

# Connecting Art Histories in the Museum: Africa, Asia, the Mediterranean and Europe

A research and fellowship program of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz and the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 2010–2019

## Projects and Fellows:

### Deconstructing the Muslim Self and its Relevance to the Study of Early Islamic Art

Nadia Ali, 2012–2013

Among the developments in the study of Umayyad art (Bilâd-al-Shâm, 661–750) we can observe growing interest in the role visual arts play in formulating cultural identity. Despite its innovations, much of this work assumes the existence of a collective Muslim mentality that is often considered as one of the strongest mechanisms for change in forms and meanings, and the most significant parameter of specificity in early Islamic art. By contrast, this project seeks to break the confines of the culturalist framework by examining what grounds there are for our assumptions in creating the generalization of ‘early Islamic art’ as a real category of visual production with specific and discrete audiences and constituencies of patrons and producers. By exploring the morphological, structural and technological factors at work in the making of early Islamic art, especially regarding Qusair Al-Amra, the project attempts to demonstrate the existence of long-term trends and changes that may have been contemporary with the formation of the Islamic world. In turn, this line of inquiry suggests that the traditional way of thinking about Islamic art history along dynastic lines and radical civilizational ruptures needs to be revised, whereas an alternative approach is offered by an attempt to reconstruct the craftsmen’s practices and the mechanics of the transmission of forms and techniques.

### Rethinking the *nkishi* Sculpture

Bruno Brant Sotto Mayor, 2016–2018

The project aims to analyze the concept of *nkishi* in Central Africa as a variational matrix of aesthetic forms, post-human relations and multinatural perspectives. Its presence in territories across the Nile/Congo/Zambezi watersheds challenges the idea of equivalence between unity of style and ethnic totality. In fact, the contemporaneity of *nkishi* in ritual, remediation, and power processes is often obfuscated. Departing from Chokwe sculptures of Angola and DR Congo, one needs to rethink ancient images (1800–1920), formerly described as “ancestor”, “fetish”, “idol”, and representation of the mythical character “cibinda ilunga”. The images are understood according to the efficacy, role and ontology attributed to them by indigenous dynasties (*munyaci*). Bridging the gap between ancient and contemporary styles, the focus lies on the dizzying invention of images over the remains of modern wars.

### **The Egyptian Conjecture: Material Crossovers in Early Modern Antiquarianism**

David Horacio Colmenares Gonzalez, 2015–2016

The project examines a variety of scholarly practices in the early modern period, subsumed under the notion of Antiquarianism. These practices – including the collecting and studying of images and material artifacts – can be understood as forerunners of modern critical methods and in their time were sites of rich intellectual speculation. The expansion of the antiquarian's archives beyond the confines of the Greco-Roman world led to a need for innovative scholarly techniques and respective hypothesis or narratives. By following the trail of artifacts, antiquarians revisited traditional forms and fields of knowledge and explored new cultural geographies. The project focuses upon the work of the Paduan antiquarian Lorenzo Pignoria (1571–1631) for whom inspecting Egyptian antiquities opened up unexpected paths for the study of the material cultures of the East and West Indies. Pignoria and his scientific circle pioneered a form of comparative research that depended upon an international network of collaborators, such as missionaries, tradesmen, engravers, printers etc. These agents worked from within diverse intellectual frameworks and with various objectives, all of which entered into dialogue in the continuous exchange of overseas material culture. The project aims to re-situate artifacts and images – especially those from the New World – within a European matrix of visual practices and discourses.

### **Multi-, Paraline, Perspectival, and Photographic Views: Travelling Images of the Islamic Pilgrimage and Visitation Sites**

Sabiha Göloğlu, 2018–2019

In the late Ottoman Empire, Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem as well as their sacred sites and structures (the Ka'ba, the Masjid al-Ḥarām, the Prophet Muhammad's Tomb, the Masjid al-Nabawī, the Dome of the Rock, the Masjid al-Aqṣā, and the Temple Mount) were depicted via a variety of visual modes including multi-, paraline, perspectival, and photographic views. The travelling of religious imagery across different media and geographies was accelerated by international networks and transregional contacts to which Ottoman artistic and architectural cultures made their own innovative contributions. These representational modes coexisted without hierarchy or evolutionary processes, contrary to dominant narratives of art history that overemphasize the roles of perspective and photography. This project examines four visual modes with a fresh look outside traditional frameworks by demonstrating how they were technically constructed, materially utilized, and spatially mobilized in unison. It also shows that these modes were not alternatives to one another, as they could convey spatial information in different ways and create manifold graphic qualities that could suit a particular medium and setting.

### **Die transregionale Wanderung der ornamentalen Motive in der Kunst Zentralasiens**

Satomi Hiyama, 2010–2012; 2015–2016

Die Wandgemälde der *Malerhöhle* (Kizil Höhle 207, ca. 6. Jh.) an der nördlichen Seidenstraße weisen sich durch höchste künstlerische Perfektion sowie durch eines der komplexesten Bildprogramme buddhistischer Wandgemälde Ostturkestans aus. Sie wurden im Jahr 1906 während einer der vier Turfan-Expeditionen entdeckt und in Einzelteile zersägt nach Berlin gebracht. Das Projekt bereitet erstmals die kunstwissenschaftlichen Grundlagen zur *Malerhöhle* auf und ermöglicht es, durch die Arbeit mit den originalen Fragmenten im Museum für Asiatische Kunst und dem reichen, ebenfalls im Museum aufbewahrten Archivmaterial zu den Expeditionen zwischen 1902 und 1914 die ursprüngliche Gestaltung der Höhle zu rekonstruieren.

Der Fokus des Projekts liegt auf transregionalen Wanderungen von ornamentalen Motiven in den Gemälden der *Malerhöhle*. Erstmals werden Verbindungen mit der Kunst der südlichen Seidenstraße – etwa anhand des Rankenmotivs im sog. ersten Kucha-Stil – und der Kunst in Bamiyan – anhand der fliegenden Girlande – im Zusammenhang erforscht. Die Ergebnisse erlauben eine neue Sicht auf die Kunst Kuchas, die bisher zu undifferenziert als Einfluss aus Gandhara erklärt wurde. Einige Resultate des Projekts sind in der Sonderausstellung *Auf Grünwedels Spuren* (Dez. 2011–Apr. 2012) im Museum für Asiatische Kunst Berlin präsentiert worden.

### **Waddell's Tibetan and Indian Collection in the Museum of Asian Art and the Museum of Ethnology, Berlin: Provenance Research in the Spectrum of Scientific Collecting and Colonial Ideology**

Regina Höfer, 2016–2017; 2018–2019

This project retraces the provenance and collection history of Tibetan and Indian artefacts the Museum of Ethnology in Berlin bought in 1906 from L. A. Waddell (1854–1938). As an Indian Army surgeon, amateur researcher and archaeologist stationed in British India, Waddell acquired under highly problematic conditions in his position as “cultural consultant” on the 1903–1904 British invasion of Tibet led by Col. Younghusband Tibetan artefacts. The collection, located today in the Museum of Ethnology, Berlin, consists of primarily three object groups: Tibetan ritual devices and material culture, Tibetan painted scrolls and Indian sculpture.

Considered as one of the foremost authorities on Tibet in his time, however, Waddell's books on the history of civilization have caused controversy and contributed to fascistic ideology. Therefore, the project seeks to investigate the role of the Berlin collection in the light of this arguable personality and locate it within scientific, military and colonial collection strategies.

### **Argument and Ornament in the Architecture of Deccan India**

Subhashini Kaligotla, 2016–2018

Architectural history has long presented an impoverished and fractured account of India's Deccan heartland. Kaligotla's book project seeks to reimagine the history of the early medieval Deccan, 500–800 CE, and makes a number of new claims. At the intersection of the textuality, visuality, and spatiality of under-studied bilingual epigraphs and their juxtaposition of Sanskrit and Deccan vernaculars, it locates the self-representations and social roles of temple builders and other makers. Drawing on Indian courtly understandings of ornament and aesthetic pleasure and Deccan deployment of micro architecture, it sheds light on the reception of transregional visual and cultural ideas such as the Nagara and Dravida architectural styles, supraregional scripts and languages and attitudes to geopolitical space and place. Finally, the book departs from dominant monument-based approaches to architectural history by emphasizing the experiential and phenomenological perspectives of Deccan built worlds.

### **The Lives of Qur'anic Manuscripts from Eleventh Century CE Khurasan: Palimpsests of Religious and Political Meanings**

Alya Karame, 2016–2018

Qur'anic manuscripts copied in the Eastern Islamic World between the fourth/tenth and sixth/twelfth centuries have not been studied as a group. Their codicological study is important, so is approaching them as objects of material culture. By adopting a diachronic perspective, this research uncovers the layers of meanings these Qur'ans accumulated in their afterlives by examining their

travels and observing the ways in which their roles and usage have changed. The project captures the social, religious and political factors that shaped the past and present forms of the Qur'an manuscript widening our methodological understanding of its study.

### **Cultural Exchange on the Northern Silk Road: Transmission and Alteration of Buddhist Pictorial Motifs in the Wall Paintings of Kucha (Xinjiang, PR, China)**

Ines Konczak-Nagel, 2014–2015

The project started with the exploration of the material culture depicted in the Buddhist wall paintings of the Kizil cave complex in Kucha, initially with special attention to the dresses of the deities. Among the depicted deities are Hindu gods and demons that were taken from a non Buddhist context and thus not indigenous in the Kucha area. Their representation impressively shows the transregional and transcultural artistic exchange on the Silk Road by the selective adoption of pictorial elements from different visual cultures of the time from the Mediterranean area over Persia and India up to China. Through a recent archeological study by Giuseppe Vignato it became clear that the caves in Kizil once formed specific groups which makes it necessary not to concentrate on single pictorial elements depicted in different caves but on the paintings of the entire group. Therefore, the focus of the project shifted to the group of caves 178 and 179 in Kizil. Many wall paintings originally in these caves are now kept today in the Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Berlin. The project investigates the origin, transmission, and alteration of the pictorial motifs in these caves in terms of style, iconography, and symbolic meaning.

### **The Periodical *Pan* (1895–1900): Print Culture, Applied Arts and the Politics of the Senses**

Max Koss, 2016–2019

This project tells the story of the Berlin-based literature, art and design magazine *Pan* through the lens of the applied arts movement, thereby positioning it as a crucible of modern design. To this end, the project examines the material dimensions of periodical publishing at the fin-de-siècle: production, circulation and reception. A particular focus is on the multifaceted uses of paper in, but also around the magazine. Paper with its material and metaphorical qualities emerges in this project as an essential medium in the development of a modern sensorium, paving the way for an experiential paradigm which permeates both art and commerce in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

### **Actively Seeking Consumers: Everyday Objects of Islamic Art in their Social-Historical Context**

Amanda Phillips, 2010–2012

The project is centered on the early modern Ottoman Empire, and the consumption of luxury goods like silk and porcelain, with a specific emphasis on the domestic sphere. Many luxury goods are defined as 'fine art' by contemporary scholarship, and are housed in museums in Europe, North America and the Middle East. Using estate inventories from Istanbul and other cities, the project has reconstructed the types and quantities of objects in the homes of wealthy residents in several neighbourhoods between 1600 and 1750. Some categories of goods were widespread, such as incense burners and decorated felts, while some objects were exceptional, like a piece of the Ka'aba cover or a preserved elephant ear. In the same vein, the research has also helped to clarify the notions of foreign and 'domestic' in the Ottoman sphere.

### **Fashioning of a Mughal City: Fatehpur Sikri**

Priyani Roy Choudhury, 2013–2017

The Mughal Emperor Akbar founded the city of Fatehpur Sikri in 1571 as the new capital. Abandoned shortly after its completion fifteen years later, the city offers a visual manual of new aesthetic mores that would quickly become idiomatic. It reveals an expanded repertoire that reflected the Mughal dynasty's central and south Asian inheritances and accommodated a growing awareness of the larger sixteenth-century world. This project analyzes the aesthetic, architectural and tropological stratagems that presented the city as a cogent manifestation of Akbar's vision and kingship; offered a burgeoning sense of identity to the multiplicities that made up the Mughal nation; and articulated the new imperial ambitions of the emerging Mughal Empire.

### **Keystones of Islamic Art: Mshatta in Berlin**

Eva-Maria Troelenberg, 2010–2011

The ornamented façade of the Umayyad palace Mshatta is an icon of Islamic art and key to an understanding of its historical emergence and art historical definition. The façade was once part of a so-called "desert castle" that was built around the mid 8th century AD in the area of present-day Jordan. In the early 20th century it came to Berlin as a gift from the Ottoman sultan. Today it has its place in the Museum für Islamische Kunst in Berlin and is one of the major monumental exhibits on the Museum Island. The research project traces the history of Mshatta from the time of its discovery by Western travelers around 1840 to its musealisation in Berlin to its destruction during the war and subsequent reconstruction: Beginning with the archaeological significance of Mshatta, this book examines its reception and impact history as an object of modern historiography and museology. A central aspect considered throughout is the intercultural relationship between the object's origin and its European reception history. Hence, the history of Mshatta in Berlin is also a case study for art historical and/or museal concepts and constructs that inform the perception of non-European art and culture.

This project which had started off within the framework of the cooperation *Connecting Art Histories in the Museum* (directed by Gerhard Wolf and Hannah Baader) was finished in 2014 with the publication of the monograph *Mshatta in Berlin: Grundsteine Islamischer Kunst* (Connecting Art Histories in the Museum 1, Dortmund 2014). Further results include an English version of the monograph (currently in print) as well as two photo exhibitions *Mshatta im Fokus* on display in Berlin and Vienna, curated in collaboration with Katharina Meinecke, Vienna University.

### **Praying for Ten Thousand Goodness: On Ding Guanpeng's *The Buddha Preaching in the Berlin Collections***

Ching-Ling Wang, 2012–2013

The painting *The Buddha Preaching* (*Shuofa tu*) realized in 1770 by Ding Guanpeng (fl. 1726–1771), now in the collection of the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin, is among the largest paintings produced by any court artist in the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). It is painted on silk, measures 525 × 950 cm and depicts a scene of the Buddha preaching the dharma while surrounded by a pantheon of deities in a Buddhist paradise. As the final masterpiece of the first ranked court painter Ding Guanpeng, it is worthy of research for both its artistic and historical importance.

This project is conceptualized as a fundamental study of *The Buddha Preaching* and its painter. It aims to reveal the artistic and art historical value of this much-overlooked painting, contextualize its function and meaning by considering its original location in a temple within an imperial palace

complex, and reconstruct the impact of these institutional and religious contexts at the Qing court. The study looks at *The Buddha Preaching* as an example to shed light on the imperial art agency in the painting academy of the Qing court. Furthermore, this study deals with the later cultural and historical contexts surrounding this painting, before and after its arrival in Berlin.

### **Prozesse der Bildfindung. Rezeption und Interpretation von Geschichten biblischen Ursprungs in der islamischen Buchmalerei**

Friederike Weis, 2010–2012

Als „Geschichten biblischen Ursprungs“ in der islamischen Buchmalerei sollen hier solche Erzählungen verstanden werden, die von islamischen, vorrangig arabischen Tradenten aus jüdischen und christlichen Schriften übernommen, weiterentwickelt und schließlich in der persischen Buchkunst seit dem frühen 14. Jahrhundert illustriert wurden. Dazu zählen historiographische und poetische Werke sowie das Genre der *Prophetengeschichten* (*Qisas al-anbiyâ'*). In der Buchproduktion der sich unter Akbar (reg. 1556–1605) und Jahangir (reg. 1605–1627) in Indien etablierenden Moghuldynastie erscheinen biblische Themen zum einen in Form von hybriden indo-islamisch-europäischen Darstellungen von Maria, Jesus, Heiligen und Erzengeln in höfischen Alben, zum anderen in den zwischen 1604–1610 gefertigten *Mer'ât al-Qods*-Handschriften (eine von dem Jesuitenmissionar Pater Jerónimo Xavier für Akbar verfasste *Vita Christi*), deren Miniaturen den christlichen Text in einer mit dem Islam und dem Geschmack der Moghulherrscher konformen Weise illustrieren.

Im Unterschied zu den standardisierten Illustrationen der klassischen persischen Dichtkunst sind die persischen und moghulischen Bildfindungen, die biblische Geschichten illustrieren, in ihren narrativen Details häufig innovativer gestaltet, wodurch spezifische Aspekte der Überlieferung akzentuiert werden.

### **Between Artifacts and their Representations. The Rhetorics of Artworks' Reproductions from the Photographic Collection of Art Library in Berlin**

Magdalena Wróblewska, 2012–2014

The project based on the Photographic Collection of the Art Library in Berlin studies the photographic representations of ancient ruins produced in the second half of the nineteenth century in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. The aim of the project is to analyze various modes and schemes of depiction in relation to the different visual traditions that photographic images of ruins are rooted in. Romantic and exotic motifs from paintings, travelers' drawings, as well as etchings that served as illustrations in scientific books and periodicals, together formed the iconosphere of the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

Pictorial motifs travelled through cultures, across space and time, set free from their original context or meaning. In the second half of the nineteenth century, photography played a crucial role in these processes. To understand them the system of photographic production in the Mediterranean region itself must be taken into account. Images of ruined monuments in Greece, Italy, Egypt, Levant and the Ottoman Empire were produced mostly in commercial studios established at sites not only by Western European, but also local photographers, who formed the canon of representation as well as fostered new ways of circulating images.

### **Reframing Portrait Paintings in Late Imperial China**

Ning Yao, 2016–2018

This project examines the role of literati as active agents in the process of reshaping Chinese portraiture from ca. 1600 to 1800. By investigating the dynamics of cultural, economic, and artistic aspects, the project explores how and why the new sub-genre – Chinese literati portraiture – emerged. The project was developed as part of the exhibition *Gesichter Chinas. Chinesische Porträtmalerei der Ming- und Qing-Dynastien* (Berlin, 2017–2018), co-curated by Klaas Ruitenbeek and Ning Yao.

#### **Short-term fellows:**

##### **Study on the Avalokiteśvara Imagery of Turfan in the Qočo Uighur Period**

Cheng Aifeng, 27.06.2016–27.09.2016

##### **Beyond the Bamum Throne: The Cameroon Collection and the Ethnological Museum, Berlin**

Mathias Fubah Alubafi, 01.08.2014–28.10.2014

##### **Object, Collection and Identity: Yizing Teapots in the late Ming Dynasty**

Zihua Liu, 01.09.2014–28.11.2014

##### **Survey and Study of the Rock Monasteries of Kucha**

Giuseppe Vignato, 01.07.2016–31.08.2016