

BOOK REVIEWS/SOUTH ASIA

Monica Juneja. *Can Art History Be Made Global? Meditations from the Periphery*. De Gruyter, 2023. Paperback, €49.99; eBook, €49.00.

Shivani Sud, PhD¹ 

¹ Art History, Reed College

Keywords: transculturation, global, South Asia, art history, mobility

<https://doi.org/10.18874/ae.85.1.13>

Asian Ethnology

Vol. 85, Issue 1, 2026

In *Can Art History Be Made Global?: Meditations from the Periphery*, Monica Juneja, Professor of Global Art History at the Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies, posits the “periphery” not merely as a physical location but as a critical perspective from which to interrogate the ways cultures are formed through encounter and mobility.

What does it mean to write from the periphery? In *Can Art History Be Made Global? Meditations from the Periphery*, Monica Juneja, Professor of Global Art History at the Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies, posits the “periphery” not merely as a physical location but as a critical perspective from which to interrogate the ways cultures are formed through encounter and mobility. Writing in the wake of the humanities’ so-called “global turn,” Juneja’s monograph offers both a genealogy and a critique of global art history. While the global turn has led to the proliferation of several subfields (Global Medieval Studies, Global Renaissance Studies, the Global Early Modern, the Global Eighteenth Century, Ancient Globalisms, Global Modernism, the Global Contemporary, etc.), Juneja argues that global histories tend to reproduce older hierarchies by relying on nationalist and civilizational frameworks that accentuate exclusion and homogenization. Juneja’s work is an important reminder that expanding the geographical scope or appending the “global” to existing fields does not inherently challenge the entrenched concepts and assumptions that structure art historical interpretation. Through the framework of transculturation, a concept Juneja develops from the work of Cuban anthropologist and ethnomusicologist Fernando Ortiz Fernández, Juneja proposes new methods for ensuring that global histories meaningfully reconfigure art historical thinking rather than simply enlarging the geographic ambit of the discipline.

Unlike the model of hybridity, which has been critiqued for reifying the idea of two bounded cultures coming together (Dean and Leibsohn 2003), transculturation, for Juneja, emphasizes process, agency, and the co-constitution of cultures across social, cultural, and geographic axes. The framework of transculturation can productively shift scholars’ attention from the finished object toward the multiple agents, practices, and temporalities that shape cultural production. In doing so, Juneja challenges dominant narratives of globalization as a homogenizing force emanating from the West to the non-West, as well as the global/local binary that casts the local as a site of authenticity or resistance in opposition to the global. Instead,

transculturation allows art historians to account for the mutability of culture and the productive tensions between local, regional, and global contexts. Juneja thus offers an important methodological intervention that can not only unsettle art history's foundational concepts, such as the idea of stylistic development, but also ultimately reimagine the discipline as a non-hierarchical field shaped by the complex dynamics of cultural formation and transformation.

The book is organized into five chapters, which map how ideas of the "global" have been defined, challenged, and reshaped across premodern, modern, and contemporary art histories. Chapter 1 traces the emergence of World Art Studies from nineteenth- and early twentieth-century efforts to globalize art history, showing how these projects, despite their inclusive ambitions, were constrained by Eurocentric hierarchies, civilizational taxonomies, and evolutionist thinking. While Juneja's study centers on the German-speaking academe, her discussion of figures such as Franz Kugler, Carl Schnaase, and Josef Strzygowski reveals how World Art Studies often reproduced universalizing and hierarchical assumptions under the guise of global inclusion.

Chapter 2 turns to South Asia as a "peripheral" location from which to critique dominant art historical frameworks, a perspective that continues through the rest of the book. In this chapter, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Mughal paintings offer a paradigmatic example of transcultural image-making. The practice of copying within Mughal artistic traditions was not a mere technical exercise but rather deeply embedded in social, philosophical, and intercultural exchanges, thus challenging conventional art historical frameworks that privilege originality and linear stylistic development. A careful analysis of notable Mughal works such as the Jahangir album folios and Farrukh Beg's autobiographically inflected paintings reveals how artists brought together European prints, Persianate traditions, and local artistic practices to produce layered, dynamic, and polyvalent images. Foregrounding early modern South Asian painting as a model of relational, reflective, and globally entangled image-making, this chapter offers the clearest application of Juneja's theories of transculturation to a concrete case study, making it especially valuable for understanding how transculturation can reframe visual histories by destabilizing conventional art historical categories of influence, originality, and style.

In chapter 3, Juneja reconsiders modernism as a global but uneven phenomenon, showing how modernity and modernism emerged through interconnected local, national, and transregional processes rather than from a singular Western model. By treating scale as dynamic and relational, Juneja highlights how modernism has evolved transculturally across multiple

temporalities and geographies, from Europe and the Global South to diasporic and Black British contexts, revealing modernism as a co-constructed, plural, and dialogic project.

In chapter 4, Juneja surveys debates around the “global contemporary,” considering both its potential to pluralize and decenter art worlds and its risk of reproducing Euro-American models or flattening local specificity. Through artists such as Atul Bhalla, Pushpamala N., Jitish Kallat, Nalini Malani, and Atul Dodiya, the chapter highlights relational and participatory practices that rethink memory, history, and urban experience beyond nationalist narratives, underscoring the Global South’s potential to reimagine tradition, locality, and the avant-garde in critically reflexive ways.

Chapter 5 reconsiders the influential exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989), which attempted to forge a planetary perspective by including artists from across the world and presenting them as individuals rather than representatives of nations. In theory, such an approach could transcend colonial and modernist hierarchies. Juneja probes the tension between these universalist ambitions and critiques of neocolonialism, ethnocentrism, and exoticization, showing how such exhibitions can both foreground artistic agency and expand notions of contemporaneity and also flatten regional specificities and social contexts. She ultimately calls for a critically self-reflexive, transcultural curatorial practice that would move beyond mere inclusion to truly reckon with enduring historical and economic inequalities.

The postscript situates art history within the context of the Anthropocene, emphasizing the interrelations of human, nonhuman, and material life. How can art make visible ecological relationalities and distributed forms of agency? Amar Kanwar’s film *The Sovereign Forest* uses archives, films, and objects to interrogate environmental destruction and preserve indigenous knowledge. A seventeenth-century Mughal painting of a hunter and squirrels illustrates nonhuman agency and morphogenetic creation, where animals, plants, and materials actively shape the lifeworld alongside humans. Through such case studies, Juneja shows how art history can uncover ecological imaginaries and ethical relationalities embedded in visual culture, encouraging the discipline to develop a planetary consciousness that recognizes the entangled roles of humans, nonhumans, and materials.

One of the book’s most compelling contributions lies in its rethinking of scale. Juneja treats scale not as a fixed analytic frame but as a dynamic process through which relationships are produced, negotiated, and transformed. While she explicitly foregrounds local, regional, and global scales, the book also gestures toward a broader scalar imagination. Transculturation, for instance, operates across premodern, modern, and contemporary temporal registers, revealing how visual practices have evolved through cross-cultural exchanges over a *longue durée*. More implicitly, the book unfolds across three conceptual scales—the worldly, the global, and the planetary—offering a

powerful way to think about art history from the nineteenth century to the present. This movement, from world art studies, through the global modern and global contemporary, to a planetary perspective shaped by ecological crisis, underscores how art historical questions are inseparable from our temporal, spatial, and environmental situatedness. Returning to the concept of the periphery, one might ask how our current planetary crises further trouble center/periphery binaries by forcing us to think beyond human and geographic hierarchies?

Taken together, the many interventions presented in *Can Art History Be Made Global?* encourage readers to rethink not only what it means to write global art history but how art history itself might be recalibrated as a critical, self-reflexive, and inhabited practice attuned to the productive tensions between self and other, difference and connectivity, and the so-called peripheries and centers of the world. *Can Art History Be Made Global?* will be of particular value to scholars, students, and readers seeking to rethink art history's analytic categories, question universalist assumptions, and understand how artworks develop through transcultural, multi-spatial, and ecological frameworks.

Submitted: January 28, 2026 JST. Accepted: February 03, 2026 JST. Published: August 25, 2026 JST.



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