

**Diana Newall, ed., *Art and Its Global Histories: A Reader*,
Manchester: Manchester University Press in association with
the Open University, 2017, 344 pp. 17 b/w illus., 4 graphs £ 17.99
(paper) ISBN 9781526119926**

Erin L. Webster

Volume 44, Number 1, 2019

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1062164ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1062164ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

ISSN

0315-9906 (print)

1918-4778 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Webster, E. L. (2019). Review of [Diana Newall, ed., *Art and Its Global Histories: A Reader*, Manchester: Manchester University Press in association with the Open University, 2017, 344 pp. 17 b/w illus., 4 graphs £ 17.99 (paper) ISBN 9781526119926]. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 44(1), 119–120. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1062164ar>

forms; in particular, they emphasize his “innovative” pattern cutting. Josep Font of Lesage laments that “embroidery has been devalued” and suggests that it is good to “revitalize” these kinds of crafts for the future, as Balenciaga has done. Here again, craft is central to the narrative.

The exhibition clearly attempts to represent Cristóbal Balenciaga as a highly skilled craftsman in order to imbue both mid-century and current Balenciaga design with the luxury connoted by the term “hand made.” Through craft, Master of Couture links the Balenciaga label to skill and slowness, forging connotations of qualitative superiority opposed to the cheap expediency of fast fashion. These narratives are projected despite Cristóbal Balenciaga’s relative distance from the output of many of his associated ateliers, not to mention the current obfuscation of the labour practices of Kering’s suppliers. As a result, the romantic message of the exhibit feels disingenuous, accomplishing, alongside any educational value, the capitalist mythmaking on which the luxury brand industry relies for its market success. ¶

Stephanie Weber is a graduate student at Concordia University, currently pursuing an MA in Art History.
—swebe155@mtroyal.ca

1. “Kering Standards,” the company’s code of ethics, is now published publicly, but the information it provides does not provide definitive information concerning the sourcing of its material and labour. Significantly, Kering does not provide a list of its direct suppliers, nor does it communicate membership at MSIs such as ETA or FLA. It has implemented measures within the year to improve its labour practices but has not provided enough information to comprehensively specify the results of those measures, making it impossible to suggest their success. Similarly, information about establishing living wage pay rates at its direct suppliers is as of now unreleased. Rankabrand, “How Sustainable is Balenciaga?” <https://rankabrand.org/sustainable-luxury-brands/Balenciaga/>; see also “REPORT: Gucci, Balenciaga, Prada have More Forced Labour in their Supply Chains than H&M,” *The Fashion Law*, December 9, 2016.

2. Carla Jones and Anne Marie Leshkovich, “The Globalization of Asian Dress: Re-Orienting Fashion or Re-Orienting Asia?” in *Re-Orienting Fashion*, ed. Sandra Niessen, Anne Marie Leshkovich, and Carla Jones (New York: Berg, 2003), 5.

Diana Newall, ed.

Art and Its Global Histories: A Reader
Manchester: Manchester University Press in association with the Open University, 2017

344 pp. 17 b/w illus., 4 graphs
£17.99 (paper) ISBN 9781526119926

Erin L. Webster

With the publication of *Art and Its Global Histories: A Reader*, the editors and authors have chosen to offer a global, theoretical exploration of visual culture supported by the use of primary source texts, and dispensing with illustrations, save for a few black-and-white reproductions. This volume is a reader for the Open University level-three distance-learning module of the same name, which uses the lens of colonialism to construct an overview of the globalisation of art from the early modern to the contemporary eras, with a particular focus on British colonialism. The volume is meant to serve as an introduction to a series of books that expand the material offered here. Each of its four sections is presented by a different editor and consists of a brief introduction, a selection of carefully chosen primary source texts, and excerpts from “critical sources” that explain the connections between these primary texts and the approaches of present-day scholars.

The first section, entitled “Confronting Art History: overviews, perspectives and reflections,” provides a set of excerpts from major scholars who have shaped postcolonial theory, including Edward Said, Linda Nochlin, and Homi K. Bhaba, in order to establish a foundation for the material that follows. In her introduction to these excerpts, editor Diana Newall shows how the study of colonialism, postcolonialism, and globalisation enables the discipline of art history to address the challenges and limitations of Eurocentrism, given that the



very methodologies and vocabularies of this discipline are constructed by and for a Eurocentric audience. However, *Art and Its Global Histories* offers some mixed messages about the process of learning and about the subjectivity of scholarship.

The first of the four sections, “European art and the wider world, 1350-1550,” is edited by Kathleen Christian. Primary sources concerning European encounters with Indigenous cultures in Central and South America are followed by excerpts from the well-known writings of sixteenth-century artists such as Albrecht Dürer, Leonardo da Vinci, and Condivi (on Michelangelo), as well as texts from historical sources such as inventories and travel writing. Essays by scholars including Claire Farago, Luca Mola and Marta Ajmar-Wollheim ponder globalisation and historiography in the so-called Renaissance era—the complications of traditional boundaries, cultures, and methodologies that circumscribe study of this period. Unlike earlier collections of primary sources from this era, such as Elizabeth Gilmore Holt’s *A Documentary History of Art* (1957), *Art and Its Global Histories* includes this recent scholarship to provide models of how to interrogate these texts and the historiography of interpretation.

The next section, edited by Emma Barker, offers an overview of the connections and interdependencies of art, commerce, and colonialism in the period from 1600 to 1800 as the major European powers extended

their invasions of other continents. Primary source material was chosen to represent European attitudes towards religion, race, and culture as Europeans sought to dominate and supplant existing Indigenous traditions. Recent scholarship by authors including Thomas DaCosta Kauffman, Benjamin Schmidt, David Porter and Daniel Maudlin, and Bernard L. Herman on such topics as cartography, material culture, and the gendering of the “exotic” show the consequences of these invasions and the subsequent ways non-European culture was presented and consumed.

The third section, “Empire and art,” edited by Renate Dohman, delivers a concentrated investigation into the colonial relationship of Britain to India through Indian art, architecture, and archaeology, using sources drawn from archaeological surveys, history texts, and, interestingly, the early twentieth-century writings of an Irish woman known in India as Sister Nivedita, who travelled to Kolkata where she became active in establishing a girls’ school and supporting the movement for independence. From these sources one moves through to texts on topics such as nationalism, modernism, and primitivism as well as work by the colonial arts administrator George Birdwood that describes notions of authenticity and artistic heritage from that viewpoint. These sources (by far the largest number of primary sources that appear in this volume) were selected to demonstrate how the British used cultural production to establish negative hierarchies of aesthetics, which then were contested and shifted as late nineteenth-century British aesthetic perceptions began to change. The “critical sources” that accompany this material explore issues of race and the roles of photography, architecture, collecting, and historiography (the latter investigated through publication of books about Indian art and architecture for British audiences during this period) in the construction of

scholarship and identity in Indian art and the history of empire.

The final section, “Art after empire: from colonialism to globalisation” contains writings by male twentieth-century artists. Texts by David Alfaro Siqueiros and an interview with Alberto Hijar Serrano offer a glimpse into Mexican Muralism. Essays by Terry Smith, Stuart Hall, Okwui Enwezor, Chin-Tao Wu and Hito Steyerl consider a range of related topics from the contemporary art world, including provincialism, the role of contemporary museums and biennales, and the problematic positioning of contemporary visual culture vis-à-vis the despotism of the art market.

The provision of recent and contemporary essays throughout this book is both encouragingly ambitious and problematic. The essays exemplify important critical methodologies and introduce a starting point for further scholarly exploration. But, there is always some concern with the use of selectively edited passages. A more fulfilling and more instructive approach would have been to include the complete essays, together with a set of questions or comments that would encourage readers to interrogate and deliberate their ideas. While one must acknowledge that this volume was initially compiled for a very specific audience (Open University students), the sense of pre-digested offerings makes for an uneasy pedagogy and ultimately limits the usefulness of the reader to an introductory-level audience.

In turn, the primary source texts included here continue to reproduce, for the most part, the standard European male perspective and a document-based approach to methodology. Inclusion of object-focussed studies, completely omitted in this book, such as artists’ manuals and contracts would provide wider support for exploration of the roles of trade, commerce, and exoticism in choices of materials, subjects, patronage, consumption, and influences. Such information would also provide

some balance to this study through consideration of the physical objects themselves. And, there is very little material here that includes the voices of women, particularly from the earlier historical eras. At a time when there is an increasing amount of scholarship devoted to uncovering and understanding the roles women played as artists, collectors, patrons, and consumers of visual culture, why is this research not evident in this volume? The absence of Indigenous voices and scholarship is especially problematic in a work devoted to issues of colonialism and globalisation.

Since this volume is meant to serve as an introduction to a further series of works, each containing more specific information, relevant imagery, current research, and critical bibliography, some indications of these areas of contemporary scholarly investigation should have been included. One must also, in this digital age, and given the connection to the Open University module, question why there are no digital resources incorporated into this volume. Building access to online systems may be risky due to the temporary nature of some digital initiatives, but there are valuable online supports for such areas as bibliography (see Oxford Bibliographies), access to museum and image databases, and pedagogical tools and strategies, that would offer a wealth of support and enrichment for the ideas and connections presented in *Art and its Global Histories*.

While the aims of this volume, overall, are laudable and necessary, the restricted focus and specificity of the connection to a preset course module require a significant awareness of the limitations and challenges for a more general audience. But this reader and its subsequent volumes may plant seeds for future thought, if used carefully. ¶

Erin L. Webster is an Associate Professor, Teaching, in the Department of Arts, Culture and Media at the University of Toronto Scarborough. —webster@utsc.utoronto.ca