



Volume 1

Issue 1 *What's the problem with the introductory art history survey?*

2016

De-Centering “The” Survey: The Value of Multiple Introductory Surveys to Art History

Melissa R. Kerin PhD
Washington and Lee University

Andrea Lepage PhD
Washington and Lee University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://academicworks.cuny.edu/ahpp>



Part of the [History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kerin, Melissa R. PhD and Andrea Lepage PhD. 2016. "De-Centering “The” Survey: The Value of Multiple Introductory Surveys to Art History." *Art History Pedagogy & Practice* 1, (1). <http://academicworks.cuny.edu/ahpp/vol1/iss1/3>

Art History Pedagogy and Practice is published biannually by Art History Teaching Resources (AHTR) in partnership with the Office of Library Services of the City University of New York and the Graduate Center at the City University of New York. For more information, please contact info@arthistorypp.org.

De-Centering “The” Survey: The Value of Multiple Introductory Surveys to Art History

Cover Page Footnote

Both authors contributed equally to this study. The authors are grateful to Mariana Aguirre, George Bent, Elliott King, Christopher McGrath, Lindsay Twa, and Leanne Zalewski for their generous time and thoughtful commentary on early drafts of this essay. We extend our thanks to our undergraduate students Padget Sutherland and Helen Clay for their insightful responses to this essay.

De-Centering the Survey: The Value of Multiple Introductory Surveys to Art History

Melissa R. Kerin, PhD and Andrea Lepage, PhD

Abstract

This essay stems from our concern that art historians still conceive of “the” survey in terms that privilege Western artistic traditions. In this article, we offer an alternative that we designate as the multi-survey model (MSM) or approach. “The” survey becomes “the surveys” that introduce students to Western arts and the art forms of often underrepresented regions. Twenty-one percent of the schools surveyed in our peer review employ similar models, though the MSM has yet to attract critical scholarly attention. This essay addresses a void in present scholarship and elaborates upon three main goals of the MSM, all of which help to de-center the survey from Western origins and to challenge the discourse that positions Western art as normative. First, the MSM creates opportunities for students to delve into the particularities of a specific region and its narratives of art, which often exist outside Western art historical discourse. Second, the MSM produces a productive dialogue between the Western survey and the regional surveys of Africa, the Americas, Asia, the Middle East, Pacific Cultures, and other regions. Last, students investigate agency of representation, and in particular how the arts of Asia and the Americas are presented in the Western world. The MSM deliberately concedes global coverage in favor of capitalizing upon the strengths of faculty members in small art history departments. The MSM ensures that students engage with a variety of cultural perspectives early in their art history careers and bolsters our efforts to create a more globally aware citizenry at the college level.

The call for papers for the first issue of the *Art History Pedagogy and Practice* journal states, “AHPP seeks to advocate and support the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) in our field by re-examining the introductory survey course in art history.”¹ In reading this over, we each faltered at the use of the singular, as if there were only one introductory survey. As two art historians who teach introductory art history surveys of Asia and the Americas respectively, we are invested in complicating what may otherwise be an outdated and Western-centric “totalizing approach”² to the art history survey. In our four-person department, we have made it mandatory for students to take both the Western survey, taught over two terms, and at least one other introductory-level course. They have four from which to choose: *Introduction to Buddhist Art of South and Central Asia*, *Introduction to Asian Art*, *Arts of Mesoamerica and the Andes*, and when staffing permits, *Introduction to African Art*. In so doing, “the survey” has become “the surveys” that introduce students to Western art and the art forms of often underrepresented regions. We offer here our approaches and learning goals for what we have called the multi-survey model (MSM), which moves toward re-contouring the nineteenth-century-inspired art history survey.³

The MSM can be understood as a suite of introductory courses that focuses on art traditions and their sociopolitical contexts in the West, but also many other regions. This set of gateway courses at once exposes students to multiple regions and challenges the discourse in art history that positions Western art as normative.⁴ Our review of sixty-six institutions similar to our own reveals that a significant number of small art history departments have

¹ “AHPP Call for Papers (Issue #1 Fall 2016),” <http://arthistoryteachingresources.org/ahpp-call-for-proposals-issue-1-fall-2016/>.

² Bradford Collins continues, “The conception of art as a manifestation of large, sweeping historical forces has largely been rejected by so-called new art historians for one that emphasizes its complex embeddedness in the lives of its makers and users.” Bradford R. Collins, “Rethinking the Introductory Art History Survey: A Practical, Somewhat Theoretical, and Inspirational Guide,” *Art Journal* 54, no. 3 (1995): 23.

³ For more on the history of the survey, see Mitchell Schwarzer, “Origins of the Art History Survey Text,” *Art Journal* 54, no. 3 (1995): 24–29. Throughout the essay, we mention several articles that were part of the *Art Journal* Autumn 1995 issue related to the art history survey and pedagogy. For more recent discussions on the topic, however, see Saloni Mathur, “The Introductory Survey from a Post-Colonial Perspective,” *Art History* 26, no. 5 (2003): 780–82; Peggy Phelan, et al., “Art History Survey: A Round-Table Discussion,” *Art Journal* 64, no. 2 (2005): 32–51; Kelly Donahue-Wallace, et al., eds., *Teaching Art History with New Technologies: Reflections and Case Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009).

⁴ It should be noted that the Washington and Lee University art and art history department made this change to the mandatory coursework for majors in 2004—before either of us began our employment in the department—when faculty recognized it was important to require courses that take students outside of Western worldviews. At that time, *Introduction to Asian Art* became a mandatory requirement for the major. In 2012, we were able to diversify the introductory art history offerings further by adding *Introduction to Buddhist Art of South and Central Asia* (Kerin) and *Arts of Mesoamerica and the Andes* (Lepage).

already adopted a form of the multi-survey model.⁵

While the Western survey remains the dominant model at 43% of the schools surveyed, a majority of colleges and universities examined also require some alternative to the traditional Western survey model, typically at the intermediate level. We found, however, that 21% of the institutions examined employ the MSM as we define it. Thus, one-fifth of the schools surveyed already require students to take Western art surveys alongside at least one introductory-level course focused on a region outside of the West. Our review determined that most schools offer East Asian art to fulfill this requirement, and that our department MSM is situated among the few institutions that offer surveys in the artistic traditions of Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, India, the Himalayas, or the Americas to fulfill this requirement. Only 16% of the institutions studied give no priority to the Western survey, allowing students to take courses focused on any region from a range of introductory-level courses. We also found that all-encompassing global surveys have fallen out of favor in most small art history departments, and that 12% of the schools examined have abandoned the survey requirement altogether. We were struck, however, by the persistent use of “non-Western,” even at colleges and universities that have abandoned the Western survey as a core major requirement.

Though scholars have investigated the strengths of Western, Non-Western, and global survey variations,⁶ the MSM has yet to attract critical scholarly attention. Our essay addresses a

⁵ We limited our review to similar liberal arts institutions like our own that typically maintain small art history departments. We reviewed colleges and universities from three groups: Washington and Lee University-identified peer institutions, the Oberlin-Group institutions, and the Associated Colleges of the South (ACS) schools. The percentages presented exclude the four institutions that do not offer an art history major. We reviewed each school’s art history major requirements to determine whether their course catalogue language highlighted the Western survey, which was most often designated as 101 and 102. We made note of each institution that also required additional region-specific surveys at the same level. In many cases, introductory-level Western surveys (typically at the 100-level or lower) were required, and an intermediate course (typically at the 200-level) could be used to fulfill a non-Western credit requirement. Due to a lack of level parity, we did not classify those schools among those that have already adopted the MSM.

⁶ See *Art Journal*’s October 1995 special issue, especially Collins, “Rethinking the Introductory Art History Survey...”; Mark Miller Graham, “The Future of Art History and the Undoing of the Survey.” *Art Journal* 54, no. 3 (1995): 30–34; Patricia Mathews, “What Matters in Art History,” *Art Journal* 54, no. 3 (1995): 51–54; Michael W. Cothren, “Replacing the Survey at Swarthmore,” *Art Journal* 54, no. 3 (1995): 58–62; Joanne E. Sowell, “A Cross-Cultural Approach,” *Art Journal* 54, no. 3 (1995): 72–75; Romy Golan and Christopher S. Wood, “Charisma and Self-Doubt in the Western Tradition,” *Art Journal* 54, no. 3 (1995): 78–81; and online, Abigail Lapin-Dardashti and Cara Jordan, “Teaching Art and Race: Bridging Gaps in the Global Survey Course,” *Art History Teaching Resources*, March 13, 2015. Sowell proposed the introduction of a cross-cultural course in addition to the Western survey. The MSM also explores cross-cultural exchanges; however, it does so beyond the West. While the Americas are located in the geographic West, arts produced by indigenous artists are nonetheless omitted from Western art surveys. We return to this topic later in the article.

lacuna in present scholarship as we consider not only the benefits of an MSM but also share our approaches and three specific learning goals. The first goal of the MSM is to create opportunities for students to delve into the particularities of a specific region and its narratives of art. In our department, we regularly offer introductory courses related to Asia and the Americas. The second objective of this model is to create a productive dialogue between the Western survey and the introductory-level surveys. In other words, we are not merely interested in emphasizing differences between the Western survey and those of Asia and the Americas; rather, we are invested in highlighting productive points of overlap with regard to methodology and thematic inquiry. Lastly, students investigate agency of representation, and in particular how the arts of Asia and the Americas are presented in the Western world and by whom.

Moving Beyond the Non-Western and Global Art Models

The multi-survey model resists the impulse to craft broad global or “non-Western” surveys of art, inclusive of all or most regions and time periods, for two primary reasons. The first is that the MSM questions inherited taxonomies and nomenclature. Secondly, the MSM challenges accepted methods of grouping different cultures together and the manner in which these cultures’ art forms are critiqued in relation to Western art.

In terms of taxonomy, the term “non-Western” needs to be considered. One of the earliest non-Western art history textbooks did little to examine or complicate the preferential treatment of the West implied in the label “non-Western.” Lynn Mackenzie’s *Non-Western Art: A Brief Guide* glosses over the concern in the following way:

Others will not teach Non-Western, because they argue the topic is invalid, and “Non-Western” creates the notion of “The Other” by lumping together cultures that share nothing. These are major issues, and ones which cannot be addressed in a preface, although the situation is pitiful, indeed, if we are shackled by inherited methodologies. I have always been dissatisfied with the term “Non-Western” but do not feel the term has pejorative implications. The subject reflects our awareness of the richness of world cultures, even if a satisfactory word has yet to be coined.⁷

While it is concerning to hear that the author does not consider the term non-Western pejorative or problematic, it is not surprising. Scholars continue to use the term despite how it prioritizes the West. One cannot help but think back to postcolonial theorist Edward Said, who famously demonstrated that systems of categorization function primarily to justify and

⁷ Lynn Mackenzie, *Non-Western Art: A Brief Guide*, 2nd edition (New York: Prentice Hall, 2001), ix. This textbook is one of the earliest non-Western textbooks, first published in 1995.

perpetuate Western-centric worldviews.⁸ Binary identity classification systems can reveal more about those assembling the categories than those whom they seek to categorize.

Just as “non-Western” contributes to problematic nomenclature, one must also consider the overused term “Western.” In analyzing a few of the non-Western and global survey textbooks, it became clear that “Western” is more than a geographic designation. The omission of Native American, Mesoamerican, and Andean cultures, which span the entire Western hemisphere, unmistakably flags this point, as does the lack of recognition of the African presence in the Western hemisphere as a result of diaspora.⁹ Thus, the Western world within art historical contexts is limited to European and Euro-American communities that share an imagined narrative of artistic progression and development. Yet in a recent article, Anne Ring Peterson rightly disputes the characterization of the West as monolithic or monocultural. She underscores the point, noting that a “single epistemology or perception of the world that unites all regions of the West and all Westerners” does not exist. Art produced within the West that does not conform to the idea of the West is often deemed provincial and pushed to the semi-peripheries, to use Peterson’s term.¹⁰ In this way, the designation “Western” privileges a limited geography.

This privileged geography affects more than nomenclature. Indeed, the manner in which the cultures of Africa, Asia, and the Americas are presented in global art textbooks seems to demonstrate a reification of geographic preference and privilege that stems from antiquated art history survey models.¹¹ Architectural and urban historian Mitchell Schwarzer identifies nineteenth-century global art survey texts as the origin of the hierarchical organization of artistic traditions that devalues traditions outside of Western Europe. Early authors of global surveys presented Oceanic, African, Asian, and American art as aesthetic counterpoints to the development of Western European art, which they evaluated as culturally and aesthetically sophisticated.¹² Present-day global survey textbook authors have come a long

⁸ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 1–6.

⁹ Binaya Subedi argues that prioritizing Western traditions “reinforces colonial, white ideology” and thus reveals the continued cultural “investment in whiteness.” Binaya Subedi, “Decolonizing the Curriculum for Global Perspectives,” *Educational Theory* 63, no. 6 (2013): 623. See also Phoebe Dufrene, “A Response to Mary Erickson: It Is Time to Redefine ‘Western’ and ‘Non-Western’ Art, or When Did Egypt Geographically Shift to Europe and Native Americans Become Non-Western,” *Studies in Art Education* 35, no. 4 (1994): 252–53.

¹⁰ Anne Ring Peterson, “Global Art History: A View from the North,” *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 7 (2015): 1. Peterson establishes a productive framework based on multiple centers and semi-peripheries and highlights the ways that Nordic art (as one example) has been pushed to the peripheries of Western art. Moving beyond Peterson, Western models also prioritize formal development and privilege apolitical and leftist ideologies.

¹¹ For more about the construction of moralized geographies that position Europe as superior, see Martin W. Lewis and Kären Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1997).

¹² Schwarzer, “Origins of the Art History Survey Text,” 28.

way toward achieving cultural inclusivity; however, the continued reliance on a format originally intended for the linear construction of Western art traditions often results in the reinforcement of outdated hierarchical valuations. This problem is exemplified in Fred S. Kleiner's *Gardner's Art Through the Ages: Non-Western Perspectives*, now in its fourteenth edition.

In introducing non-Western cultures, Kleiner contends, "Despite this diversity, the art produced by most non-Western artists differs from art produced in the Western world by the absence of two of the most characteristic ways that Western artists have used to represent people, objects, and places since the Greeks pioneered them a half millennium before the Common Era—perspective and foreshortening."¹³ This interpretation, emphasizing the deficiencies of the arts produced beyond the West, valorizes the West (and particularly classical traditions) by casting the art of other regions as unsophisticated and lacking. As evidenced by this popular text, we still see the remnants of the powerful nineteenth-century grand narratives reflected in survey texts used in today's classrooms.

While we think offering a set of regionally diverse introductory surveys is a culturally sensitive approach, it is not without its limitations or complications. For instance, we recognize that small art or art history departments, with only one or two art historians who focus on the Western world, are in a difficult position. In such cases, a global survey that exposes students briefly to artistic traditions beyond the West is an imperfect but realistic solution to the problem. In our department, while we can employ the MSM, there are indeed regional lacunae. Our department does not employ a specialist of Native North American art; therefore, references to our coverage of the Americas refers to Mesoamerica (a region extending from central México to Costa Rica) and the South American Andean region. Students will not encounter art produced in Brazil or the Southern Cone until later in their academic careers. Except in the cases when we use sabbatical replacement hires to extend our coverage into Africa, our students will learn everything they know about African cultures in our university's Africana Studies Program. Neither of the two Asian surveys investigates art from western Asia, a region that overlaps considerably with the Middle East.¹⁴ In reality, a four-person department such as ours can never achieve full global coverage. The MSM deliberately concedes global coverage in favor of capitalizing upon the strengths of faculty members. Thus, we prioritize depth over breadth to stem the practice of distilling and oversimplifying artistic traditions.

¹³ Fred S. Kleiner, *Gardner's Art Through the Ages: Non-Western Perspectives*, 13th edition (Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2010), 4. In the thirteenth edition, "non-Western" chapters were interspersed throughout the textbook. In the fourteenth edition, the "non-Western" chapters are grouped into a single section, located at the end of the book, making it more likely that these chapters will be omitted if an instructor runs behind schedule during the term.

¹⁴ While the Middle East is not represented in any of our gateway courses, Islamic art of South Asia is well covered.

Shared Concerns and Approaches while Embracing Difference

The MSM does not seek to diminish the value of Western art historical traditions, but rather to signal to students the equal importance of African, American, Asian, Middle Eastern, or Pacific Culture artistic traditions. It is one thing to require students to take an elective non-Western course to achieve a degree and quite another to officially signal in course catalogues that a department values equally different artistic traditions. Multiple surveys potentially create a dialogue with Western survey courses that underscores shared approaches and thematic inquiry across the surveys. In all of our introductory surveys, regardless of the region covered, students come away with tools to analyze formal elements such as media, technique, composition, color, scale, and line. Students are also exposed to art historical themes of authorship, patronage, the relationship between form and function, the import of socio-political context, hybridity, cultural and political diaspora, and gendered space.

Despite emphasizing shared thematic trends among the courses, we still attempt to prioritize artistic particularities from Asia and the Americas. Some of the art we analyze does not fit comfortably within Western frameworks of aesthetics or value. By including them in our curricula, we hope to promote a healthy re-evaluation of art history’s inherited standards, criteria, and methodologies. Our classes explore artistic traditions that are based on cyclical understandings of time, for instance, artwork produced within cultures based on the interconnectedness of the human and animal worlds, and artistic systems dominated by ephemeral artworks that support sacred ritual practices or household traditions—to name only three examples. As an illustration, recent scholarship on Bengali quilt making (*kantha*) provides students a clear example of how scholars can begin to push against canonical distinctions between high and low art.¹⁵ Emphasis on the wall paintings in the suburban dwellings of Tepantitla, Teotihuacán calls into question the usefulness of traditional boundaries established to demarcate sacred and secular worlds and also exposes ingrained preferences for the study of religious art and architecture. A critical evaluation of some of the speculations forwarded to explain indigenous achievement in the arts—ranging from alternative origins to alien invasion—provides comic relief for students but also shines a light on cultural biases that cast civilizations like the Olmec as incapable of carving and transporting multi-ton stone heads without extra-cultural assistance. Our syllabi reflect other examples along these lines. As a consequence, introductory surveys of art from areas well outside the West do more than expose students to art of different regions; they also encourage students to question and think critically about the canon, its formulation, and associated valuation.

¹⁵ Pika Ghosh, “From Rags to Riches: Valuing Kanthas in Bengali Households” in *Kantha: The Embroidered Quilts from the Jill and Sheldon Bonovitz Collection and the Stella Kramrisch Collection at the Philadelphia Museum of Art* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2010), 31–57.

As previously stated, we encourage students to cultivate two main skill sets: the first is to hone formal analysis practices that can be used trans-regionally and across media. The second is to help students to become familiar with a core group of thematic concerns that affect artistic production and function, such as authorship, patronage, political ideology, hybridity, cultural and political diaspora, and gendered space.

In the process, students engage questions about the nature of the discipline of art history. Can the discipline be construed as “global” or trans-regional? Or, is art historical analysis by its very nature a Western-centered undertaking?¹⁶ Do the very questions we ask of art objects grow out of and benefit from Western sensibilities?¹⁷ The MSM complicates the often overly determined trajectory of the discipline and helps students to consider new, difficult, even potentially unanswerable questions.

Consequently, these surveys do much to shake up the four forces that Mark Miller Graham suggests define the traditional structure of the art history survey and the discipline: canonicity (some artworks are more deserving of study than others), chronology (history as a linear sequence), closure (a neat ending to the story), and subjectivity (Western-oriented march of progress populated by winners and losers).¹⁸ The MSM brings into high relief critical questions and necessary critiques of our discipline and the canon, as well as larger questions about epistemology. In differencing and pluralizing the survey, we willingly exchange the neatly defined grand narratives first imagined in the nineteenth century for alternatives that reveal the messy complexities of different artistic traditions. At the same time, the multiple surveys also give students a practical toolkit for approaching works of art and analyzing their greater sociopolitical context.

Confronting Cultural Chauvinism

The last goal of the MSM is to create greater awareness of how the artistic heritage of the Americas, Asia, and other regions is presented in the West, through both textbooks and museums. Our surveys introduce students to the role of imperialism in collecting, documenting, and exhibiting art from around the world. Histories of colonization carry with them culturally biased agendas, and this is especially true in art history. “Cultural chauvinism” in its many forms drives and perpetuates normative discourses that privilege

¹⁶ James Elkins, ed., *Is Art History Global* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007). For graphics on how and where Art History is taught the world over, see James Elkins, “Art History as a Global Discipline,” <http://www.jameselkins.com/index.php/essays/230-art-history-as-a-global-discipline>, Accessed December 10, 2016.

¹⁷ The following book provides a productive starting point for class discussion: Elkins, *Is Art History Global*. See in particular Keith Moxey, “Art History after the Global Turn, 207–214; Suman Gupta, “Territorial Anxieties,” 236–247; David Carrier, “What Happens When Art History Travels,” 286–88; and Atreeye Gupta and Sugata Ray, “Responding from the Margins,” 348–356.

¹⁸ Graham, “The Future of Art History and the Undoing of the Survey,” 30–31.

Western European cultures. These practices date back to imperial periods but continue today in the production of art history textbooks and even museum displays of art from cultures that fall outside narrow definitions of the West. The concern, of course, is that by establishing one cultural discourse as primary or even superior necessitates rendering all others subordinate, and there is much at stake for our students when we do not excise cultural chauvinism from our lectures, assignments, and required readings.¹⁹

Policies of cultural chauvinism have far-reaching consequences on the history of art. Perceived superiority led/leads conquerors, colonizers, and imperialists to take possession of art and cultural heritage without regard to regional, national, or patrimonial origins.²⁰ In present-day México, this “finders-keepers” conceptualization of art as the property of the colonizer led Spanish friars and conquerors in the sixteenth century to melt down gold objects, pillage and dismantle temples, and set fire to centuries worth of indigenous history and heritage contained in illustrated codices. Students can still detect the traces of this outdated worldview in exhibitions and textbooks that essentialize entire continents into a single set of artworks or minimize the differences among cultures and subcultures. Curators frequently prioritize objects that fit best into Western worldviews or emphasize the sensationalizing aspects of a culture (human sacrifice, for example) above all other artistic production. Multiple surveys representing different parts of the world allow students to address some of these imbalances promoted by generalist Western-centric frameworks applied to the study of all art.

Here, we outline one assignment used in the *Introduction to Asian Art* survey that encourages students to evaluate critically the ways that preconceived notions of the Western world act upon other artistic traditions in both the classroom and the museum. In keeping with the strategy identified by art historians Irene J. Winter and Henri Zerner in terms of “confront[ing] issues of value(s) and judgment(s),”²¹ this two-part and bi-focal assignment requires students to visit a museum and conduct rigorous formal analyses of an Asian art object and the exhibition in which it is displayed. For the exhibition analysis, students are asked to investigate how the object is displayed and presented. This necessarily requires students to analyze the museum’s label copy and the object’s relation to the larger display and setting. They are asked to consider a few basic questions: how is this object from Asia

¹⁹ Decades ago, Said demonstrated that the ways we choose to formulate the past shape or even define our understanding of the present. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 3.

²⁰ In India alone, there are several examples of British officials who surveyed newly found Indian archaeological sites. Once documented, the archaeological finds were dismantled, shipped to major cities in India, and eventually sent to Britain. For one example of this, see Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996): 88–105. Cohn traces the discovery of the Amaravati marbles by Colonel MacKenzie in 1797 and their eventual relocation to the Fife House in Whitehall in the 1850s.

²¹ Irene J. Winter and Henri Zerner. “Art and Visual Culture,” *Art Journal* 54, no. 3 (1995): 42.

represented? Is there a discussion about the object's original function or its original location? How is the object's larger sociopolitical environment addressed, if at all? Is there an emphasis on the object's aesthetics? Students are also asked to consider other exhibition elements, such as lighting, wall color, decorative elements, overall aesthetic placement of didactic labels, wall charts, and maps, in order to assess the haptic experience that the museum is trying to create.

The assignment outlined above encourages students to see that creating an exhibition is not a value-neutral undertaking. Biases and agendas of institutions and curators (and even donors and trustees) can make their way into displays. Consequently, students learn a few tools that help them to acknowledge power structures and to dissect the many ways Western mis/understandings of Asia can act on us, even in the educational museum setting. Students employ these tools to consider if museum exhibitions uphold or debunk essentialized views of Asia, such as prioritizing Hindu and Buddhist art over other forms of art (Islamic art traditions, for example) or representing certain Asian cultures as only premodern.²²

We situate ourselves within a line of scholars who have called for the decolonization of the art historical survey. Critical theorist Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy defines decolonization as the critical examination of the ways that "European-American thought, knowledge, and power structures dominate present society."²³ As part of the project of curriculum decolonization, we read primary accounts that reveal sets of indigenous-based knowledge. In close comparative readings of texts that display divergent worldviews, students investigate processes of memory retention and the function of oral history in preserving collective memory.²⁴

Meanwhile, students explore the inherent limitations of Western biases that prioritize cultures with written languages. For example, John Curl's compilation and translation of

²² In art historian Saloni Mathur's review of Partha Mitter's textbook *Indian Art* (Oxford University Press, 2001), she notes that Oxford University Press's rejection of Mitter's bid to title the textbook *South Asian Art* is "quite revealing because it dramatizes the fact that 'Indian art' is a firmly established object of scholarly analysis, one that has a particular coherence and currency in the marketplace of knowledge production, even as it is increasingly destabilized by a number of critical, theoretical, and historical pressures." Mathur's point makes clear that frameworks that serve the interests of a press do not always benefit students. Mathur, "The Introductory Survey from a Post-Colonial Perspective," 781.

²³ Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy, "Toward a Tribal Critical Race Theory in Education," *The Urban Review* 37, no. 5 (2005): 430.

²⁴ Much scholarly work has been dedicated to examining systems of memory preservation throughout Mesoamerica and the Andes. A selection of recent and classic studies includes, Amos Megged and Stephanie Gail Wood, *Mesoamerican Memory: Enduring Systems of Remembrance* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012); Thomas Alan Abercrombie, *Pathways of Memory and Power: Ethnography and History Among an Andean People* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998); and Miguel León Portilla, *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

Nahua (Aztec) poems helps students to explore Nahua understandings of the interconnectedness of life and death. Students also investigate indigenous knowledge systems concerning the reciprocal relationship between humans and deities, providing insight into indigenous sacrificial practices.²⁵ These investigations bring students to a better understanding of the specificity of Nahua cultural features in their own context and not in relation to Western traditions. The MSM thus introduces alternative sources of authority—like the Nahua poet or the Bengali quilt maker—that are ethnically different from those that students might encounter in Western surveys. The MSM allows a department to introduce a variety of voices and perspectives into the study of art history during the initial stages of completing the major.

Conclusion

These assignments and syllabi inherently question old definitions of art, the canon, and “the” survey. Indeed, it seems such undertakings are finally responding to Phoebe Dufrene’s two-decade old question: “When are art educators going to shed old definitions of race and culture and challenge the outdated categories of cultural inclusion/exclusion for various artistic periods and peoples?”²⁶ While far from the majority approach, there is a discernable sea change in undergraduate art history curricula as our review of sixty-six peer institutions revealed.

Following Dufrene, we again call upon educators to shed old definitions and undertake the mundane but important task of rewriting catalogue copy to provide more precise terminology that matches the progress we have made in the field. We recognize that total cultural inclusivity is impossible at most small colleges and universities like our own. Reducing all regions beyond the West into a single non-Western course has the potential to negatively impact hiring practices. What will motivate our colleges and universities to hire Africanists or Islamicists, for example, if we continue to convey the misconception that the faculty in our small departments can provide adequate coverage of all artistic traditions across the globe in one or two courses? Moreover, renaming courses to reflect subtle, but important geographic and cultural distinctions bolsters our efforts to create a more globally aware citizenry at the college level.

As previously mentioned, in our department, we specialize in arts of Asia and the Americas;

²⁵ Many translated Nahuatl texts are available to students on the Internet. See John Curl’s introduction and translation of “The Flower Songs” written by Nezahualcoyotl (Hungry Coyote). John Curl, “Ancient Nahua (Aztec) Poetry: The Flower Songs of Nezahualcoyotl,” Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc. (FAMSI), http://www.famsi.org/research/curl/nezahualcoyotl_intro.html. Accessed December 10, 2016. Recorded in the sixteenth century after contact with Spaniards, Nahua poems contain traces of contact with European civilizations, but also employ traditional Nahua structures of storytelling.

²⁶ Dufrene, “A Response to Mary Erickson...” 252–53.

consequently, our university catalogue currently makes no mention of Western or non-Western requirements, listing only existing course names in our areas of specialization. Our hope is that by listing the precise areas of specializations taught in art history departments, we will help develop an awareness of worldwide cultures as opposed to lumping them together in one designation: non-Western. Such a manageable change on the administrative level helps students become aware of cultural differences and might motivate institutions to make new hires that address gaps in geographical coverage.

This essay is a push toward articulating the necessity for a more de-centered approach to the survey, one that explores different cultural viewpoints, types of art, and methods of production. This model attends to plurality of experience and brings the discipline closer to an understanding of multiple global perspectives. Our article thus enters into a conversation that has preoccupied the field for over five decades. Art historian George Kubler spoke directly to art history's tendency to prioritize art historical narratives that valorize high art produced at political and cultural centers of power in his seminal study, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (first published in 1962).²⁷ The conversation has evolved through the decades and, certainly, significant progress has been made toward decentralizing art historical narratives and differencing the canon since Kubler wrote *The Shape of Time*. Yet we are still struck by his prescient remark, "The retention of old things has always been a central ritual in human societies."²⁸ Kubler made this comment in relation to human-made objects and artifacts, but his words also apply to the manner in which the discipline of art history has held strong to the nineteenth-century systems of categorization intended to make sense of those objects. By loosening our grip of these "old things," we gain so much more.

²⁷ George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962); David Summers addresses some of these same issues in David Summers, *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism* (London, New York: Phaidon Press, 2003).

²⁸ Kubler, *The Shape of Time*, 80.

Bibliography

- Abercrombie, Thomas Alan. *Pathways of Memory and Power: Ethnography and History Among an Andean People*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998.
- Brayboy, Bryan McKinley Jones. “Toward a Tribal Critical Race Theory in Education.” *The Urban Review* 37, no. 5 (2005): 425–446.
- Cohn, Bernard S. *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India*. Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 1996.
- Collins, Bradford R. “Rethinking the Introductory Art History Survey: A Practical, Somewhat Theoretical, and Inspirational Guide.” *Art Journal* 54, no. 3 (1995): 23.
- Cothren, Michael W. “Replacing the Survey at Swarthmore.” *Art Journal* 54, no. 3 (1995): 58–62.
- Curl, John. “Ancient Nahua (Aztec) Poetry: The Flower Songs of Nezahualcoyotl.” Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc (FAMSI). http://www.famsi.org/research/curl/nezahualcoyotl_intro.html. Accessed December 10, 2016.
- Dufrene, Phoebe. “A Response to Mary Erickson: It Is Time to Redefine ‘Western’ and ‘Non-Western’ Art or When Did Egypt Geographically Shift to Europe and Native Americans Become Non-Western.” *Studies in Art Education* 35, no. 4 (1994): 252–53.
- Elkins, James. *Is Art History Global?* London and New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Ghosh, Pika. “From Rags to Riches: Valuing Kanthas in Bengali Households” in *Kantha: The Embroidered Quilts from the Jill and Sheldon Bonovitz Collection and the Stella Kramrisch Collection at the Philadelphia Museum of Art*, Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2010: 31–57.
- Golan, Romy, and Christopher S. Wood. “Charisma and Self-Doubt in the Western Tradition.” *Art Journal* 54, no. 3 (1995): 78–81.
- Graham, Mark Miller. “The Future of Art History and the Undoing of the Survey.” *Art Journal* 54, no. 3 (1995): 30–34.
- Kleiner, Fred S. *Gardner’s Art Through the Ages: Non-Western Perspectives*. 13th edition.

Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2010.

Kubler, George. *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things*. 9th Edition. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974.

Lapin-Dardashti, Abigail and Cara Jordan. "Teaching Art and Race: Bridging Gaps in the Global Survey Course," *Art History Teaching Resources*, March 13, 2015. <http://arthistoryteachingresources.org/2015/03/teaching-art-and-race-bridging-gaps-in-the-global-survey-course/>. Accessed December 10, 2016.

Lewis, Martin W. and Kären Wigen. *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography*. Oakland: University of California Press, 1997.

Mackenzie, Lynn. *Non-Western Art: A Brief Guide*. 2nd edition. New York: Prentice Hall, 2001.

Mathews, Patricia. "What Matters in Art History." *Art Journal* 54, no. 3 (1995): 51–54.

Mathur, Saloni. "The Introductory Survey from a Post-Colonial Perspective." *Art History* 26, no. 5 (2003): 780–82.

Megged, Amos, and Stephanie Gail Wood. *Mesoamerican Memory: Enduring Systems of Remembrance*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012.

Peterson, Anne Ring. "Global Art History: A View from the North." *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 7 (2015): 1–12.

Phelan, Peggy, Kevin Concannon, Irina D. Costache, Kathleen Desmond, David Little, and Steve Shipp. "Art History Survey: A Round-Table Discussion." *Art Journal* 64, no. 2 (2005): 32–51.

Portilla, Miguel León. *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993.

Schwarzer, Mitchell. "Origins of the Art History Survey Text." *Art Journal* 54, no. 3 (1995): 24–29.

Sowell, Joanne E. “A Cross-Cultural Approach.” *Art Journal* 54, no. 3 (1995): 72–75.

Subedi, Binaya. “Decolonizing the Curriculum for Global Perspectives.” *Educational Theory* 63, no. 6 (2013): 621–38.

Summers, David. *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism*. London, New York: Phaidon Press, 2003.

Winter, Irene J., and Zerner Henri. “Art and Visual Culture.” *Art Journal* 54, no. 3 (1995): 42–43.