

# A genealogy of the global in art exhibitions

## The gap between *Westkunst* and the global contemporary

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### Título / Titre / Titolo

Una genealogía de lo global en las exposiciones de arte: la brecha entre *Westkunst* y lo contemporáneo global.

Une généalogie des expositions globales dans l'art: L'écart entre *Westkunst* et le contemporain global.

Una genealogia delle fiere globali nell'arte: il gap tra *Westkunst* e il contemporaneo globale

### Abstract / Resumen / Résumé / Riassunto

With *Westkunst* (Cologne, 1981) an exhibition that can be considered as the highest point of celebration of modernity according to the old Western and international system— and *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds*, (Karlsruhe, 2011) —a celebration of the “global paradigm”— the world of exhibitions experienced one of those epochal epistemological turns that can be called “rites of passage,” from a monocultural world to another world gradually becoming multicultural, intercultural, and globalised.

Entre *Westkunst* (Colonia, 1981), una exposición que puede considerarse el paradigma más elevado de la celebración de la modernidad según el viejo sistema occidental e internacional, y *El mundo contemporáneo y el surgimiento de nuevos mundos del arte* (Karlsruhe, 2011) una celebración del “paradigma global”, el mundo de las exposiciones experimentó uno de los grandes giros epistemológicos que podríamos llamar “ritos de paso”, de un mundo monocultural a otro mundo que gradualmente se estaba volviendo multicultural, intercultural y globalizado.

Entre *Westkunst* (Cologne, 1981), une exposition qui peut être considérée comme le plus haut paradigme de la célébration de la modernité selon le vieux système occidental et international, et *Le monde contemporain et l'émergence de nouveaux mondes de l'art* (Karlsruhe, 2011), une célébration du «paradigme global», le monde des expositions a connu l'un des grands change-

ments épistémologiques que nous pourrions appeler «rites de passage», d'un monde monoculturel à un autre monde qui devenait progressivement multiculturel, interculturel et mondialisé.

Tra *Westkunst* (Colonia, 1981) —una mostra che può essere considerata il più alto paradigma della celebrazione della modernità secondo il vecchio sistema occidentale e internazionale— e *Il mondo contemporaneo e l'emergenza di nuovi mondi dell'arte* (Karlsruhe, 2011) —una celebrazione del “paradigma globale”—, il mondo delle mostre ha vissuto una delle più grandi svolte epistemologiche che potremmo chiamare “riti di passaggio”, da un mondo monoculturale ad un altro mondo che diventa gradualmente multiculturale, interculturale e globalizzato.

### Keywords / Palabras clave / Mots-clé / Parole chiave

Transnational dialogues, ethnoscapas, deterritorialisation, cosmopolitanism, New Internationalism, Interculturalism, Primitivism, afropolitanism.

Diálogos transnacionales, etnopaisajes, desterritorialización, cosmopolitismo, nuevo internacionalismo, interculturalismo, primitivismo, Afropolitanismo.

Dialogues transnationaux, ethno-paysages, déterritorialisation, cosmopolitisme, nouvel internationalisme, interculturalisme, primitivisme, afropolitisme.

Dialoghi transnazionali, etno-paesaggi, deterritorializzazione, cosmopolitismo, nuovo internazionalismo, interculturalismo, primitivismo, afropolitismo.

At the beginning of the 1980s the world of exhibitions – outside the debates that were taking place in the postcolonial context – still seemed tied to the idea of proclaiming a single and universally valid idea of art. *A New Spirit in Painting* (London, 1981), *Zeitgeist* (Berlin, 1982) and, in particular, the ample anthology *Westkunst* continued to turn their back on any kind of art that was not created in the great centres of power, very much keeping alive the discriminatory debate between centre and periphery. Specifically, the abovementioned show *Westkunst*,<sup>1</sup> curated by Kasper König, served to highlight – using wide panorama of artistic practices inscribed in the Western map – the new German artistic identity that had been erased since the Second World War, in the sense that, although the exhibition covered an extensive period (from 1939 to 1981) and presented a wide representation of Western artists – many of whom would go on to infamous prominence in the 1980s (Borofsky, Daniels, Paladino, Salle, Schnabel, West, Chia, Cuchi, among others) – it acted as a standard bearer for the generation of German artists, unknown beyond national borders, who had been able to connect their art to local roots.

## 1. Beyond Western hegemony: 1989 as a stating point

In this chapter, we will analyse different curatorial projects that will help us rethink operations of exclusion/inclusion in relation to the notion of Western hegemony. Projects that will gradually give visibility to new players who start to appear, seeking to map the complex geopolitical and cultural environments of local surroundings. Paraphrasing the journalist Thomas Friedman, it is as if the world has become flat – taking the metaphor of a “flat world” to describe – with its benefits, its ruptures, and its contradictions – the new phase of globalisation<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Laszlo Glozer, *Westkunst. Zeitgenössische Kunst Seit 1939* (exhibition catalogue) (Cologne: DuMont Buchverlag, 1981).

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Friedman, *The World is Flat. A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2006).

that shows how and why countries such as India and China, companies, communities and individuals, governments, and societies must adapt to the conditions of a world dominated by the increasing effects of new technologies and new communications networks. And what Thomas Friedman was really referring to when alluded to the “flatness” of the world is that

“The global competitive playing field was being levelled. The world was being flattened. [...] Clearly, it was now possible for more people than ever to collaborate and compete in real time with more other people on more different kinds of work from more different corners of the planet and on a more equal footing than at any previous time in the history of the world.”<sup>3</sup>

### 1.1. “Magiciens de la terre” and its polemics

One of the first challenges in the curatorial field of making the visual arts a global phenomenon around cultures started with the exhibition project *Magiciens de la terre* (1989), an attempt by Jean-Hubert Martin to confront through artists both the Western and non-Western context, but without more connection between them than the fact that they form part of the same contemporaneity and with a distinct valuing of the artist in opposition to the magician. As Jean-Hubert Martin argued in an interview with Benjamin Buchloh, the exhibition was not composed so much of works of art as of “objects of visual and sensual experience” coming from all kinds of cultures with the aim of incorporating “critical reflections” that current anthropology had proposed about the “problem of ethnocentrism, the relativity of culture, and intercultural relations.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> According to Friedman, the “flatness” of the world would be the result of a series of factors such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, the arrival of the Web, the irruption of new software, the strengthening of the groups Google and Yahoo!, and the emergence in the new multinational capitals of countries such as India and China. See T. Friedman, *The World is Flat. A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*, cit., 8.

<sup>4</sup> “The Whole Earth Show: An Interview with Jean-Hubert Martin-Benjamin H.D. Buchloh”, *Art in America*, vol. 77, 5 (may 1989), 150-159.

Considered in its time to be “ethnocentric”,<sup>5</sup> as Thomas McEville held, it served to open the door<sup>6</sup> and start a process for which various curatorial discourses, both mainstream and peripheral, made visible and contextualised the artistic and cultural productions of “other worlds”, both the so-called “Third World” and the “Second World” (the old countries of Eastern Europe). *Magiciens de la terre* retrieved all the eliminated part of MOMA’s *Primitivism in 20th Century Art*,<sup>7</sup> an exhibition that celebrated “primitivism” and the colonial gaze of the “other” through the search for affinities between modern art and tribal art, and tried to show that “identified” artists (with name and surname) existed who could come to Paris, with whom one could talk, and who could be shown beside the stars or the most famous artists of Western art. In this sense, a hundred artists from five continents were invited, of which twenty were African, who stepped for the first time – others followed later – into the high places of contemporary European art. *Magiciens* thus proposed for the first time a direct confrontation between contemporary artists coming from all the cultures of the world – here international did not only designate Western Europe and North America but also the remaining three-quarters of humanity.

<sup>5</sup> As Johanne Lamoureux argues, in *Magiciens* it seemed that the invitation made to non-Western artists served to legitimise some of the most regressive factors of Western artistic practices: the idea of the artist as an innovator, the intrinsic quality of the object, and a conception of the exhibited artefacts as channels for the spiritual and the transcendent. As J. Lamoureux holds, the failure of *Magiciens* lies in the impossible relation between the first and the third of those aspects, between a certain conception of the subject-individual (the magician) and an unrecognised conception of the object (the fetish), terms with clear psychoanalytical roots. J. Lamoureux, “From Form to Platform: The Politics of Representation and the Representation of Politics”, *Art Journal*, vol. 64, 1 (spring 2005): 68.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas McEville, “Ouverture du piège: l’exposition postmoderne”, in *Magiciens de la Terre* (exhibition catalogue) (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou and Grande Halle-La Villette, Paris, 18 May – 14 August 1989, pp. 20-23.

<sup>7</sup> William Rubin (ed.), *Primitivism in 20th Century Art. Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (exhibition catalogue) (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1984).

### **The polemic around “Magiciens de la terre”**

*Magiciens* provoked controversies and hostile reactions from critics, art historians, ethnographers, and theoreticians, who considered this first exhibition of “world” contemporary art to be a phenomenon apart from conventional critical parameters. According to the detractors, a tacit “primitivism” had guided the representation of the non-Western artists, privileging those works which implicitly shared the footprints and the registers of tradition (colours, pigments, feathers) to the detriment of artists whose projects showed that non-Western societies did not live “outside of time”, but were committed to change: modernisation and the urbanisation derived from it. Organisers were accused of offering an excessively static image of the artist who lived in Africa, Asia, or Latin America, impervious to technical, intellectual, and artistic modernity. It was also said that, despite the laudable attempt by Jean-Hubert Martin and his advisers to encourage a “non-hierarchical” meeting of Western contemporary artists and artists from marginal areas unknown in the circuits of contemporary art, it was no more than an ethnocentric and hegemonic operation that could not avoid the account of the “others” as primitives and in which the supposed collusion of opposed cultural codes was reduced to an aesthetic confrontation which presupposed at all times the superiority of Western culture in relation to the non-Western cultures (men against magicians).

*Magiciens de la terre* without doubt represented a “before” and an “after”, a fundamental reference exhibition in this ethnological drift. McEville, in the catalogue text, argues for a transformation of the modern exhibition, which saw the other as exotic and as primitive, into the postmodern exhibition, which starts out from difference and allows the “other” to be him- or herself.<sup>8</sup> The postmodern exhibition would not articulate a unifying principle of quality, but many pluralist

<sup>8</sup> See Thomas McEville, “Ouverture du piège: l’exposition postmoderne”, in *Magiciens de la Terre*, cit., 20.

and relativised principles; neither would it articulate a unifying principle of the movement in general, nor of the artistic past, nor – of course – of history, nor of any defined hierarchy. Because, as McEvelley asserts:

“*Magiciens de la terre* hopes, ultimately, to offer an idea of the global state of contemporary art, with all its fragmentations and differences. Such an idea can, in turn, change the format of big international exhibitions that disdain the art of eighty per cent of the world’s population.”<sup>9</sup>

And in this way McEvelley concludes by recognising that perhaps the biggest problem of the show lay in handling an almost universal dimension of the exhibition without articulating universal principles and in avoiding Platonic affirmations of universal and eternal justification that could derive from any global approach that was too static: “In its eagerness to avoid imposing categories and to create an opening, *Magiciens de la terre* defined the undefined or the contradictory variety and proposed an approach around contradiction, plurality, and the lack of essence, around an idea of the self that has to be relative, changing, with multiple aspects, which has to be, in other words, around a non-idea of the self, or an idea of the non-self. The difficulty of this project is proportional to its importance.”<sup>10</sup>

In parallel with the show, both the magazine *Les Cahiers du Musée national d’art moderne* and *Third Text*<sup>11</sup> published monographic pieces about it. The critique of Rasheed Araeen stands out for its sharpness: in the text “Our Bauhaus Others’ Mudhouse”<sup>12</sup> he proposed the question not so much of the “other” but rather of how the “other” had subverted the actual assumptions in which “otherhood” is constructed by the dominant culture. The anthropological, according to Araeen, has played a decisive role in the concepts of *Magiciens de*

*la Terre*, but we do not forget that the main concern of the anthropological continues to be interest in the primitive, in the “original other”. And although recent work in anthropology has tried to correct some of the first assumptions – particularly the notion of the so-called primitive societies as static and of their artists as anonymous – this correction is in some way out of place. Furthermore, the act of placing attention to the anthropological discourse in the exhibition context in the foreground has distracted us from the fundamental aspect of the relations between the dominant Western culture and other cultures. And Araeen asks: Why such an obsession with so-called primitive societies? Which are these societies? Are not the majority of them Third World societies which today form part of the global system, with a common mode of production and similar structures of development? And although countries such as India and Brazil have not enjoyed the same industrialised system as the countries of the West, it might be that the artistic production of the mainstream has formed part of what Jean Fisher calls the “paradigm of modernity”. It is certain that there can be cultures that operate outside the limits of Western culture, but we can affirm that they are not affected by modern developments. Their marginality has more to do with the extreme of their exploitation and privation as a result of Western imperialism than with the character of their cultures. And the main struggle of most of these cultures is for the recovery of their land, and their entry into the modern world is part of this struggle in favour of a self-determination.<sup>13</sup>

The problem with *Magiciens* is that it does not match up to this ideological struggle, but rather should be understood from a position of cultural eclecticism in which the idea – up to a certain point postmodern – of “anything goes” is legitimised by the benevolence of the dominant culture, in a way that the other is accommodated in a “spectacle that produces an illusion of equality.”<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> T. McEvelley, “Ouverture du piège: l’exposition postmoderne”, in *Magiciens de la Terre*, cit., 22.

<sup>10</sup> T. McEvelley, “Ouverture du piège: l’exposition postmoderne”, in *Magiciens de la Terre* cit., 23.

<sup>11</sup> See *Les Cahiers du Musée national d’art moderne* 28 (spring, 1989), and *Third Text*, vol. 33, 6 (spring 1989).

<sup>12</sup> Rasheed Araeen, “Our Bauhaus Others’ Mudhouse”, *Third Text*, vol. 3, (spring, 1989): 3-14.

<sup>13</sup> See Rasheed Araeen, “From Primitivism to Ethnic Arts”, *Third Text* 1 (autumn 1987): 6-25.

<sup>14</sup> Rasheed Araeen, “Our Bauhaus Others’ Mudhouse”, cit., 4.

In effect, *Magiciens* was a great spectacle with a huge fascination of the exotic, but it ultimately ignored aspects of a historical and epistemological nature. The curators forgot that the history of art could solve problems that had previously been entrusted to ethnology and sociology and in general to cultural questions, but without neglecting aspects related to human creativity, aesthetics, and art. In Araeen's judgement, it would be necessary to reclaim objects of high culture produced by the "other" in its "postcolonial" aspirations to modernity:

"Of course, the conjuncture of postcolonial aspirations in the Third World countries and the neo-colonial ambitions of advanced capitalism has produced new conflicts and contradictions, which in turn have necessitated the emergence of a critical discourse that rightly interrogates modernism's utopian/broken promises. Modernism for the "other" remains a basic issue."<sup>15</sup>

What Araeen ends up questioning in a direct way is the absence of a theoretical and contextual framework that can justify the encounter of works that represent different historical formations:

"It is claimed that all the works, irrespective of their cultural origin, are presented 'on equal terms'. But is this 'equality' not an illusion? How is this 'equality' achieved, if not by ignoring the differences of different works? Of course, the differences have been allowed to enter into a common space. But what is the significance of this entry? Is it possible for 'difference' to function critically in a curatorial space where the criticality of 'difference' is in fact negated by the illusion of visual similarities and sensibilities of works produced under different systems, displacing the question of the unequal power of different works from the domain of ideology to cultural aesthetics. No wonder the common denominator here is a presumed 'magic' of all works which transcends socioeconomic determinants."<sup>16</sup>

Thomas McEvelley himself in a 1990 text<sup>17</sup> published in the magazine *Artforum*, in the monographic issue called "The Global Issue", indicates the difference in writing "before" and "after" the exhibition. After ha-

<sup>15</sup> Rasheed Araeen, "Our Bauhaus Others' Mudhouse", cit., 5.

<sup>16</sup> Rasheed Araeen, "Our Bauhaus Others' Mudhouse", cit., 10.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas McEvelley, "Thomas McEvelley on The Global Issue", *Artforum*, vol. 28, 7 (march 1990):19-21.

ving seen the show, McEvelley partly takes the side of the detractors when he points to the presence of many disturbing signs of residual colonial attitudes. The title, McEvelley notes, suggests a romantic inclination towards the idea of a "native artists" not only as a magician (almost in a pre-rational state) but also as someone close to the earth (the title was not "magicians of the world" but "magicians of the earth"), as in a pre-civilised state of nature. The healers, McEvelley continued, were inexplicably motivated by a desire not to use the word "artists" in deference to a growing debate about whether the so-called "primitive people" had the ideology (in the purest Kantian style) that converted objects into "art". But it is true that the word "magician" had nothing to do with what artists such as Hans Haacke, Lawrence Weiner, Barbara Kruger, or even Chéri Samba and many other artists in the exhibition – both Western and non-Western – were doing.

But neither these nor many other reasons generated by the exhibition would seem to justify, in McEvelley's eyes, a reaction to it that was so negative and even vitriolic. Part of the hostile reaction of critics was related to the fact that *Magiciens* – which was conceived as a response to the controversy provoked some years earlier by the show *Primitivism* (and to which McEvelley<sup>18</sup> himself had joined in a clearly belligerent way) – could be seen by the North American public nor its MoMA predecessor, *Primitivism*, by the European public. From this, McEvelley establishes a parallelism between the two shows, united by the act of presenting art of the First and Third Worlds in some of the most emblematic Western museums, to reach the conclusion that much had been achieved in *Magiciens* in relation to *Primitivism*. Thus, while *Primitivism* presented works without either date or author, *Magiciens* did so as if it involved Western pieces; while *Primitivism* had been Eurocentric and hierarchical, *Magiciens* levelled all type of hierarchy, leaving the works of art to appear without any fixed ideological framework; and while *Primitivism* presented the primitive works as "footnotes" to

<sup>18</sup> Thomas McEvelley, "Doctor, Lawyer, Indian Chef", in *Art & Otherness. Crisis in Cultural Identity* (New York: Documentext. McPherson Company, 1992), 27-57.

the modern Western imitations, *Magiciens* selected each work for its own value and not for the act of illustrating something outside of itself. Perhaps, reflected the critic, the key fact is that the two exhibitions embodied radically different ideas about history. And in this sense if *Primitivism* was still based on the Hegelian myth of Western cultures, *Magiciens* was clearly the epitaph of this myth and of the Kantian idea of universal value judgement.

McEvelley was also struck by the ideological-political origin of the terms of the debate provoked by *Magiciens*. While for conservative critics the show seemed to destroy modernity, progressive critics expressed a certain unease about its clear depoliticization: they questioned the motivations of the institution and the idea of wanting to introduce artists into the Western artistic market, they criticised the imposition of individualist and bourgeois values on these artists who came from communal societies, and, finally, they were suspicious of the leadership of French cultural politics, which led them to demand a show of a global range beyond fin-de-siècle French colonialism.<sup>19</sup>

## 1.2. The III Havana Biennial: Three Worlds

Also in 1989, the III Havana Biennial took place, which, compared with the first (exclusively Latin American), and the second (engraved with the expectations of the Third World), was presented as one of the great international events of global reach at the margin of the European and North American art system. Unlike the two previous editions, the curatorial team made up of Lilian Llanes, Nelson Herrera, and Gerardo Mosquera established a common theme, *Tradition and contemporaneity*. This heading covered a central exhibition at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes of Havana entitled “*Tres Mundos*” [“Three Worlds”] – with artists from countries of the Second and Third Worlds who worked in the

<sup>19</sup> Thomas McEvelley, “Doctor, Lawyer, Indian Chief”, *Artforum* (November, 1984).

context of the history of the Western art of the First World – and four “*Núcleos*” [“Nuclei”] which, against the monolithic structure of the central show, functioned as prisms that enabled a reading based more on difference than on comparison. *Núcleo 1*, with such artists as José Bedia, Ahmed Nawar, Roberto Feleo, and Roberto Diago, who incorporated hereditary myths and rituals or the legacy of national history, was concerned with the presence of traditional cultures in contemporary artistic languages. *Núcleo 2*, composed of three installations – “Bolivar in woodcarving”, “Mexican dolls”, and “African wire toys” – was described as a contribution to the richness of popular culture, sometimes expressed in an anonymous way and at other times by professional artists who took for granted the legacy of the old traditions from the parameters of arts and crafts. *Núcleo 3* consisted of seven shows, some collective, such as “The tradition of humour”, and others monographic, such as those dedicated to Graciela Iturbide, Sebastião Salgado and José Tola, with works both in a critical and humorous key, related to specific political and social developments. And, finally, *Núcleo 4* included workshops, visits to studios, and debates open to artists, critics, students, professors, and researchers. As Gerardo Mosquera indicates, a significant change in relation to the earlier biennials was the inclusion of European and North American artists belonging to the diasporas, such as an Afro-Asian group from Great Britain and artists from the San Diego-Tijuana border, which opened up the geographical notion that the Third World, incorporating the porosities derived from migration and its cultural transformations. In total, five hundred and thirty-eight artists from fifty-four countries.<sup>20</sup>

But perhaps the most interesting thing about the Biennial was its possible parallelism with the metropo-

<sup>20</sup> As Mosquera relates, the team of curators travelled around different regions of the world which they divided into “zones”. Mosquera himself visited seventeen sub-Saharan countries between 1987 and 1988, apart from many others in the Americas. Another important part of the curatorship was carried out in Havana with portfolios of artists. See Gerardo Mosquera, “The Third Biennial de La Habana in its Local and Global Contexts”, in Rachel Weiss (ed.), *Making Art Global (Part 1). The Third Havana Biennial 1989* (London: Afterall books, 2011), 75.

litan *Magiciens de la terre*, a parallelism which Luis Camnitzer set out in the magazine *Third Text*. According to Camnitzer, despite the vast difference in resources, the two exhibitions tried to be a forum for the art of the Third World, with the qualification that in the Havana show works were exhibited under the sole responsibility of the artist beyond any curatorial paternalism and artifice. While the two shows expressed the freedom to mix high art and popular art, the one in Havana ignored the fashionable concept of “otherhood” while the search for “otherhood” determined both the intention and the execution of the Paris event, argued Camnitzer. From the start, he continued, the title opened the door to exoticism, to an art that did not follow hegemonic norms, and which often did not define itself as art. The possibility of possessing the category of “magician” shared by hegemonic artists helped to erase the bad conscience of the organisers. Havana was not a forum for otherness, concluded Camnitzer, but rather for “thisness” where “this” is what defines us and not how we are defined by others.”<sup>21</sup>

From such considerations, we could agree with Rachel Weiss<sup>22</sup> that the Havana Biennial was one of the first contemporary art shows that consolidated the model of the global exhibition, both in terms of content and impact, and that it was the first to achieve this outside of the European and North American artistic system, which enjoyed, until then, the privilege of deciding what type of art had a global significance. Weiss claimed that, in a way distinct from the biennials of Venice and São Paulo, the Havana show centred its attention on art and artists outside the circuits of the system of Western art and – distancing itself from projects in New Delhi, Cairo, or Gabon – put its faith in travelling around its own region to explore artistic production on a global scale.

<sup>21</sup> Luis Camnitzer, “Third Biennial of Havana”, *Third Text* 10 (spring 1990): 79-93.

<sup>22</sup> See Rachel Weiss, “A Certain Place and a Certain Time: The Third Havana Biennial and the Origins of the Global Exhibition”, in *Making Art Global (Part 1): The Third Havana Biennial*, cit.

Presenting works of Third World countries in the context of the history of Western art,<sup>23</sup> the Biennial tried to break the centre-periphery scheme, suggesting that the global search for a new model of exhibition consisted in the inclusion of artists from all over the world without their being labelled as mainstream (which is to say, without forming part of neoliberal globalisation), but with a decentralised way of thinking of the global and of articulating it micro-politically. A form which referred directly, as Gerardo Mosquera suggested, to the “global south” in the sense that it included many European and North American artists involved in the diaspora movements of the Third World, such as black artists from Great Britain and artists from the frontier of San Diego and Tijuana

(*Border Art Workshop*). This movement was crucial, argued Mosquera, to open the geographical notion of the Third World, incorporating the porosities derived from migration and its cultural transformations. It was also a first step in relation to the question posed by Luis Camnitzer that the Biennial was still anchored to an international model within a growing transnational market.<sup>24</sup>

### 1.3. “The Other Story”. Diaspora Afro-Asian Artists in the mainstream

The year 1989 also saw two counter-exhibitions as a challenge to the modern Western gaze. In the first, *China Avant-Garde* (Beijing, 1989), considered to be the first official exhibition of the new Cultural Revolution, Chi-

<sup>23</sup> As Luis Camnitzer argues, one of the most polemical elements of the III Havana Biennial, consisted of the possible interpretations of “Third World” which led black artists from the United Kingdom (or, which was the same thing, all the non-white artists of that country) to complain about the “latinisation” of this term and the exclusion of the concept of the “postcolonial artist”. Luis Camnitzer, “Third Biennial of Havana”, in *Third Text* 10, cit., 79-93.

<sup>24</sup> Gerardo Mosquera, “The Third Biennial de La Habana in Its Local and Global Contexts”, cit., 77. See also L. Camnitzer, “The Biennial of Utopias”, in Rachel Weiss (ed.), *On Art, Artists, Latin America and Other Utopias* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 225.

na played a leading role in the history of its contemporary art in showing for the first time in the spaces of the National Gallery artistic practices carried out on its soil during the 1980s.<sup>25</sup>

The second, *The Other Story. Afro-Asian Artists in Post-war Britain*,<sup>26</sup> followed the guidelines of the magazine *Third Text*, in place of seeking the exotic it showed contemporary artists of mixed cultural contexts resident in the United Kingdom, among them David Medalla, Gavin Jantjes, Keith Piper, Li Yuan Chia, Mona Hatoum, Rasheed Araeen, Ronald Moody, and Saleem Arif, artists with which it sought to note the absence of non-European artists in the history of modern art.

As Rasheed Araeen argued in the text of the catalogue, this is an exceptional history, about men and women who have fought for their otherness to penetrate the space of modernity from which they were barred, with the aim not only of proclaiming their historical demands but also of questioning the framework which

<sup>25</sup> The exhibition was not exempt of polemic and reopened its doors after some days of censorship after which the artists Xiao Lu and Tang Song used a firearm to shoot their own work, called *Dialogue*. Some months after the end of the show, the Chinese government held the hypothesis that the exhibition had inspired the student protests in Tiananmen Square in June 1989. See Gao Minglu, "Toward a Transnational Modernity", in Gao Minglu (ed.), *Inside Out. New Chinese Art*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 1998), 15-40.

<sup>26</sup> *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain* (exhibition catalogue) (London: Hayward Gallery, 29 November 1989 – 4 February, 1990). In an author's note for the French edition of the catalogue Araeen wrote: "One has to oppose ignorance with knowledge. If history contributes only to legitimising a particular point of view that perpetuates the hegemony of one human group over another, of one culture over another, then it is left at the service of power, to be that of ignorance. Throughout history, there have existed metropolitan centres at the heart of which knowledge is destined for the edification, progress, and development of all human beings. In Great Britain, continental Europe, and North America, the history of art is only the history of the masterpieces of white artists. This monopoly has not only produced an incomplete history of art, but has also transgressed the fundamental ethics of history, whose aim is and must be to represent the truth. It is for this reason that the exhibition *The Other Story* has as an aim the unveiling of what had been hidden by history, laying the groundwork for the production of a true history of art in Great Britain and, ultimately, for the creation of a model for revising all the history of modern art."

<sup>See</sup> Rasheed Araeen, "The Other Story", in Sophie Orlando (ed.), *Art et mondialisation. Anthologie de textes de 1950 à nos jours*, Paris, Centre Georges Pompidou, 2013, p. 80.

defined and protected the limits. In Araeen's view, to try to tell this story is to pay homage to this defiance and he recounts how his own efforts as an avant-garde artist, in the West, have been based on his becoming aware of these questions. Without this struggle, it would have been impossible for him to have recognised the importance of this history. There are other histories and it is essential, he argues, to try to find our place in history to tell *other histories* that distance themselves from the official narratives produced by the institutions of power.<sup>27</sup>

The presence in post-war Europe of postcolonial artists freed from colonialist slavery put in check the notion of Eurocentrism and, in Araeen's words, the only way to face this challenge on the part of the West was to ignore it. The was the trigger that moved Araeen to come up with *The Other Story* at a time when Western artistic institutions maintained their intransigence and continued seeing postcolonial artists as apart from the centrality of the history of recent British art. However, the "other artists", who in general came from the old colonies of Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean, could not be ignored for ever. They would have to be recognised as part of European society, but the fact of granting them the same category as white/European artists would have interrupted the "white" genealogy of the history of modern art. And the big question for artistic institutions was: How to recognise Afro-Asian artists without situating their work in the same historical paradigm as their white contemporaries and, at the same time, putting on record that the institutions no longer continued to discriminate against non-white artists?

The solution, according to Araeen, was to adopt a cultural theory that was brought to life in the magazine *Third Text* and in the text of the exhibition catalogue which connected the work of Afro-Asian artists with their cultures and context, providing a common space for the circulation of their works in the circuits of a network shared by "white" and "non-white" artists.

<sup>27</sup> Rasheed Araeen, "Introduction: When Chickens Come Home to Roost", in *The Other Story. Afro-Asian Artists in Post War Britain* (exhibition catalogue) (London: Hayward Gallery, 1989), 9-15, in Sophie Orlando (ed.), *Art et mondialisation. Anthologie de textes de 1950 à nos jours*, cit., 80-81.



What is important is not to recognise only “cultural differences” as the basis of the practices of postcolonial artists, but rather to imagine a “third space”: a mythical space between the periphery and the centre through which the postcolonial artist must pass before acquiring full recognition as a “historical subject”. Hence the raison d’être of a new conceptual framework – multiculturalism – through which the “other artist” can remain outside the canon of the history of art and at the same time promote and celebrate his or her own cultural difference.

This would turn multiculturalism into a new strategy of “contention”. A multiculturalism that is ultimately paradoxical, which places Afro-Asian artists in a new marginality, the marginality of multiculturalism itself, in which only expressions of cultural differences are seen as “authentic”; which is justified and legitimated on the basis of a desire by Afro-Asian communities to preserve their own cultural traditions in the West. A desire that is, furthermore, understandable, given the diaspora situation manifested by these communities. And Araeen asks: Why should this mean that the individuals of these communities are necessarily trapped within this situation and not capable of experiencing the world beyond their own cultural borders? And here would lie the main problem of multiculturalism or the theories of cultural diversity, in the fact of not having known how to resolve art as an individual practice rather than as an expression of the community as a whole. And if thanks to multiculturalism many Afro-Asian artists have had the opportunity of gaining success in the market, it must also be affirmed that the Western institutions themselves have taken advantage of their cultural differences, using them as a shield against any attack on their artistic politics.<sup>28</sup>

Jean Fisher, in the special edition of the magazine *Third Text* of autumn/winter 1989, wrote that *The Other Story* was not an attempt to rewrite history, but pre-

<sup>28</sup> Rasheed Araeen, “The artist as a post-colonial subject and this individual’s journey towards the center”, in Catherine King, *Views of difference: Different Views of Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press and The Open University, 1999), 232-233.

sented the simple fact that historiography had been an exclusive construct that had removed from the history of British art the existence and the contributions of its “other artists”.<sup>29</sup>

## 2. From Postcolonial to multicultural in exhibition discourses

### 2.1. “Cocido y crudo” and “Inklusion/Exklusion”

*Cocido y crudo* [“cooked and raw”] (Madrid, 1994), the first exhibition in between the multicultural and the postcolonial presented in a Spanish museum institution – although bearing the signature of an American curator, Dan Cameron – was shaped in the slipstream of the failure of the “bomb thrown in the main square of the international community,” which was how Dan Cameron defined the exhibition *Magiciens de la terre*, which, in his judgement, canonised the otherhood of artists tying them to their places of origin as an organising principle and seeking to find something called “global art” from a curatorial perspective that tried to explore a “pan-cultural” constellation. A failure that can be explained by the fact that those responsible did not know how to resist situating the rhetoric of identity in a construction that was still dialectical between the home (the hyper-refined Western artists) and the foreign (the authentic, the genuine, the primitive).

In this vein, Dan Cameron started out from the text of the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss *The Raw and the Cooked* (1964),<sup>30</sup> in which, through studying diffe-

<sup>29</sup> “The Other Story. Afro-Asian artists in Post-war Britain”, in *Third Text Special Issue*, 1989, 4. See also Andrea Buddensieg, “Visibility in the Art World: The Voice of Rasheed Araeen”, in Peter Weibel and Andrea Buddensieg (eds.), *Contemporary Art and the Museum. A Global Perspective*, cit., 50-66.

<sup>30</sup> “El objeto de este libro es mostrar cómo categorías empíricas, tales como las de cocido y crudo, fresco y podrido, quemado y mojado, etc., definibles por la pura observación etnográfica y adoptando en cada caso

rent alimentary typologies, he equipped the concept of cooked with the civilised and of raw with the primitive and, going beyond the colonial point of view, opted for an interchange and interactive barter of cultural situations between the “raw” and the “cooked” through an attempt to remove the hierarchy of the point of view of the speaker. And it is in this way that Dan Cameron justified the choice of the artists in the show: not so much by the country of origin, sex, ethnic bonds, or sexual preferences but by the idea that interesting art always succeeds in being local and universal at the same time:

“Contrary to the title on which it is based, *Cocido y crudo* seems to allude to the probability that these categories necessarily overflow from one into the other, that one of the concepts cannot exist without the proximity of the other.”<sup>31</sup>

The idea of exchange between multiple cultural positions is a line of work closer to *Bride of the Sun* (Antwerp, 1992) than to *Latin-American Art of the 20th Century*, “a blatantly neo-colonialist overview” organised in Seville for the Expo of 1992, which became the *leitmotiv* of the show, which brought together fifty-five artists from twenty countries, a good proportion of them from Latin America and Spain, which defined their own voice according to their personal socio-cultural origins, deliberately seeking not to penalise representatives of ethnic, religious, or sexual minorities or whose points of cultural reference were situated at the margin of the alliances of the Euro-American axis.

The artist of *Cocido y crudo* is defined as someone who first discovered and then recontextualised the materials, images, sources, and situations encountered. Recall that the exhibition started to be prepared in 1992, the year in which Spain celebrated the fifth centenary of the disco-

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el punto de vista de la cultura particular, pueden sin embargo servir de herramientas conceptuales para desprender nociones abstractas y encadenarlas en proposiciones”, Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The raw and the Cooked. Mytologiques*, vol. 1 (1964) (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1969), 119.

<sup>31</sup> Dan Cameron, “Cocido y crudo”, in *Cocido y crudo* (exhibition catalogue) (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 14 December – 6 March 1995), 47.

very of America, which would explain Cameron’s need to incorporate artists (and hence the presence of Juan Dávila, Eugenio Dittborn, Gabriel Orozco, Rosângela Rennó, José Antonio Hernández Díaz, Doris Salcedo, Rogelio López Cuenca, and Juan Luis Moraza) concerned with openly questioning historical aspects of cultural domination related to the discovery. Also present in the show were a good number of international artists (Janine Antoni, Xu Bing, Geneviève Cadieux, Mark Dion, Marlene Dumas, Martin Kippenberger, Paul McCarthy, Yasumasa Morimura, Pierre et Gilles, Allen Ruppersberg, Kiki Smith, and Fred Wilson) who at the time were involved in some of the most important multicultural exhibitions of the period, such as *The Decade Show. Frameworks of Identity in the 1980s* (New York, 1990), *Documenta 9* (Kassel, 1992), and the *1993 Biennial* of the Whitney Museum of American Art (New York, 1993), which not only went into depth with manifestations of multiculturalism but which also reconsidered the professional work of minority artists. Compared with an almost contemporaneous show in the Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno in Las Palmas – *Otro país. Escaleras africanas*<sup>32</sup> [Another country. African stops] – which sought an unequal confrontation between advanced art and the cult of the West, and popular art, that which was close to the artisanal, and the naïf – *Cocido y crudo* rejected the concepts of popular, folkloric, primitive, aboriginal, local, exotic, and ethnic to reach out to the “avant-garde and radically contemporary” homogenisation between artists of the United States, Canada, China, South Africa, Latin America, Spain, Japan, Cameroon, Malta, etc.<sup>33</sup>

*Cocido y crudo* was the object of a rather unusual polemic within the panorama of Spanish criticism: apart

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<sup>32</sup> *Otro país. Escaleras africanas* (Las Palmas de Gran Canaria: Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno, 1994-1995) proposed the exploration of what African artists of the continent and those exiled in the Caribbean had in common. The title of the show comes from a novel by the Afro-American writer James Baldwin, *Another Country*, whose leading characters constantly dream of other places and create their own world. See Iván de la Nuez, “Otro país... y el mismo”, *Lápiz*, 114 (June 1995): 66-69.

<sup>33</sup> See Anna Maria Guasch, *El arte del siglo XX en sus exposiciones, 1945-2007* (Barcelona: Ediciones del Serbal, 2009) (expanded, second edition), 403.

from its high budget, it was criticised for the choice of artists, for the quality of the works presented, for the lack of radicalism in the proposals – more sensationalist and spectacular than rounded and creative – but above all the good intentions of the curator were questioned. As Iván de la Nuez argued in the pages of the magazine *Lápiç*:

“This is the centre of the problem; if the mechanisms of inclusion tilt the balance in favour of decolonialising solutions or signify a postcolonial fact, a velvet colonialism: an impasse through which a disoriented West reconstructed – with the help of Third World artists – its schemes of cultural authority [...] To the extent that the inclusions follow the line of the times, the Western critic or curator fetching and carrying, buying there to sell here, reintegrating the centre through a circular journey, then the benevolent gesture will not be able to change the perverse sense of a scheme that leaves the exhibition to the periphery and the critical consciousness of it to the West. An implicit perspective in which the margins appear to provide the ‘body’ and the West the ‘discourse’. The periphery, the ‘taste’, the West, the ‘knowledge’.”<sup>34</sup>

The ethnocentric gaze of the colonising discourse which insists on emphasising the logic of the Western aesthetic model was, in turn, the cause of some criticism which came to describe *Cocido y crudo* as a “Hollywood super-production” and grandiloquent project:

“The grandiloquence of the space and the ambition of Dan Cameron” – argued Bernardo Pinto de Almeida in the pages of the magazine *Lápiç* – “does not seem to have been appropriate to the proposed aims. One feels the plurality of senses as dispersion, repetition, and not so much as the multiplication of products and sensibilities. Some works live from the literary justification in the programme which explains them to the public, others are scholarly and literal exercises in their relation of artistic work with social and political reality.”<sup>35</sup>

This idea of eliminating difference was sustained by Carlos Vidal, who came to brand Dan Cameron as racist:

<sup>34</sup> Iván de la Nuez, “Una cosa y la otra”, *Lápiç* 111 (april 1995): 28.

<sup>35</sup> Bernardo Pinto de Almeida, “De Cameron al *Decameron*”, *Lápiç* 111 (april 1995): 76.

“Because ultimately any artist whom these new racists that satiate themselves with funds snatched from peripheral countries [...] that these demagogues go looking for in Surinam or Australia, will always be an artist without name and without individuality, because his or her role is to represent an art that is inferior [...] and lacking meanings and reflexivity, a representation of a non-existent culture following the parameters of the despotic universalism that is humanist, beatified, and pietistic.”<sup>36</sup>

A new milestone in this drive in favour of the concept of hybridisation in clear harmony with postcolonial thinking and with reclaiming the art of the exile as a magic formula for countering the still dominant concept of imperialism had its epicentre in old Europe, specifically in the symposium organised in Berlin under the title *The Marco Polo Syndrome. Problems of Intercultural Communications in art theory and curatorial practice*, which, starting from the thinking of Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993),<sup>37</sup> noted the interest of the centres towards the art of the periphery as the result of processes of globalisation, new demographics, and decolonialisation:

“The global world is also” – in the words of Gerardo Mosquera – “the world of differences [...] Decolonialisation has allowed a larger and more active intervention of previously totally marginalised voices [...] Today the strategy of power does not consist of repressing or homogenising diversity, but controlling it. The ethnocentric debate has become a political space of power struggles as much in the symbolic as in the social.”<sup>38</sup>

The curatorial side of this symposium took place a year later in another city in the German-speaking world, in the Austrian city of Graz, which in 1996 embraced the show *Inklusion : Exklusion. Versuch einer neuen Kartografie der Kunst im Zeitalter von Postkolonialismus und globaler*

<sup>36</sup> Carlos Vidal, “Comentario sobre el «multiculturalismo» de los señores Jean Hoet, Bonito Oliva, Hubert Martin y Dan Cameron”, *Lápiç* 111 (april 1995): 25.

<sup>37</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf): 1993.

<sup>38</sup> Gerardo Mosquera, “The World of Difference”, *Universe in Universe*, <http://www.universes-in-universe.de/magazin/marco.polo/e-mosquera.htm> (consulted 10 August 2014).

*Migration*, curated by Peter Weibel,<sup>39</sup> which once again challenged the project of modernity from the concept of “neo-modernism”, seeking to trace a cartography of art in the age of postcolonialism and global migration. In Peter Weibel’s judgement,<sup>40</sup> in the course of its dissolution, Europe discovered that its imperialist expansion was carried out under the form of a universal civilising function in the name of modernism. The free and universal European society, in colonising other nations, only deformed their cultures in the name of progress, liberty, and technology. But, as shown by the developments in Eastern Europe, colonising of particular ethnic groups within multi-ethnic societies by agents of central power was on the way out. These were some of the curatorial arguments that Weibel used in an earlier exhibition of 1993, *Kontext Kunst. The Art of the 90s*,<sup>41</sup> which also proposed a radical rejection of the “white cube” of modern art from the perspective of creating a common place between art and social practice.

The “white cube”, and its reference to the neutrality of the space of the museum or gallery in the 1970s constitutes a synonym for European and North American art which hides all difference – social, gender, religious, and ethnic – in the name of an aesthetic autonomy and a universal language of forms.<sup>42</sup> Depriving works of art of their historical context denies them the right to participate in the construction of reality.

<sup>39</sup> *Inklusion : Exklusion. Versuch einer neuen Kartografie der Kunst im Zeitalter von Postkolonialismus und globaler Migration*, curated by Peter Weibel (exhibition catalogue), (Graz, Austria: Steirischer Herbst, 22 September – 26 October 1996) (Cologne: DuMont Buchverlag, 1997).

<sup>40</sup> We have consulted the English translation of the original German text. See Peter Weibel, “Beyond the White Cube”, in Peter Weibel and Andrea Buddensieg (eds.), *Contemporary Art and the Museum. A Global Perspective* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2007), 138-150.

<sup>41</sup> Peter Weibel, *Kontext Kunst. The Art of the 90s* (exhibition catalogue) (Graz, Austria: Neue Galerie im Künstlerhaus, 2 October – 7 November 1993). The exhibition, organised within the framework of the Steirischer Herbst festival, inaugurated in the 1990s an artistic movement which rejected in a radical way the “white cube” of modern art from the perspective of creating a place between art and social practice. See also, Peter Weibel (ed.), *Kontext Kunst* (Cologne: DuMont) 1994.

<sup>42</sup> P. Weibel, “Beyond the White Cube”, in Peter Weibel and Andrea Buddensieg (eds.), *Contemporary Art and the Museum. A Global Perspective*, cit., 139.

According to Brian O’Doherty,<sup>43</sup> the space of the gallery must be white and pure, which means excluding all experience that is not aesthetic, making any object, banal or not, a work of art. From the point of view of its artistic value, the artistic “text” then depends on the white and neutral space of the gallery. The suppression of the historical framework in which works of art have been created results in, according to Weibel, a poverty of the experience of the work, but above all in the denial of the right of art to participate in the construction of reality. And it was this reclaiming of the slogan “context becomes text” which became the *leitmotiv* of artists participating in the *Kontexte Kunst* show – such as Cosima van Bonin, Clegg & Guttmann, Mark Dion, Peter Fend, Andrea Fraser, Louise Lawler, Reinhard Mucha, Christian Philipp Müller, Adrian Piper, Stephan Prina, and Zeimo Zobernig – who emphasised the existence of methods and practices based on contextualisation, in opposition to the classic didactic and ideological functions of traditional art.

This precedent of what a “postcolonial” exhibition in the context of continental Europe can be was useful for Weibel in *Inklusion/Exklusion* (1996) to insist on a type of practice that overcame the aesthetic discourse and embraced institutional criticism, always starting from the assumption that the deconstruction of the great logocentric narratives of modernity could be compared to the postcolonial project of dissolving the centre/periphery binary system of imperialist discourse. According to Weibel, the big post-structuralist concerns – such as the critique of the Cartesian notion of the subject, the localisation of the subject in language, the study of discourse as masculine discourse or the discourse of power – present a different angle in postcolonial discourse: deconstruction and decolonisation share a same basis. Or, put in other words, the hybrid identity of the postcolonial author corresponds to the syncretism and eclecticism of postmodernism. In this sense, the “post” of postmodernism and postcolo-

<sup>43</sup> Brian O’Doherty, “Inside the White Cube” (I part), *Artforum* (March, 1976).

nialism condition each other mutually. Postmodernism helps instigate a postcolonial discourse. And, in turn, postcolonialism is no more than a politicised postmodernism. And it is postcolonialism which shares a critical gaze towards the effect of the forms of domination, or of societies, both colonial and postcolonial.<sup>44</sup>

With this reflection, Weibel undertook his exhibition project starting from the assumption that, after the end of colonialism and the fall of the Berlin Wall, the West continued constructing and protecting itself through border controls which, translated into the terrain of the museum, implied the continuity of the “white cube” model as a synonym of the perpetuation of art created by Christian, white, and European men with the corresponding exclusion of the art of other religions and other peoples, of artists who did not belong to the masculine gender, and who were belittled by the museums of modern art. And to combat the idea according to which the “white cube” had become a synonym for exclusion, Peter Weibel brought together more than fifty artists originally coming from the Third World (Félix González Torres, Gabriel Orozco, Vic Muniz, Nedko Solakov, Mona Hatoum, Miguel Hernández Ríos, Guillermo Kuitca, Hyang Yong Ping, Iké Udé, Carrie Mae Weems, Doris Salcedo, and Kendell Geers)<sup>45</sup> although they lived and worked in the West. Weibel’s thesis was the following: within the Euro-American frame of reference, the art system first decides what kind of practices and products have to be considered art and, secondly, what kind of non-Eurocentric products and practices will be included in the Euro-American system. Western culture draws borders between itself and other peoples, cultures, races, and religions. And at the same time excludes the “other” – whether they are women, people of a different skin colour, children, old people, homosexuals, etc. – within its own culture. Social space is thus

<sup>44</sup> On this occasion, we have consulted the French edition, in Peter Weibel, “Au-delà du «cube blanc»”, in Sophie Orlando (ed.), *Art et mondialisation. Anthologie de textes de 1950 à nos jours*, cit., 165.

<sup>45</sup> For a descriptive and at the same time critical approach to the exhibition, see Okwui Enzavor, “Inclusion/Exclusion: Art in the Age of Global Migration and Postcolonialism”, *Frieze* 33 (march-april 1997): 87.

purified to the point at which no dispute is possible. The voices and the knowledge of the “other” are in this way relegated to the margins or excluded.

The “white cube” is a synonym of exclusion:

“The pure space of the gallery or the museum is pure not only from an aesthetic point of view but also it has been purified from the point of view of ethnicity, religion, class, and gender, in such a way that what we see in museum reveals mainly works of art created by mainly by men, Christians, whites, Europeans, and North Americans. The art of other religions and other peoples is excluded from the museums of modern art. Is not modern art only a European invention, as Jimmie Durham argues? And it is thus here that the exhibition is located, in the necessity of not only deconstructing the ‘white cube’ but also of deconstructing ‘white art’ as a field of practices of domination, rejection, and exclusion. The map of culture must be decolonialised in the interests of a genuine global culture.”<sup>46</sup>

The exhibition thus became a new “atlas of the world” in the era of global migration, an atlas motivated, in the words of the curator, by a kind of frustration with the gap between the rhetoric of inclusion and the European Union’s politics of exclusion. As Hans Belting pointed out, the central question of the show did not deviate excessively from what *Magiciens de la Terre* – the project labelled ethnocentric – could have been. Many artists appeared in both exhibitions – Chéri Samba, Yinka Shonibare, Fred Wilson, Rasheed Araeen, Joe Ben Jr., Frédéric Bruly-Bouabré, Huang Yongping, and Bodys Isek Kingelez – and the question remained: To what extent is Western art western? Contemporary art, as Belting notes, has involved artists of non-Western origin since, at least, the 1970s. We could rather speak of a slow transformation of so-called Western art, in which the institutions are more Western than their visual grammar or their multiform average. The question is more a matter of structures than of borders, says Belting. The Western artistic scene has easily absorbed new leading roles and new local objectives, which in

<sup>46</sup> Peter Weibel, “Au-delà du «cube blanc»”, in Sophie Orlando (ed.), *Art et mondialisation. Anthologie de textes de 1950 à nos jours*, cit., 168.

turn exclude any return to a purified Western profile in art. We often first have to read the biographies of artists to be able to identify their origin.<sup>47</sup>

## 2.2. The global contemporary

As has been shown, globalisation and its effects in all areas of society have been the *leitmotiv* of a good number of curatorial projects in the first decade of the twentieth-first century. Of these, without doubt, *The Global Contemporary*, held at the ZKM/Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe in 2011<sup>48</sup> (with an epilogue in Berlin in 2013<sup>49</sup>), is the one which has apparently provided an initial conclusion that contemporary artistic practices have experienced the “effects” or the “perceptions” of a globalisation that seems to have achieved – at the hands of different leading figures in the art system and its institutions – the crisis of the Western concept of art, seeking new audiences for art, some of them within local traditions that had never been filtered through the Enlightenment of the modern era.

*The Global Contemporary* assumed a present in which not only a spreading of biennials across the whole world had changed for ever the contemporary geography of art, or a new generation of artists proclaimed a common age in a global “common language” (*koine*) of art, but also a present for which art was presented to itself as “contemporary” in a chronological, symbolic, or even ideological way. And in this sense, beyond a single art world, following the reflections of Marc Augé,<sup>50</sup>

the emergence of “multiple art worlds” which coexisted and competed as a result of the “global practice” of contemporary art was imposed. And, as Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg pointed out in one of the catalogue texts:

“The global reality is, in fact, no longer synonymous with the all-encompassing term ‘world,’ but is composed of a multiplicity of worlds. This conclusion is not only valid for societies and cultures at large, but also includes the newly established art worlds. The resulting multiplicity of art worlds is in part explained by the observation that *art* production is turning increasingly into *culture* production, especially in such places where art is still a new experience and needs the support of local traditions of visual production.”<sup>51</sup>

Taking for granted that globalisation had created a new map of art, what was now imposed was the need to know how this map should be drawn and what should be indicated in it. Hence the proliferation of new regions of transnational character, such as Asia-Pacific or Middle East, of new biennials in which travelling curators operate as global agents and show a mix of regional and international art to a cosmopolitan audience, and of new leading players that the exhibition charges with showing in documentary format as well as through texts and objects in the three macro sections into which they are divided and in the corresponding catalogue: the *Room of Histories*, with documentation of global art; epistemological production, which specifically involved various texts included in the catalogue that tried to consolidate the figure of the curator as ethnographer; and, in third place, the presentation of the visual production (*Eight Views from an Exhibition*) by a series of artists chosen basically for their contributions to the thematic units into which the exhibition itself was broken down and which included aspects related to translation, borders, the new economy and the new markets, with curiosity cabinets and biographical stories.

<sup>47</sup> Hans Belting, “Art in the TV Age: On Global Art and Local Art History”, in Birgit Mersmann and Alexandra Schneider (eds.), *Transmission Image. Visual Translation and Cultural Agency* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 1999), 180.

<sup>48</sup> Hans Belting, Andrea Buddensieg and Peter Weibel (eds.), *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds* (exhibition catalogue) (Karlsruhe: ZKM/Center for Art and Media, 11 September 2011 – 5 February 2012) (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press 2012).

<sup>49</sup> We refer to the show *Nothing to Declare? World Maps of Art since '89* (exhibition catalogue) (Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 1 February – 24 March 2013).

<sup>50</sup> Marc Augé, *An Anthropology of Contemporaneous Worlds*, Palo Alto, California, Stanford University Press, 1999.

<sup>51</sup> Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg, “From Art World to Art Worlds”, in *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds*, cit., p. 28.

In this sense, the show implied a considerable renovation of exhibition displays in mixing the aesthetic-contemplative with the pedagogical-informational. Chronologies, maps, cartographies, information panels, and maps of statistics – which is to say, graphic media – made up the so-called *Room of Histories*, a chronicle of artistic institutions, expositions, and markets of the last twenty years which used the documentary format to visualise the changing conditions of the expanded geography of art. The hundred or so new biennials that, challenging the old binary model of centre/periphery, consolidated a polycentric world articulated in supranational “regions of art” (Asia, Asia-Pacific, Europe, Middle EAST, Africa, Australia) were documented in the section *Mapping. The Biennials and New Art Regions*. The appearance of new artistic fields, community museums, alternative spaces, as well as the role of the museum in other cultures (such as those of Abu Dhabi or Hong Kong), were gathered in the section *Art Spaces. A Museumscape in Transition*, a “displaced” concept of the global museum. Taken as its starting point the year 1989 and its crucial role in the meeting of the West with non-Western artistic production such as *Magiciens de la terre* and *The Other Story* (both 1989), the section *Documents. Exhibitions and the Global Turn* presents abundant documentation about the influential and controversial exhibitions in the definition of the “global turn” in the period 1989-2011. *Branding. New Art Markets and Their Strategies* gathered together various studies about the new alliances between the financial and artistic markets, as well as the strategies of auction houses in the promotion of contemporary art in new geographical locations (China, India, Arabia, Iran) where it did not exist previously. And the conclusion was that not only art fairs but also the biennials were entering into the system of the market in the same way that the market performed a leading role in the development of the new artistic regions and in the public presence of artists from remote regions of the world of art.

One of the most interesting sections of this *Room of Histories*, which on the other hand sealed the complicity between global capital and global art, was the

work *trans\_actions: The Accelerated Art World 1989-2011*, commissioned by the organisers from the team composed of Stewart Smith and Robert Gerard Pietrusko, a work shown on a panoramic screen which represented the temporal and spatial development of the “biennial system” and the “global art market” through a set of data whose animated visualisation and whose immersive experience offered an image of the dense network that simultaneously and through sophisticated computer programmes provides information about both the growth and the chronology of international exhibitions (including biennials) since 1895, the year of the first biennial, that of Venice, until the present day, and about the mobility of artists (their complex journeys from one biennial to another), art fairs, economic growth, and the importance of auctions at the global level.

The inclusive selection of artists illustrated some of the big questions and challenges that are also of a “global” scope (as a change from the concept of an international movement), such as, for example, the question of living in a planetary world that finds its metaphor in the airport and, more specifically, in the transit zone, an in-between place where, more than finding permanence, one waits for a new departure. As demonstrated by the works of Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Adrian Paci, Hito Steyerl, and – in particular – the Raqs Media Collective with its work *Escapment* (2009), an installation of twenty-seven watches corresponding to cities with their respective time zones, among others, the notion of time maps and compresses global space in experiencing a different time that escapes from the twenty-four time zones of the clock when our bodies move in space. It is for this reason that many of these artists use the image of the airport as a metaphor to illustrate the global condition which is familiar to each passenger as a paradox that is at the same time liberty and closure.

Another group of artists in the show, such as Bani Abidi, Rasheed Araeen, Kader Attia Meschac Gaba, Pieter Hugo, Agung Kurniawan, and Pavel Peppertein, use the mass media, such as television and cinema, and the consequent circulation of images all over the world to cross the borders of real worlds and expand

visual consumption of popular culture everywhere, whether projecting the new global images that connect different cultures with each other, whether disrupting distinct ethnic typologies, whether adopting local narratives in a set of storyboards, or illustrations showing sequences understood in the style of guides in order to capture a certain history, as occurs in Pieter Hugo's work *Nollywood* (2008), a series of forty-three photographs taken in Nollywood, the Nigerian film industry, which stars professional actors and recreates filmic scenes using stereotypes that belong to this cinema or which represent popular myths that subvert the old colonial identity.

New sections, such as "The curiosity cabinet in post-colonial times" (with artists such as Neil Cummings and Marysa Lewandowska, Christian Jankowski, James Luna, and Nástio Mosquito), "The practice of art after modernity" (Miao Xiaochun, Araya Rasdjarmrearns-

ook, and Sean Snyder), "Networks and systems: globalization as subject" (Yto Barrada, Ursula Biemann, Com & Com, IRWIN and NSKState.com, and The Xijing Men), "Art as commodity: the new economy and the art markets" (Melanie Jackson, Liu Ding, SUPERFLEX, Stephanie Syjuco), and, finally, "Lost in translation: new artists' biographies" (Francis Alys, Erik Bünger, Mona Hatoum, Martin Kippenberger, and Xu Bing), situate us in front of a show which highlights as its main premise the importance of a global practice which, as Terry Smith says, is not only a reaction to globalisation but also an audacious and positive reflection on the desire to liberate the "cultural self" towards the "other", working in favour of collaboration within the framework of a productive "cosmopolitanism."<sup>52</sup>

<sup>52</sup> See Terry Smith, "Contemporary Art: World Currents in Transition Beyond Globalization", in *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds*, cit., 191.