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"Other Modernities": Art, Visual Culture and Patrimony Outside the West. An Introduction

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**“Other Modernities”:
Art, Visual Culture and
Patrimony Outside the West**

**Guest Edited by Silvia Naef, Irene Maffi,
and Wendy Shaw**

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The *Artl@s Bulletin*'s ambition is twofold: 1. a focus on the "transnational" as constituted by exchange between the local and the global or between the national and the international; 2. an openness to innovation in research methods, particularly the quantitative possibilities offered by digital mapping and data visualization.

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“Other Modernities”: Art, Visual Culture and Patrimony Outside the West. An Introduction

Silvia Naef, Irene Maffi, and Wendy Shaw

The articles in this volume reflect the doctoral research made possible by the project, [*Other Modernities: Patrimony and Practices of Visual Expression Outside the West*](#), funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF) between the years 2013-17. Under the direction of Professors Silvia Naef (University of Geneva), Irene Maffi (University of Lausanne) and Wendy M. K. Shaw (University of Bern, Free University Berlin), the project enabled a transdisciplinary and transregional platform for the examination of modern practices of patrimony and visual expression in regions that traditional studies of modernity often fail to consider.

Modernity has generally been treated as a singular trajectory of progress modelled on the experience of the West, an assumption crystallized in Baudrillard’s comment that, “la modernité s’impose comme une, homogène, irradiant mondialement à partir de l’Occident”.¹ Despite claiming universal validity, such premises neglect the myriad cultural factors that have shaped and reshaped modernity as its ideals have spread across the globe, propagated by complex combinations of intellectual idealism, economic necessity, colonial imposition, political expedience, and technological development. Although outside the West modernist

movements projected a uniform modernity that would spread from a Western center to non-Western peripheries, the measure applied to successful modernization never became clear. Modernization often became a cloak for the programmatic homogenization of national identities, histories, and patrimonies. Under the assumption that apparently proper modernity has always already happened in the West, other modernities often acquire a subaltern nature, their unique geographic and cultural nuances unexamined. Without such nuanced contextualization, other modernities often appear as pale and belated renditions of proper Western modernity even though they actually reveal more complex processes of cultural hybridity.² Recent work emerging in subaltern studies, urban studies, and post-structural anthropology has inverted this historiography, revealing the colonies as places of “avant-garde” socio-cultural experimentation, revealing how Western modernity was often as much a product as a model of non-Western modernization.³

While poststructuralist disciplinary critique has been integral to the practice of Western art histories since the 1980s, the integration of the poststructuralist approaches of postcolonial

¹ “Modernity stands out as one, homogeneous, radiating worldwide from the West” (our translation). Jean Baudrillard, “Modernité,” in *Encyclopaedia Universalis* (Paris: Encyclopaedia Universalis, 2016) vol. 15, 552.

² Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Representations of the Orient* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000);

Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, ed., *Patterns of Modernity* (London: F. Pinter, 1987); Dilip P. Gaonkar, ed., *Alternative Modernities* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2001).

³ E.g. Timothy Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991); Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995).

studies into non-Western subdisciplines of art history, which retain their original focus on traditions described as preceding a modernity identified with Western modes of artistic production, is relatively new. The covalent adoption of art in the Western modality with the production of non-Western art led to a historical rupture in non-Western artistic production marked by the historiographic “end” of non-Western art histories at the beginning of the modern period.⁴ Challenging the long-standing Hegelian paradigm of dialectical development in the arts, an alternative model based on such a hybrid moment suggests that paradoxically, non-Western art histories did not exist until their designation in contradistinction to the modern made them possible. Conversely, non-Western modern art becomes revealed not as alien to non-Western cultures and belated versions of their Western counterparts, but as an integral part of the hybridity engendered by modern culture.⁵ While postcolonial theory has made immense strides in analyzing modern literary production, its non-Western art historical disciplines are only recently undergoing the type of critical self-analysis that mainstream art history went through during the 1980s and 1990s in the wake of poststructuralist theory.⁶

While many national and regional studies address these concerns, no cross-cultural work on non-Western modern art incorporating postcolonial approaches exists.⁷ The recent increase in the rate of publications concerning modern and

contemporary art of the Middle East points to the rising interest of art as a socio-political practice in this region in particular.⁸ While these works represent an enormous step forward in our understanding of modernity and the arts, many share two primary shortcomings: a narrow focus on art with minimal consideration of its sociological and political implications often limits the extent to which these studies can serve for a broader socio-political understanding of the regions in question and the role of cultural production within them; and a national focus often limits consideration of how modernity functions in cross-cultural perspective.

Just as art historical studies of the non-West have begun to enrich our understanding of arts of the post-traditional era in relation to their historical and political underpinnings, anthropological studies of visual culture, which long relied on studies of ethnographic objects identified with soon-to-be-extinct pre-modern practices, have also taken on a strong interest in the definition of patrimony and tradition through contemporary visual cultural traditions reliant on the reproduction of tradition. The late-twentieth century explosion of cultural heritage practices all over the world, the trend towards the museumification of local histories, the processes of nation building and the emergence of nativist movements in numerous post-colonial states have created a new field of study for anthropology.⁹ Non-western cultural heritage notions and practices,

⁴ Finbarr Barry Flood, “From the Prophet to Postmodernism? New World Orders and the End of Islamic Art,” in *Making Art History: A Changing Discipline and its Institutions*, ed. Elizabeth Mansfield (London: Routledge, 2007); Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Carolyn Dean, “The Trouble with (the Term) Art,” *Art Journal* 65 no. 2 (2006), 24-32.

⁵ Stephen Melville, *Seams: Art as Philosophical Context* (London: Routledge, 1996); Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

⁶ Yoshiaki Shimizu, “Japan in American Museums: But Which Japan?,” *The Art Bulletin* 83 no. 1 (March 2001), 123-134; Fasil Demissie and Andrew Apter, “An Enchanting Darkness: A New Representation of Africa,” *American Anthropologist* 97 no. 3 (September 1995), 559-566; Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, “The Mirage of Islamic Art: Reflections on the Study of an Unwieldy Field,” *The Art Bulletin* 85 no. 1 (March 2003), 152-184; Mimi H. Yiengpruksawan, “Japanese Art History 2001: The State and Stake of Research,” *The Art Bulletin* 83 no. 1 (March 2001), 105-122.

⁷ Julia F. Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); John Clark, *Modern Asian Art* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998); Kobena Mercer, *Cosmopolitan Modernisms* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995); Partha Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism: India's artists and the Avant-Garde, 1922-1947* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007); Chris Spring, *Angaza Afrika: African Art Now* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2008); Michael Sullivan, *The Meeting of Eastern and Western Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

⁸ Silvia Naef, *A la recherche d'une modernité arabe, L'évolution des arts plastiques en Egypte, au Liban et en Irak* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1996); Wijdan Ali, *Modern Islamic Art, Development and Continuity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997); Irene

Maffi, *Pratiques du patrimoine et politiques de la mémoire en Jordanie. Entre récit dynastique et narrations communautaires* (Lausanne: Payot, 2004); Liliane Karnouk, *Modern Egyptian Art: 1910-2003* (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 2005); Kirsten Scheid, *Painters, Picture-Makers and Lebanon: Ambiguous Identities in an Unsettled State* (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2005); Jocelyne Dakhli et al., eds., *Créations artistiques contemporaines en pays d'Islam, Des arts en tension* (Paris: Editions Kimé, 2006); Jessica Winegar, *Creative Reckonings, The Politics of Art and Culture in Contemporary Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); Nada Shabout, *Modern Arab Art: Formation of an Arab Aesthetics* (Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 2007); Wendy M.K. Shaw, *Ottoman Painting: Reflections of Western Art from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011); Rami Daher and Irene Maffi, eds., *The Politics and Practices of Cultural Heritage in the Middle East, Positioning the Material Past in Contemporary Societies* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014); Silvia Naef and Elahe Helbig, eds., *Visual Modernity in the Arab World, Turkey and Iran: Reinventing the 'Missing Modern', Special Section, Asiatische Studien/Etudes Asiatiques* 70 no. 4 (2016), 1003-1303; Nadia Radwan, *Les modernes d'Égypte, Une renaissance transnationale des Beaux-Arts et Arts appliqués* (Berne: Peter Lang, 2017); Alice Bombardier, *Les pionniers de la Nouvelle peinture en Iran. Œuvres méconnues, activités novatrices et scandales au tournant des années 1940* (Berne: Peter Lang, 2017).

⁹ Jean-Loup Amselle, *L'art de la friche: essai sur l'art africain contemporain* (Paris: Flammarion, 2005); Dakhli, *Créations artistiques contemporaines*; Richard Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988); Michael Herzfeld, *A Place in History: Social and Monumental Time in a Cretan Town* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Ivan Karp and Steven D.

various forms of artistic creations, and more broadly processes of production of visual culture, such as folkloric festivals, “traditional” handicraft, tourist or “airport” art have become central topics of study.¹⁰ The development of modern forms of art and cultural performances are closely related to the development of the cultural heritage model, insofar as they reflect the development of new visual expressions, new forms of taste and new ways of putting on stage those “things” that are often designated as identity and history.¹¹ In this issue, tangible and intangible productions are considered as inseparable forms of visual cultural expressions insofar as they are both embedded in shared discursive and iconic codes that confer meaning upon them.¹² The contributions also consider the context of production, the networks of circulation and the forms of consumption to which visual culture is subject.¹³

In countries that have undergone cultural change under the influence of Western hegemony, whether through imperialism or local socio-economic forces, the adoption of arts in the Western modality, including opera, ballet, and plastic arts has often functioned as a signal of more comprehensive modernization. However, closer examination reveals that the practice of art, and with it the adoption of modernism, has responded as much as it succumbed to Western hegemony. In contrast to the current emphasis on contemporary art as a global phenomenon divorced from local experiences of modernity, “Other Modernities” sought the examination of modern art and visual culture as necessary precursor for the construction of globally accessible visual culture identified with a uniform modernity or contemporaneity. It did so not by segregating fine arts from the

commercialized arts used for the projection of patrimony, but through the juxtaposition of multiple visual practices within contexts of modern identity production.

This critique involves a re-evaluation of the very roots of cultural history, based in historical models established by G. W. F. Hegel. The dominant narrative of artistic development replicates the narrative of Western civilization *ex Oriente lux* as culminating in the West. In this model, non-Western civilizations are considered as having stagnant historical frameworks which have a dominant, unchanging spirit contributing to the overall culture of mankind. In contrast, dialectical progress in which each stage (such as the Baroque) emerges from the sublation of a preceding stage (such as the Renaissance), is considered the purview only of Western civilization, in which art functions as a sign of cultural progress.¹⁴ When applied to non-Western arts, such paradigms have led to two dominant assumptions about the arts. First, although histories of non-Western arts certainly do follow the relationships between dynasty and artistic production, art itself is generally conceived as part of an overarching and unchanging tradition expressed differently in different times and geographies, but not progressing or interacting with processes of temporal or socio-political change. Form may vary, but underlying meaning remains consistently wed to culturally defined and relatively stagnant concerns such as religious precepts or political might.¹⁵ Secondly, this understanding of non-Western arts precludes them from the adoption of extra-cultural forms, such as oil painting or sculpture, which would imply temporal change. Thus, the adoption of these forms during the

Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991); Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer and Steven D. Lavine, eds., *Museums and Communities. The Politics of Public Culture* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992); Moira G. Simpson, *Making Representations. Museums in the Post-Colonial Era* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

¹⁰ Ullrich Kockel and Máiréad N. Craith, eds., *Cultural Heritages as Reflexive Traditions* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007); Néstor G. Canclini, *Culturas híbridas. Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* (Mexico: Editorial Grijalbo, 1990); James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture. Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge and London: The President and Fellows of Harvard College, 1988); James Clifford, *Routes. Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1997); Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture. Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998); Yorke M. Rowan and Uzi Baram, eds.,

Marketing Heritage. Archaeology and the Consumption of the Past (Walnut Creek, CA: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004. Bargna et al. *Mediascapes. Pratiche dell'immagine e antropologia culturale* (Roma: Meltemi, 2018).

¹¹ Canclini, *Culturas híbridas*.

¹² Herzfeld, *A Place in History*.

¹³ Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency. An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); George E. Marcus and Fred R. Myers, eds., *The Traffic in Culture. Refiguring Art and Anthropology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995).

¹⁴ Michael Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982).

¹⁵ Donald Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History: Meditations on a Coy Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1989); Robert S. Nelson, “The Map of Art History”, *The Art Bulletin* 79 no. 1 (March 1997), 28-40.

modern period is perceived as a rupture with, and thus a loss of, authentic culture.¹⁶ Yet historically, it is this loss that predicated the disassociation with tradition that enables modernity, understood as belatedly following in the footsteps of the West.¹⁷ Through such an understanding of cultural history, modern non-Western societies become caught in a double-bind: to be true to their national identities, they must cleave to the past, repeating tropes of authentic identity rather than producing new cultural forms; yet not only are these supposedly authentic identities constructions of modern historiography, in order to participate in contemporary society, they must act as other than themselves, running in a race in which they are already always behind. Although art production may seem peripheral in relation to contemporary politics, this rift between traditional and modern identity is symbolized in art and plays out in numerous socio-political spheres. A critical revision of this perception of bifurcation enables modern non-Western cultures to incorporate both tradition and innovation into a model of living cultures always in the process of reinvention.

Easy to appropriate and reproduce, visual culture plays a particularly important role in this process. Through promoting particular types of visual arts and performance, societies produce signs through which they define a collective patrimony, segregating a projected modernity from aspects of experience designated as past, codified as part of patrimony or programmatically forgotten as part of the creation of modern identity. While often promoted as enriching communal/national identity, such instrumentalization can also serve as a powerful political tool to modulate public understandings of history and identity as they play a role in contemporary life. Our research project examined this instrumentalization of practices of visual culture under regimes of modernization in the non-Western world, considering the

relationship between the fine arts affiliated with modernization and the traditional ones often used to consolidate local culture and employed in processes of cultural patrimony and commodification. Taking the Middle East as a focal region and contextualizing this region's experience within broader global contexts of coloniality and postcoloniality, technological and economic globalization, and touristic cultural production, the project invited cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary examination of the intersection between high visual arts, institutional practices of art production, and the visual performance of patrimony. Examining the circumscription of culture into oppositional zones of tradition and modernity, it focused on the utilization of visual cultural production in the designation of patrimony and the production of collective identity on national and sub-national levels from the colonial to the global era.

The project proposed strategies for the emerging field of the study of modern art in non-Western countries that views art not only within art historical discourses often derived through the Western tradition, but through broader cultural phenomena and local relationships with visual experience. It considered visual cultural production in the modern era as emerging from the programmatic delineation of modernity in its relationship to concepts such as "tradition", "cultural heritage", "folklore", "beaux-arts", "handicraft", and "popular culture," – familiar and yet problematic concepts that hide many implicit assumptions about past and present, high and low, urban and rural, and majority and minority cultures. By considering art in its broader anthropological ramifications, it constructed a critical discourse about non-Western modern art that would not repeat the teleological tropes of modernism implicit in existing art historical narratives.

¹⁶ David Carrier, "Deep innovation and mere eccentricity in Islamic art history" in *Making Art History: A changing discipline and its institutions*, ed. Elizabeth C. Mansfield (New York: Routledge, 2007), 173-186; Monika Kaup, "Becoming Baroque:

Folding European Forms into the New World Baroque with Alejo Carpentier", *CR: The New Centennial Review* 5 no. 2 (1995), 53-77.

¹⁷ Gregory Jusdanis, "Beyond National Culture?" *Boundary* 22 no. 1 (Spring 1995), 23-60.

The project's interest in broad practices of visual cultural production rather than the relatively limited sphere of fine arts emerged as a strategic intervention in the cultural assumptions that often frame the consideration of the arts through disciplines like art history. As work by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has effectively shown in the French context, the concept of art is bound as much by issues of its instrumentalization as a form of cultural capital as by any potentially inherent discursive or medial qualities.¹⁸ Along similar lines, the designation of non-Western arts within the epistemological category of "art", and their study within disciplines like art history, cannot be separated from the nineteenth and twentieth century procedures of modernization. At the very same moment that elite arts were recognized as part of local traditions, they also were designated as part of a past that needed to be segregated from the supposedly universal practices of modernism. Thus local practices, identified and studied within the rubric of art history, became signs of identity, but often lost their function as evolving modes of expression.

In the case of the Middle East, art history of the region is generally subsumed, somewhat problematically, under the label "Islamic art", despite a generally secular orientation, the exclusion of wide swathes of Islamic cultural production in Africa and South East Asia, and the continued cultural production of the modern era.¹⁹ Understood as a mere epigone of Western practices, modern fine arts production has, until recently, been excluded from Islamic art history. Excluded from consideration as fine art, modern traditional arts have been understood largely from the perspective of anthropology, even as their tropes are often part of the national symbolism taken up in the fine arts.²⁰ From the nineteenth century on, newly emerging, often post-colonial

nation-states invested in the production of new practices of visual culture – not only the foundation of Western-style art academies, but non-artistic performative visual practices such as the categorization of folk dancing as part of national, but outmoded, identity or the reconceptualization of religious practices as modes of secular performance. Particularly in the Islamic field, but in many areas of non-Western art, art history tends to focus on historical arts, generally ending with the colonial or modern era. Considering that stepping outside of this framework would enable researchers to examine the instrumentalization of such arts as forms of cultural capital within broader practices of visual production characteristic of the modern era, the project did thus foreground how the sociological and political aspects of art production have been part of far broader processes of modernization and identity production.²¹

Bringing together specialists in the fields of Anthropology, Middle Eastern Studies, and Art History, "Other Modernities" has considered the historiography of arts in the non-West as part of worldwide processes of modernization. Rather than conceiving of the non-Western present against the backdrop of supposedly authentic, homogenous, and undiluted traditions, this project emphasized the historiographic construction of art and visual culture as intertwined agents and expressions of sociopolitical modernization. It proposed art and performance as parallel arenas through which cultural identity came to be perceived neither as a search for roots nor a striving for Westernization, but as a process of coming-into-being within a framework of shifting cultural and political hegemonies.

The notion of modernity as phenomenon that destroys the present in order to build a new future – a tabula rasa phenomenon completely opposed to tradition – is particularly complicated in the case of

¹⁸ Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel, *L'amour de l'art, Les musées et leur public* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1992 [1966]); Pierre Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art, Genèse et structure du champ littéraire* (Paris: Seuil, 1998 [1992]).

¹⁹ See for example Wendy M. K. Shaw, *What is "Islamic" Art? Between Religion and Perception* (Cambridge, New York, Port Melbourne, New Delhi and Singapore: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

²⁰ Henry Glassie, *Turkish Traditional Art Today* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

²¹ See for example Wendy M.K. Shaw, *Possessors and Possessed: Museums and the Visualisation of History in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003); Karen Excell and Sarina Wakefield, eds., *Museums in Arabia: Transnational Practices and Regional Processes* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016); Alexandre Kazerouni, *Le miroir des cheikhs, Musée et politique dans les principautés du golfe Persique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2017).

non-Western settings. Whereas in the West, where the conceptualization of “the modern” as a post-Enlightenment project of utopian rationality responded against existing traditions, sublimating them into new forms, elsewhere modernization was often understood as erasing local culture in favor of a template borrowed from the West. For example, in much of the Arab world of the early twentieth century, the word *ruwwad*, pioneers, was used to designate modern artists, as if they were acting in a barren desert rather than in an already rich and vital cultural context. Historiographies of non-Western arts have often followed such a model, viewing artistic production as a belated import rather than a complex part of ongoing cultural change and local processes of modernization. Consequently, “tradition”, viewed in opposition to modernity, has often been understood as already finished and only available for revival, even when existing practices have survived into the present, particularly in forms of performance associated with indigenous or rural peoples. Thus the fine arts, associated with modernity, and “traditional” arts, often commodified in the production of nostalgia or marketed for tourists, serve together as a means of simplifying the complex processes of cultural mixing that this project sought to unravel. By bringing together the study of cultural production, its preservation, and its commodification, this project emphasized the agency of artists, arts institutions, and commodity production in the history and analysis of non-Western culture as a socio-political phenomenon.

To this end, the project achieved the following:

1. It ameliorated the historiographic divergence between the study of pre-modern non-Western arts and the relative inattention paid to the modern era. It thus contributed a paradigm for the study of modern art (as opposed to much more popular contemporary art) of the non-West, a geo-temporal phenomenon generally excluded from art historical consideration, but nonetheless central to understanding tropes of national identity construction that extend to the present.
2. It examined the political instrumentalization of art as an agent of modernization within the context of broader practices of visual culture. Rather than conceiving of the visual arts within a domain of elite practice or connoisseurial success, it examined art as a document of modern identity production in line with other visual practices such as clothing or advertising.
3. It developed specific case studies to suggest the range of the field and encourage future investment in academic positions and public exhibitions of non-Western modern arts, and establish research and teaching on these topics within the academic field and affiliated institutions.
4. It established a broader synergy between this project, the public, and institutions with similar interests in Switzerland, Europe and the Middle East, which served as a focal case study relying on the expertise of the project leaders.

The six articles published in this volume reflect the results of this common research project and suggest the new orientations developed through it.

Three of the articles presented here revise widely accepted modernist historiographies. In her article, “Petit répertoire méthodologique pour une approche multidimensionnelle des arts visuels contemporains” Clotilde Wuthrich develops a methodology, instigated by her fieldwork in Cuba and Benin, that could help anthropologists and art historians to apprehend the complexity and interconnections of contemporary visual art practices. Drawing on the history of the anthropological tradition studying art in non-Western societies, Wuthrich unpacks the ideological assumptions that still permeate the discourses on contemporary artistic productions within and outside the discipline. Based on archival materials, Mirl Redmann’s “Beyond Nationalism? Blank Spaces at the documenta 1955 – The Legacy of an Exhibition between Old Europe and a New

World Order” criticizes the supposed “internationality” and open-mindedness of the early documenta and shows that it had an ambiguous relationship with the recent German National-Socialist past as well as with European colonialism. In “Illness as Political Metaphor in Modernist Arts in Iran”, Katrin Nahidi critiques apolitical narratives of modernism in Iran by examining how the concept of Westoxification, elaborated by Jalal Al-e Ahmad, strongly influenced the Iranian modernist art movement of the 1960s.

The other three articles engage with contemporary practices as agents of social commitment. Starting from different definitions of what “art” is, two show how native textile production can be a source of inspiration for a critical approach of globalization or a catalyzer of social change. In “*But Them Can’t Be God: Chinese Textiles in Nigerian Dress and the Art of Ayo Akinwande*,” Erin Rice examines how contemporary artist Ayo Akinwande engages with Chinese economic influence in Nigeria. In “Weaving Social Change(s) or Changes of Weaving? The Ethnographic Study of Andean Textiles in Cusco and Bolivia”, Cristian Terry explains how production of Andean textiles for the tourist industry in Cusco, Peru, and in Bolivia empowers local populations and induces economic change while also transforming traditional weaving. In “Film and Video as a Space for Political Expression and Social Critique in Syria,” Charlotte Bank examines the possibilities of expressing critique in the authoritarian context of Syria, through the works of three video artists working in the 2000s.

As the editors of this volume and doctoral supervisors of the scholars published in this volume, we are proud of the achievements of this group, look forward to the development of their future work, and hope that this work will create ever more communicative networks concerning our shared interests.

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