

ART HISTORY AS A GLOBAL DISCIPLINE

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What is the shape, or what are the shapes, of art history across the world? Is it becoming global — that is, does it have a recognizable form wherever it is practiced? Can the methods, concepts, and purposes of Western art history be suitable for art outside of Europe and North America? And if not, are there alternatives that are compatible with existing modes of art history?

The book you are about to read takes off from problems like these. Since the Art Seminar roundtable in spring 2005, world art history and the globalization of the discipline have attracted increasing interest. Several books are in press at the same time as this one. A volume called *World Art Studies*, edited by Wilfried van Damme and Kitty Zijlmans (who also contributes an Assessment to this book) is forthcoming, and, in the odd logic of publishing, it contains a brief essay of mine, in which I contemplate the results of this project. At the moment, in autumn 2006, the subject is still entrancingly disorganized. It is not quite a field of study, even given the inception of programs in Leiden and East Anglia that aim to teach “world art studies.” A sign of the relative novelty of

the subject is the fact that despite extensive efforts, we could not find anyone who would contribute the kind of synoptic, historical Introduction that other volumes in this series have — one that would survey the history of art history's awareness of its geographic spread. This Introduction has no such ambitions; it was originally one of the essays that were precirculated among the panelists of the roundtable; some others are presented in Section 2. All I aim to do here is set out ten informal talking points: five reasons why art history might be considered to comprise several different practices, which vary from one place to another; and then five more reasons why art history can be considered as a single, fairly cohesive enterprise — not one that is homogeneous certainly, and not one that is distributed evenly around the world, but a field that shares some basic concepts and purposes. In the first case, art history would not be global because it would be several enterprises that happen to share a name — either that, or the current diffusion of Western models of art history would be weakening and melting into many local practices. In the second case, art history would be global, or on its way to becoming so. (I will note in passing that a global art history would be very approximately comparable to science. A field like physics, for example, can be said to share a rigorously defined set of assumptions and protocols no matter where it is practiced. A worldwide practice of art history would have a looser, less quantitative version of that kind of coherence: it would be a field some of whose assumptions, founding texts, interpretive protocols, and institutional forms are compatible wherever they are taught.)

The ten points, five on each side, are not meant to cover the field or even to introduce the writers who have contributed to this volume; I mean only to offer hooks on which to hang the conversation. This book is full of scholarly references to a bewilderingly wide range of cultures and literatures. I thought it would be best, in the absence of a historical introduction, to start with these two

loose and open-ended lists. At the end I'll say something of my own stake in all this.

I

I begin, then, with five arguments against the idea that art history is, or could become, a single enterprise throughout the world.

1. *What counts as "art history" in many countries is newspaper art criticism.*

In smaller and developing countries, newspaper art criticism normally serves as art history, so that reviews and exhibition brochures compose the written self-description of the country's art. In Paraguay there is a brilliant critic named Ticio Escobar: he knows postcolonial theory and visual culture, and in a country like Germany or France he could be employed in an art history department. But he writes cultural criticism and art theory, somewhat along the lines of Homi Bhabha or Nestor García Canclini, rather than art history. When I visited Paraguay in 2002, there were no art historians, and the only newspaper art criticism was being written by Olga Blinder, a painter at the Instituto del Arte Superior in Asunción. Her essays range over the history of Paraguayan modernism, and so they constitute an ad hoc history, but one focused mainly on personal appreciations of painters. There is also a book on Paraguayan modernism (and another), but it is mainly a collection of biographical facts and critical descriptions. There is no developed field of art historical research. The available texts could be said, without injustice, to be either biographical appreciations or postcolonial cultural criticism that does not have the history of fine art as its primary focus.

Around 2002 the Getty Research Institute funded a translation project, intended to produce English translations of major art historical texts from around the world.

I was at one of the preliminary meetings, and one of the issues that became apparent right at the outset was a disagreement over what might count as art history. Several of us at the meeting said that when it came to art of the past two centuries, the project should really concentrate on newspaper art criticism and on essays of the kind that appear in exhibition brochures. We wondered how many countries don't have art history as a discipline at all — Paraguay was one — and how many countries would understand art criticism to be art history. (That meeting was inconclusive, and in the end the translation project focused on major, indisputably art historical texts.)

2. *Art history, as a named discipline and a department in universities, is principally known in North America and Western Europe.*

One way to measure the presence or absence of art history in different parts of the world is to look at the number of universities that have departments of art history. There is no definitive list, and even if there were, the results would be blurred by the existence of art schools and art academies, which often have art historians on staff, although it can be impossible to determine which have degrees in art history and which are artists or critics. A country may have one or more universities that have history of art departments, and other universities that offer a few courses in art history in various departments. In Colombia, for instance, Andrés Gratán of the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana informed me that there are six other universities in Bogotá that have art history courses, and also two in Cali, two in Medellín, and one each in Santa Marta, Cartagena, and Bucaramanga. That list includes a couple of art academies, and most of the universities he named do not have art history departments; instead they

have departments of Communication or Design with art historians on staff. It would be necessary to visit in order to determine how many of the instructors are trained in art history.

At the University College Cork in 2004–6 we assembled a database of nearly eight hundred institutions worldwide that have art history departments, centers, or programs. At present it is the world's largest database of universities that use "art history" or its cognates to identify academic units. Even though that criterion is subject to discussion — for example, it misses most of the institutions Grátán named because they do not have art history departments — we have some indications that the list is nearly complete. Art historians from Finland, Jordan, Singapore, Germany, and Denmark wrote us during 2004–5, giving definitive lists of institutions in their countries that offer art history, and their lists have corresponded well with ours. On that admittedly insecure ground I have drawn some tentative conclusions about how widespread art history is as a named discipline. (The full results will appear in a book on canons in art history, edited by Anna Brzyski, which is currently in press.)

The approximate number of institutions with departments of art history in Ireland and the United Kingdom is 97. The number for continental Europe, including Turkey (which has 10 universities with art history departments), is 193. German-speaking countries have 50 institutions and the United Kingdom and Ireland roughly double that, which indicates — against a claim sometimes made in central Europe — that most art history is written in English, not German. Eastern Europe and southeastern Europe have relatively few institutions with art history departments: our database has two in Slovakia (one, the

Slovak Academy of Sciences, is very active), two in Romania, and two in Bulgaria.

The number for the United States and Canada is 226, so it appears there is more art history being taught in the States than in all of Europe. (Another caveat here is that smaller colleges in North America are likely to incorporate art departments, so that what would in Europe be art colleges and academies are counted disproportionately.) For South America and Central America the number is 48, although here as in Africa and parts of Asia the numbers are low largely because of the institutions' sporadic Internet presence. The actual number might be more on the order of 80. For Africa our database has 79 institutions, a number that is raised by a recent publication by the University of Maryland, which gives addresses for sub-Saharan countries, but lowered by the very uneven web presence of African institutions. I was amazed to discover that as of spring 2006 the Ahmadu Bello University in Nigeria, the country's largest with 32,000 students, had no official web page. Our database has 17 universities with art history departments in Australia and New Zealand; 65 in China, Japan, and Korea; 36 in southeast Asia excluding Australia; and another half-dozen in central Asia, where the low numbers partly reflect the Islamic tradition, and partly, in central Asia, the influence of the Soviet system that placed art academies and art history outside of universities.

This survey is incomplete in the ways I have mentioned, and also in that it has no entries for countries that I assume may have universities with art history departments, such as Belarus, Moldova, and Andorra in Europe; or Guinea, Liberia, Togo, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Somalia in Africa. But the University College Cork database is fairly accurate and reasonably

exhaustive, and it suggests that as a discipline and as a unit within universities, art history is very much a North American and western European phenomenon.

3. *Art history is closely affiliated with senses of national and regional identity.*

It is a not-so-harmless truism that art historians' interests have traditionally been driven by their senses of what visual art in their own cultures seem most important. Hans Belting's wonderful little book *The Germans and Their Art: A Troublesome Relationship* chronicles, in a merciless fashion, the dependence of generations of German art historians on changing ideas of Germany. In the decades immediately after the Second World War, for example, the question of the nature of German art could hardly be raised, he says, because of the partitioning of the country. At other times, German art history was driven by notions of the essential Germanness of certain centuries, especially the late middle ages, or the supposed Germanness of artists such as Dürer or Holbein. (Oskar Bätschmann has also written some excellent pages on this subject.) Belting's book is a salutary read for anyone who assumes that art historians are driven by purely personal passions, unconnected to politics, or by a disinterested sense of historical veracity. Senses of nationalism or ethnicity have been the sometimes explicit impetus behind art historical research from its origins in Vasari and Winckelmann. The current interest in transnationality, multiculturalism, and postcolonial theory has not altered that basic impetus but only obscured it by making it appear that art historians are now free to consider themes that embrace various cultures or all cultures in general.

A few years ago, I was working on a book called *Stories of Art*, which is intended as a response to E.H. Gombrich's

ubiquitous and very Eurocentric *Story of Art*. In the course of researching my book, I looked up as many introductory surveys of art history as I could find. In the second half of the twentieth century, Gombrich's book was the world's best seller, followed by Helen Gardner's and — at a distant third — by Horst Janson's. (In India and China, pirated and sometimes lightly rewritten editions may be more common than the copyrighted originals.) A number of countries have produced their own introductory art history textbooks, and I have seen examples printed in the last quarter-century in Paraguay (as I mentioned), Egypt, Romania, Iran, Japan, India, Cambodia, the Czech Republic, Australia, and Turkey. Those books tend to be deeply nationalistic in motivation, and their nationalism can strongly affect their content. Burhan Toprak's *Sanat Tarihi* (1960), a Turkish textbook, tells the history of art from Prehistory to gothic architecture and the Mérode altarpiece. Perhaps Chartres and the Mérode altarpiece seemed too Christian or too European for the author, because he veers aside and ends his survey with two chapters on Hindu art and Japan. That arrangement may seem imbalanced, but my argument in *Stories of Art* is that it is better understood as a contrast with texts like Gombrich's, which are just as nationalist or regionalist in their own different ways.

A slippery problem lies in wait here, because it may be impossible to read a book like Toprak's as a viable, independent history of art rather than as a certain *excerpt* from the history of art: in other words, it may be not so much habit that makes Gombrich more congenial, as much as the structure of art history itself, which may be based on purposes that are themselves European and North American. That treacherous problem aside, the patent

nationalism of individual art histories is another cogent argument against the notion that art history is global.

4. *Art history seems to be dissolving into image studies or visual studies.*

Given the rapid increase in the proliferation of art historical research on all subjects, it can appear that art history is growing in such a way that it will soon encompass all visual practices, and lose the sense of itself as a discipline. There was an interesting exchange of essays in 2003 in the *Journal of Visual Culture*, in which nine scholars responded to something Mieke Bal had written, celebrating the dissolution of disciplinary boundaries. Some of the respondents, including me, were roundly criticized by Bal in her reply for allegedly trying to police the boundaries of art history. Bal is at one extreme of the spectrum of ideas about disciplinarity and de-disciplinarity, but her exhilaration at the destruction of disciplines could be in line with the majority opinion.

An increasing amount of work tries to mix art history with neighboring disciplines (for example, the journals *Representations*, *Res*, *Critical Inquiry*, *Kritische Berichte*). Also, a rapidly growing number of journals are associated with visual studies, for instance the *Journal of Visual Culture*, *Parallax*, *Invisible Culture* (that is published on the web at Rochester), *Cultural Studies*, *Third Text*, and even *Screen* and *diacritics*. Scholars with an interest in post-colonial studies, such as John Clark, and those whose work is informed by interests outside art history, such as Craig Clunas, can come — by very different routes — to a way of writing that works very differently from art history.

All this could be taken as a sign that art history as we might recognize it is on the verge of disappearing. Certainly there are a number of departments worldwide that

are currently threatened by visual studies. It is another question whether that means the study of painting, sculpture, and architecture will be edged out, first by film studies, video, and new media, and then by the study of advertising, television, and eventually such things as graffiti and tattoos. There are universities where that is exactly what is happening, and the question is whether that is the wave of the future, or a fad that can be resisted. If visual studies becomes ubiquitous, then art history may get a bit lost, whether or not it is a coherent enterprise at the moment.

5. *My last reason to wonder about the worldwide coherence of the discipline is that there are different kinds of publications for different art historians.*

This is an especially vexed question. It's true that there are certain publications that have less to do with what gets called "theory," for example, *The Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, *Journal of Architectural Historians*, *Acta historiae artium*, the *Annual Report of the American Academy in Rome*, *The Burlington Magazine*, *Antike Kunst*, *Artibus Asiae*, *Ars Orientalis*, the *Zeitschrift des Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz*, *Hesperia*, *Master Drawings*, *Oud Holland*, *Studies in Iconography*, *Antichità viva*, *Antologia di Belle Arti*, *Archivo Español de Arte*, the *Römisches Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, *History of European Ideas*, *Bollettino d'Arte*, and *Storia dell'arte*.

It is also true that some journals seem to be more invested in what gets called "theory": for instance *October*, *Representations*, *Critical Inquiry*, the French journal *Critique*, the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, the *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, *Kritische Berichte*, *Qui parle*, *SubStance*, *Heresies*, *diacritics*, *boundary 2*, or *Glyph*.

These two lists are excerpted from my book *Our Beautiful, Dry, and Distant Texts: Art History as Writing*, in which I argue that the difference between “theory” and “practice” names a divide within the discipline, and that it can be observed in something as simple as a checklist of periodicals. Despite a lot of effort on the part of “theorists” to claim that there is no distinction between those who explicitly use theories and those who say they don’t, the bibliographic division is a real one, and it reflects a disciplinary division. In the larger universities in western Europe and North America, this may seem like a pseudo-problem because there may not be any people who describe themselves as not using “theory”: but in smaller universities and countries, the distinction is very real, and it affects the social interactions of the discipline as well as the choice of publications.

(I have suggested to some intransigent theory-types that if they believe there is no difference between these kinds of journals they try publishing something in, say, *The Burlington Magazine*. It’s not that easy to do.)

It is also true that some theories are limited in their appeal; they become briefly popular, and then they disappear. Semiotics was revived at least four different times in the past century: once by the Prague linguistic school, again by Meyer Schapiro, by Hubert Damisch in the 1970s, and then by a number of scholars in the 1990s, including Mieke Bal. Anthropological theories of liminality, derived from Victor Turner, were very popular in the mid-1980s. I remember Norman Bryson chaired a session in one of the College Art Association meetings called “What Use Is Deconstruction Anyway?” and a similar session was chaired by T.J. Clark on the question of De Man’s relevance for art history.

I would not deny that the discipline is fragmented by infatuations with more or less evanescent theories. But there is also a counter-argument, and so now I'll turn to the second part of my Introduction: five arguments in favor of the idea that art history is, or could become, a single coherent enterprise throughout the world.

II

1. *It can be argued, against the previous claim, that some of the best scholarship in the field is done by writers who know a lot about theories, and conversely that scholars who are not conversant with theories run the risk of producing texts that are out of touch.*

This is a delicate subject, so I'll give just a few examples. Clark's *Farewell to an Idea* is, I think, one of the best books on modern art that has been produced in the last few decades. It seems to engage theories in an elliptic and idiosyncratic way, but it is actually built around deeply considered responses to Hegel, poststructuralism in general (and semiotics in particular), and especially Paul De Man. Although it may not appear so, Michael Fried is another example: his books include encounters with phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and a range of philosophers from Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein to Robert Vischer. In medieval art history there is Michael Camille; any assessments of his relation to Meyer Schapiro, for example, would have to take on board Camille's understanding of poststructuralism and especially Derrida.

If I were to go on in this vein, the claim would be that art history is potentially unified because the writers in fullest command of relevant theories are also those who are in fullest command of the possibilities of the discipline. There might be a parallel here to a discipline like physics, although I don't want to make too much of it: in physics, a researcher who does not know the most recent

theories can presumably go on working, but her results will fail to attract the attention of physicists who were working on the current issues in the field. Emphasizing theories — even evanescent ones — as evidence that art history is potentially a coherent field around the world is also a way of saying that it is the methods of art history, and not its subject matter, that effectively unify the field.

2. *The distinction between art history and art criticism still holds.*

Depending on your point of view regarding what David Carrier calls “artwriting,” you might want to argue that art history and criticism are blurred or that their boundaries cannot be drawn with any useful degree of precision. I would argue that it is both easy and useful to distinguish the two, and that they can be separated using institutional, contextual, and commercial criteria.

Institutionally, art criticism is wholly excluded from universities. There are classes on the *history* of art criticism — on Baudelaire for example, or on the reception of the New York School — but nothing on how to write art criticism. That subject is occasionally taught in art schools, but its rigorous exclusion from universities is a sign that it differs clearly from art history. Contextually and commercially, art history is produced for different venues. Criticism can be found, of course, in magazines and newspapers, but art history is seldom found there. (The two do mix, at a grossly adulterated level, on television.)

There is much more to be said about this; volume 4 in this series, *The State of Art Criticism*, investigates it at length. In this context I’ll just note that the same separation I assumed in the first point, at the beginning of this Introduction, can also be used to urge that art history *is* unified because wherever it exists it can be distinguished from art criticism.

3. *Art history remains focused on a specific canon of artists.*

I wonder if an informal poll of art historians might not show that most of us think that there is effectively no longer a canon in art history, if only because the discipline is expanding so quickly and so unpredictably. “Canon” is an odd-sounding word in art history because we have avoided the major debates about the canon (what were called the “canon wars”) that sprang up in departments of literature and languages in the United States and Canada in the 1980s. The issue then was how to make room for women writers and writers from outside the West by displacing canonical figures like Plato or Sophocles. Art history avoided the canon wars by relying on the very large survey textbooks, which were simply enlarged to include artists of color, women artists, outsider artists, and post-colonial artists, without ever really displacing any artists that had composed the “canon.”

It is helpful in this regard to distinguish between *intensive* and *extensive* scholarship. If the growth of the discipline were characterized by extensive scholarship, art historians would be studying new artists, new media, and new kinds of visual practices at an increasing rate. If the discipline’s growth were due more to intensive scholarship, the field would be getting larger because there are increasing numbers of studies of the major artists — that is, the canon. In 1999 I got a special printout of two decades of entries of the *Bibliography of the History of Art*, one of the two largest databases in the discipline, from Michael Rinehart, who was then its editor. The printout arranges the scholarly output of the discipline according to the artists who were being written about. I collated the list and found that art history is still quite intensive: there is a canon of artists who are still studied disproportionately more than the many artists who have only been studied recently.

Here is the top-ten list for art history. The most frequently cited artists are as follows:

1. Picasso	757
2. Dürer	616
3. Rubens	600
4. Michelangelo	537
5. Leonardo	526
6. Raphael	460
7. Rembrandt	442
8. Titian	418
9. Goya	391
10. Palladio	377

In terms of media, note that this top-ten list includes only painting, sculpture, and architecture. As the list continues, it is clear that painting is really the canonical medium: it goes on past Van Gogh, Turner, and Cézanne to Tiepolo, Constable, and Lotto ... almost all the artists in the top one hundred are “dead white males”; all are European and North American; and virtually all are painters.

Looking at things the other way around, it is possible to count the number of artists who are cited only once, those who are cited just twice, and so forth, so for example:

Cited once	c. 10,000
Cited twice	c. 5,000
Cited three times	c. 1,400
Cited four times	1,105
Cited five times	715

In this count it becomes apparent that the discipline is also growing extensively, with nearly 20,000 different artists cited four or fewer times.

In statistical terms, there is a broad middle region between these seldom-cited artists and the “outliers” like Picasso: that is the canon of art history, and it corresponds

well with the contents of the large introductory art history textbooks. The full results will appear in the essay I mentioned in Brzyski's volume; all I mean to suggest here is that art history's exponential growth has been as much intensive as extensive, and it is still effectively unified by a canon of representative interests.

4. *Art history is guided by a stable series of narratives.*

The same claim can be made about art history's narratives, such as the story of the rise of illusionism told in Gombrich's *Art and Illusion*, and the familiar sequences of formal elements that lead from Greece and Rome through medieval uses to Renaissance "survivals" and postmodern "appropriations." Such narratives have been questioned by feminist art historians and augmented by postcolonial theory, queer theory, and disciplines such as literary theory, but they still give sense and structure to introductory texts.

It has been argued that specialized monographs in art history owe little to these large-scale narratives, but I am not so sure. The reason for studying a particular artwork or an individual artist must have to do with that artist's importance in the larger scheme of things. As art historians, I think we are still dependent on a relatively small number of plots. Books with titles like *Modern Cambodian Art* or *Modern Art in Tibet* will sometimes begin with promises not to be beholden to Western historiography or examples, but in my experience the authors soon find themselves deeply indebted not only to the inevitable Western comparisons (so-and-so Philippine painter is influenced by Bernard Buffet, and so forth) but also to the Western storylines of naturalism or antinaturalism, or even the Wölfflinian stories about successions of "classical" and "baroque" periods.

The grip of our accustomed narratives is best demonstrated by the few books that try to break the mold.

Stan Abe's *Ordinary Images*, a book about provincial Taoist bas-reliefs in China, includes anomalous examples on purpose, perhaps in order to upset the reader's expectations that the material will fit into neat style categories or period sequences. The result, for me, is sometimes a sense of a new kind of historical account, but more often a feeling of incompleteness, as if the narrative has not quite ended where it should. Another example would be Georges Didi-Huberman's work on Aby Warburg, *l'Image survivante*: it creates an alternate narrative for art history — one that is founded on Warburg's *Pathosformel* and Didi-Huberman's Lacanian interpretation of it — but I wonder if his approach will seem like a fruitful alternative for many historians. The grip of the familiar narratives is still very strong.

5. *Art history depends on Western conceptual schemata.*

Perhaps the most surprising fact about worldwide practices of art history is that there may be no conceptually independent national or regional traditions of art historical writing. Chinese art history, for example, demands expertise in very different kinds of source materials and formal concepts, but its interpretive strategies remain very Western. Chinese art historians, both in China and in universities in the West, study Chinese art using the same repertoire of theoretical texts and sources — psychoanalysis, semiotics, iconography, structuralism, anthropology, identity theory. They frame and support their arguments in the same ways Western art historians do: with abstracts, archival evidence, summaries of previous scholarship, and footnoted arguments.

I think it can be argued that there is no non-Western tradition of art history, if by that is meant a tradition with its own interpretive strategies and forms of argument.

Art historians in different countries vary in what they study, and there is a wide latitude in the kinds of interpretive methods that are employed. (Most scholarship, I think, still takes iconography as its principal or default model.) But there is no such thing as an independent narrative or scholarly approach to the writing of the history of art that can be understood *as* a history of art. There are ways of writing about art's history that developed in India from the seventh century, and in China from the Han Dynasty; but those texts are not recognizable *as* art history, and a simple proof of their distance from current practice is that no art historian who chose to emulate those texts could get a permanent position in a university. None of the Chinese specialists I know who teach in Western universities were hired because of their ability to deploy indigenous historiographic methods; but part of their qualifications would normally be the ability to negotiate the principal Western methods such as formal analysis and iconography.

This can also be put in more general terms. In 2000 I discovered that the basics of Western art history, such as formal analysis, periodization, and iconography, along with Chinese translations of Wölfflin, Panofsky, and Gombrich, were being taught in art academies in Beijing, Hangzhou, and Nanjing, where they were applied to both Chinese and non-Chinese art. Is that a sensible development? Shouldn't indigenous Chinese terms and methods be used to explicate Chinese art? Those questions, so apparently straightforward and self-evident, lead into thickets of problems — as the discussions in this book will show.

Some of the most ambitious books in art history in recent years attack this question of the Westernness of art history from widely differing perspectives. There is Hans Belting's *Bild-Anthropologie*, which expands art history

in the direction of a Continental sense of anthropology; John Clark's *Modern Asian Art*, which looks at east Asian art using institutional critique to evade some traditional Western categories; and most ambitious of all, David Summers's *Real Spaces*, which was one of the occasions for the roundtable in this book. All these books raise fundamental questions concerning the alternatives to art history as we know it, but by doing so, and still remaining clearly Western, they also demonstrate an underlying unity in art history.

Any one of these five reasons could be used to urge that art history is, or could become, a truly global enterprise. For better or worse, art history would then be thought of as a field whose subject matter changes with its location but whose assumptions, purposes, critical concepts, and narrative forms remain fairly consistent around the world.

III

My own feeling is that, by and large, these last five arguments are more compelling than the first five, and art history *is* becoming a global enterprise. One of the most interesting things about that possibility, I think, is that it creates an *obligation*. I'll close with a few words about that, even though it is not a theme that is developed in this book, and — as far as I can guess — may not be widely held by historians outside contributors to this book. To the extent that art history can be spoken of as a single problematic, it follows that what happens in art history in Austria, say, or in Russia, can have consequences for art history in, say, Ecuador or Singapore. That doesn't mean the *subject matter* of a monograph written in one country will be of immediate interest elsewhere, but that the *methods*, the *form* of the text, and the *questions* it raises may well be important for scholars in very different places. I don't think the subjects of art history need to be shared: an Irish art historian specializing in medieval church architecture may not need to

know about medieval Slovenian altars. But I do think that it is important to share the methods of art history: ideally an Irish or a Slovenian art historian will need to know Cao Yiqiang's account of renaissances, or Shigemi Inaga's interpretations of orientalisms. This would not be true if the common ground in art history is standard-issue iconography, or style analysis, because then I would not feel obligated to check to see *how* artworks are being interpreted in other places. But it will be true if the connections between local practices of art history reach deeper into the discipline. If world art studies deserves the name, then an art historian working in Estonia, for example, should not be able to afford to ignore what is being written by art historians in Argentina, Peru, or China: not because the Estonian art historian needs to know about Argentine modernism, Peruvian Moche pottery, or Chinese tomb reliefs, but because the Estonian art historian may need to know about the new interpretive methods and senses of history that are being tried on those very different kinds of objects.

At the same time I don't mean that it would be bad if art history divided into local practices: in fact it should be a matter of concern if art history does *not* divide into local practices. Primadi Tabrani's *Bahasa Rupa* is a book written in 2005 in Indonesian; it uses Marshall McLuhan and a mixture of Western sources to talk about twentieth-century southeast Asian painting and the southeast Asian qualities of Borobudur. As far as I can tell, that book wouldn't seem like art history if it were translated. (I suspect it would read like very idiosyncratic art criticism.) But I think it would matter if *Bahasa Rupa* came out sounding like a natural extension of western European art history (because that would be strange), and it would also matter if it sounded like nothing that could count as a plausible art history (because that would raise the question of what way of talking about those same objects and authors *could* sound like plausible art history).

A worldwide set of practices identifiable as art history poses a fascinating challenge. No one can read everything, but a worldwide

endeavor, especially one whose coherence is contested and problematic, requires worldwide reading. For me, that obligation is one of the principal reasons this subject is so interesting: no matter how art history develops (or dissolves), and even aside from the pressing political problems of the spread of Western practice, I think art history increasingly imposes an obligation to read widely and continuously, outside of any specialization.

That is just by way of introduction. It is a very different matter to ask what, exactly, constitutes art history's common language, and what historical, political, linguistic, and economic consequences that commonality might have: those are questions for the rest of this book.

