

Conclusion: Amorphous Boundaries

Taking a cue from the question posed by Harris, as to where do the forms of art categorised as global art come from, we move conclusively to address another important question, which is, of the very existence of any such strict category which can be called as global art; defined by particular characteristics, time period or regional specifications. If the single pedestal approach of globalisation and the threat of homogenisation looms over the contemporary connected world, how would the notions of culture, tradition, the indigenous and the local participate or could be absorbed. At the same time, it is evident that there is barely any dilution in the identity of the artists, as, belonging to particular nations or regions; given which, the backgrounds are bound to show their influence. Given the same, the geographic reference, relevance and insistence cannot be erased. In the last chapter, we began by understanding the global nodes of activities, that is the urban spaces. Understanding their physical and intangible character and the transformations that came about as an impact of globalisation. Then moving on to the connecting economic factors, which lay at the core of all global activities, aided by the technological proficiency. Then reading the manner in which various humanitarian concerns have been addressed, without being bound by the locational relevance, but of sheer empathy. Finally moving to the grounds of circulation of art, across the globe, through the large-scale exhibitions and the politics of projection of the works, especially of Indian artists in the global arena.

The constantly interactive exchanges across these nodes and through the networks of exchange have in a way led to the reconfiguring of our understanding of the local, ethnic, vernacular and the indigenous. One is reminded of Robertson and the concept of glocalisation, contributing to the formation of one's identity. At one point the East-West dichotomy seems to be dissolving as new spaces are constantly emerging in the East, and drawing western attention. The curators are wanting to select fresh talent from these spaces, at the same time, the Western artists are rarely aware of the practices of their Eastern counterparts, which according to David Clark, is not a two-way

process (Contemporary Asian Art and Its Western Reception, 2011, pp. 154-155). This is especially true when it comes to understanding the curatorial interest at the large-scale shows. These have come forth as new grounds and sites of meaning making and legitimisation, in the Lyotard-ian sense; where the notions of spectacle creation and the postmodern performativity dominate. Further on getting a status of prominence these also act as sites of production of taste, as proposed by Jameson. Such that the search for new, insists on the departure from what already exists and is being practiced. The play of the ethnic, rural, local or indigenous then seems to take varying tones. These could be understood either as intangible belief systems, or as mere physical and visual references, contributing to the formal aspect of the works.

For example, Sudarshan Shetty shuttles between times periods as he looks at culture as a product of the collective thought process of humans. In his work titled *Milk and Blood*, 2006, Shetty looks at the belief of abundance, which through the traditional beliefs is created by letting milk over boil and swell. A practice usually followed by people, while undertaking new ventures or settling in new homes. The notions of excess and flowing prosperity are core to this act. The artist, takes this notion to an extreme, and contemporises it, by replacing the ideal domestic kitchen setting by laboratory beakers, overflowing with white liquid. At the same time, he adds an ironic tone, by similarly placing beakers flowing with a red liquid, presumably blood, as suggested by the title. The fact that the blood flowing in excess, would usually connote an injury or even death, but the human here is absent. The countering of the notion of prosperity is presumed with the overflowing of milk, the artist counters it by staying that the overflowing of blood cannot be associated with a presence of a human body.

Sandip Pisalkar, a Baroda based sculptor, makes an attempt to explore notions of hybridity in a more physical and material form. In his work titled, *Skin/Beat*, moves from the sheer visual experience to that of a comment on the condition of the toiling class in the contemporary society. As is his tendency an impressive musical instrument – a drum, takes a larger than life presence. Designed to suit the traditional instrument the artist makes an urban intervention

by replacing the animal hide sheet on the percussion instrument by shirts of workers. Conventionally, tympanum created on the drum from the animal skin is the place used as the tapping space to create a sound. Pisalkar while drawing conceptually addresses the act of toiling, which was once done by animals. In the contemporary times, many such tasks have been taken over by migrant workers. To signify the same, he draws a parallel between the constant beating of the drum to the toiling of the workers; and therefore, substitutes the surface of the drum with the shirts of these workers. These shirts have the imprints of their toil and the character of their work on them. As a part of the metaphorical substitution, the artist picks visual and technical references which are specific to indigenous techniques, such that, there seems to be an evident mutation towards a more generalized meaning.



Figure Conclusion-1: Sandip Pisalkar, *Skin/Beat*, 2012. Mix medium

Shetty used the conceptual, and Pisalkar the visual as references for their respective works. Similarly, L. N. Tallur, as seen in *Chromatophobia*, used the traditional religious image of the god, in an unaltered form, while superimposing the notions of contemporary consumerism and urban growth. G. R. Iranna in some works has used the objects of ancient traditions and utilities, to that of a *charkha*, emblematic of political assertion of the stand of *swadeshi*, during the pre-independence period in India. When understanding these works there is an ease with which the notion of roots or indigeneity is associated with

them, as there evidently seems to be a borrowing from the visual, ideological and traditional practices of their country, especially from the historic or political past of India.

Given the nationality, the notion of indigeneity and roots, with respect to their works directly gets associated with the traditions of the country. At the same time, various artists have adopted notions of Indian philosophy and aesthetics as a part of their work. For example, Minette Mangahas, an American artist, with an interest in Asian sacred practices, chose to work on the concept of *abhishekha*; as an act of consecrating the foundation of a building. This work was done during a residency project in India, in 2015. From the exhibiting space, she chose a secluded spot, under the stairways on the lowest level. She neatly placed the bricks and anointed them with white colour, giving an effect of a closed *garbha-girha*. Though the borrowing of the concept of *abhishekha*, might have not been as convincing, but the visual certainly resembled an enclosed sanctum. By anointing the bricks with the red and yellow powder, she aimed at attaining an impact of sanctity through the visual aesthetics of the sacred space.



Figure Conclusion-2: Minette Mangahas, *Abhishekha*, 2015. Mix Medium

Similarly, Max Streicher, a Canadian artist, using his visual language and material, addressed the concept of *ashwamedh*. The tall inflatable sculptures, made from white nylon spinnaker, floated imposingly in the gallery. The two pristine white horses, large in stature, faced each other. Their posture

of galloping advancement added interesting dynamics to the already existing mobility granted to these works due to the very medium. Unlike Mangahas who used both the visual and conceptual referenced from the Indian tradition, Streicher, adopted the concept to suit his signature medium. Given the same, the notion of indigenous comes under question. As to both these artists these references are of foreign origin. Further, they are giving due credit to these references as the constructive elements of the conceptual framework, and not labelling them as a mere influence. Given the same, the notions of exoticizing the traditional or ritualistic practices of the East and adoption of the same as a foreign influence is broken. In these two cases, we looked at the long-existing, religious and political traditions from India which have been employed by these artists as conceptual cores; the same is valid when the conceptual borrowing is of the temporal and contemporary temporal issues, beyond borders.



Figure Conclusion-3: Max Streicher, Ashwamedh, 2010. Nylon spinnker

The same can be attested through the works of artists discussed earlier, who have been addressing issues which are / were beyond their local concerns, given which the regional, and locational-specificities dissolve. For example, as seen Susan Crile reacting on the atrocities at Abu Ghraib, or Atul Dodiya on the condition of women in Afghanistan, or Tejal Shah moving from a personal sphere to a larger one, where the connecting element is not based on the conventional identities, or of the rising consumerism seen in works of Koumudi

Patil and Sudarshan Shetty, which has engulfed countries regardless of their First or Third World status; the concerns evidently cross over the regional demarcations to address what can be called as a universalising sensibility; such that McLuhan's global village seems to be moving beyond the connectivity brought about by the technological progress, towards a more personal and human tone. At the same time, one has to understand the play of anomalies and ironies. For example, the rising capitalist and consumerist society has been a subject addressed by many artists. Many have tried to provide a critique of the same, by targeting the institutions of production and circulation of such tendencies. Given the increasingly commercialised art market, giving rise to a cult of artists as 'sought after brands' and the subsequent commoditisation of their works, it is interesting to see how artists resist the same while commenting on the economic principles they work. As Gompertz says,

How do you make a profound and heart-felt capitalist work, after having spent the previous evening at a swanky museum dinner sitting next to the head of some investment bank, who also happens to be one of your major collectors / clients? And how do you criticise the establishment, when you are a fully signed-up member of its inner circle? (What Are You Looking At? The Surprising, Shocking and Sometimes Strange Story of 150 Years of Modern Art, 2012, pp. 392-93)

Along with the humanitarian concerns of individuals living at a distance, which no longer seem distant, the aspects which highlight the hollowness of the globalised world, as seen with the example stated above, too form a part of the critique of the same.

These certainly have been outcomes of the world which is better connected, providing a chance to know and the liberty to act and react as desired. Having discussed about the notion of globalisation based on the growing connectivity, it is evident increasing number of cultures are becoming aware of other cultures and thereby the relativity of one's own culture. This to Thomas M. McEvelley, is the feeling of 'loss of conviction in the ultimacy of

the attitude of one's own culture' (Locating the Post-Modern, 1998, p. 140). This brings us back to the notion of postmodernity and the subsequent relativity; where artificially created borders and the hegemonic positions seem to hold less relevance, and what comes forth are open spheres of exchange. One could also relate it to the notion of 'denationalisation' as put forward by Margo Machida, such that the systems of cultural exchange play a more powerful role over the nation state. This has also been addressed by various scholars or practitioners as model for 'post-nationality' (Hanru & Obrist, 2011, p. 142). This is evident not just in the process of art making but in the new form of writing and exhibiting practices too; seen through the multivalent dialogues and critical perspectives put forward by the practitioners (Unsettled visions: Contemporary Asian American Artists and the Social imaginary, 2008, pp. 1-43).

Given the same, the examples stated above give an idea of not just the manner in which the works of art are presented, contextualised and read, at the important junctures of exchanges and interactions, like the large-scale show function, but as individual expressions, which are an outcrop of an expansive and universalising tendency. Such that the conceptual and the physical references are drawn from varied sources, regardless of their locational, regional limitations. Given the same, the need is not to define as to what can be categorised as global art, but of expanding the ways of reading the same. By defining a plural and composite approach which shall be capable of addressing these varying expressions, unshackled by demarcating limits of geographies, temporalities, and the political boundaries. In the contemporary globalised world, a composite approach of reading works of art and practices could be considered as a remedial approach towards Euro-centrism; taking us back to the debate on multi-modernism (Bilgin, 2016), before entering the postmodern situations for the respective countries / regions, based on their terms over those already define by those in the west. Considering the independent backgrounds Geeta Kapur and Jim Supangkat, propose the notion of multi-modernisms, for their respective homelands. In each case there is an opposition to the appropriation of the internationalist tendencies and the centre-periphery model. Though Kapur states that the reversal of the positions would not alter the model, but will just find replacements (When was Modernism: Essays on

Contemporary Cultural Practice in India, 2000, pp. 325-327). Supangkat while introducing the term multi-modernism, mentions as to how the modernism in Indonesia had existed even without any direct Euro-American association. He further stresses on the interrelation of multimodernism and multiculturalism, in terms of coexistence and distinctiveness over that of a mere assimilative attitude (Supangkat, 1996, pp. 70-81). One is reminded of David Summers's expression of fear as to how multiculturalism could slip into becoming mere compromised relativism (Elkins, 2007).

Parul Dave-Mukherji, in her paper titled, *Whither Art History? Whither Art History in a Globalizing World*, with reference to the contemporary practices and global condition, especially of Indian art, speaks of the colonial legacy and cultural nationalism, which burdens the reading of works of Indian art (2014, pp. 151-155). This brings us back to the very beginning of the last chapter, where we began by questioning the difference in the approaches and intents in making works of art. The two mentioned legacies, had a decidedly relevant content, where a role was to be fulfilled by the works, like the nationalist works which intentionally moved away from the western canons and tenets of working. Thereby providing a particular context to look at them through, in spite of which the western conventional tools have been used to analyse these works. The attempts towards revision of these ways and methods is seen through the move towards New Art History (Panikkar, Mukherji, & Achar, 2003), around 2000s, which with the backdrop of the globalisation, attempted at adopting a cross-disciplinary approach. Here the reference to the effort by Elkins, towards the dilution of the western approaches over a preference towards the plural and multicultural one, is evident in his work titled *Stories of Art*, (2002). Though such approaches have come in currency with the global forces playing strong, the difference in Elkins' approach is seen through the adoption of the non-Western lens to read the non-Western works, by giving due cognisance to their respective aesthetic and art historical traditions. Then given the circulation of these works in the global art arenas, the search for tokenism of the traditional, indigenous, or regional emblems is replaced by a multicultural approach in the true sense (Mukherji, 2014).

Given the rise of osmotic exchanges over the geographic spaces, and the rising notion of amorphous boundaries over the rigid ones, the primary concern still remains of the need for departure from the much-debated approaches or overbearing of Euro-centricism, hegemonic assertions, colonial legacies, marginalised segregations and various longstanding and near naturalised assertions. Therefore, while understanding the process of art making, the conceptual backing, the visual aesthetics of the works, or the politics of representing them through the large-scale show, and their receptions, the necessity is of adopting the logic of a diverse dialogue, giving due cognisance to multicultural voices in a true sense. Though the single pedestal approach of globalisation seems unrealistic, the realistic version of the same, would be of giving due cognisance to the multiplicity of individual approached, over a mere accommodating and compromising assimilation, thereby providing a true global, non-hegemonic, plural approach.