

Cross-Cultural Art History in a Polycentered World

Diogenes

58(3) 3–6

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DOI: 10.1177/0392192112452067

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The essays in this volume have been written by art historians who have all been involved in the activities of CIHA (The International Committee of the History of Art/ Comité International de l'Histoire de l'Art) during the past few years. CIHA is a daughter of CIPSH (Comité international pour la Philosophie et les Sciences humaines, The International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Studies), the body for the Humanities formed by UNESCO and responsible for *Diogenes*. This is the first issue of this famous periodical that has been devoted to the history of art.

CIHA is the oldest international organization of art history in the world. It was first constituted at Vienna in 1873. From that date CIHA has held quadrennial congresses – known colloquially as the art history Olympics, that represent the state of art history throughout the world and which were and are open to all nationalities. Well before it became fashionable to discuss globalization, CIHA was global, and as this volume shows, the concerns of CIHA remain global in a very special way.

The last congress was held at Melbourne in January 2008, where the theme was: *Crossing Cultures, Conflict, Migration and Convergence*. The themes of this issue of *Diogenes* are taken from the concept of the congress and how art history has developed during my presidency.

At CIHA Melbourne, 700 art historians participated from 50 countries. Despite the fact that Australia is a long way from many other countries, the call for papers resulted in a truly global expression of the subject, the concept enticing many contributions from countries south of the equator, notably Latin America. In the large volume 220 papers are published by art historians from 25 countries.

CIHA's role has been to stimulate international meetings of art historians, either as the quadrennial congresses or with the more frequent colloquia every year, held in different countries throughout the globe, and to publish the proceedings as a record of the state of art history. Some 33 countries belong to CIHA and the number is increasing. Representatives from local national committees constitute the General Assembly. A smaller Executive known as the Bureau is responsible for guiding the academic programs and many of the authors in this volume are members of the Bureau: Rick Asher, Thierry Dufrêne, Peter Krieger, Peter Schneemann, and Iain Boyd Whyte. Other authors have been involved in the definition of colloquia, such as Marjeta Ciglenečki, (*Art And Architecture Around 1400, Global And Regional Perspectives*, Maribor, 10–14 May

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2011), Pál Lóvei (*How To Write Art History – National, Regional Or Global*, Budapest, 21–25 November 2007), Federico Freschi (*Other Views: Art History in (South) Africa and the Global South*, 12–15 January 2011), and Ulrich Grossmann, who is the convenor of the next Olympian congress, at Nuremberg, on the ‘*Challenge of the Object*’, about which he writes at the end of the volume.

One of the outcomes of the CIHA congress in Melbourne was the establishment of the Australian Institute of Art History at the University of Melbourne. A component of this volume concerns Australian indigenous art, beginning with Peter Veth and Jo McDonald on their archaeological project about the Canning Stock Route, which has recently been celebrated in a current and much acclaimed exhibition at the National Museum of Australia, Canberra. Australia has the largest quantity of rock art of any country in the world – even South Africa. To date more than 125,000 sites have been officially recorded. The Canning Stock Route project is the most recent demonstration of how Australians have the longest continuing culture in human history, as it is increasingly said, as most notably on 13 February 2008, when Kevin Rudd, then Prime Minister of Australia, began his apology to the stolen generations to the indigenous peoples of Australia, ‘the oldest continuing cultures in human history’. The archaeological project has revealed much rock art and some very early images predating Lascaux, some believed to be made by divine presences, others by humans. Their project has resulted in the creation of contemporary indigenous art centres. The complexities and contradictions of how indigenous art is marketed in the contemporary world is the subject of the contribution by Meaghan Wilson-Anastasios, who writes on the national art market.

Christopher Marshall tackles the problems of museums in a global world from an Australian perspective but focusing on the British Museum and how it manages indigenous collections. For at least half a century, if not more, the collecting institutions of Australia have had policies that were not Eurocentric, that is well before it became fashionable to agonize (as it is now) over whether to be in the centre or periphery.

The relationship between Art and Anthropology is of perpetual interest and was the subject of a CIHA colloque organized by Thierry Dufrière and Anne-Christine Taylor in June 2007, and entitled ‘Disciplinary Cannibalism. When the history of art and anthropology meet one another’, (*Cannibalismes Disciplinares. Quand l’histoire de l’art et l’anthropologie se rencontrent*), a title locating early cross-cultural history as far back as the sixteenth century with Montaigne’s *Essays* (III, vi). They concluded that it was unfortunate to erect barriers between disciplines especially since both art and anthropology shared many concerns, such as objects and the creation of collections, defined as ‘(inter) disciplinary cannibalism’.

One of the barriers to be circumvented in our attempts to create global art history is ‘understanding’ language. Iain Boyd Whyte has created a periodical *Art in Translation*, an e-journal that publishes English translations of critical essays and articles from foreign-language journals and catalogues ranging across all fields of art history (www.artintranslation.org). Another new e-journal, *Art Historiography*, edited by Richard Woodfield at Glasgow University (<http://arthistoriography.wordpress.com>), has a policy of including key texts in English translation, such as Julius von Schlosser’s account of Giorgio Vasari, when perceived as essential to art history and the theme of a journal issue. Understanding other cultures may be achieved by virtue of translation or better still multilingualism. In the words of one of my colleagues at the University of Melbourne, Joseph Lo Bianco, ‘It is a disadvantage to not know English, and it is a disadvantage to know only English.’ Although English may be the dominant language for art historical studies now, might there be a time when Spanish or Chinese were as important? Art history as a discipline has unparalleled advantages to create cultural understanding between nationalities, especially if we are fluent in different languages.

Peter Krieger engages with the megalopolis, exemplified by Mexico City, where he lives and teaches. Mexico City now has some 20 million inhabitants. As Krieger argues it is a place where cultural fragments of the prehispanic past, the colonial period, and the modern epoch have left their imprint in a vital collage. He places much value on the concept of the neo-surrealist and neo-situationist group of urban researchers called 'Citambulos' ('Citambler' in English), who collect unknown visual and material fragments of the city as an alternative to the controlled hegemonic view of tourist guides and popular clichés. They replace the conventional art historical beholders in his paper.

Asian art has been analyzed and written about since the beginning of time. But for political reasons it is only in recent decades in the twentieth century that there have been attempts at comparative art histories between the East and the West. The argument of the Melbourne congress elicited a special response from Indian scholars, especially Homi Bhabha. Rick Asher has spent a lifetime in India and his contribution concentrates on the fact that '[w]hat India produced others wanted. Others therefore wanted India.' He develops this concept in relation to four periods in time. The richness of Indian culture is of extraordinary importance. There is a wealth and richness of monuments in India and we could make an inventory of what is just emerging and what should be studied.

In a paper that challenges the conceptual basis of Western 'art history' and its relevance to China, the artist, critic and curator LaoZhu (Zhu Qingsheng), a professor from Beijing University, presents an analysis of what he describes as 'art concepts' in China. LaoZhu explains that Western art history is only helpful in interpreting 'realistic' painting in China whereas passive and active art concepts are about Chinese practice and are more meaningful to the way we experience art and life itself. Calligraphy is the foundation of Chinese art and embodies the active art concept. The Chinese concept of 'art' was rather a combination of humanistic activities laid out by Confucius. LaoZhu is a writer on art from the second century in China, and he is also a performance artist, so that both in his scholarship and practice he demonstrates what he believes in his article. Chinese Calligraphy provokes a viewer's empathetic reading of a calligrapher's emotions. Through the twisted and modulated lines, Calligraphy reveals the sense of being of an artist. It captures and replays the moment when the artist moves his brush across the silk or paper. It also enables viewers to re-experience the force, energy and sentiments of the artist by retracing the brush lines. The best Calligraphy was not written for the public, but for a chosen group of people, or even for one individual, who is empathetic to the piece.

CIHA represents an organization that truly incorporates global art history in a unique manner, one that is not dependent on one person's experience but which depends on the collective agendas of different places. Federico Freschi outlines the plan for his innovative conference in South Africa, to be held at the beginning of 2011, where we will focus on the views of the Global South, that is those continents south of the equator. The aim will be to rethink the discipline of art history in ways that establish cross-cultural dimensions as fundamental to its scope, method and vision. This will be the first CIHA meeting in Africa and an important occasion for our knowledge and development of art history.

The subject of Thierry Dufrière's essay on art history and film has never really been broached before and is the first statement in an ambitious program for a global UNESCO project, which began in the 1960s to document world-wide resources about films and their multiple relationships to art. Provocatively entitled 'The History of Art in the Age of the Cinema', Dufrière examines how art history has had many encounters with cinema, and how the subject matter of art history is popularized in the cinema, or used as a teaching tool. Some early twentieth century art historians were fascinated by the possibilities of making films about artists and teaching in this way, as exemplified

by Roberto Longhi's film on Carpaccio. Erwin Panofsky was obsessed by film and wrote on it especially after he had emigrated to the United States in the 1940s. Dufrêne concludes with the suggestion that Malraux's *Musée Imaginaire* is now for the first time really represented by the potentialities of television.

Peter Schneemann engages with the concepts of how the perception of art is conditioned by travel in all senses. Travel affects what we study, what is studied and how it is perceived, at this time in history, as well as in the earliest times, when objects, people, art historians and indeed almost everyone and everything were and are in a constant state of movement with respect to both geography and time. Schneemann charts the impact of the philosophers, theorists, and critics on the gradual development in art history of a theory of critical reception, of a history of 'errors' and 'misunderstandings' as part of the perception of a work of art. His conclusion that there cannot be a 'right' answer is provocative. 'There is no beholder who can adopt the "right" perspective of an artwork, not even if he or she is from the same origin as the artist. But every beholder, by misunderstanding – or better: by his own understanding, contributes to the potential and power of the dislocated object.'

In a way that could never be predicted, Marjeta Ciglencečki's paper on 'Portraying The Ptujška Gora Pilgrims' exemplifies the theories of Schneemann's analysis of our perception in the twenty-first century of works of art. Marjeta's subject is the critical reception among pilgrims in many periods of changing classes of the pilgrimage church at Ptujška Gora, one of the most important cultural sites in Slovenia from the year 1400 when it was first created until now. Marjeta is in charge of developing a new department of art history at the University of Maribor in Slovenia, the site of a CIHA congress in May 2011, on mediaeval Europe. Hungary or Central Europe represents the most cross-cultural of all European experience and regions with a multi-ethnic population and complex artistic legacies. As Pál Lővei explains in his complex contribution on artistic heritage this makes for very complex management of the problems of national heritage. The art historical concept of Central Europe, the different European regions and their connections, has been analyzed previously by two earlier CIHA conferences in Hungary.

The concluding essay is by Ulrich Grossmann, who is the convenor of the quadrennial congress, the art historical Olympics in 2012 at Nuremberg. His paper is about the concept of that conference, the importance of the object in the history of art, and how it will be developed in Germany, the historical and classical heartland of art history, in contrast to the many countries who are new to CIHA and who are represented in recent activities of CIHA, such as China and South Africa.

My short introduction explains why these texts were chosen. My brief analyses, or snapshots, give a vibrant idea of the breadth and richness of research and interpretation in art history as shown in this volume, about which I feel intensely proud as President of CIHA. These articles encompass a complex range of interests in art historical research and show how art history contributes to humanities scholarship and of all the disciplines in the humanities relates most to the common experience of humanity and encounters between cultures.