

# Patterns of Artistic Hybridization in the Early Protoglobalization Period\*

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## INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades the intensification of global interconnection and international integration has stimulated the emergence of historical research on globalization, as well as a lively debate about its impact on cultural isomorphization or heteromorphization, both in the past and in the present.<sup>1</sup> All over the world, universities are creating or enlarging departments and research infrastructures related to the study of global history. However, this field is far from being completely understood, nor have scholars been able to express a critical self-reflexivity detached from the ethnocentrism of

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Burke, *Cultural Hybridity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009); Andreas Wimmer, "Globalizations avant la Lettre: A Comparative View of isomorphization and heteromorphization in an Inter-Connecting World," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43, no. 3 (2001): 435–466.

their own locales, independent of national (or regional) visions and frameworks.<sup>2</sup>

Several historical perspectives have been developed for looking at the main stages of globalization, as well as its beginnings, all with solid arguments.<sup>3</sup> Wolf Schäfer's model is particularly interesting when considering a preglobal era (up to 1500), a protoglobal era (from 1500 to 1950), and a global era (after 1950).<sup>4</sup> This article covers the early stages of the protoglobal era, that is, the period ranging from the late fifteenth century to circa 1600. This period encompasses major transformations in the history of the world, such as the "discovery" of the Americas; the circumnavigation of the globe; the globalization of diseases (such as smallpox, measles, typhus, syphilis); the transcontinental expansion of monotheistic religions (Islam, Christianity, Judaism); the transcontinental diffusion of plants (tobacco, tulips), foods (spices, corn, tomatoes, potatoes), beverages (coffee, tea, chocolate), animals (horses, turkeys, earthworms), as well as of technology (cannons, rifles, the printing press) and people (slaves, migrants, colonisers). During this rich and controversial stage of human history, built on a mix of progress and exploitation, a series of new intercultural encounters took place, (inter)connecting people from different continents for the first time. To use a botanical metaphor, many of these encounters originated "hybrid" works of art, that is, objects that possess elements from two or more distinct artistic cultures, combined in an original manner.

These hybrid works of art have caught the attention of a large number of art historians, particularly those studying (post-)colonial art and exotica in the context of Renaissance *studioli*, *cabinets de curiosités*, *guarda-roupas*, and *Kunst-und Wunderkammern*. The intensification of globalization in conjunction with commemorative centenaries has motivated the organization of large exhibitions focused on hybrid artistic creations from the early protoglobalization period.<sup>5</sup> However, the divergence between artistic hybrids and the congenital symbiosis between art history and national identities, as well as the divergence of works on traditional artistic canons (West European, Chinese,

<sup>2</sup> Dominic Sachsenmaier, *Global Perspectives on Global History: Theories and Approaches in a Connected World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Peter N. Stearns, *Globalization in World History* (London: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Wolf Schäfer, "Global History," in *Encyclopedia of Globalization*, ed. Roland Robertson and Jan A. Scholte (New York: Routledge, 2007), 2:516–521.

<sup>5</sup> Jay Levenson, ed., *Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration* (Washington, D.C., and New Haven: National Gallery of Art and Yale University Press, 1991); Anna Jackson and Amin Jaffer, eds., *Encounters: The meeting of Asia and Europe, 1500–1800*, (London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 2004); Jay Levenson, ed., *Encompassing the Globe: Portugal and the World in the 16th and 17th Centuries*, 3 vols. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2007).

of strong native cultures for foreign cultures can promote copies, translations, and emulations in the foreigners' societies. Indeed, the huge success of Portuguese faience, first, and delftware, after, demonstrates the fascination for these distant Asian cultures and the transformation of European material culture at all levels of society.

## CONCLUSION

The three patterns of artistic hybridization analyzed in this article correspond to the different relations of power between two parties in the early protoglobalization period. In the first (*minority culture pattern*), the power (im)balance clearly favors one side, that of the majority culture, whose influence on the minority culture is deep, although far from absolute. In the second (*partnership pattern*), the relation between parties is more balanced, and therefore artistic and cultural changes are developed as free choices on both sides. The impact of this type of artistic hybridization is usually deeper in local societies than in the society of the newcomers, but not necessarily so. Finally, in the third pattern of artistic hybridization (*controlled contact pattern*), power imbalance favors again one of the sides. In this case the impact of the interaction is felt mainly in the newcomers' societies, both through the massive import of works of art and through the domestic imitation of these works.

In addition to these three patterns we have also briefly referred in the introduction to two other patterns that must be taken into account when discussing artistic hybridization in the early stages of protoglobalization: These are *cultural collision* and *global intercultural hubs*. Taken together, these five patterns cover most of the artistic hybridization observable during the period under study. Art history is not a discipline dedicated to deducing general conclusions from unpredictable and complex social realities, yet classification systems such as the one presented here are important for organizing the great diversity of hybrid artworks created under fertile intercultural environments. The critical discussion of these systems and the artistic reality they stem from will certainly contribute to bring these remarkable artworks from the periphery of art history discourse into its center, encouraging new transnational narratives about the history of art in a global and interconnected perspective.