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ART HISTORY, POSTCOLONIALISM, AND THE GLOBAL TURN

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ART HISTORY, POSTCOLONIALISM, AND THE GLOBAL TURN

JOSHUA I. COHEN, FOAD TORSHIZI, AND VAZIRA ZAMINDAR

The postcolonial, the global, and the decolonial have a way of blurring together in current art criticism and scholarship. Taken as a conglomerate, the three terms might signal a coordinated "decolonizing" action—one of breaking from Eurocentric, patriarchal, and chauvinist nationalist foundations, typically by way of inclusive approaches that confront the histories, legacies, and continued workings of empire. Yet, from a disaggregating perspective, these three terms and their respective domains cannot be seen as synonymous or entirely harmonious (and none of these individual arenas seems wholly unitary, either). What stands out and demands scrutiny is a relatively recent tendency to dismiss the postcolonial, or to announce its demise, by claiming it has been superseded by other paradigms—namely, the global and the decolonial. Postcolonialism, following its substantial impact on scholarship by the 1980s and 90s, has gradually faded from view in the shadow of art history's global turn.

While affirming that there must be multiple ways to "decolonize," this special issue of *ARTMargins*—growing out of a multi-day conference supported by the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) and Brown University in fall 2020—seeks to carefully parse the postcolonial, global, and decolonial as they intersect with scholarship in art history and to challenge postcolonialism's presumed obsolescence in the discipline. We would not wish to argue too insistently that the (self-) critical, politically attuned, and historically minded lineage of postcolo-

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nialism in the humanities should be regarded as preferable to a global lens, with its inclination toward celebrating the effects of contemporary economic globalization, or to a decolonial lens, with its transhistorical focus and faith in the power of Indigenous knowledge systems to overturn (neo)colonialist frameworks. Our central claim, nonetheless, is that it would be unfortunate if postcolonialism were to fall into a permanent state of perceived or real obsolescence. Postcolonialism, we argue instead, proves in some ways more nuanced and reflexive than other paradigms and has given rise to an important series of critical interventions in art history, beginning as early as the 1970s and 80s, that will be sketched in what follows.

Today's calls for "decolonization"—manifesting, for example, in debates surrounding museums' colonial collections and complicity in racial capitalism, or in the toppling of memorials and statues after decades of activism against them—undoubtedly make this moment an important one for considering the colonial past, and the imperial present, not only as problems for former colonies but also as arenas for critical debate within the metropolitan academy, across scholarship that has examined and engaged with the anticolonial struggles and historical decolonization processes of the early 19th through the mid-20th centuries.

In prompts for a recent field-wide questionnaire, the editors of the journal *Art History* asked art professionals about the "historical specificity of current calls to decolonize," wondering how these might be "different from previous challenges to the discipline (such as postcolonialism, feminism, queer studies, Marxism)."[1] The editors of the journal *October*, meanwhile, put the question another way in a similar survey, wondering how "contemporary uses of the term *decolonize*" can be linked "historically with the political history of decolonization."[2] These framings, while clearly timely, seem to alternate between envisioning a contemporary move *beyond* previous formations and a retrospective gaze looking *back* from the present toward the independence era—as if postcolonialism and parallel currents over the past several decades had not already grappled with these questions. Our different preoccupation here involves inquiring into the ongoing relevance of *postcolonial thought*—understood as a constellation of critical

1 "Decolonizing Art History," *Art History* 43, no. 1 (February 2020): 10.

2 "A Questionnaire on Decolonization," *October*, no. 174 (Fall 2020): 3.

approaches, themes, and arguments developing out of the cross-disciplinary field of postcolonial studies—to today's demands to decolonize. Our aim in what follows is not to provide an authoritative or all-encompassing account. Rather, it is to track some key developments among numerous others that could be explored, amid a vast intellectual and artistic terrain whose wider dimensions are to some extent taken up in the contributions to this special issue and stand to be considered in future scholarship.

One key point of reference for us has been Anthony Gardner's essay "Whither the Postcolonial?" (2011), with its observation that, "For the most part . . . analyses of 'the global' have thoroughly trumped 'the postcolonial,' with the latter's brand of critique swamped by the former's sense of festival."[3] Gardner's suspicions were confirmed in the edited volume where his essay appeared: a compendium of twenty-five scholarly contributions under an ambitiously "global" title, yet that offered no further engagement with postcolonial theory or methodologies. And the repudiation of postcolonialism has hardly been limited to this one case. Proponents of what might be called post-postcolonial art history, even while professing to reject teleological models, have often been eager to displace or transcend the postcolonial, suggesting that it has outlived its relevance in a world that is now fully cosmopolitan. Rushing to establish new areas of specialization, proponents of both globalism and decoloniality have principally sought to push past or surpass postcolonialism rather than to reckon with it seriously. This has led to a certain amnesia concerning postcolonialism's most salient exchanges and contributions in relation to those of other paradigms.

Where and when did postcolonialism emerge? The genealogy of the postcolonial turns out to be deeply entwined with—which is not to say indistinguishable from—the genealogies of the global and the decolonial. These three domains are best viewed as an interwoven, kaleidoscopic formation, rather than as a linear progression from one set of theoretical insights to the next. Beginning in the late 1980s, colonial discourse analysis—an interdisciplinary venture anchored in literary studies—expanded and was institutionalized as postcolonial studies, just as Magiciens de la terre (Magicians of the Earth, 1989) and other

3 Anthony Gardner, "Whither the Postcolonial?," in *Global Studies: Mapping Contemporary Art and Culture*, eds. Hans Belting, Jacob Birken, Andrea Buddensieg, and Peter Weibel (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011), 142–43.

Jean-Léon Gérôme (French, 1824–1904). *The Snake Charmer*, ca. 1879. Oil on canvas, 82.2 × 121 cm. The Clark Art Institute, 1955.51. Artwork in the public domain. Image courtesy Clark Art Institute (clarkart.edu).

major international exhibitions launched "global art," at around the same time that decoloniality (or what would become known as such) developed in the writings of a few Latin American theorists. With the Cold War winding down, scholars and curators were reacting to historical changes by producing new reflections on the recent and not-so-recent past.

Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* (1978), an early monograph in colonial discourse analysis that is now generally thought to have engendered postcolonial studies, built significantly on Gramscian and Foucauldian analyses of knowledge production as being inextricably linked to political power.[4] Crucially, Said brought these perspectives to bear on colonialism and imperialism, and particularly on Western scholarly and literary representations of North Africa, the Middle East, and Asia—all long known monolithically in the West as "the Orient." Said theorized Orientalism as a strictly Western phenomenon: a cluster of academic specializations establishing a system of discursive authority as a vehicle for colonial ideology and exploitation.

4 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978). For a challenge to this origin story, see Timothy Brennan, "Humanism, Philology, and Imperialism," in *Wars of Position: The Cultural Politics of Left and Right* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 93–125. See also Edward W. Said, "A Conversation with Neeladri Bhattacharya, Suvir Kaul, and Ania Loomba, New Delhi, 16 December 1997," *Interventions* 1, no. 1 (1998), 81–96.

It did not take long for art historian Linda Nochlin to mobilize Said's ideas and argue that Orientalist painting functions dually to visualize colonial stereotypes and to conceal these stereotypes' ideological underpinnings.[5] Through Nochlin's reading, Jean-Léon Gérôme's *The Snake Charmer* (ca. 1879) came to appear just as significant for its content (a scene of erotic and exotic spectacle) as for what it omits (any sign of modernity and any sign of foreign presence, including that of the painter) and, most importantly, for its high naturalism, lulling the viewer into a misguided certainty about the scene's authenticity. Orientalist artworks evade the narrow purview of "mainstream art history," Nochlin noted, because they point to elements of colonial propaganda that do not advertise themselves as such.[6]

This was all perspicacious and groundbreaking, but ultimately it was also rather one-sided. Subsequent interventions aimed to complicate an overall vision of unstoppable colonizers dominating their victims. The influential move of the literary critic Homi K. Bhabha was to assign agency to "native" subjects amid colonial assimilationist practices—missionary work, classroom education, suppression of local customs—that colonial thinkers and discourse analysts alike had regarded as inevitably overpowering. Challenging polarized domination-versus-resistance schemas, Bhabha theorized "hybridity" as a quality and tactic among "assimilated" subjects that allowed them to disrupt forms of colonial authority that were reliant on hierarchies of absolute difference. For Bhabha, local adoptions of European cultural elements, far from confirming subordination, psychologically unsettle the colonial order, since native "mimicry" produces a copy bearing an uncanny resemblance to the original, with the mimic's mastery and residual difference exposing cracks in supremacist doctrines.

Writing in the 1980s, Bhabha defined "hybridity" as a "strategic *reversal* of the process of domination through disavowal," and he defined the conjoined term "mimicry" as a "strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which '*appropriates*' the Other as it visualizes power."[7] Two decades later, the artist and art historian Olu Oguibe proposed that colonial-era

5 Linda Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," *Art in America* (May 1983): 118–31, 187–91.

6 Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," 189.

7 Homi K. Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817," *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (Autumn 1985): 154, emphasis added; Homi K. Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," *October*, no. 28 (Spring 1984): 126, emphasis added.

Moses Tladi (South African, 1903–59). *No. 1 Crown Mines*, ca. 1938. Oil on canvas board, 35 × 50 cm. Private collection. Image from Angela Read Lloyd, *The Artist in the Garden: The Quest for Moses Tladi* (Noordhoek, South Africa: Print Matters, 2009). Image courtesy of Print Matters (Pty), Ltd. Photograph by Michael Hall. Reproduced with permission of the publisher.

African artists had pursued strategies of "*reverse appropriation*."[8] Oguibe surely knew Bhabha's work; he quoted an 1839 text that Bhabha had also quoted, referring to certain British colonies' constitutions as "mimic representation."[9] The artists discussed by Oguibe—including the Nigerian academic painter Aina Onabolu and Black South African painters working in Post-Impressionist styles—all figured the "hybrid" formally, in varied engagements with European traditions, and sometimes additionally through subject matter, as in portraits of modern Africans. Looking back, we might argue that reverse appropriation manifested most germanely in African naturalistic landscape painting. Whereas fine-grained illusionistic detail in Orientalist painting had persuasively packaged colonial ideology's distortions as reality, Moses Tladi's *No. 1 Crown Mines* (ca. 1938) inverts this operation. Now it is the reality of the colonized that convinces, though without alerting the viewer to this fact, given that the painting's style and spatial order do not necessarily communicate "African-ness." What the viewer immediately recognizes is the artist's technical mastery.

8 Olu Oguibe, "Appropriation as Nationalism in Modern African Art," *Third Text* 16, no. 3 (2002): 259, emphasis added.

9 Sir Edward Cust, *Reflections on West India Affairs, after a Recent Visit to the Colonies, Addressed to the Consideration of the Colonial Office* (London: Hatchard, 1839), 33. It cannot be a coincidence that Bhabha ("Of Mimicry," 125) and Oguibe ("Appropriation," 244) both mistitled Cust's text as "Reflections on West African Affairs."

Installation view, *Magiciens de la terre*, Halle de la Villette, Paris, 1989. Foreground: Paddy Jupurrurla Nelson, Paddy Japaltjarri Sims, Paddy Cookie Japaltjarri Stewart, Neville Japangardi Poulson, Francis Jupurrurla Kelly, and Frank Bronson Jalamarra Nelson (Warlukurlangu Artists, Yuendumu community, central Australia), *Yarla*, mixed-media ground sculpture. Background, on wall: Richard Long, *Mud Circle*, 1989, mud painting. © ARS, New York. Photo © Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais/Béatrice Hatala/ Konstantinos Ignatiadis.

Even while Oguibe was engaging Bhabha's theory of hybridity directly, the same concept was already morphing into a kind of industry, marking one of postcolonialism's most sustained and problematic intersections with globalism. During the global-culture boom of the 1990s, hybridity became what literary critic Timothy Brennan has called an "almost atmospheric slogan of multivalent ambiguity," potent for its ability to evoke just the right synergy between local flavor and cosmopolitan sensibilities.[10] Among a host of influential exhibitions of the late 1980s to early 1990s, Magiciens de la terre (1989) perhaps most clearly ushered in the "global" and its appetite for a retooled, now fashionable hybridity. Curated by Jean-Hubert Martin, the show included works by approximately a hundred artists who were selected evenhandedly, in the curator's mind, from two congruent categories: Western and non-Western. Although an essay by Bhabha appeared in the Magiciens catalog, the exhibition foregrounded hybridity in ways that largely departed from Bhabha's initial theorization.

Scholars have by now thoroughly detailed the features of Magiciens, noting that it was informed by a nostalgic reverence for

10 Timothy Brennan, *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 13.

Surrealist engagements with various forms of non-Western material culture, and especially by Martin's ambition to offer a corrective to MoMA's *Primitivism* exhibition of 1984.[11] The MoMA show, as we know well, sought to rebrand Eurocentric modernism as all-encompassing by juxtaposing Western modernist works with decontextualized "tribal" ones to produce striking yet largely fictitious formal "affinities."[12] Magiciens responded by rejecting a longstanding tendency (painfully on view at MoMA) to relegate marginalized cultures to a timeless past. MoMA's "denial of coevalness" (to cite Johannes Fabian's seminal contribution to colonial discourse analysis) gave way to an unmitigated and single-minded *embrace* of coevalness in Magiciens, illustrating one of several ways in which the latter project ended up mirroring the former.[13] A hallmark of the "global" comes into view when evolutionist time differentials are replaced, in Magiciens, with a triumphalist focus on the "contemporary" ("*contemporain*")—or, in anthropologist Cesare Poppi's trenchant analysis, on "synchronicity as the only legitimate site of historical evaluation."[14] In the show's best-known juxtaposition, a ground sculpture by indigenous Warlukurlangu artists from Yuendumu in the Northern Territory of Australia and a painting by the British artist Richard Long interrelate on the basis of a shared moment—the "contemporary"—that is imagined as unifying.[15] From a critical postcolonial perspective, contemporaneity in Magiciens camouflages a reconfiguration of the same tired conventions that had most recently been made visible at MoMA. Although MoMA's "affinity" became "dialogue(s)" in Magiciens, the figure of the intuitive artist-shaman (or magician) per-

11 Lucy Steeds, " 'Magiciens de la Terre' and the Development of Transnational Project-Based Curating," in *Making Art Global (Part 2): Magiciens de la terre, 1989* (London: Afterall, 2013), 28–33; Maureen Murphy, "From *Magiciens de la Terre* to the Globalization of the Art World: Going Back to a Historic Exhibition," trans. Simon Pleasance, *Critique d'Art* 41 (Spring 2013), 3; Annie Cohen-Solal, "Revisiting Magiciens de la Terre," *Stedelijk Studies Journal* 1 (2014), https://stedelijkstudies.com/journal/revisiting-magiciens-de-la-terre/, accessed June 12, 2022.

12 James Clifford, "Histories of the Tribal and the Modern" [1985], in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 189–214.

13 Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

14 Jean-Hubert Martin, "Préface," in *Magiciens de la terre* (Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 1989), 8; Cesare Poppi, "From the Suburbs of the Global Village: Afterthoughts on *Magiciens de la Terre*," *Third Text* 14 (Spring 1991): 87.

15 Niru Ratnam, "Exhibiting the 'Other': Yuendumu Community's *Yarla*," in *Frameworks for Modern Art*, ed. Jason Gaiger (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 209–13.

sisted, as did a West-versus-rest schema, weak comparisons, and avoidance of colonial legacies.[16]

Accounts of Magiciens in global art history have been more sympathetic. David Joselit, for instance, has argued in a recent monograph that Magiciens "deregulated the 'primitivist' hierarchy," with "magic rather than art history . . . form[ing] a shared ground for global contemporary art."[17] Notwithstanding global art history's far-reaching ambition, its narratives have not always paused to explain whether "global contemporary" refers to a category of artistic production or a mode of framing and interpretation. This ambiguity suggests a merging of the functions of the artist, critic, curator, scholar, and dealer. Criticality threatens to become the first casualty of such a fusion, or expanded hybridity. Longstanding hierarchies and prejudices are, no doubt, the stated adversaries of global art/histories. Yet, beginning with Magiciens, marketization has served as an unspoken and apparently unimpeachable alibi, as few would complain about artists from the Global South being made saleable in the West.

Global art history frequently treads a path forged by global-culture advocates of the 1990s (notably, Arjun Appadurai) in pursuing *culturalist* readings of US-led neoliberal globalization.[18] Perhaps only the most ardent free-market advocates would disagree that the world since the end of the Cold War has grown more unequal by every measure except one. Globalists spotlight this one exception—*culture*—to gloss globalization as a net positive. Joselit, in this vein, adopts *deregulation* as a central term. One might say that the term gets "appropriated," albeit to herald globalization as a phenomenon that is leveraged to "combat cultural dispossession" and achieve "cultural recalibration."[19] To be fair, stark power asymmetries do get mentioned in passing in seminal global-art scholarship. Yet the challenge for this literature perhaps cannot be wholly framed in terms of deciding how much emphasis to place on globalization's advantages versus its disadvantages, since benefits to the "periphery" are so often conferred at the pleasure of a center whose dominant status tracks perfectly with the outsized inequities of the neoliberal age.

16 Jean-Hubert Martin and Benjamin Buchloh, "The Whole Earth Show," *Art in America* 77 (May 1989): 155.

17 David Joselit, *Heritage and Debt: Art in Globalization* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2020), 12.

18 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). We focus here on "global" as opposed to "world" art history, whose temporal scope we understand to be broader.

19 Joselit, *Heritage and Debt*, 6, xviii.

Not only does the discourse of "inclusivity" itself sometimes rest on a self-congratulatory story about benevolent gatekeepers admitting the formerly excluded, but also, the time-worn center-periphery hierarchy (mapped geographically) has grown ever more complexly enmeshed with a precipitous class hierarchy (schematized vertically, boundless geographically) wherein global political elites, billionaires, and multinational corporations tower miles above the rest.

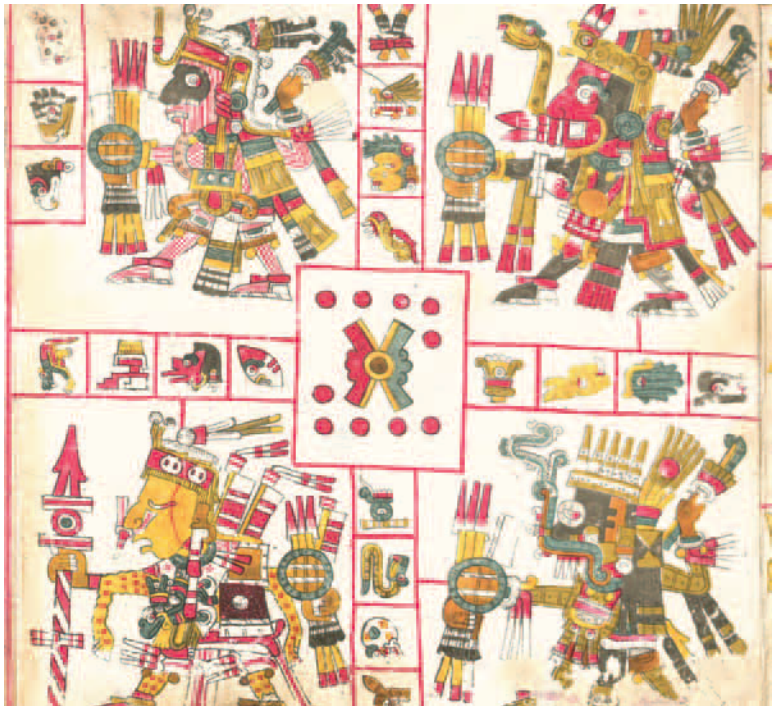
The worldwide proliferation of art fairs and biennials over the past few decades might lead one to think that control over art-world visibility has been fully democratized. Yet one could just as easily argue that the new situation consolidates power globally rather than undermining it locally or at other levels. As for global art history, one of the dominant positions has not been an outright rejection of postcolonialism, but a shrugging off of that paradigm as passé—a gesture evidenced in the near-total absence of postcolonial scholarship in this literature's bibliographies. Just as often, scholars breezily invoke the postcolonial as a theoretical asset corroborating the already-arrived globality of contemporary art, as in Hans Belting's unargued assertion that "*global art* is contemporary art and in spirit postcolonial."[20] Such positions notably tend to forgo any scrutiny of art history's continued reliance on European languages (predominantly English) and methodologies, amounting to an institutionalized devaluation of what Gayatri Spivak calls the "idiomaticity of non-hegemonic languages," whether in art criticism or visual expression.[21]

A crucial response to the imbrication of Western epistemology with colonial modernity did, however, take root through the paradigm of decoloniality. In 1989, literary critic Walter Mignolo introduced *colonial semiosis* as a term to describe "a conflictive domain of semiotic interactions among members of radically different cultures," with colonizers on one side, colonized on the other.[22] This Manichean schema clearly recalled *Orientalism*, yet Mignolo focused more on Indigenous expression than Said had done, analyzing 16th- and 17th-century map-like

20 Hans Belting, "From World Art to Global Art: View on a New Panorama," trans. Elizabeth Volk, in *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds*, ed. Belting, Andrea Buddensieg, and Peter Weibel (Karlsruhe: ZKM; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 178.

21 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 10.

22 Walter D. Mignolo, "Colonial Situations, Geographical Discourses, and Territorial Representations: Toward a Diatopical Understanding of Colonial Semiosis," *Dispositio* 14, nos. 36–38 (1989): 93.



Directional almanac, section 9, page 25 of Codex Borgia, 16th century. Mesoamerican pictorial manuscript. Mineral and vegetable pigments, paint on animal skin, 27 × 26.5 cm. Collection of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, shelf mark: Borg.mess.1. Image reproduced by permission of Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, with all rights reserved; © 2023 Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.

drawings by Amerindians. Mignolo's close reading of a page from the 16th-century Central Mexican Codex Borgia exemplified what would become the concerns of decoloniality, particularly in the privileging of local epistemology. A Mesoamerican elder here exceeds the confines of a Eurocentric vantage, visualizing the world cosmologically more than cartographically, in four domains structured around a vital center.

The Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano, also in 1989, advocated more influentially for summing up Western dominance transhistorically in a single phrase: "the coloniality of power."[23] This phrase, later popularized by Mignolo and others, extended analysis beyond any putatively narrow focus on political economy or on any one period or region. Decoloniality, in its own way, belonged to a global turn by embracing "five hundred years' macronarratives" that situated "coloniality" everywhere

23 Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality" [1989], trans. Sonia Therborn, *Cultural Studies* 21, nos. 2–3 (March/May 2007): 168–78.

and across a vast span of time.[24] Decoloniality's well-warranted intervention included a call for an expanded historical and geographic frame, as well as a complaint against postcolonial studies' frequent ignorance of Latin America.[25] Yet decoloniality's shortcomings, particularly with respect to postcolonialism, have been no less striking. Clear-eyed reactions against postcolonial studies as a hegemonic Anglophone discourse have often devolved, in Mignolo's writing, into hasty caricatures that figure postcolonialism as a convenient foil to decoloniality. Postcolonialism is rejected in this vein as "Western, theory-heavy," and even "colonial," while decoloniality's lineage is claimed to be organically Third World, rooted in "lived experience" and geared toward political action.[26]

At times, the decolonial turn rests on an explicit or implicit presumption that decoloniality has surpassed postcolonialism, both chronologically and by dint of its radicalism—a feature that is also accentuated within today's most iconoclastic "decolonization" rhetoric. According to this claim, "de-" shatters our illusions around "post-": the contemporary world is not really postcolonial, if that term is taken to denote a time *after* all forms of imperial control have been vanquished. This critique would be devastating if only postcolonialism could be fairly reduced to a single word that in turn could be whittled down to its most literal signification. As it happens, an extensive dialogue around the "post-" within postcolonial scholarship has eluded precisely those theorists who are most interested in "decolonizing post-colonial studies," to quote the title of an essay by Ramón Grosfoguel that astonishingly makes its case without referencing a single publication from postcolonial studies other than Said's *Orientalism*.[27]

If an urge to abandon postcolonialism is understandable, this might have something to do with the fatigue arising from a perceived

24 Walter Mignolo, "What Does It Mean to Decolonize," in Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh, *On Decoloniality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 107.

25 Fernando Coronil, "Elephants in the Americas? Latin American Postcolonial Studies and Global Decolonization," in *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, ed. Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 401–5.

26 Walter D. Mignolo, "Colonial and Postcolonial Discourse: Cultural Critique or Academic Colonialism?," *Latin American Research Review* 28, no. 3 (1993): 120–34; Walter D. Mignolo, "Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-coloniality," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 23 (2007): 452; Mignolo, "What Does It Mean," 112.

27 Ramón Grosfoguel, "Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political-Economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking, and Global Coloniality," *Transmodernity* 1, no. 1 (2011).

obligation to finally read all the way through *Orientalism*, as if the stakes of the field could still be gleaned from this one book. Skepticism around postcolonialism may also stem from familiar characterizations of the field as an elite metropolitan export that depoliticizes and dehistoricizes colonial formations by way of lofty poststructuralist theoretical frameworks preoccupied with the identity politics of individual subjects, who often happen to be cosmopolitan transplants. Indeed, things have sometimes gotten even worse in art history, particularly when scholars and curators seek to import concepts and approaches from the best-known postcolonial theorists without much effort to adapt or question them. This has resulted in rote Saidian-Foucauldian analyses premised on simple binaries and overdetermining contextualizations, in which the colonial or postcolonial status of a given artistic gesture or moment is not so much analyzed *through* a work of art as it comes to *define* the work, or even to fix its understood mode of expression and overall meaning. At the same time, it is necessary to acknowledge the path-breaking work of a number of art historians whose far more nuanced and critical engagements with postcolonial studies defy easy summation as a function of their depth and originality.[28]

How does the postcolonial differ from the global and the decolonial? Globalism easily strays into end-of-history-type meditations on the triumph of contemporary art. And decoloniality, as Angela Harutyunyan has observed, has a penchant for generating readymade tropes for export to any historical setting.[29] Postcolonial studies, by contrast, has been "remarkably autocritical . . . since its inception," as David Chioni-Moore has noted.[30] We argue that it is this critical tradition—encompassing diverse theoretical approaches and perspectives, and often generating heated debate—that is most worthy of being retained in postcolonial art history, especially in contrast to globalism's tendency toward celebration. Following Shaden Tageldin, we may further wish to place "post" in parentheses, "to designate both a coloniality that is perpetually interrupted—thus intermittent—and a coloniality that is both

28 See, especially, Sonal Khullar, *Worldly Affiliations: Artistic Practice, National Identity, and Modernism in India, 1930–1990* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015); and Saloni Mathur, *A Fragile Inheritance: Radical Stakes in Contemporary Indian Art* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).

29 Angela Harutyunyan, "Opting for Decoloniality: A Politics of Non-Politics," *Art History* 42, no. 5 (November 2019): 996–1000.

30 David Chioni Moore, "Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique," *PMLA* 116, no. 1 (January 2001): 112.

finished and unfinished."[31] An injunction against safely considering imperialist depredations as *past* phenomena, Tageldin's proposal additionally reminds us of the way in which postcolonialism often orients its commitments toward a political *present*—ranging from the emergent neoliberalism and protracted conflicts of the 1980s and 1990s to the forever wars, mass migration, and xenophobic nationalism of the 2000s and 2010s.[32] The early 2020s, belonging to an ever more "global" moment, appear no less dire, as corporate-led health policies and escalating geopolitical rivalries have thrust many more millions of people into extreme poverty and other destabilizing circumstances, largely in the Global South.[33]

The articles in this special issue reveal that art scholars must not lose sight of the ravages of the global modern and contemporary. While they speak to a range of different practices, contexts, and theoretical orientations, they also share a mode of critical investigation that connects earlier moments of colonial history to the conflicts, struggles, and insights of our own time. Yet these articles arrive at no consensus around the precise character, methodology, historical scope, or subject matter of postcolonial art history. Alexander Alberro examines a relatively recent exhibition, The Potosí Principle (2010–11), that originated in Europe and attempted to deal with the histories and ongoing legacies of New World colonization in Latin America, inviting a series of tense exchanges with El Colectivo, a La Paz–based group of artists and scholars. Sonal Khullar analyzes the engagement of the Mexican writer Octavio Paz with India and Indian contemporary art in the second half of the 20th century, pointing to South-South relations as a vital dimension of postcolonialism. Ijlal Muzaffar focuses on a troubling trend toward qualitative analysis in mid- to late-20th century, Western-led urban studies and development planning, calling for more attention to be paid to what he memorably calls "just quantity": the historically rooted, identifiable, and measurable reasons for conditions of poverty and disintegration in certain cities of the Global South. Tammer

31 Shaden M. Tageldin, *Disarming Words: Empire and the Seductions of Translation in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 29–91.

32 Ania Loomba, Suvir Kaul, Matti Bunzl, Antoinette Burton, and Jed Esty, eds., *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Jini Kim Watson and Gary Wilder, eds., *The Postcolonial Contemporary: Political Imaginaries for the Global Present* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018).

33 Toby Green, *The Covid Consensus: The New Politics of Global Inequality* (London: Hurst, 2021), 133, 152, 213.

El-Sheikh and Jennifer Bajorek gear their contributions toward the contemporary moment. They investigate issues of exile and migration in the work of the Palestinian-Canadian artist Amanda Boulos and in photography and films that document solidarity among African immigrants in France.

Postcolonialism's presence in art history has proven versatile, generative, and far-reaching. Postcolonial art history offers approaches that interrogate not only colonial-era and subsequent artistic practices but also the discipline of art history as rooted in colonial forms of knowledge. As such, postcolonialism vitalizes debates within the discipline regarding its own lineaments and methods. The intended purpose of this special issue is not to downgrade the status of global and decolonial paradigms in relation to the postcolonial. Yet we do argue that postcolonialism's genealogy warrants greater attention and offers significant foundations on which art history may continue to build. What the discipline of art history offers to postcolonial studies, in turn, must have something to do with surveying the *visual* archive—alongside the textual archive, as centered in other disciplines—while working to understand how dominant ideologies are varyingly instantiated and undermined in writings about art and in the formal and conceptual strategies of art itself.