

ART HISTORY, POSTCOLONIALISM, AND THE GLOBAL TURN

April 2–3, 2020 /// RISD Museum

CONFERENCE ORGANIZERS:

Foad Torshizi, Rhode Island School of Design

Vazira Zamindar, Brown University

Joshua I. Cohen, The City College of New York

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 ANTHONY GARDNER // OXFORD UNIVERSITY
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2020
 04.03

RISD MUSEUM
 METCALF
 AUDITORIUM
 10:30 AM - 7:00 PM

04.02

SCREENING OF
*UN-DOCUMENTED:
 UNLEARNING IMPERIAL
 PLUNDER* (2019)
 DIRECTED BY ARIEL
 LA AISHA AZOULAY
 FOLLOWED BY DIS-
 CUSSION WITH THE
 DIRECTOR AND VAZIRA
 ZAMINDAR
 6:30 PM - 8:00 PM
 PROV-WASH AUDITO-
 RIUM, 20 WASHINGTON
 PLACE, PROVIDENCE

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ART HISTORY POST- COLONIAL- ISM AND THE GLOBAL TURN



RHODE ISLAND
 SCHOOL OF DESIGN

DIVISION OF LIBERAL ARTS
 COLLEGE OF THE PROVIDENCE
 ASSOCIATION OF FACULTY
 SOCIAL EQUITY AND INCLUSION
 MA DEGREE IN GLOBAL ARTS AND CULTURES
 RISD GLOBAL



BROWN
 UNIVERSITY

CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY SOUTH ASIA
 BROWN ARTS CENTER FROM THE SOUTH
 BROWN ARTS CENTER
 DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
 DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY OF ART AND ARCHITECTURE
 CENTER FOR LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN STUDIES

ORGANIZED BY:
 JOSHUA I. COHEN
 FOAD TORSHIZI
 VAZIRA F. Y. ZAMINDAR

RISD MUSEUM

Art History, Postcolonialism, and the Global Turn

As attention turns increasingly toward the “global” in art history, has postcolonialism fallen into obsolescence? Although touted as liberating, does the new “global” dispensation mark a rupture with history? What shall become of the generative critical theory that emerged in the 1980s and ‘90s, which partly grew out of reflections on anticolonial movements and post-independence nation-building? At best, global art history signals a germane awareness of “post-postcolonial” conditions precipitated by the accelerating globalization of finance capitalism. But would proponents of global contemporary art rather applaud putatively post-national freedoms than reckon with globalization’s deep disadvantages, while jettisoning the postcolonial as an allegedly outmoded product of elite theory?

This symposium asks whether, or to what degree, postcolonial discourses stand to be recuperated and revised in 21st-century art history, architectural history, visual studies, and art criticism. In cases where political alliances have frayed and nascent national governments foundered, radical politics have sometimes given way to disillusionment, while transnationalism, hybridity, and self-fashioning settle in as new norms. For some in the Global South, “postcolonial” may indeed appear misleading as an overall designation. Nevertheless, what could be the implications of *moving past* postcolonialism as we arguably celebrate a cosmopolitan world that has yet to be fully realized? With neoliberalism giving rise to what art historian Anthony Gardner has called “a resurgent focus on North Atlantic relations,” what would be the cost of letting the postcolonial slip away?

In other words, what does the early 21st-century—so distant from the heyday of anticolonialism associated with Third World independence and liberation movements—hold for the practices and ambitions of artists, scholars, and critics? How have contemporary artists accommodated and/or resisted the demands of the global art world? What have the recent shifts in discourse meant—or what could they mean—for scholarly and curatorial (re)readings of chronologically staggered periods of culture clash and decolonization, including the possibilities, and failures of each moment? How might an ongoing or renewed “post-colonial” artistic output exceed the confines of galleries, biennials, art fairs, and museums? Do new interests in the “global” inevitably come at the expense of the postcolonial? Are the phenomena in question truly taking place on a global scale? Have scholars and artists from the Global South explored different terms and frameworks to structure their pursuits? To what extent are political limitations determined by working relationships with art institutions and their particular forms of patronage?

This symposium invites artists, critics, curators, and scholars to query the state of postcolonialism in modern and contemporary art. Does (or should) the postcolonial retain relevance? Or how might it regain relevance? In what ways must new projects challenge the orthodoxies, binaries, and narratives of earlier discourses?

Conference Themes

Major themes of the symposium may include the following:

Historiography

- › How do art history, architectural history, and visual studies compare with other fields in terms of their engagements with postcolonial studies?
- › How, why, and in what instances has art history embraced—or remained resistant to—postcolonial thinking?
- › Over the past few decades, what have been the most salient themes, theoretical issues, research terrains, and debates in postcolonial art studies?
- › To what extent have shared investments in postcolonialism given rise to productive discussions and collaborations across disciplines?

Purview

- › Which artists, movements, periods, and regions have attracted most attention—or, alternatively, demand greater investigation or renewed consideration—within postcolonial art studies?
- › What should be postcolonialism’s temporal frame? Although most practitioners in the field indeed focus on modern and contemporary art, might the methods of (de-hyphenated) postcolonial art studies be productively extended to include analysis of other historical moments?
- › Over the past few decades, artists and curators have introduced a new set of terms in an effort to address the inadequacies of earlier conceptual frameworks. Thus “global” is emphasized over “international,” and “diaspora” over pan-Africanism or pan-Arabism, etc. To what extent have these new terms, and their re-readings of earlier discourses, succeeded in shifting the discipline’s epistemological foci?
- › How can the concerns of postcolonial studies be understood as distinct from the realms of other, closely related areas of (critical) inquiry, such as globalization, multiculturalism, identity politics, and cosmopolitanism? To what extent is the specificity of postcolonial studies worth insisting upon, and how does postcolonial analysis intersect with the methods of art history, architectural history, and visual studies?
- › To what extent do the transhistorical phenomena of colonialism and imperialism stand to be usefully examined in art history, architectural history, and visual studies under the rubric of the postcolonial?
- › As some have argued (Loomba et al 2005), postcolonial art studies can be envisioned “reasserting its vocation in coming to terms with the contemporary shape of neoliberal global institutions, as well as with the wide ideological and intellectual spectrum that has begun...to align itself with the new global juggernaut.” How might this be playing out in art and visual studies?
- › What is the role of the art world in governing (or policing) the acceptable politics of art critics and scholars?
- › What forms of politics are most pressing and most viable within contemporary art and discourse?

Conference Participants

- › **Alexander Alberro**
Virginia Bloedel Wright '51 Professor of Art History at Barnard College / Columbia University
- › **Ariella Azoulay**
Professor of Comparative Literature and Modern Culture and Media, Brown University
- › **Jennifer Bajorek**
Associate Professor of Comparative Literature and Visual Studies, Hampshire College
- › **Tammer El-Sheikh**
Assistant Professor of Art History, York University
- › **Anthony Gardner**
Head of School and Associate Professor of Contemporary Art History and Theory, Ruskin School of Art, Oxford University and Fellow in Fine Art, Queen's College, Oxford University
- › **Sonal Khullar**
Associate Professor, Art History, University of Washington
- › **Diana Martinez**
Assistant Professor and Director of Architectural Studies, Tufts University
- › **Saloni Mathur**
Professor of Modern and Contemporary South Asian Art, UCLA
- › **Ijlal Muzaffar**
Associate Professor of Modern Architectural History, RISD
- › **Itohan Osayimwese**
Associate Professor of Art and Architecture, Brown University

Art History, Postcolonialism, and the Global Turn Conference is organized by:

- › **Foad Torshizi**
Assistant Professor of Art History, Rhode Island School of Design
- › **Vazira F-Y Zamindar**
Associate Professor of History, Brown University
- › **Joshua I. Cohen**
Assistant Professor of Art History, City College, New York

Conference Outcome

Special issue of an academic journal, or an edited volume.

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