

2012

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Recommended Citation

Kapadia, Ajay (2012) "Globalization and the Exchange of Aesthetics," *Journal of Undergraduate Research at Minnesota State University, Mankato*: Vol. 12, Article 4.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56816/2378-6949.1012>

Available at: <https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/jur/vol12/iss1/4>

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Globalization and the Exchange of
Aesthetics

Ajay Kapadia

Not only has globalization been growing over the last few years, but the anti-globalization movement has been growing as well. Anti-globalists predict that the globalization is responsible for negatively altering people's mindset, outlook and lifestyle. However, the anti-globalization movement has been negligent in considering the full effects of globalization. In its simplest sense globalization can be defined as: "the worldwide movement toward economic, financial, trade, and communications integration"¹. The parameters of communications integration can be defined as "all means of symbolic or verbal communication that people and machines use to make contact and share information"². This paper will investigate the positive intrinsic effect globalization has had on our visual culture by observing a specific archaic root of globalization, the effects of colonization during the Industrial era, and current trends in the third sector (nonprofits).

Globalization's origins can be traced back to the ancient times of Rome and Egypt through artifacts that have been uncovered. The Roman Empire was crisscrossed with trade routes. There were sea routes that covered the Mediterranean and Black Seas and numerous land routes using the roads built by the Romans. Trade and moving the Roman Army from place to place were the two principle reasons for building roads. It was within



Fig. 1

¹ Business Dictionary, "Globalization." Accessed February 1, 2012.
<http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/globalization.html>.

² CommunicationMgmt.USC.edu, "Communications ." Accessed February 1, 2012.
<http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/communications.html>.

this society that ideologies such as religions and aesthetics were in exchange as well. Every kingdom that Rome conquered it implemented its state-religion, language, and form of government; while at the same time returning to its capital spoils of conquest. Trade was vital to Ancient Rome. The empire cost a vast sum of money to run and trade brought in much of that money, thus the expansion into other borders became necessary. During the Late period of Egypt, the country found its art in the hands and services of the Romans in 51 BCE. Egypt's Roman occupiers allowed the Egyptian's religion to be practiced. Works from this period combined the conventions of Greco-Roman and Egyptian art, such as



Fig. 2

the tradition of mummifying the dead. During Roman occupancy, the mummy became a soft sculpture with a Roman-style portrait painted (Fig. 1) on a wooden panel in encaustic, inserted over the face³. This becomes a new form of aesthetic presentation brought on by the convergence of the two cultures. One might be accustomed to seeing the mummified wrapping of Tutankhamen and wall paintings of Pompeii (Fig. 2) as two separate styles of portraiture.

However, due to the crossing of empires a hybrid depiction

emerged. Contemporary opponents of globalization claim that a globalized world erodes local culture and diminishes national identity. This argument clearly doesn't hold up. While Egypt did lose its independence to Rome, the Romans hailed its culture as a remarkable one worthy of assimilating and preserving. It was through international trade—the basic root of globalization—that this development occurred. The cross-cultural exchange between these two nations spread greater diversity as well as greater similarity.

This cross-cultural spread witnessed exponential growth at the dawn of the industrialization of the Occident and colonization of their non-western counterparts, especially on the continent of Africa.

³ Stokstad, Marilyn. *Art History: Ancient Art*, (Upper Saddle River : Prentice Hall, 2011), 79.

The essentials of industrialization, including the need for raw materials in abundance, failsafe markets, and profitable investment channels, incited the European ascent and subsequent takeover of Africa. That being said, the primary motivation for Europe's intrusion was purely economic⁴. Due to Europe's industrial boom, much of the population was facing difficulties of finding employment in the new capitalist ventures. To offset the rise in unemployment, European nations acquired colonies and exported their unemployed to work in these new startups⁵. In 1855, the German chancellor Otto von Bismarck called together a diplomatic summit of European nations. The summit meeting produced a treaty known as the Berlin Act, with provisions to guide the conduct of the European colonial competition in Africa; all of which were drawn up without the participation of any African nation. Based on this treaty, Europe began to not only export raw materials, but also artifacts and knowledge of various African cultures and histories. Among these artifacts, none were more popular than masks. African masks are an essential part of a ceremonial costume and exemplified the high aesthetics of the tribe. They function in religious and social events to embody the spirits of ancestors or attempt to control the forces of nature. These costumes come to life, embodied by their spirit in the performance of the dance, music, and liveliness of the event. Some masks combine human and animal features to unite bearer with his natural environment. As Carl Einstein remarked in his book *Gesammelte Werke* (1962):

With this transformation he [mask bearer] becomes a balance of negating adoration. He prays to the god, performs an ecstatic tribal dance, and the mask transforms him into both the god and the tribe. This transformation gives him the most powerful idea of the objective; he incarnates the objective itself and

⁴ Iweriebor, Ehiedu . Hunter College, "The Colonization of Africa." Last modified 2011. Accessed March 26, 2012. <http://exhibitions.nypl.org/africanaage/essay-colonization-of-africa.html>.

⁵ Ibid.

becomes that in which all particularities are destroyed. Therefore the mask only makes sense when it is inhuman and impersonal; that is, constructive and free from the experience of the individual.⁶

This import of artifacts and histories sparked new and innovative insights as to how the canons of western society compared to those of Africa; and there was no better group to synthesize this new import of knowledge better than artists such as Pablo Picasso and Hannah Hoch.

The Ethnographic Museum of the Trocadéro was founded in 1877 as Paris' first anthropological museum and it housed 3,000 African artifacts. Many artists visited the Museum and were influenced by

its collection, in particular Pablo Picasso. It was in the spring of 1907 where he saw and was influenced by African and Tribal art several months before completing his most revolutionary painting *Les Femmes d'Alger* (O.J. no. 111) (Fig. 3). The painting's monumental size underscored the shocking incoherence resulting from the absolute disruption of conventional representation. According to the poet, Guillaume Apollinaire, Picasso experienced



Fig. 3

a jolt of new inspiration upon seeing the ethnographic exhibition. Picasso then returned to his studio, where he altered the faces of the two figures on the right side to bear mask-like visages. He used coarse hatch marks like those seen on African masks.⁸ Up until completion of *Demoiselles*, the visual standards of painting and portraiture remained relatively unchanged from Classically derived Academic

⁶ Lavin, Maud. *Cut with the Kitchen Knife: The Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Hoch*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 173.

⁷ Richardson, John. *A Life of Picasso, The Cubist Rebel 1907-1916*. New York City: A Life of Picasso: The Prodigy, 1881-1906 (R Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2007).

⁸ Arnason, H.H., and Elizabeth Mansfield. *History of Modern Art 6th ed.* Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2010.

conventions. Picasso's painting ignited what I would term as a pseudo- punctuated equilibrium. The composition went against Renaissance one-point perspective, against the ideals passed on from Classical Antiquity. A sudden change in perspective, a point of no return brought on by the changing global scene that came from overseas.

In the aftermath of the First World War, the political, cultural, and social order drastically changed in Europe, Asia and Africa, and many new concepts and ideas took a firm hold in people's minds. Dada was perhaps the most drastic response to this cataclysm, emerging as, among other things, an anti-art movement. It embraced new materials and methods creating, according to Leah Dickerman, "an abiding legacy for the century to come... so much so that Dada may have had the greatest influence on contemporary art"⁹. This period marked a substantial leap into the modern era with introduction of extensive marketing and industrialization. Dada artists, such as Hannah Hoch, challenged and outright criticized the culture industry. It was during a visit with fellow dada artist, Kurt Schwitters, that she visited the African ethnographic collection at the Rijks Ethnographisch Museum Te Leide¹⁰. She based her *From an Ethnographic Museum* series on this integrative interaction. Pleasure plays an essential role in Hoch's work as women experiencing new pleasure with their bodies beyond their class and with that, according to Maud Lavin, "create a utopian allegory of revolutionary change"¹¹. In her photomontages, Hannah Hoch observes the new found pleasures that women were given during the Weimar Republic. It was during this period that women earned the right to vote in Germany. With that came new opportunities for more women in the workplace and within society. However, the status in the domestic environment didn't change--women were still expected to do the cleaning, maintenance and cooking. Much of Hoch's works deconstructs the iconic image of women during the Weimar Republic, by

⁹ Leah Dickerman, *Dada*, (Washington DC: D.A.P, 2006), IX.

¹⁰ Lavin 168.

¹¹ Lavin, Maud. "From *Strategies of Pleasure and Deconstruction-Hannah Hoch's Photomontages in the Weimar Years*." In *The Divided Heritage*, Edited by Irit Rogoff,. Cambridge, Great Britain: Bath Press, 1991. 115.

defamiliarizing what the male hierarchy had come to accept and recognize as the ideal. Hoch's work is

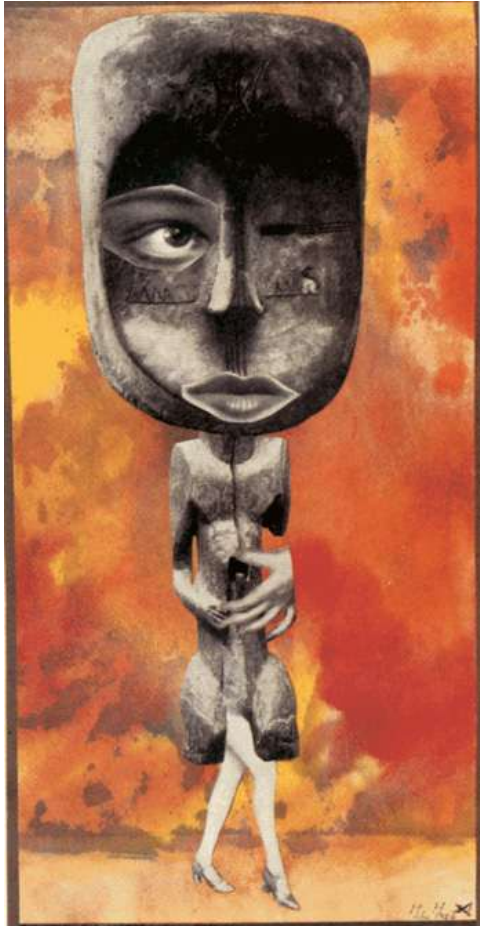


Fig. 4

not presented as ideal; instead it's chaotic, reflecting the socio-political atmosphere of Germany. Certainly, Hoch's *From an Ethnographic Museum* shows heavy reference to the fetish definition that Donald B. Kuspit describes. According to Kuspit, fetishes originate from "picturing a thing for the purpose of publicizing it to fetishize it into a 'magnificent image' worthy of worship..." or one "fetishizes them into icons by placing them in an art context¹²". In Hoch's photomontage, *The Sweet* (Fig. 4), she transforms a woman into an ethnographic image, which also resembles a phallus-shaped fetish¹³. This image becomes for the viewer, according to Maud Lavin, an "object of male gaze and a figure of denial¹⁴". *The Sweet* also brings in the fetish appeal, considering that the majority of African artifacts are used for religious purposes

until the "powers" of the objects fade and then become worthless. However, the figure in *The Sweet* doesn't diminish in power, rather we witness a shift in the paradigm of power. The female figure transitions from a "monument" of stature to a subject of objectification. The western characteristics of the eye, lips, hand, legs mounted onto wooden image of an African ethnographic sculpture simply becomes a fetishized object to be displayed in the same manner as artifacts shown in museums. The juxtapositions presented then bring into question the standards of objectifying beauty versus the grotesque, and raises the issue of how the spectators see themselves. In these two cases of Picasso and

¹² Kuspit, Donald B. "Pop Art: A Reactionary to Realism." *Art Journal* 36, no. 1 (1976): 31-38. 33.

¹³ Lavin 179.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Hoch we can see the intrinsic positive effects of globalization. The importation of histories through artifacts provided exposure and ultimately influenced their work, and to a greater extent aided in the questioning and understanding of Western society.

In Berlin, June 2010 the federal president Horst Kohler invited five African artists to create an exhibition that “explored the difficult and complex colonial and postcolonial relationship between Africa and Europe”¹⁵ and to literally impose their craft with the same dark intentions as the Europeans did prior. From what the western world obtained from Africa there has been no reconciliation from the decisions made at the Berlin Conference. And so, the dialogue continues. One of the invitees was artist Yinka Shonibare and his installation *Scramble for Africa* (Fig. 5). According to Shonibare:

Scramble for Africa is about people having a conference about a continent that was not theirs and deciding how they are going to divide it up without any form of consultation with those who would be most affected - the Africans¹⁶.

The bitterness inflected in the tone of his statement is an indicator of the situation that we face today in this global village. Adorned in African fabrics and motifs, several headless mannequins have assembled around a table. Flashing deliberate and demonstrative



Fig. 5

¹⁵ Chika Okeke-Agulu, "Who Knows Tomorrow," *Art Journal* (2010): 49.

¹⁶ Nationalgalerie Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, "Yinka Shonibare MBE: Works ." Last modified 2010. Accessed April 3, 2012. http://www.smb.museum/smb/wkt/wkt_artist.php?artist_id=6&lang=en.

gestures, hovering over a map of Africa. Yinka Shonibare's installation alludes to the Berlin Conference, which carved out the continent of Africa between the colonial powers. The characters in the installation can be identified as "responsible representatives of their respective countries busy dividing up the continent. They recall the grotesque moment in African history that marked both Africa's economic and cultural subjugation by Europe and laid the template for catastrophic border conflicts in the future"¹⁷. Lessons showcased from this exhibition are effectively brought into light for reflection and meditation. Shonibare's animosity serves as a reminder that what those European leaders did in the past was immoral. As citizens of this global society, we must be considerate, if not sensitive to the decisions that we make.

From international routes and conquest of antiquity to today, globalization has been the traditional path in the development of human existence. With more and more businesses crossing into others borders, what becomes essential to their success in these new lands are not the same modes that the Romans once used to manage their success. The new model appears to be "go global, sell local", to partners who understand these new customers. Even institutions such as museums see the need to exchange information through the vehicle of our visual culture in order for people to better understand each other. No longer can museums sit-by and expect people to venture into their gallery halls and become enlightened with a new understanding of our history. There are, in fact, two museums that have taken the initiative to move past their national borders. The Louvre and the Guggenheim are constructing two new museums of their own in Abu Dhabi. The Guggenheim has already been a leading institution in this hyper-globalized trend with having museum locations in Bilbao, Spain, Venice, Italy, Berlin, Germany, and New York City, USA. The Louvre is underway with the construction of a \$108 million museum. Upon the completion of these two new sites, a new dialogue will emerge between the

¹⁷ Nationalgalerie Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

people of the United Arab Emirates and the Occidental world on the complexity and development of the human experience. Guggenheim Abu Dhabi writes in its mission statement:

The Guggenheim Abu Dhabi will be a pre-eminent platform for global contemporary art and culture that will present the most important artistic achievements of our time. Through its permanent collection, exhibitions, scholarly publications and educational programs, the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi will promote a truly transnational perspective on art history.¹⁸

The Guggenheim's mission falls in alignment with the definition of communications: all means of symbolic or verbal communication that people and machines use to make contact and share information.¹⁹

From what we can infer, international trade leading up to contemporary globalization can be traced as far back as the Ancient Romans and Egyptians. During this time, the Roman Empire was one the wealthiest nation in history and through its conquests, integration, and assimilation new forms of aesthetics emerged, generating new ideas of creativity, vitality, and culture. The European expansion with the establishing of colonies and mass exportation reawakened dialogue on how we as people exist comparably to other contemporary societies. In the halls of museums we can see that development and look how far we have come and wonder what new potential can emerge from observing relics of the past. While those against globalization insist culture is being eroded, they fail to take into account that culture was never eroded but simply replaced by the locals themselves who saw the opportunity to take the knowledge that they knew and carry it further than before. Museums such as the Louvre and the Guggenheim recognize this potential energy and are crossing over into new territory bringing with them the knowledge that they possess to new minds. So, it is to this extent that globalization does not diminish, but enhances the development of human creativity.

¹⁸ Guggenheim , "About." Last modified 2012. Accessed February 1, 2012. <http://www.guggenheim.org/abu-dhabi/about>.

¹⁹ CommunicationMgmt.USC.edu

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