



Smithsonian American Art Museum

Abstracts for “A Long and Tumultuous Relationship” *East-West Intersections in American Art*

“Reflections on *The Third Mind*:
Topics for Intellectual Inquiry”
Alexandra Munroe

This paper will offer reflections on the exhibition *The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860–1989*, which was on view at the Guggenheim in New York this spring, and on the main ideas behind it. The show sought to trace how the art, literature, and philosophical systems of “the East” became known, reconstructed, and transformed within American cultural and intellectual currents, influencing the articulation of new visual and conceptual languages. The exhibition and accompanying catalogue documented how American art evolved in part through a process of appropriation and integration of Asian sources from the 1860s to the 1980s, when globalization eclipsed earlier, more deliberate modes of cultural transmission and reception. In the twentieth century, many of the ideas that attracted vanguard artists stemmed from Eastern religions, classical Asian art forms, and living performance traditions.

This paper will briefly review the structure of the Guggenheim exhibition and the theoretical approaches taken to the material on display, and it will point out some of the issues that arose in the critical and public reception of the show. It will also offer a threshold of analysis and suggestions for new scholarship that can further enrich and complicate our understandings.

“India and America:
Mutual Perceptions in the Contact Zone”
Partha Mitter

This paper explores India in American thought and its counterpart, the impact of America on Indians from the late eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century, the era of western colonial supremacy followed by global decolonization. Part of the complexity of the U.S./India relationship rests on the fact that Americans, as residents of a former colony, were ambivalent about the British Empire and keen to maintain trade relations with Indians; this interest was exemplified by the eighteenth-century effigies of Bengali shipping partners of American traders in the museum at Salem. It would, of course, be naïve to hold that the United States was unaffected by Victorian representations of Asia and Africa. Instead of probing the well-ploughed field of colonial representation, however, I want to turn to a cultural tendency that cannot be explained away under the rubric of racism. Cultural encounters are often a two-way process, the Other offering a novel way to critique one’s own society. Marie Louis Pratt’s notion of contact zones as a form of cultural encounter, where useful exchange and negotiation could occur, could be a promising start here.

American engagement with India in the mid-nineteenth century reflected western disillusionment with industrial materialism, culminating in Swami Vivekananda’s address to the World’s Columbian Exhibition in Chicago. The discovery of Hindu and Buddhist texts by the Boston Transcendentalists—Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, William James, Herman Melville—led to their examining their own faith more critically. On a popular level, while Hollywood perpetuated the image of exotic India with its lush Mughal interiors, florid temples, and bloodthirsty idols, its films fed the collective fantasy of Indians. On a serious level, as Mahatma Gandhi acknowledged his debt to Thoreau’s doctrine of civil disobedience, so Martin Luther King sought inspiration in the Mahatma. In post-colonial India, a symbiotic relationship sprang up between the American masters of the International Style and Indian architects, offering Indians an antidote to British colonial buildings. American architects on their part expressed deep affinities with Indian spirituality. In the 1960s, Ravi Shankar opened up a new world to the Americans, a world explored by Philip Glass and the Minimalists.

In 1958, the radical designers Charles and Ray Eames advised the Indian government on the future of small industries, their report infused with Indian spirituality. Frank Lloyd Wright’s ideas were disseminated in India through the industrialist, Gautam Sarabhai, and Wright’s disciples, Walter Burley Griffin and Antonin Raymond. Leading Indian architects, Charles Correa, A. P. Kanvinde, and Balkrishna Doshi trained in the United States. Louis Kahn, an admirer of Indian thought, used light as a metaphysical substance in his building designs. His National Assembly in Dhaka remains a masterpiece of international modernism. Joseph Allen Stein’s elegant International Centre in New Delhi deftly blended environmental ideals, spirituality, and ethnocentric regionalism. As these exponents of modernism were emulated by leading Indian architects, the formalism of American architecture was often informed with Indian spirituality. The thrust of my paper is that the dynamism of U.S./India cultural exchange in the last two hundred years goes beyond cultural stereotyping. In any cultural engagement with the thoughts of other societies, as in the case of India and America, that encounter becomes an instrument for questioning one’s own culture.

“Destructive Creation:
Instrumental Aesthetics and Geopolitical Relations in the American-Occupied Philippines”
J. M. Mancini

In recent years, much research has analyzed one of the most tumultuous relationships the United States has had with an Asian nation: that between the U.S. and the Philippines. The main focus has been on the political, social, and economic dimensions of that relationship, for example the political history of the American occupation of the Philippines, or the migration of Filipinos to the United States. Much less well understood is how the exchange of visual forms, practices, and ideas fit into that relationship.

This lack of attention is surprising, for three reasons. First, cultural exchange between the Philippines and what is now the United States dates at least to the eighteenth century, when the Franciscan missionary Pedro Cambón left the Spanish colony of Alta California on a voyage to Manila, returning with moveable objects and architectural ideas that became a persistent, but under-recognized, part of California’s cultural heritage. Second, visual and material culture also played significant roles during the American occupation from 1898 to the Second World War. Beginning with the initial phase of conflict, American intervention in the Philippines was attended by a broad effort to create, reproduce, and disseminate images, objects, and structures across a spectrum of media that included two-dimensional images (still photography and picture postcards), two-dimensional images that mimicked three-dimensional objects (stereographs and moving pictures), moveable three-dimensional objects (photo albums made by Americans in the Philippines, the American flag), fixed monuments (the Dewey Monument and Dewey Arch), buildings (Manila’s recently refurbished National Art Gallery, designed originally as the city’s public library by the American architect Ralph Harrington Doane and built, with the revisions of the Filipino architect Juan Arellano, as the Legislative Building), and city plans (Daniel Burnham’s plan for a new city of Manila). In many instances, moreover, this effort to create and reproduce American visual culture was accompanied by military, legal and political efforts to destroy or suppress Spanish, Catholic, or Filipino images, objects, structures, and landscapes—as in the iconoclastic pulling down of Catholic statuary during the Philippine-American War, or in the case of the Flag Law of 1907, which “forbade the Filipinos to use or display the Philippine flag anywhere, even inside Filipino homes.” The American occupation was sustained through the creation and manipulation of a visual culture or “instrumental aesthetic,” in the words of archaeologist Adam T. Smith, distinctly situated to that occupation.

Finally, it can be said that the complex and tumultuous political and aesthetic relationship between the United States and the Philippines persisted well into the present period of independence for both nations, not least because the final stage of direct U.S. intervention—combat between the United States and Japan during the Second World War—was attended by widespread bombing, including the virtual leveling of Manila’s walled city of Intramuros. The Battle of Manila itself became a subject for art in both the Philippines, where Filipino artists including Fernando Amorsolo painted Manila’s ruins, and in the United States, where even the recent World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C., works to contextualize combat in the Philippines in a particular way (“Americans came to liberate not to conquer”).

The analysis of such a long and tumultuous relationship is complex; thus it is my hope to offer some preliminary thoughts on how it might be pursued, with a focus on U.S. efforts to create an “instrumental aesthetic” for the figuring of geopolitical relations with the Philippines, and the larger world.

“Tropes and Achievements:
Some Cases of the Mutual Chinese-American Influence in Art”
Ding Ning

It is an obvious fact that both Chinese and American artists benefit greatly from the mutual influence of culture and art, and those artistic tropes that surpass direct borrowing arguably become very precious experiences of visual creation in the history of art. However, at least among our Chinese academicians, the studies concerning such important interchanges between Chinese and American artists are just beginning.

What matters is that if the mutual influence is ignored more or less, then certain understandings of a specific artist could be rather insufficient. As usual, in the description of American painter, Mark Tobey, Asian influences will be mentioned in this talk. It seems that Japanese elements are often discussed in more detail, and somehow Chinese influence is comparatively not emphasized, though we know that Tobey studied Chinese brush painting when he lived in Seattle from 1922 to 1930, and he studied calligraphy in China in the 1930s. Recent evidence further shows that Tobey had a quite close friend from China, Teng Kui, who was an outstanding painter and sculptor studying in America but was unfortunately forgotten in the history of modern Chinese art. In the United States, Teng Kui taught Tobey Chinese brush painting and calligraphy and, much more significantly, he profoundly transformed Mark Tobey’s ideas of art. There will definitely be more possibilities to explore Tobey’s works and mentality in a deeper sense if we can examine what the artist absorbed from Chinese culture and art and what tropes he created then.

In terms of multiple influences, some artists deserve in-depth reconsideration. For instance, Japanese cultural influence on Isamu Noguchi is obvious. But there still is something to be desired, because even within Japanese culture, Zen culture in particular, Chinese elements are important and should be traced and explicated; meanwhile, young Noguchi visited China and stayed in Beijing for eight months studying Chinese flower-and-bird painting under the instruction of Master Qi Baishi in the 1930s. Undoubtedly, Noguchi is truly an artist with multiple cultural touches.

As for Philip Guston, he is an extraordinary case. His incredibly pertinent evaluation of Song dynasty painting is impressive. It may be hard to know in the moment if he had a unique personal viewing experience of authentic Song paintings or if he had a very sophisticated tutor to guide his appreciation of Chinese Song paintings. However, it seems that Guston had a fairly free and elaborate grasp rather than a simply direct borrowing.

In turn, Tobey, Noguchi, and Guston have influenced contemporary Chinese art since the 1980s. There is another type of influence between American and Chinese art. It is not an individual artist’s influence on another foreign artist but rather a much more comprehensive and profound impact. A group of Chinese artists have been inspired tremendously by the American painter Andrew Wyeth in terms of technique, style, and ideology. With a kind of Wyethiana, these artists contributed quite a few masterpieces with certain historical significance to the history of modern Chinese art.

In our era, artistic tropes based on cultural interchanges have become almost an omnipresent phenomenon and have played a magical part in art. It is almost impossible to prove that there is a purely national art nowadays.

“Teaching American Art in East Asia”
Eunyoung Cho

I was trained as a historian of American art in the U.S. for a dozen years and have been teaching Korean, Japanese, and Chinese students in East Asia ever since. In this talk I will discuss my experiences and challenges that have included fitting this subject into each school’s curriculum, meeting students’ interests—which are mostly different from those of Americans—exploring themes and critical issues that resonate with the students’ goals, responding to their differing understandings or degrees of knowledge about American visual culture, and developing alternative teaching methodologies to meet their specific needs.

The most immediate challenge is the lack of textbooks. Several decades have passed since Western art history courses were first included in college curricula in Korea and Japan, and more recently in China. In most courses, “Western” means “European,” and almost all the Western art texts being used in classrooms represent European art, with American art usually appearing on the scene in the twentieth century, particularly after World War II. We have few translated texts on American art for the period prior to modern times; and existing texts are written from Western/American-centered perspectives. For these reasons I prefer to use a combination of lecture notes, selected readings, and visual images; however, many students do express difficulty in approaching American art without textbooks and internet resources in their own languages. American art survey texts suitable for non-Western students with little or very basic knowledge of U.S. history and culture need to be developed.

The intrinsic merit of American visual culture established on American soil is often questioned once it crosses national borders. Most students show great interest in American art starting from the 1940s, but much less prior to early American modernism and indifference for anything before the Hudson River School. The students tend to approach American art more as a means to understanding the United States and its people than for its aesthetic aspects. They find subject matter raising issues of race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, cultural encounters, and identity to be most appealing. When I studied art history in South Korea in the 1980s, seminar discussions about American art concentrated on several selected artists and began with Ben Shahn and Social Realism, in which we found parallels to Korea’s political turmoil and social predicaments. These correspondences still hold appeal: Asian students’ responses can differ depending on their countries’ shifting relations with the U.S. I have been tailoring my teaching by skimming through art of the antebellum period to elaborate on late-19th- and 20th-century art and by engaging students with artists, themes, and issues reflecting multiracial and multicultural facets of America.

In this context, it becomes necessary to reframe American art to underline its *universality*, its applicability to all cultures, and to balance that with its *Americanness*, and to try to avoid either an American or Asian-centered point of view. This effort to maintain an equilibrium, however, is at times questioned: As we locate American art in a global context, should we also reexamine it in the context of glocalization? For a Korean professor teaching American art histories to students in East Asia in the mother tongue or in English, is it “ideal” to strive to teach in the way an Americanist does in the U.S.? Should an Asian historian of American art “Asianize,” or more specifically, “Koreanize,” “Japanize,” or “Chinize” American art, fitting it to the goals of students located in their respective cultures (for instance, discussions on Asian American art within the context of transnational Asian-American cultures and identities, as done in U.S. colleges, may not work in individual Asian countries that do not support a pan-Asian concept)? This work involves some drastic revisions in the canon of American art history and reallocations of “major” and “minor” artists currently engraved in the mainstream and marginalized realm. It is time to invent alternate methodologies for American art in this era of globalization and glocalization.

“Japanese Referentiality in Mid-Twentieth-Century Japanese American Painting”
Bert Winther-Tamaki

The great diversity of styles, media, and techniques encompassed by Asian American art frustrates attempts to define this art historical category in formal terms. Even more narrowly defined categories, such as Asian American women’s art of the 1960s or Bay Area Japanese American art, include widely divergent types of objects ranging from craftwork to painting, abstraction to realism, and ornamentation to conceptualism. Thus, it would seem that “Asian American art” is primarily a sociological category and that the formal character of the artworks themselves holds little promise of contributing to the definition of Asian American art. However, a shift of focus from formal character to a broader conception of Asian American visuality allows the aesthetic experience of works of art to serve as a central factor in determining the parameters of Asian American art. More specifically, I propose the visualization and non-visualization of Asianness as an optic differentiating twentieth-century Asian American art from other categories of art. The alternatives that faced Asian American artists may be schematically outlined as follows: First, they could convey a conspicuous impression of Asianness to their viewers by emblazoning their art objects with motifs, materials, techniques, or titles commonly associated with Asia. Second, such Asian tropes could be veiled or deeply embedded within their artistic practice. And, third, Asian American artists could omit Asian references from their work completely. Roughly speaking, these three dispositions may be exemplified, respectively, by the artists C. C. Wang, Isamu Noguchi, and Ruth Asawa. To be sure, these options were available to any artist, whether identified as Asian American or otherwise, and some European American artists produced notable works with a recognizable or pronounced Asian quality or imagery. Moreover, the presentation or non-presentation of tropes of Americanness was also a vital dimension of Asian American art. Nevertheless, deciding whether to emblazon, veil, or omit Asianness was an artistic resolution fraught with unique significance to Asian American artists negotiating often tenuous positions in the American cultural context. Even art created by Asian American artists who elected not to incorporate conspicuous signs of Asian culture in their work—and such works are perhaps the majority of those dating from the mid-twentieth century that are now classified as Asian American art—were often subject to a gaze that sought occult or unconscious traces of Asianness to manifest an ideal homology between the racial identity of the artist and the aesthetic of his or her art. Thus, an Asian optic—whether inscribed by artists or ascribed by spectators—was endemic to Asian American art. This paper explores the operation of this optic in specific works of art by mid-twentieth-century Asian American artists with the aim of ascertaining a definitive visuality of Asian American art in this period.

“Before Zen:
The Nothing of American Dada”
Jacquelynn Baas

In his book, *Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter Between Asian and Western Thought* (1997), J. J. Clarke wrote:

The hypothesis that orientalism is fundamentally an escapist strategy ignores a number of important factors ... which will underline the extent to which orientalist activities have been closely integrated within central Western intellectual concerns in the modern period, and which will imply that orientalism is to be seen not as an escape, an avoidance, but as a means of confronting some of the West's most pressing and immediate problems.

Chief among the problems of our modern era in the West has been resolving the subject-object dichotomy proposed by Descartes and refined by Newton—the belief that reality consists of matter and motion and that there is no question that cannot be answered by means of the scientific method of objective observation and measurement. This dominant world-view is still with us, though somewhat frayed by the evidence of quantum mechanics that matter and motion are interdependent forms of energy, and that the observer is always in experiential relationship with the observed. The modernist ideal of “better living” by way of material progress has proven to be a disappointment, but there is evidence that American culture is slowly working its way toward a new participatory consciousness that allows actual life to be lived happily and productively.

To understand ourselves as interconnected beings that experience time and space, rather than being subject to them, takes a radical shift of perspective, and it should not be surprising that artists have been at the leading edge of this exploration. From Duchamp and Dada to Cage and Fluxus to the recent international explosion of participatory artwork, artists have been trying to get us to change how we see. Nor should it be surprising that Asian perspectives regarding the nature of reality have been a crucial factor in affecting this shift.

In what ways did Asian perspectives on life and on art nourish the creative impulses of artists working in the United States? Asian philosophy is multifarious and art is individual. The only way to answer this question is by way of specific examples; the argument must develop from works of art themselves. East-West linkages in art tend to be characterized in terms of the traditional art historical dialectic of “influence.” I want to suggest the term “resource” for exploring ways, aside from straightforward similarities of style, in which Asian perspectives have manifested in American art practice.

The recent Guggenheim exhibition, *The Third Mind*, asserted the importance of Asia, as opposed to Europe, for the development of American modernism. I want to suggest that during the early part of the twentieth century, Asian philosophy was available to American modernists primarily by way of Europe, particularly during the important period from 1915 into the early 1920s. This paper focuses on the work of artists associated with Alfred Stieglitz's circle in New York, work that predates the “great wave” of interest in Zen in the U.S. following World War II. I intend to show how the work of Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia, Man Ray, and others associated with American Dada helped make Asian theories of reality and perception available within the American context.

“Global Knowledge in the Early Republic:
The Circulation and Display of Objects from the East Indies and China Trades”
Patricia Johnston

The Rev. William Bentley described his 1801 visit to the East India Marine Society Museum in Salem, Massachusetts, where he saw “images & paintings of Hindostan, China & Japan, with complete dresses in the Chinese fashion.” These were intermingled with “various specimens of the Oyster shells of Sumatra. . . . The Albatross, birds of paradise, parakets, & several birds. . . . Some antiquities. . . . A few specimens of stones, ores, &c. not arranged, petrefactions, & curiosities, in all 185 articles.” (Bentley, *Diary*, II: 382)

The objects the minister wrote about demonstrate the truly global circulation of material culture in the Early Republic. Waiting in Asian harbors for trade opportunities, captains and crews swapped souvenirs that had literally circled the world. When they returned to their hometowns, they shared the objects they collected, both privately among acquaintances, and publicly in parades and museums. This paper is a study of the types of materials collected; exchanges between merchants; museum donations; methods of display; and public impact. This inquiry provides insights into the broad intellectual pursuits of the era, including natural history, ethnography, and aesthetics. It also illuminates early trade relations and cultural perceptions between Asia and the new United States.

Mariners operated in the contact zone between cultures. Although their ultimate destination might be India or China, they stopped at many ports-of-call in between, trading as they went, acquiring deep knowledge about commercial potential as well as cultural and natural environments. The trading process demanded friendly, reliable business partnerships; gifts between American and Asian merchants often developed these relationships.

After surveying the contexts of trade and collecting, this paper will develop a case study of the East India Marine Society museum (1799) in Salem, Massachusetts, which was among the most significant collections of global art and artifacts in the era (and remains so today as the Peabody Essex Museum). Salem was a thriving seaport in the Early Republic—the sixth largest city in the new United States, boasting the highest per capita income in the country. Explosive employment in maritime trades and proliferation of imported goods in shops generated a demand for knowledge of people around the globe. While mariners donated most of the objects in the museum, others were gifts from their Asian trading partners. For example, the museum records gifts from the Parsi merchant Nusserwanjee, based in Bombay (1803). Other gifts were portraits or even sculptures of Asian merchants (such as the life-size image of Chinese merchant Yumqua).

Even those who did not venture into the East India Marine Society’s museum saw the “curiosities” as they were carried throughout the streets of the city on the days of the Society’s annual meeting. These festive celebrations drew large crowds and were a visible reminder of the international basis for the city’s wealth.

In addition to civic education, objects from the South Seas, India, China, Indonesia, and other places functioned as a public acknowledgment of the sea captains’ global experiences. They structured and reinforced hierarchies as Salem’s elite came to define their identity as international experts. Ownership and display of images and objects of Asia signified specialized knowledge and privileged status. The objects also provided styles and themes that eventually permeated American decorative arts as additional visual signs of experience and status.

“‘A Semi-Chinese Picture’:

The Encounter of American Painter Hubert Vos and the Empress Dowager of China”

Virginia Anderson

In 1905, at the invitation of the Chinese imperial court, Hubert Vos (1855–1935) traveled from New York to Beijing to paint the portrait of the elderly Empress Dowager of China, Cixi (1835–1908). With her input, he set aside his usual academic realist technique and resolved to create for her, in his words, “a semi-Chinese picture” that would function “more like a monument than like a portrait.”

The ruler of China from 1861 to her death in 1908, the Empress Dowager was, for both Westerners and the Chinese, a mysterious and controversial figure. Castigated by her critics as a manipulative and profligate ruler, she was equally defended by her admirers as an educated, talented woman who rose above the constraints of her cloistered life to fight for the integrity of the throne. In the aftermath of the Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901), Cixi sought to create a court environment that was more open to Western cultural influences by inviting diplomats, missionaries, and other foreign visitors into the imperial sanctum, where she entertained guests and presented dignitaries with gifts. As a part of her program, she also commissioned Western artists with ties to the court to paint her portrait.

As a result of his invitation to the court, Vos—a well-known society portraitist of Dutch origin—created two remarkably curious paintings. One, the full-length commissioned portrait (now in the collection of the Summer Palace, Beijing), is an idealized, flattened, symmetrical rendering of the Empress as she would have appeared at thirty years old (less than half her actual age), surrounded by ceremonial décor. Vos kept for himself a second, half-length portrait (now in the collection of the Fogg Museum), closer in technique to his European academic style but with softer brushwork, depicting the seated Empress in a frontal pose that gives the painting an almost two-dimensional feel.

The story of these two portraits reveals a complex interchange between artist and subject. The encounter between Vos and Cixi, whom he described in awestruck letters to his family in America as the “female deity to 400 million people,” destabilizes conventional dichotomies of East versus West, the artist’s gaze versus the subject’s passivity, realism versus abstraction, and tradition versus modernity. This paper argues that the two portraits created by Vos are in effect hybrids of western academic realism and the traditionally idealized forms of Chinese imperial portraiture, produced under the influence of a formidable subject who was herself a trained artist. Vos was permitted only four short sessions with the Empress. After the first sitting, the Empress conveyed to him that he should make “the eyes wide open, the mouth full and up, not drooping, the brows straight, the nose no shadows.” In the end, Vos understood that she wanted what he called a “symbolic” rendering. Historical photographs, portraits of the Empress by other artists, and Vos’s personal correspondence are used as evidence to open up the creation myth of the paintings and to contextualize them within this pivotal historical moment.

“Between Two Worlds:

The Influence of Images of Racial Stereotyping on Japanese Art and Culture in the Late Nineteenth Century”

Nicole Fabricand-Person

After more than two hundred years of self-imposed isolation, the opening of Japan in the mid-nineteenth century introduced the Japanese people to “Amerika,” a country with a unique set of artistic conventions that would shape their perception of the West and challenge their own identities. These conventions, which were exported as images in geography books, newspapers, magazines, and even trashy dime novels, acquainted Japan with the African American and the American Indian—American people who were different from the white Americans of European descent living in the foreign settlement established at Yokohama around 1858. Naturally, the “Indians” and “Negroes” appearing in these publications were known exclusively through the filter of stories and illustrations conceived by the white Western world, which provided a subtext defining nonwhites as subhuman. That this was the message received is clearly evident in the nineteenth-century Japanese labeling of images of American Indians and African Americans as “American savages” (*Amerika no dojin*).

The history of the reception of images of African Americans and American Indians is complicated by the variety of sources that existed. In earlier images, for example, black servants hired from Africa and East India were just as strange as their white masters to Japanese artists; all appear to be based on similar (white) models from advertisements and fashion magazines. In his 1861 print, *Salesroom in a Foreign Mercantile Firm in Yokohama* (*Yokohama jin shōkan uriba no zu*), for example, Hashimoto Sadahide (1807–1878/79) portrays a woman labeled by cartouche as “Black Laundress” no differently than the other women in the composition except for the grey tint of her skin. This image is quite different from the clowning ape-like stereotype of the minstrel show staple “Brudda Bones” eighteen years later in the 1879 print from the series *Strange Tale of the Castaways: A Western Kabuki* by the artist Adachi Ginkō. This same set of prints (illustrating a play in which the characters travel to America) includes a scene of American Indians attacking a defenseless Japanese couple on the “American desert.” Despite contemporary newspaper illustrations of the “noble savage” and Indians living peacefully on reservations, this image is clearly derived from an American model that can be traced back through nineteenth-century geography books and an 1846 Currier and Ives print to the American artist John Vanderlyn’s 1804 painting *The Murder of Jane McCrea*.

Critical to this discussion is the fact that concomitant with the designation and illustration of “Indians” and “Negroes” as savages was the understanding by the Japanese that they too were not “white,” but fell somewhere in between “savage” and “civilized.” This paper, then, will examine the exportation of American images of racial stereotypes and the effect they had on both Japanese art and culture in the late nineteenth century.

“New Negro on the Pacific Rim:
Sargent Johnson’s Afro-Asian Sculptures”
John P. Bowles

In 1927 Sargent Johnson portrayed his infant daughter, Pearl, in a sculpture of glazed porcelain that resembles Indian sculptures of Krishna and the Buddha. When Johnson exhibited *Pearl* and two drawings in the Harmon Foundation’s 1933 “Exhibition of Productions by Negro Artists,” he was awarded the prize for “Most Outstanding Work in [the] Exhibit.” Despite this attention, *Pearl* has been mostly ignored by art historians. All the rest of Johnson’s sculptures evincing Asian styles or subject matter have been similarly understudied. Rather, historians have focused primarily on those of his sculptures that can be seen as representing a clear interest in African art. In some cases, they have even tried to find African precedents for some of the clearly Asian methods Johnson used for making his work. In my paper, I ask two questions: Why has Johnson’s profound interest in Asian art and culture been marginalized, even when he shared this interest with other artists of the San Francisco Bay Area; and how did Johnson’s work negotiate between his Bay Area home and his role in the Harlem Renaissance?

Historians have explained Johnson’s work according to the precedent set by Alain Locke, aesthetic theoretician of the Harlem Renaissance and Johnson’s strongest champion. In 1931 Locke called Johnson one of the foremost New Negro “Africanists, or Neo-Primitives,” and it is assumed that he deeply influenced Johnson. This is typically explained by pointing out Johnson’s interest in African art and his statement that he wanted to depict the “pure American Negro.” Locke suggested, however, that he had found more than a simple reference to Africa in Johnson’s work. He wrote of Johnson’s *Chester*, “It is a long stretch from an isolated Negro sculptor living and working in California to the classic antiques of bygone Africa, but here it is in this captivating, naïve bust.” Locke seems to acknowledge that Johnson’s attention to African art measures cultural difference—a core value of Locke’s cultural politics—while simultaneously looking east to Africa, west through the Golden Gate, and across the Pacific to Asia. Might Locke’s mention of California open up the possibility of a crucially polycultural base from which to mount the sort of cultural nationalist project Locke linked to his call for international cultural democracy?

I locate Johnson’s practice in the Bay Area, where he emerged at the forefront of a polycultural approach to modernism that has flourished there since the early twentieth century. Johnson moved to the Bay Area in 1915, at a time when artists and boosters alike represented the region as modern America’s cultural and capitalist interface with Asia; this was what made the Bay Area cosmopolitan. Additionally, at the moment Johnson was emerging as an active participant in the New Negro renaissance, African American political leaders found deep affinities between the fight against racism in the U.S. and the nationalist and anti-colonial movements in India and China. For example, only a year after Johnson depicted his daughter in Indian form, W.E.B. Du Bois reconfigured racial identification in his novel *Dark Princess* so that the salvation of “the Darker World” is a baby born to an African American father and an Indian princess. Was Johnson also reconfiguring ideas of race in the service of an anti-essentialist politics of liberation? When Johnson collaborated with Beniamino Bufano to create a monument to Chinese nationalist leader Sun Yat Sen, a commission sponsored by local members of the Kuomintang Party, did this represent Johnson’s conception of himself as an artist of the Pacific Rim, aligned in solidarity with the nationalist art and politics of China? Finally, if Johnson became one of the best-known artists of the Harlem Renaissance for both the artworks for which he is best remembered and for those that historians dismiss, how does his interest in Asian art and politics alter our conception of the racial politics of the New Negro?

“Chinese Painting Comes to America:
Zhang Shuqi and the Diplomacy of Art”
Gordon H. Chang

Discussions of historical cultural interactions between China, and other Asian countries, and the United States traditionally employ approaches that assume autonomous and dichotomous categories such as East and West, Asian and Western. The categories are sometimes even thought of as opposed, with the Asian as “traditional” and the Western as “modern” or international. Recent scholarship and thinking, however, suggests that these concepts and assumptions are highly problematic in considering artistic exchanges in the early twentieth century, if not earlier.

My presentation will examine nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century notions of Chinese art and its relationship to American artistic tastes and political beliefs, and then focus on the life and career of Zhang Shuqi, one of the first Chinese artists to have had a direct impact on Americans and their understanding of Chinese painting. Under the auspices of the Chinese government, and traveling with diplomatic papers, Zhang came to the United States in 1941 as an “ambassador of art and goodwill” to promote closer political and military ties between the two countries. He toured extensively in the country over the next five years. Exhibitions of his work were held in the major museums around the country. In conjunction with these shows, he offered demonstrations of his painting to public audiences. Thousands attended these events, which attracted widespread attention in the popular and art press. The Chinese government also presented one of his compositions to President Franklin Roosevelt on the occasion of his third election. The gift received widespread press coverage, making it then, and perhaps even up to this day, the most famous Chinese painting in America. Zhang Shuqi returned to China in 1946 but came back to the United States in 1949. He died here in 1957.

For most Americans (and Chinese) Zhang’s painting appeared to be of a traditional idiom, but his training, technique, and approach to art was fully “modern.” It in fact combined Western and Chinese features, and he thought of himself as both a Chinese and international artist. Though highly successful in China in the 1930s and 1940s, historical evaluation of Zhang in China has been challenged by his style and his overseas life. In America, Zhang is not considered part of American art history at all.

“Zen Pottery and Avant-Garde Ideals:
The Pottery Seminar at Black Mountain College, 1952”
Jenni Sorokin

In October of 1952, at the height of Abstract Expressionist mania and only two short months after Franz Kline and John Cage—artists whose oeuvres were imbued with Eastern aesthetics—had spent an extraordinary summer at Black Mountain, the college held a two-week Pottery Seminar, a little-known moment in its legendary history. Termed the “Eastern Center for Interchange of Work & Ideas: East to West,” the seminar brought together three of the most legendary performers and pedagogues of postwar ceramics, all of whom represent distinctive traditions of pottery production and were identified with definitive “styles”: Shoji Hamada, renowned in the West as a Zen potter; his translator, Bernard Leach, the self-described “courier between East and West,” a Hong Kong-born Englishman who idealized the East; and the Bauhaus-trained potter Marguerite Wildenhain, a Jewish refugee who had fled first Germany, then Holland, and resettled in Northern California during the war years. Such “styles”—Zen, English, and Bauhaus—were often portrayed as indistinct from the life philosophies and work habits maintained by these artists. In addition to the most famous international potters, Soetsu Yanagi, the director of the Imperial Folk Museum in Tokyo and the founder of the Japanese *mingei* (folk art) movement, was also in attendance. Based on period writings and original archival research conducted at the Black Mountain College Archives in Raleigh and the Archives of American Art, I explore the legacy of this momentous occasion and how it set the stage for two decades of intellectual, social, and pedagogical contributions to American craft.

In this paper, my argument is twofold: first, the seamless integration of “style” and “lifestyle” in postwar ceramics can be understood as both a social critique and a social value, a pre-1960s bohemia that could be actively distinguished from the increasingly industrialized, urban lifestyles of regular Americans. Undeniably, this was craft’s primary attraction, a spiritual and intellectual alternative to not only the excessive consumer culture of the 1950s but also the celebrity of the New York School. The second part of this argument is that the enduring internationalism of the ceramics field, established at Black Mountain, takes aim, consciously or not, at both Japan’s and America’s rapid modernization. In short, the extreme cosmopolitanism of the Black Mountain ceramists undermined their largely isolationist and rural aspirations, and I explore this strange legacy, found in period writings by nearly all the conference participants. This paper is adapted from my first dissertation chapter. Titled “Live Form: Gender and the Performance of Craft, 1940–1970,” my dissertation explores the confluence of gender, pedagogy, and artistic labor in mid-century American ceramics.

“ROCI in East:
Considering Rauschenberg’s Agency in China”
Hiroko Ikegami

This paper examines Robert Rauschenberg’s involvement with Asian art and culture, with a particular focus on China, during his ROCI (Rauschenberg Overseas Cultural Interchange) in the 1980s as a precedent for today’s globalized art practice. Tracing his artistic projects in such diverse Asian countries as Japan, China, and Malaysia, it reveals that what may be considered Rauschenberg’s act of Orientalism was in fact more complicated than it appears on the surface. As much as Rauschenberg found artistic inspiration in the cultural Other of the East, local art communities—the emerging Chinese avant-garde art scene, in particular—often took advantage of Rauschenberg’s world celebrity to take part in the global art scene.

Rauschenberg’s involvement with Asian culture dates back to the 1964 world tour of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, in which he participated as an artistic advisor. During the tour, he visited India, Thailand, and Japan, devising sets and costumes from materials collected in each locale. In Tokyo, he also created the Combine work *Gold Standard* in collaboration with Japanese artists and critics, using a traditional Japanese gold folding screen and junk materials that he found on the streets in Tokyo. This reciprocal engagement with the local culture and art community set a pattern for his future international enterprises, which culminated in the establishment of ROCI in 1985.

Rauschenberg’s 1982 trip to China initiated his conception for ROCI. Inspired by his experience with craftsmen at the oldest paper mill in China, he developed the idea for an international project, in which he would travel to a foreign land, create works of art, exhibit them in a local museum, and then move on to another place. While such an enterprise could be reproached as an act of cultural appropriation, his purpose was wider than that. Consciously choosing places that had hitherto little contact with American art (the itinerary included Latin American countries as well as the U.S.S.R. and East Germany), Rauschenberg spent the decade making works of art in eleven countries (including China, Tibet, Japan, India, and Malaysia in Asia), completing the project in 1991 with an exhibition at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

In the context of the last stages of the Cold War, China presented a special case. As ROCI China coincided with the country’s “culture fever” with Western art and culture, Rauschenberg’s presence had an enormous impact on the Chinese avant-garde art scene, which was just emerging in greater Beijing at the time. While Rauschenberg incorporated Chinese kitsch posters and rickshaws into his work, Chinese artists found Rauschenberg’s global presence a threateningly hegemonic, yet much-needed catalyst for them to begin participating in the world art scene. Before the arrival of the Internet and the “artist-in-residence” program that characterizes much of today’s world art, Rauschenberg globalized not only his but also the Other’s art practice, at the risk of representing its problematics such as the issue of cultural appropriation and the imbalance of capital flow.

“Gold Mine in Southeast Asia”:

Russel Wright, Vietnamese Handicraft, and Transnational Consumption”

Jennifer Way

In 1955 the International Cooperation Administration commissioned Russel Wright Associates to study the possibilities for exporting handicraft items created in Southeast Asia to American markets. In the process of carrying out this assignment, American designer Russel Wright amassed an enormous collection of ancient and contemporary artifacts, made films and photographs, and permitted his activity to be photographed by Associated Press photographers. He incorporated the photos in trade show and department store exhibitions in the United States and in the handicraft center he established in Saigon. This paper considers Wright’s journal articles, photographs, exhibitions, and product lines as a means to reconstitute unstudied relationships of culture and consumption linking the United States and the Republic of Vietnam under Ngo Dinh Diem.

Photographs published in Wright’s article “Gold Mine in Southeast Asia” (1956) bespeak more complex interconnections between Vietnamese handicraft artists and the American middle classes than the simple notion of Third World artisans producing for First World American consumers suggests. His article’s visual emphasis on refugees, for example, is significant for its possible multiple readings. On one hand, the photographs in Wright’s article treat refugees who had fled from North to South Vietnam as a natural resource to be mined for their untapped value as artisans working in traditions revered in the West for their materials, forms, subject matter, historical legacies, and exoticism. On the other hand, the pictures invite interpretations of refugees and other handicraft artisans as allegories of the vulnerability of the Republic of Vietnam to a communism that potentially threatened the American and world political economy. Concepts that Roland Barthes was using in his essay “Myth Today” (1957) can help clarify how the photographs make visible a process in which the artisans are depoliticized, perhaps to better accommodate them to American middle-class consumers anxious about the Cold War and related political unrest in Southeast Asia. The photos render the refugees and other indigenous handicraft workers as “uncertain signs,” stripped of “the complexity of human acts” as they are mythologized or transformed from “history into nature” and afforded instead “the simplicity of essence.” Myth is “depoliticized speech” and the figures in the photos are “visually mythologized,” thus bereft of their histories, including the recent war with France, current civil war, and any “coeval” history they shared with Wright during his travels in Southeast Asia. The workers are shown to be productive—ready for salvage through American discourses of the individual as an agent of productivity, thrift, and ingenuity in the use of materials, and of the fetishization of the hand in contrast to machine production. These were all themes that Wright and other American designers associated with craft as they underscored its capacity to counter the qualitative deficiencies of mass-produced furnishings cluttering the middle-class American home.

In his own work, Wright transposed the geography of Southeast Asia into Mekong Tan, Tonkin Turquoise, and other colors branded for an upholstery line manufactured by DuPont. But in doing so he also was requiring Vietnamese handicraft artisans to become consumers of their own culture, refracted through an American sense of what was desirable and consumable about it. In a March 1956 article entitled “Recommendations for Development of Production of Goods for Local Consumption in Vietnam,” Wright explained that upon returning to the United States from Southeast Asia he “started right in adapting Asian handicraft products to twentieth century American usage.” In Vietnam, he endeavored “to bring out in the students a strong sense of Vietnamese design” and thus establish a design style that could be identified by Americans as “Vietnamese in character.”

“From *Forest of Stone Steles* to *Neon Calligraphy*:
Cultural Transference and Creative Misunderstanding in the Recent Art of Wenda Gu”
David Cateforis

One of the major transnational avant-garde artists of his generation, Wenda Gu (b. Shanghai, 1955) began his career in the context of the so-called '85 Movement in China, relocated to the United States in 1987, and achieved international renown in the 1990s with his *united nations* series of installations made of human hair shaped into quasi-architectural forms. Since the late 1990s Gu has divided his time between bases in Brooklyn and Shanghai, and has dedicated much of his art to exploring creatively the problems and paradoxes of attempts to translate between Chinese and English languages and cultures. This paper will analyze two of Gu's recent series in this vein: *Forest of Stone Steles: Retranslation and Rewriting of Tang Poetry* (1993–2005), and *Cultural Transference: A Neon Calligraphy Series* (2004–present).

Gu's *Forest of Stone Steles* comprises fifty hand-carved, horizontal slate steles and a corresponding series of ink rubbings, produced by Chinese craftsmen employing traditional materials and techniques. The steles' surfaces bear a series of engraved texts: a classic Tang dynasty poem in the original Chinese; a popular English translation of that poem by the American Witter Bynner; Gu's phonetic retranslation (i.e. transliteration) of that poem back into Chinese, which yields a surreal “post-Tang” poem; and Gu's translation of that post-Tang poem back into English to render its strangeness accessible to the English reader. A reworking of Chinese cultural traditions, which the artist both honors and transforms, Gu's series aims to demonstrate that, as he puts it, “culture can't be translated,” and that the attempt to do so always involves “misunderstanding” that results in a new creation.

Complementing the *Forest of Stone Steles*, Gu's subsequent *Neon Calligraphy Series* employs a modern rather than an ancient medium, imported to China from the West and emblematic of China's modern urban commercial environment. Most of the works in this series take the form of large neon signs featuring texts in English and Chinese, the latter written in Gu's distinctive calligraphy (seen also in the center of the steles). Here Gu employs transliteration and translation to create new Chinese and English poems out of Western commercial and institutional names (e.g. Ferragamo, Sotheby's, University of Pittsburgh), a process he calls “cultural transference.” Unlike the “post-Tang” poetry in the *Forest of Stone Steles*, which is not intended to be taken seriously, some of Gu's English verse presented in the neons has genuine literary merit. For example, his transliteration of

“Sotheby's” into 素思碧寺 *sù sī bì sì* yields “simple thoughts green temple”—an aesthetically pleasing line that cleverly reveals the hidden meaning of “Sotheby's” when transliterated into Chinese: the auction house's single- (if not simple-) minded emphasis on the bottom line (green means money). With this and other works in the *Neon Calligraphy Series*, Gu demonstrates the potential of East-West “misunderstanding” to foster new creation with its own cultural value and resonance.