

Introduction: Art unlimited?

The globalization of the art world and its limits

With the end of the Second World War the contours and the weighting of the continents and regions of the world map of art shifted massively. The division of Europe, the rise of the USA as a super power, the beginning of the Cold War and the world-wide triumph of Western capitalism did not fail to have an effect on the sphere of art. The rapid and lasting erosion of French hegemony in the art market and of the predominant role of Paris in the production, circulation and consecration of art after the war was accompanied by the equally swift rise of abstract expressionism and pop art, as a result of which New York developed into the leading art metropolis in the course of the 1960s. And to the present day it has maintained this position of power and monopoly, enabling it to determine the canon of what was now called contemporary art. Around the middle of the 1980s an opening of the art world took place which is frequently associated with the transition from the modern to the so-called post-modern age in art and with the dynamics of contemporary art itself. The appearance of young artists from post-colonial contexts at the Paris exhibition “Magiciens de la Terre” in 1989 is an exemplary, ever emblematic sign of the increased inclusion of non-Western actors in an art scene whose mapping had hitherto been almost exclusively restricted to North America and Europe.

The historical and paradigmatic upheaval symbolized by the year 1989 and characterized by the end of a bipolar world order is accompanied by an increasing and widely attested globalization. The art world, organized around the museums, galleries, fairs, auctions, biennials, the throngs of artists, collectors, curators, critics and a steadily growing public, did not remain untouched by this change. The transformations of the world of art

have also lastingly influenced and changed its representations, discourses, institutions and artistic practices and positions.

The opening up and expansion of an art world largely restricted to the Western hemisphere can be seen, for example, in the current representations of art in the established art institutions such as the biennials or in art criticism, which have in the meantime opened their doors to artistic influences from all regions of the world and no longer represent only the centuries-long privileged and dominant Western art. This development is not least due to the diverse dynamics of interaction, cooperation and mobility unleashed in the course of globalization. The progressive globalization seems to have brought with it not only an increased cross-fertilization of various artistic traditions but also a growing transnationalization and internationalization of the art world in general and of the art market in particular, accompanied by the world-wide institutionalization of contemporary art and a visibly growing standardization of the presentation and exhibition of art from all and in all regions of the world. It is, nonetheless, still necessary to ask whether this undoubtedly existent intercultural and transnational diversity of the origins of artists and works of art does in fact reveal an all-round permeability of the former boundaries with their specific obstacles, filters and selection mechanisms in regard to the circulation of artistic goods. Could it not also be the case that the increasingly colorful international, pluri-ethnic and pluri-cultural exoticism of the contemporary art world may well exist at the level of the origin of the actors but not at the level of relevant structures and powers and processes of consecration, and that in these spheres the continued existence of powerful monopoly positions of a few Western art institutions and art centers in regard to the legitimate definition of art must be assumed?

The strong expansion of the art market in the past decades is above all taken as an indication of an increasing globalization. The rapid ascent of China to the role of global player on the art market and the high growth rates for trade in art in Brazil, India, Mexico, Russia or the Arab world – which are directly linked with the rise of a wealthy upper-class in these countries whose interest in art derives from a variety of motives – are proof of a territorial and structural transformation of the art world. On all continents, with the possible exception of Africa, a large number of public and, above all, private art institutions has arisen, which have contributed to the visibility and popularization of contemporary art. Biennials and art fairs have extended into the furthest corners of the world. Even in

countries and regions which were still characterized as marginal a few years ago prestigious galleries and art dealers' shops, museums and exhibition projects have been established. Art has developed into a privileged medium of city branding: countries or metropolises consciously deploy this symbolic capital in the international competition for visibility and attractiveness, not least in order to remain competitive in the struggle to attract financially powerful populations in a time of increasing transnational mobility.

Art production has also clearly become more international than it was in the 1970s. The art scenes in the Asian, Pacific, Latin-American or Arab regions have in the meantime developed into more than mere exotic blossoms and side issues. In spite of the already mentioned continuance of the hegemonial influence of Western art metropolises, the art milieus in economically upward-moving art centers such as China follow their own laws of organization and cannot simply be subsumed under the concepts of Western art history or the Western art field. This is one of the most important developmental trends in the art field, whose consequences can as yet scarcely be estimated.

Artists from all corners of the earth are in the meantime exhibited around the globe and can be seen, above all, at the international big events such as the Biennale in Venice or the documenta in Kassel. In many states so-called art residencies and residential art programs count among the important instruments of the public and private promotion of artists and artistic exchange. Not only the creators of art themselves but also curators, organizers of exhibitions, art dealers and gallerists, collectors and art lovers have become hyper-mobile actors in the course of the globalization of the art scene, who jet around the world from one event to the next. The so called love of art, an attitude hitherto regarded as a distinctive and distinguishing cultural pattern of Western elites, is in the meantime shared by a part of the new bourgeoisie in the so-called threshold countries. Rich collectors from Asia, the Arab region, Russia and Latin America have established themselves on the global art market and compete with Western collectors at auctions and art fairs around the world for the acquisition of representative and correspondingly expensive works of art. And for the big auction houses like Sotheby's and Christie's and mega-galleries like Gagosian, Pace or White Cube with their worldwide network of branch offices the sun literally never sets in this "brave new world".

This development towards a “global salon”, towards an apparently extensive dissociation from the regional context, which can be observed at the top of an increasingly internationalized art world and is seemingly characterized by ideals or pretensions of *savoir vivre* and urbanity, was promoted, above all by the growth of the art market and the crystallization of formats such as the international art fairs and art biennials. A throng of mega-galleries, powerful auction houses and mega-collectors moves in orbit from event to event around this nexus.

GLOBALIZATION AS A NARRATIVE OF THE ART WORLD

Globalization is a complex and multilayered concept defined and used very differently depending on the position and perspective adopted and is directly associated with the narration of the rise of the West.¹ With the upheaval at the end of the 1980s it came to be a leading category of various scientific disciplines and has since been used as a kind of signature for the expansion, concentration and acceleration of world-wide relationships. The term, which comprehends various economic, political and cultural processes, is, however, not undisputed and is controversially discussed. Globalization is not so much a historical phenomenon; it is rather the result of the interaction and reciprocal reinforcement of long-term processes such as the inter-relationships in the world economy, world-wide communication and networking or massive transnational migratory movements.² We use globalization less as a social scientific and economic

1 | The definition of the concept of the “West” is blurred and differs according to the context. From a geographical point of view it comprehends America and Europe, but sometimes – in distinction to the “East” – it can include Africa, the Arab world and Southern Asia. Furthermore, the concept refers to a “values community” based on the proclamation of human and citizens’ rights and the legacy of the French and American revolutions. When we speak of the “West” we mean primarily that normative project of the modern age and modernism comprising the “achievements” of political enlightenment since the end of the 18th century.

2 | On the concept of “globalization and its scope” see Osterhammel, Jürgen/Petersson, Niels P. (2003): *Geschichte der Globalisierung. Dimensionen, Prozesse, Epochen*. Munich: C.H. Beck. The sociological globalization discourse is very heterogeneous and refers to networks (John Urry), network societies (Manuel Castells),

leitmotif and more as a contemporary diagnostic concept in order to describe specific structures and interactions in the art field.

And although the neo-liberal model of free trade is customarily cited as a prototype of global development, globalization cannot be reduced to an economic dimension. The idea of cultural globalization starts from increased contact and a mixture of heterogeneous cultures around the world, which were formerly isolated or only occasionally or peripherally linked with one another – a process of cultural reproduction which gives rise regionally and locally to new kinds of virtual neighborhood which are fragile and pervaded by breaks and contradictions.³ This process involves a more or less paradox dynamics of contemporaneous and parallel cultural homogenization, whose results are often characterized as “glocalization” (Roland Robertson), “hybridization” (Homi K. Bhabha) or “creolization” (Stuart Hall), in which global and local elements are reciprocally transformed and reorganized and lead to a merging of differing cultural elements. It is created discursively and is mostly affected by relationships of dominance.

It is clear that the morphological and structural changes in the art field described above cannot fail to affect the distribution and weighting of the economic and symbolic factors. The map of the art field is being transformed. With the upheaval at the end of the 1980s not a few representatives of the art world saw the end of the Western monopoly looming on the horizon, not only in the art market but also in the status system of art and in regard to the power of definition over what art is and what can be included in an extended global canon founded on the history and science of art. Even the idea of the concept of art coined by Western modernism seems to have been overrun and challenged by the development.

Are we then on the way to a global art world without a center or a periphery? The readings and interpretations of these transformations differ substantially in this regard. Whereas some of the actors and observers expect a stronger interlacing of the institutions of the art world on the periphery with the established Western art field, others simply

transformation processes (David Held), “globality” as a new orientational framework and a new age (Martin Albrow) or “global cities” (Sakia Sassen) to name only a few examples.

3 | See Appadurai, Arjun (1996): *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

register a further expansion and reinforcement of Western positions at a global level. The massively extended global practice of art production and art distribution apparently challenges Western art as it has developed over the last 150 years along with the accompanying modern canon – not least because modernism itself, which has been directly associated with progressive European expansion, Eurocentrism, the ideology of progress, universalistic claims and modern capitalism since the age of colonization, has been disputed and questioned by a part of the world of art experts. In the art world the concept modern is scarcely ever used and instead the talk is mostly about contemporary art. This can be understood as an unmistakable sign of the transformation process, although a linear equation of global art and contemporary art as global contemporary seems highly questionable and problematic. This is so not only because, from an ethnographic point of view, it involves a disdainful narrative in which cultural circles are included which were and are remote from the Western topos of art. Contemporary art as a global universal concept of art which unites the practices and traditions of all places thus remains highly unspecific.

On taking a closer look the frequently postulated unlimited, so called flat and cosmopolitan art world quickly turns out, however, to be an illusion. It manifests itself only at the top of the hierarchically structured art field, where a global clientele of super-rich collectors buys contemporary art on an increasingly globalized and no longer nationally or culturally structured market. And the art they buy is produced by a relatively small circle of internationally renowned artists and marketed by equally select, transnationally operating galleries and auction houses. In business transactions in this top segment several borders are often crossed at one and the same time. It is, for example, standard practice that collectors from Western art metropolises acquire through galleries abroad the works of Latin American or Asian artists who themselves live and work in a Western art center. Or collectors from emerging countries might in the same way procure the works of Western artists. Whereas this top segment has in the meantime been largely deterritorialized, the great part of the art market continues to be enclosed within national and cultural borders. Here the artists, the art trade, the buyers and collectors belong for the greatest part to the same cultural circle.

The weak inclusivity can be explained, above all, by the strongly hierarchical structure of the art field. The three large economic areas of Europe, the USA and China also dominate the global art market; in

2013 the rest of the world had only a 6 per cent share in the market.⁴ The distribution of the art market corresponds to the density of the institutions in the regions. Scarcely any museums, academies, galleries or art exhibitions can be found in many parts of Africa, Asia or Latin America. Even in China the numbers lag far behind those in the European states.⁵ In these regions the process of the institutionalization of art, which first renders it visible, is still in its infancy; they have not gone through a historical development similar to that in the West. This indicates, in spite of all the internationalization effects, the continuing massive geographical disparities in the world of art. These processes of concentration or unequal distribution are often cited as evidence against the widely attested push towards globalization. Moreover, numerous empirical studies can be quoted against the established narrative of the globalization of the art field, which continue to point out the high level of hierarchization in the field, the low inclusivity and the maintenance of Western dominance on account of the strong incline between the center and the periphery.⁶

4 | See McAndrew, Clare (2014). *TEFAF Art Market Report 2014*. Helvoirt: European Fine Art Foundation, p. 22.

5 | The data bank of Artfacts lists world-wide around 31,500 institutions in the art field. The list is headed by the front-runners USA (5,746) and Germany (5,223), followed by France (2,444), Great Britain (2,033) and Italy (1,972). China (591) and Hong Kong (141) have just about as many art institutions as Belgium. Other Asian states such as India (170), Indonesia (61) or Thailand (43) are also on the bottom ranks. Only Japan (765) and South Korea (464) can more or less keep up with the level of West European states. And even in the so called BRICS states Brazil (284), Russia (203) or South Africa (144) art institutions are still not widespread (as of 22nd of October 2015).

6 | Buchholz, Larissa/Wuggenig, Ulf (2004): *Cultural Globalization between Myth and Reality: The Case of the Contemporary Visual Arts*. In: *Art-e-Fact*, 4. Bydler, Charlotte (2011): *Global Contemporary? The Global Horizon of Art Events*. In: Harris, Jonathan (ed.), *Globalization and Contemporary Art*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 464-478. Baia Curioni, Stefano (2012): *A Fairy Tale: The Art System, Globalization, and the Fair Movement*. In: Lind, Maria/Velthuis, Olav (eds.), *Contemporary Art and Its Commercial Markets: A Report on Current Conditions and Future Scenarios*. Berlin: Sternberg, 115-151. Quemin, Alain (2012): *The Internationalization of the Contemporary Art World and Market. The Role of Nationality and Territory in a sup-*

CHINA'S RISE TO THE STATUS OF A GLOBAL PLAYER

A massive shift in the regional weightings and the zones of influence on the international art market can, nonetheless, be observed since the turn of the millennium. China suddenly appeared as if from nowhere on the map of the international art trade. Until recently the continuously growing art market was dominated unchallenged by the USA and the West European states. In the year 2013 the story of globalization acquired a new dimension and accentuation: China overtook the USA as the art trade center with the highest turnover in the world, if only for a time.

China's share in the global art market increased from 23 per cent in the year 2010 to 30 per cent in 2011, thus overtaking the USA, which had a share of 29 per cent. The Chinese auction market grew by 177 per cent in 2010 alone and by 64 per cent in 2011.⁷ Among the five most successful artists on the auction market in 2011 there were three Chinese. The Chinese landscape painter Zhang Daqian even superseded Picasso, taking the top place as the artist with the highest turnover. The most expensive picture of the year sold at an auction was painted by Qi Baishi.⁸

However the boom quickly came to an end. In the years 2012 to 2014 China's share in the global art market fell back to 22 per cent.⁹ The prices also sank considerably, illustrating how volatile the art market is precisely in the emergent regions. But in spite of the drop the "Middle Kingdom" remained the most important of all the new art markets in regard to both the market volume and to the importance of the buyers world-wide.¹⁰

This development brought numerous actors and institutions of the Western art world on to the scene, who began to expand their activities to

posedly 'globalized' sector. In: Lind, Maria/Velthuis, Olav (eds.), *Contemporary Art and Its Commercial Markets: A Report on Current Conditions and Future Scenarios*. Berlin: Sternberg, 53-83.

7 | The figures derive from: McAndrew, Clare (2012): *The International Art Market in 2011. Observations on the Art Trade over 25 Years*. Helvoirt: European Fine Art Foundation.

8 | See Artprice (2012): *Art Market Trends 2011*. Saint-Romain-au-Mont-d'Or.

9 | McAndrew, Clare (2015): *TEFAF Art Market Report 2015*. Helvoirt: European Fine Art Foundation.

10 | See McAndrew, Clare (2014): *TEFAF Art Market Report 2014*. Helvoirt: European Fine Art Foundation.

include this region of the world. The first art fairs were initiated, galleries from Europe and the USA opened branches in China, the big auction houses attempted to penetrate the growth market via Hong Kong. This strategy was accompanied by endeavors to school and refine Asian taste in art in order to make it accessible first of all for the import of Western art commodities.

How strong the temptations of the potential of such an emerging economy were for the actors of the Western art field is impressively demonstrated by the example of the Art Basel. As early as 2005 what is probably the most important art fair in the world arranged a panel on contemporary Chinese art and the future of museums in China. This was followed in 2006 by a first official appearance in China: at the National Art Museum of China a discussion meeting was held in the series “Art Basel Conversations” under the title “China: New Opportunities in the Global Art Arena” with the support of the Ministry of Culture of the Chinese People’s Republic and the Swiss ambassador in Beijing. “Art Basel works to build a giant bridge between Chinese contemporary art and international contemporary art, and perhaps this is one more reason why it remains so influential”, the director of the National Art Museum at the time, Fan Di’an, acknowledged at the opening.

Nonetheless, it took a lot of time until, in the summer of 2011, the starting pistol for expansion was fired. After its expansion to the USA in 2002 with its offshoot Art Basel Miami Beach, the Art Basel also entered the Asian market with the takeover of the Hong Kong International Art Fair, which was, according to Magnus Renfrew, the Art Basel director at the time, already “one of the must-see events on the global art calendar”, at which numerous renowned galleries from the West were already represented. In May 2013 the fair took place for the first time under the management of the Art Basel. The art fair in Hong Kong thus finally discarded the status of a regional niche fair, which it had shared with other comparable events in the Chinese and South East Asian area since its foundation in 2007. And the Art Basel, now with three fairs on three continents, itself acquired the status of a global brand in the field of art.

HONG KONG AS A BRIDGEHEAD

As has been said above, China has in the meantime become a global player on the art market. The former British crown colony Hong Kong, since 1997 again a part of the Chinese People's Republic, is, together with Beijing and Shanghai, the center of the Chinese art trade. The city is now one of the four largest trading centers for art in the world. Although the city government has for a long time pursued a purposeful policy of promoting and financing cultural institutions which laid the cornerstone for the rise of a vibrant art market, the establishment of the city as the creative hub in the Asian-Pacific area, and the parallel assertion of the claim to be a global cultural metropolis, have only taken place in the last 10 years. Apart from the auction houses Christie's and Sotheby's, important galleries from North America and Europe such as Gagosian, White Cube, Perrotin or Pace have also set up branches in Hong Kong since 2008. The mixture of auction houses, galleries, artists, collectors and curators, the West Kowloon Cultural District, which was developed for 2.8 billion US dollars, and the Museum Plus (M+), to be opened in 2018, as its future core, have made Hong Kong an emerging center of the international art market and the art scene.

As already mentioned in the preface the metropolis of Hong Kong is an ideal territory for an exemplary case study examining the specific national and international conditions, structures and processes of the art world. As an Asian-European epicenter the city has, from a historical standpoint, also been a center for the transfer and migration of ideas and cultural goods. In this privileged location the mechanisms of transnationalization and regionalization involved in the art market and the processes of transcultural interdependence can be illuminated and evaluated in exemplary fashion.

The observable economic developments are, however, only of secondary importance in regard to the starting point of our study. Instead we are primarily interested in describing and analyzing globalization as both an economic and cultural phenomenon with the help of a methodically multidimensional approach. The initiation and acceleration of globalization of the art market in Hong Kong and China, indubitably the product of American-European hegemony in the art market, encounters a massively different socio-historical formation of cultural preconditions in the East Asian region. Consequently the "Middle Kingdom" and especially Hong

Kong as an epicenter can be utilized as a kind of laboratory of globalization from which knowledge of the structure, manner of functioning and dynamics of this special sphere of social production and reproduction can be gained. These processes are highly insightful precisely because the emergence and existence of the sphere of art is characterized by a highly culture-specific context which massively determines the nature of the market.

The particular significance of these processes results from the conjuncture of different factors which overlap and mutually reinforce one another in the object of our research. On the one hand we have the rapidly growing economic importance of the art market, which has not only developed into a privileged place for investment and speculation over the last 20 years but also reveals processes of transformation which affect the internal relationship of a quite specific market situation. On the other hand the object of study is for precisely this reason an interesting terrain for social scientific enquiry, and particularly for questions concerning the special characteristics of markets for symbolic goods or the functions they fulfill in regard to stabilization or transformation of cultural, social and normative hierarchies.

What happens in a country whose economic opening up after decades of isolation also leads to a cultural reorientation? What kind of productive misunderstandings arise here between the traditional understanding of art and Western structures of art mediation and evaluation? What happens when a world-famous art fair which functions as a kind of temporary gallery mall penetrates an emerging art market in which, in contrast to the West, galleries have hitherto played scarcely any part as gatekeepers and intermediaries between artists and buyers, collectors and a public interested in art? How are intercultural divergences and convergences constructed, enacted and symbolized? How is this order thematized and legitimated by its directors, the actors of the art world? And how is it perceived by the visitors and buyers who are interviewed? What transformations in the manners of perception and judgment can be ascertained?

The list of interesting questions can be extended at will without any reasonably satisfactory answer being found. The art field is not a self-contained sphere, but involves instead a contest of forces which is both internally and externally open. It presents a challenge not only to the knowledge of the “other” and the “far away” but also to the ideas, standards and practices of one’s own cultural circle.

The interfaces between Chinese and Western culture are concerned not least with the clear socio-historical asynchrony, different concepts of authenticity and originality, cultural divergences and differences in mentality between a Western understanding of art developed historically step by step since the 19th century and the emergent field of art on its periphery. The encounter between this dominant socio-historical setting of the Western art field and the particular cultural characteristics of the emergent field, which involves no less than a so called cultural gap, is one of the frequently repeated themes of the actors in the Western art field in their contacts with “alien” forms of the appropriation of art. “The only way that they could really experience it was through photographing themselves in front of the piece”, a gallerist explained in a discussion, “just hundreds of people around us doing the same [...] But no one ever spoke to us. There were no conversations, no engagement at all. They had no interest in having any conversations with you. Even collectors, but the audience also. They treated us as shop assistants. [...] I don’t think they understood what a gallery did or anything like that. [...] It is totally a completely different place. I felt like I had gone back 40 years. I really don’t think that they experience the work in the same way. I think there is a long way to go there.”

It is not surprising, therefore, that the spellbound eyes of the art world are on the events in China. But what can one see with Western eyes in this geographically and culturally distant, even exotic region and how can one assess its assumed entry into in the contemporary world? What stories can be heard when one speaks with dozens of actors from the Western art field about this new El Dorado of the art market and records expert opinions of widely differing provenance – from gallerists, collectors, museum staff, representatives of auction houses or curators?

From the many-voiced Western choir of the art world, recorded at various locations in Europe and the USA, a colorful kaleidoscope of images of the “other world” emerges, which is nourished by sporadic encounters on journeys, educated middle-class knowledge, spectacular and spectacularizing media reports, culture-specific stereotypes and current myths and assessments underpinned by market analyses and statistical key data. Again and again such dialogues create the impression that this emerging region of the global art world presents a projection screen for partly promising, partly alarming scenarios rather than a terrain surveyed in accordance with rational viewpoints and empirically

well-founded insights. Each dialogue partner provides a specific image of the dynamics of the expanded art market, whose perspective is determined by the position adopted and transports various combinations of economic, political, geographical, historical or sociological interpretative patterns. As the respondents are all without exception actors and connoisseurs of the art world, they usually possess a more or less distinctive insider knowledge of the structures and dynamics of their life world, which is, however, always nourished by current plausibility structures and supposedly self-evident assumptions and expectations of the Western tradition of modern art with its 150 years-long history and a resultant high degree of self-reference. This leads again and again to ethnocentric generalizations of the personal socio-historical background and the projection of habitualized patterns of perception and thinking onto unfamiliar realities.

In what follows we will first of all condense these insights and outlooks on the Far East from the perspective of Western actors of the art world to a kaleidoscope, which will, as a next step, be confronted with the insights gained on the spot from local actors. The confrontation with the appropriation of the “other” is subjected here to a critical revision. It turns out that the Western viewpoint adopted from an apparently privileged and superior position seems more and more questionable the closer one comes to the object of study. Like the Western public the majority of the actors from the Western centers of the art world continue to follow the familiar ethnic patterns.





