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The Not-So-Global Field of Global Art History

Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel

Can Art History Be Made Global? Meditations from the Periphery, by *Monica Juneja*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023, 348 pp., 20 col. and 20 b. & w. illus., paperback, £44.50

Addressing the challenge of the ‘global turn’ in art history is the stated aim of Monica Juneja’s book, *Can Art History be Made Global? Meditations from the Periphery* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023). Against what she terms ‘facile globalism’ (15), Monica Juneja proposes a ‘theory of transculturation’ (29) as the cornerstone of a ‘critical globality’. This approach aims to help art history move beyond the forms of parochialism that have long structured the field (Eurocentrism, methodological nationalism, area studies) by way of a ‘radical critique’ of these paradigms. It takes into account the multiple subjectivities and shifting perspectives’ at work in art history. ‘Negotiating multiple scales beyond the global’ (nation, region, locality, individual positions), she uses examples from South Asia (‘designated in mainstream scholarship as peripheral’) to plot a course out of the aporias of global art history (37). These propositions are articulated from a perspective she defines as ‘from the periphery,’ ‘both a situation and a scholarly position’ (33), a ‘critical modality’ (34) that she deems able to ‘challenge foundational ideas of exclusivity and universality, while offering alternative viewpoints to entrenched intellectual claims’ (33).

In a bracing chapter entitled ‘A Genealogy of World Art Studies’, Juneja offers a fascinating panorama of global studies and their various limits. This is followed by three successive chapters that illustrate her methodological proposition. The second chapter explores the ‘routes of vision’, discussing concepts such as copying, imitation, and representation while highlighting the chains of memory and the transformations of works of art across various cultures in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The third chapter

examines modernism in India and its transcultural dimensions, both beyond nationalism and in dialogue with it, from the interwar years through to the postcolonial era of the 1950s and 1960s. The fourth chapter concludes this chronological exploration by addressing globality in contemporary artistic practices after 1989 and how identity, memory, and the body politic are negotiated there. In the fifth and final chapter, Juneja looks to apply her method to an object of study that is often invoked (both enthusiastically and scathingly) as a touchstone of the global turn in art history: the exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre*, which was organized in 1989 in Paris by a curatorial team headed by Jean-Hubert Martin. This final chapter offers a masterful demonstration of the productivity of Juneja's transcultural method.

However, there are a number of reasons to question the panorama and the evaluation of global art studies of the book as a whole, and in particular its claim of proposing a new method with the concept of 'transculturation'. With her title, Juneja situates her work within a debate that animated the field of art history almost twenty years ago, fuelled in particular by James Elkins' *Is Art History Global?* (2006). Elkins himself was responding to the so-called 'global turn' in art history: an attempt to account for the dynamics of globalisation, and the repeated attempts by particular curators to open museums to artistic production from formerly colonised or peripheralised countries. On the whole, Elkins answered his titular question with a 'no', largely because art historians were too often trained in Euro-American curricula and using 'Western concepts' such as art, image, or form. This has not prevented hundreds of researchers from the 2000s onwards from attempting to go beyond an approach that would consist in little more than adding formerly exoticised or distant subjects to an unaltered art historical field, and seeking instead to reconnect and horizontalise areas, approaches, spaces, and eras too often presented hierarchically or divided up according to distinct disciplines. Thanks to these efforts, the idea that multiple and diverse complementary approaches are possible for globalising art history has firmly taken root: as well as studies on formerly

peripheral subjects and areas that at times yield rather traditional insights, the field has also seen studies interested in cultural mixing and creolisation, and approaches focusing on circulation, the mobility of concepts, cultural transfers, mediations, and the often-surprising effects of these phenomena¹. Some journals have also understood the importance of actively encouraging publications from regions and methodologies marginalised in academic discourse, as a means of contributing to the globalisation and diversification of the discipline.

Set against this backdrop, reading *Can Art History Be Made Global?* feels at times like stepping back ten years. This is unfortunate, not because we should shy away from acknowledging the immense difficulty of affording greater attention to former peripheries (none of the authors working with what are broadly and vaguely referred to as global approaches to art history would dare claim to have entirely succeeded in this endeavour), but because Monica Juneja's book gives the impression that the hundreds of available publications pursuing global approaches are not considered interesting enough to be included in this major study. As a result, what are presented as new insights sometimes repeat the conclusions of works that are implicitly deemed unworthy of reading or citing; when the author does acknowledge previous efforts at globalising art history, it is usually to dismantle them.

This is by no means to say that Juneja's book does not have numerous merits. The opening historiographical chapter is recommended for any historians interested in a survey of the field of global art history through to the 2010s, though readers should be forewarned that this is a particularly critical introduction which spares few authors: David Summers is a rare exception.² From Elkins, Belting, Buddensieg, Weibel, Zijlmans, Van Damme, Carrier, Harris, Meskimmon, Casid and Aruna D'Souza, to Baker and Joselit, Juneja's main criticisms are as follows: an exclusive focus on the contemporary period, a definition of the 'global' as 'from elsewhere' (with the latter defined according to a Euro-American perspective), an Anglo-

American bias in terms of authors cited, and the assumption that art history is essentially a 'Western discipline'.³ Going back further, Juneja looks at the limitations of authors who attempted, a century ago, to broaden perspectives to include so-called non-Western regions and practices, particularly in the context of *Weltkunstgeschichte*: Franz Kugler, Jacob Burckhardt, Ernst Grosse, and Josef Strzygowski, amongst others. This is not a new critique, and has been addressed by a number of scholars including Margaret Olin and Matthew Rampley.⁴ With this in mind, it seems rather unfair to criticise global art historians for not adequately acknowledging the nationalist legacy of their predecessors. We might also take issue with the suggestion that World Art Studies has inherited the evolutionist thinking of *Weltkunst* historians she terms their precursors, and that their work conceals the same questionable political and methodological implications.

Juneja rightly summarises the task of global art history as 'formulat[ing] a paradigm of the global that does not collapse into hegemonic localisms but remains plural and multi-site' (19). Though this project is a commendable and necessary one, the author's suggestion that such approaches are absent from the field is questionable. Firstly, the global turn in non-contemporary art history is much older than the much vaunted global turn of the early 2000s in the contemporary field, not least because specialists in ancient, medieval, and early modern periods have been less tempted by methodological nationalism, and have long disputed grand narratives of the westernisation of the planet thanks to their knowledge of the expansion of Islam, Indian, or Chinese worlds in previous eras. These historians have also insisted on the relativity of the notion of 'the world', reminding us that for many periods, the 'global' did not always cover the Earth as a whole. Indeed, transcultural approaches have long abounded in histories of the early modern period, such as those by Serge Gruzinski, Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Romain Bertrand, to name only a few.⁵ Furthermore, when Juneja denounces the dearth of global art history books pursuing the kind of approach she would like to see, she

seemingly overlooks hundreds of publications that do, in fact, adopt exactly the kind of approach she advocates, citing in a footnote only a handful of ‘welcome departures from the presentist framing of [global] studies’ (14). If, as she laments, there are fewer books than articles in this area, this may be in part due to the way in which the academic field has changed since the 2010s, with researchers increasingly encouraged to publish in open-access (which is easier for articles than for books), and the rise of evaluations based on criteria from the hard sciences, which do not value books but rather articles in peer-reviewed journals.. Additionally, the emergence of books featuring comprehensive global transcultural perspectives building on research conducted in the 2010s was always going to take time, even before the publication delays caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Several ‘expanded’ monographs have been published in recent years, where transcultural approaches are taken seriously.⁶

It is also unfortunate that Juneja’s bibliography is almost exclusively in English and German, while transcultural art history is also written in other languages. Indeed, the ‘transcultural’ angle of *Can Art History be Made Global?* is presented as if the concept had lain dormant since the work of the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz (1881-1969) who coined the term ‘transculturation’ in 1940 in his book *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (*Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*), one of the rare Spanish-language books cited. Why cite only Bruno Latour or Pierre Bourdieu (amongst rare French works to appear here) while overlooking so many publications about ‘*transferts artistiques et culturels*’, ‘*histoire croisée*’ and ‘*histoire connectée*’ that could have contributed productively to her argument? Since the 1980s, many researchers, particularly historians of artistic and cultural transfer, have long considered that cultural forms, from concepts to artifacts and categories of belonging, are unstable and mobile.⁷ These perspectives are often more relevant for global art history than decolonial approaches, which tend to perpetuate a binary opposition between ‘the

West and the Rest’, as Juneja herself recognizes. Indeed, they help to reveal the effects of resemantisation from one era and place to another as works and perspectives cross or circulate, the misunderstandings, and the capacity for agency through which actors have always used the variability of cultural forms for conscious or unconscious agendas. Their study of situations of mediation, importation, and translation, as well as the intersections of worldviews and possible temporal discrepancies, have proved highly productive. At the same time, they account for potential situations of conflict, subalternity, resistance and negotiation, in line with the perspective that Juneja advocates.

It is with these reservations in mind that I recommend reading the second to fifth chapters, which nonetheless deploy a highly intelligent conceptual relativism, a sharp awareness of transculturation at work in art practices, and a keen sensitivity of the contexts and polysemy of artifacts, particularly with regard to works and practices developed in Southeast Asia. The method is illustrated by a particularly striking selection of works, and beautifully presented in color illustration plates (for instance, [Figure 1](#)). Though its focus on multiple scales and on ‘multiple temporalities’ is not groundbreaking, the fifth chapter is particularly successful and demonstrates the relevance of Juneja’s methods convincingly. It presents a transcultural history of the Paris exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre*, which in 1989 showcased artworks from around the world, supposedly on an equal footing, and which is often touted as the inaugural exhibition of the global turn in contemporary art. Juneja convincingly demonstrates (against Hans Belting) that *Magiciens* cannot be interpreted as a result of the political events of 1989 and the fall of the Soviet empire; rather, it should be understood as the culmination of a reflection that began much earlier. Here *Magiciens* is interpreted with reference to *When Attitudes Become Form*, held at Kunsthalle Bern in 1969, and its attempt to approach contemporary artistic production by focusing on its effects rather than its alignment with modernism’s evolutionary logics. The chapter also relevantly situates

Commenté [BJ1]: A proposition : Single folio by Farrukh Beg portraying an old Sufi, c. 1615, gouache, ink, gold on paper. Qatar, Museum of Islamic Art. reproduced in Juneja 2023, p. 136.

See here : <https://easteast.world/posts/146>

Magiciens within the context of the preparations for the bicentenary celebrations of the French Revolution, and their universalist perspective. We might add, in line with Juneja's argument, that *Magiciens* was also an attempt by French curators to respond to discourses that had challenged Paris' cultural centrality by reaffirming its supposedly universal vocation. Perhaps this interpretive lens would allow us to better understand the bitterness of the criticisms levelled against the exhibition from the *October* circle, who suddenly found themselves caught in their own trap of ethnocentric centralism, and readily overinterpreted the meaning of the exhibition to suit their own ends (often using photographs of the exhibition, but without having visited it, as Juneja explains, see Figure 2). Juneja also moves beyond the easy criticisms directed at this exhibition, which largely focused on the authority of a single curator: Jean-Hubert Martin. Her most interesting move is to shift the focus away from the singular figure of Martin as author-curator. She looks closely at the composition of his team, which was made up of French curators and intermediaries in the global South, who often failed to take into account contemporary modernist art of their respective countries. Here she brilliantly retraces the mediations that allowed what we could call 'non-contemporary contemporary art' (i.e. art created in the present day but outside the social sphere of contemporary art) from these countries to reach *Magiciens*, often facilitated by specialists in so-called primitive art, native informants who contributed to the local construction of postcolonial national culture. Crossing the national (France, India), the regional (South Asia), the global, and the universal, while reflecting on the fluctuating nature of scales and concepts, Juneja's study of the trajectories of the artists and movements involved, particularly of Mithila painting and Adivasi art, is conducted with great care and finesse, not excluding a mention of the way in which Adivasis are now being co-opted by Hindu nationalist fascist tendencies. We learn a great deal about the ability of these artists and works of art to transcend national and global logics, and the varied and contradictory directions that the call to global indigeneity

Commenté [BJ2]: Figure 2 : View of the *Magiciens de la terre* exhibition, often used to justify critiques against the perceived hegemonic approach of the show, where the work of a single Western artist dominates that of a group of artists from subordinate countries. Richard Long, *Red Earth Circle*, 1989 (vertical wall); Paddy Japaljarri Sims, Paddy Japaljarri Stewart, Neville Japangardi Poulson, Francis Jupurrurla Kelly, Paddy Jupurrurla Nelson, Franck Bronson Jakamarra Nelson, Towser Jakamarra Walker, members of the Yuendumu community, *Yam Dreaming*, 1989 (on the floor)
https://www.centrepompidou.fr/media/picture/b7/a6/b7a6f16e98c72ebc650fdd5b6dba3866/thumb_large.jpg

can lead towards. The conclusion continues in this vein of methodological criticality, attempting to understand how the method could be further improved by adopting a perspective that decentres humanism and anthropocentrism to account for the climate crisis.

The contrast between the brilliant and nuanced approach to the objects under study and the unjust treatment of the bibliography is striking. Taking Juneja's arguments seriously, this contrast might be interpreted within a transcultural and social approach that can address some of the collective logics that traverse global art studies and which present a challenge for all historians working in the field.

Juneja's book constructs a solitary and vanguardist position at the intersection of Germanophone global studies and what might be referred to broadly as Anglophone modernist studies. In terms of its position in the Germanophone field, the book draws on several articles, papers and books that Juneja has written since her appointment in 2009 as the Chair of Global Art History at the University of Heidelberg (the only such chair in the German-speaking world), notably the result of the Heinrich Wölfflin Lecture Series in Zurich that she was invited to give in 2014. Here, we can understand the author's need to affirm a position vis-à-vis the dominant figure of Germanophone global studies, Hans Belting, and the activities of the ZKM Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe. The author meanwhile positions herself in the Anglophone field through a comprehensive rejection of the well-established and often caricatural myth of 'canonical' art history. Challenging hegemonic narratives is a vital part of global art studies, but the old Euro-American canon sometimes functions as something of a straw man in Juneja's book: 'Art history continues to uphold a canonical language of taste and criticism' (152). Where has Juneja encountered such an art history? At the same time, in places the book perpetuates some long-debunked canonical narratives. In her chapter on modernism in postcolonial India, for example, Juneja cites Serge Guilbaut's *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* (1985) to explain the global context of the 1980s, even

though numerous studies have shown that the international social field of modern art was not centred on New York and the so-called hegemony of the Atlantic West,⁸ and closer inspection reveals that the academic and historiographic construction of New York's so-called artistic centrality beyond the USA, particularly in European art history departments, actually began in the 1980s.⁹ In this context, a more collegial approach to the existing literature would, in places, save Juneja the trouble of undertaking a deconstruction of the putative canon that has already been carried out elsewhere.

The construction of such a personal position at the intersection of Germanophone global studies and Anglophone modernist studies is no mean feat in light of the hegemonic tendencies of these fields and the structural barriers of sexism and Eurocentrism in both fields. Her severe treatment of the existing historiography could be explained as a function of this hard-earned position at the intersection of two dominant strands of historiography.

It is harder to understand the short shrift this book gives to 'connected history', 'cultural transfers', and 'entangled histories', historiographical trends that were very much in vogue when Juneja was studying in Paris in the 1980s. Since the 1980s in France, particularly in the fields of cultural history and comparative literature, cultural historiography, national narratives, and even global perspectives have been deconstructed, and robust methodologies developed to account for transcultural phenomena and the mobility of meaning in objects. The absence of these approaches from Juneja's book is regrettable, and perhaps evidence of just how deeply the field, and even global studies, remains structured by national logics: not-so-global after all.

Notes

¹ Some examples among others: David Summers, *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism* (London ; New York, NY: Phaidon Press, 2003); Leon Wainwright, *Timed out: Art and the*

Transnational Caribbean, Rethinking Art's Histories (Manchester ; New York: Manchester University Press, 2011); *Eurasian Matters: China, Europe, and the Transcultural Object, 1600-1800* (New York, NY: Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2018); Michel Espagne, *L'histoire de l'art comme Transfert culturel: L'itinéraire d'Anton Springer* (Paris: Belin, 2009).

² Summers, *Real Spaces*.

³ James Elkins, *Is Art History Global?* (New York; London: Routledge, 2007); Kitty Zijlmans and Wilfried Van Damme, ed., *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2008); Hans Belting et al., eds., *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds* (Karlsruhe, Germany : Cambridge, MA ; London, England: ZKM/Center for Art and Media ; The MIT Press, 2013); Marsha Meskimmon and Dorothy Rowe, *Women, the Arts and Globalization: Eccentric Experience*, Rethinking Art's Histories (Manchester: Manchester university press, 2013); Jill H. Casid et al., eds., *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn*, Clark Studies in the Visual Arts (Williamstown, Massachusetts: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2014); George Baker and David Joselit, eds., 'A Questionnaire on Global Methods,' *October*, no. 180 (June 22, 2022): 3–80, https://doi.org/10.1162/octo_a_00453.

⁴ Margaret Olin, 'Art History and Ideology: Alois Riegl and Josef Strzygowski,' in Penny Schine Gold and Benjamin C. Sax, eds., *Cultural Visions: Essays in the History of Culture* (BRILL, 2000): 151–70, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789401200424>. Matthew Rampley, *The Vienna School of Art History: Empire and the Politics of Scholarship, 1847 - 1918* (University Park, Pa: The Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 2013); more specifically Matthew Rampley (transl. Camille Joseph), 'L'histoire de l'art et la crise des sciences humaines: Josef Strzygowski et Hans Sedlmayr,' *Austriaca : Cahiers universitaires d'information sur l'Autriche* 72, no. 1 (2011): 189–212, <https://doi.org/10.3406/austr.2011.4931>.

⁵ Serge Gruzinski, *La Pensée Métille* (Paris: Fayard, 1999); Serge Gruzinski, *Les quatre parties du monde: histoire d'une mondialisation* ([Paris]: Seuil, 2006); Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Toward a Geography of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Romain Bertrand, *L'histoire à Parts Égales: Récits d'une Rencontre Orient-Occident, XVIe-XVIIe Siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 2011).

⁶ For instance: Summers, *Real Spaces*; Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, *Les Avant-Gardes Artistiques 1848-1918: Une Histoire Transnationale*, Folio Histoire (Paris: Gallimard, 2015); Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, *Les Avant-Gardes Artistiques 1918-1945: Une Histoire Transnationale*, Folio. Histoire 263 (Paris: Gallimard, 2017); Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, *Naissance de l'art contemporain 1945-1970: une histoire mondiale* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2021); Pepe Karmel, *Abstract Art: A Global History* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2020); Jean Robertson

and Deborah S. Hutton, *The History of Art: A Global View: Prehistory to the Present* (New York, New York: Thames & Hudson Inc, 2021); Stephen J. Campbell and Stephanie Porras, *The Routledge Companion to Global Renaissance Art* (Londres: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2024); Edward S. Cooke, *Global Objects: Toward a Connected Art History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022); Krzysztof Pomian, *Le Musée, Une Histoire Mondiale* (Paris: Gallimard, 2020); Krzysztof Pomian, *Le musée, une histoire mondiale* (Paris: Gallimard, 2021); Krzysztof Pomian, *Le musée, une histoire mondiale* (Paris: Gallimard, 2022); Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann and Elizabeth Pilliod, *Art and the World: Global Visions* (London: Pearson Education, forthcoming).

⁷ Michel Espagne, *Les transferts culturels franco-allemands* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1999); Walter Moser, Nicolas Goyer, and Pascal Gin, eds., *Transfert: exploration d'un champ conceptuel*, Collection Transferts culturels (Ottawa: Les Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 2014); Martina Kaller-Dietrich and Frank Jacob, eds., *Transatlantic Trade and Global Cultural Transfers since 1492: More than Commodities*, Routledge Studies in Modern History (London New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2021). Extended bibliographies in: Béatrice Joyeux-, 'Les Transferts Culturels : Un Discours de La Méthode,' *Hypothèses*, 1 (2001), <http://www.cairn.info.gate3.inist.fr/revue-hypotheses-2002-1-page-149.htm>; Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin, and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, eds., *Circulations in the Global History of Art* (New York: Routledge, 2017); Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, 'Circulation and Resemanticization: An Aporetic Palimpsest,' *Art@S Bulletin* 6, no. 2 (September 29, 2017), <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/artlas/vol6/iss2/13>.

⁸ Among others: Hiroko Ikegami, *The Great Migrator: Robert Rauschenberg and the Global Rise of American Art* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2010); Catherine Dossin, *The Rise and Fall of American Art, 1940s-1980s: A Geopolitics of Western Art Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 2017); Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, 'Provincializing New York,' *Artlas Bulletin* 10, no. 1-article 12 (2021), <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/artlas/vol10/iss1/12/>; Joyeux-Prunel, *Naissance de l'art contemporain 1945-1970*; Jacopo Galimberti, *Individuals against Individualism: Art Collectives in Western Europe (1956-1969)*, *Value : Art : Politics* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017).

⁹ Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, 'Provincializing New York,' *Artlas Bulletin* 10, no. 1-article 12 (2021), <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/artlas/vol10/iss1/12/>.