

Navigating Cultural Roots in Global Art Practices

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Abstract- In the context of globalization, the integration of cultural identity within global art practices has become a pivotal area of scholarly discourse. This paper explores how contemporary artists navigate their cultural roots while engaging with global artistic trends. It examines the tensions, synergies, and negotiations involved in preserving cultural authenticity while achieving international resonance. Drawing on theoretical frameworks from cultural studies, postcolonial theory, and art history, and analyzing diverse case studies from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Indigenous communities, this study illustrates how cultural specificity and global engagement are not mutually exclusive but can be interdependent and dynamic. The findings underscore the importance of reflexivity, hybridity, and ethical considerations in global art practices.

I. INTRODUCTION

Globalization has dramatically transformed the landscape of contemporary art, enabling unprecedented cultural exchange and mobility. However, this increased connectivity poses both opportunities and challenges for artists rooted in specific cultural traditions. The question of how to maintain cultural integrity while participating in a global art economy is at the heart of ongoing debates in art criticism, cultural studies, and international curation. This paper investigates the intricate process of negotiating cultural identity in global art practices, focusing on the strategies employed by artists to honor their cultural roots without being confined by them. Globalization, the interconnectedness and interdependence of the world through economic, cultural, and technological exchanges, has profoundly impacted the art world. This phenomenon has woven a rich tapestry of cross-cultural influences and exchanges, transforming the way artists create, exhibit, and interpret art. As globalization continues to blur geographical boundaries, it fosters a global dialogue that transcends traditional borders and reshapes artistic expression.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars such as Homi Bhabha (1994) and Stuart Hall (1990) have emphasized the fluidity and constructed nature of cultural identity. Bhabha's concept of the "third space" suggests that hybrid cultural expressions emerge from the interaction between local and global influences. Hall argues that identity is not a fixed essence but a positioning, which is continually shaped by historical and cultural contexts. To many other observers however, Bhabha's views will not be so readily acceptable, and his heavily symbolic reading of 'text' in and through culture will be condemned for cultivating a self-indulgent realm of subjectivity across social science, and for unduly emphasizing what is abstruse and ephemeral in 'culture' and 'ethnicity' at the expense of what are more commonplace and centrally-prominent matters of power and inequality. To Sangren (1988), the very effort of postmodernist-style thinkers on cultural-theoretical thought (like Bhabha) to dissolve established boundaries of thought and action across society, and within knowledge of and about those societies, only gives rise to the generation of newer, replacement, much looser, and less useful boundaries around identity, affiliation, and being. To Sangren, and countercounterskeptics of his breed, no analysis can ever be entirely free of its own favored meta-narrative: thus, to Sangren, Bhabha only substitutes one established grand account on the socio-political condition of society/societies with a newer and more subtle one! But back to Bhabha's own outlook on the production of culture and the representation of ethnicity. In his fertile, exhortative, but frequently opaque and nebulous work, *The Location of Culture* Homi Bhabha has brought together, for the first time, a large collection of his own gametic writings on cultural-theoretical thought, and has created a landmark text for people who are interested in the complex figures of cultural diversity and socio-political particularity that occur across the world. Now while this 1994 Routledge collection is not a text primarily or even peripherally targeted upon tourism—indeed the keywords "tourism" and "travel"

do not even appear in the index—the work is an imperative read (if a clear-as-ditchwater one!!) for all those researching culture/ethnicity at distinct places and culture/ethnicity in supposedly distinct societies, and also for all those who manage held representations or who market iconic images of cultural sites and cultural attractions in tourism communication.

In art history, Kobena Mercer (1993) has examined how Black British artists navigate racial and cultural identity in their work. Similarly, Rasheed Araeen has critiqued the Eurocentrism of the art world and advocated for greater inclusion of non-Western perspectives. Kobena Mercer used the term “burden of representation” in 1990 to refer to the expectation placed on black artists, and exhibitions about black artists, to stand as representative of a cultural group or its contributions. In “The Other Story” and the 1993 Biennial, this burden is placed on the exhibitions as a whole and the artists featured, not only to represent black art, but the art of other marginalized groups as well, and this burden leads to the reification and fetishization of external difference. These two products of the articulation of difference are related and, in these exhibitions, serve to perpetuate binary distinctions, limit interpretations of artworks, reduce complex social problems, and affect the understanding of the exhibitions and the artists they feature. Finally, this thesis explores the historical legacy of these two exhibitions and relates the questions of identity and difference they illuminate to broader struggles for cultural pluralism at the end of the twentieth century. Contemporary curators and theorists such as Okwui Enwezor and Hou Hanru have also contributed to rethinking global exhibition models that respect cultural diversity while fostering cross-cultural dialogue. Thelma Golden also discussed the Biennial in a 2001 interview with Okwui Enwezor, stating that the exhibition made her “shed some naiveté concerning the discourse of multiculturalism”: because issues of identity and difference “had only entered the consciousness of the public at a lower level,” resistance to them were widespread once they entered the mainstream (i.e., the Whitney). Golden acknowledged “the workings of the institution” and the debatable lumping together of artists “as identity based artists, or political artists,” however, she felt that there was a resistance in the critical community to truly engage with the work and, as a result, she no

longer reads criticism of projects in which she is involved because of the negative reactions to the Biennial. She believed that the Biennial was of its moment and expressed doubt about its viability at the time of the 2001 interview. Golden ended her discussion of the Biennial in defense of it, stating that her curatorial philosophy at the time she was at the Whitney was about inclusion, her goal being to push the definition of American art.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative approach, combining critical analysis of selected artworks, artist statements, and curatorial texts with secondary literature from cultural studies and art theory. Case studies are selected from artists who have gained international recognition while engaging deeply with their cultural heritage. The methodology is interdisciplinary, drawing from visual analysis, ethnographic insights, and discourse analysis. Methodology I used,

Qualitative, interdisciplinary research design.

Use of visual analysis, artist statements, curatorial texts, and academic literature.

Selection criteria for case studies.

Emphasis on reflexivity and contextual understanding

IV. CULTURAL ROOTS AND ARTISTIC IDENTITY

4.1 The Role of Cultural Memory

Cultural memory plays a central role in shaping artistic identity. Artists often draw upon symbols, narratives, and aesthetic traditions from their cultural background to assert a sense of belonging and historical continuity. For instance, El Anatsui's use of recycled materials and traditional Ghanaian motifs challenges Western hierarchies of materiality and labor while embedding African cultural references within a global visual language.

Cultural memory theory is a framework which elucidates the relationship between the past and the present. At its most basic level, it explains why, how, and with what results certain pieces of information are

remembered. Despite its origins in historiographical scholarship, however, in recent years' cultural memory has been applied with increasing frequency to the study of the Classics, most notably in Gowing's (2005) and Gallia's (2012) exploration of memory under the Principate as well as the edited volumes by Galinsky (2014), (2016a), and (2016b). As the organisers of the 'Roman Cultural Memory' project, we are glad to count ourselves part of this emerging wave. We held three conferences to promote intersections between memory theory and Classics research, the first in November 2016 at King's College London, the second in June 2017 at the Université Paris-Est Créteil, and the third in March 2018 at the University of São Paulo. With few exceptions, the chapters in the volume, which concern cultural memory in Republican and Augustan Rome, initially took shape as papers during the former two conferences; the fruits of the latter event will be compiled into a separate volume entitled 'Cultural Memory under the Empire'

4.2 Reclaiming Marginalized Histories

Many artists engage with their cultural roots to reclaim suppressed or marginalized histories. For example, Indigenous artists in Canada and Australia have used contemporary art to address colonial trauma and reassert Indigenous sovereignty. Their work often incorporates traditional practices, such as weaving or storytelling, alongside modern media, creating a dialogue between past and present. In many galleries and museums, the majority of senior curatorial roles are held by non-Indigenous people. This has led to calls for a decentring of whiteness, similar to the Decolonize This Place movement in the US. In Melbourne, where I live, many artists and collectives work independently of mainstream galleries. Organizations such as the Footscray Community Arts Centre, which was established in 1974, have now had ten years of Indigenous-led programming and projects.

V. HYBRIDITY AND TRANSCULTURAL PRACTICES

5.1 Hybridity as Strategy

Hybridity allows artists to navigate multiple cultural affiliations, blending diverse elements into new forms. The work of Shirin Neshat, for example, fuses Persian cultural motifs with contemporary feminist discourse, creating complex images that speak to both Iranian and global audiences. Hybridity becomes a tool for resisting essentialism and embracing complexity. In 1999, she won the 48th Venice Biennial prize for her film *Turbulent*, which contrasts a man singing in front of an all-male audience, with a woman singing to an empty concert hall. Her work has been shown throughout Europe and the United States. She currently lives in New York and the majority of her work is filmed in Morocco, Turkey, and the United States.

5.2 Transcultural Dialogue

Global exhibitions such as the Venice Biennale or Documenta have increasingly featured artists whose work transcends national boundaries. These platforms encourage transcultural dialogue but also raise questions about representation and tokenism. Curators must balance the desire for inclusivity with a genuine engagement with the cultural context of the artists they present.

VI. ETHICAL AND POLITICAL DIMENSIONS

6.1 Cultural Appropriation vs. Cultural Exchange

One of the key ethical challenges in global art practices is distinguishing between cultural appropriation and cultural exchange. While the former involves the unacknowledged or exploitative use of cultural elements, the latter is based on mutual respect and collaboration. Artists must navigate these boundaries carefully, especially when working across cultures.

6.2 Institutional Responsibility

Museums, galleries, and art institutions play a crucial role in mediating cultural representation. There is a growing demand for decolonizing the art world by re-evaluating collection practices, diversifying curatorial voices, and engaging with source communities. Institutions must move beyond tokenistic inclusion towards structural change.

VII. CASE STUDIES

7.1 El Anatsui (Ghana/Nigeria)

El Anatsui transforms discarded bottle caps and metal scraps into monumental tapestries that reference Ghanaian textiles and colonial trade routes. His work is rooted in African traditions but resonates globally through its formal innovation and environmental commentary.

7.2 Shirin Neshat (Iran/USA)

Neshat's photography and video installations explore gender, identity, and exile through the lens of Islamic culture. Her work juxtaposes poetic Persian calligraphy with stark visual narratives, creating a space where cultural specificity and universal themes intersect.

7.3 Emily Kame Kngwarreye (Australia)

An Aboriginal artist whose abstract paintings draw from ceremonial body art and the desert landscape, Kngwarreye's work challenges Western distinctions between abstraction and cultural narrative. Her international acclaim has brought visibility to Indigenous Australian art.

7.4 Yinka Shonibare (UK/Nigeria)

Shonibare's use of Dutch wax fabric—a symbol of African identity with colonial origins—questions historical narratives and cultural authenticity. His theatrical installations and sculptures interrogate the intersections of empire, race, and art history.

VIII. DISCUSSION

The artists discussed in this paper illustrate diverse strategies for navigating cultural roots within global art practices. Their work exemplifies how cultural identity can be both a source of inspiration and a site of negotiation. The emphasis on hybridity, reflexivity, and ethical engagement suggests that global art need not dilute cultural specificity but can, instead, amplify it.

At the same time, the institutional frameworks of the art world must evolve to support this complexity. Decolonizing curation, fostering equitable exchanges, and resisting superficial inclusion are essential steps toward a more just global art system.

CONCLUSION

Navigating cultural roots in global art practices requires a delicate balance between honoring tradition and engaging contemporary global discourses. As artists move across borders—literal and metaphorical—they bring with them stories, symbols, and struggles that enrich the global art landscape. By foregrounding cultural identity within a global framework, they challenge dominant narratives and open up new possibilities for artistic expression and understanding.

This paper has highlighted the importance of cultural memory, hybridity, ethical responsibility, and institutional change in shaping inclusive and dynamic global art practices. Future research might further explore the role of digital platforms, diasporic communities, and emerging curatorial models in sustaining these dialogues.

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