowledgment of a global modernism, of which Western European and North American modernism were a tremendous important part, but only a part. (Cotter 30-03-2005) He suggests to equalize the modern art collections museums should start collecting horizontally instead of vertically, however, the Western bias would still prevail because ‘the Other’ would only fill in the wholes.

It is also inspiring to see that the first attempts by academic students, to let their urge for a new theory flow into the institutionalized world, are taking place. In the third issue of the *Concordia Undergraduate Journal of Art History* in 2007, undergraduate Meghan Williams comments on the problem, taking the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts as an example, and brings forth her own suggestions. (Williams 2007) Her article ‘Re-imagining the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts: Bringing the Museum into a Post-

Colonial Age' has been added as an appendix to this thesis (Appendix B). She would like to re-hang the Contemporary Art galleries to realize and inaugurate her cross-cultural curatorial undertaking. Her greatest aggravation with the space is that, with the exception of the Riopelle and Borduas rooms, there is an overall lack of context. Works are grouped together with no obvious adherence to period, style or theme. First, she would intend to re-hang the current collection coherently, having rooms with themes such as 'Modernism in Montreal'. Second, the re-hang would serve as a solid foundation for the incorporation of multi-cultural art. However, she does not want to place a newly acquired African painting into the current European and Canadian context, as this would only reinforce its marginalization. She quotes Irit Rogoff, an art historian who specializes in visual culture writes: "[we cannot] simply insert other histories into the grand narratives of Modernism and its various crises and collapses, because this ignores and devalues the struggles that marginalized cultures have endured in conflict with the West." To specifically express this conflict she would focus her re-imagining on one gallery space designated as a cross-cultural room, designed around a multicultural dialog. She thinks a smaller space would initially suit such a project best. While presently, one half of the that specific gallery is devoted to portraits and she thinks that this would be an interesting starting point. She would use portraiture as an entry point to a valuable critique and understanding of how we see ourselves and others; to examine questions of identity and authorship as well as provide a foray into more heated issues in future exhibitions. A specific selection can be read in the article itself as appendix. Interestingly, I have also found an interesting world art theory by Jean M. Borgatti with portraiture as a starting point. As Williams in her article stays very superficial about how the intercultural comparison would take place, I might try to use Borgatti's theory as a profounder foundation for a portraiture based presentation in the next chapter.

### **Conclusions on theoretical discourse**

Where *Kunstwissenschaft* never really got a foothold in the German-speaking universities or abroad during the first half of the twentieth century, and field of intercultural comparison seemed to have disappeared after the 1930s, a strong revival has been set in motion with World Art Studies in the wake of the New Art Histories that took off from the 1980s. In Europe a small selection of universities have started special chairs for World or Global Art History, among which the University of East Anglia in Norwich (UK), the University of Heidelberg (Germany), and the University of Leiden

(the Netherlands). With the publication *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches* a historiography and first insight into the possible theoretical approaches was provided by editors Wilfried van Damme and Kitty Zijlmans. The essays they collected reflect the still early stage of the research, showing a true kaleidoscope of different views, originating from different disciplines, as well as the absence of general theoretics or definitions that would give boundaries as to what World Art Studies would exactly encompass. For my thesis however, there was the important hint of the need for a ‘tertium comparationis’ to make intercultural comparison possible. Armed with this very general, but still essential clue to what would make for a world art presentation, I will in the next chapter analyze and evaluate the institutions’ ‘utterances’, meaning exhibitions, on the subject discussed. I will further try to relate back to the recent institutional discourse, as discussed in chapter I, and have therefore chosen to focus on a selection of exhibitions within Dutch ethnographic and art institutions over the last three years (2009-2011).

## Chapter 3

# Exhibiting: past, present and future

### 3.1 Evaluative analyses of recent Dutch exhibitions (2009-2011)

Before starting to discuss the recent Dutch exhibitions I have chosen to analyze for their intercultural aspects, to me it is impossible to leave out a small historiography and critique of a the exhibitions that internationally played a large role in the discussion and are still referred to today when creating multicultural or intercultural presentations, also in the Netherlands. Of course the first and foremost exhibition that comes to mind is the 1989 Paris show *Magiciens de la Terre*, that tried to counteract ethnocentric practices within the contemporary art world. Curator Jean-Hubert Martin, amongst other things, was referring to the idea and selection of art works in previous presentations that were primarily based on form, falling into a Modernist trap of providing only a pure aesthetization of the work of native cultures and perpetuating a colonial mentality. It is a type of display that is probably most common when combining non-Western and Western art objects, with early 20th century European art and its many referred to relations to tribal or ‘primitive’ art. The most famous is probably the 1984 show *‘Primitivism’ in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In the Netherlands, even recent examples of such presentations exist, for example the 2004 exhibition *Out of Africa. Dutch Primitivism in the 20th century*, held at the CoBrA Museum in

Amstelveen and *Africa-Europe. A meeting* of the year 2000 in the Museum Beelden aan Zee in Scheveningen. In the latter's catalog professor Mazisi Kumene tries to clarify the difference in backgrounds in which European and African humane representations were conceived. However, it is very questionable to what, if any, extent this has been reflected in the presentation, concentrating purely on form.<sup>29</sup> Aside from reacting to this Modernist, formal based type of presentation, Jean-Hubert Martin actually created the *Magiciens* show as a replacement for the format of the traditional Paris Biennial and used the 1984 MoMA *Primitivism* and 1931 *L'Exposition Coloniale* shows as counter-reference points. Alongside trying to abandon the colonial ideology portrayed in the exhibitions, he wanted to correct the Biennial's problem of one hundred percent of exhibitions ignoring 80 percent of the earth". In years past, the French curatorial team would select the countries to be exhibited, and representatives from the respective countries would select artists that they deemed the greatest artistic talents of their nation. This method failed as many of the non-Western artists selected were second-rate practitioners (in style and content) of artistic movements that originated in the West. It was felt that these artists were not exemplary of the diversity of human cultures, and their work only strengthened Western hegemony. With the failings of these previous shows in mind, Martin organized *Magiciens* by selecting one hundred artists from around the world: fifty from the so-called (art)'centers' of the world (the United States and Western Europe) and fifty from the 'margins' (Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Australia). No specific criteria were set up for the selection of the individual works in the show as long as this numerical ratio was maintained. When selecting artists from outside the Western tradition, the curator claimed to choose artists according to their artworks' "visual and sensual experiences. Martin explains: "I want to play the role of someone who uses artistic intuition alone to select objects which come from totally different cultures, But obviously, I also want to incorporate into that process the critical thinking which contemporary anthropology provides on the problem of ethnocentrism, the relativity of culture, and intercultural relations." In an interview with Benjamin Buchloh, published in the May 1989 edition of *Art in America* Buchloh stated: "While these conversations [the first on July 14, 1986, and the second two years later in October of 1988] originated in the interest I share with Martin in what seems to be a long overdue and courageous attempt to depart from the hegemonic and monocentric cultural perspectives of Western European and American institutions and their exhibition projects, it was also inevitable that I would want to challenge some of the underlying assumptions of this exhibition. In particular, I raise questions about the exhibition's approach to the issue of cultural authenticity, about

its treatment of the relationship between ‘center’ and ‘margin’, and about the possible fallacies of focusing exclusively on the ‘cultural’ object - in short, about the exhibition’s potential neo-colonialist subtext.”<sup>30</sup>

Martin acknowledged this method had inherent flaws, but also noted that any methodological framework for the selection of works will make similar mistakes. He felt that the inclusion of the fifty non-Western artists would begin to facilitate a change starts de-centering notions of an artistic center(s) within the Western tradition of art practice. Martin defends his seemingly to Primitivism similar ‘decontextualization’ and choosing a formalist basis for his selection as follows: “A criticism that was immediately expressed about this exhibition project concerns the supposed problem of decontextualization and the betrayal of other cultures. Yes, the objects in our exhibition will be displaced from their functional context [...]”, but ‘adds’ a new function to all of the objects on show: “It seems important to emphasize the functional rather than the formal aspects of spirituality-after all, magic practices are functional practices. Those objects which have a spiritual function for the human mentality, objects which exist in all societies, are the ones of interest for our exhibition. After all, the work of art cannot simply be reduced to a retinal experience. It possesses an aura which initiates these mental experiences.” Buchloh then asks a very interesting question: “Is your exhibition going to address the magic rituals of our society as well? You seem to be looking for an irrational power that drives artistic production in tribal societies, and you seem to argue that there is a need for our society to rediscover this power. By contrast, the actual mechanisms in which magic rituals are practiced in our society - in the fetishization of the sign, in spectacle culture and in commodity fetishism - these mechanisms do not seem to be of interest to you?” (Buchloh 1989, p. 156) Alas, he does not answer directly to this question, but avoids it by saying he is “not in search of an original purity”. At the end of the article/ interview Martin gives in to not being able to avoid an ethnocentric vision altogether, because he sees no way of developing immanent criteria from within the needs and conventions of non-Western cultures.

Artists like Rasheed Araeen (founder in 1987 of the ongoing magazine *Third Text* that publishes articles on art and visual culture of non-Western art producers) were also ambivalent about the concept of the exhibition. In his essay “Our Bauhaus Other’s Mudhouse”, he wrote: “My main point of critique concerns the lack of any radical theoretical or conceptual framework that can justify the togetherness of works that represent different historical formations.”<sup>31</sup> However he must have acknowledged the importance of Martin’s first attempt of raising the topic, as he devoted a whole edition of *Third Text* on the exhibition and contributed a work to the show as well. In 2006

Melentie Pandilowski wrote a review on the Biennale of Sydney of that year in *Artlink*, commenting on various art events since 1989 that have carried *Magiciens* legacy. She concludes: “Did the Sydney Biennale present us with new cultural visions? The answer would have to be no, but then again, is that the role of a biennale? Has the exhibition challenged, or been able to transform the ways we understand art and its role in today’s age, by traveling through the various geographic latitudes? I would say not, for there was no firm structure which allowed us to do this. The lack of curatorial cohesion means that at times the exhibition seemed like a kaleidoscope of world images, aimed at merely intriguing and pleasing the audience.” (Pandilowski 2006) I have added the review in its entirety as Appendix D.

After this short international historiography, I would like to come back to the Dutch institutions and exhibitions of the last three years in the Netherlands. In a short representation of the discussion series of *Framer Framed* we learned that among the Dutch museums the ethnographic museums and art museums had different views of how to deal with collecting and presenting non-Western art. To research if and how their positions are reflected in their (choice for and execution of) exhibitions, I have selected one permanent and four temporary presentations in the bigger museums of the last three years. As for the ethnographic museums, I chose to attend a study day of the Nederlandse Museumvereniging in the Wereldmuseum in Rotterdam on April 15 2010, during which representatives from various other museums analyzed the museum’s new presentation and collecting policy (after reopening on December 9 2009). For the Afrika Museum in Berg en Dal, I selected to analyze the exhibition *Roots & More. Journey of the Spirits* (01.04.2009 01.11.2009), and for the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, the exhibition *ROOD* (05.11.2010 31-07.2011). For the art museums, there was the big exhibition on Brazilian contemporary art in the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam, appropriately titled *Brazil Contemporary* (23.05.2009 23.08.2009), and in the Centraal Museum in Utrecht an exhibition on connections between the Dutch and Indonesian in art was on show called *Beyond the Dutch* (16.10.2009 10.01.2010). Besides analyzing the exhibitions, I would also like to evaluate them according to the theoretic discourse according to the following three points:

- How has the museum chosen to fit the presentation into the existing ones (referring back to the institutional debates in paragraph 1.2)?
- What is the balance between form and context in the presentation?
- Is there a level of intercultural comparison present, and if so, in what way (is

there for example a ‘tertium comparationis’)?

I will start with the presentations in art museums and continue with the ones held in the ethnographic museums.

### **Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen: *Brazil Contemporary***

For *Brazil Contemporary*, it was not only the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen that provided exhibition space. The exhibition also had venues at the Netherlands Architecture Institute and the Nederlands Fotomuseum in Rotterdam. The catalog immediately shows that, in connection to these three venues, the exhibition was split into the disciplines of architecture, visual culture and art, thereby at first glance separating ‘art’ from ‘culture’. Bregje van Woensel (the exhibition curator for the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum) during the workshop *Presentation policy* of the *Framer Framed* conference *Collecting without borders* on October 22 2009, extensively presented how he views of the curators of Brazil reflected on the choice for the artists at the exhibition.  
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While there obviously was a lot of background and context to the exhibition, I have to agree with the workshop participants, that this was almost invisible to visitors of the Boijmans Van Beuningen presentation. I remember to read a relatively small introduction to the exhibition on the ground floor, main entrance hall, and after that only picking up on the traditional ‘artist-title-materials-etc.’ information on small signs on the walls of the higher floor, where the exhibition continued. The exhibition was, in terms of space, treated as any of their temporal exhibitions, and placed in the room that is reserved for this purpose; no connection to the permanent exhibition or inclusion of any of the collection’s objects was made. The presentation was clearly a traditional ‘white cube’ one with lots of space, lighting from above, as least contextual information (visually) as possible, and a choice of art(ists) that speaks the ‘contemporary international art language’.

If there was a ‘tertium comparationis’ to be found it was the use of the central art historical figure Helio Oiticica who was connected to the contemporary artists, like Ernesto Neto. But the curator herself admits in the catalog: “To keep talking about ‘Brazilian art’ can sometimes provoke irritation. ‘What is that?’, the artists we interview ask. It is a logical objection. As long as you apply categories, you keep running up against the principle of ‘the other’. [...] But in the last resort, how do the artists in *Brazil Contemporary* relate to their own culture and to the international trends in art? Are they the new tropicalists, and if so in what sense of the word? Are

they a new kind of national internationalists, or do they have a solely international orientation? The artists in *Brazil Contemporary* are just as varied as the different descriptions of the color of their skin, but nevertheless form a unity in diversity.” (Figueredo et al. 2009, p. 242)

### Centraal Museum Utrecht: *Beyond the Dutch*

As the Centraal Museum in Utrecht is not just strictly an art museum, but also houses cultural-historic collections and applied arts and design, all from many ages, its director until 2009 Meta Knol has been confronted with the problem of how to present and what to include or exclude in its collections. She was one of the initiators of the ongoing *Framer Framed* debate series, and therefore I was very curious about how the Centraal Museum would exhibit on a post-colonial topic. *Beyond the Dutch. Indonesia, the Netherlands and the visual arts from 1900 until now* focuses on three important phases from the two countries’ shared history: the cultural exchange that occurred in the subsequent periods of colonialism (1900), of decolonization and independence (1950s), and the current developments in the post-colonial era. Each phase is highlighted by a selection of exemplary works, loaned from Indonesian collectors and artists, and newly created works by participating Indonesian artists, and Dutch artists who were born in or have family ties with Indonesia.<sup>33</sup>

Meta Knol explains how the exhibit seeks to explore and reveal intercultural connections between the two nations in three periods of history through the visual arts: “This major exhibition deals with the intercultural relationship between the Netherlands and Indonesia from the perspective of the visual arts. The chronology of the show takes the visitor on a journey from the past to the most recent period and then back again to the past. The exhibition’s route comes to a dead-end, requiring visitors to retrace their steps through the entire exhibition in reverse order. Thus the exhibition’s set-up is designed to allow the visitors to revisit the same works ‘with new eyes’.”<sup>34</sup> With its essayistic nature and structure *Beyond the Dutch* aimed to reveal and analyze a variety of intercultural connections. Knol mentions that this methodology was expected to pose questions both old and new. With the exhibition and accompanying publication she did not aim to answer all these questions or to draw definitive conclusions, but wished to provide a layering of information that would afford opportunities for the professional and the interested layperson alike to deepen their knowledge, reflect upon the issues raised and draw their own conclusions.

As for an evaluation, referring again to my three questions, I have to say that,

again the room for the exhibition was the reserved room for temporal exhibitions, keeping the ‘white cube’ with its large spaces, white walls and lighting from above. Aesthetics were definitely outwaying context, although through the use of different media, including television reels and newspaper clippings, the feel was different from that of the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum: the cultural-historic aspect was clearly present. However, it was still the accompanying publication, interviews through media or the education department that were truly providing context for the art works on display. The *tertium comparationis* was of course the collective history of the two countries between 1900 and today and how their people looked at each other from their own cultural framework. The showing of a ‘constant process of *mutual* influences’, that Mirjam Shatawi of the Tropenmuseum was talking about (Muskens 2010, p. 123), was maybe a first for a Dutch art museum, where it has to be said that the heritage of the Centraal Museum also being a museum of cultural history probably helped the initiative.

### **Afrika Museum: *Roots & More. Journey of the Spirits***

*Roots & More* in the Afrika Museum in Berg en Dal was curated by Wouter Welling. The temporal, thematic exhibition was about spirituality in the work of contemporary artists from the African diaspora from different countries and different generations (specifically Brazil, Britain, Cuba, Curacao, Haiti, Suriname and the United States). For all their variety, they display one particularly striking similarity: they are all rooted in a spiritual world that is thoroughly African. Therefore, their work provided an opportunity to establish links with traditional African art from the Afrika Museum collection. However, unlike in the case of functional objects (i.e. objects that have ‘operated’ in a religious setting), the contemporary artists interpreted things in their own way, and would now be labeled as ‘Glocal Art’ (according to Welling, art that is very internationally oriented, but with the artist’s roots as a base). The exhibition showed how a traditional non-Western art object can be ‘decoded’ by the art language of a contemporary work.

It also takes the new road for ethnographic museums in showing that cultures are not static. The hybrid and flexible spirituality (Catholicism merged with African religion) actually attracts much interest from the secular West: mutual influence? However, there were no artists present with a non-African background to show if or how African spirituality has influenced the other way around. Even though there was a lot of intercultural food for thought and sight, I could not help feeling somehow

sad about the chosen presentation: where the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum and Centraal Museum kept their ‘white cube’ background, the Afrika Museum created a specially designed huge, but compartmentalized, room for *Roots & More*. Instead of a ‘white cube’, we could sarcastically have called this one a ‘black cube’, for the entire exhibition was surrounded by darkness and gloomy lighting. The objects on display were themselves treated like art objects, with small signs besides them, sometimes pointing out the ‘roots’ of its subject in text and/or with original pieces from the Afrika Museum collection close by. The strong ‘exotic’ feel is reflected by the design for a special website on the exhibition.<sup>35</sup> I have to say I have difficulty evaluating if this ‘exoticism’ was a choice to attract public or an inherent part of the subject. I wonder what the contemporary artists would have to say about this presentation as opposed to one more close to the Boijmans Van Beuningen one.

Up to these exhibitions, polarity between a ‘white’ or ‘black’ cube background seems for me to trigger negative evaluations on the presentation, even though the balance of form and context differed among the exhibitions.

### **Wereldmuseum: *permanent exhibition 2009-***

As the Wereldmuseum in Rotterdam, formerly known as the Museum voor Land- en Volkenkunde, reopened in 2009, it became clear that its strong-willed new director Stanley Bremer was not afraid of bold choices and statements. Visiting the museum on invitation by the Nederlandse Museumvereniging on April 15 2010, Bremer declared in the permanent exhibition ‘the Collection’ now only the finest objects were on show, without the ‘fuss’ of touch screens, computers or difficult story lines. This caused for the departments (a traditional geographical lay-out is still uphold) to be different in size.<sup>36</sup>

The selection was based on quality of the works according to art historical value (I can only conclude: valued by Western art historical qualifications like originality, craftsmanship and aesthetics). They have chosen not to incorporate contemporary works, but trace back to different roots of religion and spirituality through historical objects. This is suppose to allow the target group of the new marketing strategy of the museum, the ‘cultural creatives’, open-minded, highly educated people in their thirties and forties, to shop for original thoughts on spirituality. The exhibition opens with a video about how we as people seek to influence and understand the world around us, making use of patterns and structures to handle life and death. Answers for why and what are we destined for are sought in the other world, the world of gods and ancestors.

To connect, we need specialists, rituals and images to negotiate. The images of the exhibition are supposed to give insight into the cosmology, rituals and life philosophies of different cultures. This was a big promise, and I was very curious how they would establish this.

As it turned out, ‘people of the world’ are still ‘the Others’ where the Wereldmuseum is concerned; no reflection or mutual influences between cultures from all around the world, including our own, were to be found in the permanent exhibition. Some of the accent rooms were indeed very aesthetic, in the fact that they provided a lot of space and special lighting for the ‘top pieces’, with color planes in the background; other rooms were still quite conservative with art works crowding for attention behind the glass of their cabinets, see figure 3.1.



Figure 3.1: Examples of the choices for aesthetic presentation of the Wereldmuseum in Rotterdam. Top pieces of the Oceania collection (a) and a glass cabinet with mixed pieces from this collection (b). Figures courtesy of Mrs. Annelies de Boer.

Only small booklets at the entrance of rooms provided information on the art works, with texts of academic reading level. ‘Spirituality’, with no attachment to time or individuals, is what the management communicates to its visitors. However, when an object obtains its spiritual meaning from context, I find it very hard to even though its aesthetic form may exude the spirituality connect the objects to my own world. The *tertium comparationis* of spirituality for me does not work, because the promise made

by the introduction video of the museum is not met to me: insight into the cosmology, rituals and life philosophies of different cultures cannot be gained by just watching their products, especially when they are spatially separated from each other, when there are no intercultural relations made, and no connections to the contemporary, global(ized) world.

### **Tropenmuseum: *ROOD***

Following other exhibitions of the Tropenmuseum that have made connections between the Western and non-Western world and history and present, like *Eastward Bound!* (part of the current permanent exhibition, about the Dutch-Indonesian relations) and *Urban Islam* (a temporal exhibition during 2003-2004), from November 2010, *ROOD* was presented to the public<sup>37</sup> The idea of the color red as a way to show how cultures' views on one single thing as a color can differ or correspond, was adopted from the *Rot* exhibition of the Museum of Cultures in Basel, Switzerland of 2008. However, the Tropenmuseum took the concept a whole step further: they mixed the traditional objects of ethnographic collections with historic and contemporary Western and non-Western art objects.

This was the first time I saw a true cross-cut of visual art, media and artifacts from different times and cultures from all over the globe. The circular labyrinth that was specially created in the enormous central hall of the museum architecture lead the visitor through eleven themes, from 'life and eternity', to themes as 'power and strength', and from 'love or erotics' to 'energy' and 'identity'. Because they mixed the selection from Basel with not only their own collection (that already contains contemporary art objects), but also with pieces from the CoBrA Museum (Amstelveen), the Amsterdam Historisch Museum, and Legermuseum (Delft), the objects differed from an African war shield to a British nineteenth-century army jacket, to a painting by Constant, to political posters from Iran and China, to a speech by Barack Obama, to Dutch folklore bridal wear, and a contemporary Catholic cloak for Dutch cardinal Simonis, to a sculpture by Anish Kapoor and a photo by Inez van Lamsweerde.

The exhibition was accompanied by a booklet with the objects' information and context in it, following a numbered route (that was sometimes hard to follow due to the labyrinth formation). The choice was made that, even though sometimes an individual maker was known, the name of the producer was only mentioned left in bold typing when a 'modern artwork' was involved, seemingly taking 1950 as a marker (assigned with the letters 'MK' for 'moderne kunst'). For the other objects, they either start with

the material, followed by its origins (often a culture, followed by a country or region), and estimated age, or, if it is a Western painting it would be: name of the maker, dates of birth and death, material and then the dating. Even though this seems to create a clear difference between handling ‘art’ and ‘artifact’, I am still pleased to see that every object is accompanied by a context description, the ‘modern’ and ‘Western’ art included. This shared type of information gives balance to one’s view of the objects, in which the visual presentation also has tried not to favor one object to another.

So even though the choices and connections may sometimes have seemed somewhat random or superficial (as of a theme like ‘red’ could be expected), and the connections that were made were ahistorical, I was pleasantly surprised by the feeling of being ‘human’, as opposed to ‘Western’ or ‘female’ or ‘contemporary’: a human as part of this world in which people react to circumstances in different ways and show this through art and other visual stimuli. It is clear, that since the 1989 *Magiciens* exhibition a cry out for a method to present art objects of different backgrounds is still as loud as ever.

In *ROOD*, the Tropenmuseum exhibition of 2010-2011, an in my eyes successful ‘tertium comparationis’ for art from all cultures and times was finally there; a color that subdivided different themes of comparison of how different cultures over different times have expressed on the themes using the color red. For an exhibition I would like to curate, however, I would try to find a base even stronger. Are there any world art theories available today that could provide this basis? In the next paragraph I have made a selection from the World Art Studies volume that I have found most suitable on first sight. But after a critical reading, does one of them provide a truly usable framework for an exhibition?

### **3.2 Selection of world art theories as a base for a world art presentation**

In World Art Studies, there are three fundamental topics that ask for our attention when we start looking into possibilities of studying the visual arts across time and space.

First, the origins of art, meaning its appearance in human evolution, the when and how visual arts came into being, need to be studied.

Second, intercultural comparison comes into the picture. Once having come into being, the visual arts would develop an enormous variety of forms, embody a host of themes, and be used in a wide range of contexts, for various purposes and with var-

ious effects. The extensive examination of the numerous dimensions of visual artistic behavior in the world's many different cultures is of course a primary task of world art studies. Fortunately, it is a task to which art historians, anthropologists, archaeologists and other scholars have already made substantial contributions, which may have gone unnoticed because of a lack of an overarching global framework in the study of art. This absence of an integrative framework might also explain why so very few scholars have tried to subject cross-cultural data to systematic secondary analysis, or intercultural comparison. The idea of comparing art in various human contexts or settings worldwide is a theoretically complicated and contested issue. Its objectives may vary from highlighting cultural differences to analyzing regional patterns to establishing and accounting for universal commonalities in art and artistic behavior. Looking at art around the globe, crossing both various topics and times, not only leads to the discovery of spatio-temporal traditions, it also leads to the observation that the world's various artistic traditions have only rarely developed in complete isolation.

So third and last, artistic exchanges between cultures (mutual artistic crossfertilization) or between more or less discrete sociocultural contexts or settings, are a burning topic. This type of exchange has obviously boomed in recent years due to globalization, yet such exchanges have been occurring in one form or another for most of human history - Egyptian influences on ancient Greek art, Chinese influences on Japanese art from the sixth century onward, and the two-way interactions between African and European art in the twentieth century are but a few and relatively recent examples.

For each of these topics I have selected an author that in my view made an outstanding contribution to the field of research of world art studies and could possibly provide ideas or foundations for a world art presentation:

1. For the origins of art: Ellen Dissanayake's adaptationist 'artifying' or 'making special' theory
2. For intercultural comparison: Jean M. Borgatti (and Donald E. Brown's) intercultural comparison in portraiture
3. For exchange/Interculturalization/mutual artistic crossfertilization: John Onians's *Atlas of World Art*

### 3.2.1 Dissanayake's theory for art as an adaptation: 'artifying' as a common denominator

Many scholars of the twenty-first century supposedly wish to incorporate the works and worldviews of non-Western man in their field, but are held back by the 250 year old fight that Western humanities put up against Darwinism. According to Dissanayake an expansion of the our understanding of basic evolutionary history and psychology is long due, as is the comprehension of art being an integral and necessary (adaptive) part of a common human nature. This calls for a 'heliocentric' point of view instead of the 'geocentric' one that has been in use for so long. In her words: "[...] accepting that human bodies, brains and behavior (including making and exhibiting art) evolved to enable individual survival and reproduction ranging right back to our ancestral environments." (Zijlmans & Van Damme 2008, p. 242) Her theory sheds new light and possibilities on ways to address problems of why and how the human brain evolved in the field of art, for example on the way which we perceive, how it is we can recognize aesthetic objects or the existence of dualism in our cognitive and emotional response to art objects. Additionally, the adaptationist principle of the unity of species provides an underlying framework for problems of identity, authenticity, relativism, crisis of representation and consequences of globalization, enabling for us to discard or reframe the nineteenth and twentieth century theories of the likings of Marx, Freud, Jung and the structionalists.

The adaptationist view claims human action comes from evolved human nature. Accordingly, different circumstances produce different responses in different individuals, however, the same underlying psycho-biological needs remain. To defend her theory of art being an human adaption, Dissanayake first tries to prove this with the following facts:

1. Art is cross-cultural and present in all members of society;
2. Art can be traced back to our ancestral past;
3. Art's rudiments can be spotted in young children;
4. Art is like other adaptive behaviors like playing, mating, parenting or resting, a form of pleasure;
5. Art occurs at the passing of important life stages (ceremonies);

6. Art is costly (in time, effort and materials), thus must play an important role somehow.

The adaptationist view requires a functional explanation, but she warns this does not resemble the functionalist theories of for example Durkheim, Malinowski or Browne. The functionalists, mostly of an anthropological background, stated all parts of society are interrelated and that each individual behavior in a society would have an intrinsic function in that society. Adaptationists find these claims to be inflexible, hierarchical and determinist. Their belief is that behaviors are evolved predispositions, and therefore can be expressed in a variety of cultural and individual manifestations. A functional explanation for art can be sought in the ‘proximate’ reasons for behavior (instinct for decisions on good or bad for you) and ‘ultimate’ reasons, that result in selective values we use for survival and reproduction. So why do we engage with the arts? She mentions:

- to express our inner selves;
- to demonstrate devotion (for example to a deity);
- to earn a living;
- to assure a successful hunt;
- to please a client;
- to impress others;
- to while away time;
- for entertainment and pleasure.

But how do self-expression, wish fulfillment and projection of individuals contribute to our fitness? Or rephrased: How does or which function(s) of art contribute to our survival or reproductive success? Dissanayake then proposes four general adaptive hypotheses of art. She combined theories of different authors to come to these four (which, she admits, will have led to the loss of detail):

A Improving cognition: the arts contribute to problem solving and making better choices. This group of hypothesis contains:

- Darwinian/evolutionary aesthetics (explains our preference for symmetry in faces for example);
- Neurasthenics (neurologists of vision), show how evolved perpetual psychology underlies our appreciation of visual art (repetition allows us to acquire a deeper knowledge); and
- Cognitists (fictional stories help us prepare for dangerous situations as risk-free exercises).

B Propaganda: the arts are used to manipulate, deceive, indoctrinate or control other people;

C Sexual display: the arts promote mating opportunity through display of desirable qualities;

D Reinforcing society: the arts enhance cooperation and contribute to social cohesion and continuity.

She concludes that all are plausible in some instances, but that most of the arguments are inadequate. They are either too narrow (only refers to one type of art or one evolved capacity like visual perception) or vague, using the word 'art' imprecisely and mixing it with other concepts. The cognitive explanations for example treat art equivalent to beauty, but defining beauty a visual sensory adaptive development (because it is preferred and enjoyed) does not distinct art from any other pleasurable visual experience. In other words, one must still specify for which additional capacity art has been selected.

To find a common denominator of art, Dissanayake first presents a list of the Western orthodox notions of aesthetics and art:

- art is rare, elite, original, individual and costly;
- art is associated with beauty, skill, creativity, imagination, representational accuracy and self-exploration;
- art are autonomous objects or activities;
- only specialists/artist can make art (painting, carving, song, dance, literature).

However, most human societies do not have this Western concept of art as an artifact (a work or object), containing an essential attribute (beauty, skill, costliness, a preference, disinterested appreciation) or cue to something else (the presence of a deity, virtuosity and creativity which indicate good genes), or being a behavior (activity, making or displaying). The notions of artifact and cue are discarded by Dissanayake as they do not exclusively tell what is art and what not. Therefore humanist scholars today regard art as a socially constructed concept. Evolutionists on the other hand who consider art as a component of human nature, search for universal features that must somehow help selection. Dissanayake praises Denis Dutton, who has quite recently valiantly tried to formulate eight characteristics that apply to the practice of art across cultures and time: (Dutton 2000, pp. 217-238)

1. Giving pleasure in itself (self-reward);
2. Exhibiting special skill;
3. Made in recognizable style to formal rules,
4. (so it) can be judged and appreciated (critical evaluative language);
5. Representing or imitating real or imaginary experiences of the world;
6. Product of a conscious intent by a maker;
7. Set-off from ordinary life ('bracketing');
8. Serving an imaginative experience for maker and viewer.

She regrettably notes that many of the eight characteristics could also apply to non-art, and therefore cannot be used to explain why we specifically need art for our survival, as she is trying to. Only intrinsic pleasure and 'bracketing' seen more or less restricted to art or art-like activities.

### **Art as a behavior**

She continues by explaining how ethological or bio-behavioral studies focus on what individuals do or accomplish when they, for example, court, parent etcetera. Art too could be regarded as a behavior by describing what people do or accomplish when they make something art - when they 'artify'. Instead of focusing on the product or

outcoming of the ‘artifying’, the process or activity come into view. But what -if anything- do these activities accomplish or have in common? In earlier publications she called this common denominator ‘making special’. She claimed that in all instances of this behavior, in all times and places, ordinary experience (e.g., ordinary objects, movements, sounds, utterances, surroundings) are transformed and made extraordinary. The notion of ‘bracketing’ by Dutton is congruent. ‘Making special’ does not deny the functions of hypotheses-groups A, B and C, it strongly supports hypothesis D, that artification is important in reinforcing sociality. Unlike many of the hypotheses, the concept of ‘making special’ proposes answers to the proximate questions ‘when’ or ‘why’ as well as to the operational question of ‘what’ is art. It is ‘making special’, not beauty or display that explains the difference between a collection of decorated yams (or for example a ready-made by Marcel Duchamp) and a field of wildflowers (or a man’s toilet in his bathroom) or a headdress composed of colored feathers and the feathers on the bird itself; beauty, virtuosity, skill and costliness, like individual sensory stimuli or preferences, are ‘ingredients’ of the arts, that are used to make something special. The question of ‘why do we make art’ can be translated into the adaptive question ‘why did we start and continued to make things special or extraordinary’? It is the ‘making special’ - weirdness, strangeness, unusualness as well as beauty, costliness or excessiveness - that requires evolutionary explanation. To do this, we have to leave the fields of philosophy and art history and enter the realm of psychology. Dissanayake’s adaptationist hypothesis about the arts contains of three strands: origin, motivation and manifestation. In other words, where does our need for ‘making special’ come from or when did it start, why do we do it and at what are the occasions?

## Origin

Dissanayake suggests that the interactivity between parents and babies (bonding emotionally, learning motor functions, speech etcetera), which seems to be universal, and contains of formalization, exaggeration, repetition, elaboration and delayed expectancy, is part of a ‘behavioral reservoir’, from which early humans could draw when at a later point in evolution they began deliberately to ‘artify’. Notably, it is these same manipulations or operations that are used - intentionally and in varied ways - by artists in any medium when they ‘artify’.

## Motivation

Humans, more than animals, use wits rather than instincts to address the problems of their lives. Interrelated powers of memory, foresight and imagination gradually developed, and humans could remember or dwell upon good and bad things and imagine them happening again. One cost of this growing awareness of the desired possibilities and inevitable unpredictability of life was uncertainty, or even anxiety. Arts in small-scale societies are often connected to ritual ceremonies that are about biologically important things that assure or restore subsistence, safety, fertility, health, prosperity, and victory or successful dealing with body changes and social acceptance of sexual maturity, pregnancy, birth and death. Dissanayake suggests that uncertainty - leading to emotional investment or 'caring about' - was the original motivating impetus for the human invention of religion and its behavioral expression, the 'making special' (to regulate, maintain and transmit sentiments on which the continuity of the society depends). As an adaptationist she views various components that are considered culture (for example religion, art) as outgrowths of evolved psycho-biological predispositions. In uncertain circumstances that did not call for immediate pragmatic action (fight, flee, freeze responses), our early human ancestors would at some point have found that performing repetitious, simplified or stereotyped, exaggerated sounds and movements felt comforting and ultimately eased tension - particularly when performed in a coordinated fashion among members of a group. Hereby she adds a fifth hypothesis - stress reduction - to the former four: the temporal arts help individuals psychologically to cope with uncertainty. It would not be the only function of the arts, but an addition to the total understanding.

## Manifestation

As mentioned before, especially in small-scale societies, ritual ceremonies seem to give a primary context for 'artifications'. In ceremonies, the arts attract attention, sustain interest, coordinate group effort, and provide emotional excitement and satisfaction, plausibly implying that the arts arose in human evolution as adjuncts to ceremonial behavior rather than as independently evolved activities. The arts in 'rites' engage and shape emotion, thereby stimulating memory of historical and subsistence information in a non-literate society where everything must be remembered (a cognitive hypothesis).<sup>38</sup> Through aesthetic operations, ceremonial practices create and reinforce emotionally satisfying and reassuring feelings of belonging to a group (the reinforcing society hypothesis). Further, they provide individuals with emotional force presenting

explanations of how the world came to be as it is and what is required to maintain it (JH: stress-relief hypothesis). All these effects contribute to psycho-biological steadiness and thus to individuals' survival and reproductive success (fitness). Beauty, skill and high cost are indicators (to higher powers, to others, to one's group, and to oneself) the supreme importance of the artifact or occasion.

### **Implications of a 'humanity-centered' or adaptationist model of the arts**

'Making special' shifts the subject of study from art as an object or product, essence, cue, opinion, label, preference, or experience, to what people do or accomplish (the operation of 'making special') and it reframes aesthetics to the larger matter of when and why people do it. Studies of the arts of an individual or society can be recast within this framework and then compared with similar what, when and why questions of another individual or society. The ways that different groups artify the various values themselves (e.g. subsistence, safety, prosperity, health, social harmony, social role, status) can also be a relevant basis for comparative studies. Similarly, the study of meaning (symbols and language) can be enriched with adaptationist understanding of why humans evolved to have and use these capacities and when and why (not just how) meanings are so often artified. Because humans generally artify biologically and psychologically important things, artifications are a useful index to the values of a group or individual and an additional way of identifying those values. Dissanayake concludes her essay with the following, warning for the 'art for art's sake' vision: "Finally, an understanding that 'making special' is inherent in all societies and individuals compels awareness that the subject of art is of particular and commanding interest and consequence within humanistic studies and to human life itself. The current postulate that art has no biological or functional importance has real-world implications outside academic theory. It echoes the traditional Western elitist assumption of 'art for art's sake' and contributes to the broader cultural atmosphere that increasingly reduces support of art programs in schools and communities." (Zijlmans & Van Damme 2008, p. 260)

## My critique

According to Dissanayake what sets an object apart from an art object is that it is 'artified', 'made special', set apart from normal life (or 'bracketed'). The *tertium comparationis* is studying its 'operation': the when and why people do it, apart from what it is. Stress-relief by removing uncertainty and stimulating social bonding are expected to be the main motivators and bio-evolutionary causes for us to have art in our lives (as a tool of survival). As means we have a common 'behavior reservoir' to our disposal with formalization, exaggeration, repetition, elaboration and delayed expectancy ever reappearing in our 'artified' products. Still the boundaries for this theory to function as a base for a world art presentation seem very vague and broad. It is still a big step to apply the theory to for example Western modern and contemporary art or Global or Glocal Art. It would take at least another PhD research in my estimation to translate Dissanayake's ideas to a tangible theory for a world art presentation in which well-founded relations can be made between art products of all times and origins.

Where Dissanayake stays very broad, Jean M. Borgatti luckily zooms in on the concept of portraiture, which provides more tangible means to start constructing a presentation.

### 3.2.2 Borgatti's Constructed Identities: Portraiture in World Art

Jean M. Borgatti begins her essay with a description of portraiture: the indexing of a particular personality through material objects. Whether representational or conceptual, for personal, political, ritual or social reasons, portraiture springs from a common impulse to remember and be remembered. Rephrased: it is a 'weapon against oblivion'. How identity is constructed and presence evoked differs from culture to culture, but three general categories of image emerge from a survey across many cultures and time periods:

1. Generic human representation, made correct by attributions of wealth, status, physical resemblance (most widespread method of portrayal);
2. Symbolic or emblematic images, made correct by associational characteristics, for example site, clothing or literary convention;
3. Representational mimesis, based on likeness, the result of a confrontation between artist and subject (or some facsimile).

Borgatti stresses that these three categories of image are not mutually exclusive.

The 'lens' of physiognomic likeness has 'tricked' Westerners into thinking that this type of portraiture will always portray a 'true' picture. For example Chinese Ming dynasty ancestral portraits, Roman and Yoruba (12th century Nigerian) heads are easily accepted in the Westerners' eye. However these portraits are more likely to be stereotypes or conventions, and not necessarily based on the subject's actual face ('prefabricated likeness'). To establish common ground across cultures within this genre depends first on differentiating between realism as a mode of depiction, that is, a artistic convention, and description as an aspect of portraiture, and second, on recognizing the evocative quality of the work for its intended audience, however that is achieved.

Western culture emphasizes individual identity, incorporating the idea that personality is communicated through idiosyncratic facial features and expression (even if there is no available documentation or artist-subject contact), but most of the rest of the world emphasizes social identity, which calls for conventions to convey a personal identity. For example, in the Japanese tradition, although many sketches would be made of an important individual, the actual portrait would show perfected forms and features reflecting that he or she was worthy of the portrait. In Africa the generalized aesthetic is one that stresses ideals of expression and comportment. There are many fewer studies of portraiture in the so-called non-Western world (in English) and fewer still of portraiture from what are frequently termed preliterate societies. This raises important questions about the nature of portraiture, especially about how the portrayal is achieved, providing a view alternative to that of the self-centered historical discourse of the West. A single portrait can lead to different interpretations across societal frameworks: it is in the eye of the beholder.

### Cross-cultural analogues

In the art of the West photography has played an important role in stepping away from the conviction that a personal identity should only be constructed by a literal physical description, becoming more and more ‘indexal’, whereas it has had the opposite effect in many non-Western cultures (becoming more ‘iconic’. Modern and postmodern portraits now demand an effort on the part of the viewer to recognize the subject or acquire the knowledge that enables him to do so, for example Brancusi’s 1913 portrait of Mademoiselle Pogany and Christian Boltanski’s depiction of clothes of Holocaust children (see figure 3.2).

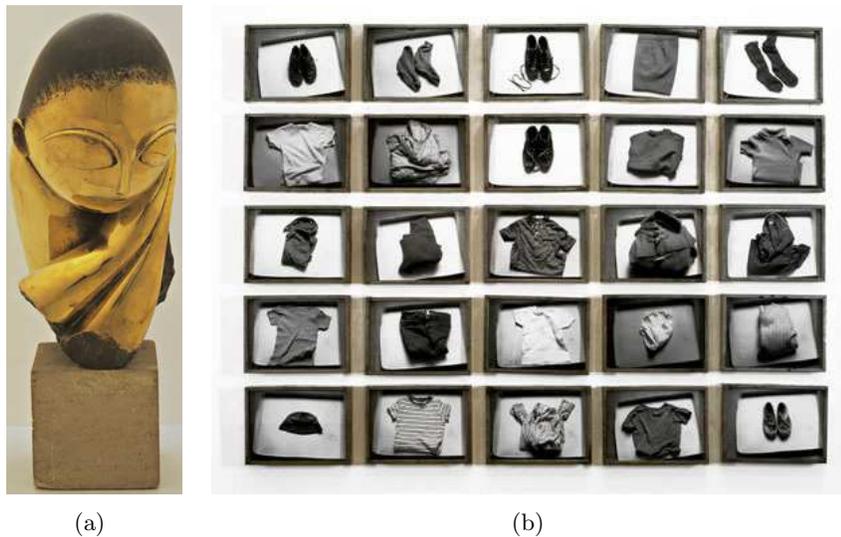


Figure 3.2: Mlle Pogany Constantin Brancusi. Version I, 1913 (after a marble of 1912). Bronze with black patina (43.8 x 21.5 x 31.7 cm), on limestone base (14.6 x 15.6 x 18.7 cm). MoMA, New York. [www.moma.org/collection/](http://www.moma.org/collection/)

Similarity is gone, contiguity is proposed as the new mode, which is of course a mode of portraiture that has long existed in non-Western cultures. Several cross-cultural analogues can be made:

A) Reliance upon literary reference and indirection, for example:

- *Fon appliqué* portraits draw upon the imagery of a proverb to suggest a name and character (discussed in Borgatti, Jean, 'African Portraits', *Likeness and beyond: Portraits in Africa and the world*, Jean Borgatti and Richard Brilliant, New York: The Center for African Art, 1990, pp.69-70) See figure 3.3(a) for another example.
- Chinese commemorative portraits have characters on it to spell out the patrons *hao or praise name* (*T'ang Yin (1470-1524), Dreaming of Immortality in a thatched hut* (the Meng-hsien Pavilion), Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. - Master Wang's praisename is shown on the left side of the scroll asleep and dreaming in his study with an immortal appearing to him, pictured on the right). See figure 3.3(b)
- Charles Demuth's *I saw the Figure 5 in Gold*, a symbolic portrait of William Carlos Williams, referring to his poetry. See figure 3.3(c)
- Marsden Hartley's *One Portrait of One Woman of Gertrude Stein*. See figure 3.3(d)

B) Evoke a personality through an assemblage of memorabilia or the clustering of artifacts, for example:

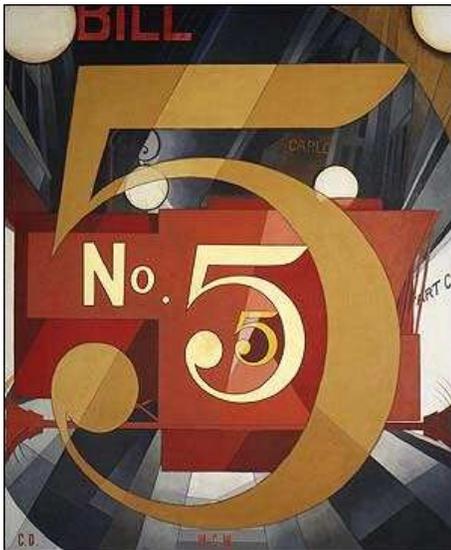
- Eleanor Antin's *Eight New York Women*, in which she constructs a portrait of Margaret Mead with a director's chair, thermos flask, umbrella and binoculars, see figure 3.4(a)
- Armand Arman's portrait of Andy Warhol, see figure 3.4(b)
- Katherine Dreier's portrait of Marcel Duchamp, see figure 3.4(c)
- Tracy Emin's selfportrait *Everyone I Have Ever Slept with 1963-1995*, see figure 3.4(d)



(a) Twelve Kings of Dahomey, Royal Dynasty Banner. Fon people, Benin, 1997, Fabric applique, 89 x 124.5 cm. www.indigoarts.com, 5-3-2011



(b) T'ang Yin, *Dreaming of an immortal* (Meng-hsien Pavilion). Source: Clapp, Ann, *The painting of T'ang Yin*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991, Plate 6



(c) Charles Demuth, *I saw the Figure 5 in Gold* (1928), oil on composition board, 90.2 x 76.2 cm, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art. www.metmuseum.org, 7-8-2011



(d) Marsden Hartley, *One Portrait of One Woman*, c. 1916, oil on fiberboard, 76.2 x 63.5 cm, Collection Frederick R. Weisman, Art Museum at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. www.fineart-china.com, 5-3-2011

Figure 3.3: Reliance upon literary reference



(a) Eleanor Antin, *Portraits of Eight New York Women*, installation, 1970, [www.feldmangallery.com](http://www.feldmangallery.com), 5-4-2011



(b) Armand Arman, *Portrait of Warhol*, mixed media on board, 188 x 91.4 cm, the estate of Andy Warhol, Crozier Fine Arts Inc., New York, 1987 [www.clarku.edu](http://www.clarku.edu), 5-4-2011



(c) Katherine S. Dreier, *Abstract Portrait of Marcel Duchamp*, oil on canvas, 145.7 x 81.3 cm, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Fund, 1918 [www.toutfait.com](http://www.toutfait.com), 5-4-2011



(d) Tracey Emin, *Everyone I Have Ever Slept with 1963-1995*, installation, 1995 (also known as "The Tent") <http://en.wikipedia.org>, 5-4-2011

Figure 3.4: Evocation of a personality through memorabilia

C) Emphasis on name and personal artifact, for example:

- African modes of portraiture, the 'dead mothers' of the Nigerian Edo group Okpella (a white-faced mask, used in an annual festival)
- person evoked by usage of their actual clothing
- including the last used goods of the deceased along with his or her image (siting it appropriately)
- relics of the body of the deceased in a large cavity in the picture (Japanese devotional portraits of Buddhist monks)
- visual references to the profession or métier of the subject (for example, Ghanaian caskets, see figure 3.5 )



Figure 3.5: Emphasis on name and personal artifact: a death casket from the West African nation of Ghana to reflect a person's trade or interest. Source: <http://quigleyscabinet.blogspot.com>, 13-04-2011

### Functions of the portrait

As functions of portraiture, Borgatti distinguishes:

- Ancestral portraits serve to validate position cross-culturally, an aspect of reinforcing political authority, demonstrating chiefly status and social hierarchy, legitimate dynasty (for example in China), but can also function as intermediaries.

- Providing a visual genealogical record, especially in non-literal societies: works of history as well as art
- Genealogical reference points and as public statements (monuments).
- Royal portraits, emblematic or representational, recall not only specific monarchs and their achievements, but also principles of governance -i they provide models of ideal behavior and comportment.

### **Icon and index: changing interpretations**

A portrait is in the eye of the beholder. That non-Western portraiture has suffered from lack of recognition is part of a larger problem of cross-cultural misunderstanding. Because of the equation between likeness and image that stands at the forefront of Western attitudes about portraiture (iconic representations that refer to their subjects mimetically to make them present), ‘we’ often failed to recognize images from other cultures as identified with particular people (indexal works that evoke presence of an individual through referential means), and dismissed them as portraits (especially in non-literate societies where no name was added). We should however realize that numerous studies of Western portraiture also reveal many changes in the nature of ‘our’ portraiture: the plastic realism of Rome gave way to the stylization and symbolism of Byzantine and Early Christian mosaics and artistic convention through background, costume, posture, and expression can be detected in any particular period or location in Europe. When during the Renaissance the reconciliation of inner life and outer appearance became important and nineteenth century Romanticism fueled the idea of a personality, portraiture shifted from indexal to more iconic, mimetic pictures. (Donald E. Brown tries to explain these changes with his theory on portraiture as a social stratification, see the next paragraph.)

Interestingly, the introduction of photography had the consequence of moving portraits to a more representational program in many non-Western cultures and to a less representational one in the West. For example, memorial portraits of twins in the Yoruba society of Nigeria (*ibeji*) used to be standardized but gender specific wooden carved figurines given the dead twin’s names, but are now often replaced by photographs of the deceased twin(s) in rituals. (Zijlmans & Van Damme 2008, p. 306) In early twentieth century Europe Picasso’s cubist portraits could only be attributed to a person because of attributes; the referential became a strategy to evoke individual

identity, replacing the mimetic in some portraits. Contiguity is proposed as the new mode, something that has long existed in non-Western cultures.

When the last knowledge of an ‘indexal’ portrait gets lost, the portrait has become an object, increasingly decontextualized over time. Changing interpretations of images find their way into art historical studies. She concludes: “Just as much non-Western sculpture was not recognized as art until the forms were appropriated by Western artists, many non-Western portraits have been unrecognized and unappreciated. It is not without irony that a principle long established in many parts of the world underlies the new paradigm forming for Western portraiture - that the power of the image depends upon it being unseen.” (Zijlmans & Van Damme 2008, p. 322)

## My critique

Borgatti’s more tangible theory of portraiture (providing a clear definition of the term) as a *tertium comparationis* for intercultural comparison seems to provide a strong base for a smaller scale world art presentation within a museum department or as a temporal exhibition. Her three typologies of generic, emblematic, and representational portraits would even enable a curator to make cross-cultural analogues between historic non-Western art objects and contemporary non-Western, Western or maybe preferably labeled ‘Global Art’.

### 3.2.3 Donald E. Brown’s ‘Portraiture and Social Stratification’

In his essay ‘Portraiture and Social Stratification’ he aims to offer an explanation for why some peoples who surely did possess the relevant skills - such as the ancient Egyptians over many centuries - do not seem to have shown much interest in the realistic representation of distinct individuals. (Zijlmans & Van Damme 2008, pp. 325-342) He argues that part of the explanation for the absence or presence of realistic portraiture in premodern societies lies in the alternative patterns of the social stratification: where it was hereditary closed, as in caste-organized societies, realistic portraiture was inhibited; where the social strata were open to social climbing and descent, as in most if not all modern societies, realistic portraiture could flourish. The main body of his essay is filled with cases that support his argument, comparing portraiture in cultures both between each other and chronologically within themselves. It appears that caste is a ‘sufficient’ condition to suppress realistic portraiture (in the pre modern world),

it is not alone in this. Other conditions - such as the Muslim ban on images - may also suppress realistic portraiture. He deduces that although open stratification may be 'necessary' condition for the emergence of realistic portraiture, it is not in itself a sufficient condition. He lists the traits of open versus closed stratifications as follows:

- members are considered to be a single species of humanity versus a graded series of race-like castes;
- individualism versus caste stereotyping;
- scope for humanistic secularism versus hypertrophied ritual and supernatural concerns;
- more versus less scope for science;
- historical minded versus mythical minded;
- biography versus hagiography;
- realistic portraiture versus iconography.

While the traits in each of these clusters interrelate in various ways, Brown considers the contrasting conceptions of humanity or human nature (the first cluster) to have the most important connection to portraiture. In caste ideology, character is determined by line of descent. Individuals of course do differ from each other, but not in the way and for the reasons that caste ideology posits. Maintenance of the caste ideology relies on representations of the myths, not of reality. As accurate representations of individuals - whether written or visual - would expose the ideology as false, instead iconography is used. In the openly-stratified society the concern is not how to justify inherited and unchangeable inequalities but rather is to confront the problem of the social placement, fate, and effect of the individual where social inequalities are substantial but birth is not perceived as deciding who will be placed high and who low. Confronting this problem provides a rationale for keeping account of individual actions in concrete circumstances (history and biography), and thereby promotes a focus on the individuals who make history: who they were, what they did, and what they were like. That is the context in which realistic portraiture of particular individuals finds a rationale.

## My critique

My criticism of Brown's comparisons of the types of portraiture and the links he makes to the two types of society, is that they are not only very generic, but also, after reading Borgatti's critique of what types of portraiture are from our Western perspective more accepted (our preferred representational mimesis), to me he also seems to have a more positive evaluation of the realistic portraiture of the 'open stratification' type society. The separation of the two just does not add up when, for example, we want to label contemporary art works that are made within a (now) 'open(ed) stratification' society due to globalization. This makes his theory not usable for my idea of a world art presentation, as I intend to include contemporary art works.

### 3.2.4 Onians' *Atlas of World Art*

With the publication in 2004 of the *Atlas of World Art*, Onians has undertaken the gargantuan task of organizing the global range of artistic expression from 40,000 B.C. to the present, (Onians 2004). "Archaeologists are experts in the earliest art, anthropologists in the art of modern pre-literate peoples, and art historians in the art of literate peoples," art historian Onians says in his introduction, and as such, the study of art history has up till now been correspondingly divided, preventing "the study of art as a worldwide phenomenon" and inhibiting "the study of the nature and origins of human artistic behavior." The *Atlas of World Art* maps the cumulative traces of humankind's artistic activity and demonstrates the importance of physical and political geography for the history of the world's art. Accompanying text provides plenty of detail on how the art of particular geographical regions or cultural groups changed with economic, ecological and political situations. The idea that the natural materials available can limit a culture's art, or how the rise of hierarchies within societies leads to for example more extravagant projects (a tendency that becomes depressingly and obviously repetitive), can sometimes function as an eye-opener. The atlas is divided into seven parts, each devoted to a specific time period: Art of the Hunter Gatherer (50,000-5,000 B.C.); Art, Agriculture and Urbanization (5,000-500 B.C.); Art, War and Empire (500 B.C.-600 A.D.); Art, Religion and Empire (600-1500); Art, Exploitation and Display (1500-1800); Art, Industry and Science (1800-1900); and Art, Competition and Identity (1900-2000). Within each section, the spreads are organized by four broad geographic regions: the Americas, Europe, Africa, and Asia and the Pacific, which are further partitioned into entries about a region or country during a shorter unit of time. Each section opens with a time line for that period bringing together

important dates from across various cultures.

### My critique

In the introduction Onions already describes the challenges of his approach, particularly the ‘inherent unevenness’ that results from limited knowledge when art was made of ‘impermanent materials’ in ‘hostile’ climates. Thus, for example, North and Sub-Saharan Africa are each afforded only two pages for the period A.D. 1500 to 1800, but Italy receives four. Due to the constraints of the single-volume format, the information is idiosyncratic and superficial. A further critical review by Larry Silver in *The Art Bulletin* of December 2004 is added as an appendix.<sup>39</sup> If one dream of the possibility of building a world art museum specially designed according to Onians’ construction, I would think of seven floors for each epoch (basement for BC, top floor for the 2000s), with a central hall to introduce each epoch (with the maps a illustrations), leading into the four geographical divisions (an equal cross-shaped plan). The obvious problem is this fictional museum would probably crumble under the problems the textbook had: an unevenness in collection and superficiality or randomness due to the restricted number of objects one can display. Despite all of the impossibilities of Onians’ approach, I would still applaud an attempt to put a world art museum together like this: it actually mixes the way in which ethnographic museums traditionally departmentalize, namely geographically (with often a lack of historical development), with the way art and cultural-historical museums often do, namely in epochs (with a lack of intercultural comparison). Is it truly mere utopia or could it be a near future?

### 3.3 Proposal for a world art presentation

Reviewing the possibilities the selected theories from the field of World Art Studies in paragraph 3.2 offer, there is really only one in my eyes that, at its current stage, can directly be applied to a world art presentation, and that is Borgatti’s cross-cultural typology of portraiture. Where the visions of Dissanayake (art as a behavior) and Onions (presenting four parts of the world through seven epochs) could be applied to rearrange the current collections of existing museums, or even to a specially built new World Art Museum, they first need more research and elaboration to come into practice. Borgatti already showed that with her theory cross-cultural analogues, even for contemporary art, are currently possible, showing a range of practical examples. (Zijlmans & Van Damme 2008, p. ) The title of her essay *Constructed Identities:*

*Portraiture in World Art* makes for a good working title for the exhibition. Of course, one could also think of a shorter title like *Facing World Art* or a more commercial one as for example *Face/Off*, that plays with the notion of confrontation and revealing beyond the visually obvious.

## Location

To relate back to my questions as I was wandering along the canals of Leiden and passing by several different types of museum in just this one town, I would like to try and propose a realistic world art presentation, fitted to a municipality that separately houses at least an ethnographic collection, a historical art collection, and a modern and contemporary art collection. In the Netherlands, Rotterdam and Amsterdam would, for example, be clear candidates. (Rotterdam: Wereldmuseum, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, and the Historisch Museum Rotterdam; Amsterdam: Tropenmuseum, Rijksmuseum, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdams Historisch Museum) In Germany, my current residency the city of Stuttgart also houses three types of collections in separated locations, namely the Linden-Museum (ethnographic collection), the Staatsgalerie (historic and modern art collection), and the Kunstmuseum (modern and contemporary art collection).

As I would like to stress with this exhibition that it transcends the current (separation of collections in) different institutions, I would prefer a ‘third party’ to house the exhibition. Of course the necessary conditions of climatization, lighting, etcetera, unfortunately prohibit one from choosing a location that is not properly equipped. It would be interesting to use a space that was not originally designed to exhibit art objects, like a subway station or a shopping mall: places where through images (also through visual media like commercial posters) and our own visual experiences we construct identities continuously. An ‘unexpected’ location would also break the notion of the ‘white cube’-temple, immediately turning every object within into art, versus the exotizing of ‘the other’ in very contextualized surroundings (like that if the traditional ethnographic presentation in the Linden-Museum), automatically turning objects into artifacts.

As the use of these locations is however virtually impossible, I would choose a location that has both historic (contextual) features and the possibility of transforming into a specifically designed inner architecture: the im Kunstgebäude in Stuttgart, centrally located at the Schlossplatz, with a maximum of 2000 m<sup>2</sup> floor space available. This also happens to be the choice of the in September opening intercultural exhibition

*Weltsichten* by the Linden-Museum. Apart from one thematic room on aesthetics, in an interview with director Ines de Castro she reveals a substantial amount of *Inszenierung*, or contextual staging for the other parts of the presentation. (see Appendix F) I am eager to visit the show and experience how their use of the room influences the works, and take my evaluation with me for my own idea of a world art presentation.

### **Design and information: balance between form and context**

Taking into account the outcome of my evaluations of the exhibitions in the Netherlands of the last three years in paragraph 3.1, I will choose to transform the inner ‘white cube’ of the Kunstgebäude with a specially designed inner architecture that will enable a thematic presentation of portraiture. Important is that each object is treated with the same regard: lighting, positioning, and available space should not create differences of valuation. Partly following the themes Jean Borgatti addresses in her essay, a choice for the themes of the exhibition could be:

- Introduction: the construction of identity (explaining a.o. the three categories of image: generic, emblematic and representational mimetic portrayal)
- The lens of likeness (about the Wests interpretation and preference of physiognomic likeness)
- A portrait is in the eye of the beholder (about how cultural frameworks can cause different interpretations)
- Icon and index: cross-cultural analogues (showing how portraits of different origins and ages meet within the emblematic category of image)
- The power of the image (about functions of portraiture)

Together with a designer and interior architect choices for a route, coloring and other means of presentation can be decided. Refraining from the use of digital media (other than when it concerns the artwork itself) or text shields, and thereby safeguarding ‘equality’ in the amount of context, the information provided will consist of a DIN-A5 booklet, resembling the idea of the one accompanying the exhibition *ROOD* held in the Tropenmuseum in 2010-2011. Through matching numbers on a floor plan the visitor can find written information on the presented objects, with object information on the left side of the page, joined on the right by contextual background

with every object on show revealing its function and meaning (and also how interpretations may vary between viewers from different backgrounds). Contrary to the *ROOD*-booklet, I would with object information however not make a difference between ‘modern artworks’ and other, but always start the description with mentioning a maker (anonymous or not) and an object name. The latter can then also illuminate how non-Western portraits often do represent individuals even though we cannot recognize them.

### **Selection of works: intercultural comparison**

The selection for the exhibition contains works from the collections of the Linden-Museum, the Staatsgalerie, and the Kunstmuseum in Stuttgart, and if necessary complemented by loans if essential objects to a theme are not available. Curators from the different museums would assist in finding portraits that represent the three categories of image. Together with the themes the categories facilitate intercultural comparison. The total amount of works I would estimate between about a hundred (thus a minimum of twenty per theme) and four hundred (the approximate amount that will be on show for the *Weltsichten* exhibition).

To make a fictive selection, without full access to the collection databases and knowledge of the curators, I only have the selected digital online databases of the Linden-Museum (small selection) and the Staatsgalerie (search database) at my disposal. Unfortunately the Kunstmuseum does not provide a collection database online, and only shows a few top pieces. Their most current (paper) collection catalog, edited by Marion Ackermann, dates back to 2005, and obviously does not contain the currently acquired works. With these limited sources available to me, I will try to give a first idea of how to the proposed themes could ‘take shape. This selection with pictures and descriptions of the works is added as Appendix G to this thesis. Per theme, an accompanying text would frame the intercultural comparison:

#### **1. Introduction: the construction of identity**

How identity is constructed and presence evoked differs from culture to culture. But through all times it is subject to concepts of individualism, a prevailing aesthetic, and a host of social or ritual beliefs particular to a given time or space. However, three general categories of image emerge when we survey portraiture across many cultures and time periods: generic, emblematic and representational mimetic portrayal.

The most widespread method of portrayal is by means of a generic human representation, made ‘correct (individualized) by its attributes of for example wealth and status, without necessarily bearing physical resemblance to the subject.

Many cultures also use symbolic or emblematic images to evoke an individual. Various associational characteristics as site, clothing and literary conventions can point out when a person is portrayed even though no human representation is directly involved. For example, visual reference to the subjects name in acronym or proverbial form, is a common way to do this through all times and ages, not in the least today.

The third category is portraiture based on likeness, a mimetic or representational portrayal. These portraits are the result of a confrontation between artist and the subject (or some facsimile in the case of posthumous portraits).

As this exhibition will show, these three categories are far from mutually exclusive. Our different social networks and societal frameworks cause us for example to interpret portraits as a general one where the original maker intended a mimetic one, or the other way around. Some emblematic portraits may never be recognized if the knowledge to decipher its ‘code’ or ‘index’ is not available to the viewer. The exhibition will expose preconceptions that often determine our value judgments, and reveal how portraiture can be interculturally compared and connected through all times and places, up to our globalized world of today.

## **2. The lens of likeness**

Physiognomic likeness is historically the most favored strategy of portrayal in Western art. This ‘lens actually refracts all views of portraiture as a subject in Western discourse. A lifelike portrait to us is so persuasive that we easily accept that a general image cannot be specific, but that a representational one must be. Our eyes convince us, even though there may be evidence to the contrary. Where the painstaking realism of faces of Chinese ancestor portraits or a bust of a Roman emperor or a Yoruba twelfth-century head for example makes us accept them as physical descriptions of real people, we now know that they are not necessarily based on the subjects actual face. Most of the time ideals, and the conventions to communicate them, are in play.

## **3. A portrait is in the eye of the beholder**

Where we have little difficulty believing that mimetic portraits present real people, we have a much harder time thinking of for example the highly stylized

Yoruba commemorative images for dead twins (known as *ere ibeji*) as portrayals of individuals, despite good documentation that they are (given names and today reinforced by photographic portraits). In Africa identity is often formed through a socially preferred generalizing aesthetic with distinctive conventions for constructing and conveying personal identity (hair style, body markings, symmetry and smoothness of the face, expression). For precise identification, naming is also used as a strategy (also for placing a person socially and giving him historical reality). In Egypt for example, the power of an inscribed name was such, that the identity conferred by name on a pharaonic image could be altered just by changing the name. In modern and contemporary art generic images can often only be recognized by signals in surroundings, attributes or by naming. Here, the 'lens of likeness' is also reflected, as still many members of the public have a hard time accepting this type of portraiture.

#### 4. **Icon and index: cross-cultural analogues**

The introduction of photography has had the interesting effect of moving portraits to a more representational program in many non-Western cultures (sometimes even used as substitute) and to a less representational one in the West. By the late twentieth century, the combination of likeness and revelation that characterized the flowering of Western portraiture had split into discrete phenomena glossed by the terms 'icon and 'index. Iconic representations refer mimetically to their subject, indexal works do not claim but evoke presence through referential means, as has been the case with much world portraiture historically. Therefore, the latter category of portraiture, creates a conceptual and cross-cultural bond across several traditions. The use of literary reference and indirection, assemblage of memorabilia (reference to a profession), or adding a name or personal artifact (clothing, relics from the body) can pave the way for intercultural comparison and make for surprising analogues.

#### 5. **The power of the image**

Indeed, numerous studies of Western portraiture discuss the changing nature of the personal image from the plastic realism of Rome to the stylization and symbolism of Byzantine to early Christian art, which most of all represented the Platonist idea of 'truth: an ideal, extrasensory reality. Up to the Renaissance, all European portraits seem to reveal a reliance on artistic convention in the rendering of background, costume, posture, physiognomy and expression to create an image that fulfills the expectation of the patron. To court circles of of sixteenth

century Europe one of the chief functions of art was to serve as a weapon against oblivion. Memory asks for a portrait to replicate, which can be achieved in several ways as we now know. But besides being reminded of a person, a portrayal can have several additional functions.

For example, ancestral portraits can serve to validate a persons position cross-culturally, can reinforce political authority, demonstrate chiefly status and social hierarchy, or even legitimize an entire dynasty (for example in China). A portrait can provide a visual genealogical record, especially in non-literal societies, thereby becoming a tool of history as well as art. Portraits can surpass their function of reproducer and as an indicator even become a way to transact or negotiate with (persons from) another world. Royal portraits, emblematic or representational, recall not only specific monarchs and their achievements, but also principles of governance and provide models of ideal behavior and comportment.



# Conclusions

“How can it be that in our age, in our time of globalization and freedom of information, there is still no place where the art of the world can be enjoyed in an interconnected way? Why is it that the arts of the world are often still separately presented in (non-Western) ethnographic museums and (Western) art museums? Is there no way to show art and its history in a global view, without a chosen ‘center’?” These were the questions that played my mind when I started writing this thesis.

To try and answer them, first of all I had to analyze how the institutions in the Netherlands were reacting to the questions of globalization and the post-colonial era. It was actually the ethnographic museums that had first raised the topic at a conference during the 1980s - spurred on by the question of how to handle contemporary non-Western art. Pressured by society and politics to reflect on their mere existence and mission, and confronted with the changing view of cultural artifacts turned non-Western art objects, they sought out the help and opinions of their colleagues of the art and cultural history museums. Even though their intentions were good, the discussion quickly faded until in 2009 the debate course *Framer Framed* resparked the communication between the different museums in the Netherlands. This time representatives from both art museums and the other types initiated the platform together, including not just specialists from the institutional world, but also from the academic world. As of now the results are that the institutions, with the art museums in particular, waive the idea of clearly appointing a group, type or specific museum to the task of collecting and/or presenting contemporary non-Western art. No exclusive manner of how to deal with presentation was decided upon: the balance between form and context and style of presentation remains a decision that is up to the curator. Involving curators from the culture of origin has been found to be a way to handle (redirecting) Western perspective and the occasionally occurring lack of knowledge. Concerning the latter,

a great appeal was made to the academia to pay increased attention to studying and researching art as a global phenomenon, thereby raising the interest for the problem amongst the future generation of art historians and theoreticians. First and foremost however, self-reflection was pointed out to be most urgent; each museum for itself has to decide on their mission and how new acquired artworks - including contemporary non-Western art - would fit into their collection (policy and history). Proposals for cooperation by exchanging knowledge, loans, and combining forces to acquire works were accepted quite naturally but still have to gain momentum, mainly between the different types of museums. This of course all means that no big steps have been taken yet, if my dream were to find the art of the world interculturally presented under one roof.

However, prior to turning such a dream into reality, a theoretical framework would have to be provided to enable a curator to create such a presentation. A relatively new field of research in the wake of the so-called New Art Histories that could do just that is World Art Studies. With its roots in early twentieth-century German scholarship, World Art Studies aspires to study art as a worldwide phenomenon and invites different disciplines and theories to contribute. The 2008 publication of my former professors at Leiden University, Kitty Zijlmans and Wilfried van Damme, *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches*, presented me with the latest ideas coming from a range of highly regarded specialists in the field.

Two of the articles in there inspired me in particular: Ellen Dissanayake's hypothesis on regarding art as a behavior - or as 'artifying' or 'making special' - in her own words, and Jean M. Borgatti's categorization of three types of portrayal. Together with John Onians' *Atlas of World Art* that maps out the effects of geographical influences on the four parts of the world through seven epochs, I reviewed them on their potential of providing a strong theoretical base for a world art presentation. I concluded that Dissanayake's and Onians' theories, even though they could form the basis for a future world art presentation on an institutional scale, needed more research to prepare them for practical use. A PhD-research lies ahead for someone in the future.

Jean M. Borgatti's categorization of portraits from all times and cultures proved adequate for me to create a practical world art presentation proposal at this moment. Following some of the ideas of previous Dutch exhibitions such as *ROOD* in the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, that have recently made first steps in intercultural comparative presentation, I suggested first outlines for a thematic exhibition with a selected list of works from three types of museum from my current residency Stuttgart. The proposal can essentially function as a blueprint for alternative places that have

multiple collections at their disposal.

For all the complexity and width of the subject, and the risks of comprehensiveness that have come with it, I still hope to have inspired the reader to even more intensely pursue the exploration of the possibilities for truly uniting the world's art. This thesis for me has provided a first step in creating a world art presentation that I someday hope to have the privilege to curate.

As I am now living in Germany, I intend to pay close attention to how the German-speaking institutions (with their heritage of *Kunstwissenschaft*) address the subject. Interestingly, ethnographic museums here already restructuring their permanent collections into thematic ones or are experimenting with parts of their set-up or with temporal exhibitions. Shortly upcoming, the research project *Global Art and the Museum* of Hans Belting in the ZKM in Karlsruhe, will present its achieved results in an exhibition. And keeping in touch with my Dutch roots I will actively continue following the debate course *Framer Framed* online, with its international agenda that keeps those who take an interest informed on important conferences and other events. I myself have truly become part of a globalized (art) world!

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I will be using a working definition of art that was developed by visual anthropologist Howard Morphy in 1994 and described in *The Anthropology of art*: Art objects are ones with aesthetic and/or semantic attributes (but in most cases both), that are used for representational or presentational purposes. (Morphy & Perkins 2006, p.12) This definition is not intended to be exclusive; rather it indicates that art making is a particular kind of human activity that involves both the creativity of the producer (the artist) and the capacity of others to respond to and use art objects, or to use objects as art. The form of art is connected to meaning and the interaction between the two contributes to the aesthetic effect. The definition does on the other hand narrow the topic down to material objects or ‘visual art’, although it often functions as a part of a performance (song, music, dance, or other modes). Therefore, determining what makes the object an art object, can only be determined by analysis across media and contexts (for example, if there is no linguistic equivalent for the word ‘art’ in a specific society). As Morphy and Perkins do, I recognize that with this general definition the dividing lines between art and non-art are fine and often fuzzy, however, narrower terms that are used to replace art as a general concept are often complementary and often seem to be drawn together in discourse that surrounds the objects that are usually designated art objects.

<sup>2</sup> During the last decades the ethnographic museums and ethnography alike have faced strong internal and external discussions over the existence and methods of their field. For the museums this sometimes led to new directions, for example for the Tropenmuseum and Afrika Museum in the Netherlands, that have embraced contemporary non-Western art as a part of their presenting and collecting policy, and the Wereldmuseum and Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden, that have drastically changed their presentations to stress the objects on show as visual art instead of mere artifacts. In the academic world commentators have suggested a ‘qualitative turn’, or an ‘ethnographic turn’ might have taken place. In the abstract of ‘The Ethnographic Turn: Fact, Fashion, or Fiction?’ published in *Qualitative Sociology* in 2004, the authors examine if a turn has truly taken place. Over the recent history of ethnography there has been a shift from a ‘discourse of justification’ in mainstream sociology to internal debates within the sub field of qualitative methodology. Many new forms have sprouted since the ‘realist ethnography’ of Malinowski (1922), Boas (1928), and Radcliffe-Brown (1948), that still has followers. There is ‘postmodern ethnography’, that regards ethnography as a part of colonial enterprise, ‘feminist’, ‘standpoint’, ‘institutional’, ‘performance’, ‘visual’, and ‘experimental ethnography’, to name just a few. However, it may be that the proliferation of new forms and standards has increased the use of the term ‘ethnography’ while making actual practices less coherent. In other words, the ‘qualitative turn’ may have institutionalized of a set of labels rather than a set of practices. There is no longer a great deal of debate over whether ethnography is a legitimate form of research instead, a great internal debate on what good ethnography is and what counts as ethnography is taking place, with the risk of losing touch with other fields of socio-cultural studies. Curator Mirjam Shatanawi of the Tropenmuseum even comments that to her the term ‘ethnology’ is outdated, and anthropology today consists of much more than just ethnology. She claims most of Europe’s former ethnographic museums have become anthropological museums or museums of cultural history. (Muskens 2010, p.117) Wilfried van Damme, who describes three types of anthropology (see section 2.2, paragraph ‘Intercultural comparison’), has taken his own stance on which types of anthropology he distinguishes. As for

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the term 'non-Western art', even though it is strongly debated and criticized for a.o. being a 'non-definition', implying a dichotomy and a unity where there is none, and bringing with it a firm evaluative connotation, I will uphold it for this thesis; not just because of the lack of a better term, or that it is almost impossible to avoid when discussing past and present literature, but also because I agree with the stance of Wouter Welling, that the term can also be regarded as a purely geographical reference, just as for example a Japanese art historian would use the term 'non-Asian art'. (source: audio-file of the presentation by Wouter Welling on 22 October 2009, see <http://framerframed.nl>, 22-05-2010). However, during the same expert meeting it was discussed that especially for contemporary non-Western art, due to fading borders, the opposition Western - non-Western is really no longer tenable. With ever increasing regionalism and nationalism one could choose to step away from geographical notions altogether (like the terms 'Global' or 'Glocal Art' - art with its roots in a particular culture but with a visual vocabulary that is recognized all over the world, and prefer a time-based term like 'Twenty first-century Art'. (Musken 2010, p. 14)

3 See <https://studiegids.leidenuniv.nl>, 13-08-2011.

4 In one of his earliest statements of intent, the British art historian T.J. Clark proposed to step back from deciding on attributions and cultivating the canon, and instead return to the questions as large and important as those which had been confronted by their predecessors in the early part of the twentieth century. He wanted to return to a more social history of art, studying how ideologies work, not in the least the worlds of art and art history themselves. Michel Foucault then adopted the concept of discourse analysis, and reminded us that the art of the past is the art of the victors, and that the work of art historians is itself conditioned by a web of discourses. So thinking out of the box, stepping onto unknown territory of other sciences, trying to abort our and thus 'our' vision of 'the other', or the Western world and 'the rest' with Europe as the central and only (starting) point of (art) history, was and is no feeble task. However, a start was made in raising the problems of assessing quality, of intention, and reception alongside authorship, of artistic production in place of artistic creation, and of Western-oriented attitudes to race in references to orientalism and colonialism. While the thrust of the New Art Histories was intended to affect the study of all periods of the history of art, there is little doubt that the force which motivated its adherents was primarily a reaction to the art history of modernism, resulting in the paradoxical label 'Postmodernism' for this era.

5 The grouping together of precious objects has gone on since antiquity. But the attractive presentation of these pieces, including art, as opposed to their secretive storage, marked the beginning of what we know as the museum. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, in English country houses and French castles, painting collections were shown in long, connective corridors, referred to as galleries.

6 The term 'cabinet' originally described a room rather than a piece of furniture.

7 Even though today *Wunderkammern* seem to have ceased to exist after the nineteenth century (or have transformed into public museum collections, like the in 1798 opened Teylers Museum in Haarlem, the first and oldest museum of the Netherlands), according to Newhouse the *Wunderkammer* type of display has a contemporary counterpart; in her chapter called 'The cabinet of curiosities - an update' in her book *Towards a New Museum*. (Newhouse 1998, pp. 14-45) She speaks of surprise and delight, discovery and joy as characteristics that these museums share

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with their Renaissance forerunners. (Newhouse 1998, p. 9) She finds private collections by single persons to be more applicable to the idea of the *Wunderkammer* than museums with more anonymously formed collections, for presentations in these museums tend to be more 'homely' and often show strong relations to its architecture and surroundings. She cites William Rubin, curator of MoMA's department of paintings and sculpture from 1967 to 1988: "Museums are essentially compromises... Their weakness is that they are necessarily homogenized - emptied of all connotations other than art. And that is, finally, an artificial situation." (Newhouse 1998, p. 16) Two of her examples of 'updated *Wunderkammern*' are Foundation Beyeler, situated near Basel, and the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts in St. Louis. "Beyeler's collection of some 160 objects represents his vision of Modernism, beginning with Monet, ending with Warhol, excluding major movements like German Expressionism. In a gesture popular with many collectors, tribal sculpture - in this case from Alaska, Africa and Oceania - is scattered among the Modern art. This integration of separate categories of objects is another reminder of the cabinet of curiosities, which constitutes an important part of Basel's history." Other ideas of a contemporary cabinet of curiosities have also appeared in recent publications and performances: *Cabinet* magazine is a quarterly magazine that juxtaposes apparently unrelated cultural artifacts and phenomena in order to show their interconnectedness in ways that encourage curiosity about the world. (See: [www.cabinetmagazine.org](http://www.cabinetmagazine.org)) The Italian cultural association *Wunderkammern* uses the theme of historical cabinets of curiosities to explore how such 'amazement' is manifested within today's artistic discourse (see [www.wunderkammern.net](http://www.wunderkammern.net)) The University of Leeds Fine Art BA research program entitled *Wunder Kammer* allows viewers to encounter work from across all disciplines; ranging from intimate installation to thought-provoking video and highly skilled drawing, punctuated with live performances (see [www.wunder-kammer.com](http://www.wunder-kammer.com)).

8 Prior to this, he ordered his scholars to set up collections from the realms of China, Indonesia and Japan. It was the knowledge and objects of doctor Von Siebold and the smaller collections of Blomhoff and Van Overmeer Fischer that formed the heart of its predecessor, the Museum Japonicum.

9 See also the comments of Mirjam Shatanawi, curator at the Tropenmuseum in (Muskens 2010, pp. 118, 122). Also, most African objects in Western museums, for example, are made of wood, a material that in tropic conditions has a short lifespan because of the moisture and insects. The moment wooden objects were brought from Africa, they were no older than fifty to a hundred years, the same goes for textiles. See booklet *Kijken naar Afrikaanse Kunst*.

10 Even though the maker or origin might not be known, one could simply state 'anonymous' or 'artist of the tribe', instead of just a tribe name or region.

11 In 1796 the theoretician Quatremere de Quincy in his *Lettres* already predicted a waxen desert, which resembles a temple and a salon, a graveyard and a school, see (Fumaroli 1992, 285)

12 For example in the Netherlands the reconstruction of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, or the now often experimented with, although often still mild, coloring of walls, as in the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam, or mixing up objects of different genres and ages in the presentation as Sjarel Ex did in the Centraal Museum in Utrecht.

13 See also (Muskens 2010, p. 117)

14 See <http://framerframed.nl>, 12-07-2011.

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- 15 For an overview of exhibitions on African Art in the Dutch museums, see Groeniger.
- 16 See <http://framerframed.nl>, 13-07-2011.
- 17 See <http://framerframed.nl>, 13-07-2011.
- 18 See <http://framerframed.nl>, 13-07-2011.
- 19 For example, the International Council of Museums, ICOM ([www.icomnederland.nl](http://www.icomnederland.nl) and <http://icom.museum>) and the Nederlandse Museumvereniging ([www.museumvereniging.nl](http://www.museumvereniging.nl))
- 20 See Appendix A.
- 21 See 'The many beginnings and the one end of World Art History in Germany, 1900-1933' (Zijlmans & Van Damme 2008, pp. 91-105)
- 22 See 'Introducing World Art Studies' (Zijlmans & Van Damme 2008, pp. 23-61)
- 23 See 'Art and the Academic Disciplines' (Zijlmans & Van Damme 2008, pp. 157-165)
- 24 'Envisioning Art Worlds: New Directions in the Anthropology of Art', pp. 219-233
- 25 See [www.iq.harvard.edu](http://www.iq.harvard.edu) Unfortunately, I cannot find a working website on the Baobab project, nor any clear information on whether it is still continued.
- 26 Which has in my view happened with the exhibition *Brazil Contemporary* in Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen and is clearly exemplified by the way uprising contemporary art is hyped, pushed by the art market, currently for example art from China and the Middle-East.
- 27 Luhmann uses the term 'autopoietic', adopted from neurobiology.
- 28 I wonder how he would categorize the exhibition of Indonesian artist Dono in the Tropenmuseum, which was heavily inspired by political circumstances of Indonesia's past and present.
- 29 "[...] to the Western man true fulfillment and bliss are only to be found in a fictional heaven; as its counterpart, life on earth is portrayed as a battleground. Therefore, it is not of great surprise that the concept of Utopia rests on an image of the future, in which peace, material plenty and a non-approachable irreal world exist. The African view of Utopia refers to a past, characterized by surplus and harmony between all peoples. The African Utopia thus presents us with a world once perfect, all lost paradise. [...] Because the African worldview of Utopia existed before the present day, it is essentially an earthly paradise and therefore neither purely spiritual or unattainable. That is why an African ruler, king or dictator is during his time of initiation expected to restore the old, destroyed ancestral order. In fact, no changes have occurred in this respect since the coming of the Europeans; their conceptions of a future paradise essentially devaluates the past. Western man's contempt for the past can be illustrated by his tools with which he continues to change his environment: one tool keeps getting replaced by a better and more modern one. This results in a dogma of an ever improving future, whilst the past becomes more and more archaic and redundant." Source: [www.trouw.nl/krantenarchief](http://www.trouw.nl/krantenarchief), 12-03-2010.
- 30 The entire article by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, entitled 'The Whole Earth Show', published in *Art in America*, in May 1989, pp. 150-158, 211-213, is added as Appendix C.
- 31 Published in *Third text*, Vol. 3(6), 1989, pp. 3-14.
- 32 See <http://framerframed.nl>, 15-07-2011.
- 33 See [www.centraalmuseum.nl](http://www.centraalmuseum.nl), 19-09-2009.

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- 34 For the entire interview with Knol and a background on the exhibition, see <http://c-artsmag.com>, 19-09-2009.
- 35 See [www.wix.com/afrikamuseum/rootsandmore](http://www.wix.com/afrikamuseum/rootsandmore), 23-09-2010.
- 36 Bremer even intends to sell off the Africa collection of the museum as its quality supposedly does not meet the standards of the museum, eventually turning its focus on the Asian collection alone. See online article of the *Volkskrant* of August 9 2011: [www.volkskrant.nl](http://www.volkskrant.nl)
- 37 For more information on the first two exhibitions, see (Muskens 2010, 120-121)
- 38 This is similar to medieval European times when pictures would be used as instruments for religious experience or complementary for the study of texts. See: Jeffrey F. Hamburger in *The visual and the visionary: Art and female spirituality in late medieval Germany*, New York: Zone books and Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998.
- 39 See [www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org) for Larry Silver's review article in *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 86(4), pp. 783-787)

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