

# Introduction

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The *Art and its Global Histories* Reader, and the associated Open University module of the same name, offer an expansive approach to the history of western art in the context of global cross-cultural interactions. To this end, the Reader outlines and documents key issues, debates and perspectives which support such an approach. The Reader has five Sections of texts including an opening Section that presents a range of relevant theoretical texts followed by four case studies from the fourteenth to twenty-first centuries.

The Sections are as follows: Section 1, 'Confronting Art History: overviews, perspectives and reflections', edited by Diana Newall, introduces and explores the theoretical development of and issues associated with global approaches to art history. Section 2, 'European art and the wider world 1350–1550', edited by Kathleen Christian, considers the global artistic contexts produced by early European travel, trade and colonial encounter with Mexico, the Ottoman Empire, Asia and Africa. Section 3, 'Art, commerce and colonialism: 1600–1800', edited by Emma Barker, illuminates a period of growing global trade and colonial activity, accompanied by increasingly widespread European fascination with exotic luxury goods. Section 4, 'Empire and art: British India', edited by Renate Dohmen, explores the context of the British Empire in India in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and how colonial attitudes framed and controlled perceptions of Indian art, artefacts and architecture. Finally, Section 5, 'Art after empire: from colonialism to globalisation', edited by Warren Carter, takes the debate through the twentieth century from the context of Modernism and 'Primitivism' to issues and debates on globalised contemporary art and display.

The case studies explore cross-cultural and global relationships, connections and entanglements that have shaped the production and perception of western and non-western art. Extracts from primary sources offer

insights into contemporaneous artistic theory and practice while the associated critical texts present analytical and interpretative approaches. All of these texts, regardless of origin, are to a greater or lesser extent mediated through Eurocentric scholarly and pedagogic priorities and methodologies. Many of them directly address and challenge the issue of Eurocentrism in art history but they remain within its western framework. Central to this issue are the endeavours of European states to discover, trade with, colonise, exploit, scrutinise and control other parts of the world. Therefore, throughout this Reader, a key point of debate has to do with the broad range of consequences, in the past and the present, of European colonial and imperial hegemony.

### Edward Said and Orientalism

The consequences of European colonialism and imperialism on societies and cultures within the western sphere and across the world have been the topic of intense scholarly debate for more than half a century. After the Second World War, the greater part of Europe's former colonial territories achieved independence. Many of them had experienced decades of unrest and war as they sought to challenge the injustices of imperial rule.<sup>1</sup> The theoretical framework which underpins consideration of the social and cultural implications of colonial rule is often seen to be rooted in Edward Said's (1935–2003) *Orientalism* (1978).<sup>2</sup> These issues had already been addressed by other writers including, most notably, Frantz Fanon (1925–1961), the Martiniquais-French psychologist, philosopher and writer who wrote in French colonial Algeria around the time of the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962).<sup>3</sup> However, Said's work set out a robust polemic which has provided a foundation for critical debates within Postcolonial Studies ever since.

In *Orientalism*, Said analysed writings from European politics, scholarship and literature, from the classical period onwards, to reveal and

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1 See for example, Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Bipan Chandra, Mridula Mukherjee, Aditya Mukherjee *et al.*, *India's Struggle for Independence* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1989); Peter Fryer, *Black People in the British Empire* (London: Pluto, 1988); James Rotberg and Ali Mazrui, *Protest and Power in Black Africa* (New York: Open University Press, 1970).

2 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1978, 1995, 2003).

3 Earlier interventions include the poet Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (*Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*) (1939), which explores African black cultural identity, and Frantz Fanon, who further explored the issues of black identity in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961).

interrogate the ways in which concepts of the 'east', the 'Orient' and Asia were created.<sup>4</sup> His central claim was that the imperial power ambitions pursued initially by Europe (primarily England and France), and later by the United States of America, entailed the conceptualisation the 'Orient' and the 'Oriental' as an inferior *other*. He argued that, rather than being based on geographical, political, social or cultural reality or empirical evidence, this ideological construct of inferiority functioned as a tool of power through which colonial rule was orchestrated (see Section 1).

Said identified Napoleon's invasion of Egypt at the start of the nineteenth century, accompanied by a group of scholars whose role was to study and document the country, as the radical moment of change in the relationship between Europe and the Orient, inaugurating Orientalist discourse.<sup>5</sup> Within the Reader, this moment is recognised by the changing perceptions of non-western art and culture from the vogue for the exotic in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Section 3, to the denigration of Indian art under British rule from the nineteenth century, discussed in Section 4. Said also developed a critique of the discipline of Oriental Studies, with its origins in the scholarship initiated by Napoleon in Egypt, for the way in which it reinforced the conceptual framework of the inferior *other* through the power imbalances created by knowledge acquisition. His argument drew on Michel Foucault's theories in which knowledge functioned as power in society.<sup>6</sup> Said contended that in all aspects of the West's relationship with the 'Orient', the structures of European societies, politics, religion and culture kept those of non-European states in the Middle East and Asia in a permanent condition of exclusion and inferiority. This not only provided a justification of colonial rule (political and legal), Christian evangelisation and the imposition of western cultural values, but also constructed a framework in which the colonised seemingly accepted and participated in the colonial endeavour.<sup>7</sup>

Among the many scholars who have responded to Said's work have been numerous art historians. One of the earliest to do so was the American

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4 See particularly, Said, 'The Scope of Orientalism', in *Orientalism*, pp. 31–110.

5 Said, *Orientalism*, p. 87.

6 Especially, Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970), *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith and Rupert Sawyer (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972) and *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

7 Said developed his theories further in *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993) where he analysed western culture, interrogating the colonial dynamics in works such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814) and *Persuasion* (1817), and works on postcolonial issues by Salman Rushdie and V.S. Naipaul.

art historian Linda Nochlin. The prompt for her work came from the large body of so-called Orientalist painting produced during the nineteenth century, a period in which large swathes of North Africa and the Middle East came under European control, most notably work by French artists such as Eugène Delacroix and Jean-Léon Gérôme. The underlying stereotyping and denigration of the Oriental peoples, cultures and societies within these artworks, as Nochlin shows in her essay 'The Imaginary Orient' (Section 1), can be interpreted as another dimension to the colonial discourse critiqued by Said.

The scholarship on French Orientalist art since Nochlin is extensive. Some have challenged Said's and Nochlin's interpretation of Orientalism, among them John MacKenzie, who contended that Orientalist art was produced and functioned on a more respectful and positive level.<sup>8</sup> More recently, scholars have moved beyond the East–West binary construct of Orientalism at the centre of Said's hypothesis to a more nuanced reading of Orientalism as (in the words of Jill Beaulieu and Mary Roberts) 'an engagement with Orientalism as heterogeneous and contested'.<sup>9</sup>

Taking a different perspective, but also looking beyond the binary power dynamic implied by Said's Orientalism, Roger Benjamin has analysed closely the politics and imagery of colonialism, conceiving Orientalist art as products rather than drivers of colonialism.<sup>10</sup> Benjamin's work on the Orientalist art of French North Africa considers the beginning of the twentieth century up to 1930, thereby encompassing modernist artists' engagement with these cultures and situating them firmly within the context of French imperial hegemony in the region. The implication is that although the avant-garde developments of the early twentieth century and their appropriation of non-western artistic forms can be seen as progressive in western art terms, they are also part of the colonial hegemony (see Section 5). Section 5 also considers the debates on Primitivism and the ethnographic museums and collections in which many avant-garde artists first saw artworks from African and Oceania.

Scholarship on French Orientalist art, until recently, has tended to be much more extensive than consideration of British Imperialism. The Tate exhibition *Art and Empire: Facing Britain's Imperial Past* interrogated Britain's colonial and imperial history and legacies within a range of

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8 John M. MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

9 Jill Beaulieu and Mary Roberts (eds), *Orientalism's Interlocutors: Painting, Architecture, Photography* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 2.

10 Roger Benjamin, *Orientalist Aesthetics: Art, Colonialism, and French North Africa 1880–1930* (Berkeley, CA and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003).

artworks and objects.<sup>11</sup> Britain Imperialism in India is the focus of Section 4 and its approach forges new ground in studying, from a European perspective, the colonial encounter and its impact on perceptions of Indian art.

### Postcolonialism and Subaltern Studies

Highly relevant to the issues explored in this Reader is the broader field of Postcolonial Studies. Postcolonialism and Postcolonial Studies engage with debates and concepts associated with the legacies of colonialism.<sup>12</sup> Postcolonial Studies traces its origins back to the works of Said, along with scholars and writers on colonialism such as Fanon, in their characterisations of the drivers and consequences of European hegemony across the world. Postcolonial scholarship is perhaps furthest developed in the sphere of literary studies, and is elucidated by literary scholars Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin:

Post-colonial theory involves discussion about experience of various kinds: migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place and responses to the influential master discourses of Imperial Europe such as history, philosophy and linguistics [...].<sup>13</sup>

Each of these different types of experience leaves a trace in the global cross-cultural interactions explored in this Reader. For example, slavery is part of the debates in Section 3; suppression, resistance and representation are explored in Section 4; difference is a key concept in Section 2 and place is considered in Section 1, to mention a few. Among the scholars who have contributed to the development of Postcolonial Studies are Homi K. Bhabha, whose work is included in Section 1, Stuart Hall, included in Section 5, and many others. Indeed, most of the critical

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11 *Art and Empire: Facing Britain's Imperial Past* (25 November 2015–10 April 2016) (London; Tate Enterprises Ltd, 2015).

12 The term Post-Imperialism, on the other hand, has a more political and economic inflection associated with international development and multinational business. See for example, David G. Becker, Richard L. Sklar, Sayre P. Schatz and Jeff Frieden, *Postimperialism: International Capitalism and Development in the Late Twentieth Century* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Reiner Publishers, 1987). There are a wide range of introductions to Postcolonial theory including, for example, Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998).

13 Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (eds), *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, 2nd edn (London and New York: Routledge, 1995, 2006), p. 2. See also on Postcolonial literary studies, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures*, 2nd edn (London and New York: Routledge, 1989, 2002).

approaches included in this Reader engage with the issues and debates of Postcolonialism in some way.

Postcolonialism is an interdisciplinary field which has permeated the humanities and social sciences, including literature, history, anthropology, archaeology, political studies and art history. The postcolonial theorist Robert J.C. Young summarises the key points of debate within the field in 'Ideologies of the Postcolonial' (1998), highlighting questions ranging from migrancy and dislocation; race, ethnicity and gender; connections to theories of Marxism and poststructuralism, to its impact on theories of aesthetics.<sup>14</sup> Postcolonialism is also concerned with concepts of *self* and *other*, objectification and exoticism of the *other*, the power imbalances of the colonial encounter, issues of language and translation across cultural boundaries and hybridity. It is concerned to interrogate and subvert the western knowledge systems which underpin all aspects of colonialism, and to a degree, the postcolonial discourse itself. There is recognition that the legacy of colonialism is not just in the past but has ongoing impacts in the contemporary globalised world; that the activities of western imperialism have not ended and that the contemporary globalised world is still negotiating the consequences of continuing western hegemony.<sup>15</sup>

Art historians who have explored postcolonial approaches within art history include James Clifford and Annie Coombes, who consider ways in which non-western art and culture have been framed within the hegemonic structures of colonialism and western art history.<sup>16</sup> A particular topic of concern for them is the role of the museum in representing and framing non-western art and culture. This issue is intrinsic to the watershed moment of the 1984 MoMA exhibition '*Primitivism*' in *20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, related to the material in Section 5. The exhibition was critiqued by Clifford in his essay 'Histories of the Tribal and the Modern' for its Modernist and Eurocentric approach to and presentation of 'Primitivist' art.<sup>17</sup>

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14 Robert Young, 'Ideologies of the Postcolonial', *Interventions*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1998).

15 See for example, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA and London, Harvard University Press, 2000).

16 James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Annie Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in late Victorian and Edwardian England* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1994) and Annie Coombes, 'Inventing the Post-Colonial: Hybridity and Constituency in Contemporary Curating', *New Formations*, Winter (1992), 39–52.

17 James Clifford, 'Histories of the Tribal and the Modern', in *The Predicament of Culture*, pp. 189–214.

Particularly relevant to this Reader and the case study in Section 4 on India is the sub-discipline of Subaltern Studies, which applies many of the insights of the broader framework of Postcolonialism to the particular case of South Asia. Subaltern Studies is concerned to interrogate and address the circumstances and voice of the subaltern: the suppressed, marginalised colonial *other*. Most prominent in this field is the Indian scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who, in her essay ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ explores the circumstances in which colonised people in India during British rule had their voices silenced by colonial policy, political subjectivity and cultural dominance.<sup>18</sup> She argues that the continuing domination of western knowledge systems and the legacies of colonialism mean that the subaltern still struggles to be heard.

### Globalisation and Art History

As outlined above, Postcolonial Studies has had an impact on art-historical approaches and stimulated consideration of the consequences of globalisation. Globalisation broadly suggests that the world has become more closely interconnected through political, economic, business, social and technological developments. The idea that the discipline of art history might recognise and develop greater global interconnections has generated many initiatives over recent decades which have sought to respond to the challenges of Postcolonialism and explore more global strategies.<sup>19</sup>

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- 18 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Donna Landry and Gerald M. MacLean (eds), *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996).
- 19 Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters: A History of European Reactions to Indian Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); Anthony D. King (ed.), *Culture, Globalization and the World-System: Current Debates in Art History* 3 (Binghamton, NY: Department of Art and Art History, State University of New York at Binghamton, 1991); David Summers, *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism* (London: Phaidon, 2003); Clare Harris, ‘The Buddha Goes Global: Some Thoughts Towards a Transnational Art History’, *Art History*, vol. 29, no. 4 (2006), 689–720; James Elkins (ed.), *Is Art History Global?* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2007); Partha Mitter, ‘Decentring Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery’, *Art Bulletin*, vol. 90, no. 4 (2008), 531–548; Kitty Zijlmans and Wilfried van Damme (eds), *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2008); Jonathan Harris (ed.), *Globalization and Contemporary Art* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011); Monica Juneja, *Die Universalität der Kunstgeschichte* (The Universality of Art History), Theme Issue, *kritische berichte, Zeitschrift für Kunst- und Kulturwissenschaften*, Heft 2, 2012 (edited with Matthias Bruhn and Elke Werner); Matthew Rampley, Thierry Lenain and Hubert Locher (eds), *Art History and Visual Studies in Europe: Transnational Discourses and National Frameworks* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Jill Casid and Aruna D’Souza, *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014).



## *Introduction*

However, many have recognised the limitations and constraints of Eurocentrism within the discipline and the challenges of developing methodologies and interconnectivity which is not rooted in the western tradition.

For art history, there has been substantial debate on how to address this challenge, some of which is presented in Section 1. Approaches to this challenge can broadly be categorised into two distinct alternatives. The first, which may broadly be termed Global Art History, has considered the question of how the discipline and its methodologies pursue closer integration. It has, however, proved difficult to escape its western origins. The extract in Section 1 by James Elkins sets out some of the different ways in which art history's methodologies, institutions and terms are rooted in a western discourse, in turn, shaped and compromised by colonial and imperial histories. Exemplary in this respect is the way that western art historians use terms such as 'space' in a way that privileges traditions of the artistic developments deriving from the Italian Renaissance. Some of the issues relating to perceptions of non-western art during the Renaissance are explored in Section 2.

The second approach, known as World Art Studies, offers a different strategy, one in which a looser network of art-historical interventions encompasses contributions from across the world without attempting to provide a unified disciplinary methodology for studying any and every work of art, regardless of their origin. With both approaches, however, there remains the problem that the driving force for these initiatives often comes from within the western discipline of art history.

A further consideration, addressed in Section 5, has to do with the circumstances of global contemporary art. Among the developments encompassed by this term is the growing popularity of world art fairs and biennales showcasing international contemporary art. Texts included in Section 5 consider to what extent the global art world continues to be driven by western artistic and market priorities. Bringing the debates up to the present, this section of the Reader questions whether or not the idea of the global remains simply another western construct.

Sections 2 to 5 of the Reader provide case studies for applying and testing the debates and perspectives outlined in this introduction. Although these case studies cannot step outside Art History's western methodologies, they aim to explore how, within each period, artistic practice and theory are shaped by and contribute to global cross-cultural interactions. The selection of case studies allows for consideration of a wide range of encounters extending over some seven hundred years. Starting with early exploration and initial contact from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, they move on through the flourishing of international European trade



## *Introduction*

and colonialism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and take in the nineteenth-century era of Imperialism as exemplified by Britain in India. Finally, through a consideration of the artistic innovations and emancipatory politics of the twentieth century, the narrative comes up to date, raising the question of the continuing hegemony of western discourse in the contemporary art world.