

DISCUSSING 'GLOBAL ART' AND THE ROLE OF THE MUSEUM



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Museological challenges of global contemporary art in the Tropenmuseum and the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam

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Introduction

In October of 2014, I finished an internship at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam in which I had experienced the debate on globalization within the contemporary art discourse first hand. I have witnessed the difficulties that a museum faces when it challenges itself to broaden its view to explore the 'global'. The Stedelijk Museum initiated the *Global Collaborations* project (this will be elaborated on in chapter two) on which I worked as well. Here, I learned how hard it is, even in 2015, to exhibit the geographical 'other' in a mainly Western Modern and Contemporary Art museum.

On a trip to Paris in February of 2015, I visited the Centre Pompidou and its exhibition *Une Histoire, Art, Architecture et Design, Des Années 80 À Aujourd'hui*. This exhibition looked back at the past thirty years, by displaying objects solely from their own collections and as the website states: "it offers a themed circuit through ultra-contemporary creation, with the works of nearly 180 artists and some 50 architects and designers from 55 countries".¹ What struck me most in the exhibition is that their method is to look back at events that led up to the globalization of the world and the art world, but without emphasizing the 'global' too much, in other words: they did not overstate the fact that some of the exhibited art came from other geographical parts of the world than the so-called 'West'. On the one hand, one can argue that they are avoiding the discussion by not really engaging in it, but on the other hand: they are showing works, regardless where they come from, themed and thus framed in different contexts. They are, as they say, exploring the idea of a horizontal history, instead of a vertical one.

I do not suggest that this is the best or the only way to engage in the globalization debate, or engaging with the 'global'. By 'global' I refer to contemporary art originating from all regions of the world. Rather, I would like to emphasize that there are many ways to engage in this debate, the debate being centered on how to treat and exhibit this 'global art'. Why it is so difficult for museums to create an exhibition relating to 'global' art? In

¹ For more information on this exhibition:

https://www.centrepompidou.fr/cpv/ressource.action?param.id=FR_R-38c80ed699767388e67e1c6621b7d6¶m.idSource=FR_E-bae182224fcc99e9639a4d2eadf21993, 27 March 2015.

other words, why is it difficult to exhibit contemporary art from around the world next and equal to each other, in the confinement of an exhibition in a museum?

In the past few years, the attention to the 'global' has risen again. I say again, since the globalization in art initially garnered a great deal of attention in the 1980's. Then, many world changes that had built up tensions, caused the art discourse to reflect on itself and on its exclusion of the so-called 'other', 'non-Western', the 'non-Euramerican'. In the 1980's, several exhibitions were made that challenged this division, and many scholars and art critics theorized this long standing exclusion.

With many different terms to point to contemporary art on a global scale containing a division between the 'West' and the 'non-West', I have chosen to use one term throughout this thesis: global contemporary art. According to Hans Belting, one of the initiators of the ongoing *Global Art and the Museum* project (GAM) since 2006, global art is by definition contemporary, since the term came into use at the same time the discussion started, and it refers to contemporary art on a global scale.² For me, global contemporary art is a better fitting term to make an even clearer distinction between the term contemporary art that seems to apply to mostly 'Western' art, and global contemporary art that encompasses contemporary art on a global scale. What is excluded is the work of amateur artists and art that does not engage in the global art world debate, but it includes art that somehow relates to or reflects on the changed global relations, in art as well as the world, regardless of the origin of the artist.

The debate that flared up in the 1980's is very wide-reaching, and too large to capture in this thesis. To simplify and condense it, the discussion centers on the in- and exclusion of the 'other'. Since the beginning of art history as a discipline, art historical discourse has solely focused on the 'Western' artist. The 'non-Western' artworks were only regarded in the light of being inspirational sources, for instance with Primitivism, a stream within the movement of Modernism. 'Western' artists, from primarily Europe and North America, made up the art discourse. When international, political and economic issues led to several significant changes in the world – the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of the Soviet Union and more – this also led to a rethinking of the system of the art discourse. This led to

² Belting, 2013, p. 178.

a debate on the 'Western' hegemony in art, the inclusion of the 'other' and how to create an art discourse that encompasses the global art production. Exhibitions such as *Magiciens de la Terre* in the Centre Pompidou and *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain*, both in 1989, exhibited the 'other' in a new context: as a legitimate contribution to the art discourse, instead of being unequal to 'Western' art, which was the idea of the respective exhibitions.

Thirty years later, this debate continues. It is still debated how the 'other' can be included, and whether this 'other' be included at all.³ Who is this 'other' and why does 'othering' happen? How can the 'West' and the 'non-West' be exhibited side by side? What is the place of the global contemporary and what platform is or should be given to this?

This thesis places itself within the globalization discussion, specifically on the museological side. Since the deliberation has been going on for several decades now, how has this process been reflected in modern and contemporary art museums? Is this discussion only conducted in these museums or also in other types of museums? As will become clear, the Tropenmuseum, the museum of Ethnology in Amsterdam, which is now part of the National Museum of World Cultures⁴ is engaging in this theoretical debate. The Tropenmuseum started early with relating itself to the debate of the 'inclusion' of the 'non-Euramerican', the Stedelijk Museum has a different history of participating in the discussion of the position of the 'global'.

The aim of this thesis is to explore how these specific museums position themselves in the debate of globalization. The overarching question of this thesis is: what strategies do the Tropenmuseum and Stedelijk Museum use to position themselves in the globalization in art debate and how is the global contemporary represented in these respective museums? This will be researched by comparing both museums. The Tropenmuseum is the ethnographical partner in the debate, the side that has a closer connection to the 'non-

³ In this thesis, the 'other' is used to point to a certain distinction of 'us', the 'West' and the 'other', the 'non-Euramerican', but with full knowledge of how the use of these terms still implies a hierarchy or hegemony. By lack of a better word to point out both the existing distinction within the art discourse as well as the discussion of terms like the 'other', this as well as 'non-West' is used.

⁴ The National Museum exists of the Tropenmuseum (Amsterdam), the Volkenkunde (Leiden) and the Afrika Museum (Berg en Dal). This merge took place in April 2014. For more information, see: <http://asemus.museum/museum/museum-volkenkunde/>, 27 March 2015.

West', since the focus of their collection is anything but the 'West'. What strategies are used by the Tropenmuseum to position itself in this debate, now and before? How is the global contemporary embedded in the museum? I will apply the same questions to the Stedelijk Museum, but from the 'art side' of the debate. This modern and contemporary art museum has shown attention for the 'non-West' on and off over the past thirty years.

The research of both museums will lead to an overlap between these museums, since the boundaries of these once strictly defined museums are no longer so strict, the roles and traditional visions of the museums can change. The strategies used by the museums will become clear, as well as the position of global contemporary art.

To do so, I will first lay out my framework, which will be drawn from several discourses. The foundation will consist of arguments coming from the discourse of museum studies, by looking at Nana Leigh, lecturer of Museum Studies at Leiden University, as well as Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, professor emeritus at the University of Leicester and a well-known professor within Museum Studies.⁵ For the art historical and art critical substantiation art critic Thomas McEvilley will underpin important thoughts on the start of this globalization debate, and curator of the Stedelijk Museum Jelle Bouwhuis will help to clarify what the current status of the Stedelijk Museum is in this debate. Mirjam Shatanawi, curator of the Tropenmuseum, will do the same for the ethnographical side of the framework. With arguments from Peter Weibel and Hans Belting, more art historical weight will be added to my framework, as I will lay this out in chapter one.

Chapter two will look at the Tropenmuseum as a case study, and will construct how the Tropenmuseum is relating itself to the global contemporary and the debate, and what strategies are used. In the third chapter, the Stedelijk Museum will be explored as a case study, how does the museum relate itself to the globalization debate, as well as the history of the museum when it comes to this debate and the way the project space SMBA, of which Jelle Bouwhuis is one of the head-curators, is used by the Stedelijk within this discourse. After this I will reach my conclusion. What can be concluded on the strategies used by these museums?

⁵ <http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/museumstudies/about-the-school/people/professor-emeritus-eilean-hooper-greenhill>, 30 July 2015.

Chapter 1 – Framing the framing of globalization

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will present the discussion on globalization in art, to set the scene for the discussion in the chapters on the ethnographic museum, the (contemporary) art museum and their relation to global contemporary art. The debate on globalization that has been taking place for over three decades within the art world(s) is too widespread to capture in its entirety. Therefore, I will outline what is relevant in relation to the subsequent chapters and the main question in this chapter: How do the authors in the selected literature identify globalization in the contemporary art discourse? What are the problems they see concerning globalization in art? What are crucial factors that should be considered for constructing a framework for researching this topic?

The literature that will be explored in this chapter discusses the globalization debate, and the problems the authors see regarding 'global' art. The first excerpt is the introduction text to the exhibition *How Far How Near* shown at the Stedelijk Museum from September 2014 until February 2015, organized by Stedelijk curator Jelle Bouwhuis. I contributed to the writing of this exhibition's catalogue during my internship period at the Stedelijk Museum. Jelle Bouwhuis's text broadly explores the challenges the museum faces in relation to the *Global Collaborations* project, as well as to the history of the Stedelijk regarding 'global' art.

Next, I will take a step back in time and look at the beginnings of the discussion and discuss how art critic Thomas McEvilley contributed to this in 1992. The statements he made, 23 years ago, are still relevant today regarding the 'globalization within art' debate. These statements as well as his critiques regarding the *Primitivism* exhibition of 1984 at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMa) New York and the *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition of 1989 at the Centre Pompidou in Paris will reveal that not much has changed since he wrote his essay, and also the need to continue the debate.

I will then return to the present to the book called *Art Worlds After 1989: The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds* (2013), which was edited by Peter Weibel, Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg and published in the context of the exhibition *The Global Contemporary* (September 2011 – February 2012). This book and exhibition are part of a large scale project: *Global Art and the Museum*, which encompasses research,

exhibitions, publications and more. Since 2006 Peter Weibel, Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg are dedicated to researching the underlying systems of a globalizing world and how this makes a 'global' art world, or multiple art worlds, and what this means for looking at the 'global'.

Mirjam Shatanawi, curator of the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, wrote an essay on the changing role of the Tropenmuseum which was featured in *The Global Art World: Audiences, Markets, and Museums*, part of the *Global Art Museum Project* and edited by Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg (2009). This article will shed more light on the ethnographical side of the discussion, and how the Tropenmuseum is redefining itself.

From the questions these authors pose, the points they make and what I take from their points of view, I have constructed my framework for this thesis. As will become clear, in 2015 the discussion is still going on and museums are searching for new roles to play, or change their old roles. This chapter will explore as well as lay out a foundation for the following chapters.

1.2 *How Far How Near*

The exhibition *How Far How Near* opened on the 18th of September, 2014. This exhibition was part of the broader project *Global Collaborations*, which encompasses lectures, symposia, publications and exhibitions in collaboration with art institutions worldwide, the Stedelijk Museums' project space *SMBA* (Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam) and publications. I will elaborate on this project in chapter three, in this chapter I will focus on the introductory text which curator of the Stedelijk Museum Jelle Bouwhuis wrote for the exhibition *How Far How Near*. The idea for the exhibition was formed after the Stedelijk Museum acquired several contemporary artworks from Africa following their display in the *SMBA* exhibition *Project 1975*. This brought Bouwhuis to look more closely to the collection of the Stedelijk, where he discovered a 'geographical gap'⁶

⁶ By this gap I mean how he sees that some geographical parts are represented more than others, or some parts not even represented at all. This is what I call a gap: clearly something is missing in the collection of the Stedelijk Museum.

and he asked himself: “Why was the museum’s exhibition and collection policy so geographically restricted until now?”⁷

In his introductory text, Bouwhuis connects the exhibition to the history of the Stedelijk Museum, as well as to the debate on globalization: he relates the Stedelijk Museum to the MoMA in New York, the Tate Modern in London and the Centre Pompidou in Paris, museums that are also trying to reposition themselves within the ‘global’ era in art. Also, within the exhibition of *How Far How Near*, Bouwhuis looks back at the history of the Stedelijk Museum and how it previously exhibited the geographical ‘other’, with the *Modern Art – New and Old* exhibition of 1955 as a guideline (see image 1). He tries to unravel why the Stedelijk has such a narrow geographical area covered in its collection.

Bouwhuis refers to a quote of artist Alfredo Jaar in his text, coming from the publication *Project 1975* (2014), the previous large-scale project by SMBA, focusing on post-colonialism in the contemporary art discourse – I shall also return to this in chapter three. Jaar, who is also featured in the *How Far How Near* exhibition, says: “Our little art world is no more than a perfect reflection of the geopolitical reality of the world, and reflects quite perfectly the unbalances that we see everywhere”.⁸ What Jaar is saying here is that the way the world is shaped, the relationships the world is built on, international relationships, anything that contributes to power balance and imbalance in the world, contributes to the (im)balance within the art world. Following this, contemporary art, as it reflects contemporary life and the contemporary world, contains a residue of the relationships and power (in) balances of the world. Thus, as Jaar says, in that way the art world is a reflection of the geopolitical reality of the world.

This reality, as Jaar calls it, was in previous years reflected scarcely in the policies of the Stedelijk Museum. By revisiting the Stedelijk Museum’s history, it becomes clear that in the past there have been few exhibitions with a more ‘non-Euramerican’ approach. For example, in the *Modern Art – New and Old* exhibition held in 1955, the then director Willem Sandberg said to have “found evidence of free expression elsewhere in the world”.⁹ This exhibition showed modern art, (Picasso, Paul Klee, Roger Bissière and others) next to

⁷ Bouwhuis and Winking, 2014, p. 2.

⁸ Idem.

⁹ Ibidem, p. 6.

'primitive' art: objects from Papua, tapas and shields, or African ritual masks and sculptures.¹⁰ The idea was showing art from around the world together in one exhibition, but its main goal was to show "old and new sources that inspired modern artists".¹¹ This exhibition shows similarities with the *Primitivism* exhibition that was held 1984, thirty years after Sandberg's exhibition, and both showing 'tribal' and 'primitive' art as an inspiration to modern art. As Nana Leigh points out in her dissertation, the Stedelijk did exhibit art of the 'other', however, its main focus was and is modern art – and how 'the other' fits into this discourse, I will explain more in chapter three.

However, Bouwhuis' exhibition is taking place over 60 years after the *Modern Art – New and Old* exhibition, and there still appears to be a gap, since Bouwhuis asks where Africa or Latin America are currently represented in the collection of the Stedelijk Museum. From his position of a curator in a modern and contemporary art museum like the Stedelijk Museum, Bouwhuis experiences how the museum has excluded a large part of the world in its collection. For a modern and contemporary art museum that wants to engage in a 'global' museological or global contemporary art discourse, there needs to be a change to be inclusive. Herein lies for him the relevance of making this exhibition: shaping a new "global" world. Even though, as Jaar says, the geopolitical reality is reflected in the art world, changes can be made.

In conclusion, according to Bouwhuis there is a lack of diversity in the collection and policy of the Stedelijk Museum. Bouwhuis' conclusion is that the world inside the Stedelijk is mainly 'Western', and thus excludes a large part of the world. His questions and answers are paired with carefulness, without being all too critical of the museum itself, the same approach the museum had before with many of its 'global' exhibitions. Given his position as curator in said museum, this comes as no surprise, he is in fact fairly critical of 'his' museum. Bouwhuis does show how the history of the Stedelijk up to the present is responsible for a lack of courage of including certain geographical regions in the Stedelijk's collection.

¹⁰ Bouwhuis and Winking, 2014, p. 5.

¹¹ Leigh, 2008. Dissertation: *Building the image of modern art : the rhetoric of two museums and the representation and canonization of modern art (1935-1975) : the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and the Museum of Modern Art in New York* , dissertation still under embargo. For the Stedelijk Studies a fragment was edited and expanded, and published under the title "A Rhetorical Analysis of African Art in the Story of Modern Art", on their website.

1.3 *Art & Otherness*

In 1992, Thomas McEvilley bundled and published *Art & Otherness*, containing several essays that relate to the globalization debate within the art discourse. Jelle Bouwhuis signaled the same problem Thomas McEvilley did 23 years before: “While seeming to emphasize universality or sameness, art in the ‘West’ became a force for divisiveness and exclusion”.¹² This is effectively the same thing Bouwhuis says regarding the Stedelijk Museum, and many years before Bouwhuis asked the same questions, McEvilley criticized the dichotomies existing within the art discourse.¹³ McEvilley’s volume of essays is important since it shows how the same questions are still being asked after so many years. It also points to the importance of his words, by the usage of the terms: ‘Western’ art, ‘Western’ art history or the ‘Western’ art world is still excluding a large part of the world, and upholding dichotomies.

The main point that resonates throughout his essays is that McEvilley sees the division between the ‘West’ and as he calls it ‘the ‘other’, meaning that which doesn’t resemble the ‘West’. As a result of many factors throughout history, due to Modernism and colonialism, a dichotomy between the ‘West’ and ‘the rest’ was formed and maintained. Modernism is a factor that returns many times in his essays, saying: “With the gradual demise of Modernism during the last three decades, however, there are signs that the art world’s cultic ambience is diminishing – or at the very least that its membership base had broadened dramatically”.¹⁴ For McEvilley, Modernism is the catalyst in the art world that kept the division in place, and because of the inherent values of Modernism there was no space left for the so-called ‘other’. When the grip of Modernism within the art world loosened, there was more attention for the ‘other’.

Modernism is yet one of the many factors that held and still holds the existing dichotomy in place. Furthermore, colonialism and its effects created a geopolitical situation that excluded anything ‘non-West’ from being institutionalized. By the end of the 1980s, the world had changed dramatically. Or, to use Alfredo Jaar’s words: the geopolitical situation of the world had changed. With this I refer to the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Soviet Union

¹² McEvilley, 1992, p. 9.

¹³ Idem.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 10.

dissolving, economic and political boundaries shifting, a global economy being established, and so on. Also part of this is how the art world changed and became more 'global', under the influence of these changes. As a reaction to these processes, exhibitions with a more broad view on and of the world were made. For McEvelley, the art exhibition is the place where the "multiculturalism" debate needs to be fought.¹⁵ Within exhibitions, the 'other' and the 'West' can be shown side by side, and thus reflecting the changed (art) world. The discussion should be held within actual art exhibitions, and with actual artworks.

In 1984, William Rubin curated the exhibition *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, in the MoMa, New York (see Image 2). His interest was in the modernist art that had affinities with the 'tribal'. By 'tribal' is referred to objects from for instance Africa, South America or Polynesia, which are defined as ritual or traditional utensils and not as art, objects like masks, costumes, totems and other objects.¹⁶ In this exhibition, modernist works were juxtaposed to these 'tribal' objects, to show relations and affinities. Rubin made a clear distinction between art and 'tribal' or 'traditional' objects, and felt that researching the latter in its original context was a job for anthropologists. However, he makes his aim very clear: he wanted to research the Primitivist artworks in their 'Western' context and how 'Western' artists 'discovered' the primitive sculptures and objects.¹⁷ The term 'Primitivism' refers to the modernist interpretation of tribal objects that received attention from these artists for various reasons. Some liked these objects for their simplicity, others for what they imagined it stood for: a primitive state. In his exhibition, Rubin clearly states that the view of *Primitivism* is ethnocentric, that he focuses on this 'Western' point of view instead of the objects and artworks being equals.¹⁸

In retrospect, the exhibition generated a lot of attention, one reason being its ethnocentric point of view. McEvelley said for instance that the 'other' only had a place as a source, not as an autonomous entity. This refers to how the objects were displayed, to show a (direct or indirect) source of inspiration, which takes the tribal objects out of their context. Since the aim of Rubin was to study the 'Western' artworks it is not surprising that the role of the tribal was subordinate to the Primitivists. However, as McEvelley sees the

¹⁵ McEvelley, 1992, p. 14.

¹⁶ Lafuente, 2013, p. 10.

¹⁷ Rubin, 1984, p. 1.

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 5.

exhibition as a place to work out the globalization in art debate, *Primitivism* did not challenge this discussion. *Primitivism* embodied many of the 'old' Modernist values, containing, in McEvelley's words, the Hegelian view that "history is a story of Europeans leading dark-skinned people toward spiritual realization".¹⁹ Within the exhibition the Modernist artworks were highlighted, the tribal objects remained anonymous and a mere illustration to the 'higher' art. For McEvelley, this exhibition showed the rule of the 'Westerner' over the 'other', since the Modernists created artworks, and the 'other' remained 'tribal'. The 'tribal' only acted as a source, thus upholding the hierarchy between the 'Western' work and the 'tribal'.

A few years later, *Magiciens de la Terre* was organized in Paris. In 1989, Jean-Hubert Martin curated what would become a benchmark exhibition within the globalization debate (see image 3). Even after twenty-six years, *Magiciens de la Terre* is still referred to as the starting point of many debates and discussions on globalization in art to come. However, between *Primitivism* and *Magiciens* a lot had changed. Whereas *Primitivism* had a modernist approach to 'non-Western' objects, *Magiciens'* aim was to show artists from around the world as being equal to one another. The curators were well aware of the critiques on *Primitivism* and could therefore try to more actively avoid the pitfalls of an ethnocentric or Eurocentric view and opt for a universal view on the production of art. The artists were called *Magiciens*, to universalize the name of the 'authors' of the artworks, instead of choosing the 'Western' term 'artist'. Living artists from around the world were invited to come to Paris and make an art work on site. *Magiciens* presented itself as being the "first worldwide exhibition of contemporary art" from an institutional perspective.²⁰

As McEvelley sees it, *Magiciens* was the first serious attempt at an exhibition that showed the so-called 'other', that gave the 'non-Western' artist a platform in the 'West'. It was a first attempt at 'including'²¹ the 'non-Western' artist, and also making an exhibition in a postcolonial era and at the same time leaving Modernist values and ideas on history and the hegemony of the 'Western' artist behind, as opposed to *Primitivism*, according to

¹⁹ McEvelley, 1992, p. 155.

²⁰ Lafuente, 2013, p. 11.

²¹ Speaking of including is something that is not a solution for this debate, in my opinion. I will come back to this in paragraph 1.4.

McEvelley. By being regarded as the first attempt, this also relates to how McEvelley wants to see the discussion being held, within an exhibition.

However, he disapproves of the term *Magiciens de la Terre*, for him it seems to imply a certain closeness to the earth, a more primitive or traditional approach.²² McEvelley saw the 'non-Western' artists as being more traditional and the 'Western' artists as being more conceptual, creating a dichotomy within the exhibition. Nevertheless his words contain a certain optimism about *Magiciens*, which is mostly because he has "belief in the premises [of the exhibition]", despite of the "lame curation", as McEvelley to the exhibition.²³

His ambiguous words still exude positive belief that underscore his point that the place for the discussion of globalization in art is the art exhibition. *Primitivism* was flawed and upheld the 'Western' hegemony, *Magiciens* had the right premises but still did not work out that well according to him, but it was a (first) step in the right direction. The struggle of the exhibition as a battleground is therefore that, no matter what context the curator or institution has for the featured artworks, a new context arises. As Pablo Lafuente formulates this in *Making Art Global (Part 2)* regarding *Magiciens*, but his quote can be applied to exhibitions in general: "This is perhaps what the exhibition form is: a place where nothing belongs, but where, because of this, objects and people (artists, curators and others) enter into relations, according to and against their will".²⁴ Here, in the globalization debate, global contemporary art is placed context-less in a new context.

Returning to the notion of the exhibition being the battleground for the globalization discussion (McEvelley), between *Primitivism* and *Magiciens* the world had changed. The view on the 'other' had changed. The desire to incorporate this 'other' into our existing dialogue, discourse and debate was comprehensive. Even though Rubin wanted to look solely at the Primitivist from a modernist perspective and illustrate their affinities with 'tribal' objects, the tribal acted as a source, not as an autonomous object in itself. In *Magiciens* the 'other' had a place of his own, artists were invited for the sake of making art in a worldwide context. Nevertheless, artists and artworks were stripped of their context, like in *Primitivism*, and placed in a 'context-free' environment in *Magiciens*.

²² McEvelley, 1992, p. 154.

²³ Idem.

²⁴ Lafuente, 2013, p. 22.

1.4. *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds*

Fast forward again to the present. In 2006, Peter Weibel and Hans Belting started the project called *GAM – Global Art and the Museum*. They aim to keep the debate on globalization in the art discourse going. This project “represents a first attempt at documenting the contested boundaries of today’s art world”.²⁵ To them, globalization is a central phenomenon within the contemporary art discourse and the art world(s). With the project of *GAM*, research is being done on this phenomenon and documenting what is happening today, how the art worlds are changing and how to deal with this change. Through multiple publications within this research project, conferences and the exhibition *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds* in the winter of 2011-2012, over the past few years the creation of a new vocabulary is brought into being. The publication *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds* (2013) that was published in tandem with the exhibition *The Global Contemporary: Art Worlds after 1989*, is too large to discuss here in full extent, so instead I will focus on the introductory text of Peter Weibel, which explains the idea behind the project and opens the discussion with the suggestion of a new approach: rewriting (see image 4 for overview picture of the exhibition).

As said earlier, the end of the 1980s signified important *geopolitical* changes. Thus far, it is clear that these changes had their consequences for the production, reception, exhibiting and framing of (contemporary) art. The previous geopolitical situation until circa the 1980s consisted of the hegemony of the ‘West’ and led to the exclusion of ‘the rest’. Broadly speaking, this hegemony seems to be rooted in colonialism, capitalism, racism and modernization. Peter Weibel explains: “modernity is the result of differentiation, it also applies rules of inclusion/exclusion.”²⁶ Modernism was an excluding ‘mechanism’, and being kept in place, it dictated the rules within the then perceived singular art world for a long time.

At the end of the 1980s, the focus shifted to discussing the ‘Western’ hegemony in art. The inclusion/exclusion dilemma as it is laid out by Peter Weibel, needed to be ‘solved’. Many solutions came in the shape of including the ‘other’, as Thomas McEvelley said as well. However, including the ‘non-Euramerican’ seems to be a solution with problems of its own.

²⁵ http://www.globalartmuseum.de/site/about_us, 28 March 2015.

²⁶ Weibel, 2013, p. 21.

Including suggests stretching or broadening an existing framework to make something else fit in. That means that the 'West' makes the 'other' fit and this keeps the hegemony in place: after all the 'Western' framework is the one that is still used, only now the 'other' can join. This way, exclusion-mechanisms keep existing and the 'other' becomes almost forced to join this new framework.

Inclusion therefore is not a solution, but it creates a different problem. Weibel suggests that we should think of something else: rewriting. According to Weibel, the 'old' singular art world was a system, defined by colonialism and Modernism and led to a hegemony of the 'West' and an exclusion of 'the rest'. For this to change, we need to change that system, or rewrite it. McEvilley also pointed this out in 1992 and pleaded for a turnover of the 'Western' hegemony and Peter Weibel seems to still plead for the same thing over twenty years later. The importance of what they are both saying on 'Western' hegemony lies in this large time gap: after so many years the need for change is still high.

McEvilley's approach on *making the 'other' fit* is in my opinion not an option, this will still exclude the 'other'. Weibel's rewriting is based on "the assumption that every system consists of a finite number of elements and of a limited number of rules as to how these elements are connected and can be sequenced. These rules are called rewriting rules."²⁷ For Weibel this means the rewriting of society, which has been happening for thousands of years, and was happening at the end of the 1980s when globalization transformed the world.²⁸

Part of this transformation is the use of the term 'contemporary'. For Hans Belting, contemporary art is by definition 'global': "[global] art] is recognized as the sudden and worldwide production of art that did not exist or did not garner attention until the late 1980s. ... it is guided by the intention to replace the center and periphery scheme of a hegemonic modernity ...".²⁹ Contemporary art is 'global', since the period 'we' classify as contemporary is also defined by globalization. A side note here is that there is no sudden worldwide production of art, since art was produced before as well. Is art before the 1980s a lost cause in the globalization debate? Was it too tightly gripped in the discourse of

²⁷ Weibel, 2013, p. 21.

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 22.

²⁹ Belting, 2013, p. 178.

Modernism to consider it with a global view, or as global art? In my opinion, what Belting says mostly refers to that ‘Western art historians’ recognize as contemporary art and therefore as a ‘global’ phenomenon. Also, this worldwide art did garner attention before, only within a colonial framework. The big change being here that the view became post-colonial, aware of its colonialness and ‘Western’ framework. So when this transformation, or re-writing occurred, part of that was rephrasing the discourse. Modern art did not include art from ‘the rest of the world’, and therefore the term contemporary art is supposed to cover the entire ‘present day’ art production that reflects on a changed, ‘global’ world.

Eilean Hooper-Greenhill notes that museums are deeply affected by the processes of rewriting: “Histories are being rewritten from new perspectives and the past is being re-remembered to privilege different events. Formerly silent voices are being heard, and new cultural identities are being forged from the remains of the past”.³⁰ So as Weibel explained as well, rewriting is a process started by the questioning of the current (or past) paradigms, while shifting this paradigm onto a new rewritten one. These processes take time, as can be seen from the fact that the globalization discussion has been going on for a while. Rewriting means also developing new narratives in museums, and also “new ways of thinking about collections and audiences”.³¹

Weibel’s theory on rewriting regards the whole discourse, spanning from its early days in the 1980s until the present day. This means that the defining of the discourse now is different from defining the problem or discourse in the 1980s: it is not a clash of cultures (within globalization processes) nor is it a question of in- or excluding, for Weibel it can be seen as a rewriting process, that keeps evolving.³² Rewriting and revisiting means developing forward, and that is what is happening, and should happen within art and ‘ethnographic’ museums. For me, it is also time to evolve or rewrite the discussion of today: to create a new discourse that is not bound to a ‘Western’ history per se, but to a ‘global’ and world scale history.

³⁰ Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p. 19.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 31.

³² Weibel, 2013, p. 27.

1.5. Contemporary art in ethnographic museums

Part of the GAM project was the publication of *The Global Art World. Audiences, Markets and Museums* (H. Belting, A. Buddensieg (eds.) 2009). In this book the process of 'global' art production was researched, by "reevaluating the notion of mainstream art".³³ Within this context, curator of the Tropenmuseum Mirjam Shatanawi explored the place of contemporary art in the ethnographic museum, specifically the Amsterdam Tropenmuseum, in her essay 'Contemporary Art in Ethnographic Museums', where Shatanawi works as a curator. Part of the rewriting ideas of Weibel and Belting is that the strict division between ethnographic museums and contemporary art museums can no longer hold as it is. In chapter two I will elaborate on the strategies used by ethnographic museums, how their role is changing and how contemporary art finds its place in this type of museum.

Shatanawi's main focus in her essay is how the Tropenmuseum has trouble overcoming its role of 'colonial left-over'. Ethnographic museums have a long history, rooted in the colonial 'West': displaying the (exotic) 'other'. Part of their role is informing the audience on foreign, 'non-Western' and 'unknown' cultures and their objects. However, exhibiting this 'other' can quickly become a hierarchy: the 'Western' museum showing off the 'other', in an often static display of objects taken out of their contexts.

The Tropenmuseum, so she explains, has been challenging itself since 1985, when they organized a symposium on contemporary art from "what were at the time referred to as developing countries".³⁴ As becomes evident in her essay, the Tropenmuseum is aware of its own 'flaws', and is prepared to face and challenge these. What also becomes evident, is how deeply rooted the remnants of colonial rule are in an ethnographic museum, but is it even possible for a museum like the Tropenmuseum to let go of this? The Tropenmuseum is trying to overcome itself and transform into a museum that does not just 'collect' other cultures, but is able to show a cultural and visual history of the entire world. I will elaborate on this in the next chapter.

The reason it is important for now, is that this debate from the ethnographic museum's point of view shows that the discourse and debate of globalization in art not just

³³ <http://www.globalartmuseum.de/site/publication/91>, 26 April 2015.

³⁴ Shatanawi, 2009, p. 368.

focuses on modern and contemporary art museums, but also centers itself in ethnographic museums. The debate is going on for thirty years or so: the Tropenmuseum caught up early with the globalization debate and is therefore an important player in the debate and relevant for the role they are trying to play and their effort to change.

I see the debate centering in ethnographic museums also as a part of the present rewriting program, one that differs from McEvilley's paradigm over twenty years ago, and maybe as well from Peter Weibel's ideas on rewriting, since both are not drastic enough. Museums have changing roles to play, boundaries are blurring and dichotomies are to be overcome. Global contemporary art has an important position in both ethnographic and art museums, which also echoes in the main research question of this thesis: What is this role and what strategies are used?

The essay of Mirjam Shatanawi as well as the larger debate that the Tropenmuseum is relating to, is important for my framework: it shows the interdisciplinarity of the debate. It is not limited to one aspect of society (the art museum) but is affecting the globalization in art debate on many levels. The Tropenmuseum started the discussion on contemporary 'global' art in 1985, and has been paying attention to it ever since, occupying a solitary position, at least back in the 1980s. According to Shatanawi, back then the discussion was not picked up by art museums, and 'global' art was not deemed appropriate for art museums, since it was not recognized as such but aligned to ethnographic objects, which according to many art museums belonged to ethnographic museum. Modern art had a place in a modern art museum, the 'other' did not 'fit in' and thus was excluded from the art museum and only had a place in ethnographic museums.³⁵

As Shatanawi points out, the Tropenmuseum has been trying to get the discussion on globalization in art going from the ethnographic side of the debate for a long time, as one of the first museums who do engage. Back then, the discussion also pointed out that some objects belong in an ethnographic museums and others in an art museum. To me that seems to be part of the discussion of today: 'Western' art vs. 'non-Western' art is also a debate on what art is, since art 'belongs' in an art museum and 'the rest of the cultural objects' 'belong' in an ethnographic museum. That is exactly what is part of the changing

³⁵ Shatanawi, 2009, p. 368.

roles of both museum: lines between these 'classified' objects are blurring, which leads me to conclude that these works can be displayed in both types of museums. What type of objects from outside of the 'West' can be classified as contemporary art and what is 'just' handicraft?

1.6. The framework

To wrap up: the debate on globalization as a phenomenon in art has been going on for decades now. The attention has been there, but the same questions have been asked for over thirty years. McEvelley engaged in this debate in the early 1990s, after *Magiciens* was organized a just a few years before and around the same time the debate grew larger. He pleads for an inclusion of this 'other' in our discourse. McEvelley saw the 'Western' hegemony within art, Jelle Bouwhuis still sees this in the collection of the Stedelijk Museum. He sees the larger problem: how can a museum like the Stedelijk Museum ignore such a large part of the world? I agree with him that even though the Stedelijk tries to exhibit this 'other', a large part remains ignored. That leads me to Peter Weibel and his 'rewriting'. If rewriting means creating a new framework, detached from the rigid 'Western art' framework, then it might be more constructive to create a new discourse in which global contemporary art comes to its right. It also appears to be that the Tropenmuseum is engaging in the debate in a more reflexive way than the Stedelijk does, but this will become clearer in the following chapters.

The framework that has been constituted here is a combination of art criticism, namely the essay by McEvelley and the 'Western' hegemony he detected so many years ago. With points made by Bouwhuis and Shatanawi, namely the struggles of museums and the relation this effectively has to art history, the art history side of the debate is highlighted. With references to Nana Leigh and Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, the discourse of museum studies and the struggles these respective museums have are coming to the fore. With the case studies laid out in the following chapters, the struggles the Tropenmuseum and the Stedelijk Museum face are discussed and looked upon from this framework. How do these museums position themselves in this globalization in art discussion, and what strategies are used?

Chapter 2 – The global contemporary in the Tropenmuseum

2.1. Introduction

Using the framework explained in the first chapter, this chapter focuses on the ethnographic museum and specifically on the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, which will be the case-study here. The central question in relation to the Tropenmuseum is how this ethnographic museum, with a long (post-) (colonial) history, places itself into the globalization in art debate, in to the ‘global’ art discourse and global contemporary art. What strategies are used by the Tropenmuseum to position itself in relation to the global contemporary?

The Tropenmuseum is an important example because of its position as a pioneer, since the museum stood at the very beginning of the globalization debate in the 1980s – in the Dutch museological scene. The museum acknowledged from early on the importance of a global view when it comes to art and cultural objects and was questioning its reason of existence as an ethnographic museum. The Tropenmuseum started to actively think about its changing role around 1985. Over the next decades, the Tropenmuseum has been researching this changing role, as well as regarding (new) ideas on how an ethnographic museum in a postcolonial era can also be shaped³⁶.

Like many ethnographic museums, the Tropenmuseum finds its origins in the 19th century. In 1864 the Colonial Museum was founded in Haarlem, and would later become to be known as the Tropenmuseum. The collection was made up of objects Dutch people brought back from their travels, in ‘the East’. The exhibiting of these ‘exotic’ objects was for both pleasure and research, as well as to educate the visitor.³⁷ The collected objects and the initial idea of these ethnographic museums had strong connections to colonial ideologies.³⁸ The founding ideas of these museums were notably linked to social and political

³⁶ Shatanawi, 2009, p. 368.

³⁷ In 1910 the Colonial Museum merged with the Colonial Institute, which name would later be changed to the ‘Royal Tropical Institute’, a name that suited the new intentions better: the institute would, in the context of decolonization, focus more on the tropics in general instead of Dutch colonies. The Tropenmuseum was separated from the Royal Tropical Institute in 2014. For more information see <http://www.kit.nl/kit/en/organisation/history/>, 17 May 2015.

³⁸ Legêne, 2009, p. 14.

constructions within Europe.³⁹ It was not only a collection of objects from distant places, but it was also a display of certain (colonial) beliefs of the local (colonial) context.

Over the course of the century after its founding, the Tropenmuseum looked at itself and from time to time, reevaluating its existence and roles. The Tropenmuseum went through several ‘periods’ in which different important issues stood at the core of the museum. Closely connected to social changes, the Tropenmuseum related itself to the “rise of imperialism”, to “an expression of the self-confident colonial elite”, or “a time of reconstruction and national and international reorientation” and finally, “globalization and the rise of cultural diversity within Dutch society”.⁴⁰ This final period started over thirty years ago and is still going on.

In this chapter this recent history of the Tropenmuseum will be examined, I will first discuss the introspection of the museum on its practices and history, how exactly has the Tropenmuseum reflected on itself over the past years? Through publications on past symposia, the intentions and ideas of the museum will be explored. After this, I will examine the role of global contemporary art in this recent history. What is the role of global contemporary art in the Tropenmuseum and what strategies are used by the museum?

2.2 A short history of self-reflection

Although the Tropenmuseum is reflecting intensively on its colonial history and finding new ways to present itself, as well as to get rid of this old framework, the museum cannot get around this history, it has a colonial foundation of collecting ‘the other’ within a framework of a colonizing nation, to get rid of this history is impossible. The museum itself already has a ‘non-Western’ focus point, since the ethnographic by definition centers on geographical areas outside of the ‘Euramerican’. It is important to state that this is still a ‘Western’ view on the ‘other’, and thus contains a certain bias. The questioning of this bias grew and after an exhibition on African art⁴¹ in 1980 called *Modern art in Africa* raised the question whether this ‘non-Western’ art belongs in an anthropological museum or in an art

³⁹ Shelton, 2011, p. 65.

⁴⁰ Legêne, 2009, p. 14.

⁴¹ van Brakel, Legêne, 2008, p. 38.

museum?⁴² This led to decades of self-reflection within the Tropenmuseum, a period of many symposia and publications on different issues, questioning the merits of the museum and its role as a museum.⁴³ The awareness of its colonial framework and what this means for exhibiting ‘the other’, is characteristic of the museum and led to rethinking the museum’s colonial past and its views.

In 1985 a symposium was held on this topic of reflecting on the museums’ past and changing roles, and was centered on the role of art in ethnographic and art museums. Since 1985 the Tropenmuseum is aware of its changing global surroundings, a changing role for the museum and the role of (global) contemporary art within the museum. During this symposium, directors and curators discussed contemporary art from what was then referred to as “developing countries”.⁴⁴ The Tropenmuseum discovered, despite its good intentions, that it had an isolated position in this debate. The conclusion of that day – at least from the art museum’s perspective – was that contemporary art from ‘developing countries’ would best be left to ethnographic museums, as Shatanawi describes. At the time it was felt that this contemporary art did not fit the framework of modern and contemporary art museums, because of its specific origin, namely: ‘not the West’.⁴⁵

In 1992, the Tropenmuseum organized yet another symposium, called: “How to display it? The museological presentation of contemporary ‘non-western’ art”.⁴⁶ As Harrie Leyten, who was a curator at the Tropenmuseum, explains: the museum had new issues to think of when rethinking its role. On the expectations of the visitor Leyten says: “how would the visitors react to this new presentation – one, it was argued, that would not correspond with their frame of reference; and what could museums do to facilitate this process?⁴⁷ This led this symposium, another incentive for the museum to rethink its own role, and its own actions regarding the ‘other’. This symposium rethought the way of exhibiting the ‘other’, and whether to provide the visitor with information or not, since art museums left out information and let the art works speak for themselves, where anthropological museums “are inclined to provide a great deal of information [on the

⁴² Shelton, 2011, p. 65.

⁴³ Faber, van Dartel, 2009, p. 8.

⁴⁴ Shatanawi, 2009, p. 368.

⁴⁵ Idem.

⁴⁶ Leyten, 1993, p. 8.

⁴⁷ Idem.

objects]”.⁴⁸ What becomes apparent, is that in this publication and during the symposium, a comparison is made between anthropological and art museums. This creates a friction between the notions of either providing information on the objects on display, or not. Leyten also expresses his optimism in the foreword to the publication of this symposium and says: “both anthropological museums and museums of modern art now make their exhibition spaces available for shows of contemporary ‘non-Western’ art. This phenomenon seems to mark the end of a discussion that began in 1980 [...]”⁴⁹ Little did he know that this discussion would go on for another twenty years at least. It does express a certain hopefulness, and optimism that real change is going to come.

However, in 1995 an important refurbishment began.⁵⁰ During this refurbishment the museum stayed open as a building and as a receptor for new ideas on how to shape the museum: “It [the museum] pondered new international relationships and focused on the changing demands, wishes and possibilities of a public with a different composition.”⁵¹ Not only did the museum look at external factors like international relationships and changing surroundings, “the objects became important again, but stories still took center stage”.⁵² With stories, the museum focuses on the histories and individual stories that are associated with the objects, and placed within the context of the objects of the museum’s collection. This storytelling has become an important factor within the policy of collecting and exhibiting of the Tropenmuseum.

This refurbishment led to a reorganizing of exhibitions and displays, to underscore the reflective nature of the museum, and the awareness of its diluted colonial history. In 2008, a symposium was held to conclude the refurbishment of the years before. The outcome and outline of this symposium was published in the 2009 bulletin *‘Tropenmuseum for a change!’*. Speakers from around the world were invited to give their view on the Tropenmuseum and its future reorganizations.⁵³ This symposium is an important benchmark, since it gives an overview of the years that passed in which the Tropenmuseum actively researched how to change its colonial attitude and how to position itself in the

⁴⁸ Leyten, 1993, p. 8.

⁴⁹ Ibidem, p. 7.

⁵⁰ Colunge, 2009, p. 23

⁵¹ Faber, van Dartel, 2009, p. 8.

⁵² Idem.

⁵³ Ibidem, p. 7.

globalization in art debate. The symposium discussed these issues, as well as exhibition policies, and whether to collect contemporary art or not.

In the 2009 publication of the symposium, attention was given to previous exhibition practices. Previously, the museum used dioramas to exhibit the 'other' quite literally, by putting objects and models of actual source community-members next to each other. A picture from 1938 shows a display of "Absent Queen Wilhelmina and her colonial subjects" (see image 5).⁵⁴ This kind of display takes the object – like a mask, shield or even a statue of a member of a source community – out of their context, and places them in a 'timeless' new context. The objects remain the same in the collection of the Tropenmuseum, and in the original exhibition the objects and 'people' were arranged in such a way that it showed a 'traditional society'.⁵⁵ According to Susan Legêne, who was an associate of the Tropenmuseum and head of the Museological Matters department of the Tropenmuseum, looking back on these past exhibition practices can give insights that can be used today.⁵⁶ Reflecting on such a display of 'a culture' shows that it generalizes and creates a timeless bubble for the objects. Instead of emphasizing that an object represents a certain tradition or culture in a specific time-period, cultures are generalized fairly quickly. In past exhibitions, emphasis was placed on how a culture and its traditions remained the same, even though some of the exhibited people and objects became part of the Dutch colonial empire and became subjected to major changes imposed by this empire rather than remaining timeless "source communities". She also notes how it is the role of the museum to make clear to the visitors that what they are looking at is a captured moment, and how cultures are always changing: labeling objects with a time period is important in this, to avoid stripping objects of their present.

Another example of a question that was central to the debate during the symposium of 2008 is: "what is the social role and position of the anthropological museum at this point in time?"⁵⁷ During the discussions of this symposium many views were given, for instance by Okwui Enwezor, who is amongst others an art critic, playing an important role in the globalization debate since it started in the 1980s, and currently the Director of the Visual

⁵⁴ Legêne, 2009, p. 17.

⁵⁵ Ibidem, p. 18.

⁵⁶ <http://framerframed.nl/en/mensen/susan-legene/>, 26 Juli 2015.

⁵⁷ Shatanawi, 2009, p. 10.

Arts Sector of the Venice Biennial 2015.⁵⁸ He pointed out that “this [a new era] will prevent the obsolescence of the ethnographic museum and make its existence of great importance for societal development in the 21st century”.⁵⁹ The ethnographic museum is not obsolete but when reacting to changes around itself, the Tropenmuseum can evolve into a museum that represents the global present. The nuanced discussion led to a careful conclusion, the role of the museum has not inherently changed: it should still educate people in a way, or at least take them “somewhere else intellectually”.⁶⁰ However, the museum cannot give a blunt view and tell its own story, they have source communities from where the objects originate to take into account, as well as the large cultural mix of peoples in the direct vicinity of the museum, namely Amsterdam (and by extent, the Netherlands). So the role of the museum to educate their visitors is closely connected to a more social role. I think that the new role of the Tropenmuseum entails a more individual approach of telling certain (cultural) stories, told by both objects of material culture (traditional or ritual objects) or contemporary art. By deploying contemporary art within the museum, it can become a more cultural history museum, which was also discussed in the same symposium. This would mean taking on a broader role, a more global outtake on (material) culture, by exhibiting older and newer ‘ethnographic’ objects as well as art, to provide context and interesting stories on specific parts of different cultures.

Keeping in mind the reflexiveness of the Tropenmuseum, the Musée de Quai Branly in Paris takes on a different approach. The Tropenmuseum is constantly reflecting on itself and its actions, and how the museum itself can evolve. On my trip to Paris I mentioned before, I also visited the Musée de Quai Branly. This ethnographic museum situated at the Seine was founded in 2006. Part of its collection comes from the Musée de l’Homme (founded in 1878 as the Paris Museum of Ethnography)⁶¹, as well as from the National Museum of the Arts of Africa and Oceania.⁶²

In a report on the opening of the museum in 2006, Herman Lebovics, who is professor at New York State University Stony Brook, describes his experience in the

⁵⁸ <http://labiennale.org/en/art/news/04-12.html>, 15 Juli 2015.

⁵⁹ Van Dartel, 2009, p. 79.

⁶⁰ Ibidem, p 80.

⁶¹ Lebovics, p. 5.

⁶² Kros, 2013, p. 834.

museum, and says: “Quai Branly has not successfully resolved the thorny problem – which, admittedly, may not have an *ideal* solution – of how in the ‘West’ to show the objects collected by conquest, swindle and purchase during the colonial era”.⁶³ The objects of their collection are grouped together and sorted in their respective continents (see image 6). This is all exhibited in one big, open space, closed off here and there with cabinets. This museum is clearly struggling with ways to position itself differently in relation to its colonial past, and taking on what seems to be colonial perspectives in displaying objects. The objects are exhibited with little information and grouped together by the type of object, which creates a ‘timeless bubble’. For instance, a room full of ‘African’ masks, or a cabinet full of ‘African’ cloth (see image 7). What exactly is on display here? Objects originating from a specific time and place or a generalization of a certain ‘culture’?

Cynthia Kros, connected to the Wits School of Arts, University of Witwatersrand, South Africa, wrote about the Quai Branly in the *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, and said that the museum can still change itself into a more postcolonial oriented one.⁶⁴ Right now, the museum shows many ties to France’s colonial past according to Kros: “France should not have these works [that are in the Quai Branly’s collection] in a museum on its soil”.⁶⁵ In my opinion this refers to the current colonial approach of the museum, to the static display and the geographical grouping of the objects. Yet she argues that the museum is looking for ways to solve problems of representation.⁶⁶ Perhaps it is not the intention of the Quai Branly to change its image, however, in my opinion it should be on their agenda to critically look at their role and course as a postcolonial museum. In the 21st century, it is long overdue to change a colonial attitude towards the ‘other’. Unlike the Tropenmuseum, who challenges the public with contemporary art within their ‘story telling’ policy, the Quai Branly does not tell individual stories, but generalizes cultures within its displays, and in my view, disregarding their role as a creator of context of the perception of the exhibited ‘cultures’.

The many symposia the Tropenmuseum organized over the last decades are symbolic of their reflective attitude. The change of the museum seems never over and is

⁶³ Lebovics, 2007, p. 5.

⁶⁴ Kros, 2014, p. 835.

⁶⁵ Ibidem, p. 836.

⁶⁶ Ibidem, p. 837.

constantly evolving. Regardless of the aspirations the Tropenmuseum has had since the 1980s: bridging a gap between art museums when it comes to global contemporary art, the museum itself faces issues with this new approach. As Mirjam Shatanawi, curator of the Tropenmuseum, explains: "The ethnographic museum faces a dilemma with respect to the kind of approach to adopt toward the presentation of the global and the local, the past and the present, knowing that such notions were considered irrelevant when the museum came into being."⁶⁷ The Tropenmuseum is after all a colonially founded museum, but is always self-reflecting and aware of its history, and aware of the changing role. By changing role I refer to how, instead of being a demarcated museum, a museum that only focuses on material culture from countries that people generally see as Third World or 'non-West', the Tropenmuseum is pushing its limits and taking on a more interdisciplinary point of view and 'incorporating' global contemporary art to give room for many different points of view.⁶⁸

2.3 Global Contemporary art and strategies within the ethnographic museum

It has become clear that the Tropenmuseum is very reflexive when it comes to its own role, and its own history. If the museum is already focusing on exhibiting the 'other', why is it so important that the museum also engages in the globalization in art debate? The Tropenmuseum has a policy of telling stories from cultures all over the world. This is not only done by exhibiting 'timeless' objects of ancient or modern cultures, but can also be done by relating the stories of these objects they are trying to tell to global contemporary art.⁶⁹ Why is it important to collect and exhibit global contemporary art?

Firstly, in the 2008 publication on the collection policies of the Tropenmuseum called *Collecting at Cultural Crossroads*, the museum states clearly what they want to reach by exhibiting contemporary art: "collecting modern art is not about collecting a representative sample of the individual artists, [...], the individual and often transnational

⁶⁷ Shatanawi, 2009, p. 1.

⁶⁸ See the first chapter on why I find incorporating a difficult term to use in the sense of the 'West' vs. the 'non-West', since incorporating means placing something into an existing framework or system.

⁶⁹ For their most recent thoughts on this debate I will refer to the 2009 publication of the symposium *Tropenmuseum for a Change!*, since this is the most recent and elaborate publication.

character of modern art is most important”.⁷⁰ Connected to this is the changing role of the museum: “This appreciation of the individual is linked to the museum’s development from an ethnographic into a cultural history museum”.⁷¹ Contemporary art is therefore crucial to the changing role of the museum, in telling the stories of other cultures and individuals all over the world, by exhibiting material culture alongside contemporary art which can express a more individual take on society culture, issues and so on, to build a cultural history museum. As Mirjam Shatanawi says on the implementation of contemporary art within the museum: “the Tropenmuseum however, has opted for slow-paced change, re-interpret the existing collections and complementing them with contemporary art, popular culture and intangible heritage”.⁷² So the combination of ‘ethnographic’ objects with (contemporary) art is relevant to the Tropenmuseum as it demonstrates from a different perspective that an interdisciplinary approach can help tell a story: not to illustrate a point but to give a different insight.

Second, global contemporary art is by definition of the present, the Tropenmuseum has because of its roots a strong connection to the past: global contemporary art can give the Tropenmuseum a connection to the present. This is also what Mirjam Shatanawi explains on presenting and collecting contemporary art, it maintains a connection to the modern world.⁷³ What is the importance of this modern world connection? If the museum is set on morphing into a cultural history museum, the relation to the present is key to connect to these ever-changing cultures. It is important to get rid of the notion of ‘timeless’ cultures, a modern-day connection, and to prevent the same ‘mistakes’ as in the past.

Also, giving global contemporary art a more prominent place in the museum can provide more context and give a broader perspective to the collection. Context is crucial to perceiving art. One example that particularly illustrates this is the 1988 exhibition *Art/Artifact* in the Center for African Art, New York⁷⁴, curated by art historian and ‘African

⁷⁰ van Brakel, Legêne, 2008, p. 39.

⁷¹ Idem.

⁷² Shatanawi, 2009, p. 63.

⁷³ Ibidem, p. 64.

⁷⁴ Faris, 1988, p. 775.

art expert' Susan Vogel.⁷⁵ In this exhibition, objects from various countries in Africa were presented in different settings:

“For example, a piece of white heavy handmade rope was tied to a fishing boat, with the appropriate locally-made nets and other artifacts placed near to hand. A label explained the tools of fishing on display. Next to this display the visitor could see another length of the same dazzling white rope handsomely coiled and arranged in the center of a well-lit white-back grounded installation. The simple label named the society and the rope’s material. Tool? Art? Susan Vogel’s innovative idea was that the meaning of displayed objects came from however their observation was framed. The meaning did not come from the object but from the observer, or more precisely from the dialectic of what the curator did and what the visitor saw.”⁷⁶

The role of contextualization was explored in this exhibition, and how this can change the meaning of objects and artworks. In one setting something is presented as an art work, in another it is a tool or a ‘tribal’ object. This is crucial in any display of objects: contextualization is pivotal for directing meaning production. For the Tropenmuseum this means that global contemporary art can add an extra dimension to their material culture on display, and create extra context.

Since 2011 Anke Bangma has been working as a curator of contemporary art in the Tropenmuseum, to give the museum more focus on contemporary art.⁷⁷ Having a curator on contemporary art shows how serious the museum is on collecting and exhibiting contemporary art, which contributes to the self-reflecting mode of the museum. However, even though the intention of exhibiting, collecting and researching contemporary art within the collection of the museum is apparent, global contemporary art remains to have a difficult position within the museum.

⁷⁵ <http://www.susan-vogel.com/Susan-Vogel/Vogel.html>, 26 July 2015.

⁷⁶ Lebovics, 2007, p. 6.

⁷⁷ <http://framerframed.nl/en/mensen/anke-bangma/>, 26 July 2015.

One of the difficulties and also an important first step for the Tropenmuseum is to establish their definition of (global) contemporary art. Within the anthropology field, there is a discourse on the overlap between art and anthropology. For instance, Arnd Schneider and Christopher Wright published several books on the shared area of art and anthropology, amongst which are *Contemporary Art and Anthropology* (2006) and *Between Art and Anthropology* (2010). They point to the ‘ethnographic turn’ of contemporary art, which has apparently involved a broad definition of ethnography and “the production of an increasing number of works that directly tackle some of the concerns of anthropology”.⁷⁸ The aim of researching the overlap between the discourses is “to encourage fertile collaborations and the development of alternative shared strategies of practices on both sides of the border”.⁷⁹ Their focus is also on the interdisciplinary collaboration between anthropologists and artists, instead of artists only focusing (one-way direction) on anthropology, to see what new possibilities arise, this is important for the Tropenmuseum as well: (contemporary) art can provide new insights.⁸⁰ The museum is exploring different ways of displaying the ‘non-Euramerican’ and art from around the world, and has done so for quite some time. By pushing the limits of its own existence, the museum is finding new methodologies of displaying the ‘global’, as well as the ‘local’. But this overlap is also causing issues with the terminology, perhaps because different discourses have their own sets of terms.

In the 2009 publication, different terms are used to refer to (global) contemporary art, there is also spoken of modern and even popular art, by asking: “should the museum collect modern art, as well as popular art and design, or not?”⁸¹ By using the term modern art, the Tropenmuseum – perhaps not intentionally – refers to a certain history and bias within the globalization discussion. The use of the term modern art adds a different context. Given the mainly ‘Western’ focus of modern art, and the context of the ‘Western’ hegemony excluding the ‘other’, modern art is in my opinion not a proper term to point out contemporary art, however, if the Tropenmuseum does refer to modern art they should make that more clear. Another question is, what is meant by popular art? Does it refer to

⁷⁸ Schneider, Wright, 2006, p. 3.

⁷⁹ Ibidem, p. 1.

⁸⁰ Ibidem, p. 5.

⁸¹ van Dartel, 2009, p. 9.

popular culture, to objects that are part of popular and contemporary culture?⁸² In the 2008 bulletin called *Collecting at cultural crossroads. Collection policies and approaches (2008-2012) of the Tropenmuseum*, the terminology is diffused as well. There is mentioning of “modern art” and “contemporary modern art” in the publication(s) of the Tropenmuseum, which is confusing for me, since it is not clear which art they refer to.⁸³ In my opinion, if the Tropenmuseum wishes to become a more hybrid, cultural history museum, then the terminology should be clear, for communication outside the museum as well for a clear course within the museum.

Another difficulty for the Tropenmuseum regarding the transition to a cultural history museum, is how contemporary art remains a difficult issue, and how to incorporate global contemporary art. In the recent publications mentioned before, the museum constantly points out that it is not an art museum. Perhaps collecting global contemporary gives way to a more hybrid museum, one that is not strictly an ethnographic museum nor an art museum, but as the Tropenmuseum desires: a cultural history museum. Since the latest reorganization in the 1990s, the Tropenmuseum “focused primarily on art and culture”.⁸⁴ They also posed the question back then: “should the museum collect modern art, as well as popular art and design, or not?”⁸⁵ In my opinion, it should not be a question of whether the museum should collect art or not, it should be a question of how to change the collection to focus more on global contemporary art in relation to the collection of ethnographic objects.

2.4 Roy Villevoeye’s *Madonna (after Omamá and Céline)* in the Tropenmuseum

The collection of the Tropenmuseum does contain contemporary art, since the museum has been collecting art works over the years. The museum has been providing a platform for different contemporary art projects. In 2014 several of these projects were realized. For instance, Dutch artist Jasper Krabbé was given the opportunity by the museum to browse the collection of the museum, and exhibit objects alongside his own paintings. This exhibition, called *Soulmade*, created hybrid exhibition rooms where objects

⁸² van Brakel, Legêne, 2008, p. 30.

⁸³ Ibidem, p. 38.

⁸⁴ Faber, van Dartel, 2009, p. 8.

⁸⁵ Ibidem, p. 9.

were placed next to one another.⁸⁶ This is an example of how the Tropenmuseum invites a contemporary living artist to the collection and asks him to reflect on the museum. Another example of global contemporary art is the Indonesian artist Jompet Kuswidananto, whose exhibition *Grand Parade* was held from 31 October 2014 until 22 March 2015, in the Tropenmuseum, which was an enormous installation. Kuswidananto's works have previously been shown all over the world, in Taipei, Karlsruhe (GAM exhibition) and Melbourne. The installation is made up of three different groups of 'human figures', which are made up of objects hung from the ceiling to look like humans – but are essentially a conceptual visualization of a human figure – and the figures come in action at set times with sound and movement.⁸⁷

Another example of contemporary art is an art work by Amsterdam artist Roy Villevoey, called *Madonna (after Omamá and Céline)* (2008) (see image 8). This work is a wax sculpture of a dark man, holding a Caucasian baby. The man is life-size and very life-like. The sculpture can be found in an alcove, almost hidden away, close to the museum shop. The combination of a man holding a baby is less common than a woman holding a baby, for instance. A contrast arises by the colors of their skins, and friction is created within the iconography of the art work: The colors of their skins, a man holding a baby, a man referred to as Madonna holds a baby. This way, the work connects not only to the history of the museum, but also in a formal and conceptual way to Christian iconography.

However, the *Madonna* by Villevoey is an autonomous art work, and this separates it apparently from the wax sculptures that were used by the museum in displays as early as the 1903. The museum used a statue of a Papua man and child in an exhibition that showed the Dutch colonies. (see image 9). This makes the work in my opinion controversial, since it seems to represent a certain people, from Papua. Or as Susan Legêne points out: “the people [on display – wax dolls] represent the subject of both physical and cultural anthropology. The museum combined the two throughout its displays; it thus essentialized differences between people that were based on a peculiar mix of physical and cultural markers of difference in a colonial context”.⁸⁸ While the dolls within previous and present

⁸⁶ http://topenmuseum.nl/nl/tentoonstelling/Soulmade_JasperKrabbeXTropenmuseum, 27 July 2015.

⁸⁷ <http://topenmuseum.nl/en/exhibition/Grand-Parade-by-Jompet>, 27 July 2015.

⁸⁸ Legêne, 2009, p. 17.

displays function as examples of how a source-community or a member of this community was supposed to look or played a certain role and was represented by a wax sculpture, Villevoeye's sculpture stands on its own and functions as an autonomous art work.⁸⁹ Previously, the statues were used to represent something larger: the people of, in this case, Papua. In another early exhibition, the throne of Queen Juliana is shown with sculptures of her 'subjects', people from source-communities from for instance Indonesia (see image 5).⁹⁰ The relation the Tropenmuseum has with these 'representations' is an ambiguous one, and the work of Villevoeye lays this friction bare.

This art work thus connect to the history of the Tropenmuseum itself, and how the museum used to represent specific cultures. Now, Villevoeye's work is creating tension by relating to this exhibition, but also playing with people's expectations. In a museum like the Tropenmuseum, a 'representation' of a member of a source-community might not be out of place. This would admittedly be controversial, given the discussion I am trying to lay out in this thesis, but would perhaps fit expectations of the visitors. The blatant similarities between this art work and the statues that 'represent' a source-community (and still remain in the collection) are striking.

The artist travels every year to the Asmat, a people and a region in Papua.⁹¹ On the website of De Hallen, a museum for modern and contemporary art in Haarlem, a context is given to the works of Roy Villevoeye:

"Few subjects are presently as sensitive as our relations with 'non-Western' cultures. Confrontation with the evil aspects of the colonial past has often led to mental contortions. The representation of 'exotic' peoples from a 'Western' viewpoint is very quickly suspect. Roy Villevoeye is well aware of this situation, but for him that is no reason to abandon making work with and about Papuans. He shows the reality that he finds there as authentically as possible. In the photographic and film reports of his annual trips to the Asmat he does not show only the

⁸⁹ The museum also has a wax doll of the photographer Le Roux on display, as seen on page 43 of *Tropenmuseum for a change!*

⁹⁰ Legêne, 2009, p. 17.

⁹¹ <http://www.dehallen.nl/en/exhibitions/roy-villevoeye-english/>, 27 July 2015.

‘otherness’ of these cultures; his images also always emphasize that isolated cultures no longer exist in the globalized world.”⁹²

On the one hand, what is said here is that a sculpture like *Madonna* can be regarded as a ‘representation’ of a member of a source-community, being outdated in the eyes of the ‘Westerner’, as well as controversial. On the other hand, the work not only touches on the subject of globalization and the idea of an isolated culture, but it also connects to the notion of (creating) context and expectations. Within an ethnographic museum, a sculpture like this one can be perceived as being part of an exhibition on a specific culture, as if it ‘represents’ a whole, maybe as part of an (outdated) exhibition style, instead being an object that tells its own story. In a different display and room, the museum still uses a wax statue in a diorama, so a wax statue of a man is not out of place. This object probably still remains in the collection. So not only does this art work relate to a globalizing world, that can be both global and local, by connecting the different appearances of the baby and the man, or the clothes of the man and the supposed ‘tribalness’ of the man - given the context of the museum – it also relates to the history of the museum itself. So by exhibiting this art work, the Tropenmuseum still reflects on its own history, by making a connection between seemingly the same objects, only one of them being an actual, critical art work and not an outdated exhibition tool.

Not only is a sculpture by Villevoeye on display in the Tropenmuseum, there is also one (currently) shown in the Lakenhal: *Preparations* (2009) (see image 10). The Lakenhal Museum in Leiden, is an art museum that not only exhibits the Old Dutch Masters like Lucas van Leyden and Rembrandt, but also engages actively in exhibiting contemporary art and design.⁹³ In one of the first rooms of the museum, right behind the very large triptych of *The Last Judgment* by Lucas van Leyden (ca. 1525-1527, see image 11)⁹⁴, a wax sculpture is on display. It is an Asmat man, bare-footed and wearing dirty shorts and shirt. The man is carrying a giant wooden cross. The man is life-size and takes up a presence in the room. The work is relating strongly to the Christian paintings in the same room, just as the work

⁹² <http://www.dehallen.nl/en/exhibitions/roy-villevoeye-english/>, 27 July 2015.

⁹³ The Lakenhal is currently hosting an exhibition in an external exhibition space in Leiden: *Global Imaginations* in the Meelfabriek. This way, the museum connects to (global) contemporary art.

⁹⁴ http://www.lakenhal.nl/nl/verhaal/verhaal_lucas-van-leyden, 17 August 2015.

in the Tropenmuseum on a conceptual and formal basis. *Preparations* coincides with *The Last Judgment*, since the cross of Christ is actually present. Also, the work shows the universalness of religion, since the work relates to art and religion on a global scale. The name of the work seems to refer to the preparing of the cross of Christ, relating even more to the Christian iconography and context.

Within the context of this art museum, the work is looked upon differently than in the Tropenmuseum since it lacks the cultural and colonial history connection. However, this work is also giving new meaning to the other works in the room, by providing a broader (global) context. Also within this room, the work relates to the changing traditions of the Asmat under the influence of Dutch travelers, who brought Christianity to them, which was then interpreted locally.⁹⁵ The room in which this work is exhibited shows large religious triptychs, which were important in the sixteenth century society they were part of, to keep the citizens to their faith. The global spread of Christianity relates to local expressions, and relates these again to each other. This is in fact a translocality connection that is displayed here. Translocality refers to a “spatial interconnectedness”.⁹⁶

This example is not per se on the notion of context and the way meanings of art works can be influenced by this context, but on the changing roles of the museum, and how contemporary art plays an important role in reflecting on the collection of a museum. Even though the Tropenmuseum is not an art museum, the art work by Villevoye gets an extra layer since it connects to the history of the museum, Christian iconography by their titles and formal characteristics, as well as to the history of colonial collecting in the scope of the globalization (in art) debate.

2.4 Recapitulating

What are the strategies used by the Tropenmuseum? By organizing many symposia, over the past thirty years, the Tropenmuseum has kept the internal and external discussion

⁹⁵ <http://lakenhal.nl/en/collection/10988>, 29 July 2015.

⁹⁶ This term was mentioned and elaborated upon during a workshop in SMBA in May 2014. This workshop was part of a collaboration between SMBA and the project called MeLa: European museums in an age of migrations. This project investigates the role of museums in contemporary context. The publication of *Transfigurations: Curatorial and Artistic Research in an Age of Migrations* can be found online: http://www.mela-project.eu/upl/cms/attach/20140902/162716911_3882.pdf, 29 July 2015.

going. The museum has been reflecting on itself ever since the Africa exhibition of 1980, but has also tried to engage other (art) museums in the globalization in art discussion.

The symposia are interesting ways to reflect on the museum practice and collection policy itself – as well as on the notion of the ‘other’ and the timelessness of cultures within the collection of an ethnographic museum – and bundling the discussions on these notions in publications means spreading their message and reflections, always rethinking their steps, and reevaluating the previous ones.

Another strategy the Tropenmuseum deploys is relating itself to contemporary art, to keep a present-day connection and not only focus on history. If the museum does want to tell (individual) cultural stories, in my opinion contemporary art must have a more established position within the museum, even though the museum has a contemporary art curator. I would suggest the museum has to stop trying to define or deny that they are an art museum, which is out of the question. The museum is trying to evolve into a cultural history museum, as was stated, which means collecting or exhibiting contemporary art, as well as ‘ethnographic’ objects, to tell multivarious stories within the museum.

Even though the museum does reflect on itself, and has not stopped doing this over the past thirty years, the position of the global contemporary remains difficult. Establishing clear terminology and defining what the museum exactly tries to do with this, so I would argue, is a very important move for the Tropenmuseum. However, as we will see in the next chapter, a reflective nature like the Tropenmuseum has, is not that self-evident. In the coming chapter, the position of the Stedelijk Museum will be researched, is this museum as reflexive as the Tropenmuseum?

Chapter 3 – The global contemporary and the Stedelijk Museum

3.1. Introduction

As was shown in the first chapter, Jelle Bouwhuis is one of the people who asks himself: why does the museum have a ‘gap’ in its collection? Art from ‘non-Euramerican’ countries did not have a place in the Stedelijk Museum for a long time, as Bouwhuis found an exclusion of large parts of the world. This led to an exhibition and an ongoing project on the position of the museum in this ongoing discourse, but in this chapter I will look at how the Stedelijk Museum is trying to position themselves, and by what means.

The museum has a long and rich history, and was founded in 1895.⁹⁷ At first, there was a mixed program of exhibitions. In these first decennia, while there did not remain any visual recordings of this, the Stedelijk Museum exhibited objects from “various cultures and different times”.⁹⁸ It was not until the Stedelijk Museum came under the directorship of Willem Sandberg in 1945, that the Stedelijk became an internationally known modern art museum. Sandberg’s interests covered the ‘non-Western’ as well as ‘Western’ art, and these were exhibited often side by side. In its history, the Stedelijk had the tendency to exhibit the ‘other’, in various ways and displays.⁹⁹ However, the question of the ‘gap’ in the collection of the Stedelijk Museum remains nevertheless.

I chose the Stedelijk as a case study out of personal experience, but also out of interest, since the position of the global contemporary seems to be unsure in this internationally known institution. Over the past thirty years, the museum has tried to engage with and position itself within the globalization debate, which is going on for many years but gained even more attention in recent years. How does the museum try to position itself and what strategies are used?

I did research during my internship on how the Stedelijk related itself to global contemporary art, at the end of the 1980s, when there was more attention from the ‘West’

⁹⁷ <http://stedelijk.nl/over-het-stedelijk/geschiedenis>, 18 July 2015.

⁹⁸ Leigh, 2008. Dissertation: *“Building the image of modern art : the rhetoric of two museums and the representation and canonization of modern art (1935-1975) : the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and the Museum of Modern Art in New York”*, dissertation still under embargo. For the Stedelijk Studies a fragment was edited and expanded, and published under the title “A Rhetorical Analysis of African Art in the Story of Modern Art”, on their website. <http://www.stedelijkstudies.com/journal/creating-ancestors-affinities-rhetorical-analysis-african-art-story-modern-art/#top>, 23 July 2015.

⁹⁹ idem.

for the 'other'. I discovered that the Stedelijk did try to take a position, right around the time *Magiciens de la Terre* in 1989 was on display at the Centre Pompidou. The Tropenmuseum tried to engage the art museums in the globalization debate, but was turned down by them. As more was happening on a worldwide scale in relation to contemporary art, like the '*Havana Biennial*' of 1986, '*Magiciens de la Terre*' in 1989 and opposite to these the '*Primitivism*' exhibition of the MoMA in 1984 as an example of how not to exhibit the 'other', as was also explained in the first chapter by McEvelley, the Stedelijk Museum was looking at ways how it could engage in this debate as well.

In this chapter, the role and position of global contemporary art within the Stedelijk Museum will be discussed. How is the 'other' represented? What strategies are used by the Stedelijk Museum to position itself in the globalization debate? How does the Stedelijk relate to the global contemporary? To answer these questions, I will look at the history of the Stedelijk Museum and what for them the 'global tendency' was. After this, I will explain more on the project space of the museum, called SMBA, and research the role of such a space in relation to the museum as well as the globalization discussion. Then I will explain more about the project of *Global Collaborations*, and end this chapter with an analysis of an artwork that relates to the issues laid out in this chapter.

3.2 A recent history of the Stedelijk Museum

Over the last thirty years, the Stedelijk Museum tried to engage in the globalization discussion. Before I pointed out that the Stedelijk actually did exhibit the 'non-Euramerican' within the museum, in different exhibitions throughout the 20th century, however, these exhibitions did not actively engage in a debate on the 'other', nor was there a critical view on this specific discourse. Now, the *Global Collaboration* project garners attention on an international scale, but how did the Stedelijk try to position itself in relation to the 'global', before this project? What is the 'global tendency' in the history of the museum? I will give a short overview of the history of the Stedelijk Museum regarding its interest in displaying the 'other'. This will illustrate that the museum in fact did have attention for the 'global' but also how this changed and fluctuated over the years. For this, I will turn to Jelle Bouwhuis once again, since he briefly describes this history of the Stedelijk Museum in his article 'The Global Turn and the Stedelijk Museum' in *Changing Perspectives*

(2013), a publication on the museological landscape (mostly in the Netherlands) in relation to the global.

In this article, Bouwhuis starts his overview of the Stedelijk's history with the exhibition *Old Negro Sculpture*, an exhibition the Stedelijk Museum hosted in 1927. This is to show the early interests of the museum in 'non-Western' art.¹⁰⁰ In this exhibition, the sculptures that originated from countries in Africa, were displayed in their own right, "to be enjoyed for their own qualities", which meant there was no connection being made between these 'primitive' art works and modern art.¹⁰¹ This was different in an exhibition of 1935. *'Negro Art'* was exhibited alongside French modern paintings, but still no direct connection was laid out.

From 1945 until 1963 Willem Sandberg was the director of the Stedelijk Museum, and his focus led the museum to exhibit 'non-Western' art again after the previous 'primitive' art exhibitions. As Bouwhuis explains, Sandberg's attention was mostly for the primitive, and "the authentic as manifestations of the universal freedom of expression and lack of academicism that he looked for in modern art as well".¹⁰² His interests also led to the 1955 exhibition of *Modern Art – New and Old*. As explained in the first chapter, this exhibition showed 'Western' and 'non-Western' art works as well as 'tribal' objects next to each other. Not only did Sandberg's interests pave the way for more exhibitions showing the 'non-Western' artist, it also led to acquisitions of art works, for instance art works by Haitian painters who participated in the 1950 *19 Painters from Haiti* exhibition.¹⁰³ As Nana Leigh explains in: 'A Rhetorical Analysis of African Art in the Story of Modern Art': "the exhibition thus served the Stedelijk's aspirations to become a true modern art museum, welcoming new developments with an open artistic approach".¹⁰⁴ This illustrates among others how the museum did have attention for the 'other', early on.

¹⁰⁰ Bouwhuis, 2012, p. 156.

¹⁰¹ Leigh, 2008. Dissertation: *"Building the image of modern art : the rhetoric of two museums and the representation and canonization of modern art (1935-1975) : the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and the Museum of Modern Art in New York"*, dissertation still under embargo. For the Stedelijk Studies a fragment was edited and expanded, and published under the title "A Rhetorical Analysis of African Art in the Story of Modern Art", on their website. <http://www.stedelijkstudies.com/journal/creating-ancestors-affinities-rhetorical-analysis-african-art-story-modern-art/#top>, 23 July 2015.

¹⁰² Bouwhuis, 2012, p. 156.

¹⁰³ Ibidem, p. 157.

¹⁰⁴ Bouwhuis, 2012, p. 157.

After Sandberg, the attention of the Stedelijk Museum focused “almost obsessively toward the art of the new economic superpower, the United States”.¹⁰⁵ Director Edy de Wilde, who was director of the Stedelijk Museum from 1963 until 1985, broke the artistic connections with several South American countries, because of their dictatorial regimes.¹⁰⁶ For the exhibition policy this meant that the attention was mostly on the ‘Euramerican’ regions, instead of ‘non-Western’ artists. De Wilde’s attention was focused on the then contemporary art and American artists like Willem de Kooning and Barnett Newman, with no real effort on establishing a global outlook for the museum.¹⁰⁷

However, his successor Wim Beeren wanted to “re-establish the cultural relations in our area of interest that the Stedelijk Museum previously maintained”.¹⁰⁸ Beeren was the director from 1985 until 1993, and took the museum in a different direction. So in 1989, the exhibition *U-ABC* was held in the Stedelijk. In this exhibition, artworks by artists from Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil and Chile were shown in the museum. In previous years, these countries were subjected to dictators and non-democratic governments, making the international relations tense and difficult for the museum to maintain artistic contact, at least for de Wilde. After the democracies were re-established in the respective countries, delegates of the Stedelijk Museum selected the artists during a trip to the respective countries. Requirements for the artists the curators wanted to include in the exhibition were their age (they needed to be young), the artworks would have been made recent and without having been exhibited outside of these countries.¹⁰⁹

Why could they not be exhibited outside of their countries before the curators of the Stedelijk got to see these artists? To have as pure as possible a piece of art, free from outside influences? The countries and artists of *U-ABC* were regarded as having no history, their history was erased by their colonizers. Dorine Mignot, the curator of the exhibition, as well as one of the delegates to visit the countries, said: “I was ashamed at my own lack of understanding and at what had actually happened: clearly the conquerors had murdered, plundered and destroyed to such an extent that the very awareness of history had been

¹⁰⁵ Bouwhuis, 2012, p. 157.

¹⁰⁶ Idem.

¹⁰⁷ <http://stedelijk.nl/nieuwsberichten/edy-de-wilde-overleden>, 24 July 2015.

¹⁰⁸ Beeren, Mignot, 1989, p. 4.

¹⁰⁹ Idem.

obliterated".¹¹⁰ In the catalogue of the exhibition the artists are looked at from a 'Western' framework, which is inevitable, but what in my opinion should not have happened is that they were constantly compared to Western art: artist Leda Catunda's work is for example compared to Pop Art, Daniel Senise's work is supposed to be reminiscent of Anselm Kiefer (see images 12 and 13).¹¹¹ The 'non-Western' artists are judged and framed from the perspective of a 'Western' art framework. The South American artists are not judged at their own merits, but strictly from the 'Western' frameworks of the curators. How can these artists overcome their so-called lack of history, as Mignot calls it, and this ever-present 'Western' framework, if 'we' keep comparing them?

Not only did Beeren give the museum more focus on South America, there were many other exhibitions with a 'non-Western' focus, and as Bouwhuis says: "Beeren got quite far establishing a global outlook for the Stedelijk Museum, as various large and sometimes quite seminal exhibitions rapidly succeeded each other".¹¹² For instance, the exhibition *Wanderlieder*, on the new power balances and nation's boundaries after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain and how artists viewed these changes in Europe.¹¹³

In 1993, Rudi Fuchs succeeded Wim Beeren, this was yet another change to come. First, in 1993 the Stedelijk hosted the more politically tinted exhibition *Southern Cross (Zuiderkruis)*, art from South Africa. In 1948, the National Party (NP) commenced the Apartheid regime.¹¹⁴ This regime lasted well into the 1990s and led to other ('Western') countries boycotting South Africa, ties with South Africa were cut, and no art was exhibited for a long time.¹¹⁵ The exhibition that was shown in the Stedelijk was previously shown at the 45e Biennial of Visual Arts in Venice. Deriving from an interview with the then director Rudi Fuchs (who had taken over from Wim Beeren) in 1993 in Dutch newspaper *Het Parool*, Fuchs elaborated on the *Southern Cross* exhibition and says: "This exhibition is essentially about the liberation of the imagination. It is an exhibition of a culture that is growing, that seeks new forms of freedom, autonomy and integrity."¹¹⁶ For Fuchs, it seems

¹¹⁰ Beeren, Mignot, 1989, p. 18.

¹¹¹ Ibidem, p. 22/23.

¹¹² Bouwhuis, 2012, p. 157.

¹¹³ *Wanderlieder* press release, 30 October 1991.

¹¹⁴ Ellis, 2011, p. 659.

¹¹⁵ *Southern Cross*, 1993, p. 8.

¹¹⁶ Fuchs, *Het Parool*, 11 December 1993.

almost as if South-African art is not yet there were 'Western' art formally finds itself, as if there is a formal difference between 'Western' modern art and the exhibited South African art. The latter shows the social and political engagement of the artists, stemming from their society's situation, but were according to him clearly not made just for the sake of art.

Even when Fuchs did give attention to the global contemporary, the main focus remained otherwise. For the most part of the 1990's, the globalization debate died down, even though there have been exhibitions in the Stedelijk regarding the global contemporary, for instance: *Surinaamse Kunst*¹¹⁷ (Surinam art) in 1996, several exhibitions with artists from New-Zealand (1996, 2002)¹¹⁸, and two 'encounters with modernism' exhibitions: Singapore art museum in 2004 and Museum de Arte Moderna in Rio de Janeiro in 2004, in which modern art was juxtaposed with art of a younger generation.¹¹⁹ However, most of these exhibitions were externally organized, like the Southern Cross exhibition, Surinam Art and the exhibition on a New Zealand artist, Colin McCahon.¹²⁰ So, during the directorship of Fuchs the attention for the global contemporary diminished. The approach of the Stedelijk Museum seemed to be based on formal criteria in art: "following the line of the American critic Clement Greenberg".¹²¹ Greenberg's theory "drew the attention of the art world away from *what* was represented in a particular work of art and toward *how* it was represented, i.e., how well the medium chosen by the artist was deployed to make an artistic statement", meaning that formalist criteria were drawing on 'Western' traditions.¹²² Since 'Western' art history is by definition 'Western', the 'non-Western' art basically does not 'fit' into these traditions, meaning their formal vocabulary did not coincide with the Modern art focus of the Stedelijk Museum. The exhibitions created with a more global outlook were incidental, and mostly externally organized. Exhibitions that were made

¹¹⁷ This exhibition was also made in conjunction with the Tropenmuseum. For more information see the website of the Stedelijk Museum <http://www.stedelijk.nl/tentoonstellingen/surinaamse-kunst>, 14 June 2015.

¹¹⁸ <http://www.stedelijk.nl/tentoonstellingen/under-capricorn-the-world-over>,
<http://www.stedelijk.nl/tentoonstellingen/laurence-aberhart>,

<http://www.stedelijk.nl/tentoonstellingen/colin-mccahon--a-question-of-faith>, 14 June 2015.

¹¹⁹ <http://www.stedelijk.nl/tentoonstellingen/singapore-art-museum-encounters-with-modernism>,
<http://www.stedelijk.nl/tentoonstellingen/rio-de-janeiro-encounters-with-modernism>, 14 June 2015.

¹²⁰ Bouwhuis, 2012, p. 158.

¹²¹ Idem.

¹²² Thompson, 2015, p. 152.

within the museum had a different focus than his predecessor's and the 'global' became an undercurrent.¹²³

In the last couple of years, the attention of the Stedelijk Museum mostly went out to more established 'Western' artists. For example, for the most part of the last three years, contemporary art and modern art are the main focus of the programming of the exhibitions, mostly without the 'global' aspect.¹²⁴ Artists like Mike Kelly (2012), Malevich (2013), Henri Matisse (2015), Marlene Dumas (2014), Jeff Wall (2014), are amongst the artists that had large-scale solo-exhibitions in the past three years.¹²⁵ Modern and contemporary art are widely represented, global contemporary art was given attention in the past, but is clearly not the main focus of the museum.

3.3 The project space: SMBA

Before I will discuss the wide-scale project *Global Collaborations*, I will explain more on the project space of the museum. This experimental art exhibition space is called Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam, which was founded in the early 1990s. This project space is an external part of the museum, and is located elsewhere in the city of Amsterdam, in the 'Jordaan', one of Amsterdam's neighborhoods. The idea of SMBA was to provide space for exhibiting art from Amsterdam and its surroundings, for local contemporary artist to have a meeting place.¹²⁶

The Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam was a continuation of Museum Fodor, an art museum in Amsterdam that provided a platform for artists from Amsterdam. In 1974, Museum Fodor was put under financial and organizational management of the Stedelijk Museum, and in 1978 also under artistic management of the Stedelijk.¹²⁷ In 1993, Museum Fodor was closed, which left a platform gap for contemporary Amsterdam artists. The Stedelijk replaced Museum Fodor by the Bureau Amsterdam, which was supposed to be a

¹²³ Bouwhuis, 2012, p. 159.

¹²⁴ The Stedelijk closed in 2004 for renovations, and re-opened again in 2012.

¹²⁵ For more information on the mentioned exhibitions, see the website of the museum: stedelijk.nl.

¹²⁶ Anon., Trouw, 30 April, 1993.

¹²⁷ <https://stadsarchief.amsterdam.nl/archieven/archiefbank/overzicht/5446.nl.html>, 22 July 2015.

breeding ground for new ideas, and SMBA was also to fill the gap of the Amsterdam artist's platform.¹²⁸

What is the place of the project space within the museum? This image of Dan Perjovschi, an artist that responds and comments to the environment around him in with quick sketches, illustrates perfectly where the project space finds itself (see image 14).¹²⁹ The project space is neither fully part of the museum, nor is it a fully independent institution. Within the field of museum studies, the project space is seen as an ambiguous part of museums.¹³⁰ On the one hand it is treated as part of the institution it 'belongs' to, and on the other hand the special status the project space has is often overlooked.

The main role of a project space that belongs to a museum – a project space does not refer to contemporary art centers, but to separate spaces, part of a museum – is acting as a laboratory.¹³¹ Since the space is part of the institution as a whole, the name of the museum is connected to said space. This also gives the (guest) curators of SMBA the freedom to experiment, because of the connection to the established name of the museum, as well as the access to funding. Practically, this can mean that there are less rules and policies to deal with, or if the space is much smaller: less people within the organization to deal with, then in the museum. Artistically, this gives the space the freedom to exhibit more experimental art that perhaps would not have a place in the museum itself.

Another example of a project space is PS1 MoMA, founded in 1971 by Alanna Heiss as the Institute for Art and Urban Resources Inc.. This organization organized exhibitions in abandoned spaces in New York. Over the next twenty years, PS1 was used for many purposes, like SMBA, for performances, exhibitions and more. In 2000, PS1 became an affiliate of the MoMA. As it says on the website of PS1, this fusion combined PS1's contemporary art mission with one of the greatest collecting museums of modern art. In 2010, the two institutions completely merged and the name changed to MoMA PS1. The

¹²⁸ Anon., Trouw, 30 April, 1993.

¹²⁹ For more information on the artist, see the website of the Van Abbe museum: http://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/programme/detail/?tx_vabdisplay_pi1%5Bptype%5D=18&tx_vabdisplay_pi1%5Bproject%5D=317, 30 July 2015.

¹³⁰ In 2014 I followed the course Museum Matters by Nana Leigh at the University of Leiden, a course within museum studies. As a paper subject I chose the project space SMBA, and it became clear that within the discourse of museum studies, the project space is an underexposed topic.

¹³¹ <http://journal.stedelijk.nl/2011/07/the-smba-interview-with-jelle-bouwhuis-part-1/>, 24 July 2015.

mission of MoMA PS1 is: “A true artistic laboratory, MoMA PS1 aspires to maintain its diverse and innovative activities to continue to bring contemporary art to international audiences”.¹³² Clearly, MoMA uses this space as a laboratory, to experiment with contemporary art.

After almost twenty years showing and participating in the contemporary art discourse of Amsterdam – SMBA also hosts themed movie nights, lectures, workshops and almost anything related to the discourse of contemporary art – the project space took a different direction. In 2010, *Project 1975* came into being, set to take two years.¹³³ With the project, the goal was to open up the project space to a more global view on art. The focus of *Project 1975* was mostly the reconsidering of contemporary art in a postcolonial era.¹³⁴ Research was done through seminars, the exhibitions in SMBA, a blog and more, on questions like “how do artists today view the historic or contemporary acts of colonial powers? Do colonial mindsets persist in art and its institutions?”¹³⁵ The title containing the year ‘1975’ is significant, it is the year the Netherlands became post-colonial: Surinam became independent.¹³⁶ The project is a large-scale research on post-coloniality in relation to contemporary art.

Within *Project 1975* several exhibitions were hosted in SMBA, one example being *Hollandaise*. The “long-standing economic relations between The Netherlands and the African continent” were central to the exhibition (see image 15). The title is derived from the name of the fabrics that are exported from the Netherlands to Africa, known as *Hollandaise* or “Dutch Wax”.¹³⁷ The Dutch Wax is made by a company called Vlisco, founded in 1846 and an interesting case study of globalization processes. The techniques of the Vlisco fabrics are Javanese Batiks, but found their way to West-Africa, where the Vlisco products became immensely popular and 169 years later still are. The exhibition of *Hollandaise* centers on this fabric as a center of globalization, relating to art. The exhibition

¹³² <http://momaps1.org/about/>, 08 June 2014.

¹³³ <http://project1975.smba.nl/nl/about>, 22 July 2015.

¹³⁴ The name of the project comes from the year in which the Netherlands became a postcolonial nation. For more information on the project see the website: <http://smba.nl/en/exhibitions/see-reason/>, 13 June 2015.

¹³⁵ Bouwhuis and Winking, 2014, p. 19.

¹³⁶ <http://project1975.smba.nl/en/about>, 22 July 2015.

¹³⁷ <http://www.smba.nl/en/exhibitions/hollandaise/>, 24 July 2015.

is linking the global and the local together, both the locality of the Netherlands as the origin of these fabrics as well as the 'Africaness' of the Visco products in West-Africa, since the Visco designs are generally seen as 'typically African fabrics'.¹³⁸ Global contemporary artists reflected on this given of economic and global connections, in this exhibition curated by guest curator Koyo Kouoh.¹³⁹ An example of this work is *Blue to Black* by Willem de Rooij (2012) which connects to the rich and complex history of the Dutch Wax, connecting Indonesia to West-Africa, by use of the colors blue and black (see image 16). The Dutch colonizers referred to Indonesians as 'Blue' and to African people as 'Black', by using the product that centers in between to visualize the racial stereotypes the Dutch use(d), his work connects to multiple layers of globality.¹⁴⁰

Another *Project 1975* exhibition was the *Time, Trade & Travel* exhibition of 2012. For this exhibition, SMBA collaborated with the Nubuke Foundation in Accra, Ghana. The collaboration existed of Dutch and Ghanaian artists participating in the exhibition. The artists visited the other artist's countries, and researched the "historical encounters between Europeans and Africans, between the Netherlands and the former Gold Coast, in which trade and the concomitant cultural exchange received particular attention".¹⁴¹ This also reflects on the complex web of global exchanges, and how this influences art on its turn.¹⁴² Part of this exhibition was the installation by Dorothy Akpene Amenuke, called *How Far How Near*. This artwork was also part of the *How Far How Near* exhibition in 2014 and will be elaborated further on in this chapter.

Besides these two examples of exhibitions within the context of globalizing art worlds, and the context of *Project 1975*, SMBA hosted more exhibitions on this topic. Also lectures, symposia, workshops and more, to provide a platform for a broadened contemporary art discourse. The project was constantly in development, and the research and exhibitions developed over the span of the project. Eventually, *Project 1975* came to a

¹³⁸ <http://www.smba.nl/static/en/exhibitions/hollandaise/smba-newsletter-130.pdf>, 24 July 2015. Online pdf and published booklet.

¹³⁹ Bouwhuis and Winking, 2014, p. 102

¹⁴⁰ <http://www.smba.nl/static/en/exhibitions/hollandaise/smba-newsletter-130.pdf>, 30 July 2015. Online pdf and published booklet.

¹⁴¹ Bouwhuis and Winking, 2014, p. 94.

¹⁴² <http://smba.nl/static/en/exhibitions/time-trade-travel/smba-newsletter-129.pdf>, 27 July 2015. Online pdf and published booklet.

close, and led to several conclusions, open-ended as they may be. One is that post coloniality and by extent globalization in art has not received the attention the contributors felt it should have, which led to the idea of *Global Collaborations* and how a modern and contemporary art museum can re-position itself to engage with these globalization issues.¹⁴³ For now, it is important to stress that this project is a continuation of *Project 1975*: “the program [of *Global Collaborations*] puts the collaboration and exchange concept of *Project 1975* at its heart” in the way that it also researches the role of the global within the contemporary art discourse, as well as the role of the museum, to put it broadly.¹⁴⁴ The project of SMBA also gave the project space more direction, and it was felt that this new and global direction was the right one for the exhibition space to continue.¹⁴⁵

Recently, apart from the *Global Collaborations* project, SMBA hosted a small exhibition called *Come as You Are* (2015), on proposals for art works for a renovated mosque in the vicinity of SMBA, on the Rozengracht in Amsterdam (see image 18). The collaboration between “a religious institution that generally has the image of being traditional” and contemporary artists created an interesting context.¹⁴⁶ The local context of Amsterdam and a certain religious community close to the exhibition space and a broader and global context was combined within the contemporary art works. It is exactly exhibitions like this, that in my opinion create a fruitful environment for the global contemporary art discourse.

3.4 Global Collaborations

In 2013, the museum started a three-year project called *Global Collaborations*. This project “offers a well-informed, nuanced view of developments in contemporary art from a global perspective, with particular emphasis on emerging regions such as Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia.”¹⁴⁷ With this project, the museum’s goal is to engage more actively in the globalization discussion. Relating to this project, the museum is deploying several strategies to position itself in relation to ‘the global’.

¹⁴³ <http://www.stedelijk.nl/en/global-en/global-collaborations>, 13 June 2015.

¹⁴⁴ Bouwhuis and Winking, 2014, p. 28.

¹⁴⁵ Idem.

¹⁴⁶ <http://smba.nl/en/exhibitions/come-as-you-are/>, 27 July 2015.

¹⁴⁷ <http://www.stedelijk.nl/en/exhibitions/tromarama>, 12 June 2015.

Even though, off and on, the ‘other’ would have a place within the museum, with this project the museum tries to research ways to relate to the global contemporary, and new roles to play. On the role of the museum in this debate, as can be read on the special *Global Collaborations* page, the museum states that:

“In the current trend on the parts of ‘Western’ museums wanting to exhibit and collect ‘non-Western’ art, we can detect an echo of an old and greedy colonial habit: it is more a reinforcement of a ‘Western’ oriented perspective than a denial of such a perspective. *Global Collaborations* investigates alternative models with which a museum of modern art can relate to international visual art, without falling into the trap of a new kind of cultural imperialism. This means maintaining constant exchanges of knowledge, art and ideas, and with that, an atmosphere of reciprocation and nuance.¹⁴⁸

Over the score of three years, the Stedelijk Museum plans to and already has made exhibitions in a ‘global’ context, amongst other activities. Several of them being in SMBA, and two of them in the museum itself: *How Far How Near* (2014) and *Tromarama* (2015). Within the context of the project the museum organized a symposium, *Collecting Geographies*.¹⁴⁹ During this three-day conference in March 2015 (the 13th, 14th and 15th), organized in collaboration with several other national and international museums like the Folkwang and the Moderna Museet (Stockholm, Sweden) – as well as the Tropenmuseum – over eighty lectures took place given by curators, artists, and many others. The main focus of the lectures was the role of institutions in the globalization in art debate and roughly: how to deal (as a museum) with the global contemporary? The conference took “a closer look at the new inquiries into the relationships between art institutions, globalization, and postcolonial discourse, including a critical assessment of the deployed terminology and the strategies that focus on local affinities within a larger art-historical and global

¹⁴⁸ <http://www.stedelijk.nl/en/exhibitions/tromarama>, 12 June 2015.

¹⁴⁹ For more information on this conference see the website: <http://www.stedelijk.nl/en/calendar/symposia/call>, 13 June 2015.

framework.¹⁵⁰ This conference was a cluster of three days with only intercultural, global and interdisciplinary discussions and exchanges on the subject of the role of the museum within the discussion. The panel discussions were on many different subjects, divided in themes: from “National Narratives”, “New Perspectives” to “Artists Practices”, and from talks on “What to Collect in a Globalised World? The Public and The Private Perspective in Portugal”, “The exhibition “La era de la discrepancia”: when the local challenges the national and the global” and “The Art of Postcolonial Intervention: West African Artists at the Royal Museums Greenwich”, the symposium contained many kinds of discussions.¹⁵¹ This provided a platform within the museum, based on an international collaboration between museums and a world-wide exchange between experts, scholars, artists, curators and other interested parties. However, eighty lectures is a lot, even in three days. One can argue that getting to the core of the debate is difficult when it is divided and spread out in such a symposium. But on the other hand, it gives the debate attention from many different persons, which keeps the debate within the museum going.

Another important part of the project was the exhibition *How Far How Near*. Leading up to the opening of this exhibition in September 2014, several art works were on display in the first room of the museum. Within the context of *Global Collaborations* these works were a kind of warm up to the actual exhibition. The work by Dorothy Amenuke, which would also be in the exhibition *How Far How Near*, and which was purchased after being exhibited in the *Time, Trade & Travel* exhibition in SMBA (2012).¹⁵² This work touched on the global system of trade and economics; products from all over the world were combined to create a ‘tribal’ art work, reminiscent of an African mask. This work explores cultural, social and economic exchanges as well as ‘fixed identities’ and challenges the viewer to look beyond the ‘typical’ products, like Dutch Wax or jute sacks.¹⁵³

One of the other works on display was *Trophy Stands*, by Pauline M’barek, Also previously exhibited in SMBA, within the context of *The Memories are Present* (2012) (see image 17). In this exhibition, the “role of the museum as conveyor of knowledge” was

¹⁵⁰ <http://www.stedelijk.nl/en/calendar/symposia/call>, 27 July 2015.

¹⁵¹ http://www.stedelijk.nl/upload/agenda/symposia/PROGRAM_Collecting_Geographies_03.2014.2.0.pdf, 27 July 2015. Online pdf.

¹⁵² Bouwhuis and Winking, 2014, p. 94.

¹⁵³ <http://www.smba.nl/static/en/exhibitions/time-trade-travel/smba-newsletter-129.pdf>, 27 July 2015. Online pdf and published booklet.

researched by several contemporary art works.¹⁵⁴ The work by Pauline M'barek was purchased by the Stedelijk Museum and exhibited in the entrance to the exhibition rooms, for a short period in 2014. This exhibition is balancing on the boundaries of the grey area between art museums and ethnographic museums: "today the metaphorical distance between institutions of art and ethnography is still a fact that is most obviously manifested in the physical separation of their collections in buildings that are dedicated either to ethnography or art."¹⁵⁵ The participating artists were challenged to respond to these issues, and Pauline M'barek's work is positioning itself on the blurring roles of both types of museums. The work is made up of five metal constructions which are normally used to support masks or statues in an ethnographic museum, which also means that these structures normally "disappear into the background".¹⁵⁶ The objects which are then hung onto the metal bars are considered much more valuable than the system that is holding these objects. This is conceptualized in the work of M'barek, since this supporting system is laid bare. What kind of system is at work in exhibiting 'tribal' art works? What is the underlying structure in an ethnographic museum? This work is pinpointing to the issues the Stedelijk Museum wants to explore with the project, but also to the broader discussion laid out in this thesis. Since this work touches upon various important issues, it finds itself at a crossroads of discussions and has multiple layers of meanings, linking ethnography and art museums together in this debate.

With *How Far How Near* curator Jelle Bouwhuis explored, as mentioned earlier, the so-called gap in the collection and policies of the museum. This exhibition looked at grander issues like the place of global contemporary art in a museum, the blind spot the museum has for certain geographical areas and how to engage in this widely held discussion. The exhibition was also a collection presentation, thus relating the research to the collection of the museum. What does the collection contain, regarding global contemporary art?

Art works that were previously exhibited in different exhibitions in SMBA, were purchased and exhibited within this collection presentation. New art works were specially

¹⁵⁴ <http://www.smba.nl/static/en/exhibitions/the-memories-are-present/smba-newsletter-128.pdf>, 27 July 2015.

¹⁵⁵ Idem.

¹⁵⁶ Idem.

created for this exhibition as well, like the wall-covering 'wall-paper' by Godfried Donkor, called *Organized creation of dissatisfaction I (Short boy wallpaper)* (2014), who's point of departure was the many posters within the collection of the Stedelijk Museum dealing with South Africa (see image 18).¹⁵⁷

The exhibition *How Far How Near* showed global contemporary art, as well as older art works, like photographs by Koen Wessing – a famous Dutch photographer who traveled to many countries to capture their social and political situations (see image 19). Part of the exhibition was a poster presentation on the stairway, with posters from the collection and from various periods. Many of the posters unveil a colonial history, captured in the Stedelijk's collection, combined with contemporary art that reflects on postcolonial situations and colonial heritage.

Recently, in June 2015, a less critical and self-reflecting exhibition opened in the Stedelijk Museum: *Tromarama* (see image 20). This is the first solo exhibition by the Indonesian artists' collective. This exhibition is less engaging with the questions themselves, but is more part of an answer provided by the Stedelijk Museum: global contemporary art exhibited in a mostly 'Western' art orientated museum like the Stedelijk, exhibiting their art in the same way the museum would with their modern art and 'Western' oriented contemporary art. This small exhibition is mainly on digital art, and the experiments that this collective does with the possibilities of digital technology.¹⁵⁸ In my opinion, there is no real discussion conducted within the scope of this exhibition, neither does the exhibition touch on recent issues and debates on (post)colonialism or the discussion of global art itself. However, the exhibition can be regarded as an exhibition of global contemporary art itself, providing a platform for this Indonesian artists collective.

3.5 Summing up

In my opinion, it has become clear that when it comes to global contemporary art, several directors tried to engage in the globalization discussion but I would argue that on the whole there was no real discussion happening in the Stedelijk Museum and no real self-reflection nor discussion's being held. Either the approach was to 'include' the 'other', by

¹⁵⁷ *How Far How Near*, 2014, p. 41-42.

¹⁵⁸ <http://www.stedelijk.nl/en/exhibitions/tromarama>, 27 July 2015.

fitting it in the mostly 'Western' art oriented museum or to ignore it for the most part and focus on modern art and formal criteria.

By not giving the global contemporary full attention, or a permanent focus within exhibition and collecting policies, the global contemporary will always come second, or even third within the museum. I would argue that if the Stedelijk only relates to the global contemporary depending on the director, the museum needs to rethink its position within this debate and search for a more permanent focus on global contemporary art.

The project space of the museum is the space where the actual debate seems to center. Relating to global contemporary art as well as Amsterdam itself, SMBA is becoming a global contemporary art center. The main focus of this project space has shifted from a local contemporary art scene to a 'global' contemporary art scene, collaborating with art institutions around the world. Even though SMBA's attention was at first a project space, the projects created a focus for the institution that seems to last.

However, what is going to happen with the focus of the Stedelijk after *Global Collaborations* has ended? Will the gaze of the museum reach to the 'non-Western' or will it go back, as it did before, to being a mostly 'Western' modern and contemporary art museum? Will the museum use its name tied to SMBA to use it as a laboratory and thus have a global outlook for the museum, using SMBA as an antenna? Is it likely that after *Global Collaborations*, the attention will diminish again? Right now, there is no information on any future projects, or even on a changed policy, to relate to the global contemporary. At present I think the museum needs to come to terms with, in Bouwhuis' words: "the ideological void in which it finds itself situated."¹⁵⁹ This is what the museum is trying to do with the project *Global Collaborations*.

¹⁵⁹ Bouwhuis, 2012, p. 159.

Conclusion

As I have been trying to show, the discussion of globalization within art and the 'inclusion' or rewriting of the discourse of the global contemporary has been going on for quite some time. In this time, the discussion has been enriched with many publications, symposia, discussions, lectures, workshop, exhibitions and art works on the subject. This has made this debate a large and complex one, which touches upon many questions. Not only questions like, 'who is speaking for whom', 'how to represent this so-called 'other'' but also touches this on the 'what is art' debate – which I have not discussed here – as well as the, 'what is the role of the museum in this debate'? I find that it is important for museums to engage in this debate. As it is such a complex discussion, it feels is important that museums take a position, exactly because it is a problematic discussion. There seems to be no rigid right or wrong in this discussion, but it is peculiar for a postcolonial, contemporary (art) museum to ignore the fact that the world as well as the art worlds have become global.

Now returning to where I started: the importance of this discussion is found in the fact that it has been going on for so long, and that the same questions are asked again and again. Where has this brought us? If Jelle Bouwhuis still in 2015 sees a gap in the collection of an internationally known modern and contemporary art museum, what has happened since Thomas McEvilley wrote an essay on the hegemony of the West within the art discourse?

In between these two statements, much has happened. The Stedelijk has engaged itself to this debate and off, depending on the time period and on the choices made by the directors. This has led the museum to a point, in 2015, where the position of the global contemporary, the 'other' is still debated upon, and is still unsure. The Stedelijk has not taken important steps to actively change and rethink their role as an art museum within the globalization discussion. The only steps that have been taken are within a temporary project, which does create an interesting discussion within the museum, but keeps the scope relatively small. By hosting a large symposium the museum made a real effort, as well as by trying to create a collection presentation that tried to critically look inside the museum, and see, as an inventory, what the museum had to offer regarding global contemporary art. However, with the exhibition of *Tromarama*, the critical self-reflection is

not pursued. As opposed to the Stedelijk Museum, its project space is actually evolving into a more and more global contemporary art institution, which offers a platform for both the local and the global community. The Stedelijk seems to be satisfied to connecting their name to their laboratory, instead of making the effort of actively engaging with global contemporary art in the museum itself.

At the other end, the Tropenmuseum has been self-reflecting from the start. What has this self-reflecting attitude the museum has had for decades, actually achieved? The museum is always self-reflecting, thinking of new ways to position itself and new ways to expand its outlook. However, after decades, the museum still struggles to exhibit and collect the global contemporary. Even though discussions and symposia are held on the subject, actually creating a hybrid installation that includes both objects from material culture all over the world as well as global contemporary art proves to be a challenge. I would suggest that if the museum would stop arguing that they are not in fact an art museum, and define what kind of art they refer to and want to focus on, the focus can be on the evolving into a cultural history museum.

Part of the processes that are happening within these museums are rewriting processes. As Peter Weibel pointed out, processes of rewriting are what can actually change a discourse. That is what is happening with the museums, they are changing the discourse as well as themselves. But it also relates to a discourse on a larger scale. As art history originated as a Western discipline, rooted in nineteenth century Europe, the hegemony of the West that founded it is not a surprise. I find it a surprise that this hegemony lasted for so long, since the debate has spread out for all these years. Jean-Huber Martin tried to find a way to sort of overcome this hegemony and create an exhibition in which artists from all over the world had a place, and McEvilley captured the essence of this hegemony as he saw it in his essays, but thirty years later 'we' scholars, curators, historians and artists are still debating the 'otherness' and the hegemony, instead of actually rewriting the older systems and biases 'we' uncovered. Within this particular discussion on the global contemporary art discourse, the time that has passed since the discussion started, points at the relevance as well as the difficulties the discussion faces. Trying to let go of the established Western framework, or the framework that has its roots in the Western and European history of art, is key. We cannot demand that global

contemporary should fit into this old system, which had not place for this 'other' in the first place. Neither should museums expect this to happen. If the museums do not make an effort to change their framework to create an outlook that encompasses global contemporary art as well as a sort of global or world art history, then nothing will change. The 'other' will not ever fit if 'we' keep making 'them'.

Even though both museums have deployed strategies to position themselves within the debate, as well as to relate to the global contemporary, that seems to be not enough. Fundamental changes are crucial, I believe. If the Stedelijk Museum will not actively engage in this debate the attention remains to be project-based and incidental. Strategies are only providing a positive outcome, if the goal is also clear. Even though the extent to which both museums relate themselves are different, in my opinion, setting clear goals should be on both of their agenda's.

Images



Image 1: Overview of the *Modern Art - Old and New* exhibition in the Stedelijk Museum in 1955.

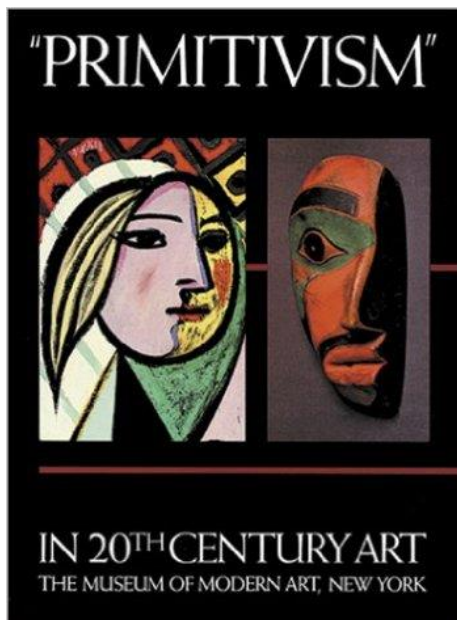


Image 2: Cover of catalogue, W. Rubin, *"Primitivism" In 20th Century Art*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984.



Image 3: Overview of the exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre*: Cyprien Tokoudagba. Centre Pompidou, 1989.



Image 4: Overview of the exhibition *The Global Contemporary: Art Worlds after 1989* at ZKM, Karlsruhe, in 2011.



Image 5: Display in the Tropenmuseum: Absent Queen Wilhelmina and her Subjects, photo part of the archive of the Tropenmuseum, taken in 1938.



Image 6: Picture of the grouping of the permanent exhibitions in continents in the Musée de Quai Branly.



Image 7: Overview of mask installation at the Musée de Quai Branly in February 2015.



Image 8: Roy Villevoye, *Madonna (after Omamá and Céline)*, 2008.
Wax statue. Part of the collection of the Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam.



Image 9: Overview of a statue of a man and boy, as on display in 1903. Photo from the archive of the Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam.



Image 10: Roy Villevoye, *Preparations*, 2009

Wood, metal, rubber, textile, human hair, silicone.

Cross: 389 × 195 × 19,5cm. Asmat: 160,5 × 82 × 30cm.

Collection De Lakenhal.



Image 11: Lucas van Leyden, *The Last Judgment*, ca. 1526-1527.
 Oilpaint on panel. Middle: 269,5 × 184,8cm. Sides: 264 × 76cm.
 Collection De Lakenhal.



Image 12:
 Leda Catunda, *Japanese Lake*, 1986.
 Acrylic, nylon. 130 x 250 cm.



Image 13: Daniel Senise, *Untitled*, 1989.
Acrylic on canvas. 185 x 168 cm.

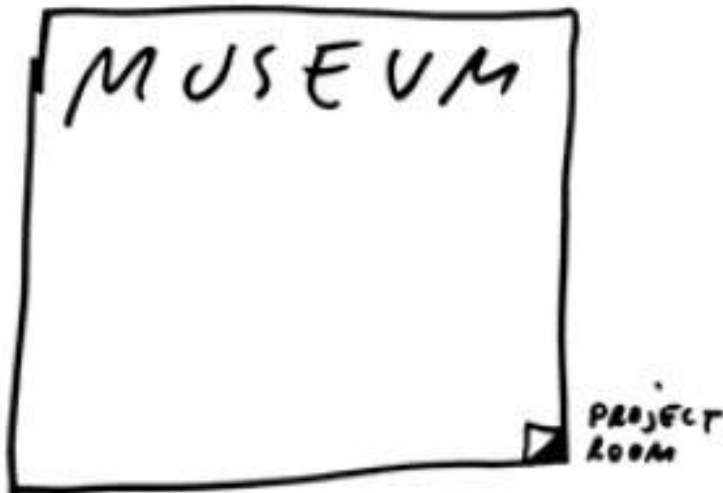


Image 14: Dan Perjovschi, *Untitled*, year unknown.



Image 15: Overview of the *Hollandaise* Exhibition at SMBA, 3 November 2012 – 6 January 2013.



Image 16: Willem de Rooij, *Blue to Black*, 2012.

Wax print. Ca. 550 cm.

Part of *Hollandaise* exhibition at SMBA, 2012.

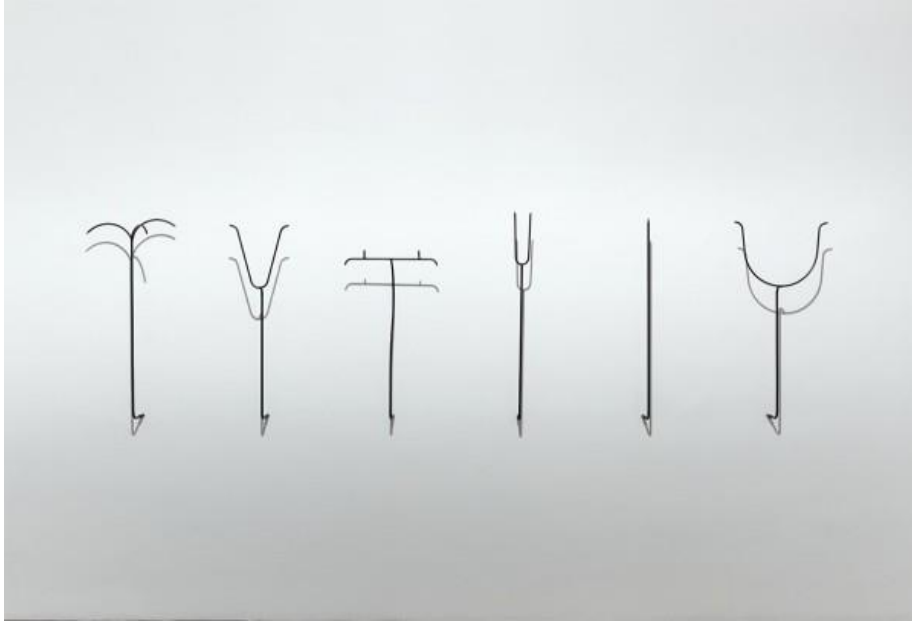


Image 17: Pauline M'barek, *Trophy Stands*, 2011.

Installation.



Image 18: Godfried Donkor, *Organized creation of dissatisfaction I (Short boy wallpaper)*, 2014.

Part of the *How Far How Near* exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in 2014-2015.



Image 19: Overview of the *How Far How Near* Exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum, from September 2014 till February 2015.



Image 20: Tromarama, *Unbelievable Beliefs*, stop motion animation with fabric, 2 min 57 sec., 2012.

Part of the *Tromarama* exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in 2015.

Source images

Cover Image : <http://journal.stedelijk.nl/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/fig.-6.jpg>, 16 June 2015.

Image 1: http://stedelijkstudies.com/beheer/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Fig-2_Leigh.jpg, 16 August 2015.

Image 2: <http://www.amazon.com/Primitivism-20th-Century-Art-Affinity/dp/0870705342>, 17 August 2015.

Image 3 : <http://africanah.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/magiciensCyprienTokoudagba.jpg>, 16 August 2015.

Image 4: http://zkm.de/media/styles/stage_1024x370/public/bild/zkm_forschungsstelle_globale-studien.jpg?itok=kne1MxLW

Image 5 : Legêne, Susan. "Refurbishment: The Tropenmuseum for a change." *Tropenmuseum for a Change*. Ed. Daan van Dartel. Amsterdam, KIT Publishers: 2009, 17. Print.

Image 6: Picture taken by me in February 2015.

Image 7: Picture taken by me in February 2015.

Image 8: <http://www.kunstbeeld.nl/nl/weblog/409/drieluik-over-leven-verlossing-en-dood.html>, 17 August 2015.

Image 9: Legêne, Susan. "Refurbishment: The Tropenmuseum for a change." *Tropenmuseum for a Change*. Ed. Daan van Dartel. Amsterdam, KIT Publishers: 2009, 16. Print.

Image 10: <http://royvillevoye.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/afbeelding15.jpg>, 17 August 2015.

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Image 12:

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Image 17: http://www.paulinembarek.com/files/gimngs/21_Trophy%20stands1.jpg, 17 August 2015.

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