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SOME INTERCULTURAL ISSUES FROM ART HISTORY FOR MUSEUM EDUCATORS

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INTRODUCTION

This paper will demonstrate that if museums are like universities that art educators have a dynamic role in carrying out the substance of their work. The intercultural dimensions of your work is not necessarily dependent on multicultural, monocultural or mixed nature of the communities you serve. I would like to argue that the intercultural dimension of your work is relevant to all. These are therefore not issues about political correctness but of enabling museum educators to feel that they have a free interpretative role as professionals.

In terms of the intercultural arts one of the questions is: what are the appropriate aesthetics for arts at the universal level. Is it possible to have a 'neutral' (value free) aesthetic which has a rational or a scientific basis? However, since the arts are part of the creative and imaginative domains of the human experience, this might not be a possible way forward. The second is to adopt a critical approach to one's own aesthetic (Western or Eastern) and to question the ideas and the 'centric' notions of arts and culture. This would necessitate critical thinking and 'viewing' skills to understand the diversity of artistic and cultural productions. Hence, Rabindranath Tagore's idea of knowing 'the other' as being an absolute necessity in finding out about oneself fully can perhaps be a useful way forward. He set up Shanti Neketan, not as an urban university but in a rural context of Bengal in the early part of the 20th century. This it would seem was an attempt on his part to connect the rural India with the urban, the local with the national as well as the universal, Hence, from this perspective the educators connect

diverse worlds.

One of the most important issues raised by Partha Mitter in his book Much Maligned Monsters is the level of aesthetic appreciation of Indian art, since the Europeans now possess much more knowledge of Indian art than they had in the past. In 1833 Gandhara art came to the notice of Europeans. Because its links with Classical Art were never in doubt it was perceived to be 'the epitome of perfection', especially as it was perceived to be a product of rationalist Buddhist faith (p. 258-9). Hindu art was on the other hand seen as being indigenous, and unlike the Gandharan art did not provide Ferguson, Smith and others with a yardstick 'to measure aesthetic perfection according to the classical canon' (p. 267). Hence, the emergence of great art in India was seen only as a result of the influence of commerce and classical culture.

However, scholarship and appreciation of Indian art needs to be based on an understanding of the role that religious, classical, cultural and the social contexts made to Indian art. Hence, an understanding of the complexities of Indian art and an aesthetic based on these moorings would allow educators to develop a more informed aesthetic of the borrowings amongst different artistic cultures including Gandhara art, and develop an aesthetic which is free from dominant European perspectives and locate it within the developments of Indian art. Again, Tagore writes that: 'The sign of greatness in great geniuses is their enormous capacity for borrowing, very often without their knowing it' (R. Tagore: Celebration of his Life. 1986 p. 59). Obviously, Tagore does not suggest that the originality in the arts are also not a product of genius.

The issues represented in the context of modern India from Shanti Niketan are the ways in which educators in Europe can try to understand the arts of 'the other' especially the tutors in the arts attempted to teach interculturally and to engage with finding their own identity or artistic bearings by the study of different artistic cultures and traditions..

A. “The Cultural Prison”

The art educators and the viewers cannot expect to make sense of the complex inner and outer realities of the arts if both of them are themselves locked in a “cultural prison.”

With increasingly large numbers of diverse populations, young and older learners and viewers from many communities may live in artistic ghettos and other cultural prisons. The viewers may be locked into their own particularist traditions which would delimit their aesthetic, while the educators may be locked into the European Classical canon. Many also argue that Classical arts from Europe are form the basis of a universal aesthetic. Other Classical aesthetics from other cultures do not have the same status or gravitas. Therefore, the Greek Classical Canon creates immense problems for understanding or appreciating the arts of other cultures and civilisations. This also applies to the various artistic movements and productions which are rooted in specific contexts or syncretise various specific artistic traditions.

B. “Artistic Neo-Colonialism”

In general historical terms Toynbee states:

‘An intelligible field of historical study is not to be found within a national framework; we must expand our historical horizon to think of an entire civilization. But this wider framework is still too narrow for civilizations, like nations, are plural, not singular’.

It may be helpful for art historians to reflect on the implications of such a perspective and critically and analytically examine and study art history. It brings us up against a fundamental problem which will continually be addressed in this paper. Those who study western artistic heritages customarily present the classical tradition as the foundation of Western civilization. Yet, as Martin Bernal has pointed out in his important, multi-volume study *Black Athena*, which deconstructs the origins of Western civilization, the Egyptians and Phoenicians played a central role in the formation of Greek culture a role that the academic tradition of the West refuses to acknowledge.

Bernal shows how the eighteenth century Romantics and racists in Europe could not accept

that Greek culture, the fount of Western civilization, was heavily influenced by Phoenecia and Egypt. They wanted to preserve the image of Greece as the basis of “pure childhood”, which necessitated the elimination of Afro-Asian influences on Greek society.

The arts establishment and the viewers are faced with the task of confronting a very long European tradition which equates non-Europeans with the uncivilized. Similarly, as Bernal shows, nineteenth century racism in Europe had strong Anti-Semitic underpinnings which meant that Semitic origins of Greek names, as well as the Phoenician influence on Greece and the legend of the Phoenician colonization of Greece were all denied.

In order to teach the art history of the world, teachers therefore need to engage with others in attempting to displace the western dominance in terms of ideas and knowledge, which has succeeded in suppressing the past, the knowledge and artistic history which is an integral part of human knowledge. Art history is not confined to any one civilization; it is multifaceted and multifocal in its origins and developments. However, artistic and academic neo-colonialism have not allowed it to surface.

All that can be done in this paper is to suggest some connections between various artistic traditions, and to point towards the multiple bases of the development of human arts and culture. It is for specialist art historians located within different artistic cultures or traditions to examine outside influences within their own cultures. When art history originated as a discipline in the 18th century it had an intercultural outlook which needs to be reinstated today by mainstream historians. Johann Winklemann (1717-68) effected a complete reappraisal of the arts of antiquity and the need for regeneration from the point of view of ‘a man of sensibility’ and of the Enlightenment. Indeed art historians (after Winklemann) would be reclaiming a territory which, as has been indicated, became ethnocentric only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

However, such an art historian’s perspective faces complex problems including the initial construction a ‘multicultural aesthetic’. At the first level, such an aesthetic ought to inspire viewers to form an educated appreciation and judgement of the specific artistic traditions of particular artists’

work. Secondly, it ought to foster that studying art history and those viewing artistic production to develop an “inter-cultural aesthetic” and facilitate an even broader appreciations of the arts.

These are two different sets of issues and raise complexities within the arts because different art systems have fundamentally different ways of seeing, feeling and being, with their own pictorial grammar and syntax. Can the pictorial grammar of one system be translated into and comprehended by another without causing considerable distortion?

For example, can different African arts be decoded by the concepts of European aesthetics? Similarly, can European art be decoded by the concepts of different African aesthetics? There remains this complex problem of acknowledging radical differences and divisions between artistic cultures.ⁱ To establish a common ground between them, the Euro-centrism which comprehends ‘the other’ extra-European artistic traditions needs to be tackled. Ignoring these traditions will elicit demands for ‘politics of recognition’ of the Afro-centric, Islamo-centric artistic knowledge whose politics will pertain only to particular groups.

Edward Said explains:

‘The whole effort to deconsecrate Euro centrism cannot be interpreted least of all by those who participate in the enterprise, as an effort to supplant Euro centrism with, for instance, Afro centric or Islam centric approaches. On its own, ethnic particularity does not provide for intellectual process – quite the contrary’. (Quoted in: McCarthy and Critchlow, 1993, p. 311).

Said refers to the need to develop a “many-windowed house of human culture as a whole” (Said, 1986, p. 2). Euro centrism is simply a source of prejudices and errors that heighten xenophobia and chauvinism. Samir Amin points out, that after 1492 there has been a continual Europeanization of the globe. This leads to, a de-universalisation of knowledge. Art historians therefore need to displace the dominant European knowledge which has succeeded in suppressing knowledge which is an integral part of universal or human history.

C. Some Case Studies

(i) Ancient Egypt

When the Sahara began to dry up some of its peoples moved towards the Nile valley where, within a thousand or so years, they had created the great Egyptian civilization. The masterly skills of Saharan painting and carving were carried on, and extended to three dimensional sculptures. But in Egypt the free forms used in Saharan painting were confined to a strict, undeviating style, the so-called “canon of proportion”. (IMAGE NO. 1 TWO EGYPTIAN FIGURES) The human figure was depicted, in painting and in sculpture; according to a mathematical formula by which the size of each part of the body was related exactly to the size of the other parts (e.g. the foot was always so many times shorter than the leg, etc). This convention was followed in Egypt for about a thousand years, giving Egyptian paintings and sculptures their static, monumental, almost timeless quality.

The Egyptians also left a valuable medical, scientific and technological legacy which formed the basis of framing great generalisations. The knowledge of comparative anatomy gained through the process of embalming the dead and the diagnosis of stomach, heart, brain and female disorders influenced both the medical and the artistic knowledge. This influence of Egyptian material medical is to be found in the Hippocratic Collection and in the later works of Pliny, Discords and Galen (Winter: p. 11). The famous Greek historian Herodotus (fifth century B.C.) records the Greek debt to Egypt. This debt was especially great because it formed the basis of the Hippocratic medicine.

The purpose of much Egyptian art was to enliven the dead in the next world by recording them in this world. But though they built monumental tombs, like the great pyramids, the Egyptians were not preoccupied with death. They loved life, as illustrated in the spring song above the famous banquet scene in Thebes:

Enjoy thyself as much as thou canst

For a man cannot take his property with him

Four of those who depart not one come back again.

They organised athletic contests long before the Greek Olympics. And their tombs were filled with useful and ornamental objects to allow the dead to enjoy themselves in death as they had in life.

The Greeks picked up the Egyptian tradition of sculpture but they broke out of the rigid canon of proportion. As the art historian Ernest Gombrich states they “began to use their eyes” rather than their knowledge ⁱⁱ and sculpted human figures in a naturalistic way. (IMAGE NO. 2: AETHENIAN POTTER EXEKIAS; 550-525 BC; AJAX AND ACHILLES PLAYING DICE). It was the same with Greek vase painting where the figures are depicted naturalistically. Thus the Greeks restored to art the vitality and fluidity displayed by the rock painters of the Sahara and were able to re-invent these ancient techniques in their artistic creations.

Whether in Egypt, Greece or elsewhere, artists worked as part of their societies. In Egypt they remained restricted by the canon of proportion which suppressed individuality and made artists, generation after generation, represent (and perhaps even see) the world according to its prescriptions. In the democratic Athenian society, however, their status was better recognised, and they were able to convey something of the unspoken feelings among people, to let us see “the workings of the soul”.

(ii) South-West Asia

The river valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates (Mesopotamia) (modern Iraq), and the Indus (modern Pakistan), “hydraulic societies”, were based on the control of water resources. These civilisations were similar to those of Egypt, and were founded around rivers. Here too distinctive art styles emerged. ⁱⁱⁱ It is also important to note that these River Valley Cultures were where the ‘tools’ of science were also fashioned, which included the handling of ‘natural materials and a degree of abstraction which resulted in writing and symbolism’ (H.J.J. Winter: Eastern Science: John Murray. 1952).

The early Sumerian settlers in Mesopotamia established around 4000 BC what may be called a theocratic egalitarian society with a divine sovereign and elements of a welfare state. There is evidence

that from about 3000 BC urban centres from Mesopotamia to the Indus Valley, the Persian Gulf to Baluchistan, were inter-related and inter-connected. The Indus Valley civilization exchanged goods with the Sumerians. In Lothal and Ruper in the Indus Valley which were urban and mercantile cultures, no royal tombs, palaces or dynastic monuments have been found. Similar to the Sumerians it seems to have been an egalitarian society, and part of a network of these regional societies.

(IAMGE 3; HEAD OF GUDEA, FROM TELLOH, C. 2100 B.C.) The one interesting city which survived was that of Lagash, ruled at about 2180 BC by Gudea who referred to himself as a faithful shepherd of the people and his city as an oasis of peace. His clean-shaven face reflects delicate and youthful sensitivity which is pious and reflective. In some of the Indus Valley sculptures of that date male torsos are exceedingly sensual, as if they were living beings. (IMAGE 4: MALE TORSOS FROM HARAPPA, 2400-200 B.C. NATIONAL MUSEUM IF INDIA, NEW DELHI)

In the sixth century BC much of South-West Asia, and briefly Egypt, were conquered by the Persians (Iranians).^{iv} Cyrus the Great of Persia respected the cultures and religions of the peoples he conquered. One example is his use of multi-lingual inscriptions. The palace of one of his successors, Darius I, was itself an example of a cosmopolitan synthesis of styles and materials (stone, gold, and bricks), created by Persian, Ionian, Median, Egyptian and Babylonian craftsmen.

(i) Syncretism: Hellenism, Buddhism, Hinduism

After the death of Alexander the Great (323 BC) his empire, stretching from Egypt to Iran, was divided by his successors into three kingdoms. Here the Greeks introduced their own distinctive Hellenistic art style which interacted culturally with the existing indigenous art forms and created a new stylistic language. Only the Egyptians resisted any alteration to their own ancient tradition. Elsewhere artists and architects assimilated Hellenistic styles to their own indigenous art forms but without losing their own stylistic identities. Political domination did not bring cultural domination.

Though these kingdoms disappeared after two hundred years, the cultural impress of Hellenism, which spread outwards over the northwestern regions of the Asian continent from the

Euphrates to the Ganga (Ganges) and Jamuna basin (modern north-east India), lingered there for a millennium.

Gandharan art may be taken as an illustration. (IMAGE NO. 5: HEAD OF BUDDHA, GANDHARA, 3RD c. A.D., V&A). Gandhara, in one of the farthest reaches of the region, lay at the crossroads of the eastern and western trading worlds. Here a range of stylistic elements from Western classical tradition were transformed in terms of a local conceptual imagination, what Lolita Nehru calls the “Gandharan imagination”, which modulated the stylistic elements Gandhara absorbed from India. In Western Iran and the southern Euphrates regions of the Parthian Empire there was an equivalent cultural synthesis in the same period, the first century AD.

Thus the Gandharan style absorbed a wide spectrum of stylistic elements from neighbouring regions but remained an independent stylistic language, distinct from the parent traditions it drew from. Moreover it transmitted iconography and style to its neighbours. Buddhist monasteries close to the Silk Route across Central Asia to China inherited the arts and philosophy of Gandhara. This mingling of different and successive traditions in the regions of north-west India exercised its influence up to the time when Islam superseded Buddhism.

Buddhist art has a homogeneity and continuity through various societies, and over a long historical period, as exemplified by the Buddha’s icon, in its various attitudes of meditation or teaching. The other symbol is the lotus the image of the soul opening up to transcendent light.

The power of image over word, exemplified in traditions throughout the world, is not to be underestimated, particularly where large numbers of people are illiterate. As Pope Gregory the Great said, “painting can do for the illiterate what writing does for those who can read”.

The extreme complexities of Indian art, and in particular the Hindu tradition, are too wide-ranging to explore in this paper. However, one example may be of interest because of its concern with international peace.

The Emperor Ashoka (272-232 BC) built an Indian Empire across the length and breadth of

India. (IMAGE NO. 6; ASHOKA'S COLUMN OF PEACE WITH LION AT TOP, NEPAL 243 B.C.) His message on the columns that were built was very different from that of other conquerors. It was a declaration of non-violence and adherence to the teachings of Buddha. On one column it was stated that he had been moved to remorse, and that he felt "profound sorrow and regret because the conquest of a people previously unconquered involved slaughter, death and deportation". He had learnt from Buddha that "moral conquest was the only true conquest". So, while the Hellenistic Empire had been established through military conquest, Ashoka sent missionaries to all the Hellenistic rulers in the west to preach Buddha's pacific doctrine, to where the Greek King Antiochos dwelt and beyond the Antiochos to where dwelt the four kings -- Ptolomey, Antigonus, Magas and Alexander. Hence the route of trade and conquest also became a means of disseminating peaceful doctrines which could prove a less aggressive way of attempting to determine the course of history.

D. The Islamic Contribution

Under Emperor Justinian the schools of learning had been suppressed in the year 529, but some five centuries before this event the Alexandrian School had retained the legacy of Greek science and mathematics, and Alexandria was the focus of scientific and other learning when the Muslim conquerors overran the city in 640. When Arabs overran Persia, scientific and other knowledge translated from Greek and Sanskrit into Syriac and Pahlawi became available in Arabic. The Arab dynasty of the Umayyads established in Damascus in 661 did not suppress existing cultural institutions, and until its overthrow in 749 Court physicians were Jews and Christians with Arabic names (Winter: pp. 60-61).

The Umayyads were succeeded by Persian Khalifs – the Abbasids and Arabic science and culture entered its Golden Age. While the Umayyids were slain by their successors, Abdu-r-Rahman escaped to Spain, where his dynasty was founded in Cardoba in 755 and ruled until 1030. Throughout this period, Muslim science and culture flourished in the Iberian Peninsula. The Spanish cities of Cardoba, Granada, Seville, Toledo were culturally and scientifically intercultural. As Winter states:

‘Muslim, Christian and Jewish influences comingled, that Greek genius preserved and supplemented by Arabic, came to enter largely into Western Europe’. (Winter: p. 62) This propagation of learning was further aided by the enthusiasm of Emperor Frederick II of Sicily, who founded the University of Naples in 1224. Arabic manuscripts were translated into Latin and Hebrew and presented by the Emperor to the University of Bologna. Thought and learning in medieval universities of Europe were strongly influenced by the writings of Ibn Sina (Avicenna: A.D. 980-1037), Ibn Rushd (Averroes: A.D. 1126-98) both philosophers of Muslim Spain, and the great Jewish thinkers and philosophers like Ibn Gabirol and Maimonides who transmitted Arabic knowledge into Latin (Winter: p. 69).

The art of Islam spread both east and west from its heartland in Arabia. There is an ancient and respected tradition in Islam that forbids artists to depict humans or animals. Muslim artists instead turned to non-representational art, to which they made a major contribution. (IMAGE NO. 7; PAGE FROM THE HOLY KORAN, MAMLUK RULERS, EGYPT, 1372 A.D. 774 A.H.)

Artistic fervour consorted with imagination to create new patterns and forms, particularly in imaginative uses of the Arabic script as a decorative medium (so-called “arabesques”), in which the patterns were constructed from religious texts. Thus intricately presented texts from the Qur’an combined together image and message. Architects used them to decorate the outsides of buildings. Hence, directing the artist away from human and animal representation resulted in a new kind of exploration of, lines and geometric patterns in art.

(IMAGE NO.8; ALAHAMBRA, GRANADA). They are exemplified, for instance, in the courtyards of the Alhambra, built in the fourteenth century when Spain was under Muslim rule, which display an immense variety of these decorative patterns, and are also exemplified also in woven textiles. The trade in oriental rugs has spread over the world, influencing artistic expression in all cultures.

The dynamic of early Islam was dramatically displayed in its architecture. The layout of Baghdad in the eighth and ninth centuries under the Abbasid *Khalifs*, a city built round a vast mosque and palace, set a style that was repeated through the Muslim world. In Egypt under the Fatimid dynasty Cairo was built with mosques and palaces and merchants’ mansions. The great al-Azhar mosque, also

a centre of higher learning, founded in 970, is the oldest university in the world. Westwards in the Maghreb and in Spain, eastwards through Iran, at Isfahan and Tabriz, and beyond at Bukhara and Samarkand, in Afghanistan and India, Muslim architects designed superb buildings. The Taj Mahal mausoleum at Agra is one of the architectural wonders of the world.

The conquest of Constantinople (Istanbul) by the Ottoman Turks in 1453 brought another architectural flowering. (IMAGE N. 9; SINAN'S SELMYE MOSQUE, EDRINA 1567-74) The Ottoman tradition of architecture reached its maturity in the late fifteenth century, and was crystallised by the architect Sinan, who designed a total of three hundred and thirty-four buildings in the fifty years of his working life. He designed eighty-one Friday mosques, fifty smaller mosques, thirty-four palaces, thirty-three public baths and nineteen mausoleums. There also many hospitals, bridges and other utilitarian structures. Many are designed with extremely crisp details in glazed tiles. The Selmya Mosque at Edrina is one of his masterpieces. Interestingly, Sinan and Palladio the very famous architect of Palladian architecture in Europe and America were also known to be in contact through the Venetian and Istanbul Courts.

Nevertheless Islam had to come to terms with the arts of those who were conquered or converted. After a period of time this led to a development of arts which had regional differences, although conforming to the Islamic ethos. Art based on erotic traditions, such as the Indian sensual sculptures, were destroyed. But in Iran and in India, Persian and Mughal artists broke with strict Muslim rules and depicted scenes of human life and mythology in illuminated manuscripts of enchanting beauty. (IMAGE NO. 10; SUFI ART) The Sufi tradition of Islam also profoundly influenced Islamic art.

Muslim architecture changed in India partly because of the influences of Persian art, and partly with the use of Hindu artists. Emperor Akbar (1542-1605) was among the wisest of the Mughal rulers. He had a great passion for paintings, particularly these with a narrative content, perhaps because he was largely illiterate, and showed his wisdom politically by trying to merge Hindu and Muslim ideas in

a new architecture. He also attempted to found a new religion based on discussions between Muslims, Hindus, Zoroastrians, Jains and Christians.

Mughal miniatures from India had a wide-ranging influence. Rembrandt, for instance, was not only influenced by the Italian painters of the Renaissance, but also by Mughal miniatures from India which he owned and copied. Rembrandt however was a master who assimilated everything, whose paintings reflect the Classical notion of the “working of the soul” which had such a profound influence on Dutch art.

Mughal painting flourished in the Delhi court as well as in the provinces, like Oudh and Murshidabad. Provincial Mughal art however, developed its own idiom, marked by warm colour. Non-Mughal traditions survived in the Deccan region and Southern India.

The British trading centres began to influence the work of artists, and a tradition called “company” art (after the East India Company) developed.^v (IMAGE NO.11; QUILT COMPANY ART) European artists and craftsmen began to use Indian motifs, also Chinese, creating the so-called “Chinoiserie” for the European market -- a complex, interactive process which influenced the baroque and Rococco styles of Europe. But it was a process that resulted from European fantasising about the Orient, an interest in exotica. The principles of Indian and Chinese art were not at that period studied or understood.

An exotic architectural feature widely copied was the veranda. Introduced originally into Spain and Portugal during the years of Muslim rule, it was adopted by white settlers wherever they went in India (where the word veranda originated), in Africa, the Caribbean, and even in Australia where the ironwork veranda developed in the late nineteenth century as a local art form.

E. China

China has had a continuous cultural history, without significant break, from the Bronze Age, withstanding and engulfing external invasions and internal revolutions -- a continuity which the

Cultural Revolution of 1966-76, and the subsequent introduction of the globalised Coca-Cola capitalist culture, may now have effectively destroyed. The portrayal of the bamboo in Chinese art symbolises the nature of this society which bends without breaking, and encapsulates tradition on the one hand, and innovation on the other. (IMAGE NO. 12; QI BASHI (1863-1957) Prawns and Saggitaria)

Chinese artists concentrated on representing the spirit of objects as an aid to the process of meditation. They painted water and mountains in a devout spirit of reverence, providing material for deep thought. Often their works do not contain details, and are not meant to be compared with the real world.

Hence an observer of art had to be trained to meditate, because the painters were attempting to capture the moods of the landscape. Confucian thinking contributed to this development, as did the Buddha's icon which travelled to China, Korea and Japan.

China was connected by the overland silk routes to Europe as well as by sea routes to the Middle East and East Africa. The caravans and ships carried more than silk: artistic material and ideas were part of this communications network. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries fabrics with Chinese motifs were being shipped to Egypt and other Islamic markets. In the sixteenth century European traders arrived in China and Chinese patterns were adapted to European tastes and markets. Chinese processes and materials also developed in syncretism with those of Iran, particularly in the decorative arts. The Chinese profoundly influenced Iranian art, including porcelain. The Gandharan styles too were influenced by Chinese styles, as evidenced by a standing Buddha made in wood in Eastern Turkestan. The impact of Buddhism on the Chinese arts was also dramatic. Sculptures were transformed at monastic centres as an important medium of artistic expression. Similarly, Chinese humanistic traditions affected Buddhist arts.

F. Africa

The great African cultural heritage is often overlooked or marginalised by European art historians.

(i) Northern Africa

The art styles of Ancient Egypt spread up the Nile to the modern Sudan. The Meroe style was derived from Egypt, but the painting and sculpture had its own distinctive forms, and the Meroitic language was written in its own script. After Meroë declined in the fourth century AD (partly from desertification, caused by cutting down the forests to smelt iron), it was succeeded by Nubian kingdoms.

After Egypt became Christian, with its own Coptic Church, quite separate from the other Christian churches of the world, the Nubians too adopted Coptic Christianity, and decorated their churches (now being uncovered by archaeologists) with paintings in their own styles. Eventually by the fifteenth century the kingdoms became Muslim and the Christian religion died out there. In Ethiopia, however, where King Ezana was converted to Christianity in the fourth century, the country remained Christian. Here a distinctively Ethiopian style of Church architecture and painting has flourished over the centuries.

(ii) Tropical Africa

West and Central Africa have an immensely rich and varied sculpture tradition. The oldest sculptures so far discovered are the so-called “Nok” figures (named from the place in Northern Nigeria where they were first found), small clay figures of great diversity, the earliest dated about the sixth century BC, and the latest about a thousand years later.

When kingdoms were founded, sculptors worked at the royal courts, casting bronze and brass, and carving stone and ivory. A number of full-length bronze sculptures (one, a seated figure, is cast all in one piece) have been found at Tada in the mid-Niger country, dated thirteenth or fourteenth century. Westwards in the Yoruba country, at the same period, at the royal court at Ife, a series of magnificent bronze portrait heads was made. Further south at Owu a large assemblage of distinctive stone figures has been found. And in Benin, near the Niger delta, sculptors cast ornate bronze plaques to decorate the royal palace (over 4,000 have survived), as well as portrait heads. There are also fine Benin ivory

carvings. (IMAGE NO. 13 BENIN QUEEN MOTHER PENDANT MASK. (1520)

A spectacular royal treasure has been discovered at Igbo-Ukwu, east of the Niger in the Igbo country. It is surprising because subsequently the Igbo peoples discarded kingship. Dated to the ninth century AD, some of the bronze work has a sophisticated technical complexity of a kind not matched by any European metal work of that date.

Sculptors also worked in the kingdoms of the forest country of the modern Zaire, notably in the Kuba and Luba kingdoms, creating masterly sculptures. Others worked in small village communities, sometimes using perishable materials like wood or mud. Such artists were concerned only to create works to give immediate satisfaction in the present: they were not worried about the future, which would have its own artists. In the Zambesi valley early royal burials are being dug up by archaeologists. Vast stone enclosures, the most famous of which, Great Zimbabwe, has been taken as the name of the state of Zimbabwe, were built, chiefly in the fifteenth century, by the ancestors of the Shona people for their rulers. The sculptures and gold decorations with which they were adorned were almost all stolen in the nineteenth century by marauding Europeans. Further south in the eastern Transvaal sculptured clay heads have been discovered. These date from the sixth century AD.

These works of art are customarily labelled after the place where the sculptor worked, and are called Ife, Benin, Kuba etc. sculpture. But we must not forget that each was created by an individual artist of high talent whose name is now lost.

The royal portraits illustrate the values ascribed to monarchy, values which may be unrecognisable by Western aesthetic. (IMAGE NO. 14; QUEEN OF HOLO, MODERN ZAIRE) An iron statue of a Queen of Holo (modern Zaire) depicts her as ruthless and sexless; sitting on a cylinder round which heavy iron wire is twisted. Western aesthetic would not identify her as a queen. But in this region there was a tradition of dynamic women rulers whom this figure may be taken to exemplify.

Masks linked sculpture to performance. The carved head or face pieces preserved today in museums, or hung on collectors' walls, were made to be integrated into costumes of fabric or fibre,

covering the whole body, so that the individual wearing them was given a new visual personality. Craftsmen also made intricate body ornaments, particularly out of copper which tended to be prized for decoration more than gold because of the rich colour it takes when burnished. And many people decorated their bodies with scarification or painting to mark status or identity, or just to enhance their physical appearance, as among the Nuba of the Southern Sudan.

Sculpture also served commerce. In the gold-producing Akan country of Ghana small brass weights were sculpted to weigh out gold dust human or animal figures, or figures of fantasy, of great charm and variety. Over 300,000 of them are contained in museums and collections. Nor must one forget the long tradition of African weaving (often wrongly dismissed, with body ornamentation, as a “minor art”) in textiles and fibres, with designs of great beauty and complexity, which is still widely practised.

ii (i) Islam in Africa

Islam brought its own contribution to Africa with the great mosques and palaces of Egypt and the Maghreb. The architecture that flourished in the Muslim cities of the East African coast, until they were destroyed by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, has customarily been described as being “Arab”. But recent archaeological work in East Africa has revealed that the city layouts are in African style, and that the mosques have features not found in Arabia. The inhabitants’ Swahili language and culture was basically African, though absorbing Arabic influences fruitfully.

But as Islam spread through Western Africa it undermined the indigenous artistic traditions. African art forms were dismissed as pagan, and its manifestations deliberately destroyed. Muslim Africans have uprooted their own indigenous African culture as much as did the Christian missionaries, and often far more effectively.

G. Some European Connections and Developments

(IMAGE NO. 15; CLOISONNE JAR, MING DYNASTY 1430) As we have seen, imported

Indian and Chinese (or Chinoiserie) motifs influenced European artists, notably in the European Rococco style of the eighteenth century, exemplified by the hyper Rococco of the Kaisersaal in Wurtzburg (Austria) with its fresco paintings by Tiepolo. Here the ceiling demonstrates an interest in the customs, people, flora and fauna of Africa, Asia and America, but from the perspective of an extremely firm European superiority. The “Orient” and the other parts of the world were to be enjoyed from the perspective, and in the civilised comfort, of Europe.

Britain did however import artistic and architectural knowledge from the Empire, particularly India. For instance, the architect George Dance in designing the south front of the Guildhall in London in 1788, incorporated Indian ideas in the scalloped arches of the windows, his work having been influenced by Hodge’s engraving of the view of the Musjid at Janipur. While the City aldermen were unaware of the Indian origins of their Guildhall, there were those who recognised it and referred to it with disapproval as “Hindoo Gothic”. And the Pavilion built in Brighton for George IV when Prince Regent set a fashion for Regency Oriental construction.

(IAMGE NO. 16: ELVEDON HALL, NORFOLK 19C.)A curiosity of the period is Elvedon Hall in Suffolk, designed by the Gothic architect John Norton, for the Maharajah Dalip Singh who had lost the Kingdom of the Punjab to the British. Queen Victoria saw him as “a Christian and completely European in his habits and feelings”. The exterior was Italianate, but the interior was elaborately Indian, particularly the arches and columns.

(i) Blacks in European Art

The image of the black changed dramatically in European painting.^{vi} In mediaeval times religious painters regularly depicted a dignified black king in pictures of the three kings coming to see the birth of Jesus, and painted pictures showing black saints. But with the era of the Atlantic slave trade and the introduction of black slavery in the Americas and the Caribbean, blacks were only depicted only in servile roles. Portraits of white ladies and gentlemen often included a black servant (in law, a slave), positioned to enhance the sitter’s dignity.

William Hogarth, however, introduced black people into his paintings as sympathetic figures, using the stereotype of supposed black savagery as a satirical mirror to ridicule the pretensions and viciousness of upper class British society. He also shows black people as part of the normal everyday life of London. Numerous books about Hogarth have been published, but not one of them mentioned the black presence in his paintings until the Guyanese art historian David Dabydeen published his *Hogarth's Blacks* in 1985. (IMAGE NO. 17; MME. BENOIST, 1800) In France Marie Guilmine Benoist, a pupil of Louis David's, exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1800 "Portrait d'une Nègresse", probably portraying a servant brought by her brother-in-law from the Antilles. Yet this is not a portrait of servitude. The black woman is completely at her ease: it is a warmly humane and noble image. She looks at the viewer with a gaze of reciprocal equality. It is a portrait of visual sensitivity, set off by her crisp white freshly laundered cotton headdress and drapery. Painted soon after the French Revolutionary decree of 1794 which made a black *citoyenne* "free and equal", it gives a sense of intimate rapport between artist and sitter. The Benoist painting is a reminder that, over the centuries, there have been distinguished women painters. They include in the last century the Mexican painter Frida Kahlo, who was always conscious, and immensely proud, of her own Native Mexican ancestry.^{vii}

Passionately committed politically, she depicted her own sexuality, and the agonies of the physical pain from which she suffered during much of her life, with an uncompromising, self-critical honesty unprecedented in the history of painting.

(ii) "Oriental" Art and Japanese Art

"Orientalism" wrote Edward Said, "is a western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient".^{viii} It was manifested in the "orientalist" genre of European painting which began in France and was taken up by painters all over Europe. Eugène Delacroix, who visited Morocco in 1832, set the fashion for paintings depicting exotic, often also highly erotic, scenes of allegedly oriental life. Ingres, with his "Turkish Bath", crammed full of nude women, and Jean-Léon Gérôme, who depicted scenes of slave markets and snake-charmers, set the tone for paintings that distanced the

European viewers comfortably from a barbaric but enticing fantasy world which they could enjoy vicariously without endangering their own respectability.

Such paintings also had a political implication. In a period of growing colonial expansion, as the white nations of Europe established empires over the world in which alleged distinctions of race were made a basic technique of government, the paintings served to emphasize the gap between the rulers and their conquered subject peoples. They also preached an implied lesson: that it was the duty of European rulers to introduce “civilization” to those who were still in a state of “oriental” savagery.

“Orientalist” painters painted their pictures in the accepted European style. Only their subject matter was exotic. In contrast, the art of Japan with its very different styles and techniques was taken seriously by European artists. Japanese art gave European painters a new vision of the world. The French Impressionists, and the American painter Whistler, in particular, were deeply impressed by it. Degas was said to have made Japanese art so much part of him that it was almost wholly integrated into his work. The work of Monet too was influenced by Japanese prints, as was that of Toulouse-Lautrec who wanted it to give joy to ordinary people, not to make his art the preserve of wealthy connoisseurs.

Far from being treated with condescension as a primitive, “exotic”, art form, Japanese art was received in Europe with admiration, even reverence. One might speculate whether it is significant that Japan was then an independent, unconquered nation not a conquered colonial territory.

(iii) “Primitive Art”

The royal palaces of sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe often contained “Cabinets of Curiosities” where unfamiliar art objects from beyond Europe were collected for interest rather than for aesthetic reasons. During the nineteenth century collecting became formalised as a branch of ethnology. Since these works were not regarded as ‘works of art’, they were displayed in many 19th century ethnographic museums like Copenhagen (1841), Berlin (1856), Leiden (1864), Cambridge, Mass (1866), Dresden 1875, and Paris (1878). In these museums utensils, implements and sculptures from

Polynesia, Melanesia, New Zealand, North and South America and Africa were displayed, to enable visitors to determine as Edward Tylor, Professor of Anthropology, Oxford, put it, “the relation of the mental condition of savages to that of civilized man”.

The great international exhibitions of the nineteenth century displayed the cultures of the world, with a similar assumption. The Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851 was supposed to exhibit the collective output of humanity. In describing the Indian exhibits, the catalogue stated that while some techniques had started in India they had “matured” in Europe. And the Paris and Vienna Exhibitions, while giving more space to the non-European world, still claimed that Europe was superior in the arts.

Early in the twentieth century European painters, notably Picasso, began to evaluate these museum exhibits as serious works of art. He and other painters and sculptors (Braque, Nolde, Modigliani, Brancusi) used African and Pacific Island sculptures and interiorised them in their work. To fit them into the canon of art appreciation, a new category, “Primitive Art”, was created. Museums began displaying their exhibits as works of art rather than as ethnological specimens. Art galleries also began displaying them and art collectors began paying high prices for them, thus encouraging unscrupulous marauders to steal them or buy them up cheaply from their unsuspecting owners.

Museum curators and collectors defined this “primitive art” as belonging to cultures authenticated as being dead or dying.

H. “Ethnic Arts”

To the category of “primitive art”, ascribed to the work of the past, there is now added a category of “ethnic arts” for the work of the present created by non-Europeans. It is not in itself an acceptable term. The word “ethnic” is a synonym for the word “racial”. To restrict it to non-Europeans is to imply that white people have no ethnicity that it is a category that excludes whites. Yet it is among the white people of the former Yugoslavia that the term “ethnic cleansing” has recently surfaced. If we are to hear of “ethnic arts” they must also include the arts of the European ethnicities.

In the British context however the term is only applied to what is created by those of

non-European origin. The term also suggests that what they are creating is not “art”, to rate with the art of Europe, but “arts”, a humbler activity that deserves less serious notice, if indeed it deserves any notice at all. When the Arts Council, the Gulbenkian Foundation and the Community Relations Commission sponsored a Report entitled, “The Arts Britain Ignores”, Rasheed Araeen commented that it is not that Britain *ignores* these arts, but that it *refuses* to accept them.

Kwesi Owusu commented that in seeking a solution to what is defined as the problem of ethnic arts, the report dealt with the huge historical question of cultural domination and appropriation by proposing communication. But “communication” is not enough: there must be recognition. And it must be recognition that these arts are innovative and dynamic. They must not be marginalised “by relegating them to past histories^{ix}, as if they were some contemporary form of “primitive art”.

What must also be recognised is the popular art done by “ordinary” people, the insider’s view of historical events of our times. This is the voice of the powerless of the world whose normal condition is described by Paulo Frere as “the culture of silence”. While this art may portray local reality or experience, it is still globally recognisable. Guy Brett has done a study of five of these vernacular arts: urban popular art in Africa, Chinese amateur peasant painters, the Chilean patchwork pictures, paintings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings, and the art work of Greenham Common Women. The authenticity of this art is not with individual authorship or style, but a pointer in a new direction away from the art market.

Similarly, neglected has been painting by people certified as insane. Belatedly it is being realised that their work is often close in style and feeling to that of recognised painters, and may be expressed with far deeper emotion and intensity.

I. Intercultural Artistic Conflicts

There are currently a number of controversies and conflicts regarding the arts in an increasingly unequal and dominantly globalised world. There is the controversy about the return of the arts and artefacts from the various Ethnographic Museums to their countries of origin. (IMAGE NO.

18. BIMAYAN BUDDHAS; DESTROYED BY TALIBAN, AFGHANISTAN) There has been the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas by the Taliban in Afghanistan and the destruction of Buddhist arts in that country. UNESCO has undertaken to restore the Bamiyan Monuments. However, these two examples are just indicative of the ways in which interculturality within cultures not only open up possibilities of deeper cultural understandings but also of conflicts. This is especially the case where cultural intolerance becomes pervasive.

J. Conclusion

What we have to consider is how (to use Edward Said's definition) 'the production of knowledge best serves communal as opposed to sectarian ends; how knowledge that is non-dominative and non-coercive can be produced in a setting that is deeply inscribed with the politics, the considerations, the positions and the strategies of power'.

The oppressed peoples of the world have continued to contribute to art. Modern art in Latin America, Asia and Africa is extremely vibrant and dynamic. Their cultural systems are not frozen nor do they have a fixed status.^x Curators and art historians need therefore to challenge the muteness imposed upon the artistic images of oppressed civilizations. They need to grasp the legacies of resistance these civilizations have, and ensure there is a connection established with the general histories of societies, and with the social bases of the production of art.

Without working in a particularistic manner or discrete discipline, they should try to establish a more progressive, non-repressive and non-manipulative way of interpreting other cultures and other arts. The first process they may have to consider is to "unlearn", as Raymond Williams says, "the inherent dominative mode", avoiding the portrayal or the containment of those outside the dominative framework be they blacks, women or "Orientals" and letting "the other" speak for itself.

Thus by developing "an oppositional critical consciousness" art historians and curators can not only assist in dismantling the mythical notions of the mysterious Orient, the uncivilized African, or the curious Amerindian, but can be asking fundamental questions about artistic endeavour at the human

level as a whole, without being locked into the discourse of a single discipline. They can interrogate and challenge what is normally taken for granted.^{xi} And so, in learning from the artistic history of humanity as a holistic community, we may be able to avoid the “seductive degradation of knowledge”.
