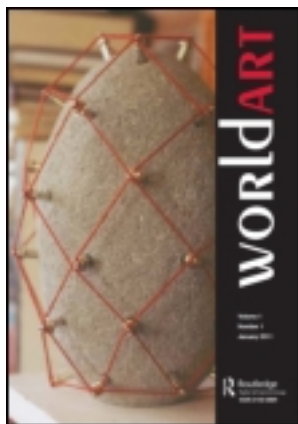


On: 08 March 2012, At: 06:55

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office:  
Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## World Art

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rwor20>

## Editorial

The Editors <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> World Art, a Taylor and Francis Journal

Available online: 25 Feb 2011

To cite this article: The Editors (2011): Editorial, World Art, 1:1, 1-7

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21500894.2011.547300>

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## Editorial

### Beginnings

This is the first issue of *World Art*, a brand new space dedicated to the works and debates about human creativity, broadly envisaged.

The term ‘world art’ emerged out of the very particular circumstances of the donation of the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection to the University of East Anglia. The collection, which encompasses art from around the world, dating from c. 4,000 BCE to the present day, coexists with temporary exhibition, public events and learning programmes, academic teaching and research departments, library and archive resources – all housed in a Norman Foster building. Very recently (2010), these components have become a single entity: The Sainsbury Institute for Art.

The enterprise of world art at UEA has its origins, to be sure, in Western modernist traditions. Yet the range and intensive examination of the collection contributed very significantly to a major change in attitudes concerning what art is and where its study could be concentrated. This was reflected not least by the naming of the department, from what had been initially Fine Art and then Art History, to The Department of World Art Studies, created in 1992. World art has always been about questions and questioning, rather than a prescriptive framework of research or pedagogy. Perhaps it was always clearer what it was not, than what it was. Early proponents moved away from the privileging of history and chronology as a main means of organising the discipline. Rather, they looked at comparative developments, things, environments, places, and the organisations, formations, and understandings of cultures. In more prosaic terms, World Art Studies, in its examination of histories of art, aligned most strongly with the content, scope, and approaches more commonly associated with anthropology and archaeology. Latterly, it has embraced the practice and study of cultural heritage and museology, complemented by other endeavours, such as gallery education, which brings in a wider range of creative practitioners, audiences, projects and debates centred on world art.

John Onians must be credited with establishing the name for the school and also for advancing a special kind of world art study. As his article (this journal) outlines, he joins other eminent scholars who, in different ways, pursue ambitious studies which stress the human brain and the environment to explain art-making. At the same time, rather than occluding alternative understandings, he has urged scholars, colleagues and students from various countries (e.g. USA, China, Germany, the Netherlands) to explore the potentials of other world art trajectories.

### **Futures**

World art is productively broached as a concept that pertains as much to contexts of making and interpretation as to material objects, artworks and other forms of visual and performative creativity. It also encompasses the provocations engendered through those intellectual and vernacular histories that enable objects to exist – independently and also relationally with other objects – and generate their multiple meanings in multiple places and through time. We see the journal as part of a world-wide field of writing, making and sensing art which will contribute to the re-construction of canonical values, and the re-consideration of numerous pressing concerns. Encompassing histories and processes of conceptual, intellectual and aesthetic exchange, world art may be approached through divergent yet connected systems of thought: such as world art studies, world heritage, the anthropology of art, world art history, post-colonial critique, world history, world archaeology, critical pedagogy, world anthropology.

Given that the interrelation of many of these world views now already stimulates nomadic thinking and cross-border collaboration (e.g., between disciplines or professions), world art does not and cannot assume fixed coordinates, nor be dominated by cartographic or completist globalising agendas. The interlacing of various processes (e.g., art-related display, mediation, collecting, interaction, intervention, agency, reflection) both characterise new global conditions and provoke a re-evaluation of former specialist positions. World art perspectives may offer a means of resolving, or re-addressing, questions about the distinctiveness, intersections and adjacencies of histories not only in relation to each other but also in relation to other less art-centric experiences and outlooks.

The notion of world art has – almost by definition – an unsettling presence, especially if it is considered in relation to the impact of

disciplinary practices of anthropology, or wider histories of empires, colonialism and de-colonisation that have helped to generate its multi-faceted approaches and uneven textures in recent years. World art has widely differing resonances in relation to specific historical, geographical or cultural locations. These call into question what might formally have been seen as centres and margins, and reshape the nature and character of influences. Rather than attempting to use the term to capture and classify particular artworks, or types of objects, one way to assess world art more productively may be as a network of diverse intellectual, artistic and curatorial activities centred on human creativity. If the concept is to contribute to the contestation of conventional art historical and museological approaches, then to locate world art as an unfolding matrix of practice-based networks can be a crucial manoeuvre. Because networks pertain to the open-endedness rather than the bounded nature of historical, political, social and cultural phenomena, the possibilities are vast and may have profound implications for art-related praxis. In effect, the potential to configure definable entities – such as the artist, the artwork, the art event, etc. – as stable and discrete realities, read only from one place, position or from an exclusive interpretive perspective, is destabilised.

The consideration of ancient cultures around the globe must inform a broader rethinking of world art, not least because of the empirical richness of the archaeological record. The range of artefacts, fragments and contexts of discovery can inform the nature of art, values, locations and status. Yet there is also a great imbalance between the wealth of this record and the rather inchoate theorisation of it. Many recent advances in archaeological circles shift the emphasis away from key objects (e.g., as static indices of wealth, status symbol, ideology) to changing relational situations of their use, production and experience. Exciting rewriting of ancient objects and spaces has come about by highlighting their sociality, history and cosmology. This has involved expanding the range of analogy, with purposeful questioning of traditional and usually Western-centric understandings of art, experience and time. To effect this discussion, scholars draw strategically from many other domains of enquiry to perceive and write about the past, namely anthropology (agency/power of images), philosophy (phenomenology), linguistics (intertexts), cognitive sciences & psychology (visual systems and inference), and environmental sciences (landscape, ecology, perception). This is part of larger programmes in archaeology and other disciplines interrogating the

nature of evidence (especially 'objects') and turning to complementary routes in the production of knowledge. We see this work as having many overlapping objectives and ambitions with the overall project of the journal, as its further development should actively articulate.

Archaeological perspectives in world art are vital for another reason: archaeology actively mediates objects/places in the knowledge about and commodification of the past. Ancient remains, of course, have long been part of the global art market, and no doubt will continue to be so as long as there is demand for the past and its aesthetic objects. But more than ever, and with unprecedented scope, the role of the ancient past has ballooned in identity politics and community-building. Forms and continuities are incorporated, pronounced, attenuated or muted across local and larger scales. Contests over the look and future of the past occur with a range of stakeholders: from small souvenir shops to world heritage sites. All the while, crucial questions surface about the ownership of cultural remains and the commodification of the past.

A common impulse of contemporary art, in which there is a bringing together of cultural forms and perceptions, intentional or not, may also be conceptualised as part of a broader human pattern. There are various understandings of these encounters, some of course with deep and problematic histories: hybridity, fusion, *mestizaje*, multiculturalism, syncretism, acculturation, orientalism. They frequently relate to the incorporation, mimesis, popularization, citation, eclecticism, democratization and sometimes to the silencing of new forms of expression. Each is a juncture and a movement of unique interactions that emerge out of local aesthetic economies, with significant histories, social forces and personnel. To invoke a few distinguished creative domains and trajectories, examples may range from bebop to hip-hop, from Amarna to Modernism, from Moche to tourist arts, from curries to El Bulli; it is the sampled, the hybrid and the interculturally daring that enable creative renewal. It is peculiar that in this long-term disposition, which one might even call an ongoing human tradition, the skilled instrumentalisation of knowledge might give birth to new fields of inquiry and desirable interventions. We challenge our contributors and readers to explore comparative patterns and movements, while also locating and/or unpacking those patterns, terms and perspectives that may be applicable both in diverse artistic contexts and over the *longue durée*.

The field of world art history also brings together universal concerns, of human material expression, with insights into the

contingency of particular modes of thinking and the positional specificity of historical representations. The anthropology of art, similarly inclusive in its heterogeneous scope, generates intercultural and hybrid accounts of material and visual encounters, conventions and subversions.

*World Art* establishes a new arena for critical thinking and creative production across the terrains of museum studies, art practice, art education, and the new humanities. Given the transformative potential of art-related knowledge, appreciation, understanding, awareness and dialogue, *World Art* is situated in and also activates the connections between numerous sites. By negotiating various intersecting and opposing imaginaries, world art may be addressed as more than an all-inclusive field. There will be potential for articulation and rupture while being cognisant of the need for personal, interpersonal and institutional reflexivity. The understanding of local developments and environments takes on increasing relevance as part of the thinking about art, further shaping the emergence of radical global re-positioning, and situating new regionalities such as the 'global south'.

### Processes

*World Art* is intended to help chart and reorient existing practice and understandings, and the journal's physical presentation and organization of material are part of this process. We intend to widen the academic field, making a clear acknowledgement that visual media are on a par with words and texts. We encourage contributions as much from artists, educators and curators as from scholars, with a view to making world art debates more inclusive, creative and ambitious.

If a 'world artist' exists, she/he is, in our view, someone who conceives of their work as a project of world relevance and which may challenge or cross traditional cultural boundaries, be willing to experiment with their skills, their imagery and their interpretations as acts of cultural translation. The 'world artist' may also be deepening and re-positioning a sense of identity in relation to place for the purpose of widening understanding and communication. In terms of writing about artists, we recognise that the single authorial or curatorial voice is often privileged. We intend to promote those writings and images by experienced practitioners, which grapple with the impact of situated ideas in comparative perspectives, testing one

idea against another or being attentive to different value systems. We also aim to involve contemporary artists and thinkers who make themselves and others aware of how they 're-world' the past and the present, by either reproducing or disrupting previous practice. Differing educational traditions have the expectation that their own art criticism takes priority. As editors we need to balance the sometimes conflicting expectations of critical engagement. As advocates of international and intercultural practice, we would like to highlight some of the newer roles for artists, educators and creative thinkers who take risks and cross boundaries, either outside the conventions of galleries or beyond their walls.

We anticipate that a number of controversies will be worked out candidly in the pages of this journal. A work made or written in one context cannot be assumed to translate equivalently in another and the interpretive confusions, sensitivities, and complexities that result are likely to be among the most interesting and problematic issues for a global audience. Just as important, we welcome different forms of contributions, particularly those which experiment and take risks in establishing new spaces or deepening a debate in world art. In addition to *research articles*, the journal offers scope for *visual essays* which can privilege a series of images, with minimal or simply synoptic text. We also encourage *dialogues*, which can contain dialogical viewpoints and multi-authored commentary, located in the same issue or in sequential issues. We also promote *interventions* that may diverge from conventional approaches, themes or presentation formats. The online mode, especially, has capacity for video, sound and greater colour content. On the one hand, these are all to capture, as much as possible, the diversity of world art creativity and discussion. On the other, they seek to complement (and disrupt) the traditional single-authored text as the primary contribution in scholarly serials based on 'art', while enhancing the readership and accessibility by a wide range of interested parties.

For the inaugural issue we have included invited contributions from our Advisory Board as well as general articles to help lay the groundwork from which to begin to build the journal. Future issues are now open for contributions. *World Art* is offered as a working premise and a challenge to our audience. The term helps to orient the wide parameters of our content and to locate common departure points. As editors, we wish to broaden both its relevance and its

workability. We do not have pretensions to stabilise it. We aim to nurture its openendedness in intelligent and innovative ways so that it may renew itself, engage your participation and concentrate our interchanges.

The Editors

*World Art*, a Taylor and Francis Journal