

adaptation efforts that succeeded in the wake of the agricultural revolution, but leaves open whether something like this is to be expected after global warming gets eventually out of control in the near future.

The last two continuous thematic threads of this illustrated world history concern “morality” and “initiative”, a peculiarly bashful formulation for the exercise of power and its legitimation. References to scandalous inequalities within or between societies and the justification of selfishness in destroying the livelihoods of others as well as humankind as a whole are not withheld from the reader. However, this is done from a peculiarly distanced perspective, which views humanity as an insect crawling irrationally through the landscape – just as the introductory metaphor of the galactic view of the Earth suggests, which feeds the illusion of objective observation. The text reads like an invitation to a kind of philanthropic engagement with this world and who would seriously decline such an invitation that something has to change here – after all, it is part of the basic equipment of the liberal promise of a better world for the future. However, the alternatives to capitalism and democracy have now disappeared from this world of the future. And this despite the fact that the attractiveness of capitalism is also dwindling in parallel with the hegemony of the West. Thus, the reader is left somewhat perplexed. The world continues to turn, inequality will probably continue to exist and the “Initiative” will return to China in the foreseeable future, where it had been for the greater part of historical development anyway. In such a way, the educated citizen who has worked

his way through this beautifully illustrated volume, even with the prospect of a manageable future, puts the work aside at the end and senses the limitations of his own possibilities to change the course of things.

**Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann /
Catherine Dossin / Béatrice Joyeux-
Prunel (eds.): *Circulations in the
Global History of Art (= Studies in Art
Historiography)*, Farnham: Ashgate
2015, 247 p.**

Reviewed by
Beáta Hock, Leipzig

It is a peculiar task to review an edited volume that not only has two or three contributions, on top of an Introduction “proper”, that might qualify as further sections of the book’s general introduction but that also contains an elaborate and extensive review (admittedly a critique) of its own as Afterword. It both appears a tempting and sound choice to enter in dialogue with this built-in critical assessment in the commentary below.

The Afterword is authored by James Elkins whose keen intellect and sharp, albeit occasionally arrogant, reasoning the present reviewer greatly values. This time, however, a peculiar epistemological shortsightedness seems to prevent him from crediting the goals and achievements garnered in “*Circulations in the Global History of Art*”. Elkins self-consciously talks as a representative of the North Atlantic – and in his eyes,

supreme – academic community and reads the texts collected in this book through the lens of his own inquiry into Global Art History.¹ Hence, his chief concern pertains to commensurability: whether a middle ground is possible between what he sees as two irreconcilable enterprises. These are the universalizing claims and other canonical certainties of modernist art history on the one hand and, on the other, extreme cultural relativism: a supposedly inevitable attendant of an approach that gives preference to localized, rooted cultures. Elkins doubts the methodological usefulness of the concept of “circulations” in finding this middle ground.

Quite conversely, the editors – themselves initiators of the Artl@s project digitally mapping art and literary history, and/or speakers at the conference from which the present collection of essays emerged – are convinced that thinking of circulations, rather than influences and diffusion, seems to be the only successful move towards a truly transnational narrative. Their project not only hinges on foregrounding transcultural encounters and exchanges as circulations but also on studying circulations in a historical materialist perspective. This materialist outlook is different from an “idealist” approach in that the latter equates the subject of art history with images, styles, and texts about these, whereas the materialist angle also reckons with the materiality of objects and images, the artist as embodied historical actor, as well as the various conditions in which circulations occur. This view incorporates a central insight of the Spatial Turn, the acknowledgment that “space matters”: where things happen is critical to knowing *how* and *why* they happen,² where the “why” and “how”

also imply factors that might pose *limitations* to interconnections between different parts of the world.

The traditional art historical narrative, dominated by a temporal/chronological viewpoint, usually falls back on categories like backwardness and belatedness to explain such limitations and the resulting historical alterity. Reinserting space helps recover the agency, projects and resources of historical actors, and this is exactly the ambition of this compilation: to bring in the so far unknown experience of art history’s various “Others”.

At the same time, this is an aspiration that James Elkins fails to comprehend or appreciate. It is hard for him to consent to the vista that when art history is opened up to account for non-European cultures, the discipline will not only be quantitatively (geographically) expanded, but it will qualitatively change as well (its preoccupations and key terms will have to be renegotiated) – “*and it will still be art history*”. Once it is understood that global interaction is inescapable and results in hybridity and “*métissage*”, which renders envisioning pure contexts no longer tenable, it is a tiny next step to accept that the dissolution of boundaries does not only affect the objects of art history (individual cultures, artistic genres, etc.) but the very study field, too.

A second accomplishment of the editors’ extraordinarily rich Introduction is an extended excursus about the older origins of thinking transnationally as opposed to within national containers, and this discussion embeds recent developments of art historiography within the broader discipline of history.

The first discussion chapter, authored by Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann reads as an-

other possible introduction for it critically reviews a set of concepts and theories related to the enterprise of writing world art history. Kaufmann also demonstrates that, at least for the period before 1800, the colonial pattern now commonly used to describe relations between dominating Europeans and the “foreign” cultures they encountered in Asia or Africa needs to be reversed, or at least Europeans need to be recognized as having been mere mediators between continents.

Monica Juneja’s essay might similarly aspire for the status of another introduction inasmuch as it addresses further crucial issues which the editors’s Introduction only passingly mentioned. Prioritizing materialist historicism and operating with the concept of circulations – which in Juneja’s case becomes transculturation – may lead to the notion of art becoming relativized: it might turn out that art has not always been a factor common to human societies, has not been produced everywhere, or if it was produced, it has not been necessarily perceived as such for it did not constitute a separate domain of social practice.

Michel Espagne’s take on the globalization of art history seems to be diametrically opposed to Juneja’s stance when he claims that the integration of art from outside Europe into art history was bound up with the representation of art as a universal human activity, and that “a history of art that does not include this universal dimension is inconceivable” (p. 105).

Other contributions, which cannot all be referenced in the scope of a brief review like this, offer individual case studies while they too delve into questions of terminology and methodology. Carolyn Guile re-visits early modern Europe’s easternmost

borderland, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the extraordinary variety in architectural form, religious and ethnic makeup that the Commonwealth bred. In light of this complexity, Guile unmasks the limitations of period terms such as “gothic,” “renaissance,” or “baroque” for capturing the architectural landscape of borderlands.

On the contemporary end of the timescale the volume straddles, Sophie Cras remains within the North Atlantic art world to investigate attempts to decentre this domain. Taking the 1999 *Global Conceptualism-exhibition* (Queens Museum) as her starting point, the author exposes the peculiar limits of “internationalism” as contemplated from such an undisputed center as New York.

This collection of articles will be most appreciated by researchers whose work reflects the conviction that there exist no such thing as separate civilizations, cultures always encounter each other and interconnect. Consequently, what makes up culture and art is not stable and fixed, arising from one single source, but the result of a ceaseless transformation and adaptation of ideas. Many of this appreciative readership may turn out to come from “geographically and economically small part[s] of the world”,³ eager to flatten out the inherent hierarchies of art history. One ancillary shortcoming of the present volume is that its list of contributors does not mirror a comparable attempt at the extension and decentralisation of the international scholarly community: all but one contributors hold positions at prestigious North Atlantic universities.

Notes

- 1 J. Elkins (ed.), *Is Art History Global?*, London 2007, and J. Elkins/Z. Valiavicharska/A. Kim (eds.), *Art and Globalization*, University Park 2011, as well as Elkins's book project in-progress "The Impending Single History of Art: North Atlantic Art History and Its Alternatives", accessible online: http://www.jameselkins.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=251.
- 2 See B. Warf/S. Arias (eds.), *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, Abingdon 2009, p. 1.
- 3 This is how James Elkins refers to art historians working outside Western institutions in his Afterword, p. 210.

Greg Burgess: *The League of Nations and the Refugees from Nazi Germany*. James G. McDonald and Hitler's Victims, London et al.: Bloomsbury Academic 2016, 224 S.

Rezensiert von
Isabella Löhr, Osnabrück

Mit seinem Buch über den Hochkommissar für Flüchtlinge aus Deutschland des Völkerbunds, James G. McDonald, greift Burgess ein Thema auf, das in der historischen Forschung zuletzt viel Aufmerksamkeit erfahren hat. Im Kontext von großräumigen Flüchtlingskrisen und einer internationalen bzw. europäischen Gemeinschaft, die im Verlauf des 20. Jh.s und am Beginn des 21. Jh.s hierauf nur unzureichende Antworten formuliert hat, richtet sich das Interesse von Historikerinnen und Historikern vermehrt auf die Genese

von Flüchtlingsregimen, auf die Entstehung der Figur des modernen Flüchtlings und auf die wichtige Frage nach dem Verhältnis von staatlicher Souveränität, Völkerrecht und humanitären Interventionen. In diesem Kontext ist auch die Studie von Burgess situiert. Er untersucht die verhältnismäßig kurze Amtszeit von McDonald als Hochkommissar des Völkerbunds, die von Dezember 1933 bis Dezember 1935 dauerte. McDonald beendete sein Mandat mit einem fulminanten Rücktrittsbrief, der eine scharfsinnige Analyse der politischen Blockaden, der institutionellen Schwierigkeiten und der moralischen Herausforderungen lieferte, die eine effektive Einhegung der Fluchtursachen verhindern und dazu führten, dass jüdische und politische Flüchtlinge aus Deutschland keine hinreichende humanitäre oder völkerrechtliche Unterstützung erhielten. In der internationalen Presse sorgte der Brief für Furore. Auch wenn die Mehrzahl der von Burgess zitierten Pressestimmen den Rücktrittsbrief mehr oder weniger einhellig als Dokument rezipierten, das die eklatante Entrechtung der jüdischen Bevölkerung in NS-Deutschland eindeutig beim Namen nannte und direkte politische Reaktionen forderten, geschah genau das nicht. Warum das der Fall war und warum McDonald mit seinen Maßnahmen und Vorschlägen beim Völkerbund nicht durchkam, ist die Leitfrage des Buches. Die Studie basiert auf dem Nachlass von McDonald, der in den 2000er Jahren ediert wurde. In Kombination mit Archivmaterial von und über ihn, das in verschiedenen Archiven verstreut und entsprechend fragmentarisch ist, gelingt es Burgess, ein umfassendes und detailliertes Bild von McDonalds Amtszeit zu zeich-