



Where Does Art Come From?

**Dr. Leah McCurdy
& Contributors**



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About the Publisher

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About This Project

Overview

Where Does Art Come From? focuses on global arts and culture for the UTA core curriculum art history introductory course ART 1317 “Arts of Africa, Asia, Islam, Oceania, and the Indigenous Americas.” By offering this course resource at no cost, we reduce the required financial outlay of students and build new mechanism for course engagement, thereby enhancing the student experience. The text prioritizes relatability, cultural context, and inclusivity, following much needed decolonization practices in higher education.

Creation Process

The text was written from February–August 2021. The primary author drafted each chapter, including two chapters that were written collaboratively with two student contributors. After drafting, each chapter was immediately sent for review by an undergraduate-level student reviewer and a graduate-level student reviewer. Student reviewers offered feedback about clarity and relatability while the peer-reviewer offered feedback about content and context. Revisions were immediate, with a final review process in fall 2021 by UTA Art & Art History Department faculty and two anonymous peer-reviewers. All illustrations were developed by student graphic designers from June 2021 – July 2022.

About the Project Manager

Dr. Leah McCurdy (she/her) is an anthropological archaeologist and art historian focused on global visual traditions. Her scholarship focuses on ancient Maya architectural and construction histories while her expertise via graduate education and professional experience spans visual traditions across the ancient Americas, Africa, Islamic lands, South Asia, East Asia, Oceania, as well as Egypt and Western Asia. McCurdy has been teaching in higher education for 10 years, covering art history, anthropology, and archaeology. McCurdy develops courses with an applied focus, promoting awareness about cultural traditions, heritage, pluralism, and global citizenship. In all courses, she seeks to increase understanding about diverse art historical traditions while enhancing critical thinking and pluralistic perspectives on the world. McCurdy has been teaching ART 1317 and upper-level art history courses at UTA since 2017.

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Author's Note

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How to Read this Book & Land Acknowledgement

As an open educational resource developed originally for the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA), we developed this book with the ethics of inclusivity at the front of our minds. As an art history text, we also focus on accurate historical context. Thus, at the outset, we acknowledge that UTA is located on Native American lands. The UTA Land Acknowledgement Task Force constructed the following statement.

The University of Texas at Arlington respectfully acknowledges the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes upon whose historical homelands the university is located. Their ancestors resided here for generations before being violently displaced by US settlers and soldiers in the mid-1800s CE. We recognize the historical presence of the Caddo Nation and other Tribal Nations in the region, the ongoing presence and achievement of many people who moved to the area due to the Indian Relocation program of the 1950s and 1960s CE, and the vital presence and accomplishments of our Native students, faculty, and staff.

How to Read this Book

You've probably noticed that this book is made up of a ton of questions. The title is a question and all chapters are focused on questions. We will explore these questions as they relate to your life and to art history. Thus, this isn't a chronologically or geographically organized art history textbook. We'll talk about why we choose not to take that traditional approach in ["Where Does Art Come From? An Introduction."](#)

In addition, unlike most art history textbooks, we wrote this book in a conversational tone, with the hope of making you smile or LOL (laugh out loud) at some point. Mostly, we wrote informally to ensure this text is readable and enjoyable for everyone. In addition to LOL, you'll see informal abbreviations like P.S. (postscript), aka (also known as), btw (by the way), FYI (for your information), and tbh (to be honest). If you aren't familiar with those abbreviations, just come back here to see what they mean. We periodically announce 'SPOILERS' as well, especially when we talk about recent films but also when we foreshadow what's to come in later chapters. FYI: We'll also include some videos with content warnings to reduce any triggers.

Importantly, while the writing style of this textbook is intentionally informal, we expect students to practice formal, academic writing. There are models of academic writing embedded throughout the text, including scholarly books and articles, as well as example student papers linked to chapters. Look beyond this text at those resources to ensure you understand the difference between conversations about art that facilitate learning and demonstrations of your learning according to academic standards.

Also, this conversation is not one-sided! You have a voice! This is a digital text and easily editable. Students should suggest changes and additions. BTW, this is something that students and scholars are supposed to do! We find the gaps and inaccuracies and work to fill or correct them as best we can! In fact, students who develop excellent research papers and projects will be invited to submit their work as part of this text! You'll see examples already embedded in the text, including [a comic written and illustrated by Emery Martinez-Blas, a UTA art student!](#) And, the graphic designer of many illustrations, Marizela Garza, is a UTA art student! You'll see her work in every chapter! Further, UTA art student and athlete, Simona Cabella, designed the book cover [here!](#)

Speaking of Marizela's work, we hope it helps you navigate all the artworks, geography, and time periods discussed in the book. In ["Where Are We Going?"](#), we'll discuss the geography you need to know to get started. Marizela's maps in that chapter will get you situated before diving into all the artworks! Then, each chapter starting with ["Who Am I?"](#)

begins with a specifically designed map featuring the artworks in that chapter, as well as a timeline visualizing how those artworks relate chronologically.

We chose all artworks discussed in the book carefully. They relate to the questions and offer perspectives or approaches that aren't necessarily well-known or well-understood. Because of this, it is important to thoroughly contextualize every artwork, so you know exactly who, when, and where it comes from (as far as we can know with current scholarship), and where it is now. That info is summed up in artwork captions below each image, following the art history standard Chicago Manual of Style format:

Artist Last Name, Artist First Name (if known) OR Cultural Maker(s). *Artwork Title* (in italics). Date of creation (may use "ca." to abbreviate "circa," meaning 'around' the date(s) listed). Media, dimensions (provided in inches or centimeters, depending on the information provided by the artist or museum). Museum collection that holds the artwork or "courtesy of" the artist or "in situ" if in its original location. Photo attribution if known; [Creative Commons copyright license](#) (provided via the artist, photographer, museum, or established in this publication).

Some artworks (and/or images of them) have copyright restrictions, so we could not include photographs of them in the text. They are so important to the topics discussed that we couldn't leave them out. So, Marizela developed transformational sketches of these artworks. Check out Marizela's amazing sketches and the original artworks through links provided in their captions. To give you a sense of how these transformational sketches were created digitally, Marizela screencasted her work! Figure 0.1 below demonstrates Marizela's work on the sketch of *Bester I, Mayotte* (Fig. 5.7) by South African artist Zanele Muholi. Check out all those clothes pins! View all the sketching time lapses [here](#).

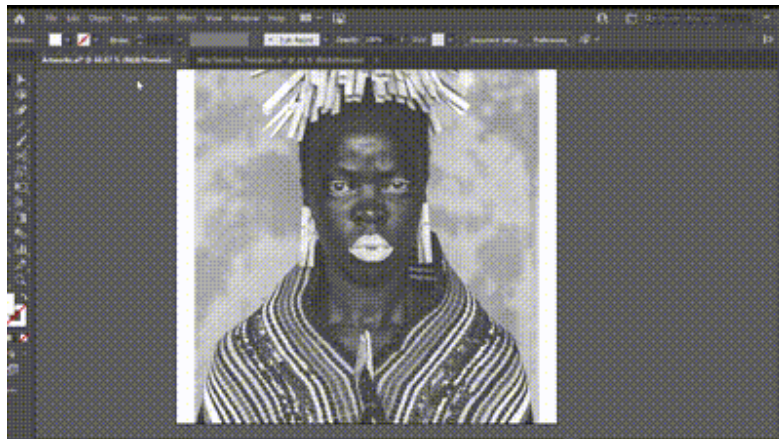


Figure 0.1: GIF time lapse of digital transformation sketching process by Marizela Garza of the artwork: Zanele Muholi from South Africa, [Bester I, Mayotte](#), 2015 CE, digital photo. Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town/Johannesburg, and Yancey Richardson Gallery, New York. © Zanele Muholi.

A few notes about dates in captions and in the text:

- We don't use the BC/AD dating convention, which abbreviates the phrases "Before Christ" and *Anno Domini* (Latin for "in the year of our Lord"). That convention assumes Christian structures of thought and chronology. Instead, we use the BCE/CE convention, which abbreviates "Before Common Era" and "Common Era." BC and BCE dates are the same numerically. But the BCE label does not presuppose Christian relevance. Thus, it is much more appropriate when discussing cultural traditions that do not see Christianity as relevant to their belief structures.
- You'll see BCE or CE after every date mentioned in the text. This may feel redundant but it is important to ensure that everyone understands when events occurred. BCE/CE will not be included in bibliographic references since almost all sources were published in the Common Era. But there are exceptions, so if you are confused, make sure

to ask.

- Labels like ‘ancient,’ ‘traditional,’ ‘historical,’ ‘modern,’ and ‘contemporary’ are used to separate time periods but can be a bit confusing. Generally speaking:
 - ‘Ancient’ refers to periods prior to the development of writing and/or a cultural period that is contrasted to a more recent period (like the ancient Maya versus the historic or modern Maya).
 - ‘Traditional’ is problematic because it often comes with a value judgment that something is not ‘modern’ (see discussion below; meaning new, sophisticated, or ‘civilized’) but old-fashioned or dependent on cultural belief. We try to avoid this term but when we use it, we refer to practices or arts that are long-established and important to a particular group.
 - ‘Historical’ usually refers to periods after the development of writing but more recent than ‘ancient’ periods.
 - ‘Modern’ is malleable. In formal art history, it was a period of art starting in the late 1800s CE that challenged the long-held focus on realism in art (see [“Where Does Art Come From? An Introduction”](#)). When used in that sense, we’ll capitalize the term for clarity. Generally, ‘modern’ (lowercase) can refer to recent times. To add to the confusion, ‘modern’ and ‘contemporary’ are often used interchangeably.
 - ‘Contemporary’ refers to artists making art right now and to the developments of Postmodernism starting in the 1960s CE (see [“Where Does Art Come From? An Introduction”](#)).

Getting back to Chicago Manual of Style... unlike many textbooks, this book will include in-text citations (directly in the sentences) to credit information sources. Textbooks usually don’t include citations because they can hinder readability, especially for introductory audiences. But, we’ve decided that we want our readers to be informed about sources. We don’t cite every single source but we offer key resources and we cite every quotation to model ethical writing practices and help you start your own research. For academic writing, you must cite ALL sources of information, including those you have paraphrased and quoted.

Typically, art historians use the [Chicago Manual of Style Notes and Bibliography \(footnotes\) subtype](#). As a digital text, it was difficult to include footnotes here so we chose to use the [Chicago Manual of Style Author-Date subtype](#), which uses parenthetical in-text citations (not footnotes). FYI: Chicago Author-Date citations appear similar to MLA citations BUT THEY ARE DIFFERENT! There are many ways to cite your sources in academic writing. It is crucial that you follow the specific assignment instructions, including Manual of Style expectations.

The Wrap-up

Every chapter ends with “The Wrap-Up” to summarize and conclude things. Then, you’ll see a section called “News Flash” highlighting social media, movies, television, and games that relate to the traditions and arts discussed in each chapter. If you don’t see something that you’ve found on your own, send it in as a recommendation! Lastly, there will be a “Where Do I Go From Here?” section that acts both as a bibliography for in-text citations and as a list for recommended reading to learn more. You can use these bibliographies to begin research for your essays and projects! You’re Welcome!!



P.S. Can you find all the drawings by Vy, a UTA student in spring 2022? Look for Vy’s signature above this kitty!

If you find all 16 drawings after this one, let your instructor know to claim a prize!

I. Where Does Art Come From? An Introduction

Where does art come from? This is the type of question that we don't often consider carefully because it feels so simple. Duh... art comes from where it is made! You're probably asking why a textbook about art history even asks this question (and, perhaps, why it is written so informally; for that refer to [“How to Read this Book”](#)). The question is actually really important when you want to consider all art, not just some of it. We've got to question what we have been taught about what 'art' is and/or is allowed to be. This requires understanding the history of art history.

An admittedly very brief and condensed history of Art History

The title of 'first art historian' usually goes to Giorgio Vasari, an Italian artist and architect who wrote [Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects \(Vasari 1550, 1558\)](#) but this is debated (see more below). From the title of Vasari's book, you already get a picture of what his art history was like. He offered biographies of famous painters, sculptors, and architects who worked during the Italian Renaissance (a French term that was given to this period after Vasari's time but reflects his use of the Italian term *rinascimento*, meaning 'rebirth'). He praised the artists who achieved what scholars today call realism and/or naturalistic representation (rendering of subjects very close to the way we see things in real life). These ideals were adopted from ancient Greek and Roman (i.e. Classical) artists. This came in contrast to subsequent Medieval artists, whose work was “shapeless and clumsy,” according to Vasari (1550). After the Medieval period, the Renaissance was the 'rebirth' of Classical ideals, intellectualism, and visual style.

Vasari is pretty clear about what types of art interest him. One big distinction made early on in art history was the difference between 'art' and 'craft.' Paintings, sculpture, and architecture were classified as art while objects like ceramic vessels, baskets, or beaded jewelry were crafts. A related distinction created by later art historians contrasts high art and low art. High art requires more and scarcer resources to produce than baskets or pottery, and appeals to the so-called higher classes of society (those with wealth, power, and prestige; we'll expand on this in [“Why Do They Have More Than Us?”](#)). Low art primarily features commonplace and cheap materials. High art is primarily function-less, and therefore only made to be admired and contemplated. There are exceptions, like highly decorative porcelain dinnerware that adorned lavish tables and served tasty meals! Low art is primarily functional, such as a basket used to transport many small things at once but happens to have interesting visual qualities. Low art that has strong cultural resonance for lower status people, sometimes called the 'common folk,' is often labeled 'folk art.'

Any guesses who the high status people associated with high art were when art history was just getting started? They were European. They were white. They were wealthy and/or from noble families and they were predominantly men. So, high art was for and about old rich white men and their families. Those are the patrons of art that you read about in traditional art history textbooks. P.S. 'Patron' derives from the Latin *pater*, meaning “father.” The gender bias (favoring or advantaging of one gender over another) is clear.

Who made high art like that? They were skilled (and sometimes high status) artists paid to glorify the heritage, power, and wealth of those old rich white men. Most of those artists looked a lot like their patrons, albeit with less fancy adornments. For example, almost all the artists mentioned in Vasari's (1550, 1558) [Lives](#) are white men. Vasari included four women painters. Vasari's art history successor, German artist and scholar Karel Van Mander, wrote [Schilder-boeck \(The Book on Painting, 1604\)](#) to expand the collection of valued artists to include those of the Netherlands (aka Northern Europe) and also mentioned several women. But, we cannot ignore that the vast majority of valued artists of high art were men.

Before Vasari and Van Mander, one of the earliest recorded attempts to describe high art is now known as the [Seven](#)

[Wonders of the World compiled by the Greek historians](#). These were architectural marvels, often adorned with marble sculpture or mural painting, that housed the activities and/or graves of the social and political elite. Most of these 'wonders' were built during the early part of the Classical Period. Overall, this period spans the development of the Greek city states and the Roman Empire. The term 'Classical' was applied to those periods after the time of Vasari and Van Mander but they shared the sentiments it relates. The term 'classical' (as a proper or regular noun) is synonymous with 'harmonious,' 'pure,' and relates to phrases like 'the epitome' of something. Thus, the term implies a sense of 'rightness' and superiority to the arts produced during the Classical period.

In [Schilder-boeck, Van Mander](#) included a section dedicated to Greek and Roman, as well as Egyptian, artists because scholars of the Renaissance saw a line of descent from the Classical artists to the artists of their day (thus, the 'rebirth'). Greeks saw links between their culture and that of the preceding Egyptians (including direct political links because the Greeks conquered Egypt in 310 BCE and established the Ptolemaic Dynasty). That's why Van Mander included Egyptian artists in his *Schilder-boeck*, because the vaunted Greeks already made the connection to them. (P.S. Another of the original Seven Wonders was the Great Pyramid at Giza).

After Vasari and Van Mander came Johann Joachim Winckelmann. This German art historian wrote [Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums \(The History of Art in Antiquity, 1764\)](#) focused on Greek and Roman arts. He was the first to arrange Greek and Roman artists into periods and structure our view of 'Classical' art. His work wasn't just a list of artists and their dates. It solidified an underlying message or narrative of art history started by Vasari and continues to this day: Classical arts, and those that relate to their ideals (namely Renaissance and Neoclassical arts) are set above, as in superior to, other arts. This is the foundation of art history. When a school teacher uses an image of a Greek marble sculpture to introduce children to art, they are being taught 'taste' and to have an 'eye' for the 'Classical' beauty and sophistication of such arts. They are being taught the 'Western Canon.' The term 'canon' derives from the practices of the Christian Church but is also generally used to describe a group of ideas/things that have been established and accepted as 'the rule' or standard for judgment. We'll focus on the more specific canon of art (not the canon of music, literature, etc.).

The Western Canon

The Western Canon of art is a collection of artworks, usually organized on a timeline, that Western scholars agree should be understood as the best examples of art. And here, we get back to our ultimate question... Where do those best examples of art come from? Yep... you got it... the so-called 'Western World'/'the West.' So, what's the 'West'? It's not just whatever place is west of where you are right now. It's West with a capital 'W.' This term derives from the Latin *occidens*, meaning 'sunset' or 'West.' Its contrast was *oriens*, meaning 'rise' or 'East.' These were directional terms relative to Rome. The term 'Western' came into prominence with the division of the Western Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church. This is where we get the modern terms of Western Europe and Eastern Europe.

So, in the Western Canon, arts from Western Europe (by white men) are prioritized. There are a few exceptions. As art history developed over time, scholars started to contextualize ancient Egyptian art with examples from the Levant (aka the eastern Mediterranean coast; present-day Israel, Palestine, Jordan, and Syria) and Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq). Egyptologists realized that ancient Egyptian leaders had long-established contacts in the Levant and Mesopotamia. Biblical references to the Mesopotamian cities of Ur and Babylon also inspired investigations of these regions. It is not a coincidence that the trajectory of Judeo-Christian-Muslim (aka Abrahamic) history laid out in Biblical texts features prominently in the Western Canon. But, it is important to note that Egyptian religion and the social systems of places like Babylon are not represented favorably in the Biblical tradition. Thus, there is a question whether Egyptian and Mesopotamian cultures really belong in the Western Canon. Interestingly, there are many antecedents of the Abrahamic

traditions within Egyptian and Mesopotamian culture, such as the Goddess Isis and her son Horus (forerunners of the Virgin Mary and her son Jesus Christ).

Overall, the Western Canon is biased towards European and Mediterranean art, especially high art, and is fundamentally Eurocentric. It is a master narrative of prestige, power, and progress. Many art historians now recognize that as art history was developing so too were the early European countries (aka nation-states). As [Shelly Errington \(2007, 417; also Tchibozo 2007, 235 citing Summers\)](#) writes,

Emerging European nation-states depended on their colonies not just economically but imaginatively, coming to define themselves artistically, photographically, architecturally, and in innumerable other ways in contrast to their colonies in the set of binaries all too familiar – the civilized versus the savage, the agent of history versus the passive recipients of history, the emblems of progress versus the emblems of backwardness and decadence.

These notions of ‘progress’ and ‘civilization’ are still ever-present in Western culture today. They derive from this period of setting Europeans and Euro-Americans (people of European origin who colonized the Americas) apart from the rest of the world (that, in their eyes, was open for colonization). The concept of ‘Manifest Destiny’ so tied to the history of the United States and settlement of the Americas, derives from the perception that Europeans and their descendants are ‘active’ and ‘civilized,’ while all others are ‘passive,’ ‘backward,’ ‘uncivilized,’ ‘primitive,’ ‘savage,’ and ‘tribal.’ These ‘others’ needed saving, so the heroic European colonists set out on their “civilizing mission” ([Errington 2007, 420](#)) to save the day (please, notice the sarcasm). These are the types of sentiments, implicit or explicit, that fueled severe violations of basic human rights, such as the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. These sentiments supported the intent to actively suppress and oppress peoples without European heritage.

FYI: *Xiyang* or “The West” was also a term developed within China to refer to the areas west of the boundaries of *Zhongguo* (“the Middle Kingdom”; the name of the historic territories of what we now call China today). *Xiyang* did not refer to Europe but to Central and Western Asia. *Zhongguo* was ‘civilized’ while *Xiyang* was ‘barbarous.’ Such derogatory perceptions were not just limited to the history of European/Western expansion and foreign relationships. The communist government of China today does not hold to the values of *Zhongguo*, as a system of dynastic imperial rule, but does demonstrate prejudice against populations of *Xiyang* (more specifically *Xiyu*), such as the predominately Muslim Uyghurs of Xinjiang.

Sentiments of prejudice and superiority also justified the theft and/or exportation of cultural objects from their places of origin into Europe as ‘curiosities’ of ‘primitive culture.’ From the European perspective, these objects were interesting for their difference and for their ‘anti-artness’ and how ‘low’ they were in comparison to the high arts of Europe. This difference is summed up by the term ‘Non-Western,’ a catch-all that could identify whether something was part of the Western Canon or not. This term developed as people started seeing the flaws in the narrative of civilization inherited by European colonists from their ‘perfect’ Greek and Roman Western predecessors.

People started asking, so what about all the other art? There had been trade along the Silk Roads for thousands of years prior to the development of the Western Canon. This trade brought the arts of Asia into Europe and vice versa. These were always curiosities and exotic luxury goods but weren’t really treated seriously. Starting in the 1500s CE and ramping up in the late 1800s CE, the arts of East Asia flooded into Europe. Famously, artists like Vincent Van Gogh became fascinated with Japanese prints. The distinct approach of abstracted elements seen in these prints helped fuel the Impressionist and Modernist turns away from Classical realism/naturalistic representation. Modern art (with a capital M; see [“How To Read This Book”](#)) rejected realism and sought to experiment beyond the boundaries of the traditional Western Canon of art. But who were those Modern artists, you ask? Yep... mostly white, European men. Even though they messed with and threw out the Classical ideals, artists like Van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, and Salvador Dali were immortalized in the Western Canon. The narrative of progress and prestige shifted from getting closer and closer to picture-perfect realism to experimenting with the boundaries of painting and sculpture. SPOILER: We’ll discuss how lots

of this early Modernist experimentation was inspired by arts from around the world and not just Japanese prints. Those revered artists benefitted and profited from the study and exportation of 'Non-Western' art to Europe.

As artists like Van Gogh and others started taking arts beyond Europe seriously, we needed a way to describe those 'other' arts. That's where 'Non-Western' came in and investigations of various geographic regions ramped up. One society that didn't necessarily influence European artists but impressed scholars of the late 1800s CE was the ancient Maya. The crew of Columbus' last voyage probably came in contact with a large Maya trading canoe traversing the Caribbean sea in 1502 CE. Europeans didn't know much about Mesoamerican cultures until Hernán Cortés and Pedro de Alvarado reported back to Spain after the conquests of what became the present-day countries of Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, and Honduras. In the 1520s CE, Catholic missionizing started swiftly. Plantations and colonial cities like Mexico City were built (over existing indigenous infrastructure). The ancient cultures were of interest but the colonial mission was more important for a long time.

By the late 1800s CE, the field of archaeology formally developed in Europe. Archaeologists started undertaking expeditions to 'discover' 'lost' Maya cities. (Make sure to notice the quotations marks in that previous sentence. Those cities were not 'lost' to local inhabitants and descendants. They were very much aware of their existence; that's how the European explorers knew where to look.) Many archaeologists focused on the Maya because they found an affinity for their art styles. Maya artists were very adept at the representation of the human figure, realistic proportions, and detail in painting and sculpture. These characteristics put them high up on the rungs of the Non-Western ladder of art.

In fact, early Maya archaeologists used the term 'Classic' to refer to certain examples of Maya art. Today, we still use these terms. The Maya Classic period ranges from about 250-900 CE. Scholars designate the period before as the Preclassic period (ca. 1000 BCE-250 CE) and the period after as the Postclassic (ca. 900-1541 CE) (really imaginative, huh?). This 'Classic' designation is different from equating it with 'Classical' (Greco-Roman) culture but it demonstrates that a certain bar of sophistication was met by the Maya, according to the preferences of the Western Canon. Today, Maya archaeologists realize that what earlier scholars prioritized is not necessarily what the Maya would have prioritized and that the arts of the Preclassic and Postclassic give arts of the Classic period a run for their money according to internal Maya conceptions of visual value. Eventually, other traditions were provided with the 'Classic' term, typically denoting when the art styles became the most Western-looking/feeling. For example, the so-called Classic Veracruz culture demonstrated orderly architectural design and skillful figural ceramic sculpture.

Applying the term 'Classic' to cultures outside Europe wasn't about challenging the Western Canon but developing a hierarchy of Non-Western traditions. Scholars are competitive and they want the culture they study to be regarded well. Eventually, Chinese art, Japanese art, Maya art, and the art of specific periods like the Gupta Empire of India or the Benin Kingdom of Nigeria took top prizes in those rankings. Still, the convenient division of 'us' versus 'them' (Western versus Non-Western) persisted for a good while.

Then, the world changed. The World Wars slowly but surely made people rethink what nationalism (nation-statism) was about and how art history could be used to bolster racialized nationalism (think about Nazism here). In addition, the Post-War period included a succession of independence movements within European colonies, such the independence of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh from the British Empire in 1947 CE. New nations were building out of old colonial powers.

Post-war sentiments lit a cultural fire called Postmodernism. As the name implies, Postmodernism was a movement to move past modernism, and actually challenged the assumptions of modernism (here used as a cultural term and not specifically referring to Modern art but oftentimes relating to it). In a nutshell, cultural modernism refers to systematic as well as order- and progress-focused thinking typical of European and Euro-American traditions from the Industrial Revolution to the decade after World War II. Think of the first skyscrapers of the 1890s CE: big, geometric, industrial, and so-called symbols of progress. Think about the stereotype of the 1950s housewife and nuclear family.

Postmodernism was a rebellion against those things. This is when we got Andy Warhol printing large-scale images of [Campbell's Soup Cans](#) and telling the world he didn't care about the intellectual property of a big industrial giant. We also saw strongly Feminist artists making statements like [Your body is a battleground by Barbara Kruger](#), demonstrating that modern society wasn't as progressive as it thought it was. Post-War Postmodernism also coincided with Postcolonialism and rethinking of the intersecting colonial, industrial, and Eurocentric agendas of the past. Recently, for example, this re-thinking has inspired the disuse of the term Non-Western, because it feels like a negation of the very traditions it is meant to describe, in favor of terms like 'global art' or 'world art.'

Many people argue that we're still in the Postmodern period right now and that when art history is written about our contemporary period, it will be classified as Postmodern along with Warhol and Kruger. Others disagree. But, the recent Coronavirus pandemic and events of summer 2020 CE in the US indicate that Americans and the world at large are still grappling with the legacies of colonialism and the embedded biases of concepts like the Western Canon.

So, what happens now?

What do we do with that history of art history? How do we deal with that baggage? Firstly, we have to understand it and not just sweep it under the rug, pretending that art history is "neutral" or unbiased (see [Orfila 2007: 312](#)). As [Kitty Zijlmans \(2007: 293, after Mosquera 2005\)](#) states, "We cannot ... unwrite the art history that has been written ... What we can do, and what has been happening for the past decade, is to reevaluate *how* art history has been written and question *why* it happened in such a way..." (her emphasis). The Western Canon and the appendages of Non-Western art are what we have to start with but they don't have to define what we do moving forward. For example, many art history faculty are rethinking what they teach and how they teach it.

So, let's start by asking ourselves why a textbook offered for global art history courses has focused on Europe and Euro-America so much. That's an excellent question! Many art history scholars have asked themselves similar questions. In fact, that became the theme of a scholarly debate in [The Art Seminar series, which produced a book called Is Art History Global? \(Elkins 2007\)](#). We've already quoted many of the contributors from that volume in this chapter because there were so many important voices collected together to debate this deceptively easy question. You can say, "Sure, art history is global," but the people who actually work in art history day in and day out know that it's not as easy as that.

Check out books that explain this history of art history in more detail, such as [James Elkins' \(2002\) Stories of Art](#), an ironic riff on [E. H. Gombrich's \(1950\) tome The Story of Art](#). Gombrich wrote one of the preeminent textbooks of art history, used to teach countless high school and undergraduate college students about art history for many years. It is the grand narrative of the Western Canon, with beautiful imagery and engaging descriptions of naturalistic forms. Our brains always love a good story and Gombrich offers one. More recent art history textbooks like the long-lived [Art Through the Ages first developed by Helen Gardner](#) in 1926 CE, which is now in its 15th edition, continue this narrative with Non-Western or global art sprinkled in.

Contrary to what these textbooks imply, [Elkins \(2002\)](#) highlights that there isn't just one story of art. In fact, he mentions several examples of art histories written by non-European scholars, including:

- The [1606 CE Persian Calligraphers and Painters by Qadi Ahmad \(Ahmad and Minorsky 1959\)](#)
- The Stalinist [Universal History of Art](#) by the Institute for the Theory and History of the Visual Arts at the Academy of Arts (1956) in Moscow
- The works of Zhang Yanyuan ca. 850 CE (Tang Dynasty China) called *Fashu Yaolu* (法書要錄 *Compendium of Calligraphy*) and [Lidai Minghua Ji \(歷代名畫記 Famous Paintings through History\) \(Zhang Yanyuan 1993-2000\)](#)

Each of these art histories was written with distinct narratives in mind. To consider this revelation that there isn't just

one story of art history further, let's just focus on some of the most well-known ways of perceiving and presenting a narrative of art history, following examples provided by [Elkins \(2002, 11-36\)](#):

| Who's Perspective? | Basic Structure of the Narrative |
|--|--|
| Erwin Panofsky (famous art historian focused on the Renaissance) | Classical (Mycenaean; Hellenistic) Medieval (Carolingian; Gothic) Renaissance (Early Renaissance; High Renaissance) Modern |
| Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (famous Western philosopher) | Symbolic/Primitive stage (Ancient art) Classical stage (Greek and Roman) Romantic/Neo-Primitive stage (Post-Classical) |
| A Modernist's view of art history | Before Art (Prehistory; Classical Greece and Rome; Middle Ages) Art (Renaissance; Baroque; Modernism) After Art (Postmodernism) |
| Gombrich in <i>The Story of Art</i> (1950) | Pre-Realism (Ancient and 'Tribal' Art) Realism (Greek and Roman) Loss of Realism 1 (Medieval) Return to Realism 1 (Renaissance) Loss of Realism 2 (Baroque, Rococo) Return to Realism 2 (Neoclassicism) Loss of Realism 3 (Modernism) Continued Loss of Realism 3 (Postmodernism) |
| Gardner and subsequent editor Fred Kleiner in <i>Art Through the Ages: A Global History</i> (2008) | Ancient art (Africa; Europe; Near East; Egypt) Early Classical art (Minoan; Mycenaean; Greek) Early Asian art (India; China; Korea; Japan) Later Classical art (Etruscan; Roman) Late Antiquity and Byzantine art Islamic art Early art of Africa and the Americas Medieval and Gothic art Renaissance, Baroque, and Rococo art Late Asian art (India; China; Korea; Japan) Modern art Late art of the Americas and Oceanic art Late African art Postmodern art |
| Most museums today | Non-Western Art Western Art (Pre-Modern art; Modern art) International Postmodern Art |
| Many practicing artists today | Art History (for anywhere in the world or specific locations that the artist favors) The Present (i.e. their own work and that of their peers) |

All this variation demonstrates that there isn't just one story or narrative. It's actually up to the author or reader to make the narrative into what they want it to be. We all have that choice.

So, what's this book about?

Firstly, we want to challenge the narrative that prioritizes Europe and Euro-America at the expense of the indigenous traditions that they exploited and colonized. We recognize that tacking on new threads to the old narrative does not help. So, for starters, we're not tackling global arts in a timeline or geographic travelog and we're not using the standard map.

Have you ever considered what this standard map (Fig. 1.1) implies about the world? If you get out a ruler and measure the center of this image, where does it land? Have you done it yet? It hits right about at the toe of present-day Italy (since it looks like a boot).



Figure 1.1: Standard map of the world based on the Web Mercator Projection. Created by Marizela Garza in 2021 for this volume.

Why is that? Cartographers (mapmakers) like Gerardus Mercator who developed the basic Mercator projection of maps (flattening the spherical earth out onto a 2D image, because the earth is NOT FLAT) were... European! They made maps for European navigators in the 1500s. Thus, they centralized Europe so that any way expeditions went, you could draw a path from your starting point out to your destination. Have you realized that this also means that people who already visualize Europe as the center of the world now have physical evidence that this is the case? That's what maps can do for you, offer a tangible picture of how you view the world. BTW, [Arab cartographers focused on Muslim traditions chose to center their maps on their holy city of Mecca](#), in present-day Saudi Arabia.

In addition, the famous Mercator projection also presents geography of the global south (such as South America and Africa) as much smaller than the global north (such as Canada or Russia). This is a result of cartographic choices and incorrectly represents the surface area of southern continents, relative to others. Maps like the Peters World Map (Fig. 1.2) offer projections that accurately present the relative scale of continents.

Image of Peters Projection Map.

Figure 1.2: [Peters World Map](#) from Oxfordcartographers.org.

Another map called the [AuthaGraph](#), invented by Japanese architect Hajime Narukawa in 1999, accurately represents continent and ocean area sizes relative to each other and reduces distortions (Fig. 1.3). It presents a completely different arrangement of continents, which may look strange, but actually more accurately represents our world.



Figure 1.3: [AuthaGraph map](#) from authagraph.com

Since we're trying to reduce the baggage of the Western Canon, we'll use a different map than the one you probably expect (Fig. 1.4). We're not centering Europe; we're centering a part of the Pacific Ocean with no land or occupants. That feels more objective, doesn't it? This map also visualizes how big the Pacific Ocean is, whereas Figure 1.1 breaks it up. It may take a bit to get used to seeing the Atlantic Ocean broken up (Columbus would hate it!), but you'll get over it! Our map does not reflect accurate relative surface areas or other ways to project continent arrangement but that is something we are working on for the future.



Figure 1.4: Map of the World used throughout “Where Does Art Come From?” based on the Pacific-Centered Web Mercator Projection. Created by Marizela Garza in 2021 for this volume.

So, what else are we doing in this book? We’re asking questions that most people ask themselves throughout their lives. Each chapter is dedicated to a human question, about identity, birth, death, relationships, and how we live. We’ll engage with the categories of art and think about visual qualities, including very subjective qualities like beauty, but our discussions will focus on the human element of art.

As Hans Belting (2011) argues in his book [An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body](#), an image (anything with visual content) is both the physical stuff that an artist creates and the way that a viewer sees/considers/interacts with it. The viewer is the body that interprets the artist’s work into what we call images, or art or visual culture. Thus, any study of art must consider the viewer, the user, the audience, in addition to the maker. As the title of his book demonstrates, Belting was interested in using anthropology (literally meaning the study of humans) to better understand art. We don’t think divorcing humanness from art does much good. We find that the best studies of art keep humanness at the forefront. Here, we will prioritize the various dimensions of our personal and social lives and how art relates to them, as both producers and viewers/users of art.

This priority means putting people first. When we are talking about traditions outside the Western World, that means European and Euro-American audiences need to invest time in learning about people around the world, who have been ignored, devalued, and demonized. In this book, indigenous traditions are prioritized and recognized as ‘active’ (not ‘passive’) agents of culture and change. But, AND THIS IS A BIG BUT, we have to realize, as [Elkins \(2007, 100\)](#) notes, “[We] can never hope to attain cognitively the kind of seeing and habits the original audiences had when such objects entered their consciousness, but only hope to arrive at some approximations of them.” This existential obstacle doesn’t mean that we can’t seek to learn about distinct traditions and seek to build relationships with people who live, think, and see the world differently. We’ll discuss this more in [“Who Am I?”](#) and [“Can We Live Together?”](#)

Our prioritization of indigenous culture and art is a reaction to colonization. It is part of the process of decolonization and the Postcolonial movement, including (but not limited to) removing the interpretations imposed upon indigenous traditions by non-indigenous people. FYI: decolonization and Postcolonialism are sometimes considered synonymous but they are distinct, as a number of scholars discuss in an [online forum about the distinction between these terms on](#)

[Research Gate](#) (P.S. this forum demonstrates that such terms require discussion to pin down and scholars don't always agree).

Generally, Postcolonialism refers to the time period and processes of change after the end of colonialism in any particular area. But, that's not the whole story. Postcolonial movements often begin before independence, when people are seeking independence and defying colonial culture. Decolonialism is often used today to refer to the broad processes of removing colonial biases from education, museums, and other social institutions. Overall, decolonialism is an approach focused on “disobedience [...], de-linking” ([Mignolo 2011: 122-123; 2007: 450](#)) and “reconstruction” ([Quijano 2007: 176](#)) as well as “eliminating the [...] tendency to pretend that Western European modes of thinking are universal” ([Okumu 2021](#) citing [Mignolo 2000: 544](#)). Check out “[Decolonization is not a metaphor](#)” ([Tuck and Yang 2012](#)) to learn more.

Colonialism and colonial legacies globalize European and Euro-American traditions, reducing the cultural and social space for many indigenous traditions. For example, many indigenous languages have gone extinct with the prioritization of English and other European languages through colonization. The last speaker of the indigenous Australian language *Awu Laya* (aka *Gugu Thaypan/Kuku-Thaypan*) died in 2016. His name was Tommy George Sr. ([Snowchange 2016](#)). With him died immeasurable knowledge and oral history. Recognizing and sharing these traditions (when appropriate) works against the idea that Western culture is universal, privileged, or ‘right.’ Keep that in mind as you move through this book.

Given that art history has often been exclusionary and biased, it is important that authors offer their readers visibility on who they are. Subjectivities are important and influence how we write and read. We don't want you to assume that the ideas presented here are universal. So, we, the authors and contributors to this project, want to be clear about our identities. We are (in alphabetical order):

- an African American cisgender woman
- an agnostic African and Caribbean American queer woman
- an agnostic Asian cisgender woman
- an agnostic Euro-American white woman
- an agnostic-leaning Mexican-American trans person
- an Asian-American cisgender man without religious affiliation
- an atheist white European woman
- a Christian straight white cisgender man
- a Muslim Lebanese-Canadian woman
- a non-practicing Catholic Mexican-American cisgender woman
- a non-practicing Catholic white, cisgender woman
- a non-practicing Jewish-American cisgender man and descendant of German-Lebanese WWII refugees
- a non-practicing Muslim Lebanese-American woman
- a practicing protestant white, Euro-American, cisgender woman
- an unreligious white, Euro-American cisgender queer woman
- a white-passing Mexican-American cisgender woman with spiritual ties to Omnism.

The Wrap-up

Overall, we offer this book as a way to make art history, in its broadest sense, relevant to your life, a life you lead in a Postmodern, Postcolonial, and decolonizing world. So, we hope you think about the questions that form each chapter and the intriguing artworks that we discuss in them. Consider how they relate to your life and the way you see the world. Consider how other people see the world, what you share with them, and how your perceptions differ.

News Flash

- Interested in some humorous (and sometimes raunchy) jokes about the Western Canon and Western artworks? [Check out “Classical Art Memes” on Instagram.](#)
- Check out the documentary [“The Last Trackers of the Outback” \(2007\)](#) that follows Tommy George Sr. and his brother George Musgrave.

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2. Where Are We Going?

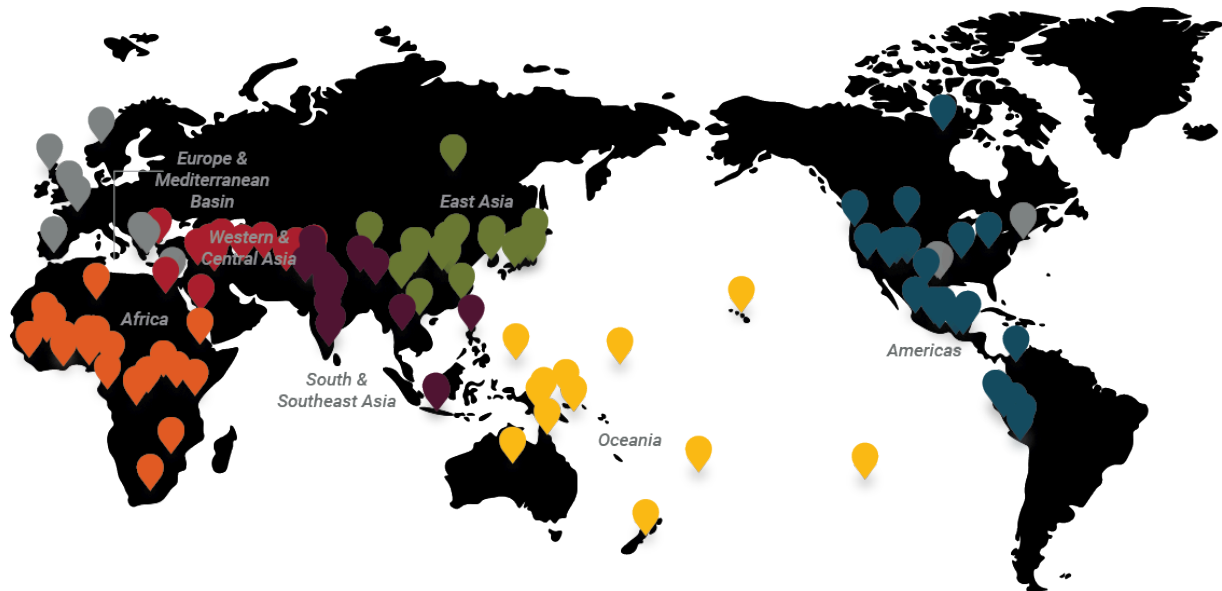


Figure 2.1: Map of locations of all artworks discussed in “Where Does Art Come From?” by Marizela Garza.

Where are we going?

Let’s talk geography! That’s your favorite subject, right? Probably not, but it is an important topic relevant to our overarching question, “Where Does Art Come From?” You probably already noticed while reading [“Where Does Art Come From? An Introduction”](#) that we’ve got to know a bit about geography to consider global art history. We’ve also got to dive into some population genetics to understand human migration, so hold onto your hats!

There are seven major regions that are relevant to the discussions in this book: Africa; Western Asia & Central Asia; South & Southeast Asia; East Asia; Oceania; the Indigenous Americas; Europe, the Mediterranean Basin, and Euro-America. The key on Figure 2.1 illustrates these regions. P.S. That color coding will be consistent for every map in the book!

For cultural and artwork discussions, we’ll be focusing on the first six regions but also discuss how European contact and colonization, as well as Euro-American settlement and globalized culture, has impacted arts around the world (as you probably guessed). Ancient traditions from the Mediterranean Basin, such as Egypt and Mesopotamia, are considered part of the Western Canon and thus are bundled with Europe. But, remember that there’s some fuzziness there so you’ll see some ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian examples included in this text. Then, once Muslim leadership and patronage in North Africa and Western Asia emerges, the classification fully switches to the global category of art history. So, the geography remains the same but the art historical perception of the region changes over time.

Check out the regional maps below to consider what you know about the geography, including both physical and cultural geography, of these six major regions. Some of the geographical terms may not be as familiar to you as others. Below, we’ll cover some of the reasons why certain terms are used and how they relate to popular terms today.

Another important thing to consider is whether the present-day boundaries of countries have any bearing on the past. In many cases, they don't. Contemporary boundaries obviously resonate with contemporary artists and artworks, but many of the artworks discussed in this book derive from regions from historic territories or from regions that were not independent (and therefore given their contemporary names and boundaries) until the 1950s CE or later. You will see the term 'present-day' country in the text to continually remind you that these boundaries were not relevant to peoples of ancient and historic cultures.

As you review the regional maps, also consider the clustering of artworks and the sub-regions that are represented. The voids in these maps may reflect that those areas were unoccupied (thus, there weren't artists living there and producing artworks) or that arts produced there aren't well-studied. As you know, art history doesn't treat all areas of the world the same. This means that some areas are very underrepresented or totally unrepresented. Maybe you can change that if you become an art historian or archaeologist... wink wink.

Africa

Let's start with the geography of Africa (Fig. 2.2). Let's think about five primary regions within Africa: North Africa, West Africa, East Africa, Central Africa, and Southern Africa (not to be confused with the present-day country of South Africa, which is part of, but not the only part of the southern Africa region). This regional division is a simplification because the continent is huge and very environmentally diverse. There's the arid Mediterranean coast of North Africa that turns into the Sahara Desert. Did you know that the Sahara wasn't always a desert? Around 6000-4000 BCE, it was more like the savanna environment that we see across West and East Africa today (which people often associate with the landscape depicted in Disney's "The Lion King"). We'll cover some artworks from southern Algeria that demonstrate how non-desert-like the Sahara was thousands of years ago in ["Where Do Babies Come From?"](#).



Figure 2.2: Map of locations of all African artworks discussed in “Where Does Art Come From?” by Marizela Garza.

As you expect from “The Lion King,” the savanna is where you find the large-bodied animals so synonymous with the continent: elephants, rhinos, giraffes, zebras, and, of course, lions. In West Africa, the savanna transitions into coastal forests, sometimes called the Atlantic Forests, of present-day Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Benin, Togo, and Nigeria. These regions supported agricultural societies focused on either rice or yams.

The present-day countries of Gabon, Republic of the Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, Kenya, and Somalia sit directly at the Equator. The equatorial rainforests are dense west of the Great Lakes. The Great Lakes region, including Lakes Victoria and Turkana, is the cradle of humanity, preserving the oldest remains of *Homo sapiens sapiens* and our human ancestors. Check out the [“Human Evolution Interactive Timeline” from the Smithsonian](#) for more on this huge topic that we can’t cover here. Farther south, the environment transitions into savanna again across southern Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola, and Zambia. There are smaller deserts than the Sahara in the present-day countries of Namibia, Botswana, and South Africa. This is where most of the surviving species of native African animals are protected in land reserves.

These environments determine the local resources and materials available for art-making, such as woods from the Central African forests and clays from the savannas. There's always trade opportunities for non-local resources but resources from distant regions often fetch a high price. Therefore, only certain people in society really have access to non-local resources. Few artworks originate in the deserts because few people live there, if any at all. But artworks traverse the deserts through trade, especially through the Trans-Saharan trade networks, for example. One prominent item of trade across Africa, and out of Africa, was ivory, procured from elephants and rhinos.

P.S. Did you already skip ahead and see Figure 2.7? Check out that map illustrating what scholars have discovered via genetic studies: the island of Madagascar off the east coast of Africa was populated by seafarers from Southeast Asia before anyone from mainland Africa got there!

Western & Central Asia

Historically, Africa was physically connected to only one other landmass: Eurasia. The Sinai peninsula connected present-day Egypt to Israel, before the Suez Canal was dug in the 1860s CE. That project allowed traffic from the Mediterranean into the Red Sea, instead of having to sail all the way around Africa. But it broke the ability to physically walk from Africa into Eurasia, which has been such an important pathway for our human ancestors over time. It's not a big deal today, but imagine if they couldn't have navigated that region as easily back then. Human history would be drastically different!

Given their proximity, North and East Africa have had strong ties to the neighboring major region, Western Asia, which is combined with Central Asia for the purposes of this book (because we have so much to cover in so little time) (Fig. 2.3). Firstly, let's talk about terminology. We use the term Western Asia instead of terms that may be more familiar to you. For example, US-based audiences often hear the geographic terms Middle East, the Arab World, etc. to refer to this part of the world. Those terms relate to Near East (referring to the Mediterranean coast of Asia; aka the Levant) and Far East (a way of describing East Asia). Obviously, 'near,' 'middle,' and 'far' are relative terms, based on the distance from...; you guessed it: Europe. Directional terminology like west and east also are European inventions but today, they feel more objective. So, we'll divide the continent of Asia into Western, Central, South, Southeast, and East Asia.

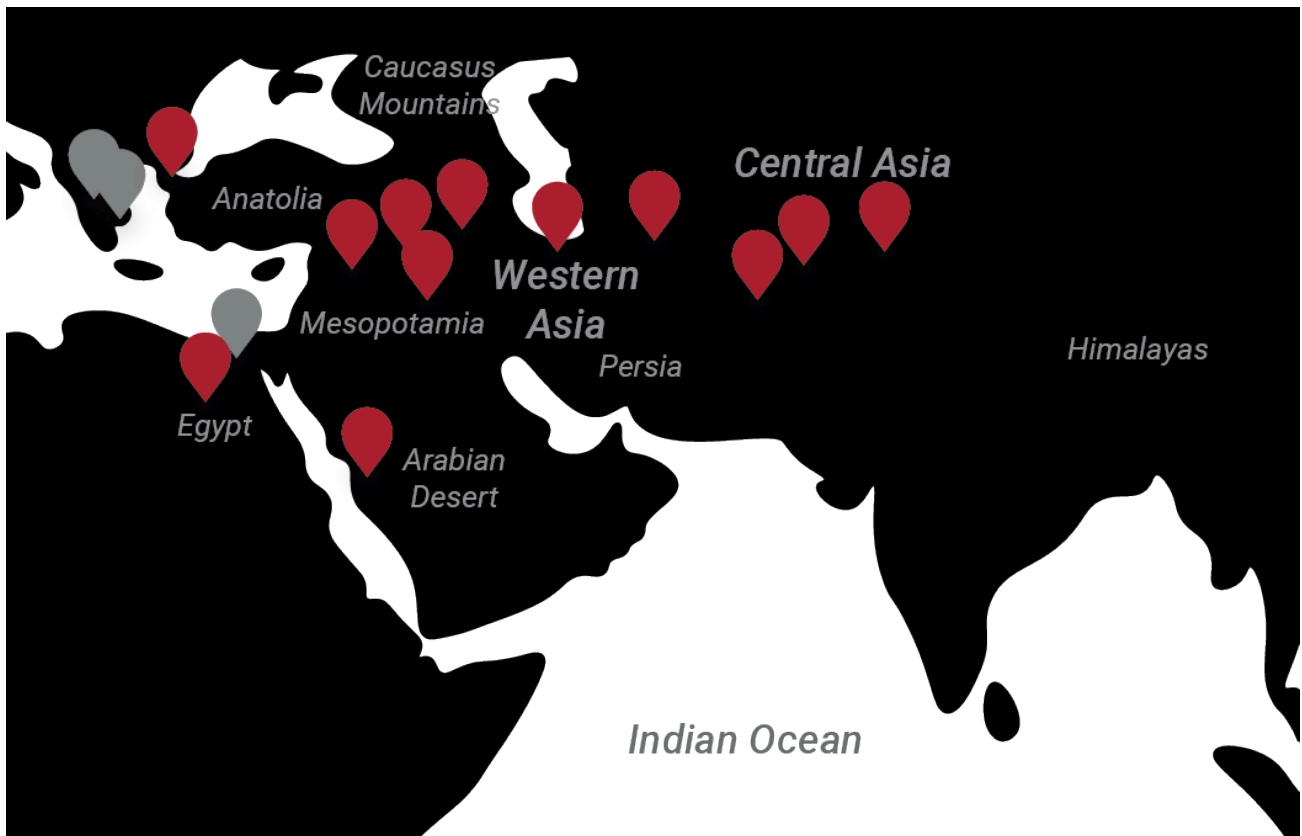


Figure 2.3: Map of locations of all Western and Central Asian artworks discussed in “Where Does Art Come From?” by Marizela Garza.

Western and Central Asia are distinct regions environmentally and culturally. They are both relatively dry but Western Asia is home to the Arabian Desert, which contains one of the largest continuous masses of sand in the world. Not too far away, the Mediterranean coast is considered one of the most pleasant places to live or visit in the world. But, that preference has a lot to do with the bias towards Western culture. The Mediterranean coast was the hub of activity between Egypt, the Levant, southern Europe, and into Mesopotamia. This western-most part of Western Asia has been called the [‘Fertile Crescent’](#) because it incubated the rise of agriculture in western Eurasia. There were separate agricultural ‘revolutions’ in East Asia, the Americas, and elsewhere.

The eastern part of Western Asia comprises the arid parts of present-day eastern Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan. Present-day Iran generally corresponds to the ancient region of Persia. Many of the inhabitants of Iran today still speak Persian (Farsi). Depending on the source, Afghanistan is considered part of Western Asia, Central Asia, or South Asia. It is one of those crossroads of the world, often traversed as part of the Silk Roads, with both environmental and cultural similarities to neighboring areas of all three major regions.

Central Asia generally sits north and to the east of Western Asia. Though, the region is quite nebulous. The Caucasus Mountains region between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea functionally separates present-day Russia from Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia, as well as Central Asia from Western Asia on the western side. On the eastern side, the present-day countries of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan were the lands of the Silk Roads that led merchants north of the Himalayas into China. These ancient highways of trade and ideas were incredibly important to the history across Eurasia and the world at large. Western Asia has very strong contacts with Europe while Central Asia has strong contacts with East Asia and served as the intermediary of trade from East Asia to the west.

Textiles are particularly important products in both Western and Central Asia, as the term Silk Road implies. Bundles of fabric, silk and otherwise, traversed these regions for thousands of years. Other prominent arts include pottery and stone sculpture. Stone or brick architecture is also important to the visual culture of these regions, including monuments built along the Silk Roads to promote faiths and political agendas. Metal working was practiced in these regions from the earliest periods of technological development. This region is also home to a number of special materials like lapis lazuli and bitumen (natural tar).

South & Southeast Asia

Like Western and Central Asia, South Asia and Southeast Asia are distinct regions but they share certain elements of history, particularly religious movements, that are helpful to consider together. South Asia (Fig. 2.4) primarily refers to the Indian Subcontinent (present-day India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Pakistan, Bhutan, and Bangladesh), which is the [landmass that drifted into the Eurasian continent 55 million years ago and created the Himalayas through continental impact and uplift!](#)

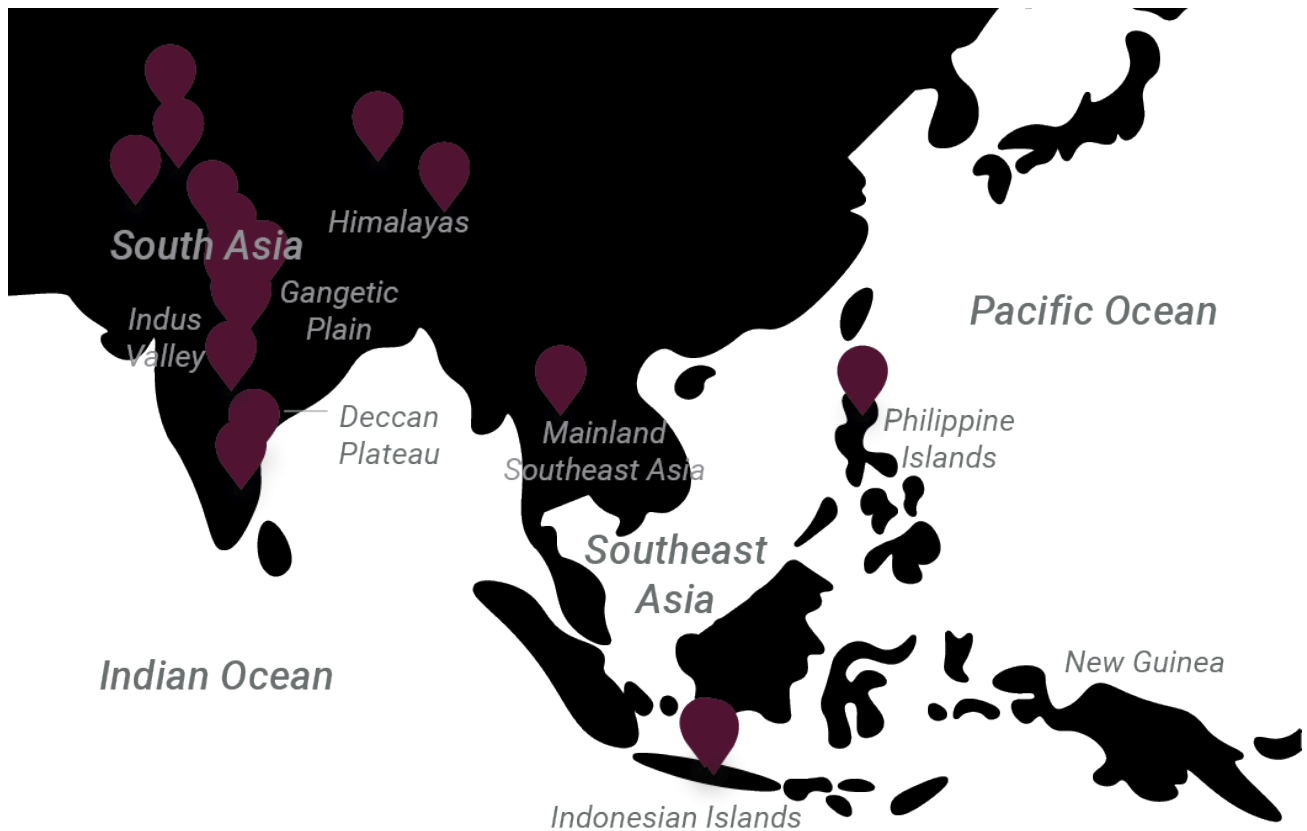


Figure 2.4: Map of locations of all South and Southeast Asian artworks discussed in “Where Does Art Come From?” by Marizela Garza.

South Asia is diverse environmentally with the highest elevations in the world to the north and dense jungles in the south. The region along the border of India and Pakistan is forested and riverine. As you go west and north, the climate begins to dry out. Nepal and northern India feature the Himalayan foothills and the Gangetic Plain (focused on the

Ganges River). The Deccan plateau of central India features remarkable cave and rock formations as well as river valleys and waterfalls.

South Asia exemplifies why present-day country borders do not matter to the ancient past. The Indus Culture (one of the oldest agricultural cultures known in the subcontinent) settled the Indus River Valley which forms the border between India and Pakistan today. Indus peoples lived on both sides of the river with two major cities spanning the modern border: Harappa, India, and Mohenjo-Daro, Pakistan. Then, immigrants on chariots from Central Asia arrived, through present-day Afghanistan. They didn't care about borders!

South Asia also is a good example of how place-names transform over time. The oldest written record (that we can currently decipher) of the lands we call South Asia today, called the *Rig-Veda*, describes this region as 'Sindhu.' Check out ["What is Divine?"](#) for more about the *Vedas*. Neighboring cultures such as the Persians pronounced this term without the 's' at the beginning, so it became 'Hindu' or 'Hidush.' It was the Greeks, first arriving during the incursions of Alexander the Great into present-day Afghanistan and Pakistan, who translated 'Hindu' into *Ἰνδία* (India) and called the people of the region *Indos* (Indian). But the term 'Hind' also stuck around for a while among Arab writers. It wasn't until the end of British colonialism and the independence movement of South Asia that India was separated from the present-day countries of Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Southeast Asia is connected to South Asia primarily through sea routes but is also connected via land, across the present-day borders of India, Bangladesh, Burma/Myanmar, and Malaysia. Southeast Asia comprises a mainland (south of present-day China) and archipelagos known today as Indonesia and the Philippines. Southeast Asia is predominantly tropical, especially in the southern areas. Northern regions of present-day Vietnam, Laos, and Burma/Myanmar are relatively mountainous and feature highland forests.

The Philippines comprises many relatively small islands while the Indonesian archipelago features large landmasses including Borneo, Sumatra, Java, and portions of New Guinea. Today, New Guinea is divided into Irian Jaya, Indonesia, (on the west side) and Papua New Guinea (PNG; on the east side). PNG is part of the Oceanic region, discussed below. The Philippines is quite close to Taiwan and the mainland of China. You might be wondering where the Philippines got its name. Any guesses? King Philip of Spain put his stamp on these islands, grabbing it as a colonial territory in 1565 CE. Eventually, the Philippines was taken over by the US after the Spanish-American War and continues to be highly influenced by the US, though it is an independent country today.

South Asian resources are vast, since the environments are diverse. In particular, India is full of excellent building and sculptural stone. Geological formations contain gemstones like emeralds while Asian elephants and rhinos were exploited for ivory. Perhaps the best known products of South Asia are tea and spices. These were the things that motivated strong European investment, through colonial endeavors like the Dutch and British East India Companies. These enterprises also made impacts in Southeast Asia, often exporting 'exotic' woods from mainland and island forests. The region is also home to incredibly diverse tropical species of birds, monkeys, and other animals. Feathers, furs, and other forest products were important luxury and export items.

East Asia

The present-day country of China dominates the region of East Asia today, along with the Korean Peninsula (North and South Korea), Mongolia, Taiwan, and the Japanese archipelago (Fig. 2.5). China is vast, comprising a wide variety of physical features including the heavily populated river valleys of the northeast and central area, the Gobi Desert in the far north and center, as well as the Himalayas and Plateau of Tibet in the west. For much of its history, major population settlement focused on the eastern part of China between the Yellow River and Yangtze River. Southeastern China is forested and similar in climate to Vietnam. Coastal population centers developed there include Hong Kong and

Shanghai. The arid regions of northwest China border the Central Asia territories of Silk Road intermediaries, who took northern routes to avoid the high elevation Himalayas. FYI: “The Silk Road(s)” is a modern term developed by German scholars to describe a vast array of trade relationships. It is a convenient simplification.



Figure 2.5: Map of locations of all East Asian artworks discussed in “Where Does Art Come From?” by Marizela Garza.

Northeast of present-day Beijing (which was established relatively late as a capital) is the region historically known as Manchuria, the home of the Manchus (an ethnic group that came to rule over all of China during the Qing Dynasty). Manchuria is connected to the Korean Peninsula to the south. The Hamgyong Mountains create a natural boundary between these regions. Today, North Korea is predominantly mountainous while South Korea features a lowland environment quite similar in climate to northeast China.

The diversity of the mainland physical features corresponds to the cultural diversity of mainland East Asia. Most Western media conflate all Asian groups into one mass. But it is important to recognize the distinct cultural traditions and histories originating for these regions. Most people understand that China and Japan are distinct, since Japan is a set of islands, but the understanding of the distinctions of China and Korea are less known. It is true that there were strong contacts and influence between China and Korea but they are certainly not the same.

Japan comprises five islands, the central and largest of which is Honshu. It is heavily forested with volcanic mountains, such as the famous Mt. Fuji near present-day Tokyo (historic Edo). To the north, the island of Hokkaido was probably the home of the earliest inhabitants of Japan, the Jomon peoples. Immigrants from Korea and China reached Japan across the small Strait of Korea, landing on the southernmost Kyushu island. Jomon peoples merged with mainland immigrants, developing traditional Japanese culture known as the Yayoi culture. Jomon cultural elements remained present in Japan throughout its history but only recently have they been celebrated to the same level as Yayoi cultural elements.

As mentioned above, East Asia is known for its silk textiles and developed long-lived trade relationships with Central Asian people. Stone, ceramic, brick, and wood are prominent building materials, with brick more frequent in China, stone more frequent in Korea, and wood more frequent in Japan. Pottery was produced by all peoples, with the earliest innovations in Japan. Eventually, the development of kaolin clay-based porcelains in China changed the game for pottery and ceramic production, eventually greatly impacting the market for luxury items in the West. Special materials like jade are highly prized within East Asia and as export items to the wider world.

Japan has a long coastline of the Pacific Ocean, which brought many foreigners to the islands. Early Europeans included the Portuguese and the Dutch, but eventually American Commodore Matthew Perry arrived on Japan's Pacific coast in 1853 CE and demanded that Japan's leaders begin trading with the rest of the world. This marks the global emergence of Japan in the modern era, including major events such as their colonization of Korea and World War II. The conflicts between the US and Japan during World War II were primarily undertaken across the Pacific and incorporated many waypoints, such as the Micronesian islands of Oceania.

Oceania

Oceania may be one of the least familiar regions to many Euro-American readers, except maybe for the islands of Hawai'i or cities like Sydney, Australia. This is a vast region incorporating all habitable land of the Pacific (thus it is sometimes referred to as the Pacific or South Pacific [because it does not typically include the northern Pacific regions of Siberia and Alaska]). Oceania can be divided into four sub-regions: Australia, Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia (Fig. 2.6). The landmasses were occupied by humans in that order. As early as 65,000 years ago, humans island hopped across present-day Indonesia, entered Melanesia through New Guinea, and then crossed into Australia. Those peoples became the indigenous Australians, known as Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders. To populate all the islands of Micronesia and Polynesia, people had to get in canoes and sail, without seeing any destination in sight. Imagine the courage!



Figure 2.6: Map of locations of all Oceanic artworks discussed in “Where Does Art Come From?” by Marizela Garza.

You’ve probably seen a pattern in the naming convention already. The suffix *-esia* refers to collections of islands. The *melan-* of Melanesia refers to skin tone. Those with dark skin tones have more melanin and those with lighter skin tones have less. Vitamin D absorption, which is super important for our health, is a big reason for this. If you live at or near the equator (or at high elevation elsewhere), you are exposed to the most intense and highest levels of sunlight. If you live far away from the equator (and/or in low elevations), you’re getting less sunlight overall and lower intensities. Thus, people in latitudes far from the equator have less opportunity to absorb Vitamin D and so have adapted to have lighter skin tones so that they can absorb at higher rates. Dark skin tones of people at and near the equator help protect them from too much Vitamin D absorption, and other ill effects of UV radiation, such as skin cancer. Melanin levels also impact folic acid production, which has implications for the success of pregnancies (and therefore, the production of the next generation). For more details, check out [“Modern Human Diversity – Skin Color” from the Smithsonian](#).

That’s a long-winded explanation for how Melanesia got its name. The many indigenous populations of Papua New Guinea and the other islands of Melanesia, as well as Aboriginal peoples of Australia, have dark skin tones. Papua New Guinea is at the same latitude as Central Africa and thus it makes sense that populations in both areas would have dark skin tones to protect from UV overexposure. Since all human ancestry derives from Africa, it is accurate to say that humans started with high melanin levels (adapted to the central region of East Africa), and eventually adapted lower levels of melanin if they migrated into areas with lower UV exposure. Skin tone is a gradient mostly based on geographic

origin. Short-term migrations do not impact skin tone. It takes evolution over many generations to adapt melanin levels to new geographies.

Have you guessed by now how Micronesia got its name? It is home to some of the smallest islands in the world, some of which are too small to really support permanent settlement (without modern transoceanic shipping, etc.). Small island size restricts population growth so islands usually have small populations, until modern infrastructure changed the game. Today, most of these tropical islands are politically joined through the Federated States of Micronesia but some, such as Palau (discussed in [“Where Do Babies Come From?”](#)) are independent.

The largest region of Oceania is Polynesia, which refers to ‘many islands,’ but is unique because of how far apart the islands are. Check out the distance between Samoa (one of the western most Polynesia islands) and Rapa Nui (aka Easter Island) (Fig. 2.6; about 6489 km, 4032 miles, or 3504 nautical miles). Masters of outrigger canoes set sail and island hopped for centuries, eventually reaching the farthest islands of Polynesia (the Hawai’ian archipelago to the north, Rapa Nui to the east, and *Motu Maha* [Auckland Islands] to the south) (Fig. 2.7).



Figure 2.7: [Chronological dispersion of Austronesian people across the Pacific](#) after [Benton et al. 2012](#) by Obsidian Soul; [CC BY 4.0](#).

Like Melanesia and Micronesia, the Polynesian islands are relatively small (except large land masses like the two islands of *Aotearoa* [indigenous *Maori* name for present-day New Zealand]). Polynesian islands are also particularly volcanic, and thus subject to severe events such as eruptions or lava flows. In addition to volcanic stones, ocean resources such as shells, materials derived from marine wildlife, and tropical woods are the most common art materials on most islands. Australia includes a large central desert, thus resources are relatively scarce and art is focused on stone-based pigments.

Indigenous Americas

Don't let the dotted line on the right side of Figure 2.7 mess with you. The continents of the Americas were not populated from Rapa Nui. They were populated via migration from Asia across the Bering Strait (a sea between present-day Siberia and Alaska) and along the Pacific coastline of the Americas. During the earliest parts of human history, the Americas were isolated by huge oceans and unoccupied (and covered by huge glaciers for long periods). By around 40,000 years ago, climate change and the human tendency to migrate changed that! Check out [“How the First Americans Got There”](#) (Fig. 2.8) to learn about the most recent studies of how people got into the Americas.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:
<https://uta.pressbooks.pub/wheredoesartcomefrom/?p=52#oembed-1>

Figure 2.8: “[How the First Americans Got There](#)” uploaded by SciShow on Youtube (Jan 5, 2018). Based on research published in “[Terminal Pleistocene Alaskan genome reveals first founding population of Native Americans](#)” (Moreno-Mayar et al. 2018).

The ancestral Siberians, Ancient Beringians, and northern and southern Native American ancestors are all part of the development of indigenous populations across the continents. As the SciShow video describes, the northern and southern Native American ancestors moved into North America pretty quickly. Climate change and sea level rise coincided with the melting of the large glaciers (which resulted in Beringia being covered with water and now being the Bering Strait). Eventually, the modern coastlines and physical geography of North America were exposed. This happened quickly, as did migration of animals and the hunters that followed them into the Americas. By 18,500 years ago, people had already migrated all the way down to Monte Verde, Chile, on the continent of South America. This may have occurred via boat and/or on foot along the coastline.

Before we move forward, we’ve got to address the elephant in the room: how we describe these landmasses and the term “America.” Firstly, the land masses are two separate continents but we recognize three primary regions within them: North America, Mesoamerica/Central America, and South America (Fig. 2.9). The distinction between North America and Mesoamerica/Central America is based on environmental differences, though it can be quite arbitrary. For example, people debate whether northern Mexico is part of North America or Mesoamerica.



Figure 2.9: Map of locations of all artworks of the Indigenous Americas discussed in “Where Does Art Come From?” by Marizela Garza.

The terms Mesoamerica and Central America can be interchangeable but archaeologists use the term Mesoamerica to describe cultural similarities across the southern half of present-day Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, El Salvador, and the northern islands of the Caribbean. Archaeologists use the term Central America to describe the transitional zone into South America (the present-day countries of Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, and many of the southern islands of the Caribbean). The continent of South America starts between present-day Panama and Colombia. Mesoamerican/Central America and South America feature distinct climates and cultural histories, thus they are recognized as distinct regions.

So, what about the term “America” itself? All the indigenous peoples of the continents we call the Americas never used that term to describe their land prior to Spanish colonization. As all children of the American public school system learn, ‘in 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue...’ Cristoforo Colombo (aka Cristóbal Colón, aka Christopher Columbus), an Italian navigator, was sponsored by the Spanish King Ferdinand II and Queen Isabella I to find a route to India by heading west, not south and east (around Africa and into the Indian Ocean). Instead of finding India, he landed in the Bahamas and eventually, over four voyages across the Atlantic Ocean, he landed on or sighted most of the Caribbean Islands and

the mainland of Central America and South America. Columbus thought he had found some part of Asia, calling it the 'West Indies,' and told everyone who would listen back in Spain and across Europe. This is why indigenous Americans were called 'Indians' for a long time.

Columbus' ships weren't the only ones crossing the Atlantic by the early 1500s CE. Others were landing on the coast of present-day Brazil and Florida. One guy named Amerigo Vespucci, another Italian-born navigator working for Spain and Portugal, is thought to have been the primary skeptic who said that the lands Columbus encountered were not Asia. Vespucci suggested that those lands were a [Mundus Novus or 'New World' \(Vespucci 1503\)](#). A few years later in 1507, some French and German cartographers learned of Vespucci's suggestion, were convinced he was right, and published the first maps with the term "America," as a Latinized version of Amerigo's name (it could have been 'Amerige' but the cartographers thought that a feminized word was better). It is typical for cartographers to borrow terms and continue conventions developed by previous makers so the term stuck. It took a while for 'America' and 'American' to replace the terms 'West Indies' and 'Indian'.

So, anyone who calls themselves an American is actually named after an Italian guy. That's how history works sometimes. While most Native American peoples use that term as a representation of their identity, most prefer their indigenous cultural names to recognize that 'American' and 'Indian' are actually colonial impositions upon them.

The Americas are environmentally diverse with the basically uninhabitable arctic/polar regions of the north transitioning into the habitable sub-arctic and temperate zones of present-day Canada and the US. Let's pause here and address what some of you may have been shouting at the page. Yes, there is good evidence that a small group of Norse (not necessarily Vikings) explorers followed the coastlines of Iceland and Greenland (starting from their homeland in Scandinavia), eventually reaching present-day Newfoundland (far northeastern Canada). An archaeological site called *L'Anse aux Meadows* was occupied between 990-1050 CE and represents a short-term settlement by Norse people. It is likely that these Norse settlers saw and/or developed relationships with indigenous people of the region (the 'Dorset' discussed in ["Who Am I?"](#)). There may have been conflicts with the Dorset and/or other circumstances that encouraged the Norse to move back to Greenland. Two Norse sagas mentioned a land called *Vinland* west of Greenland that was unsuccessfully colonized for a short time. Many scholars think that *Vinland* is the Norse name for Newfoundland and the surrounding region that they explored. This is an important piece of colonial history but all in all, the Norse didn't have much impact on the Americas.

Moving south into North America, there are unique regions, such as the wet and cold Pacific Northwest Coast (incorporating the coastlines of Canada and the US) home to richly diverse indigenous groups. The Rocky Mountains are a transitional zone from east to west and north to south, bounding the northern temperate zones and the arid Southwest region (present-day Utah, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, Arizona, and California). Those arid regions do not stop at the US-Mexico border but continue into northern Mexico, with a large continuous region, the present-day Chihuahuan Desert, inhabited for thousands of years by related indigenous peoples. The southeast US is a unique region characterized by bayous and swamp where people have always worried about floods, mosquitos, and crocodiles.

The Valley of Mexico, which hosts present-day Mexico City, is a plateau surrounded by mountains and volcanoes. Those mountains bound the semi-tropical regions of Mesoamerica and Central America, with Caribbean and Pacific coastlines. The Caribbean islands are predominantly semi-tropical as well. As in Africa, the semi-tropical forests transition into rainforests at the equator, with the Amazon forests dominating the northern part of South America. Very close to the Pacific coast of the continent, the Andes Mountains create a unique environmental transition from dense rainforest in the east to highlands, and then steep descents to a coastal desert in the west (covering the coastlines of present-day Ecuador, Peru, and Chile). South of the Amazon, the Andes also transition into a desert in present-day Chile and Argentina. A good part of the southern coasts of South America are temperate.

Given this diversity, arts from the indigenous Americas are incredibly diverse. Most regions have abundant clay, stone, and wood resources. That diversity increased as indigenous trade networks were built over time and as colonial

trade networks emerged. In terms of special materials, the Americas has its own sources of jade and jadeite (jade-like greenstones), as well as obsidian, ivory from walrus and whales, and gold from the Andes. The most glorious resource to derive from the Americas is cacao, hands-down. We'll talk about it, don't worry!

The Wrap-up

Geography is crucial to understanding cultural context, resource availability, and environmental influences. So, we'll be talking about geography a lot in the coming pages. The production or find location of every artwork discussed will be offered to as much precision as possible. You'll find location information in the caption of each artwork and oftentimes it will be directly discussed in the text. Use the maps from this chapter and those provided in each following chapter to visualize geographies and timescales.

News Flash

- Did you know there is a Geography Awareness Week in the US? [Join in during the third week in November annually!](#)
- In addition to the "Human Evolution Interactive Timeline," the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History has a whole program called "[Human Origins](#)" with tons of updates by [@HumanOrigins](#) on Twitter.
- There are many melanin-focused/inspired social media venues, such as [#MelaninPoppin](#), [Melanin Book](#), and [MelaninPeople](#).
- Columbus is a controversial figure in many indigenous American communities. Thus there has been a strong movement to replace Columbus Day (on the second Monday in October) with [Indigenous Peoples' Day](#). [Several states have already made the change.](#)

Where Do I Go From Here? / The Bibliography

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3. Who Am I?



Figure 3.1: Map and timeline of artworks discussed in “Who Am I” by Marizela Garza. Review image captions below for details about each artwork and copyright information.

Who am I?

You’ve asked yourself this question, right? We all have. You start wondering: Who am I? Where do I come from? Why am I like this? These questions are natural. In fact, it is concerning if people don’t ask themselves such questions because they demonstrate good mental health practices like self-reflection. We must reflect upon our experiences to make sense of them. This is how we develop ‘selfhood’ or ‘personhood’ (being an individual with our own identity). As we mature, we encounter new experiences and need to catalog them according to our selfhood.

As you grow older you realize that you are not the only one doing this self-reflection. We all start as egocentric infants and need to grow into a “theory of mind.” Psychologists use this term to describe the awareness of others’ individual mentality and points of view, distinct to our own. When you ask yourself the question, “Who Am I?” you are working through a theory of mind of others, to consider where you fit in the landscape of perspectives and experiences.

In studying global arts, one of the first and most important concepts to understand is what we will call the ‘theory of mind of cultures.’ This is the awareness that not only do individual people have their own perspective, and that difference is okay, but that those people are part of cultures that have their own group perspectives. These group perspectives, or cultural traditions, impact individual people. Cultures develop norms (implicit or explicit expectations and standards) that impact how people live their lives and the decisions they make. Norms are founded in normativity (the consensus of desirable and undesirable actions and things) developed independently in all human societies and then sometimes influenced by external groups. Some of the most engrained social norms relate to identity. For example, many societies normalize binary (two-parted) gender identities, featuring masculine men and feminine women. (FYI: Sex and gender are distinct. Sex relates to biology and genitalia. Gender refers to social constructions of identity). In such societies, reflection upon “Who am I?” often starts with situating yourself within such gender norms, or not accepting these norms and challenging your way out of them. But first, let’s consider how we go from being kids to adults and dealing with gendered norms of identity.

Coming of age

Identity formation begins at the earliest ages. Just think of how young children start thinking about potential careers and play doctor or teacher. But, identity formation ramps up significantly as you reach your ‘age of maturity.’ In most cultures, this age is when you become sexually mature (able to produce children). This age also relates to the transition from childhood to adulthood, in terms of decision-making ability and maturity of thought. In many societies, these moments of transition are marked with important ceremonies and rituals, often known as ‘rites of passage,’ ‘initiation,’ or ‘coming of age’ ceremonies that are normalized ways to enter adulthood. Among the historic and contemporary Maasai culture of Kenya and Tanzania (see Fig. 3.1), rites of passage are gendered so that men and women undertake different maturation journeys that prepare them for and mark their different roles as adults.

Young Maasai men prepare to be warriors and protectors of cattle, the primary resource for Maasai livelihoods. *Eunoto* is an important rite of passage for Maasai men, involving a practice that you have probably seen in tourist or travel journalist photologs: the *Adumu* or “jumping dance” (Fig. 3.2). This ritual activity is a performance, a competitive demonstration of strength and finesse. The participants demonstrate prowess by keeping their heels from touching the ground as they repeatedly jump and maintain an upright posture. Chanting accompanies the jumping and signifies the pulse of the group.



Figure 3.2: [Maasai young men demonstrating the Adumu ceremony](#). Photo by Brutere; [CCo Public Domain](#).

In the official ceremonies (not those performed solely for tourist revenue), young men visually prepare themselves, sporting ochre body paint, intricate hair braiding, beaded ornaments, and patterned red textiles. In addition to *Adumu*, the *Eunoto* (literally “warrior-shaving ceremony”) focuses on the shaving of each warrior’s braids, typically by the warrior’s mother. Combined, all these facets of the *Eunoto* and *Adumu* produce a series of spectacles, only heightened (pardon the pun) by the fact that Maasai people are some of the tallest in the world, on average, and can jump higher than most of us can dream. These spectacles present these young men as mature members of society and as having reached the age for marriage and procreation (having babies). Their prowess in the *Adumu* ceremony and in many other rites of passage within Maasai culture, such as those involving the *Rungu* (throwing club; Fig. 3.3) symbolize their identity as a man. To consider how globalization has impacted what it means to be a Maasai man, check out [“Once Intrepid Warriors: Modernity and the Production of Maasai Masculinities” \(Hodgson 2001\)](#). Maasai women undergo distinct coming of age rites to prepare them for marriage and childbearing. We’ll expand on this in [“Where Do Babies Come From?”](#)



Figure 3.3: Maasai Maker(s). *Rungu*. ca. 1950 CE. Wood, 19 ¾". UTA African Art Collection. Photo by Leighton McWilliams; [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

Like the Maasai, other cultures in Africa and around the world practice initiation rites. On the northern coast of Papua New Guinea (PNG) in Melanesia, near the modern city of Madang, so-called Astrolabe Bay is home to a group known today as the Astrolabe Bay peoples (this is the type of unimaginative naming that developed under colonial European rule). Many cultures of PNG are known for carving ancestral figures but the Astrolabe Bay peoples historically focused one of their unique art traditions on an early stage in the initiation of boys into adulthood: circumcision.

Many boys around the world are circumcised (wherein the natural foreskin around the head of the penis is removed). In Astrolabe Bay, this event marks a key point in a boy's identity and journey to manhood. Boys are separated from the main community around age four and over the next ten years of their lives, they will transform through education in the secrets of manhood and ritual duties. This transformation incorporates circumcision, a painful process often undertaken without anesthetics. Astrolabe Bay boys endure this pain to demonstrate their worthiness.

In ceremonies that celebrate circumcision events, dancers wear *Asa Kate Masks* (Fig. 3.4), representing the spirit *Asa*. Carved in local wood, this mask incorporates exaggerated facial features such as protruding eyes with pronounced pupils, ear or horn-like protrusions featuring figures of men, elongated nose and cheeks, and an open mouth. *Asa* is a malevolent spirit known for frightening and potentially eating the boys who undergo circumcision. They must overcome this fear and *Asa's* 'bite' (a metaphor of circumcision). The mask sports a gag in the mouth, probably simulating a measure taken to help boys endure the pain. After the circumcisions have been performed and the newly minted men are now prepared to return to their village, a large festival welcomes them home. They arrive on the shoulders of their fathers and uncles, now part of the fraternity among the Astrolabe Bay people. These norms help young boys form their identity.



Figure 3.4: Astrolabe Bay Maker(s) of Papua New Guinea, Melanesia. [Asa Kate Mask](#). 19th century CE. Wood. Minneapolis Institute of Art Collection; [CC Public Domain](#).

Aging well

As people age, they often consider “Who Am I?” in different contexts. For example, one may consider who they are with respect to their peers. In positions of power, your peers may be your colleagues and/or your rivals. How do you ‘stack up’ to those around you? We will continue on this topic in [“Why Do They Have More Than Us?”](#) but for now, let’s consider the *Portrait of Shin Suk-ju* (Fig. 3.5) from the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1897 CE) of Korea (see Fig. 3.1). The fact that Shin’s portrait was painted in this manner tells us a lot about his identity. He was a civic official/bureaucrat of the Joseon court. He was esteemed by the Joseon King for his academic achievements and for honorable deeds. He aged well.



Figure 3.5: Joseon Period Maker(s) of Korea. [Portrait of Shin Suk-ju](#). 1417-1475 CE. Hanging scroll with ink and color on silk. Goryeong Sin Family Collection; Public Domain.

How can we deduce these facts about Shin Suk-ju? Let's talk about Confucianism, or in this case, Neo-Confucianism. In ancient China, probably during the Zhou Dynasty (ca. 1046 -256 BCE), a scholar (probably) named *Kǒng Fūzǐ* and/or *Kǒng Qiū* (supposedly) expanded upon a pre-existing social philosophy that was passed down through generations, eventually becoming codified as Confucianism (Confucius is the anglicized way of saying his potential Chinese name). You may have noticed the multiple probablys and supposedly in that previous sentence. Scholars can't be sure when (or whether) Confucius lived or much about him other than the way the ideas of his intellectual group eventually coalesced into a social and moral doctrine followed by many rulers of ancient and historic China, Korea, and Japan. Confucianism eventually developed into a religion focused on order in society, which is ultimately founded in family structures, particularly the hierarchical structures of elders and primacy of men's identities in family life. These hierarchical structures are classed under the term "filial piety." Younger people and women must respect the hierarchy (relationships of power and authority) in their family. The hierarchy that rules a family, maintaining order and stability, is a microcosm for the whole society and the government. If society is to be harmonious and the government is to be effective, hierarchies must be respected and sustained. To learn more about the scholarship on Confucianism, check out

[Manufacturing Confucianism \(Jensen 1997\)](#). In fact, Jensen is one of the scholars who supports the claim that Confucius wasn't a real person but developed as a mytho-historical idea through writers after the Zhou Dynasty period.

Confucianism is considered a rationalist approach to philosophy and a religion incorporating spiritual elements such as the worship of ancestors – the ultimate elders. Other schools of thought such as the metaphysical (transcendent and/or concerning abstract ideas beyond matter) religion of Daoism and the imported (from India/Nepal) spiritual system of Buddhism began to compete with Confucianism for sway among rulers and the general population. Starting in the Song Dynasty (960-1279 CE) of China, scholars began to reform the original Confucian tradition into what we now refer to as Neo-Confucianism. This new trajectory incorporated more metaphysical components to 'answer' the competitive landscape of Daoism and Buddhism. Thus, Neo-Confucianism served political, social, and spiritual needs as a continuation of the age-old Chinese tradition of hierarchical structure. Confucianism and later Neo-Confucianism became very influential in Korea, Japan, and other cultures around Asia. The Joseon Dynasty of Korea actually rejected Buddhism (the official state religion of the previous Koryŏ Dynasty) in favor of Neo-Confucianism.

Now, we're back to Shin Suk-ju. Like good (Neo-)Confucianists, the Joseon court was organized as a large civic bureaucracy with many ministers, officials, and lower-level bureaucrats. To distinguish between the ranks, officials commissioned silk robes with 'rank badges' embroidered front and center on the chest. What do you notice about Shin's rank badge? The luxurious gold thread plays nicely against the teal silk, right? What about the symbolism there? Notice the clouds, plants, and the two birds at the bottom of the design? Those are peacocks. Birds have always held important symbolism in Korean arts; we'll discuss this more in ["What is Beautiful?"](#) Peacocks in Shin's rank badge present his identity as a civic official, one of high rank and status in the court bureaucracy. Documents from this period also help us to learn that he eventually ascended to Prime Minister of the Joseon court.

This portrait also demonstrates that Shin wasn't just any peacock-level civic official. He became a 'meritorious subject' of the Joseon Royal Bureau of Painting. This portrait was commissioned by the Joseon King to honor Shin for a valued decision and/or job well-done, potentially associated with Shin's work creating the modern Korean alphabet known as [Hangul](#) or his work on royal painting collections. Check out ["Sin Sukju's Record on the Painting Collection of Prince Anpyeong and Early Joseon Antiquarianism" \(Jungmann 2011\)](#) for more on that topic. Portrait of Shin Suk-ju would be presented to the official's family and eventually would serve as an ancestor image, to be worshipped according to the Confucian tradition. In this way, Shin's portrait represents his status as an elder. Given all these facets of his identity, Shin sat at the top of his family hierarchy and near the top of the social hierarchies in Joseon Korea.

Gender and sexuality

For a distinct contemporary perspective, let's consider Muslim culture in modern-day Iran (see Fig. 3.1). Iranian photographer Shadi Ghadirian questions "Who Am I?" in her Qajar series presenting sepia-toned, historic looking portrait photos with unexpected twists. In Ghadirian's *Untitled* (sketched in Fig. 3.6, [original here](#)), a veiled woman standing in front of an old-timey portrait backdrop holds a large boombox on her right shoulder and poses with a strong hand on her opposite hip. Other photographs in the series show veiled Muslim women, sometimes in historic garments while wearing sunglasses, drinking from a Pepsi can, vacuuming with a modern appliance, or posed with bicycles. Ghadirian juxtaposes historic and contemporary elements to challenge how non-Muslim viewers see Muslim women, especially Muslim women who chose to veil. Most Americans often see veiling practices as historic holdovers from previous eras and see veiled Muslim women as stuck in the past and thoroughly non-Modern. As a Muslim woman herself, Ghadirian asks, why can't a veiled Muslim woman carry a boombox or ride a bike? Importantly, while these photographs poke at stereotypes of Muslim women held in the United States and around the world, Ghadirian's work also intersects with debates within Muslim communities concerning whether religious practice can interface with modern practices and/or attitudes.

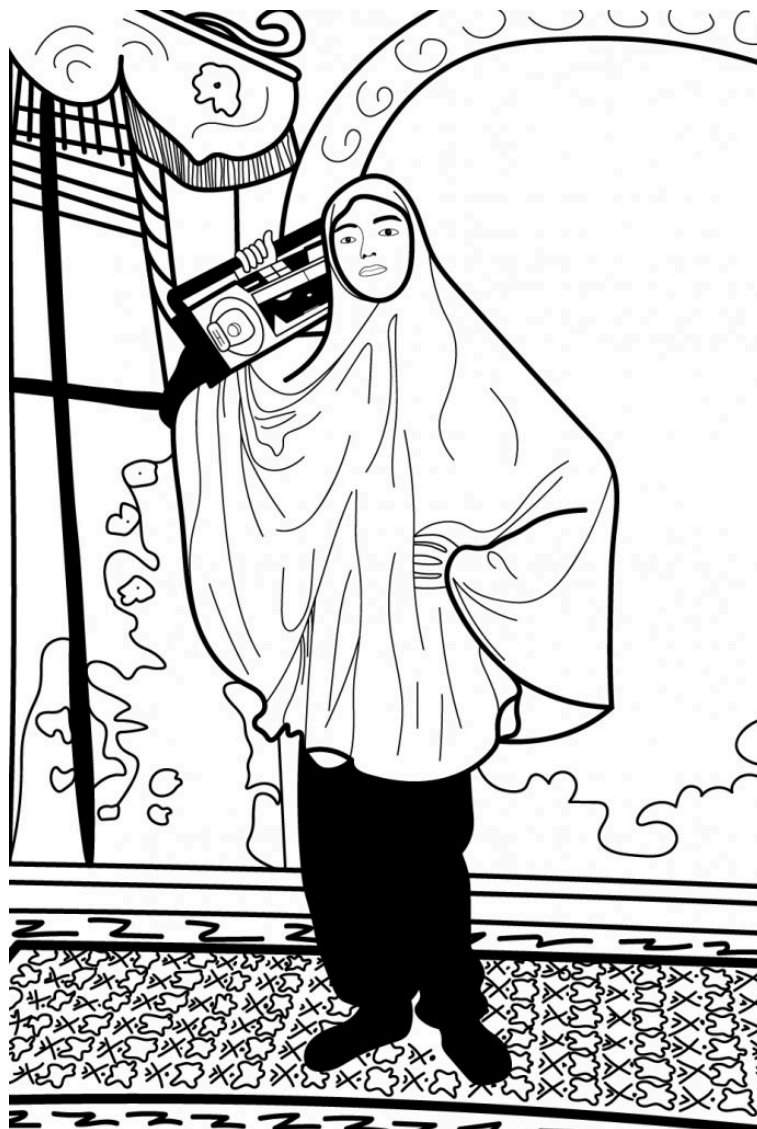


Figure 3.6: Digital Transformational Sketch by Marizela Garza of the original artwork: Shadi Ghadirian from Tehran, Iran. *Untitled* from Ghajar Series. 1998 CE. Gelatin-silver bromide print, 9 7/16 x 6 7/16” (image). Los Angeles County Museum of Art Collection; [View the original artwork here](#) © Shadi Ghadirian. Refer to Figure 0.1 to view the transformational sketch process.

To consider Ghadirian's work fully, we have to understand Islamic views of gender. In Islam, binary gender identities are the norm, while other gender identities are often illegal. The Qur'an (the holy book of Islam) and the Hadith (sayings of the Prophet Muhammed) provide guidance on the expectations and social roles of men and women. In the late 1970s CE, a surge of public support for conservative Muslim values rallied against the rule of Persian Shahs (Kings) in Iran. The Shahs were focused on westernization, modernization, and did not prioritize Islam as conservative communities wished. In 1979 CE, the Islamic Revolution changed the political and social landscape, officially transforming the country into the Islamic Republic of Iran with a theocratic constitution (a political system focused on the leadership of religious officials who rule in the name of their God/gods). Elections in Iran have brought many men to power, maintaining conservative Muslim values and laws. These leaders also sanction violence against dissenting social minorities and perpetuate unequal human rights.

Despite their important role in the revolution, women do not receive equal rights under Iran's constitution. There have

been movements towards women's rights in Iran but women are subject to required veiling in public (even if veiling is not part of their personal choice), segregated educational standards, strong domesticity expectations, and, sometimes, sexual assault that goes unpunished. It is important to note that this is not the case in all countries with large Muslim populations or where Islam is the official state religion.

As a social movement, the Iranian revolution rejected European and Euro-American influences, including modern technologies, American brands, and popular culture. As Ghadirian depicts, boomboxes were imported items purchased by wealthy Iranians flirting with the illegality of European and Euro-American materials. Women would certainly not publicly present themselves with such items. Veiled women could not ride bicycles in public either given social codes of women's modesty, even if their family was wealthy enough to own one. Under the laws of their country, based in their faith, they are not permitted to pursue the activities that they may wish to. Thus, their identity feels fractured. They are Muslim, as faithful believers, and they are women, restricted in their social freedoms. Ghadirian's Qajar series challenges the norms assigned to contemporary Muslim women in Iran from her own point of view (which we must recognize may differ from other Muslim women in Iran). Check out "[Restaging Time: Photography, Performance, and Anachronism in Shadi Ghadirian's Qajar Series](#)" (Heer 2012) to learn more.

Many people challenge norms and sometimes eventually deconstruct and/or change norms. In many cases, when men display traits normalized for women or vice versa, those people are viewed as 'different,' 'abnormal,' or, sometimes criminal. In Europe and Euro-America today, there is a spectrum of such non-norm gender identities, some that are not so upsetting to the norms and others that ruffle many more feathers. For example, girls who identify as 'tomboys' are not necessarily so 'different' these days. But, what if your identity lies on the other side of the spectrum and you don't 'fit in' ways that are more challenging to the established norms?

Non-binary gender and sexuality identities often lack normalization. People who identify as transgender or non-conforming in Euro-America, for example, often live at the margins of society because of the perceptions of others. In global societies, non-binary gender and sexuality identities have long histories and sometimes are normalized. Let's consider a long-established transgender identity in South Asia is known as Hijra (or Kinnar) (check out [The Truth about Me: A Hijra Life Story \[Rêvathi 2010\]](#) for a personal narrative).

Most Hijra grow up as men then at some point in their life choose to live according to women's social roles, potentially undergoing removal of male sex organs. Some Hijra are born intersex, meaning with reproductive or sex organs atypical for their 'presenting' gender (which is often prescribed by parents at birth). There are references to such identities in ancient texts associated with Hinduism, indicating the longevity of this non-binary gender tradition in South Asia. FYI: We will discuss Hinduism in depth in "[What is Divine?](#)"

Despite this longevity, Hijra have not fared well in Hindu social life, often choosing to live in secluded spiritual communities and/or working as sex workers. Despite this marginalization, the Hijra community of south India celebrates its history and spiritual ancestry in the Koothandavar Festival, featuring images of the Hindu mythical hero Aravan (Fig. 3.7). The culminating event of the festival is the chariot parade of a monumental and highly decorated sculpture of Aravan, featuring thousands of strung flowers and brightly painted features. Hijra from around India assemble to ritually marry Aravan, as Lord Krishna did after transforming into a woman known as Mohini in the mythology. Then, according to the legend, Aravan is sacrificed. In this story, Lord Krishna represents the transgender experience. This ceremony recognizes the place of Hijra in history, and is a performance of their role in society. By 2014, all South Asian governments had officially recognized Hijra as a "third gender" protected under the law. Unfortunately, the Hijra who work as sex workers still lead criminalized lives because "homosexual acts" remain illegal. Despite these continued hardships, the Hijra community has more access to education and career opportunities now that their identity and their rights as people are normalized by legislation.



Figure 3.7: Contemporary Maker(s) of Koovagam, India. [*Aravan God Image in the Koothandavar \(Kuttantavaar\) Festival*](#). 2006 CE. Multimedia. Photo by Kabir Orłowski; [CC BY 2.0](#).

Another normalized non-binary gender is the *nádleehí* of the Diné (Navajo), a Native American culture that eventually settled in what is now the southwest US (see Fig. 3.1). Within the multiple gender traditions of the Diné, *nádleehí* identify as female-bodied or male-bodied, taking on norms of a woman or a man based on the embodied gender, but also occupying a different social space altogether, as discussed by [Carolyn Epple \(1998\)](#) in “[Coming to Terms with Navajo “nádleehí”: A Critique of “berdache,” “Gay,” “Alternate Gender,” and “Two-Spirit.”](#) For example, historic Diné artist and healer Hosteen Klah could traverse the gendered domains of weaving (gendered for women) and singing/healing (gendered for men) as a *nádleehí*. *Sandpainting Tapestry* (Fig. 3.8) exemplifies these dual roles.



Figure 3.8: Hosteen Klah of Arizona, US. [Detail of Sandpainting Tapestry](#). ca. 1925 CE. Wool, dovetail and single interlocking tapestry weave, 67 ¾ x 63 ¼". © Art Institute of Chicago Collection.

Firstly, it is important to note that many Diné people do not wish their mythologies and spiritual knowledge to become public, thus the display of Diné artworks is problematic. [Sandpainting Tapestry by Hosteen Klah is part of the Art Institute of Chicago collection and on their website they offer a full image if you wish to view it.](#) With respect to Diné traditions, we choose not to illustrate the full image here. Let's focus on Hosteen Klah as a person and artist, versus the symbolism represented in the tapestry. Klah was a trained Diné healer who performed many ceremonies focused on chanting, spiritual illustration in sandpainting, and medicinal knowledge to aid recovery from illness. According to tradition, such sandpaintings were destroyed to ensure that the powerful spirits invoked through them did not overwhelm this mortal world by their continued presence. Thus, the sandpaintings themselves are gone. However, they sort of survive because as a *nádleehí*, Klah could translate sandpainting designs from memory into woven tapestries, a preservable artform. These weavings are the only surviving record of Klah's healing role and serve as a testament to the normalization of multiple genders in Diné society.

Another non-binary gender that is relatively normalized in Afghan society was highlighted in the 2003 film "Osama" by Afghan filmmaker Siddiq Barmak. Osama is the name taken on by a young girl who must become a *bacha posh* to ensure the livelihood of her family during the early part of the authoritarian Taliban regime in Afghanistan (see Fig. 3.1). *Bacha Posh* literally translates from Persian to "dressed up as a boy" and describes daughters of families without sons who must take on the role of a son, living in public as a young man. Under Taliban rule, women were often forced to remain home

and were persecuted if seen in public, especially when without an escort. In the opening scene of the film, a crowd of veiled women in long blue burqas (full-body veils as seen in the Fig. 3.9 sketch and in the [original film poster](#)) protest on the village streets. They hold banners protesting for their right to work outside the home, some as widows who need to provide for their family. Eventually, members of the Taliban military arrive, chasing the protesting women, spraying many with painful streams of water, and arresting several women by locking them in cages. This is the circumstance that the unnamed protagonist and her mother find themselves in, without a father/husband or brother/son to provide income and accompany them in public. Thus, the young girl cuts her hair and takes on the clothing of a young boy, creating the character of Osama. Unfortunately, Osama is found out by the Taliban, who do not see the Afghani tradition of *bacha posh* as acceptable, and her fate is not a happy one.



Figure 3.9: Digital Transformational Sketch by Marizela Garza of the original artwork: Osama film poster. [View the original artwork here](#) © United Artists/Yorleni O. Refer to Figure 0.1 to view the transformational sketch process.

Osama is remarkable for many reasons (but not because the name of the film happens to coincide with the name of Al-Qaeda terrorist Osama Bin Laden). This was the first film to be completely produced in Afghanistan since the Taliban take-over in the 1990s CE. Aesthetically, the film is somber and dark with some flashes of color such as the blue burqas. In tone, the film is realistic, sad, and revelatory for European and Euro-American audiences. In addition, all the actors were amateurs from Kabul, 'discovered' by Barmak. Given all of these important factors, this film received multiple accolades from the independent film industry including awards from the Cannes Film Festival and the Golden Globes. While Osama is not a story of hope for *bacha posh* in Afghanistan, it portrays this cultural tradition with realism and purpose, bringing light to one global example of where gender norms do not fit global stereotypes and have been

persecuted by totalitarian regimes. Read about another personal story in [“I’m a Woman Who Lived as a Boy: My Years as a Bacha Posh”](#) (Nordberg 2014). We’ll consider the Taliban again in [“Why Do People Take What Doesn’t Belong to Them?”](#)

Big picture

Over time, we might ask ourselves “Who Am I?” in the grander scheme of things, in the large-scale patterns of societies, economies, politics, and cultures that mingle? Contemporary artist Yinka Shonibare asks such questions, focused on his heritage as a British-born, Nigeria-raised Black man. In the early 2000s CE, Shonibare started interrogating the relationships of European imperial expansion across Africa (and other parts of the world) and Africans as people in spaces that did not offer equality.

Scramble for Africa (sketched in Fig. 3.10; [original here](#)) is one of a series of life-sized installations using the imagery of Victorian-era stately interiors, such as dining rooms, for staged and highly theatrical scenes. Headless figures gesticulate around a table, at the center of which sits a map of Africa. The gesticulations are territorial claims: “I get this part and you get that part.” These men, perceived as Europeans, are dressed in finery that denotes their station in life. They are wealthy and apparently that wealth gives them the right to stake claim to a continent already home to millions of people (please, note the sarcasm). Shonibare describes the mindset he portrays: “I wanted to represent these European leaders as mindless in their hunger for what the Belgian King Leopold II called ‘a slice of this magnificent African cake’” ([Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth 2013](#)). We’ll talk about Leopold II in [“Why Do They Have More Than Us?”](#)



Figure 3.10: Digital Transformational Sketch by Marizela Garza of the original artwork: Yinka Shonibare MBE from Nigeria/UK. *Scramble for Africa*. 2003 CE. Life-size fiberglass mannequins, chairs, table, Dutch wax printed cloth. The Pinnell Collection, Dallas; [View the original artwork here](#) @ Pinnell Collection/Yinka Shonibare. Refer to Figure 0.1 to view the transformational sketch process.

The bright, colorful, and patterned clothing is important. The fabrics are often referred to as 'African' or 'Tribal' prints but Shonibare learned that such fabrics are actually wax-printed Dutch knock-offs of batiks, an indigenous type of cloth traditional in Indonesia. In the early 1600s CE, the Dutch East India Company established trade with India and Southeast Asia, eventually establishing colonies like Indonesia. Attempted sales of these 'Dutch wax' knock-offs were not successful in Indonesia (because Indonesians wanted traditional batiks), so the Dutch sent the knock-offs to West Africa. They became popular there and soon the history of these fabrics was conflated into 'African' or 'Tribal' labels.

We cannot ignore the human rights dimensions of Shonibare's artwork. Are you asking yourself, "where would Shonibare's Nigerian ancestors be in this scene?" They would be serving around the table or in a much worse situation as slaves to these seated men. Shonibare has stated that these works that exude historic character are metaphors for his feelings on imperialism and materialism still undertaken and experienced today, such as through American brands like NIKE. Shonibare asks "Who Am I?" in this confluence of resources exchanged back and forth across oceans: oil, shoes,

iphones, human beings. He wants you to ask yourself who you are in these networks of exchange. How do you contribute to the perpetuation of inequality, pollution, injustice?

We should mention two other facets of Yinka Shonibare's identity. In 2019 CE, he was awarded the honorific title Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire to recognize the importance of his work. Also, since he was 19, Shonibare has used an electric wheelchair due to a paralyzing illness. He produces some of the most acclaimed artworks on the contemporary art scene today. He is an artist asking us to think about the past and the present. To hear from Shonibare himself, check out an interview in ["Yinka Shonibare in Conversation" \(Downey 2004\)](#). To read about perceptions of Shonibare's work and how it relates to the work of other artists, check out [Chinamerem Ahuchaogu's research essay submitted in Spring 2022, focused on an interview with his grandmother who grew up in Igboland, Nigeria](#).

Let's take one more big leap to consider our question of identity. Have you ever asked yourself, "Who am I, a tiny human, compared to this huge planet earth?" For the people now referred to as the Dorset culture of present-day Arctic Canada (see Fig. 3.1) (we don't know what they called themselves), the idea of human humility and the bigness of nature was a norm of their identity. Before the Inuit peoples (formerly known as Eskimo) of the Canadian Arctic and Alaska, the Dorset lived in this harsh environment, adapting to cold conditions and seasonal change. They were hunter-gatherers focused on storing enough resources to keep comfortable over the coldest months. They were very good at this, especially hunting sea mammals with harpoons. These practices naturally taught them about their environment and shaped their identity.

Dorset artists created miniature ivory carvings of polar bears (Fig. 3.11) that reflect this identity. Dorset polar bear carvings often represent the bear in the position called 'laying, still-hunting.' In a semi-relaxed horizontal posture, the polar bear floats/lays in the water waiting to spring into action to catch sea mammals like seals, walruses, and narwhals.

PHANG

Importantly, these are the same animals Dorset people hunted. Dorset artists obviously observed polar bears while hunting and probably identified with them as successful hunters. This type of connection to nature is rare in European and Euro-American societies because patterns of consumption and resource extraction distance people from animals and nature. Most people probably associate polar bears with Coca-Cola branding or with social media pictures of melting icebergs. The Dorset saw themselves in nature. If a Dorset hunter was to ask themselves, "Who Am I?," they may have reflected "I am like the bear."



Figure 3.11: Dorset Maker(s) on or near Igloodik Island, Canada. [Polar Bear Figurine](#). ca. 500 BCE – 1300 CE. Ivory. Canadian Museum of History Collection. Photo by dalbera; [CC BY 2.0](#).

You may also be asking why there are incised lines on the polar bear carving. Scholars do not agree on the significance of these lines. The most interesting hypothesis asserts that these lines imitate the skeleton beneath the bear's fur and that this skeletal reference is another bear-human connection. Archaeologists rarely find bones associated with the Dorset people. They rarely find any burials at all. Some think that Dorset mortuary practices involved dismembering the dead and sinking the fragments into the sea, becoming food for sea animals. Illustrating the skeleton on the polar bear carving is a way to visualize the cycle of life and death, hunting and consumption, and potentially linking polar bears to spiritual systems of Dorset culture. Many scholars suggest that these carvings represent profound spiritual connections between bears and people. Learn more about archaeological excavations that support such interpretations in [“Dorset Shamanism: Excavations in Northern Labrador” \(Thompson 1985\)](#).

The Wrap-up

Don't stop asking yourself “Who Am I?” because that's how you remember where you've been and figure out where you want to go. As you continue your studies of global arts and you meet new people, remember the theory of mind. Everyone is thinking, just not thinking the same as you. That's a good thing most of the time. Your identity is valuable but isn't singular. You are part of many collectives, even if they are small ones. To consider global identities more, check out the media recommendations below. Then, make your way into the scholarly literature on these topics by checking out the articles and books cited. You can contribute to these conversations!

News Flash

- Are you interested in fashion? Check out the [article on slate.com called “The Curious History of ‘Tribal’ Prints”](#) to see how Yinka Shonibare's work relates to Gwen Stefani and New York Fashion Week.
- The BBC made a documentary film about Hijra and featuring the Aravan Festival called “India's Ladyboys.” (Note that “Ladyboy” can be considered an offensive term.)
- The animated film *The Breadwinner* (2017) by Cartoon Saloom highlights the story of a bacha posh, based on the novel by Deborah Ellis.
- Are you a fan of K-Drama? Shin Suk-ju was featured in a South Korean KBS2 television period drama called *The Princess' Man* produced in 2011.

Where Do I Go From Here? / The Bibliography

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4. What Is Divine?



Figure 4.1: Map and timeline of artworks discussed in “What is Divine?” by Marizela Garza. Review image captions below for details about each artwork and copyright information.

What is divine?

The constellation of questions surrounding that big question [“Who Am I?”](#) from the last chapter is about us as individuals. We should also consider what connects us as groups and communities. We’ll explore communities and what they prioritize in the next chapter. For now, let’s go big. What unites everyone on this planet? Our humanity! We humans share so much, including the (somewhat disappointing) fact that we are not superheroes. We are not gods.

Our social and spiritual systems have developed over generations to answer other big questions like, “What is Divine?”

What goes beyond human? What is super-human? To be very clear, this chapter will not be answering this question from a personal spiritual point of view. That question is yours to answer for yourself. Instead, we will explore how different cultures have approached this question from their unique point of view and how visual expressions have allowed the sharing of views of the divine.



Figure 4.2: Early Classic Period Maya Maker(s) of Peten region, Guatemala. [Hun Batz and Hun Chuen Figures atop ceramic lids](#). ca. 250-600 CE. Earthenware with colored slips, 22 ¼ x 8 11/16 x 14". Cleveland Museum of Art Collection; [CCo Public Domain](#).

We mostly know the expressions of divinity as deities. Many deities are represented in physical forms, often in anthropomorphic (human form), zoomorphic (animal form), or hybrid physical forms. In some spiritual traditions, deities are non-physical and/or cannot be represented in physical form. We will explore some examples of these non-physical forms later. To get a handle on physical deities, let's take an interesting example at the literal intersection of art and divinity: divine artists of the ancient Maya! The brothers *Hun Batz and Hun Chuen* (Fig. 4.2) are the patron deities of Maya artists and scribes and are artists themselves.

The brothers sit cross-legged in the act of writing and/or painting. Each originally held an implement in their upper hand. They each have predominantly human bodies, and thus are primarily anthropomorphic, but the brothers are, in fact, hybrid deities. Did you notice the tail on the left? Their human bodies and limbs are complemented by monkey tails and in the case of *Hun Batz* (left), more so than *Hun Chuen* (right), exaggerated facial features related to primates. *Hun Batz* literally translates to "One Monkey" and probably references a howler monkey, one of the primate species endemic to the Maya region in eastern Mesoamerica (Fig. 4.1). Within the Maya tradition, monkeys are recognized as particularly

intelligent animals, and thus became associated with intellectual pursuits like writing and artistry. In Maya mythology, hybrid human-monkeys became the divine representation of these activities and the traits required of skillful writing and art making. The lavish jewelry, headdresses, and garments worn by *Hun Batz and Hun Chuen* indicate their status and power. Their hybrid features (beyond that known for any human) indicate their superhumanity and thus divinity.

If we move northwest of the Maya region, into the central Gulf Coast region of present-day Mexico, we can explore the divine entities of the Olmec (aka Olmeca). The Maya and the Olmec have strong cultural connections but sometimes those linkages are exaggerated to suggest that the Olmec were a ‘mother culture’ to the Maya. In actual fact, the Olmec and the Maya were contemporaneous cultures, neighbors, and trading partners for a long period of time. They both influenced each other. Many ideas about the divine and deities flowed between these groups, such as one of the preeminent deities in both cultures: the Maize God.

As many of you know, *maize* is the Spanish word (though derived from the indigenous Taino language of the Caribbean) for corn. Along with beans and squash, corn was one of the most important food crops in Mesoamerica, and eventually throughout the Americas. A wild plant called *teosinte* was domesticated into *maize* in the Pacific Coast region of present-day Oaxaca, Mexico. Eventually, it was traded and spread across the Americas. Check out [“Domestication of Corn” \(Mangelsdorf et al. 1964\)](#) to learn how scientific archaeological investigations led to this understanding.

For both the Maya and the Olmec, the Maize God offers fertility, abundance, and life-sustaining foods through agriculture. Corn is his primary plant association but he is also associated with squash and bean crops, and plants generally. We’ll explore a couple examples of Maya expressions of the Maize God in [“Will You Tell a Story?”](#) later. Here, let’s consider the unique ways that the Olmec represented and honored their Maize God.

Adze of Divine Figure (Fig. 4.3) exemplifies many of the features of Olmec art. It is a groundstone object, meaning Olmec artists painstakingly reduced a raw piece of basalt by grinding it with a harder stone and abrasives like sand to produce this figural object. In particular, Olmec carvers are known for their drilling techniques, typically seen at the inner corners of eyes, nostrils, and outer corners of mouths. These are often the deepest cuts that took the longest to achieve, and may have been a way to start the carving of a face. To be clear, this carving was done without metal tools! That’s dedication! And that demonstrates the importance of this divine figure within Olmec society.



Figure 4.3: Olmec Maker(s) of the central Gulf Coast region, Mexico. [Adze of Divine Figure](#). ca. 1000-300 BCE. Stone, 12 11/16 x 5 1/2 x 4 1/2 “. Cleveland Museum of Art Collection; [CCo Public Domain](#).

Do you notice how large the head of *Adze of Divine Figure* is in proportion to the body and how much more attention has been paid to detailing it compared to the body? This tells us right away that the head is the most important part. Check out the large eyes, probably originally carved in a typical almond shape (you can see the faint outline and indentation) and then blocked into rectangles for some unknown reason. Notice the furrowed brow, flat nose, and chubby cheeks, typical of such depictions. You're probably wondering... "Okay but what about that mouth?" Yes! First, the mouth is open with top and bottom lips flared dramatically. Beneath the top lip, notice the bare gums, except for two huge curving fangs! This way of representing a mouth is typical of Olmec sculptures of divine figures. Most scholars suggest it reflects the mouth of a wailing infant, when a baby cries so forcefully and intensely that their lips spread widely and almost seem to curl back. The furrowed brow complements the image of a wailing baby. The infant suggestion also makes sense given the toothless gums. But, what about those fangs?

Most scholars attribute the fangs to a hybridization of this partly anthropomorphic deity with a jaguar, the primary feline predator of this region. In fact, some scholars think that these depictions represent a transformation of a baby/human into a jaguar. Scholars refer to this transforming hybrid entity as a 'were-jaguar' (drawing from the mythology of werewolves). Olmec shamans (spiritual and ritual specialists) are often depicted in a state of transformation and scholars think that the concept of transformation relates to this particular deity as well.

Now, you're asking, "okay, so what deity is represented?" Well, that's a matter of debate. Most scholars focus on the lower half of this type of Olmec sculpture to make interpretations about this deity. If you were to look at the *Adze of Divine Figure* from the side ([check out this photo of a similar object known as the "Kunz" Adze](#)), you'll notice that the base of the body comes to a point. This is why these objects are called adzes. An adze is an agricultural tool used to till the ground to prepare for planting ([check out a photo of an intact adze from Hawai'i](#)). The stone carved to a point is hafted (attached via string and resin) to a wooden handle for tilling. The choice of the adze form for a sculpture of a deity is not incidental. This agricultural reference makes most scholars think that this deity reflects the Maize God, or at least some specific manifestation of the Maize God within the Olmec spiritual system. It is important to note that the *Adze of Divine Figure* would not have been used by an Olmec farmer to till soil; it was a ceremonial object. But it may have been hafted onto a handle like a real adze. The neckline of most of these objects forms a deep groove that could serve to secure the string for hafting. These objects hafted onto a handle may have been used in ceremonies to simulate tilling.

Another common trait of these sculptures, not represented in Figure 4.3 ([but check out this photo of another Olmec adze](#)), is a cleft (an opening made by splitting) at the forehead. Scholars think this cleft represents the indentations that an adze makes in soil, the opening of the earth into which a seed is planted. If you look carefully at the neckline of *Adze of Divine Figure*, you'll find the cleft imagery in this example. Furthermore, *Adze of Divine Figure* incorporates a decorative pattern on the lower body below that cleft, appearing like four dots surrounding a bar. Some scholars suggest that this motif is an abstracted depiction of plants (crops in rows) and thus offers another link to the Maize God attribution.

I know you are asking, "okay, so how does the baby/were-jaguar connect to the Olmec Maize God?" The answer is we don't know. Some scholars suggest that the infant imagery reflects the larger realm of fertility (human fertility) over which the Maize God presides. Just because we call the deity the Maize God today doesn't mean that the Olmec only saw them as an agricultural deity. Agriculture and the fertility of plants/the earth is one component of fertility of life and may have been directly connected to human fertility and infants for the Olmec. There's more to learn about the complexity of Olmec Maize God. Check out ["The Olmec Maize God: The face of corn in Formative Mesoamerica" \(Taube 1996\)](#).

The practice of shamanistic transformation, hypothesized among the Olmec, was important to many cultures. Shamans would ingest substances, such as hallucinogens, or undertake other preparations such as starvation, that would induce otherworldly feelings. In art, these experiences are often represented as a process of transformation, whereby the shaman transforms from a human into a hybrid and/or zoomorphic deity. These practices demonstrate that the shaman (often political as well as spiritual leaders) has a connection with the divine that no one else in the community has. *Gold Figure Pendant* (Fig. 4.4) from the Tairona culture of Central America (Fig. 4.1) reflects this sort of divine connection.



Figure 4.4: Tairona Maker(s) of northern Colombia. [Gold Figure Pendant](#). ca. 1000-1550 CE. Gold, 13.7 x 16.8 x 5.1 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art Collection; Public Domain.

The Tairona lived in the northern region of modern-day Colombia, within the Sierra Nevada de Santa Maria mountain range (modern-day Magdalena), near the Caribbean coast. Relatively speaking, the Tairona are unknown to most people because cultures like the Inka of the Andes region are prioritized. You may have heard of the Tairona (and some of their neighbors like the Musica, [check out this map to see their proximity](#)) tangentially through the stories of 'El Dorado,' a myth developed by Spanish *conquistadores* and perpetuated by indigenous groups. Most scholars think that when the Spanish came in contact with groups like the Tairona and Musica, they noticed that gold was worked into objects like *Gold Figure Pendant* worn by shamans/chiefs. As the Spanish learned more about these cultures, they became enamored of the Musica ritual involving covering the chief in gold dust. The Spanish wanted to get their hands on that gold so they started asking where they could find it. Indigenous people told them, "oh, just travel a bit farther south and you'll find it." This was the start of the myth of *El Dorado*. Eventually, the Spanish reached the Andes, observed the Inca Empire, and decided to invest their time subjugating those vast territories, despite the fact that they never really found their dream 'city of gold.'

Tairona people wore these objects as pendants to demonstrate their status and their connection to the divine. *Gold Figure Pendant* features a hybrid figure with a human torso, penis, and muscular legs. Above the shoulders, notice the hooded, beady eyes, the snout-like diamond shaped nose, and long sharp teeth. These features may reflect the face of a bat, specifically the leaf-nosed bat species native to this region of Colombia. ([Check out a photo of a leaf-nosed bat's face](#). See the resemblance?) Above the bat face, the figure wears a massive headdress, laden with imagery of wings and

birds. Notice the two decorative ovals above the eyebrows? Those ovals are hanging from the beaks of two birds with wings folded in at their sides. The bodies of these birds merge with the large profile face of a bird with a scoop-like beak in the headdress.

Bats and birds are notable imagery for divine figures because they can fly, and thus already have attributes that are super-human. Doesn't every human want to be able to fly? Because of this almost ubiquitous unattainable wish, flight has often been taken as an indicator of sacredness and divinity. For the Tairona and several other cultures around the world, bats are particularly special, beyond birds, because they are nocturnal and associated with dark spaces like caves. This quality gives bats a distinctiveness. We'll consider why caves are so interesting in ["Will You Tell a Story?"](#)

The figure in *Gold Figure Pendant* may be a bat-faced deity, a shaman transforming into a bat (or the bat-faced deity), or a shaman wearing a bat-faced deity mask and simulating the practice of transformation for a public performance. It is important to note that shamanistic transformation rituals likely were not public affairs. These would have been held in private spaces individually or in the company of other shamans. Regular people would not be privy to these rituals and experiences, except if a shaman or leader demonstrated the significance of these actions in a public place through performance. For the Tairona, there would have been a very thin line (or no line at all) between whether this is a representation of a deity or a shaman transforming into / merging with a deity or the way a shaman describes their practice to the public. European and Euro-American frames of reference often see these things as entirely separate, but they may not have been seen as separate to the Tairona. They are all part of a spectrum of divinity and the ways that certain people can connect with the divine and others cannot.

In most past societies, connections to the divine, especially to the most important deities, were not equally held by all people. Those relationships were reserved for the highest ranking members of society, such as the religious practitioners and political leaders. However, some religious traditions take a more egalitarian approach to divine connections. In the Yoruba and related traditions of West Africa, divine entities are called *Òrìṣà*, spirits and forces that guide humans towards success, morality, and balance as intermediaries. Thus, in this tradition, all people can have a relationship with the divine, according to their own needs for guidance. *Òrìṣà* reside in the spirit world (as non-physical entities) and are made anthropomorphically physical on earth as needed. Many *Òrìṣà* are deified ancestors (people of one's lineage who have died and ascended to spiritual power), thus they are already linked with humanity. *Òrìṣà* have personalities and character traits such as gentle or assertive that relate to the types of actions they help us undertake on earth. They are usually represented with specific items or animals that reflect their characteristics. For example, *Shango*, a heroic *Òrìṣà* associated with thunder and lightning, usually wields the *oshe*, a double-headed ax.

Many Yoruba communities see *Ìyá Nlá* (Great Mother) as one of the most important *Òrìṣà* (who may have strong connections to another *Òrìṣà* named *Yemoja*, a primary water spirit and protector of women). Yoruba scholar [Dr. Babatunde Lawal \(1996, xiv\)](#) notes that "the female principle in nature has been personified as *Ìyá Nlá* (The Great Mother), whereby human beings can relate to one another as children of the same mother and so think of less malicious acts." The term 'Our Mother' is also used in reference to *Ìyá Nlá* to cement this feeling of connectedness and moral duty to treat others well. The Yoruba honor *Ìyá Nlá* and all mothers, including deified ancestors of particular value, by wearing *Gẹ̀lẹ̀de Helmet Masks* (Fig. 4.5) in a performance known as the *Gẹ̀lẹ̀de* spectacle. By putting on the helmet mask and performing the personality of *Ìyá Nlá*, the performer becomes her.



Figure 4.5: Yoruba Maker(s) of Nigeria. *Pair of Gelede Helmet Masks*. ca. 1850-1950 CE. Pigment on wood, 47 x 35 x 45 cm (right). The British Museum Collection; [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Gelede Helmet Masks prominently feature a calm woman's face with large eyes and markings of status on the cheeks and forehead (probably referencing scarification practices). The most dramatic features of the masks are the projecting scenes of animals and plants. The mask on the left in Figure 4.5 incorporates two brightly patterned snakes on either side of the main head and a projecting stalk of a banana tree. The mask on the right also incorporates two snakes, twisting around the forehead and top of the main head. The heads of these snakes project up towards the hindquarters of a frog, who will be consumed by the snakes. This natural imagery of subsistence crops and powerful animals references the natural power and importance of women in Yoruba society. In particular, the banana stalk imagery helps us to link the head at the base of the mask to *Ìyá Nlá*, because this mask represents the fruiting/childbearing ability of women, which sets them apart from men. Importantly, the performer who wears this mask is always a man whose face is covered by a veil attached to the bottom rim of the mask. The performer takes on the identity of *Ìyá Nlá*.

The festival goers who see men perform as *Ìyá Nlá* (and the other characters of the *Gelede* spectacle) are supposed to learn from *Ìyá Nlá*, as a mother teaches her children, about upstanding moral behavior and good character. The *Gelede* dances are also performed to honor mothers, their ability to procreate, and the power they have to influence society. *Gelede Helmet Mask with Twins* (Fig. 4.6) highlights the significance of procreation that results in multiple births among the Yoruba. Instead of the natural scenes of the masks in Figure 4.5, *Gelede Helmet Mask with Triplets* features a standing mother (possibly *Ìyá Nlá* herself) touching the heads of two sets of triplets. Mothers who have twins or triplets are seen as particularly blessed and fertile, thus demonstrating strong connections to *Ìyá Nlá*. As part of the many divine forces within the Yoruba tradition, *Ìyá Nlá* and the *Òrìṣà* related to women serve important needs in Yoruba communities to procreate and protect future generations.



Figure 4.6: Yoruba Maker(s) of Nigeria. *Gẹlẹdẹ Helmet Mask with Twins*. ca. 1900 CE. Wood, 20 ½ x 11 ½". UTA African Art Collection. Photo by Leighton McWilliams; [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

Vedic traditions of divinity

Vedic deities and divine leaders, including Shiva, Krishna, and Buddha, are often quite recognizable to most people today. Yes, you read that correctly. Shiva, Krishna, and Buddha all relate to the ancient Vedic traditions of the Indian subcontinent. The global religions of Hinduism and Buddhism, with which you are probably more familiar, as well as the lesser known religions of Jainism and Sikhism, derive from the developments of the Vedic period. Let's trace this history of religious development before diving into specific deities.

Between 2000 and 1500 BCE, many peoples were migrating out of Central Asia, probably from the region of the Ural Mountains in present-day southern Russia. These groups all spoke Indo-European languages, from which most European and Western Asian languages derive. If you're interested in language and linguistics, check out [An Introduction to the Indo-European Languages \(Baldi 1983\)](#). The speakers of original Indo-European are generally called Indo-European cultures. From their Central Asian homelands, many of these folks migrated west into present-day Eastern Europe or south to the Mediterranean. Other peoples went southeast to Persia. The group we're interested in for this discussion is the large group of Central Asian migrants, known as the Indo-Iranians or Indo-Aryans, who settled in the Indus River Valley (*Sindh*), spanning present-day Pakistan and northwest India.

The term Indo-Aryan may jump out at you. The term derives from the culture's use of the Sanskrit term *ārya* to describe themselves. 'Aryan' is a word created in the 1850s CE by European scholars to describe this group and distinguish them from the larger category of Indo-European cultures. As you know, 'Aryan' was also used to build an ideology of European racism, focused on the attempts to prove that Europeans were superior to others. Eventually, this racist scholarship influenced the anti-Semitic ideology of the National Socialist Party (Nazi) of Germany and the atrocities of the Holocaust. Nazi ideology was founded in inaccurate and biased understandings of history. The Nazi understanding of Aryan, as pale-skinned, blond-haired, and blue-eyed people of central and northern Europe, does not align at all with what we know of Indo-Aryan migrants to the Indus Valley. This demonstrates how history shapes the present, sometimes in ways that should have been prevented. Many scholars today are still trying to unpack what 'Aryan' is and how it has been used in the past. For example, check out [Romila Thapar's \(2008\) book *The Aryan: Recasting Constructs*](#).

The Indo-Aryan culture entered the Indus River valley to find that a previous culture flourished there but had reduced in population significantly. That original culture is known as the Indus (River) culture (formerly known as Harrapan). Indus peoples are known for building huge urban centers with public infrastructure like sewer systems, as well as ritual bathing facilities. They are also known for their trading systems, which we will discuss in ["What Will I Get Out of It?"](#)

Indo-Aryan migrants encountered the descendants of the Indus culture. Over a long period of contact and cultural merging, Indo-Aryan peoples incorporated elements of the Indus spiritual traditions into their own religious system. This hybrid spiritual tradition started to emerge around 1500-1200 BCE with the oral composition of the *Vedas*, a collection of *mantras* (sacred sayings), songs, ritual instructions, and philosophy in Sanskrit (an Indo-European language, btw). This was the beginning of the Vedic tradition. It is difficult to know what portions of the Vedic tradition derive from the Indus culture or from Indo-Aryan heritage. Scholars suggest that the practices of meditation, yoga, and some deities (or aspects of deities) may derive from the Indus. However the merging played out, most scholars think that the *Vedas* were formally written down around 500 BCE, after the practices and beliefs had been firmly established.

There are several principal gods within the Vedic tradition, including Indra (god of rain, storms, and rivers), Agni (god of fire), and Soma (aka Chandra; god of the Moon, night, and plants). Vedic rituals included sacrifices, veneration of fire and/or trees, and marking important life experiences (birth, marriage, childbirth, death, etc.). In addition, a cosmology (understanding of the physical and metaphysical composition of the world/universe) was developed in the *Upanishads* (one component of the *Vedas*). This cosmology is founded on the oneness of everything. *Ātman* is the self, or soul, that is our individual being/essence. This *Ātman* derives from and is always part of *Brahman*, the infinite and eternal unity that binds everything together. All deities derive from *Brahman*. This cosmological unity is the foundation of the concept of *samsāra* (cyclical rebirth/reincarnation). All *Ātman* derive from *Brahman*, and reintegrate with *Brahman* after the temporary period that we call a lifetime. It is the nature of this relationship that *Ātman* will continually be 'reborn'/emerge from *Brahman* until the *Ātman* can release itself from the cycle of reincarnation. It is through the understanding of the nature of *Brahman* and *Ātman* that *moksha* (release, freedom) can be achieved. This is the ultimate goal of the Vedic spiritual system.

The *Vedas*, particularly the *Rigveda*, also outline the system of *varnas*, commonly known as 'castes' today. This ancient system of differentiating segments of society hierarchically and based on heredity incorporated four broad segments, including (from highest status to lowest): *Brahmin* (priest), *Kshatriya* (nobles/ruler), *Vaishya* (commoner), and *Shudra* (servant) castes. (Hint: Don't confuse *Brahmin* [priest] with *Brahman* [unifying cosmic principle] discussed earlier, or *Brahma* [Hindu deity] discussed later.) You may be aware that another group of people called *Dalit*, commonly called 'Untouchables' in English, segregated from the four castes because of perceptions of behaviors like meat-eating or 'unpure' practices. DISCLAIMER: This is a very short and simple description of a profoundly complex tradition. To learn more, start with [Discovering the Vedas: Origins, Mantras, Rituals, Insights \(Staal 2008\)](#).

Hopefully you have realized already that the Vedic religious system is not the same as Hinduism today. Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and later Sikhism developed out of the ancient Vedic religion. They incorporate many Vedic

concepts, deities, and philosophies and they reject or modify some, too. Hinduism has the strongest links to the Vedic tradition, so we'll start with it.

Between 400 and 200 BCE, another set of religious texts, the *Puranas*, developed alongside several epic Sanskrit poems, including the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. The epic poems focus on heroes and political leaders, including the Bharata Dynasty and Rama, and form the basis of much of the mythology of Hinduism. The *Puranas* were probably written by *Brahmin* priests, the literate, learned knowledge holders of Vedic philosophy. Through their experiences as priests, *Brahmins* learned all the expectations of rituals, were considered ritually pure themselves, and understood the inner workings of deity worship. They knew all the important stories about each deity. In fact, the *Puranas* are primarily stories about deities, with each *Purana* (totaling 18 by most accounts) dedicated to a particular deity. The *Brahmins* held this information as part of their status and duties in society. These new texts form the basis of Brahmanical Hinduism (aka Brahmanism). This early form of Hinduism, derived from Vedic foundations, was maintained for a millennium, with a 'Golden Age' during the Gupta Period (320-650 CE). To learn more about that period, check out [The Gupta Empire \(Mookerji 1989\)](#).

Most textbooks today indicate that there are three primary deities of Hinduism: Vishnu (the preserver/protector), Shiva (the destroyer/procreator), and Brahma (the creator), ignoring the importance of *Shakti* or *Devi*, the goddess, within the tradition. This is a poor simplification of the true nature of modern Hinduism, better referred to as Devotional, or *Bhakti*, Hinduism (in contrast to Brahminical Hinduism). The *Bhakti* movement (ca. 700-1400 CE) encouraged the selection of a single deity for personal worship to achieve *moksha*. There is a strong debate in the scholarship whether the *Bhakti* movement was a rejection of *Brahmin* dominance in Hindu society and a way for non-*Brahmins* to develop divine connections.

Today, the worship of Vishnu (Vaishnavism, including Krishnaism and Ramaism), Shiva (Shaivism), and Shakti (Shaktism) are the most prevalent. The most prominent Hindu deities have many manifestations, or avatars, through which they can anthropomorphically and/or zoomorphically manifest on earth (e.g. Krishna and Rama are manifestations of Vishnu). Devotees typically target their worship to one particular manifestation. Personal devotion to one deity, be it a form of Krishna or Shiva, does not mean that devotees reject the existence and power of other Hindu deities. For example, the *hijra* community discussed in ["Who Am I?"](#) are particularly devoted to one manifestation of Krishna while the primary mythology of *Aravan* also relates to the goddess *Kali* (a form of *Shakti*). In contrast to *Bhakti* Hinduism, the *Smarta* tradition focuses worship on all deities equally.

As an example of a *Bhakti* visual expression, let's look into Shaivism. Devotees to Shiva recognize his cosmically important dual roles of destroying what must be destroyed and procreating anew in the wake of that destruction. He is not just a destroyer, as many pop culture venues suggest. This duality of Shiva is exemplified in *Shiva Nataraja* (Fig. 4.7) from the Chola Dynasty of southern India (Fig. 4.1). You may have encountered this representation of Shiva before, known in English as Shiva 'Lord of the Dance.'



Figure 4.7: Chola Dynasty Maker(s) of Tamil Nadu, India. [Shiva Nataraja](#). 901-1100 CE. Bronze, 27 1/4 × 24 1/4 × 9 1/2 in. Art Institute of Chicago Collection; [CCo Public Domain](#).

Shiva elegantly performs a cosmic dance within a halo of fire. Shiva's supportive leg presses upon a small figure, usually described as a demon in the form of a dwarf who represents ignorance and other negative aspects of the world. Through his dance, Shiva 'stomps' out ignorance, thereby destroying it. Shiva's lifted leg demonstrates his prowess at this dance and in his duties as a cosmic tinkerer. As in many depictions, *Shiva Nataraja* is represented with more than two arms, thus instantly conferring superhuman status to him. Don't you wish you had four arms sometimes?

Shiva's hands are also important. His lower two hands (both at the left of his body) form *mudras*, meaningful hand gestures seen across traditions with Vedic roots. His upper two hands hold items. At the left, Shiva holds a small drum, a reference to the musical beat of his cosmic dance. At the right, Shiva produces a flame, as if lighting the surrounding halo ablaze from his palm. This fire is the demonstration of his procreative aspect. He does not just destroy for the sake of destroying. He remakes the world from what he destroyed. (Shiva is the ultimate recycler!) Shiva's movements in such sculptures are important within the Hindu tradition but have also been influential elsewhere, such as in the art of Auguste Rodin (one of the most celebrated French sculptors). Learn more about Rodin and his interest in Shiva Nataraja

in [Rodin and the Dance of Shiva \(Manochhaya 2016\)](#), including the full text of Rodin's own essay called "[The Dance of Shiva](#)."

Shiva's flowing locks of hair probably catch your eye as well. He is often depicted with dreadlocks to indicate that he lives an ascetic lifestyle, eschewing social life and material comforts (including hair care routines) in favor of self-discipline and meditation. Shiva is the ultimate ascetic within the Hindu tradition. His cave home in the Himalayas is the site of his deep and profound meditations that rejuvenate and bring renewed fertility to the world. We'll consider Shiva and his procreative aspects again in "[Where Do Babies Come From?](#)"

Objects like *Shiva Nataraja* are displayed in shrines and used in festival parades. In these venues, these bronze sculptures do not typically look just as presented in museums or in Figure 4.7. [Check out this photo of how such sculptures transform over time](#). Like the festival object *Aravan God Image in the Koothandavar* (Fig. 3.4), garlands of flowers, leaves, and various floral arrangements are offered as adornments that provide a living and fresh component. These offerings are regularly renewed, each new garland presented as an offering to *Shiva Nataraja* as a demonstration of personal devotion and connection to him.

As the modern photographs of flowers at Hindu shrines and festivals attest, devotional Hinduism is not a thing of the past, but very much part of the present. Devotees of Vaishnavism or Shaivism today are just as devoted as people of the Gupta or Chola eras. Contemporary artists often explore ways to update the imagery of Vishnu or Shiva so that worship doesn't feel stuck in the past. For example, photographer Nandini Valli Muthiah offers captivating contemporary imagery of Vishnu and Krishna in her "The Definitive Reincarnate" and "The Visitor" series.

Muthiah draws inspiration from historical representations of these deities, as well as Bollywood aesthetics, fashion photography, and popular calendars that feature a Hindu deity each month. As journalist [Vaibhav Mathur \(2018, para. 2\)](#) notes in an article about Muthiah's work, these photographs "raise questions about the nature of worship, the relationship of the God to his devotees, and the areas in which celebrity-worship and the worship of deities overlap." This last contemporary notion of celebrity-worship and its effects is exemplified in Muthiah's *Disillusioned 1* from 2010 CE (sketched in Fig. 4.8; [original here](#)). Vishnu's blue skin, typical of the deity, contrasts with the gold adornments he wears and the stark white backdrop of a luxury hotel room. We see an emotional moment where it seems that Vishnu reflects on the burdens of his positions as a deity/celebrity. Muthiah's approach offers a different way for devotees and non-Hindus to view Vishnu, perhaps from a more human perspective. ~~SPANG~~



Figure 4.8: Digital Transformational Sketch by Marizela Garza of the original artwork: Nandini Valli Muthiah from Chennai, India. *Disillusioned 1*. 2010 CE. Digital photo. [View the original artwork here](#) © Nandini Valli Muthiah. Refer to Figure 0.1 to view the transformational sketch process.

As noted above, Hinduism and the Vedic tradition are not the same thing and Hinduism is not the only distinct tradition to emerge from the ancient religious system. Buddhism is probably more familiar to European and Euro-American audiences, though the many different forms of Buddhism thriving today are often conflated. Where Hinduism is seen primarily as a continuation of Vedic traditions, Buddhism is seen as a reaction to and divergence from them. Let's consider the Buddha and his story first, then dive into the tenets of the religion derived from his experience. Watch Asian Art Museum storyteller Leta Bushyhead tell Siddhartha Gautama's (the Buddha's) story in *How a Prince Became the Buddha* (Fig. 4.9).



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://uta.pressbooks.pub/wheredoesartcomefrom/?p=257#oembed-1>

Figure 4.9: [“How a Prince Became the Buddha”](#) uploaded by Asian Art Museum on YouTube (May 8, 2015).

Siddhartha's Shakya clan was part of the *Kshatriya* noble caste of the Brahmanical traditions of the late Vedic period around 500 BCE (the exact date of his birth is uncertain). The city Siddhartha explored was probably Lumbini of present-day Nepal. Investigations in Lumbini found that Vedic tree worship was important during Siddhartha's lifetime, as discussed in [“The earliest Buddhist shrine: excavating the birthplace of the Buddha, Lumbini \(Nepal\)”](#) (Coningham et al. 2013).

Leta describes the *sannyasin* ('seeker of the spirit' through asceticism [non-materialism/self-deprivation]) whom Siddhartha met on his first excursion outside his palace. When Siddhartha chose to leave his noble life to become a *sannyasin* himself, he first practiced an extreme form of asceticism which amounted to severe self-deprivation through starvation, sleep deprivation, and constant meditation. Sculptures such as the [Starving Buddha in the Lahore Museum of Pakistan](#) illustrate this time in Siddhartha's life.

After years of this extreme deprivation, Siddhartha realized this approach was not getting him anywhere. He decided to take food generously offered by local people and settled for a calm meditation beneath a pipal fig tree, also known as the bodhi tree, at a place now known as Bodh Gaya, India. With enough nourishment and a mind calmed from the extreme pressures he endured before, Siddhartha's meditation at Bodh Gaya was deeper than ever. According to the stories, as he meditated Siddhartha was tempted by Mara, a demon in the guise of beautiful women and other excesses. Like in our everyday lives, Siddhartha battled the forces of the material world, what he realized are the causes of our suffering, and overcame them through a calm mind and spirit. This was his enlightenment, under the bodhi tree.

Shakyamuni Buddha (Fig. 4.10) represents this moment of enlightenment, with the Buddha seated in *padmāsana* ('lotus position'; cross-legged with soles of the feet facing the chin). Buddha, like *Shiva Nataraja*, performs *mudras*. One hand is raised in the *abhaya mudra*, signifying reassurance, as if Buddha is saying 'fear not.' His other hand rests near his knee, with fingers pointed down towards the ground. In other examples (like the sculpture behind Leta in *How a Prince Became a Buddha* [Fig. 4.9]), his fingers actually touch the ground. This is the *bhumisparsha mudra*, signifying that Buddha is 'calling the earth [by touching the ground] to witness' his enlightenment. It is also related to the process of subduing Mara, or the personified temptations that we all experience in life and lead to suffering. When you see the *bhumisparsha mudra*, you know the artist is depicting Buddha's moment of enlightenment. At the corner of the sculpture, do you notice the branch of a tree with pointy leaves? That's the bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya!



Figure 4.10: Kushan Period Maker(s) of Mathura, India. [Shakyamuni Buddha](#). ca. 120 CE. Sandstone, 20 ¼". Cleveland Museum of Art Collection; [CCo Public Domain](#).

Popular understandings of the Buddha's life often misconstrue what happened next. Buddha's enlightenment did not immediately result in *nirvana* (the release from suffering and the cycle of rebirth; a concept quite related to the Vedic notion of *moksha*). Scholars reconstruct that Buddha Shakyamuni reached enlightenment in his 30s and then went on to teach his 'Middle Way' to others until he was around 80 years old. He taught moderation between the extremes of starvation and material excesses. He rejected the basic Vedic assumption of *Ātman* and *Brahman*, suggesting that the personal soul and the cosmic soul principle do not exist. He rejected the dictates of the Vedic caste system that offered him more opportunity and creature comforts because he was born a *Kshatriya* and allowed only some to pursue spiritual matters if they happen to be born a *Brahmin*. According to Buddha's teachings, enlightenment and spiritual devotion were open to anyone willing to devote themselves to the 'Middle Way.' Shakyamuni Buddha died of natural causes and upon the moment of his death, he achieved *nirvana*. Eventually, Buddha's teachings were written down and spread into Southeast and East Asia.

Buddhism transformed significantly as it traveled, merging with indigenous spiritual traditions of East Asia and elsewhere. There are now many Buddhas, such as popular images today that feature a large belly and a smiling/

laughing face. This so-called '[Laughing Buddha](#)' does not depict the founder of Buddhism, but is probably inspired by a Chinese monk of the Chan Buddhist tradition (known as Zen Buddhism in Japan). The founder of Buddhism cannot be accurately represented with a smiling face and rotund form. Most traditional representations of Buddha comprise a series of signs, called *lakshanas*, that indicate the figure represented is Shakyamuni. You'll notice many of these in Figure 4.10.

- Elongated but empty earlobes (from all that heavy jewelry he wore as a young man in the palace)
- Ushnisha (bun of hair or cranial bump symbolizing his superior knowledge)
- Urna (mole or 'third eye' between the eyebrows symbolizing his ability to 'see past' the mundane)
- Monk's robe (referencing his choice to become an ascetic)
- Fleshy belly (visualizing his eventual path of moderation including eating enough to be comfortable for meditation)
- Mudras (hand gestures that offer meaning to the viewer, who may or may not have been able to read written inscriptions included on the object)
- Lions, usually present in the surrounding architecture (symbolizing his birth into the Shakya Clan of Kshatriya rulers of Lumbini. 'Shakya' means lion).
- Halo (signifying a special presence)
- Bodhi tree and/or leaves (aka the pipal fig tree under which Buddha reached enlightenment)
- Spoked wheel often seen on the heel or in a footprint (symbol of the cycle of reincarnation and/or 'The Wheel of the Law' of Buddhist doctrine)

Shakyamuni Buddha was made more than 500 years after Shakyamuni Buddha is thought to have lived. Over that time, Buddhist monks, following from Shakyamuni Buddha, were traveling around India and teaching. As religions spread, groups who are receiving the new information need something to grasp onto, something familiar that they can see as a guide post as their beliefs transform. As Buddhist imagery started to develop, artists started incorporating imagery tied to the Vedic religious system and Brahmanical Hinduism to build that familiarity that new converts would be seeking.

One example of this can be found in *Shakyamuni Buddha*. Did you notice the second figure, smaller and positioned behind and to the left of Buddha? That figure is a *Yaksha*, a male-bodied anthropomorphic fertility spirit often paired with a *Yakshi*, a female-bodied fertility spirit. These fertility spirits are ancient Vedic deities often associated with vegetation and fruits that continued into Brahmanical Hinduism. We'll explore *Yakshi* imagery in "[Where Do Babies Come From?](#)" They are often incorporated into the visual representation of Buddha's life as observers of important occasions or as attendants. It is important to note that Shakyamuni Buddha's tenets held that there are no deities or spirits. His philosophy rejected the Vedic tradition of *Ātman* and *Brahman*, from which any divine entity would derive. Thus, later artists who chose to incorporate *Yakshas* or *Yakshis* were doing so not to represent the original Buddhist tradition accurately but to offer familiar imagery to followers of Vedic and Brahmanical Hinduism as Buddhism was spreading. Many scholars think that Vedic *Yakshas* inspired Buddhist *bodhisattvas*, people who have reached enlightenment on earth and choose to delay *nirvana*, to help others reach their own enlightenment. We'll encounter *bodhisattvas* with a distinct manifestation of Buddha in "[What Happens When We Die?](#)"

Divine spaces

This spread of Buddhism led to the rise of distinct traditions based on Shakyamuni Buddha's original teachings but diverging from them to various degrees. One later tradition that remains relatively close to the original teachings is called *Vajrayāna*, or Tantric Buddhism. This is the predominant religion in Tibet today, where it is called Tibetan Buddhism, and traces its roots to the 400s CE in northern India. Tibetan Buddhism has several different sub-traditions, including the *Gelug* school of which the Dalai Lama is the spiritual leader.

The terms tantric or tantra may have (sexual) connotations for you that aren't necessarily reflective of the original ideologies. Tantrism, as applied in both Hinduism and Buddhism, refers to practices and beliefs that focus on the body (such as yogic practice) and attaining enlightenment through attention to one's body, and do not solely relate to sex. In some Tantric traditions, practices focus on the acceptance and overcoming of bodily desires, including hunger, sex, etc. Most importantly, any negative feelings or thoughts that one experiences are not to be banished but to be embraced and transformed according to one's goals. In Tantric Buddhism, all people have a 'Buddha-nature,' a seed out of which enlightenment will sprout if they are able to harness their mind and body towards that goal. *Vajrayāna* means 'the path of the fruit'; one seeks to grow the fruit of enlightenment from the seed within.

Tantric Buddhism is distinct from other forms of Buddhism because it is primarily taught via practice, not reading or listening to group lectures/sermons, and direct student-teacher relationships. A young Tibetan monk will undertake ritual practices in collaboration with a teacher to learn the lessons embedded in these practices. Practices can include *mantras* (repetitive recitations), yoga (including the practice of *mudras*), and *mandala* production. *Mandalas* are symbolic representations often formed via repetitive geometry. As you produce a *mandala*, you contemplate its layers, relationships, and complexities. In Vedic-based traditions, *mandalas* often serve as maps or spatial representations of the universe, including where deities reside. *Mandala* meditation is often seen as a journey through the space one has visualized. You may have encountered the traditions of *mandala* sandpainting.

Figure 4.11 illustrates a *mandala* created from *Tsakalis*, initiation cards from the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. Each card depicts a deity, divine couple (male and female deity pair who are considered paired in the mythology), or spiritual realm. These deities derive from the Vedic tradition and offer a different dimension to Tantric traditions of Buddhism that are not found in the original teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha. The back side of each card features an inscription detailing a particular mindset to be overcome and instructions for *mantras* one should practice while laying the card in the *mandala*.



Figure 4.11: Nepali Maker(s) (commissioned by Tibetan patron). *Tsakalis*. ca. 1400-1450 CE. Opaque watercolor on paper, approx. 6.25 x 5.75" each. The Metropolitan Museum of Art Collection; Public Domain.

As highly portable objects, these cards can be carried while traveling. Thus, they can be used to undertake spiritual practice anywhere. When laid in this pattern and accompanied by the proper *mantras*, a sacred space is created, even where there is no temple. Thus, not only can an already devoted practitioner use these cards for their own personal practice, but they can use them to teach others anywhere they happen to travel by creating a sanctuary for learning. These cards are an example of portable connections to the divine, such as symbolic jewelry or pocket texts, that support devotional and/or meditative practice in all areas of life.

Let's move to examples of established sacred spaces that offer permanent, and often monumental, connections to the divine. The first example, the *Naikū* of Ise, Japan (sketched in Fig. 4.12; [original here](#)), is the innermost shrine of the Ise Temple complex and is dedicated to *Amaterasu*, the *Shintō kami* of the sun, in fact the *Ōmikami*' (most important *kami*). *Shintō* spirituality is focused on the worship of *kami*, non-physical spiritual entities that are primarily related to natural phenomena and elements, such as trees, rivers, astronomical bodies, etc. *Kami* also include honored ancestors. For example, *Amaterasu* is considered the ancestress of the *Yamato* imperial family that eventually came to rule over all of Japan. Because of this human connection, *kami* like *Amaterasu* can be represented in anthropomorphic form. But most

kami are non-physical and not visually represented except when a marker is placed to recognize the presence of a *kami* in the landscape. For example, you may have seen images of large trees in Japan wrapped with impressive ropes and adorned with decorative paper. These shrines develop when natural places are recognized as a *kami* dwelling place. You may have also seen large red gateways in many iconic travel images of Japan. These are *Shintō torii* that represent a transition from mundane to sacred space, occupied by *kami*.

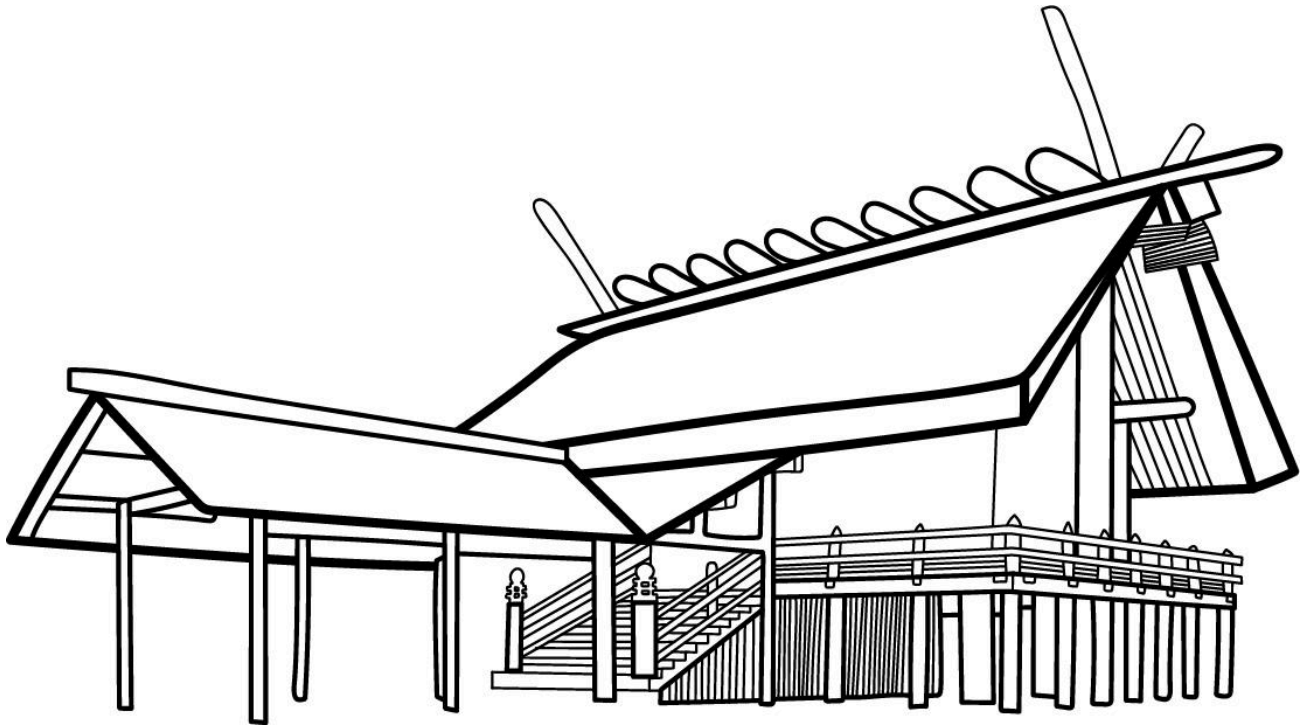


Figure 4.12: Digital Transformational Sketch by Marizela Garza of the original artwork: Japanese Makers at Ise, Japan. Naikū shrine. 2013 CE. In situ. [View the original artwork here](#). Refer to Figure 0.1 to view the transformational sketch process.

The *Naikū* shrine comprises an entrance *torii* that offers access to a rectangular complex. The complex is sparsely designed with only three buildings. The largest is the abode of *Amaterasu* and the others store precious items and offerings provided to her by *Shintō* priests. The architecture of these structures reflects an ancient tradition of building in Japan and the very foundation of sustenance: rice agriculture. Each *Naikū* structure resembles a traditional rice barn, elevated off the ground and protected with a large thatch roof to reduce the infiltration of moisture to the crop.

But the *Naikū* buildings certainly don't look like any old barn! They feature a ceremonial style inspired by the types of building associated with the very mundane, but incredibly important, labor of rice farming. Without rice, no one eats well. Without the sun, there are no rice plants. Thus, rice agriculture has a direct tie to *Amaterasu*. Along these lines, it is also significant that the abode of *Amaterasu* is designed with the uppermost components of the roof covered in gold. This gold brilliantly reflects the sun and thus ensures that *Amaterasu* is at the forefront of our minds as we consider this structure and its surroundings.

There are many rituals associated with *Amaterasu's Naikū* shrine, including the daily offering of rice at the door of her abode. These rituals are only undertaken by high-ranking priests. And only the imperial family, *Amaterasu's* descendants, can ever see inside the shrine. As legend has it, the *Yata no Kagami* (Sacred Mirror) is housed in the

shrine. This mirror played a role in the mythology of *Amaterasu*, luring her out of a cave, and thus bringing sunlight to the world.

One of the most unique rituals that occurs at Ise includes the *Naikū* shrine, neighboring *Gekū* shrine, and the nearby *Uji Bridge*. *Shintō* is founded on the concept of death and renewal, constant change (a lesson learned from all those nature *kami*), and therefore, impermanence. This means that the *Shintō* approach to architecture is quite distinct to traditions that prioritize permanence and choose to build out of long-lasting materials like stone. *Shintō* architectural tradition dictates that instead of long-standing, and decaying, architecture, the most important buildings must be renewed to honor the deities they serve. That's the more spiritual explanation of the ritual. A more political explanation relates to the imperial family. Having the resources and power to have your ancestral shrine renewed on a regular basis (even though the old one could last much, much longer) demonstrates a great deal of political authority. Both explanations can be true simultaneously.

This goal of rebuilding is achieved through the *Shikinen Sengū*, whereby the two primary shrine complexes and the bridge are rebuilt every 20 years. Importantly, [they are not rebuilt directly over the previous one, but in an adjacent enclosure](#). The new shrine is built right next door to the old shrine over the last 8 years of the 20-year cycle. During this time, the old shrine continues to serve the *kami*. Once the new shrine is complete, the final *Shikinen Sengū* ritual can take place, moving *Amaterasu* from her old shrine to the new shrine. This ritual is undertaken with the utmost respect and secrecy. Many artists have depicted portions of this ceremony, as in *Ise Daijingu sengyo no zu* (伊勢太神宮遷御之図) (Fig. 4.13).



Figure 4.13: Utagawa Kuniyoshi of Japan. [Ise Daijingu sengyo no zu](#) (伊勢太神宮遷御之図; [Depiction of the Relocation of the Grand Shrine of Ise](#)). 1847-1852 CE. Woodblock print, 25.1 x 37.2 cm. The British Museum Collection; [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Scholars think that the *Shikinen Sengū* 20-year cycle began around 690 CE. It continues to this day, with the most recent rebuilding completed in 2013 CE. The next 8-year construction process will begin in 2025 CE. The connection to *kami* in Japan is strong, even though foreign-derived religions such as Buddhism and Christianity have become popular. Many contemporary Japanese people, no matter their faith, visit *Shintō* shrines on special occasions, seeking connections to the natural divinities of Japan.

The idea of non-physical deities is not unique to *Shintō*. In fact, one of the primary tenets of Islam is that *Allah* (God) cannot and should not be represented in human-form, or in any form. Further, the Islamic Prophet Muhammad is not supposed to be represented anthropomorphically, though some Islamic traditions do not necessarily follow this prescription. The non-physical nature of *Allah* derives from the fact that he is defined as so far beyond human and what humans can imagine that it would be impossible to represent him effectively. The prohibition against depicting *Allah* and Prophet Muhammad, referred to as aniconism (a non-figural approach to art) by scholars, extends to a prohibition against human or animal representations in the sacred spaces of Islam.

This aniconistic approach only applies to *masjids* (mosques), tombs/mausoleums, and *madrasas* (schools) attached to *masjids*. The prohibition of such imagery is described clearly in the Qur'an and Hadith, centering on the rejection of any attempts to imitate *Allah*'s creation or compete with his mighty abilities. Whether a grand royal edifice or humble community space, the *masjid* is a place for reflection, personal devotion, and attention to *Allah*. Similarly, tombs and *madrasas* (focused on religious teaching) are spaces meant to honor those who have passed and the teachings of *Allah* and the Prophet Muhammed.

These spiritual tenets related to imagery and design have meant that Islamic art has focused on architectural design, space, form, geometry and monumentality as opposed to figural decoration. As an example, one of the most iconic *masjids* in the world today is *Hagia Sophia* (Fig. 4.14) in Istanbul, Turkey. This structure was originally built in 537 CE as a Byzantine cathedral of Constantinople. In 1453 CE, the Ottoman Empire captured Constantinople from the Byzantines, renamed the city Istanbul, and converted *Hagia Sophia* into a *masjid*. This conversion required the building of minarets (towers used to announce the five daily calls to prayer), four on each corner of the complex that was also expanded to include a large *sahn* (courtyard), *madrasa*, and *suq* (marketplace).



Figure 4.14: Byzantine and Ottoman Period Makers of Constantinople/Istanbul, Turkey. *Hagia Sophia*. 537 – 1500 CE. In situ. Photo by Arild Vagen; [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

A larger transformation occurred inside *Hagia Sophia*. The Byzantines had decorated the spacious interior with elaborate mosaics, such as *The Imperial Gate mosaic* (Fig. 4.15), focused on the figural traditions of Christian arts. The central figure is Jesus Christ, particularly the Christ Pantocrator depiction, who is enthroned and being honored by a kneeling emperor, probably Leo VI or Constantine VII. Jesus holds a book facing the viewer with an inscription of several short biblical phrases including “Peace be with you.” Other Christian deities are depicted anthropomorphically here and throughout the Byzantine mosaics of *Hagia Sophia*, including the Virgin Mary and the Archangel Gabriel.



Figure 4.15: Byzantine Makers of Constantinople/Istanbul, Turkey. [Hagia Sophia Imperial Gate mosaic](#). ca. 800-900 CE. In situ. Photo by Maksym Kozlenko; [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

Given the Islamic focus on aniconistic imagery, when *Hagia Sophia* was converted to a *masjid*, new interior non-figural decoration was required. Mosaics like that in Figure 4.15 were plastered and painted over with decorations typical of *masjid* interiors. Figure 4.16 illustrates how the main domed space of *Hagia Sophia* looks today, including geometric, *arabesque* (curvilinear floral patterns), and calligraphic ornamentation. The large roundels attached to the massive pillars that support the dome offer beautifully designed calligraphic inscriptions of the name of *Allah* (center), the Prophet Muhammad (left), and Abu Bakr (right; the first *caliph* [“successor” / rightful political leader] to succeed the Prophet Muhammad after his death). Calligraphy and geometric patterning are some of the most common decorative motifs employed in *masjid* decoration. Designers create entrancing and awe-inspiring ornamentation that inspires the worshipper to think beyond the physical, to the world of the divine. Calligraphy is the most important form of decoration in sacred Islamic spaces. We’ll explore smaller-scale calligraphy in [“What is Beautiful?”](#)



Figure 4.16: Ottoman Makers of Istanbul, Turkey. [Hagia Sophia interior](#). ca. 1450-1500 CE. In situ. Photo by Rabe!; [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

The prohibition against figural imagery in spaces such as *Hagia Sophia* and other *masjids* does not extend to secular spaces, such as family homes, marketplaces, and palaces. The art produced in some regions of the Islamic world, such as Ottoman Turkey, incorporates a rich history of figural imagery, especially that produced by royal and elite workshops. We'll encounter several examples of figural arts produced for Muslim audiences beyond Istanbul as well as awe-inspiring non-figural arts in the chapters to come.

The Wrap-up

Hopefully, this chapter offered some interesting insights into how cultures around the world consider the divine. These insights do not need to influence your own vision of the divine but should be respected. Every human being and every culture has their own way of seeing the world. As you explore more about "What is Divine?" consider the resources from the wide world of popular media and scholarly literature below.

News Flash

- Check out the [Hagia Sofia Cats Instagram](#), documenting the cats living around the complex! Thanks to student Erika for sharing this one!!

- Check out the video game called [Overwatch to find and play with a character called Orisa](#), inspired by Nigerian Yoruba traditions! Thanks to student Allie for sharing this one!
- Disney created a film called [“The Road to El Dorado”](#) based on the El Dorado Spanish myths. Check it out but take it with a grain of salt!
- Clover Studios and Capcom produced [a video game called “Okami”](#) loosely based on the Shintō tradition and featuring the character of Amaterasu. It’s fun but take it with a grain of salt, too!
- The [video game “Animal Crossing: New Horizons”](#) incorporates several art history references, including an Olmec colossal head that shares several features with the Adze of Divine Figure.
- Tibetan Buddhism is featured in the Hollywood film [“Seven Years in Tibet”](#) from 1997.
- Watch [Tibetan monks create a sandpainting in a video](#) from the Crow Collection of Asian Art in Dallas, Texas.

Where Do I Go From Here? / The Bibliography

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5. What Is Beautiful?



Figure 5.1: Map and timeline of artworks discussed in “What is Beautiful?” by Marizela Garza. Review image captions below for details about each artwork and copyright information.

What is beautiful?

What do you think is beautiful? Many of us may respond, beauty is in the eye of the beholder, as the old saying goes. As we discussed in [“Who Am I?”](#), ‘the eye of the beholder’ is another way of thinking about the ‘theory of mind.’ One beholder thinks differently than another beholder. When thoughts, values, and perspectives on the world are very common within cultural groups, we call them norms. Norms about beauty are the idealizations and expectations of how people should look in a society: what ‘good looks’ are. BTW, we’re focused on beauty norms for physical appearance but they also relate to aesthetic qualities of things, which we’ll come to later in the chapter.

Beauty norms or ideals for women often relate to facial and body features. Preferred characteristics become a shorthand for femininity. There are also cultural norms that reflect ideals for the appearance of men and masculinity. For example, if you went through an European or Euro-American educational system, it is very likely that you encountered imagery like [Bust of a Youth by Francesco Mochi](#) from 1630-1640 CE. Artworks like this are often used to illustrate primary school textbooks or public flyers because they exude many of the beauty norms of European and Euro-American societies. This marble sculpture represents a young man with lush curly hair, a symmetrical face, straight nose, plump cheeks, large open eyes, parted full lips, and strong chin in clean, polished white marble. With skill and precision, Mochi captured a portrait of a classically beautiful young man, according to long-established beauty ideals of the Western Canon.

But, Mochi and other artists of the Renaissance and Baroque periods misunderstood something about Greek sculpture... it wasn't ever meant to be seen as bare white marble. It was lavishly painted with bright colors! Check out some examples reconstructed by scholars in ["When the Parthenon had dazzling colours" \(Haynes 2018\)](#). Following from what Renaissance artists thought were Greco-Roman traditions, European beauty ideals often coalesced around qualities such as light complexion, facial symmetry, and straight noses. White marble came to offer an aura of 'whiteness' and normalized the relationship of whiteness to purity in the Western Canon and ideals of beauty.

Such images and expected ways of representation reflect how people view others in their society. We all know that people look different and the vast majority of people in any culture do not 'fit the mold' of beauty ideals. Yet, we continue to set store by them. These ideals influence art and they become shorthand for not just good looks but 'goodness' in a society, as the discussion about the term "classical" in ["Where Does Art Come From? An Introduction"](#) demonstrates. What about global arts that do not fit the mold of classical beauty but focus on unique traditions developed without reference to 'the classics' of the Western Canon? This is one of the ways that art history has to reflect upon its biases. In this study of art, we are taking a global perspective and so must affirm the 'theory of mind of cultures' and be aware of the ways that beauty (as well as gender, sexuality, etc.) is relative.

Beauty is relative

For example, let's take a trip to Tang Dynasty China (Fig. 5.1). Like in many periods of ancient China, people wanted to be buried in style. We'll talk more about this in ["What happens when we die?"](#) Burials during the Tang Dynasty often included painted ceramic objects representing the types of things and people you wanted to populate your afterlife. *Equestrienne* (Fig. 5.2) (a French term applied to a Chinese artwork) represents a fancy lady on a fancy horse, indicating the companions that the deceased person buried with this object expected in the afterlife. We'll be talking about the importance of horses in Chinese culture later. For now, let's focus on this lovely lady.



Figure 5.2: Tang Dynasty Maker(s) of China. [Equestrienne](#). ca. 725-750 CE. Earthenware with polychrome pigments. Art Institute of Chicago Collection; [CCo Public Domain](#).

She delicately leans forward upon the saddle, originally holding reins in her clasped hands. You've probably noticed her hair already. A voluminous up-do appears to be intentionally floppy and soft. Next, we focus on her face, a soft expression upon round cheeks and a plump chin. Her skin is pale, almost white. Then, viewing her flowing red robe, we notice delicate hands against a heavy-set frame, carrying weight in the belly and thighs. If you look closely, you also will notice her fashionable shoe inserted into the stirrup. *Equestrienne* probably sported red-rouged cheeks in its original state, emphasizing the weight of her face. Unfortunately, paint is often lost when objects are buried for long periods.

This lady is a large woman, not skinny as the European and Euro-American stereotypes of women of Asian descent assume, and she is presented with elegance and prestige. This representation reflects women's beauty ideals during the early Tang Dynasty. In studies like ["Chinese Palace-Style Poetry and the Depiction of a Palace Beauty" \(Laing 1990\)](#), we find that Tang court ladies carried weight and weren't shy about showing it off. Scholars suggest that these ideals can be

attributed to a trend-setter known as Yang Guifei (meaning ‘Imperial Consort Yang’ but probably named Yang Yuhuan). Yang Guifei was the favorite consort of the aging Emperor Xuanzong. He was enraptured with her voluptuous figure, pale skin, and bold fashion choices.

One of Yang’s bold choice is understood through a story about an event at court. The story goes that Yang riding horses with other courtesans and attendants. By accident, she fell off the horse and the combs that kept her hair in a controlled bun also fell. With grace and pose, Yang regained her seat on the horse allowing her loosened bun and hair to flow around her face, framing her plumb cheeks and chin. This hairstyle received its own name: *duomaji*, literally “falling off the horse bun.” Through this storied experience and many others, including sacrificing herself for the Emperor, Yang Guifei set new standards for beauty and body type ideals.

The ‘whiteness’ of Yang’s skin was an important aspect of her beauty, but did not derive from assimilation of European norms (since there was only very distant knowledge of each other between China and Europe at this time). The ideal of pale skin tone for women in China developed independently, as a marker of their sheltered and elite lives. Elite women did not labor or toil, thus their skin was unaffected by the sun.

At around the same time Yang Guifei was shaking things up in Tang China, across the Pacific in what we now call the Americas, the cultures living around the Gulf Coast of Mexico (Fig. 5.1) also produced funerary objects representing women but focused on their own ideals of beauty. These cultures, like the Nopiloa and Totonac, lived in the Gulf Coast region well after the Olmec culture transitioned into other traditions. These cultures lived contemporaneously to the Classic Maya to the east.

Figure of a Woman in Ceremonial Dress (Fig. 5.3) is also made of ceramic but features a standing or seated woman wearing the finery befitting ritual events in her culture. She wears a [huipil](#)-like woven garment featuring a stepped-fret pattern (shapes with edges that resemble the geometric profile of a staircase), defined borders, and potentially hieroglyphic symbols on the sleeves. Imagine the color and texture of this intricate woven garment! She wears adornments such as a large beaded necklace, beaded bracelets, ear flares, and a headband with horn-like projections. The texture of her hair was carefully incised into the clay surface, accentuating a hairstyle commonly seen in this region: center-parted bangs. Her face is sensitively rendered with open eyes, parted lips making teeth visible, and full cheeks as if slightly tensed in a small smile. Scholars often note that figures from this region offer very expressive faces and charming demeanors, unlike typical depictions of sedate and/or neutral faces elsewhere. The artist employed selective naturalism, depicting her face with strong realism while abstracting her hands and lower body.



Figure 5.3: Totonac or Nopiloa Maker(s) of Veracruz, Mexico. [Woman in Ceremonial Dress](#). 700-900 CE. Ceramic. Art Institute of Chicago Collection; [CCo Public Domain](#).

Given the adornments she wears, this woman obviously represents a position of prestige in her society. Her features communicate strength and power, complemented by the stability of her slightly forward-leaning form. Her identity is one of feminine status normalized in ancient Gulf Coast cultures. As a funerary object, this womanly representation would accompany the deceased in death, probably elevating the deceased's position in the afterlife. Thus, this figure's identity has an active purpose within this cultural worldview: to make the afterlife better. Like *Equestrienne* inspired by Yang Guifei, this proud woman of ancient Mexico demonstrates the significance of women's identities in the past.

Over 1000 years later in Edo period Japan, artists created images of beautiful women, representing the unique ideals of Japanese society. *The Courtesan Komurasaki of the Tamaya* (Fig. 5.4) by Kitagawa Utamaro is a *hashira-e*, or 'pillar print,' produced using woodblock printing for very long and narrow proportions. To learn about the woodblock process, check out [Japanese Woodblock Printing \(Salter 2001\)](#). Such artworks would be perfect for hanging on a pillar in one's home. The star of this *hashira-e* is a woman in an elaborate, multi-layered robe. She wears a complex hairstyle with ornamental pins and tortoiseshell combs, akin to the *yoko hyōgo* ("butterfly") style. Komurasaki has a flawlessly pale complexion with diminutive facial features and a delicate hand cupping her chin. Utamaro's composition accentuates the elongated profile of her face and neck. Differing stroke sizes used to render the facial features, hair, and the garments reflect the original painting choices and the skill of the woodblock carver to replicate that painterly variation in a different medium. These talents of the print designer and woodblock carver (not to mention the printer that ensured the many layers of color and pattern were executed well) combine to visually articulate the remarkable beauty of this woman.



Figure 5.4: Kitagawa Utamaro 喜多川 歌麿 of Japan. [The Courtesan Komurasaki of the Tamaya](#). 1796-1806 CE. Color woodblock print. Art Institute of Chicago Collection; [CCo Public Domain](#).

We know the name of this woman from the calligraphy at the top of the print. On the right, we can read her name and title. (On the left, the artist/designer Utamaro signed his name.) Komurasaki was a famous *yobidashi* (“on call”) courtesan associated with the Tamaya brothel in the New Yoshiwara pleasure quarter of Edo (present-day Tokyo; Fig. 5.1). Visitors could only seek her services by making an appointment with the Tamayo teahouse, one of the most prestigious establishments where samurai, merchants, and intellectuals sought entertainment. Women like Komurasaki were considered the height of beauty in their day. The frequency of her depiction is testament to this. **SPANG**

Such celebrity portraits were part of the Edo culture’s *ukiyo-e* tradition. Literally meaning “pictures of the floating world,” *ukiyo-e* spanned landscape imagery, portraiture, narrative illustration, and erotica. In fact, many scholars trace the developments of contemporary *manga* and *anime* back to the surge of *ukiyo-e* in the Edo period. Check out [Hokusai x Manga: Japanese Pop Culture since 1680 \(Schulze et al. 2017\)](#) from more. In Edo, famous beauties, exuding the feminine presence and sexuality normalized for courtesans in Japanese society, offered the growing middle class an escape into

'the floating world' of social leisure. While some activities associated with pleasure quarters and *ukiyo-e* traditions were criminalized, many Edo people, including elites and royalty, refreshed themselves in their delights.

Superhuman beauty

Edo courtesans of Japan represented the epitome of the 'earthly delights' found in pleasure quarters of that time. Beauty also can emanate from non-earthly or superhuman sources, the divine and spiritual realms that impact many human societies. In southeastern Nigeria, Igbo peoples represent 'the feminine' in a performance centered on *Agbogho-mmuo* (literally "maiden spirit"), the divine and ultimate picture of womanhood. Figure 5.5 illustrates two examples of *Agbogho-mmuo* Masks. On the left, the larger mask is worn to conceal the dancer's head entirely while the small mask (right) would primarily conceal the dancer's face. The larger mask incorporates an exquisitely crafted *coiffure* (fancy hairstyle with adornments), accentuated by polychrome (multi-colored) paint. Both masks feature a similar face, with a prominent straight nose that connects the broad forehead to the large, slightly open mouth and accentuated chin. While her eyes are small in proportion, they are open and highlighted by the black curving diagonal lines that form an artistic "X" shape across her face. Her skin is white indicating her spiritual status, not an Igbo ideal of human skin tone. In the larger example, her supernatural complexion contrasts with black curls at her hairline and ascending curlicues then sweep the eye into her elaborate headdress of folding forms, and potentially some anthropomorphic elements. The patterned fabric at the base of the larger mask balances the detail of the *coiffure* and hides the dancer from view, enhancing the sense that divine *Agbogho-mmuo* is among mortals during a performance. The smaller mask was probably worn with similar fabrics to conceal the dancers. Dancers also wear a series of highly patterned garments to represent *Agbogho-mmuo*'s specialness. [Check out this historic photograph to see an example.](#)



Figure 5.5: Igbo Maker(s) of Nigeria. *Two types of Agbogho Mmuo Masks*. 1900-1950 CE. Wood, fabric, pigment. Art Institute of Chicago Collection ([left](#)) [CCo Public Domain](#); UTA African Art Collection ([right](#)) [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

Agbogho-mmuo can represent femininity at all ages, though young women are most associated with this tradition (i.e. ‘maiden’ called out specifically in the spirit’s name). Nigerian-born Professor of English and Women’s Studies at Wichita State University, Dr. Chinyere G. Okafor enumerates the many qualities ascribed to the feminine identity in Igbo society: “communal, moral, good body shape and features, nurturing, gentle, vigorous, and dynamic” (Okafor 2007, 40). In public performances, *Agbogho-mmuo* entertains and instructs. The performance demonstrates what Igbo women should be from a divine authority, visualizing the sought-for identity of Igbo womanhood. Some Igbo groups prefer the *Ijele* masquerading tradition, focused on grandeur and excess (as in economic success) to reflect the scale of women’s roles in society. *Ijele* masks are known to tower over houses as they move through a village! Both *Agbogho-mmuo* and *Ijele* masquerades are spectacles celebrating Igbo women’s identity and beauty, from many angles. To consider many other examples of native African beauty ideals, check out the book [The Language of Beauty in Africa Art \(Petridis 2022\)](#) or visit the [exhibition by the same name on view at the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, Texas, from April to July 2022](#).

In another way, artists of the Sukhothai Kingdom in ancient Thailand produced images of the most important divine figure within their cultural canon, Buddha, following guidelines about Buddha’s superhumanity. The Sukhothai people were devout Buddhists, taking up the religion after learning from Sri Lankan traveling monks. After about the 600s CE, Sri Lanka, unlike mainland India, sustained a large Buddhist population who were often on the move in Southeast Asia.

As discussed in [“What is Divine?”](#), the spread of Buddhism often inspired artists to incorporate pre-existing symbols to make images familiar to new groups. This also meant that pre-existing spiritual systems could merge with Buddhism, to form hybrid traditions. For example, new traditions developed that saw Buddha not just as a mortal man who reached enlightenment but as a divine figure like a god. We will explore one example of this in [“What Happens When We Die?”](#)

For now, we should consider how Sukhothai artists of Thailand (Fig. 5.1) chose to represent Buddha, according to their norms and historical conventions. Remember back to the traditional images of Buddha in [“What is Divine?”](#) Sukhothai artists produced sculptures like *Walking Buddha* (Fig. 5.6), distinct from that Indian imagery. Why are the Sukhothai examples unique? Firstly, Sukhothai rulers became very interested in the stories of Buddha walking around India teaching his message. The kings equated this practice with the way they ‘walked among their people’ seeing to the needs of the common man. This came in contrast to Sukhothai rivals, the Khmer rulers of present-day Cambodia, who the Sukhothai leaders considered to be very distant from their subjects. Thus, Sukhothai Buddhas are often portrayed walking versus sitting.

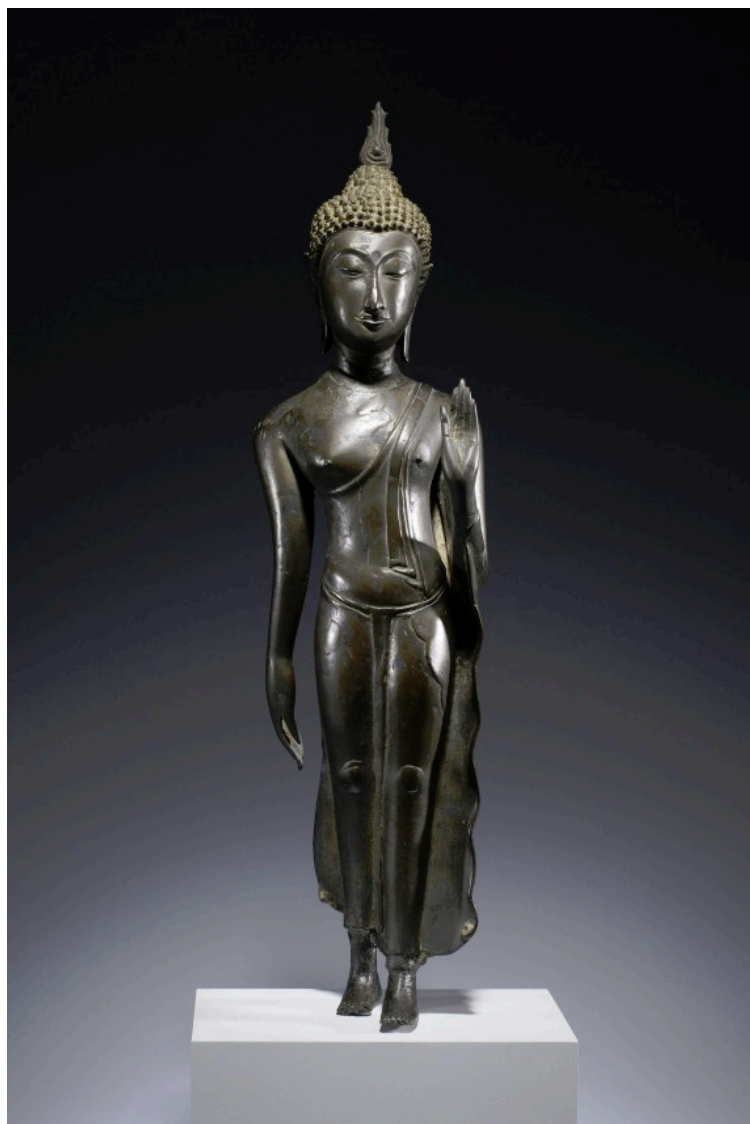


Figure 5.6: Sukhothai Period Maker(s) of Thailand. [Walking Buddha](#). 1400s CE. Brass. The Walters Art Museum Collection; [CCo Public Domain](#).

Perhaps more importantly, Sukhothai artists worked from the “signs of a great man” described in the Pali canon of Buddhist texts. Beyond the *lakshanas* listed in [“What is Divine?”](#), Buddha had 32 primary and 80 secondary signs of greatness including “long, slender fingers,” “thighs like a royal stag,” soft, smooth skin,” “well-retracted male organ,” “ears ... long like lotus petals,” and “arms ... shaped like an elephant’s trunk.” These poetic reflections upon the Buddha’s image render his physical identity beautiful, complementing his spiritual beauty. To consider these ideals more, check out [“Visualizing the Evolution of the Sukhothai Buddha”](#) (Wisetchat 2013).

Can you recognize such traits in *Walking Buddha*? In bronze, Buddha’s skin is supple and smooth. The robe he wears clings to his form, enhancing this quality of softness. Do you notice the elephant trunk arm? His curving right limb follows the contour of his body and ends in long fingers almost reaching to his knee. His left hand, with slender fingers, is raised in the *abhaya mudra*, presenting a message to the viewer as if he is saying ‘don’t fear’ and ‘take reassurance from my presence.’ The curving quality of his arm is mirrored in the curvature of his very extended earlobes, a sign of the early life of material delights he left behind. Buddha’s thighs are accentuated with roundness. In addition, as Buddhist scripture codified, Buddha does not have a prominent penis or pelvic bulge. Sexuality and/or gender are not really relevant to the Buddha. While we use the pronoun “he” to describe Buddha, he transcended gender and sexuality through his enlightenment. Sukhothai artists accentuated this transcendent quality of Buddha by developing figures that appear androgynous (sex and/or gender is indeterminate; often intentionally when seen in art). In the Thai Buddhist tradition, Buddha is divine and thus not beholden to the norms of gendered identities of mere mortals.

Beauty ignored

Over time, many critical thinkers have questioned whether beauty norms and ideals are ‘a good thing.’ For example, we can ask whether Barbie’ dolls offer young girls realistic expectations for their appearance? Furthermore, many artists associated with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Queer, Intersex (LGBTQI+) communities question why beauty ideals and norms about appearance exist. How do such norms affect us as we mature? Do we have to conform to them? What happens if we don’t conform? One contemporary artist wrestling with these very questions is South African photographer Zanele Muholi (an individual who does not use gendered pronouns such as he or she) (Fig. 5.1).

Muholi is a queer “visual activist” exploring why the beauty of people of color and people with non-conforming gender/sexuality identities are not normalized. Muholi captures self-portraits using dress and applied objects, creating raw images of personhood and challenges to norms of fashion, portraiture, and identity. In [Bester I. Mayotte](#) (sketched in Fig. 5.7; [original here](#)), Muholi created a self-portrait using lighting to spotlight their face with dark complexion contrasting white highlighted lips and eyes. Their face is framed by a coiffure of wooden clothespins, which also serve as earrings and secure a woven rug garment at their chest. The backdrop offers a fuzzy amorphous texture to the photograph, contrasting with the sharp focus and clarity of Muholi’s figure.



Figure 5.7: Digital Transformational Sketch by Marizela Garza of the original artwork: Zanele Muholi from South Africa. *Bester I, Mayotte*. 2015 CE. Digital photo. Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town/Johannesburg, and Yancey Richardson Gallery, New York. [View the original artwork here](#) (Fig. 2) © Zanele Muholi. Refer to Figure 0.1 to view the transformational sketch process.

This figure reflects a stereotypical European and Euro-American perception of African women's identity: the 'tribal' woman with eccentric adornments. Like African or tribal prints challenged by Yinka Shonibare in "[Who Am I?](#)", this stereotype is embedded with negative connotations of primitiveness, mental simplicity, and, sometimes, 'savagery.' Muholi composed this self-portrait very intentionally. As an African female-bodied individual, Muholi knows how global culture views African women. Muholi presents this stereotype as a bold challenge to its perpetrators, including Black people around the world. Muholi's images ask Black people to consider what these stereotypes mean in their lives and how to change them.

In addition to motivations of global social activism, Muholi's series from which *Bester I, Mayotte* derives also comes with personal context. Bester was the name of Muholi's mother. Bester was a domestic worker, often using clothespins and cleaning rugs. During Bester's lifetime, being a black-skinned woman in South Africa was never easy. Until the early 1990s CE, South African society was ruled by the policy of *Apartheid* (literally "aparthood" in the Afrikaans language),

segregating indigenous African people (of many different cultures), 'Coloured' people (a legal term describing people of mixed ancestry), Indian people (often descendants of slaves/servants from eastern regions), and white people with European heritage (mainly British and Dutch). The populations outside the realm of "whiteness" were oppressed and considered not deserving of the same rights, governed by the minority white supremacist group of European colonizers.

Like during the segregation-era in the US, atrocities of discrimination and violence were perpetrated against all groups not seen to conform with white 'rightness.' Bester Muholi lived in a world that often ignored her free will, negated her beauty by normalizing opposite qualities, and reduced her opportunities. Furthermore, people with non-conforming gender identities like Zanele Muholi did not fare well during Apartheid. In 1994 CE, when South Africa passed large-scale human rights legislation ending Apartheid, they were the first country to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation, recognizing various dimensions of sexuality and gender. While these laws were officially set in place, South African society did not transform overnight. Zanele Muholi continued to face similar discrimination as Bester did during Apartheid, along with prejudice against LGBTQI+ sexualities. Today, Muholi uses an artist's voice to bring awareness to the identities of those that have been and continue to be oppressed, giving face to movements that actively seek equality.

Material beauty and beyond

Ideals of human appearance, whether for us mortals or for the divine, often greatly impact lives. In addition, ideals of beauty beyond the human impact how cultures view the world around them, how they create art, and what they value. One artistic practice that exemplifies this grand scale of beauty is calligraphy (fancy writing) in traditions associated with Islam. Let's consider a Safavid Period *Qur'an Manuscript Folio* (Fig. 5.8) from present-day Iran (see Fig. 5.1).

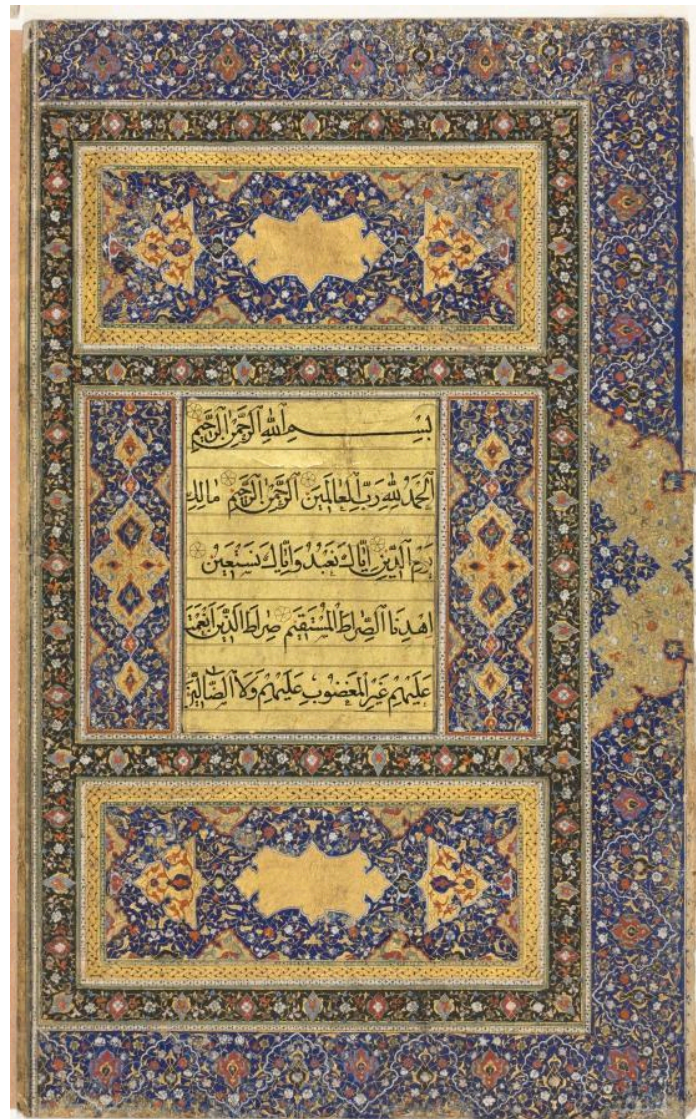


Figure 5.8: Safavid Period Maker(s) of Herat, Iran (modern-day Afghanistan). [Qur'an Manuscript Folio](#). 1500s CE. Ink, gold, and colors on paper. The Cleveland Museum of Art Collection; [CCo Public Domain](#).

Manuscript folios are pages in books that oftentimes have been dismantled and/or disarticulated over time. This folio comes from an immensely decorative version of the *Qur'an*, employing the technique of illumination (use of gold-leaf to add luster). This single page would have served as one half of a two-page spread at the very beginning of the manuscript. In fact, this part of any *Qur'an* is the most decorated part and sometimes the only portion of a *Qur'anic* manuscript with decoration, other than expertly applied calligraphic writing. The balanced, multi-layered borders and box insets on this page create a maze-like effect. These visual mazes are full of polychrome floral and geometric patterns, characteristics of holy arts in Islam. The blue and gold complementary color scheme is a traditional choice while the accent colors of reds, greens, and neutrals add dynamism.

The star of this show is the centered box of Arabic text, written in formal *naskh* calligraphic script and read right to left. Each letter was formed meticulously using a *qalam* (reed stylus) according to a system of proportions based on diamond-shaped dots, known as *nuqta*. *Nuqta* are only guides and are not inked in final products. The small dots and linear marks around and at the top of the letter forms, known as diacritics, enhance readability and add visual interest. Those of you who have studied text design will probably spot that this text block is justified, meaning aligned to the starting

right margin and then spaced to end neatly at the left margin (remember, Arabic is read right to left). Text justification produces geometric blocks of text but often includes irregular spacing, such as the elongated horizontal letter on the right of the first line. This adds emphasis and interest, inviting the reader into this holy *Qur'an*. Check out "[Quantifying the Qur'an](#)" (Brey 2013) for a unique analysis focused on the proportional standards of *Qur'anic* manuscripts.

Among the artists involved in creating this manuscript, the calligrapher would have been the most important. The production of such exquisite *Qur'anic* manuscripts typically took place in royal workshops attached to the Safavid and other courts. Design directors, calligraphers, illustrators, and paper makers collaborated in these workshops. These were places of prestige where the rendering of beautiful text held the most value. It is difficult to understand the fundamental importance of calligraphy in Islam if you do not consider *Qur'anic* scripture itself. In *surah* (chapter) 96 of the *Qur'an*, we find this: "Recite in the name of your Lord who created... Who taught by the pen. Taught men that which he knew not." It is said that *Allah* speaks to the pen and orders it to write. In this way, there is a spiritual nature to writing and the art of the pen in the earliest periods of Islamic history. This prominence continues to this day. Calligraphy is taught in *madrasas* (colleges attached to mosques). People who practice calligraphy see it as a religious pursuit that allows them to follow the path of sacredness and purity. In fact, there is an Arabic proverb that translates to "purity of writing is purity of soul."

All beautiful *Qur'an* manuscripts are not just produced for their beauty, they are produced as functional objects for people to read. Admittedly, some calligraphy is quite difficult to read (when the aesthetic value is prioritized) but all-in-all *Qur'ans* are for reading and reciting. In many traditions there are objects that are both pretty and functional. Let's look at another example. *Birdstone* (Fig. 5.9) originated in one of the hearts of Native North American culture, what we now call Ohio (Fig. 5.1).



Figure 5.9: Late Archaic Hopewell Maker(s) of Tremper Mounds, Ohio. [Birdstone](#). ca. 100 BCE – 500 CE. Blackstone, 4". The Walters Art Museum Collection; [CCo Public Domain](#).

You might look at *Birdstone* and question our sanity for saying it is functional. But hold onto your hats, folks! At the base of this object beneath the neck of the bird form, there is a hole drilled horizontally through to the back beneath the tail feathers. This hole allowed a carefully crafted piece of wood to be inserted. That wood stick would be attached to an *atlatl* (spear-thrower used for hunting). Check out "[What is an atlatl and how does it work?](#)" (Pettigrew and Garnett 2020) if you are unfamiliar with *atlatls*. Some scholars have suggested that objects like *Birdstone* would function as a

weight on the *atlatl* to help propel the thrown projectile farther. Others think that birdstones were used as handles on *atlatls* that fit well in the palm and metaphorically alluded to flight. There may have been many uses for these objects.

Birdstones were produced with care, via a laborious process of stone grinding (literally rubbing stones together to reduce a raw stone into a designed object). That labor tells us that these objects were special. Furthermore, raw stone was chosen carefully for color and veining by artists to result in the intriguing qualities of light and dark brown streaks seen in *Birdstone*. The beauty and the practical use of these objects were linked as well through the reference to flight and birds as creatures that can do something humans cannot.

Birds hold particular symbolic significance in many cultures. In ancient Korea, cranes represented longevity and (as water birds) reflected the presence of water sources in the landscape. Can you spot the cranes in *Maebyeong with Clouds, Flying Cranes, and Children amidst Willows* (Fig. 5.10)? White cranes (probably red-crested white cranes native to Korea) fly amidst clouds on the periphery of the central foliated (leaf-like) shape surrounding children playing in a bamboo grove. This vessel was produced by artists of the Koryŏ (or Goryeo) Kingdom of ancient Korea (prior to the Joseon Dynasty and Shin Suk-ju from "[Who am I?](#)").



Figure 5.10: Koryŏ Dynasty Maker(s) of Korea. [Maebyeong with Clouds, Flying Cranes, and Children amidst Willows](#). 1150-1200 CE. Art Institute of Chicago Collection; [CCo Public Domain](#).

Koryō potters are known for their enhancements upon Chinese techniques to produce greenware pottery, also known as celadon (a European term). Greenware refers to the green-gray color produced from iron-oxide additives in ceramic glazes that emulate the natural color of jade. In East Asia, jade has always been a prominent stone for sculpting spiritual and adornment items, bearing an aura of beauty and magic. Replicating the color of jade in other media infuses its qualities into new form. Greenware ceramics in Korea soared to new aesthetic heights with the invention of the *sanggam* (“inlaid”) technique. Prior to firing, artists would carve or incise designs into the somewhat dried clay body, creating wells for applying decorative glazes. This technique offers crisper and more vibrant designs than glaze painting.

This is why the imagery is clearly defined in the *maebyong*. The curvature and swirling patterns of the wispy clouds and the thin lines of *sanggam* decoration offer complexity to the design. Vessels like this reflect deep investment in artistry (because the *sanggam* technique takes much longer than typical glaze painting). Further, the various hues of green achieved in this example mimic the variation found in natural jade, and thus the beauty to be found in nature’s multitude. Koryō people also may have attributed a kind of beauty to such vessels because as a *maebyong* (literally “plum vase”), they would hold either long blossoming plum branches or plum wine. In the art world, greenware vessels demonstrating *sanggam* artistry are synonymous with Korea’s Koryō Kingdom. Check out a [research essay by Celeste Smith in spring 2022 about a contemporary artist using Koryō/Goryeo ceramics in unexpected ways](#).

In southeast Nigeria (Fig. 5.1), where Igbo peoples live today, an ancient culture known as Igbo-Ukwu holds a similar art historical aura of artistic mastery, connected to detailed bronze sculptures in their case. Igbo farmers in the 1930s-40s CE uncovered ancient bronze arts as they tended yam fields. At first, people weren’t sure how old these bronzes were. After archaeological investigations and radiocarbon dating, scholars determined that these bronzes were the creations of Igbo ancestors from over 1000 years ago, during the 800s-900s CE. Learn about the earliest archaeology at Igbo-Ukwu in [“Bronzes from Eastern Nigeria: Excavations at Igbo-Ukwu” \(Shaw 1960\)](#).

Shell (Fig. 5.11) is a small ornamental container created to resemble the [marine triton shell](#). In addition to the form, what jumps out at you about this object? Your eye probably is caught by the dense and varied decoration. At the widest part of the shell, lattice-like patterning overtakes the surface with grids, concentric circles, and complex netting. As the spiral narrows, there is a consistent pattern of alternating stripes with tightly-spaced lines and dense dots. Representations of crickets and flies pepper the surface as well. At the end of the shell, a finial supports a scene of four frogs being eaten by snake heads. This concentrated imagery of the terrestrial and undersea worlds demonstrates that Igbo-Ukwu artists were strongly observant of the natural world and attendant to cultural symbolism. For Igbo-Ukwu people, insects probably related to agriculture (as pests that must be controlled) and/or to unknown cultural dimensions. Marine imagery probably reflected exotic resources and trade that enhanced the prestige of the leaders who owned such items as this bronze-made shell.



Figure 5.11: Igbo Ukwu Maker(s) of Nigeria. [Shell](#). 800-900 CE. Leaded bronze. National Museum, Lagos, Nigeria Collection. Photo by Ochiwar; [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

The decorative style of Igbo-Ukwu, exemplified here, has been compared to [Rococo furniture and architectural design of the Western Canon](#). These styles share an ‘all-over’ character, with no surface going untreated. (P.S. the Safavid *Qur’an Manuscript Folio* shares this ‘all-over’ aesthetic as well.) Igbo-Ukwu bronze artists independently developed an aesthetic of excess and pattern that reflected beauty and prestige in their culture. Dozens of ornamental bronze objects, including *Shell*, were discovered together near the burial of an ancient Igbo-Ukwu leader. As a high-ranking member of Igbo-Ukwu culture he preferred this style of art, collecting a large number of pieces that eventually were buried with him.

We’ve talked about many objects associated with burials in this chapter. Let’s talk about another one! If you picture where *Woman in Ceremonial Dress* is from on the Gulf Coast of Mexico, let your mind travel to the northwest. Then, settle your mind in the Chihuahuan Desert (not a desert full of tiny dogs), spanning the modern-day states of Chihuahua and Sonora of Mexico and Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas of the US (Fig. 5.1). The US-Mexico border was totally irrelevant to native peoples of the Americas.

One culture that spanned southwestern New Mexico and northern Chihuahua was the Mimbres (literally meaning “willows” in Spanish). The Mimbres River and surrounding landscape supported many ancient Pueblo cultures (meaning those who lived in congregated adobe structures the Spanish called *pueblos*). The Mimbres are known for producing pottery, specifically bowls, that were provided to people in death. *Bowl with Geometric Design* (Fig. 5.12) typifies the ‘transitional’ style of Mimbres vessels, dating to 950-100 CE, focused on geometric motifs depicted with a sense of radial movement. Typically called ‘black-on-white’ ceramics, these vessels demonstrate strong color contrast (with blacks, browns, reds, etc.) and linear abstraction. In this case, large white triangular shapes accentuated with repeating black contour lines and alignments of rhombic shapes appear to swirl around a squarish center, defined with bold lines leading to the primary white border of the bowl. Looking down upon the bowl, we see that the circular rim of the bowl merges with the rotating design and almost looks as if it is spinning. Such interesting abstraction is characteristic of Mimbres

vessels, with beauty focused on simple contrasts of line and shape. These bowls also regularly include figures of people and animals centered within geometric patterns.



Figure 5.12: Mimbres (Mogollon) Maker(s) of the American Southwest. [Bowl with Geometric Design](#). 1000-1150 CE. Earthenware. The Cleveland Museum of Art Collection; [CCo Public Domain](#).

Another common characteristic of these vessels is the so-called 'kill hole.' Seen in *Bowl with Geometric Design* at the center right of the vessel's base, a small hole pierces through the clay body, removing segments of the carefully painted interior design. This hole, and the many others in surviving Mimbres vessels, was intentionally created. After a bowl was decorated, and potentially used in daily life, it would be 'killed' so that it could accompany a deceased person to their afterlife in a parallel metaphysical condition. The Mimbres believed that special bowls were imbued with spirits, just like living things in nature. Living bowls could not go to the afterlife, so their state must be appropriately modified. Archaeologists call such processes 'ritual termination.' Most cultures believe that the afterlife should be a place of rest and harmony, a kind of beauty. Burial offerings should ensure that such otherworldly beauty is attainable. We'll explore many approaches to the afterlife in ["What Happens When We Die?"](#)

Many archaeologists who study the ceramic arts of the Mimbres focus their attention not just on the deceased who

took their bowls into the afterlife but the artists that made such bowls. For example, [Michelle Hegmon and Stephanie Kulow \(2005\)](#) studied Mimbres pottery using agency theory. Anthropologists use the term 'agency' to refer to the ability of people, and things, to act and influence. Artists have agency to produce artworks. Agency theory also accounts for 'structure,' meaning the frameworks in societies that guide, control, and/or constrain how people act and/or do not act. Artists often follow visual styles, like the so-called 'transitional' Mimbres style, that structures the artwork they produce. Hegmon and Kulow (2005) highlight the agency of Mimbres potters to innovate outside the boundaries of existing styles and structures in their lives. After the harsh circumstances of colonization for Native American peoples, innovation and experimentation in pottery was revived in the early 1900s CE by artists such as [Maria Motoya Martinez and Julian Martinez](#). As a couple, they produced the famous 'blackware' vessels of San Ildefonso Pueblo, New Mexico, modernizing pueblo pottery with their matte unique black-on-black style. Art collectors of the 1930s-40s CE fawned over Martinez blackware, recognizing the beauty of connections between past and present.

Material beauty can be seen in objects that we hold or that populate our graves, or it can be seen in landscapes and vistas curated for reflection in nature. You've heard of Japanese rock gardens, right? You may have encountered a miniature sand garden equipped with a rake. Were you enticed to pull the tines of that rake across the smooth sand? That's the goal of those objects: to give you a break from stressful, daily life for a moment of peace, gently moving sand around in interesting patterns. *Karesansui* (literally "dry landscape") represent the original tradition from which those miniature de-stress gardens derive. Primarily associated with Zen Buddhism in the Muromachi period of medieval Japan (ca. 1336-1573 CE and a longer history), minimal rock gardens illustrate landscapes of *san* ("mountain") and *sui* ("water"). As in the *Karesansui* of Myoko-ji Temple in Kyoto, Japan (Fig. 5.13), mountains are symbolized by large, artfully placed boulders. Light-colored sand or gravel symbolizes water, raked to resemble the ripples of currents. Concentrically rippling gravel pockets appear to bounce off of the boulder mountains and mossy shores of this miniature landscape.



Figure 5.13: Maker(s) of Kyoto, Japan. [Karesansui of Myoko-ji Temple](#). ca. 1400s-present CE. Boulders, gravel, and moss. In situ. Photo by Urushi88; Public Domain.

The garden is secluded from distractions. This would have been a place of contemplation and active meditative practice within the Zen Buddhist monastic community of Myoko-ji. Distinct from the Thai Buddhist tradition discussed above, Zen Buddhists of Japan (alongside Chan Buddhists of China) believe that enlightenment can be attained, not just through stillness in seated meditation, but through immediate and completely engrossed action. For example, there are stories of Zen monks reaching enlightenment while they swept their modest hut free of leaves or while cutting wild bamboo stalks with a sharp knife. Enlightenment occurred in these cases because the practitioner was so wholly invested in their task that they transcended thought or preoccupation or desire, demonstrating utter devotion to that one moment.

A garden of stillness, as if a moment of time has been captured, can help a devotee move through their spiritual practice, potentially achieving the transcendent beauty of enlightenment, like the Buddha. These temple rock gardens and the miniature versions sold in gift shops seek to offer psychological respite and inspire calm. In the Zen Buddhist tradition, beauty is calm, clarity, and stillness. Scholars have considered these psychological effects in [“Structural Order in Japanese Karesansui Gardens” \(Van Tonder and Lyons 2003\)](#). Take a moment to consider the beauty of raking pebbles in “Sand and Stone Garden Raking | Japanese Garden” (Fig. 5.14) and de-stress yourself. **SPANG**



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://uta.pressbooks.pub/wheredoesartcomefrom/?p=233#oembed-1>

Figure 5.14: [“Sand and Stone Garden Raking | Japanese Garden”](#) uploaded by Portland Japanese Garden on YouTube (June 10, 2020).

The Wrap-up

We began this chapter by asking what you think is beautiful. We have discussed how beauty has been normalized, represented, and explored cross-culturally over thousands of years. Your opinion on beauty and how it plays a role in your life is your own. Perhaps additional experiences with media or studies of the history of what others find beautiful could lead you to contribute to our definitions of beauty today, according to what you value. To learn more, check out the links to global ideas of beauty and the examples of scholarship that investigate beauty in all its variation.

News Flash

- The Igbo style of arts like Agbogho Mmuo features in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel entitled [Purple Hibiscus](#). Adichie is an award-winning Nigerian writer bringing attention to African literature.
- Like the painting by Utamaro, *Beauty Looking Back* by Hishikawa Moronobu is featured in “Animal Crossing: New Horizons” (Nintendo 2020) as one of the artworks sold by Jolly Redd. [Make sure to check whether it is “real” or a fake!](#)
- Want to learn more about Edo Period hairstyles? Check out The Art Institute of Chicago's video called “[Recreating Ukiyo-e Hairstyles](#)” on YouTube. A master of hairstyling, Tomiko Minami, recreates multiple styles seen in historic prints.
- Are you interested in learning how to write and design Arabic calligraphy yourself? Check out Alhamdulillah Arts on YouTube. Start with the basics, “[Arabic Calligraphy Tutorial – Lesson 1](#).”

Where Do I Go From Here? / The Bibliography

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6. What Is Important to Us?



Figure 6.1: Map and timeline of artworks discussed in “What is Important to Us?” by Marizela Garza. Review image captions below for details about each artwork and copyright information.

What is important to us?

Let's get back to that big question that led us down the rabbit hole of [“What is Divine?”](#): What unites us? We looked at the unity of not being divine but what about the smaller-scale unities of communities? See what I did there? 😊

Humans like to group themselves based on the similarities they share with certain people. These are our communities, based on geographic, religious, ethnic, social, etc. similarities. We develop communities based on hobbies like sports and music, age group, or careers. These communities often form around a set of values, or priorities, shared among

members of the community. For example, many suburban communities based on geographic membership often share values of household maintenance, security, or social engagement. LGBTQIA+ communities often share values about representation, support, and activism. These values define what is important to communities. Beauty ideals, as discussed in [“What is Beautiful?”](#), can factor into these values. It is clear that different communities may prioritize different values.

The importance of solidarity

Remember our discussion of social norms in [“Who Am I?”](#) Such norms are imperative to communities, so much so that norms are sometimes values, such as politeness in public settings. Norms also instruct community members about what is expected of them. Not everyone follows the norms, but they wouldn't be called norms if it wasn't normal to follow them. The fact that some people don't follow norms can be dangerous to the cohesion of a community. Sociologists and anthropologists call this cohesion [‘social solidarity’](#). If there are too many ‘bad apples’ (according to the expectations of ‘good apples’), cohesion/solidarity can suffer and communities may not work like one hopes.

Among several groups of people of West Africa (Fig. 6.1), the loss of social solidarity is an ever-present threat (as it is in most societies). It is so important to maintain social solidarity that several societies developed a way to combat the danger of norm-breaking through a men's group known by many names. Among the Bamana, this men's group is called *Kòmò*, often called the *Kòmò* society. Like in Maasai and Astrolabe Bay cultures discussed in [“Who Am I?”](#), portions of a society organize around a common goal, like initiating young boys or girls into adulthood. These internal groupings are, confusingly, referred to as societies, like “Greek Societies” (sororities and fraternities) often found on college campuses. Different societies' goals vary. The goals and inner workings of the *Kòmò* society are very secret. The visible actions of this men's society come in the form of public events where masked performers act out the finding and destroying of ‘evil’ (those practices that defy social norms in the opinion of leaders). Oftentimes these performances include characters that clearly depict unwanted behaviors, such as drunkenness.

The *kòmòkun* (Fig. 6.2) is the mask of the *Kòmò* society. *Kòmò* members commission sculptors to create a wooden mask out of a single piece of wood. In the secrecy of the *Kòmò* society, members enhance the mask by applying powerful natural items such as animal horns and other remains, porcupine quills, feathers, and secret substances (potentially feces and blood). Check out [“On the Surface: A Cultural and Scientific Analysis of Two West African Komo Masks’ Surfaces”](#) (O'Hern 2012) and the follow-up [“Beyond the Surface: Where Cultural Contexts and Scientific Analyses Meet in Museum Conservation of West African Power Association Helmet Masks”](#) (O'Hern et al. 2016) for investigations of such added substances and ethical considerations of studying this topic.



Figure 6.2: Bamana Maker(s) of West Africa. [Kòmòkun](#). Late 1800s-1900s century CE. Wood, metal, antelope horns, porcupine quills, organic materials. Brooklyn Museum of Art Collection; [CC BY](#) (Photo: Brooklyn Museum, 69.39.3_version1_psl.jpg).

Applying these special substances results in a mask that looks like a creature that will strike fear in those who defy social norms. *Kòmò* men wear the mask and perform their duty of maintaining social solidarity in public performances by mock-battling ‘evil-doers,’ such as the characters exhibiting drunkenness or undertaking harm against their neighbors. We don’t know what other *Kòmò* ceremonies and rituals impact community cohesion because they occur behind closed doors or only for certain people’s eyes. Whatever occurs, it is part of the social solidarity of Bamana society to maintain social norms and reduce the likelihood that people will transgress.

To look at another example, let’s say a community member experiences a personal hardship, like an illness, or the whole community suffers through a difficult period, like a drought. These are inevitable parts of life to which communities must respond to ensure that the community survives. If one family’s illness is not treated, it may spread. If a drought occurs, the community needs to reorganize its resources so that harm is minimized. These responses often develop as community mechanisms to maintain social solidarity. If some or many community members suffer, the whole community may suffer. Response mechanisms like social health services, government-funded welfare, or volunteerism are common around the world today. In the historic communities of central Africa, response mechanisms were often organized by people with special knowledge dedicated to the wellbeing of the community and the maintenance of social solidarity. We’ll call these people ‘ritual specialists.’ We prefer this general term over a term like ‘shaman,’ because shamanism refers to a specific set of practices among indigenous groups of Siberia and has been applied (somewhat controversially) to many Native American traditions.

Nkisi (Fig. 6.3) served the needs of a community in central Africa, under the guidance of a local ritual specialist, called an *nganga* in Kikongo (a language spoken in west-central Africa). This *Nkisi* probably derives from the present-day Democratic Republic of the Congo (Fig. 6.1; formerly Zaire). Present-day peoples of this region of Central Africa, including the Kongo, Vili, and Yombe cultures, were once unified as the Kongo Kingdom (ca. 1390-1857 CE).



Figure 6.3: Kongo Maker(s) of Central Africa. *Nkisi*. ca. 1900-1950 CE. Wood, cloth, resin, organic material, natural fibers, approx. 29". UTA African Art Collection. Photo by Leah McCurdy and Cheryl Mitchell; [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

Among Kongo and related peoples, *ngangas* are some of the most important and powerful people in society. These individuals instruct community members on overcoming their suffering, including illness, drought, conflict with a neighbor, or the stresses of trade. *Nkisi* is the result of the interaction of *nganga*(s) and many community members over time. Each *Nkisi* is an accumulation of many interactions, each focused on an individual or family need. *Minkisi* (plural for *nkisi*) start as 'plain' objects: a wood sculpture of a human man or male dog, or other everyday items like baskets or glass bottles. Prior to use, the *nganga* empowers the figure with a mixture that may contain natural material, like plants or shells, or other powerful material (some include gunpowder or small bullet casings) and calls the spirits to the vessel. Over time and with use, the bare object is then adorned with fabrics, feathers, paint, and other ornamentation. The *Nkisi* in Figure 6.3 probably was adorned with a tall headdress of wrapped fabric and upright feathers and would've held a spear or other object in the cupped hand. The bundled cloth attachments and metal objects concentrated at the neck and torso of the *Nkisi* are the accumulations of use over time, probably years.

So, what do we know about *nganga* instructions? After the figure is sculpted and adorned, it is offered either in a communal place (such as the center of a village) or residence (where family members could access it). At the point a

community member requires intervention regarding something they would like to resolve or suffering they are feeling, they will consult a *nganga*. In large communities today, there are several *nganga* who specialize in specific interventions, such as healing needs, conflict mediation, or widespread concerns like drought. This may have also been the case in the past. As an example, let's say a community member's child is suffering from an illness. That parent would seek out a *nganga* they feel will be successful in helping to alleviate the illness. Based on knowledge and experience (including herbal remedies, effective prayers, divine beings who oversee health), the *nganga* would provide the parent with a 'prescription' (an Western medical term applied as an analogy for *nganga* practices). These are secret recipes and instructions, held closely guarded by *ngangas*, that they think will combat particular issues. As far as scholars know, these prescriptions often included recipes for plants, other forest materials such as resins, animal products, or soils, as well as potential human products such as blood or saliva. Materials likely were chosen for a variety of reasons, such as practical benefits (like the alleviation of pain) and metaphorical significance.

When collected and combined, these materials form a powerful substance, often called 'medicine' or *bilongo*, that is valuable in the amelioration of the specific suffering at issue. *Bilongo* is offered to a *nkisi* in different ways, depending on the *nkisi* type. *Nkisi* in Figure 6.3 actually combines multiple mechanisms for offering *Bilongo*. The substance could be rubbed inside the *kondu* gland, the projecting circular section at the navel of the sculpture, covered in this case by a piece of fabric but sometimes covered by a mirror or piece of glass. *Bilongo* can also be concealed in pieces of cloth, formed into bundles (via twisting, braiding, or other means) and then tied to the *nkisi*. If prescribed, the *nganga* and/or the community member seeking assistance may also pound a shard of metal (sometimes literal nails used in construction and oftentimes just fragments of metal) into the wood body of the *Nkisi* after offering the medicine in the *kondu* gland or as a bundle.

The offering of *bilongo* and/or insertion of a nail (and other activities of offering) is accompanied by prayers and other rituals dictated by the *nganga*, that articulate the request and benefit sought. This process energizes the spirit housed within the *nkisi*. That spirit works on behalf of the afflicted to mediate with divine forces (called *bakisi*; including ancestors and the god *Nzambi*). Many *minkisi* document (literally serve as records of) many different requests by different people over time. Some *minkisi* demonstrate more longevity and/or interest in their abilities because they feature many more offerings than others of their kind. This suggests that some *minkisi* were more successful than others or more needed, and thus more frequently sought by community members. For example, a *Nkisi Nkondi*, meaning 'hunting spirit', was frequently used for instances when a community member seeks revenge against someone they feel has wronged them or when leaders need to enforce norms upon a rule-breaker.

The *nkisi* tradition reflects an art that was available to everyone, not just kings or wealthy people. Everyone may not have had full access to the benefits of the *nganga* or *nkisi*, if payment was required for services, but historic photographs show that *minkisi* were often public objects on view for everyone in a community. It is relatively rare for such powerful objects to be visible to all community members, including children. Perhaps the reason for this visibility is because even when not in use, *minkisi* stand as memorials of divine benefit and hope in the face of future suffering. Such a presence in the community may help to sustain social solidarity. FYI: *Minkisi* are commonly called 'Power Figures' or 'Nail Figures', and sometimes are called 'fetishes.' Check out "[Fetishism Revisited: Kongo Nkisi in Sociological Perspective \(MacGaffery 1977\)](#)" to learn why 'fetish' is an inappropriate term to apply to *Nkisi* and other objects.

In many communities, social solidarity is created and maintained through kinship (familial connections). If you can trace your ancestry in connection with someone else's, they are your family. Like the Yoruba tradition of *Ìyá Nlá* discussed in "[What is Divine?](#)", familial connections often ensure that you will treat others kindly. Shared heritage is an important value.

Among cultures of the Northwest Coast region of North America (spanning the Canadian coast of British Columbia and US states of Washington and Oregon; Fig. 6.1), ancestral heritage is one of the most important facets of identity. Individual identity derives from community identity traced back through ancestors. Among the *Kwakwaka'wakw* (formerly known as the *Kwakiutl*) peoples, animals of their native lands of present-day Vancouver Island and the

corresponding coast of British Columbia became symbols for ancestral lineages. You may think of totem poles when animals are mentioned in this context. The *Kwakwaka'wakw* are one of the Northwest Coast cultures that produced totem poles (though not all do).

The *Kwakwaka'wakw* culture consists of clans, each represented by a crest animal, including orca, thunderbird, raven, grizzly bear, wolf, and others. Clans comprise ancestral lineages (sometimes called 'bands') made up of family members who trace their ancestry back to a common ancestor and specific mythology of that ancestor. Crest animals often feature in totem poles but are the specific focal points of *Kwakwaka'wakw* transformation masks.

Bear Transformation Mask (Fig. 6.4) is a figural carving of the head of a bear, carved and painted in the traditional *Kwakwaka'wakw* artistic style called 'formline' by scholars. This style is particularly noticeable in the layered shapes of the pupils, eyes, eyelids, and eyebrows. The arched or parabolic forms with pointed ends are common decorative techniques. The color palette of *Bear Transformation Mask* is also quite traditional, featuring tints of red and blue with black and the natural wood color.

You've probably noticed the big line down the front of the bear's snout and that the features don't precisely align. Why would that be? It's because this sculpture opens! The rectangular components at the far right and left are hinges that allow two halves of the face to open and reveal something else inside... Check out Figure 6.5 and watch *Raven Transformation Mask* (Fig 6.6; Go to 2:15-2:30 for good images of the transformation). ~~SPANG~~



Figure 6.4: Northwest Coast Maker(s) near Vancouver, Canada. *Bear Transformation Mask*. Before 1940 CE. Pigment on wood, approx. 12.5". The British Museum Collection; [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) @ The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 6.5: Northwest Coast Maker(s) near Vancouver, Canada. [Bear Transformation Mask](#). before 1940 CE. Pigment on wood, approx. 12.5". The British Museum Collection; [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) © The Trustees of the British Museum.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://uta.pressbooks.pub/wheredoesartcomefrom/?p=277#oembed-1>

Figure 6.6: [“Raven Transformation Mask”](#) uploaded by John Cussans on YouTube (April 7, 2019).

Bear Transformation Mask (Figs. 6.4 and 6.5) reveals ‘*Namugwis*, who according to some mythologies was a bird (probably a seagull) who transformed into a man when he landed on the earth. As the [Kwakiutl Band Council \(2018\)](#) describes, this mythology is somewhat debated among the various clans and bands. It is generally true that transformation masks depict a crest animal in their closed form and open to reveal a clan or band ancestor, in animal form (as in Fig. 6.5) or more commonly in human form (as in Fig. 6.6).

So, how does this relate to social solidarity? Transformation masks are worn and performed at ceremonies called potlatches (an Anglicized term based on one indigenous word, among many, that describes these events). A potlatch is a gathering of the community to celebrate important events such as house inaugurations, marriages, births, deaths, and, most importantly, the transfer of leadership from one chief to his successor. Potlatches include feasting and dancing. Feasts are provided as gifts to the guests by the chief who hosts the potlatch, considered a form of wealth redistribution by scholars. Those who benefited from the generosity displayed at a potlatch are expected to reciprocate in the future, when they accumulate enough resources to host a potlatch of their own.

Potlatch dances, as seen in Figure 6.6, are expressions of heritage, ancestry, and mythology. Dancers wearing transformation masks perform the mythologies of the local band and/or clan, thereby ensuring that everyone remembers their history. These performances also serve to see ancestors in contemporary life. The ancestors are among us, demonstrate their power of transformation, and their presence in all aspects of life.

In many ways, potlatches relate to social solidarity. Community members are reminded of their heritage. Young children

may be introduced for the first time to mythologies and heritage memories at potlatches. These communal events, offered in the spirit of generosity, also involve an expectation. Individuals are responsible to the community to repay the benefit they have received, in the name of the ancestors and shared heritage. Reciprocation and devotion to heritage demonstrate commitment to the community.

The importance of place

Heritage is often tied to particular places. Geography and landscape often feature prominently in what a community values, including the places where ancestors lived. For example, *Kwakwaka'wakw* clan crests, and ancestral mythologies, relate to animals native to the Northwest Coast. A monkey or tropical bird crest would be totally inaccurate to the place.

Let's take a journey down the Pacific Coast of the Americas, from the border of present-day Canada and the US to present-day Peru. At the 'elbow' of the southern Peruvian coast, a peninsula juts out into the Pacific. The Paracas Peninsula is now part of the Paracas National Reserve, protecting marine habitats and archaeological remains of the ancient Paracas culture. You may have heard of the Paracas because of their mummified burials. The Paracas were expert weavers and produced enormous textiles to wrap their dead in layer upon layer of cloth. Along with the arid desert climate, this cloth wrapping resulted in the (probably unintentional) mummification of many Paracas burials. We'll return to Paracas embroidered textiles in "[Why Do People Take What Doesn't Belong to Them?](#)"

For now, let's talk about something the Paracas and the *Kwakwaka'wakw* have in common. As communities living along the Pacific coast, they were both witness to the migrations of whales as water temperatures and currents changed seasonally. One species, the orca, is known to range up to Alaska (passing the Northwest Coast) and down to the Peruvian coast. Both the Paracas and *Kwakwaka'wakw*, as coastal peoples, would have observed large marine life like orcas during relevant seasons, either from boats or as whales beached to hunt seals. Both cultures probably observed the prowess of the orca, as an apex predator, and thus attributed qualities such as strength, resilience, and intelligence to them. Thus, when imagery of orcas is invoked, these qualities are metaphorically relevant.

So, how does the orca factor into Paracas culture? Paracas peoples created an abstracted image of an orca (with a fish as prey in front of the orca's face) on a hillside (sketched in Fig. 6.7; [original here](#)). This image is approximately 200 feet long. Does it remind you of anything? Heard of the Nasca lines?



Figure 6.7: Digital Transformational Sketch by Marizela Garza of the original artwork: Paracas Makers of southern Peru. *Orca geoglyph*. 800-100 CE. In situ. [View the original artwork here](#). Refer to Figure 0.1 to view the transformational sketch process.

The Nasca lines and geoglyphs were produced very near to this Paracas image and other Paracas geoglyphs. Paracas

examples are older (800-100 BCE) than the Nasca imagery (200 BCE – 600 CE). The Nasca are effectively the descendants of the Paracas culture, if not genetically then in many cultural traditions. The Paracas were creating geoglyphs well before the Nasca created the images of monkeys, hummingbirds, and trees on the plains of the coastal desert. Interestingly, the Paracas chose to create their geoglyphs on hillsides, not on the flat plains.

Before we move on, it is important to dispel the myths that anyone other than human beings created these geoglyphs and associated lines. No lasers or spaceships were required. The geology of the coastal desert is the key to understanding how HUMANS made this imagery. The coastal desert is an odd environment created at the contact (or subduction zone) of two tectonic plates. When one plate slides under another at a subduction zone, this causes a lot of pressure at the edge of the overlying plate, causing what is called uplift. This process of uplift often results in the development of mountain chains, like the Himalayas, as mentioned in [“Where Are We Going?”](#)! Along the South American Pacific coast, this process started to occur around 60 million years ago and (slowly) continues to this day. The Andes Mountains are the result. There are extreme environmental differences on either side of the Andes: coastal desert on the west and Amazon rainforest on the east.

Due to this gradual continual uplift and continental movement, the Andes Mountains continually erode. This erosion is visible as a layer of dark stone overlying the sand of the coastal desert. Over millions of years, the Andes (and most mountain ranges around the world) literally crumble and erode onto neighboring ecosystems. The coastal desert retains the material of this erosion on top of the original sand layer.

Paracas and Nasca peoples definitely knew about this layering because both groups practiced agriculture and had to develop strategies for growing crops in the arid environment. It is not well known why Paracas and Nasca peoples were motivated to develop large-scale geoglyphs but we definitely know how they did it. If you walk around the coastal desert, and shuffle your feet a bit, you will dislodge the upper layer of dark Andes erosion material, and reveal the lighter sandy material beneath. All it takes to create large orcas on a hillside or monkeys on a coastal plain is to gather a community and shuffle your feet together. This obviously required coordination, which was likely facilitated by political and/or spiritual leaders who chose the imagery. Paracas leaders chose the Orca imagery because of the symbolic qualities discussed above and potentially for other spiritual connections. The Nasca chose their imagery for similar reasons, and probably because they developed trade across the Andes to the Amazon forests (where they would have encountered monkeys).

The monumental geoglyphs and long-distance lines would not be developed in this way or in another place in the world because they rely on the specific environment of the coastal desert. The Paracas and Nasca communities relied on the coastal desert as the place of their survival. The connection to significant animals and local flora demonstrates the importance of place.

In a more literal sense, *Mural Fragment with Elite Male and Maguey Cactus Leaves* (Fig. 6.8) represents an importance of place among the Teotihuacanos of present-day central Mexico (Fig. 6.1). Teotihuacan was an ancient city of the Valley of Mexico, where present-day Mexico City and historic Tenochtitlan (the Aztec/Mexica capital) were eventually built. Teotihuacan predates both those later cities but developed later than the Olmec of the Gulf Coast region and was contemporaneous with the Early Classic period of the Maya to the east.



Figure 6.8: Maker(s) of Teotihuacan, Mexico. [Mural Fragment with Elite Male and Maguery Cactus Leaves](#). ca. 500-550 CE. Pigment on plaster, approx. 32.5" x 45.5". Cleveland Museum of Art Collection; [CCo Public Domain](#).

Teotihuacan started as a small settlement and eventually grew into the largest urban place of its day, eventually comprising a population of around 125,000 people. [Review this map of Teotihuacan](#), including both the central precinct and the residential hinterlands, to get a sense of the size and urban development of the city. Do you notice any resemblance to modern city maps? When you look closely at the central precinct, check out how grid-like the city was. These look like modern city blocks!

Teotihuacan was organized along a central sacred corridor (now known as the 'Avenue of the Dead' because there are several tombs located along it; Fig. 6.9 left). The corridor was a pathway between several important structures including (what the Aztec/Mexica called) the Pyramid of the Moon (at the north end), the Pyramid of the Sun (centrally located; Fig. 6.9 left), and the Citadel (at the south end). The avenue and those buildings formed what archaeologists call the 'ceremonial core' of the city, where important civic-spiritual rituals and royal events would take place.



Figure 6.9: [View from “Pyramid of the Moon” looking toward the “Avenue of the Dead” and the “Pyramid of the Sun” at Teotihuacan, Mexico, in 2018](#) (left); [CC BY-SA 4.0](#) and [View from “Pyramid of the Sun” looking toward residential areas of the city, at Teotihuacan, Mexico, in 2013](#) (right). [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

Residences surrounded the central ceremonial core (Fig. 6.9 right). Archaeological excavations of the residential areas suggest that the farther one’s house was from the central core, the less well-connected one’s family was. Some of the royal family of Teotihuacan lived between the Pyramids of the Moon and the Sun, just off the main avenue to the east, in the Xalla Palace ([labeled here](#)). A group of wealthy people lived in the Tetitla complex ([also labeled on the map](#)), farther from the ceremonial core than the palace but closer than many of the distant *barrios* (neighborhoods; [labeled on the map](#)). For example, the so-called Merchants Barrio on the east side of the city sits over a kilometer away from the central core.

One of the largest residential complexes, built sort of like apartment complexes today, was the Tlacuilapaxco compound located just northeast of the Xalla palace. Given its proximity to the ceremonial core, this was a high-status home. Like many other high-status residences at Teotihuacan, Tlacuilapaxco featured large murals with repetitive imagery, including that seen in *Mural Fragment with Elite Male and Maguey Cactus Leaves*. One striking thing about this mural is the use of red pigments. Many archaeologists have studied the pigments used in Teotihuacan murals including [Lopez-Puertolas and colleagues \(2019\) in “Characterization of Color Production in Xalla’s palace complex, Teotihuacan.”](#)

In addition to artistic production and use of colors, we can learn about the significance of a place from the mural fragment. A human figure stands in profile, lavishly adorned with necklaces, knee fringe, anklets, a plumed back ornament, and a zoomorphic plumed headdress. The figure’s mouth is open with a scroll-like decorative object emerging from it. This object is known as ‘speech breath’ or the visual representation of speech or singing in Mesoamerican art. Thus, we can be certain that this figure is represented as either saying words or singing, probably during an important ritual, given the amazing regalia he wears. The figure’s left (lower) arm is slightly extended in front of his body, with the hand holding a decorative ritual object (possibly a bag of incense). His right arm is extended farther with fingers separated. When viewed closely, it appears that a stream of water flows from his fingers.

What does that water flow upon? In front of the water stream, there is a rectangular object that appears to be a bundle wrapped in cloth. The horizontal lines are straight and uniform in length, suggesting some sort of harvested resource. Most scholars think this is a collection of reeds bundled together and tied at the center. There are 4 curious objects with needle-like ends that appear to be inserted into the bundle. If you’ve lived in or visited Central Mexico, you may recognize these objects as the spiny leaves of the maguey cactus (the species often used to make tequila, traditional medicine, and fabrics). We’ve identified the component parts, but what does the whole mean? Some scholars think that this is a set of symbols used to represent a ‘place name,’ such as ‘the place of the maguey cactus and reeds’.

There is [another very similar mural fragment \(housed in the de Young Museum collection\)](#) that actually features not 4 but 5 maguey spines in the bundle. These two mural fragments may have been removed from the same or two

neighboring complexes: Figure 6.8 from Tlacuilapaxco and the de Young fragment may be from Techinantitla, just north of Tlacuilapaxco. Check out [Feathered Serpents and Flowering Trees: Reconstructing the Murals of Teotihuacan \(Berrin and Millon 1988\)](#) to learn more about how these objects came to be in museum collections.

If the bundles in these murals relate to place names, then they may relate to two different, but perhaps connected places. Indeed, some scholars think that these bundles don't refer to general places but specific plots of land, which may be differentiated because one has more maguey cactus than the other. The bundle of reeds may also indicate that the place or plots of land contain a water source, since reeds generally grow in watery places. If true, these places would be important, indeed. Maguey and water were both important resources in the arid environment of the Valley of Mexico.

Now, we can get to the question: what is this guy doing? He is probably a priest, wearing the regalia of the feathered serpent deity (known as *Quetzalcoatl* to the Mexica/Aztecs). The feathered serpent is a hybrid of a snake and bird, combining the qualities of the sky and the land, including water, into one deity who was probably related to fertility and agriculture among the Teotihuacanos. A hybrid zoomorphic representation of the feathered serpent is present in the upper border of both murals.

The priest of the feathered serpent offers prayers and blessings through his speech/singing and through providing water. This may symbolize the coming of the rains, provided by the feathered serpent, or a ritual in which water was literally spread over plots of land. It is likely that the priest is blessing places important to the people who lived at these complexes. These may have been plots of land that the family owned and wanted to ensure would be fruitful. The original viewers and patrons of these murals may have been able to read more into the imagery, such as the symbols embedded in and around the speech breath, which might offer more details about the nature of the words or song that the priest offered. Overall, these murals probably are memorials to the blessing of a significant place connected to the families who lived in these complexes. We'll think more about Teotihuacan and place in ["Can We Live Together?"](#)

The importance of literacy

We can't cover everything that every community in the world finds important. We've considered some primary values such as solidarity, heritage, and place that can be seen in many communities around the world. Literacy (the ability to read and write) is not necessarily a value that all communities, or even most, found important prior to the globalization of European and Euro-American traditions. Prior to European contact, many societies did not use or need a writing system because they passed on knowledge orally, visually, or in other ways. Beyond these cases, the importance of literacy definitely is not only a European or Euro-American value.

Think back to ["What is Divine?"](#) and ["What is Beautiful?"](#) where we discussed the Islamic tradition of calligraphy. It is intimately tied to the origins of Islam: the Prophet Muhammed receiving the revelation from *Allah* and the eventual codification (standardization through writing down) of that revelation into the *Qur'an*. We studied a beautiful Safavid *Qur'anic* manuscript in which the *naskh* script expressed the message of Islam. To those outside the Islamic tradition, calligraphy is most associated with the *Qur'an* but calligraphic inscriptions feature on a wide variety of objects and in many contexts. Let's take a close look at *Bowl with Calligraphic Inscription* (Fig. 6.10) to explore this variation.



Figure 6.10: Central Asian Maker(s) of Nishapur, Iran. [Bowl with Calligraphic Inscription](#). 900s CE. Earthenware, slip-painted and glazed, approx. 14” diameter. Aga Khan Museum Collection; [CC BY-NC 2.5 CA](#).

The minimalistic design of this bowl may attract you since popular design today often prioritizes the ‘less is more’ design aesthetic. The primary black on white contrast and the brief pops of red are striking to the eye. The concentric circles are also quite appealing, from the central black dot, to the inner black line, to the circular inscription at the edge of the bowl. Scholars think that this choice to paint the text along the edge of the bowl was an innovation of artists of Nishapur, Iran, during the Samanid Period (900–999 CE). This aesthetic was emulated by many contemporaneous and proceeding artists around Asia, as these early examples found their way into new lands via trade.

The artist who painted this inscription chose to experiment with a traditional Arabic script known as *kufic*. One of the oldest Arabic scripts, *kufic* was used in the oldest known *Qur’ans* and the oldest known Islamic monuments from the late 600s and early 700s CE. All traditional Arabic scripts are ‘joined-up’ (cursive) with the letters merging with each other. And all Arabic scripts are read right to left. Typically, *kufic* script has a very linear and perpendicular quality with long horizontal segments (connecting letters within words) and vertical segments dictated by the form of each Arabic letter. Some *kufic* styles appear almost geometric. The Nishapur artist who painted this bowl chose, in the black inscription, to compress the details of each letter to emphasize the horizontal (in this case curved) and vertical components. These choices reduce the readability of the inscription but make it very aesthetically interesting.

Contributor Dr. Lina Jammal provides a more readable version of the black Arabic inscription on the bowl, while the [Aga Khan Museum \(2021\)](#) provides the English translation:

السخاء والجود من أخلاق أهل الجنة

“Generosity is the disposition of the dwellers of Paradise”

While this inscription relates to a religious concept (i.e. paradise; discussed in detail in [“What Happens When We Die?”](#)), it is also about morality and how that morality relates to secular (everyday) life. This type of inscription is an aphorism (a popular saying; a truism) that reflects social norms of the community. In this case, the moral of generosity is attributed to all those who are able to reach paradise (according to the Islamic tradition of the afterlife). Other aphorisms found on similar bowls include:

من كثر كلامه كثر سقطه

“He who multiplies his words, multiplies his worthlessness”; alternate translation: “He who talks a lot, spills a lot.” ([Metropolitan Museum of Art citing S. Heidemann 2/2011](#))

التدبير قبل العمل يؤمنك من الندم اليمين والسلامة

“Planning before work protects you from regret; good luck and well-being.” ([Metropolitan Museum of Art citing Ekhtiar et al. 2011, 108](#))

إن السلامة ما صمت و إنما يبدي بظانة ذي العيوب كلام

“Peace is that which is silent and only his speech will reveal the [inner thoughts] of the man with faults.” ([Brooklyn Museum n.d.](#))

To learn more about Arabic inscriptions from a variety of art contexts, check out [Islamic Inscriptions \(Blair 1998\)](#). Inscriptions are an incredibly important part of arts associated with Islam and Muslim communities and literacy is an important part of life, in general. The Islamic faith expects everyone to become literate, as a personal ability to read/recite the *Qur'an* is paramount to worship. From the late 600s CE, as Islam spread, literacy was prioritized in conversion. The *Qur'an* was translated into many different languages and writing systems so that barriers in learning Arabic would not necessarily halt an individual's knowledge of the faith. It was also the case that people learned the *Qur'an* via oral memorization and recitation (the original means of transmission prior to codification) as Islam spread. This importance of literacy in Islamic societies eventually spilled over into everyday life. In fact, reading, and to a lesser extent writing, were more common in historic Islamic societies than most other contemporaneous societies (such as medieval Europe). This is because more people within Islamic societies were literate (including so-called lower classes) than in other societies wherein literacy was a privilege only of those with high status and access to education.

Relatively high rates of literacy were also known in historic China, especially during the Tang and Song Dynasty periods. Access to education and literacy were primarily restricted to families with connections to the Confucian bureaucracy (review our discussion of Confucianism in [“Who Am I?”](#)) or those wealthy enough to pay for education. Among those who were literate was the smaller and more exclusive community known as the ‘literati.’ This was the class of scholars, poets, important artists, officials of the court, and intellectuals who were considered literate, not just in general reading and writing but in the traditions of Chinese arts and literature. We’ve already met a member of the Joseon Korean literati: Shin Suk-ju from [“Who Am I?”](#)

Scholars like Shin Suk-ju earned their knowledge and position through *keju* (imperial subject examinations, aka civil service exams). Developing in the Tang Dynasty (with origins from the Han Dynasty) and formalized in the Song period, exam requirements dictated that men study topics prioritized by the Emperor's court: Confucian literature, statecraft, law, arithmetic, military topics, and even arts like painting. If a man passed an exam (of which there were many levels),

he would earn a degree and could advance to more difficult exams or take a position according to his newly earned credentials (*tongsheng* ‘child student’ > *shenghuan* ‘student member’ > *juren* ‘recommended man’ > *gongshi* ‘tribute scholar’ > *jinshi* ‘advanced scholar’). Those that reached the highest ranks became ‘scholar-officials’ and served in the imperial bureaucracy, impacting the government, political policy, and society at large. Women participated in activities associated with the literati community, including reading and writing poetry, painting, and considering Confucian ideals but they were not eligible to take imperial exams. You may have taken an exam influenced by this historic Chinese system. The history of standardized testing in US public education traces back to imperial exams in China. To learn more, check out [“A Brief History of Imperial Examination and Its Influence” \(Kwang 2017\)](#).

This community of literati did not stop reading and writing after their exams. For most, their passion for literature and intellectualism continued throughout their lives and was expressed as a representation of their continued merit as a scholar-official. One of the common activities of these men would be to view paintings of renowned artists, either contemporary artists or those of the past, and offer commentary in their own words. Zhang Yanyuan, the author of *Fashu Yaolu* (法書要錄 *Compendium of Calligraphy*) and *Lidai Minghua Ji* (歷代名畫記 *Famous Paintings through History*) from the Tang Period, mentioned in [“Where Does Art Come From? An Introduction.”](#) was one such scholar-official focused on painting. In fact, as his works demonstrate, the appreciation of calligraphy developed first among the literati of China, then the standards of that appreciation was applied to painting.

Streams and Mountains without End (Fig. 6.11) visually exemplifies this tradition. The work was painted by an artist of the early (or Northern) Song Dynasty period on an incredibly long handscroll (approx. 36 feet long!). The length of these handscrolls mean that original viewers (prior to photography) would rarely see the whole image at once. Instead, viewers would unroll the scroll in small sections, viewing the details of each section and then moving onto the next. Figure 6.12 offers a video from the Asian Art Museum demonstrating this handscroll viewing process.



Figure 6.11: Northern Song Dynasty Maker(s) of China. *Streams and Mountains without End* (painting top; full scroll bottom left; inscriptions bottom right). ca. 1100-1150 CE. Ink and color on silk handscroll, approx. 14” x 7’ painting (36’ total scroll length). Cleveland Museum of Art Collection; [CCo Public Domain](#).



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://uta.pressbooks.pub/wheredoesartcomefrom/?p=277#oembed-2>

Figure 6.12: [“Viewing a Chinese Handscroll”](#) uploaded by Asian Art Museum on YouTube (Sep 26, 2018).

As *Viewing a Chinese Handscroll* (Fig. 6.12) demonstrates, there is not just a painting on these scholarly handscrolls. Before and after the painting, there are inscriptions added either by the artist or by scholars who viewed the painting, sometimes many years after the original production date. *Streams and Mountains without End* has 9 inscriptions, 2 of which are quoted below ([Cleveland Museum of Art 2021](#)):

造物元無心，山川秀氣聚。畫手亦無盡，各出新意度。誰將妙林泉，淡墨寫縑素。重巒疊嶂間，三兩人家住。茅舍隔素籬，小橋通細路。溪上數葉舟，雅有物外趣。崑崙藏招提，依稀認窗戶。山色四時宜，雲煙自朝暮。不知塵世中，此景在何處。收拾買山錢，投老好歸去。泰和乙丑三月三日平原王文蔚謹再拜，書于河東縣署之野趣堂

The creator has no intentions, Making mountains and streams from pure air. The painters too are also innumerable; Every one of them has some new ideas. Who has picked these tasteful forests and springs, And laid them on this white piece of silk with light ink? In the midst of layers of peaks and piles of overhangs, Two or three families have found dwellings. The thatched huts are separated by sparse fences. A little bridge leads to several narrow paths. On the river boats float like leaves. The tranquility gives a flavor that is beyond this world. Behind a rock, a monastery is hidden, Doors and windows of some buildings are faintly recognizable. The appearance of the mountain is proper for all four seasons, Cloudy and misty from dawn to dusk. I wonder where in this dust-filled world Can scenes like this be found! Gather your pension money; When old, this is a good place to go. The third day, third month, the year of yichou in the Taihe reign (1205), Wang Wenwei of Pingyuan wrote this at Yequ Tang in the magisterial office of Hedong.

觀此圖，經營位置，筆法高古，山明石潤。其橋梁、路道、樹林、人物、遠近；一一誠得真山水之深趣。非當時名筆有大才者不能至此。不必問其誰何，可為神品。況宋金元三朝名公所跋，尚不能記，想其來尤遠矣。然而物經累變而尚存，是物之有壽者也。余不復再論。文顯其保之。洪武庚申春，八十翁楊懋觀。

I have studied the composition and the design of this painting and have noticed its brushwork in the ancient manner. The mountains are bright and the rocks are moist. Far and near, the bridges, paths, trees, human figures, and other objects are clear and give the flavor of real landscape. None but the greatly talented hands of that time could have achieved this. There is no need to ask the name of the painter; the work itself can be classed in the divine order. Considering the fact that the writers of the colophons of three dynasties, Song, Jin, and Yuan, have not been able to trace the source of the painting, its origin must indeed be ancient. A work that survives age and crisis is a work with the virtue of longevity. It is not for me to make further speculations, but only to hope that Wenxian will treasure this with great care. In the spring of the gengshen year, the Hongwu era (1380), I, Yang Mao, at eighty sui [have seen this].

Wang Wenwei wrote of wanting to retire in this landscape in 1205 CE, about a century after the painting was created. Almost 200 years after that in 1380 CE, Yang Mao viewed the painting, read all the previous inscriptions (aka colophons), and lamented that the skilled painter remains unknown. These inscriptions demonstrate that the writers viewed the painting carefully, considered its meaning and relevance to their lives, and reflected upon the history of the literati practice of viewing paintings.

Did you notice all the blocky red components on the *Streams and Mountains without End* and on the scroll in the *Viewing a Chinese Handscroll* video? Those are seals, recorded on the silk using red ink, to document individuals who have owned each scroll and/or prominent persons who viewed them. *Streams and Mountains without End* contains 49 seals, including those of multiple emperors, and date from circa 1300 to the early 1900s CE.

Of course, we cannot ignore that, as Wang and Yang state, the painting is excellent. *Streams and Mountains without End* is one example of a long tradition of *shan sui* (mountain-water) painting in China (relates to the *karesansui* garden discussed in [“What is Beautiful?”](#)). Mountains and water features are the primary subjects of these paintings and the techniques reflect mastery of detailed brushwork and interest in the bare beauty of monochromatic black ink on silk. The naturalism in such paintings primarily relates to Daoist values and symbolism. We’ll expand upon the metaphorical

meaning of this type of imagery in [“Why Does Size Matter?”](#) To sum up for now, Confucian ideals embedded in the literati community of viewership and commentary intersects with the Daoist tradition through imagery and historic meaning. As we’ve seen, these intersections originally developed in China and then strongly influenced the social and bureaucratic structures of Korea, Vietnam, and Japan.

In Japan, writing in the Chinese style, using the *Kanji* script to write the Japanese oral language, emerged as early as the Yayoi Period (ca. 300 BCE – 250 CE). By the Edo Period (1600–1868 CE; aka Tokugawa Period), artists such as Hon’ami Koetsu developed a tradition of lacquered boxes (like Fig. 6.13) that served the Edo literati of Japan in their scholarly pursuits. PS: This was also when *The Courtesan Komurasaki of the Tamaya* (Fig. 5.4) was painted by Kitagawa Utamaro).



Figure 6.13: Edo period Maker(s) of Japan. [Lacquer Box](#). 1800s CE. Lacquer on wood, approx. 6". Cleveland Museum of Art Collection. [CCo Public Domain](#).

Lacquering requires an artist to build up countless layers of tree sap over a painting on wood, to seal that painting and wood object but also to establish an unparalleled luster and shine. The fact that this laborious process was applied to such small objects indicates that the *Lacquer Box* was important. Boxes are meant to hold stuff, so what did this box hold? Any guess based on what we’ve been talking about? Writing utensils! On the far right, the photo shows the interior of the box, with an ovaloid well that would hold the charcoal inkstone and water. The box is just long enough to store a few of the scholar’s favorite writing brushes and other implements that he needs to produce inscriptions and poetry.

Like *Streams and Mountains without End*, *Lacquer Box* reflects the intersections of Daoist *shan sui* and Confucian-driven literati priorities. In fact, *Lacquer Box* depicts a specific mountain from Chinese mythology called Mount Penglai, known

as *Horai-zan* in Japan. The original Chinese myth, from the [Classic of Mountains and Seas](#), connects Mount Penglai to the islands of the immortals and attributes mystical properties to it. Chinese and Japanese scholars would study the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* as an example of classic literature that held valuable geographic information, both for physical travel and for spiritual consideration.

The subject matter of *Lacquer Box* definitely reflects the older painting tradition of *Streams and Mountains without End* but there is an obvious difference. Check out all that gold! Edo lacquer artists were very skilled at embedding powdered gold leaf into lacquer layers to build up the metallic sheen and fetch a high price, from a developing middle class. During the Edo period, the literati community of Japan transformed as urbanization and political changes brought many different people together in cities, like in the Yoshiwara pleasure district where Courtesan Komurasaki worked. Unlike in previous periods, merchants, artists, theatre performers, and others of the growing middle class were now entering the literati community. The rise of woodblock printing and accessible/cheap reading material greatly increased literacy in Japanese cities like Edo and broadened literati social life to include a wide variety of people. This meant that many people needed personal writing boxes. For many Edo patrons, the flashier, the better!

The importance of observation

Literacy and intellectualism according to the traditions of East Asia or Europe do not apply everywhere. For example, in the dense forests of central Africa, Bambuti cultures engage in a distinct type of intellectualism – that of observation. The forest is most important to Bambuti cultures. The forest offers everything they need to live and fascinates the mind with sights and sounds.

Bambuti cultures (singular: Mbuti) are hunter-gatherer pygmy societies primarily living in the Ituri Forest of northeastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (Fig. 6.1). The term pygmy is applied to a group of people when their average height is significantly shorter than the global average (approx. 5'9" for men). For example, the Mbuti average height is about 4'6" and the Twa peoples of southern DRC average about 5' tall. Pygmyism is distinct from dwarfism as it is applied to an entire population versus individuals within a population. It is important to note that while terms like pygmy and dwarf are used within scholarly communities to describe people, these terms often carry baggage of negative perceptions built from years of prejudice against people because of their difference, including racist theories about evolutionary histories. Mbuti peoples, for example, have been subject to horrific treatment including slavery, genocide, and capture. The story of Mbye Otabenga (Ota Benga), captive at the Bronx Zoo in 1906 CE, attests to the discrimination these groups have endured and continue to face today. Learn more about Otabenga in "[Ota Benga Honored](#)" (Graves 2017). More recently, there have been genocidal conflicts undertaken against pygmy populations during the 'Second Congo War'.

After considering that context, let's focus on Mbuti art traditions to celebrate their culture. In terms of arts, the Mbuti are most known for their music, dance, and *pongo* or *murumba* (barkcloth). [You can view several Pongo examples here](#) and sketched in Figure 6.14. Notice the highly patterned quality of each example? Motifs such as dots, parallel lines, concentric circles, hatching, and various colorblocked shapes are common in *Pongo*. Most traditional examples only feature black paint, while newer examples can incorporate colored pigments.

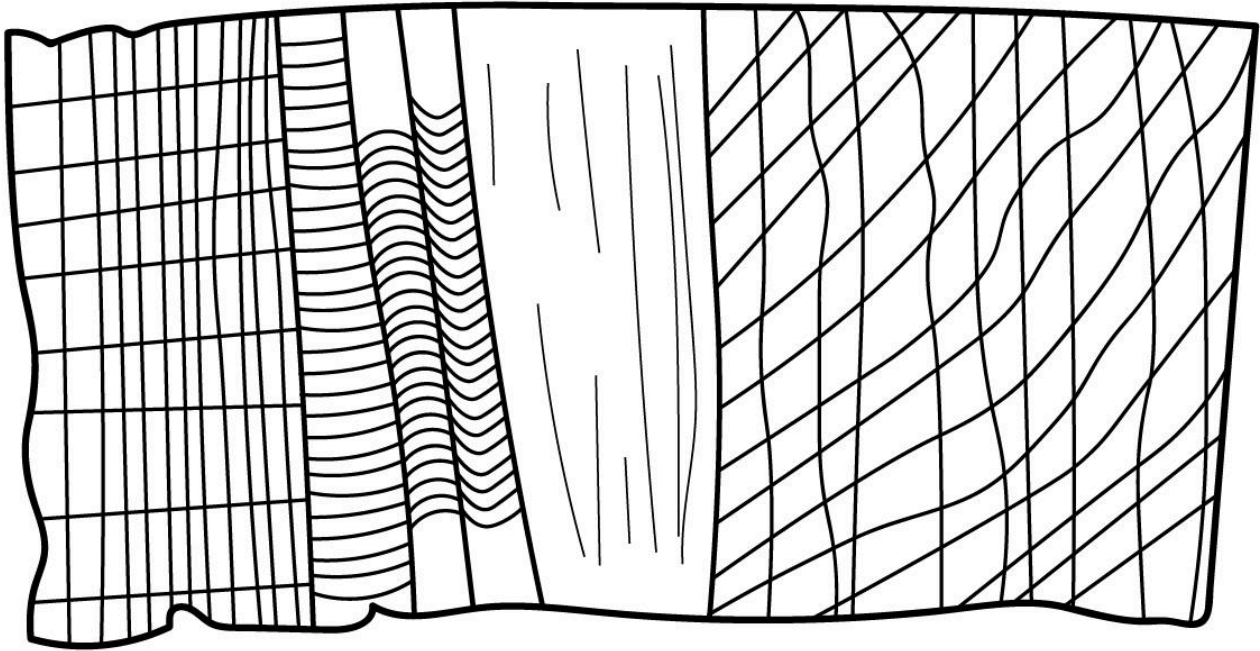


Figure 6.14: Digital Transformational Sketch by Marizela Garza of the original artwork: Mbuti Makers of Democratic Republic of the Congo. *Pongo*. ca. 1900 CE. Barkcloth and pigment. Los Angeles County Museum of Art Collection. [View the original artwork here](#). Refer to Figure 0.1 to view the transformational sketch process.

These patterns are not merely aesthetic. They are painted to express the light and shadow, along with the sounds and silences, of the forest. The Mbuti are *bamiki bandura* ('children of the forest') focused on the observation and celebration of *ndura* ('forestness'). The forest is a sanctuary to which Mbuti people will sing and speak, as if to a friend. Dances and songs, including the 'leaf-carrying' and 'honey-bee' songs, are offered in reverence to the forest. This reverence derives from intense study of the forest, listening to the deep silences, carefully attuning to the insect hums, considering the play of light among the trees, and noticing the natural patterns of reptilian scales. The abstraction of Mbuti *Pongo* is a reflection of this scholarship of the forest, developed through conceptual thinking.

Pongo, and the forest that inspires them, decorate the important events of Mbuti life. They are worn as clothing for both men and women at celebrations of rites of passage, weddings, and funerals. Men and women cooperate to produce *Pongo*. Men collect the inner bark of several special tree species and pound it into a fiber-like cloth. Mud may be added to darken the surface. Women are responsible for dye/paint production from forest pigments. *Pongo* painting is a communal activity, undertaken together and as a reflection of the importance of the forest and the Mbuti life within it. Mbuti painting and scholarship of the forest should be better known around the world as an example of how intellectualism and scholarship can take many forms, not just the forms prioritized in Europe and Euro-America (to which this textbook is admittedly tied). To learn more about it and spread the word, check out [Mbuti Design: Paintings by Pygmy Women of the Ituri Forest \(Meurant and Thomsson 2005\)](#).

The Wrap-up

Again, this discussion of community values and priorities is not exhaustive. What other values or important concepts would you add based on your experience in different communities? Just like the question "[Who I Am?](#)", we often ask the question "What is Important to Us?" throughout our lives, as our priorities shift. That reflection also helps us to

understand the world around us, as we notice where our values and priorities relate to and/or differ from those of other communities. Keep exploring by checking out the resources below.

News Flash

- Are you a Minecraft gamer? [Explore Teotihuacan in Minecraft through the DeYoung Museum](#).
- Check out how Nasca geoglyphs inspired characters in the [Yu-Gi-Oh Earthbound Immortals](#) card series.
- [Virtually visit Teotihuacan through 3D photo imagery here](#).
- Check out a detailed video discussion of another scholarly handscroll, known as “Old Trees, Level Distance” at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, including the way that handscrolls would be unrolled by scholar-officials: [Part 1](#) (starting around minute 3:00) and [Part 2](#).

Where Do I Go From Here? / The Bibliography

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7. Will You Tell a Story?



Figure 7.1: Map and timeline of artworks discussed in “Will You Tell a Story?” by Marizela Garza. Review image captions below for details about each artwork and copyright information.

Will you tell a story?

What do bedtime, Snapchat, and *To Kill a Mockingbird* have in common? Stories! Some are comforting. Some are provocative. Many are very personal. In this chapter, we discuss how storytelling and narrative go hand-in-hand with visual arts. Indeed, visual arts are often the most important vehicles for stories because they last longer than generations. As people die, stories may die with them if they are not told to the next generation, written down, or visualized in a permanent medium. The most important stories, and those that are often immortalized in stone, clay, or paint, often relate to how cultures developed, either realistically or mythologically.

Most people educated in European or Euro-American schools are familiar with Greek mythology. Ever heard of Achilles? The term 'my Achilles heel' and the biological name of our Achilles tendon derive from the Greek myths about this heroic figure's exploits during the Trojan War, classic of the Western Canon of literature. A lesser known myth about Achilles inspired the decoration on *Black-Figure Amphora* (Fig. 7.2). Achilles (left) plunges a spear towards Penthesilea (right), a Queen of the Amazons. Penthesilea deflects the blow with her shield. You can see the gendered differences between the two characters: Achilles' bearded face and Penthesilea's long hair and breasts.



Figure 7.2: Attributed to Exekias from Athens, Greece. [Black-Figure Amphora](#). ca. 535 BCE. Ceramic and pigment. The British Museum Collection. © The Trustees of the British Museum; [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

The Amazons were described in many Greek myths as a society of women warriors and hunters with the prowess and skill to defeat men (with no relation to the Amazon River in South America except when a conquistador was reminded about the Greek myth through interactions with an indigenous group and gave the river its modern name). While the origins of the Amazons were not clearly described by Greek writers, recent archaeological evidence suggests that the stories featuring Amazons were, at least in part, based on real women warriors of Scythia, Sarmatia, and ancient Siberia, all cultures of Central Asia, within the Eurasian Steppe region (Fig. 7.1).

These cultures are relatively unknown to European and Euro-American audiences, even though they may feature in one of the foundations of Western culture (classical mythology). In addition, scholars have shown that these cultures form part of the ancestry of modern Slavic peoples who now live across Eastern Europe. Art of the Eurasian Steppe, found primarily in burials in southern Russia and Ukraine, is not considered part of the Western tradition until Greeks colonized portions of their lands around 300 BCE (thanks to Alexander the Great).

One of the most remarkable burials from this region was frozen in time, literally. Before Greeks arrived, around 500 BCE, Princess of Ukok of the Pazyryk culture (located east of Scythian lands) was regally buried and then (probably unintentionally) mummified via freezing. The frozen conditions not only preserved her body but most of the burial objects, including those of perishable materials that almost never survive. Skin is also perishable but mummification (by a variety of means) can preserve it, along with any body modifications such as tattoos.

Princess of Ukok is not the only one! There are at least 6 mummified bodies from the region that retain tattoos. Each of the mummies retains at least one tattoo (most have multiple and up to 12) reflecting the Pazyryk 'animal-style' of art. View photographs and drawings of these tattoos in "[Tattoos from Mummies of the Pazyryk Culture](#)" (Iwe 2013, Figs. 2-16). Did you notice all those horns?

Deer are frequently depicted in these tattoos, probably because they were sacred animals to Pazyryk peoples. Birds of prey, snow leopards, sheep, and horses are represented as well. Iwe's (2013, 93) study of these zoomorphic tattoos demonstrates a distinction between depictions of real animals and "fantasy," hybrid creatures. Hybrid forms may incorporate special attributes associated with the Pazyryk spiritual system. Thus, these tattoos, such as *Horned Creature Shoulder Tattoo* (sketched in Fig. 7.3; [original here](#)) may represent Pazyryk deities. Work is still ongoing to understand the significance of this tattoo imagery. Iwe (ibid) suggests that "tattoos show a special code [...] based possibly on the foundation myths of the Pazyryk society." If representative of myths, these tattoos demonstrate that stories probably mattered just as much to the Pazyryk peoples as they did to the Classical Greeks. UTA student Nicholas found these tattoos inspiring and created a video project entitled "[An Artistic Analysis of Hyper Light Drifter's Setting and Narrative](#)," exploring how class themes are relevant to one of his favorite video games.



Figure 7.3: Digital Transformational Sketch by Marizela Garza of the original artwork: Pazyryk Maker(s) of Siberia. *Horned Creature Shoulder Tattoo*. ca. 500 BCE. Image Source: Iwe 2013, Fig. 14; after Polosmak 2000; [View the original artwork here](#). Refer to Figure 0.1 to view the transformational sketch process.

Starting at the beginning

Pazyryk ‘foundation myths’ are their creation or origin stories. Some of the most important stories told in a society relate to creation and/or the beginning of the world. What anthropologists call creation narratives or mythologies are not fantasies or works of fiction in people’s minds. These are recollections of the earliest parts of their histories.

Ancient and historic Maya peoples of eastern Mesoamerica circulated several creation narratives. Most early narratives reflected the worship of the Maize God (their version of the Maize God, not the Olmec version from [“What is Divine?”](#)). The *Maize God Mural Reconstruction Painting* (Fig. 7.4) recreates a mural painting by Maya artists living during the Preclassic period in modern-day northeast Guatemala (Fig. 7.1). [The original murals are difficult to view in photographs due to deterioration](#). The *Maize God Mural* is part of a series that spanned the upper portions of interior walls in a single-

room structure, known as *Las Pinturas*, built around 100 BCE. *Las Pinturas* was built towards the end of the Preclassic period, known as the Late Preclassic (300 BCE – 250 CE).



Figure 7.4: Heather Hurst. *Reconstruction Painting of the Maize God Mural of San Bartolo, Guatemala*. 2005 CE. Watercolor. Image Source: [Hurst 2009](#).

There are two primary components of the *Maize God Mural* composition, read from right to left. The longer portion on the right is framed by the long horizontal feature at the bottom. What do you think that is? Look carefully at the feature as it turns up at the far right and transforms into a ... head of a serpent-like creature with its jaws open, spewing curling red spirals! If you follow the red, yellow, and white body of the serpent to the left, notice the black footprints, presumably left by the characters that walk on the body of the serpent above. As your eyes reach the end of the serpent's body, it appears to emerge from an overhang of some kind, within which a woman kneels. Just above her head, curving shapes mingle with iguanas, snakes, trees, and even a spotted jaguar. If you look just above and to the left of the kneeling woman's head, do you notice a curious feature hanging from the overhang? What does that resemble? Have you ever been spelunking?

That's a representation of a stalactite, the stone formations of cave ceilings. The woman kneels inside the mouth of the cave! This isn't just any cave... it has fangs. Like the jaguar above it, the Maya believed that special cave openings, sometimes termed mouths of caves, were considered to be the open maws of cosmic earth monsters. They were the divine embodiment of the earth and generally were associated with the origins of rivers, streams, and springs. The serpent creature that emerges from the mouth of the cave, represents the water source (because when you see a snake in the forest, that's a good sign you are near water). This scene takes place in front of the mouth of a cave, from which life-giving waters flow. FYI: While the Tairona, discussed in ["What is Divine?"](#) and the Maya are distinct cultures, they probably shared the view of caves as important places on the landscape because they are often sources of water. The Tairona specifically focused on cave-dwelling bats while the Maya anthropomorphized cave openings.

Back to the *Maize God Mural*. The kneeling woman faces a procession of figures. Who is the most important figure, do you think? Scholars think it is the fifth figure from the right, standing with hands outstretched and represented with a fully red body. The red-bodied figure looks at two kneeling figures behind him (his head faces a different direction than his body), and three trailing figures, one with an impressive headdress, and two carrying heavy bundles. The red-bodied figure's hands touch a squash, or calabash, from which viney tendrils and flowers sprout. Most scholars think the red-bodied figure is the Maya Maize God, similar but distinct to the Olmec Maize God.

Turn your attention to the scene to the left of the cave mouth. There is an elaborate standing figure, holding a special implement. To the left of that figure, is a ... calabash! It is decorated with the same diagonal yellow band and motifs as

the calabash the Maize God touches in the scene on the right. But this calabash is not sprouting flowers, it is cut open at the top and sprouting... a human! In fact, before the human emerged, the four red baby-looking figures with curly umbilical cords, arranged above and below the calabash, emerged! Many scholars have suggested (though there is some debate) that the standing figure is *Chaak*, the Maya rain and storm god. In Maya mythology, *Chaak* wields an axe that cracks like thunder and produces lightning when it strikes the earth. In this scene, it appears that *Chaak*'s axe struck the calabash (a stand-in for the earth, or a seed within the earth), tore it open, and allowed the entities to emerge. Thus, rain produces life.

Who are those babies? There have been several interpretations, including that they are linked to infantile imagery among the Olmec, but if that is the case, it's probably a general versus specific link. One distinct interpretation suggests that the four babies represent the four directions of the earth, the land that stretches around us, and that their umbilical cords are connections to the sky realm. Thus, they metaphorically represent the land, or the physical surface of the earth. Once the land is formed, what emerges? The first human, perhaps the first king! Have you gleaned the overall purpose here? This is a visualization of the origins of humanity, a creation narrative. At the mouth of a sacred cave, the Maize God provided the fruit/seed that was nourished by the rain god *Chaak* to produce the land and the people.

Importantly, this is just one creation narrative among many that probably existed during the Maya Preclassic Period. This was the one considered important by the elites of the site we now call San Bartolo (they didn't call it that). But there were Maya living in many different areas during the Preclassic Period, far afield from San Bartolo, such as those living in the mountainous highlands of southern Guatemala. Different regions often have different creation narratives that reflect different landscapes and histories.

Also importantly, creation narratives change! For example, Maya people living during the Postclassic period favored the mythology found in the *Popul Vuh*, a book translated by Tedlock (1996) in [Popul Vuh: The Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life, Revised Edition](#). The *Popul Vuh* focuses on the sons of the Maize God, known as the Hero Twins, *Hunahpu* and *Xbalanque*. They defeat the Lords of *Xibalba* (the Underworld) by playing the ballgame and bring about the resurrection of their father. The Hero Twins eventually ascend into the heavens to become the sun and the moon. For many years, most scholars thought that this version of the Maya creation story was developed very late in Maya history. However, archaeologist Richard Hansen recently discovered a series of exterior plaster murals on buildings at the site known as El Mirador in Guatemala (not too far from San Bartolo), which may reflect the story of the Hero Twins, as early as 300 BCE. This evidence suggests that several different creation narratives, with similar themes and characters, were probably circulating across the Maya world at any given time.

What happened between the Preclassic Period and the Postclassic Period, you ask? The Classic period (ca. 250-900 CE), of course! (Review how these terms reflect bias in scholarship in ["Where Does Art Come From?: An Introduction."](#)) Vessel of *Dancing Lords* (Fig. 7.5) is an excellent example of Classic period Maya painted pottery. This vessel is especially significant because it is signed by the artist! The hieroglyphic inscription near the rim identifies *Ah Maxam* as the maker and the style indicates that the artist worked in or near to the Maya city known as Naranjo, Guatemala (Fig. 7.1).



Figure 7.5: Ah Maxam (Late Classic Period Maya Maker near Naranjo, Guatemala). [Vessel of the Dancing Lords](#). ca. 750-800 CE. Ceramic and pigment, 9.5 x 6.25". Art Institute of Chicago Collection; [CCo Public Domain](#).

Following from the Preclassic San Bartolo *Maize God Mural* and the El Mirador murals, the imagery on this vessel relates to the creation narrative emphasized in this region during the Late Classic period (ca. 600-900 CE). In this case, leaders costumed as the Maize God, perform/reenact creation and the cyclical rhythm of life and death. The hieroglyphic inscriptions and other context clues help scholars make the distinction that this is a person performing as the Maize God, versus the ambiguity discussed with the Tairona *Gold Figure Pendant* (Fig. 4.3) in "[What is Divine?](#)" Figure 7.5 focuses on one of the three repeating panels on the vessel, each featuring a Maya lord dancing energetically.

It may be difficult to make him out. Start at the feet: at the thin ground line, locate a flatly planted left foot and right foot resting on toes with heel raised. Then follow the line of the right leg up to bended knee, over an ornate belt, across the torso leaning to the left, with an arm extended towards a court dwarf on the far left. Then, find the lord's face looking left in profile. Something confuses and overwhelms our eyes as we try to make out the dancing figure. It is the enormous and elaborate back rack and headdress he wears (primarily depicted to the right of his body). Back racks (like backpacks made of wood) were sturdy embellished components of costumes worn on the back that allowed attached feathers, textiles, and other painted items to tower over and behind the dancer. (P.S. The Singing priest in *Mural Fragment with*

Elite Male and Maquey Cactus Leaves [Fig. 6.8; “What is Important to Us?”] also wears a back rack.) In addition, the lord’s headdress features extravagant feathers and sacred items probably made of jade and obsidian. At the far right of Figure 7.5, where there has been loss to the ceramic body of the vessel, you will see that there is another court dwarf standing. The scene repeats. Everything between the dancing body and the right-most dwarf is the back rack that the lord sports to adequately represent the significance of the figure he personifies: the Maize God.

The *Vessel of Dancing Lords* demonstrates how significant creation narratives and the primary deities that feature in them were in Maya life. In the wet and humid climate of Mesoamerica, rulers themselves dressed in heavy and cumbersome costumes to bring the Maize God to life. What a workout! They would perform in plazas and/or on staircases surrounded by monumental structures that supported the temples and palaces of the city. These rulers showcased their special relationship with the divine and the origins of Maya society, reenacting creation narratives very similar to that represented in the *Maize God Mural*. Their ability to perform, and take on the persona and power of the Maize God, was a marker of their ability to rule. Learn more in [“Plazas, Performers, and Spectators: Political Theaters of the Classic Maya” \(Inomata 2006\)](#).

Experiencing creation

Different people consider the origins of humanity differently. The Maize God was significant to the creation narratives of many Mesoamerican cultures. If we take a trip northwest of Mesoamerica, to the Chihuahuan Desert of northern Mexico and the Southwest US (Fig. 7.1), we encounter a distinct creation narrative, which still resonates with people today.

The *White Shaman Mural* (Fig. 7.6) is one of the most famous examples of Pecos River rock art. The Pecos River runs north to south, generally parallel and eventually merging with the Rio Grande, across New Mexico, West Texas, and northern Mexico. Archaeologists who study ancient rock art flock to the confluence of the Pecos and Rio Grande Rivers. This region, around the [Seminole Canyon State Park in Texas](#), exhibits one of the highest densities of rock art in the US. Ancient people in this region, generally called Pecos River Peoples, painted important imagery in caves and rock shelters that were probably sites of ceremony, residence, or both.



Figure 7.6: Pecos River Maker(s) from near Seminole Canyon, Texas. *White Shaman Mural*. ca. 2000 BCE. Pigment on rock, 26 x 13'. Photo by Leah McCurdy; [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

When first studied, archaeologists viewed the *White Shaman Mural* as a palimpsest, a layered artwork that many artists contributed to over time. If true, the mural would be a random collection of paintings done by many different artists with different intentions. Despite this, archaeologists recognized that there were abstract human figures present in the mural and one of them, represented with a white body, stood out from the rest. This 'white shaman' became the poster child for the mural and thus, the mural got its name.

We know better now. Archaeologist Dr. Carolyn Boyd came to the study of the *White Shaman Mural* as an accomplished painter with an eye for composition. When she viewed the mural, she did not see a random assortment of unrelated images (as in the palimpsest theory) but a coherent and planned narrative composition, within which the famous white shaman was a secondary character. So what's the story?

To figure that out, Dr. Boyd had to think outside the box. She studied the living cultures of Yaqui (Hiaki) and Huichol (Wixáritari) peoples, native to the Chihuahuan Desert. These groups were still practicing shamanism, the spiritual tradition that dominated the region prior to Spanish conquest. Many archaeologists interested in the ancient cultures of the Southwest US and northern Mexico view the Yaqui, Huichol, and others as important sources of '[ethnographic analogy](#)', a technique to develop interpretations about the past based on evidence from the present. Studying contemporary and/or historically documented groups can lead to insights about how past people lived or what they believed, if there is evidence of cultural continuity (which can be a matter of debate). Yaqui and Huichol shamanism are considered to

be good analogies for practices of ancient peoples of the Chihuahuan Desert. In particular, Dr. Boyd realized that the description of peyote hallucinogenic experiences among the Yaqui and the significance of the divine deer within Huichol mythology could help interpret the *White Shaman Mural*.

Heard of peyote? It is a button-shaped cactus native to the Chihuahuan Desert, that produces psychoactive substances and when ingested can induce hallucinogenic experiences. Dr. Boyd learned that when Yaqui shamans ingest peyote and feel the psychedelic effects, they often remark that it feels like “being swallowed and passed through the body of a snake” ([Boyd 2003, 54](#) citing Beals 1943: 64). Distinct to Tairona transformation experiences discussed in [“What is Divine?”](#), this Yaqui experience would transport the shaman into the ‘otherworld’ – the realm beyond this one where one can seek healing, communicate with the divine, and understand the origin of things (*ibid*). Shamans have a ‘spirit guide’ that helps them navigate the otherworld (*ibid*). Huichol shamans follow the divine deer as a sort of ultimate spirit guide who traces the lineage of humanity from the first people to those living today.

Do you see reflections of these elements of contemporary indigenous cultures in the ancient *White Shaman Mural*? [Review this reconstruction drawing of the mural for more clarity](#). Look closely near the bottom of the mural. You’ll notice a white undulating line running from left to right. What does that make you think of? That is the body of the snake! Now look above and below that line. Do you see the regularly spaced repeating figures, five in total, with long torsos, thin legs, outstretched arms, white faces, and red heads? These are the main characters of this narrative and the compositional component that made Dr. Boyd realize this wasn’t just random disjointed paintings but a planned depiction of traversing from our realm to the otherworld.

Originally painted with black pigmented bodies that have faded to a bluish gray over time, the five figures are shamans ingesting peyote (all the little black dots on the right and at the center) and traveling with their spirit guides (the figures, including the white shaman, depicted next to or above each black shaman). Their travels through the body of the snake lead them to the otherworld, mostly depicted beneath the white undulating line. At the far bottom right, notice the red and black feature that appears to be notched. Just to the left of this notched feature, do you recognize that animal? It is a red deer. This combination of elements really got Dr. Boyd’s attention. The Huichol creation narrative centers upon the divine deer who guides the first humans from the watery underworld (associated with the colors red and black) to the ultimate settlement of humanity at ‘Dawn Mountain.’ The brown notched archway on the bottom left is Dawn Mountain, where according to Huichol tradition, the divine deer sacrificed himself (note the deer with an arrow in its neck above the archway) and the sun rose for the first time (the first dawn). The deer’s sacrifice is a means for the first humans to learn to hunt and their first meal. Above Dawn Mountain, the peyote-deer deity (an antlered human) rises from the underworld.

It is important to note that Dr. Boyd does not apply this ethnographic analogy to suggest that the *White Shaman Mural* was painted by Yaqui or Huichol people. Dr. Boyd’s team accurately dated the mural to approximately 2000 BCE, applying scientific dating techniques to carbon-based pigments. Instead, the connections between the contemporary Yaqui and Huichol to this ancient painting help us to learn that there are long-established and continuing mythological and ritual traditions in this region. Dr. Boyd argues that the painters of Pecos River rock art were the ancestors of the Yaqui, Huichol, and other peoples. Her book [The White Shaman Mural: An Enduring Creation Narrative in the Rock Art of the Lower Pecos \(Boyd 2016\)](#) changed the game in rock art studies of the region, demonstrating that narrative sophistication and heritage are much older than previous scholars thought.

To the north of the Chihuahuan Desert in the Four Corners region of the US, sacred architecture offered a means to re-experience creation in a different way and according to different mythologies. In the Southwest US (New Mexico, Arizona, etc.; Fig. 7.1), you’ll find the modern-day reservations of Hopi, Diné (Navajo), and related cultures. As discussed in [“Who Am I?”](#) the Diné are more recent migrants to that region, whereas the Hopi are a Puebloan culture with deep roots. Puebloan (a term derived from Spanish) refers to cultures that live in permanent dwellings of adobe, often multi-storied with flat roofs. Modern Puebloan groups mostly live on reservations created by the US government based on unequal relationships and forced resettlement of indigenous peoples (see [“How to Read this Book & Land Acknowledgement”](#)).

The predecessors of the Hopi and other Puebloan groups are known as the Ancestral Puebloans. In the past, this culture was called the Anasazi, a name from the Diné language that means 'ancient enemy' or 'ancient outsiders.' Since the Diné often were in conflict with Puebloan groups like the Hopi, they applied an antagonistic term to Puebloan ancestors. Modern Puebloan peoples view the term Anasazi as disrespectful. They promote the use of (and changing of textbooks to reflect) the term Ancestral Puebloan.

The Ancestral Puebloans were the builders of cities like Chaco Canyon (New Mexico), Mesa Verde (Colorado), and Taos Pueblo (New Mexico). As their name and descendants demonstrate, they are known for building pueblos of multi-family houses of adobe bricks. [Check out the ancient apartment complex called Pueblo Bonito at Chaco Canyon.](#) In addition to their residential structures, the Ancestral Puebloans built unique ceremonial structures called kivas (Fig. 7.7). These are semi-subterranean (partly below and above the ground surface) and circular. Interior kiva spaces are accessed using a ladder from a hole in the ceiling (see [the reconstructed kiva at Spruce Tree House at Mesa Verde, Colorado](#)) or steps integrated into the upper portion of the circular wall.



Figure 7.7: Ancestral Puebloan Maker(s) from Chaco Canyon, New Mexico. *Kiva of Casa Rinconada*. ca. 1050-1150 CE. Masonry, 64' diameter. Merged panorama by Leah McCurdy; [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

Imagine the *Kiva of Casa Rinconada* (Fig. 7.7) reconstructed like the Mesa Verde example. These are dark, enclosed spaces with only one or two sources of light. In fact, the interior could be concealed from all sunlight if needed, only illuminated by the central fire hearth, ventilated through the ceiling. Imagine the heat and the scent of the fire!

Most kivas have an interior bench and niches integrated into the circular wall. Benches were for the people viewing and participating in the ceremonies and the niches likely served as storage for ceremonial objects and/or a metaphorical function discussed below. The Casa Rinconada kiva served a whole community, and therefore large groups of people at one time, whereas smaller kivas like the one from Mesa Verde within which smaller groups of people would gather, sometimes a single family or lineage. Large residential complexes like Pueblo Bonito contained numerous kivas, likely used by distinct groups and/or dedicated to distinct rituals.

Who descended the ladder or steps and sat on these benches? The answer is everyone, but mostly men. In Ancestral Puebloan society, community members of all ages would gather for important occasions but the most frequent participants in kiva ceremonies were men. Scholars think that women may have congregated for their own set of rituals in so-called 'mealing rooms,' as part of their responsibilities for preparing corn into ground *masa* (corn meal; from which foods like tortillas and tamales are made).

What were the rituals associated with kivas? Scholarly understanding of these rituals is limited to what descendants of the Ancestral Puebloans, such as the Hopi, chose to share. These ceremonies involved some of the most sacred and special aspects of Puebloan culture. It is understandable that some things will be kept secret and held as internal knowledge. From what we do know, the kiva is not just a place for these special rituals but a microcosm of the Puebloan universe, and a visualization of their origins.

The subterranean feature of kivas is not happenstance; it is profoundly meaningful. As one descended into the kiva, they travelled in time to the origins of their society. Puebloan mythology tells us that the first people emerged from a hole in

the ground, like the corn and other plants that were so integral to their livelihood. These first people, like seeds, came from a place of darkness, up into the light, and learned how to sustain themselves in harmony with the land. Kivas usually have a central hole in the ground called a *sipapu*. This is the 'place of emergence' according to present-day Puebloan people. The niches may relate to the *sipapu* as holes from which life emerges from dark to light. Every descent into the kiva was a way of remembering one's origins, remembering the stories of one's ancestors, and continually renewing one's relationship with the past.

Let's consider one more example of origins and storytelling by traveling from New Mexico across the Pacific to Alhalkere, Australia (Fig. 7.1). A famous Aboriginal artist, [Emily Kame Kngwarreye](#), descended from the indigenous peoples of arid central Australia. Kngwarreye invested in her cultural heritage, including sacred rituals, dances, songs, and body painting traditions, becoming a ceremonial leader of *Awelye* (women's business). Kngwarreye spent much of her time in the desert, as a camel handler and stockhand moving herds between watering holes. She mentally mapped the desert landscape of Alhalkere over these years. That became the subject of her art.

Unlike some of the exoticized stories told about her, Kngwarreye was not an isolated indigenous woman naively painting in the desert. Emily learned various art techniques through adult education classes offered by organizations such as the Central Australia Aboriginal Media Association, which exposed the work of indigenous peoples to mainstream Australian society. In her 60s, Kngwarreye learned many styles of art, including imported batik making and Western painting on canvas. To learn about Aboriginal Batik (somewhat related to the batik discussed in "[Who Am I?](#)"), check out the exhibition "[Across the Desert: Aboriginal Batik from Central Australia \(National Gallery of Victoria 2008 – 2009\)](#)". Kngwarreye made batik fabric paintings in the 1980s and early 1990s CE. Then, in the mid-1990s CE, Kngwarreye began experimenting with applying acrylic paint to canvas with household implements, such as shaving brushes, producing works like [Yam Story I](#) (sketched in Fig. 7.8, [original here](#)).

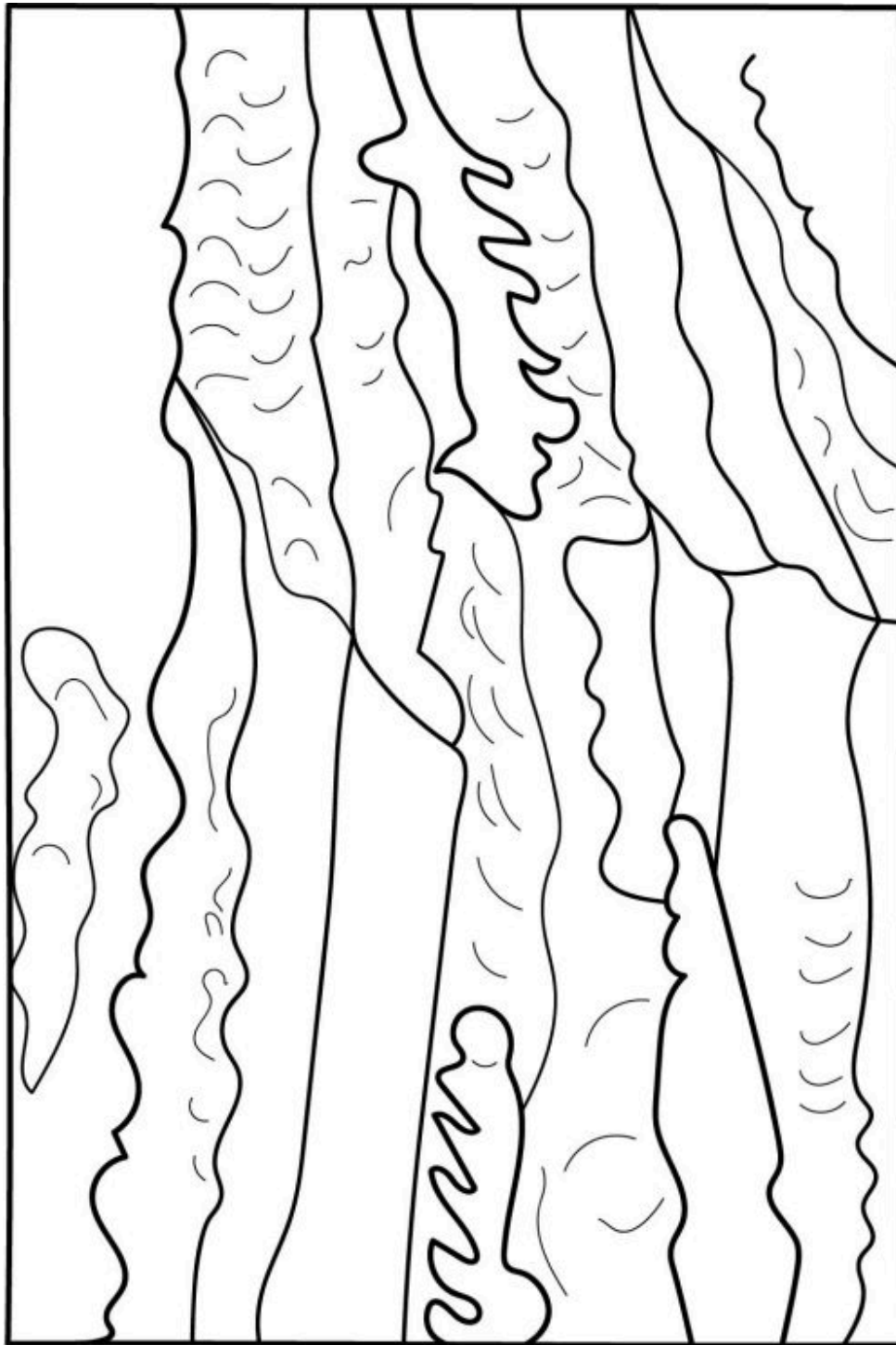


Figure 7.8: Digital Transformational Sketch by Marizela Garza of the original artwork: Emily Kame Kngwarreye of Alhalkere, Australia. *Yam Story I*. 1994 CE. Acrylic on canvas. View the original artwork here @ Emily Kame Kngwarreye. Refer to Figure 0.1 to view the transformational sketch process.

The title *Yam Story* relates to the embeddedness of storytelling within Aboriginal societies. In English, we can only approximate the nature of Aboriginal storytelling and thought, much of which concerns the time of creation before humans existed, known in English as 'The Dreaming' or 'Dreamtime.' Dreamtime stories were only ever passed on orally,

through spoken word, songs, and dances. Stories of the desert landscape, teeming with the memories and continued presence of ancestors, often incorporate the wild yam. This resilient tuber is a source of life in the arid desert. As a leader of *Awelye*, Kngwarreye took on the responsibility of passing on the Dreamtime stories of yams and fertility of the desert to future generations of women. Her paintings reflect this important aspect of her ritual life and her practical knowledge of the desert.

Kngwarreye's abstract style and experiments with Western derived media like acrylic paint contributed to the aura of her work within the art world. Very soon after her paintings like *Yam Story I* were shown in galleries in Australia, the global art market coveted them. Eventually, an entire museum was built dedicated to her work: [The Emily Museum](#) in Cheltenham, Australia. Art dealers and journalists wanted to hear from Kngwarreye herself to report on her fame and success. For example, in [One sun one moon: Aboriginal art in Australia \(Green 2007, 205\)](#), a quotation from Kngwarreye explains the reason behind her shift from batik textiles to painting, "... My eyesight deteriorated as I got older, and because of that I gave up on batik on silk – it was better for me to just paint." At the end of her life, Kngwarreye became a household name in Australian art and was somewhat hounded by art dealers to purchase her work. Recently, one of her most famous paintings, [Earth's Creation](#), was sold for over \$1.6 million. This sale demonstrates how much monetary value the art market places on Kngwarreye's work but cannot compare to the value of her storytelling ability and contributions to her ancestral lands. [UTA art student, Johnny Antram, was inspired by Kngwarreye's visual and narrative brilliance for a word-focused laser cutting project in a digital media class.](#)

Kingly and divine beginnings

Sometimes creation stories carry a flavor of royal heritage and lineage, if royal leadership played a significant role in the settlement and/or unification of a society. This is the case for the Kuba Kingdom primarily located in the southern regions of present-day Democratic Republic of the Congo (Fig. 7.1). The peoples that eventually established the Kuba Kingdom migrated to their present location as major changes were occurring across Africa due to European contact. The migrants settled around the Sankuru River, incorporating an existing society living there already, the Twa.

By the 17th century CE, one ethnic group called the Bushoong in this region came to dominant the rest and established the Kuba Kingdom, incorporating the local Twa as well as the Ngeende, Kel, Pyaand, Bulaang, and many others who probably migrated together. The leaders of the Kuba Kingdom unified these groups under a political unit, always ruled by a member of the Bushoong ethnicity. There is a political hierarchy amongst these groups that ensures that only certain members are able to hold power.

This hierarchy of power is explained via stories, presented as dramatic public performances, centered on three main characters: Moshambwooy/Woot (Fig. 7.9 left), Ngaady a Mwash (Fig. 7.9 right), and Bwoom (Fig. 7.9 center). Moshambwooy is the creator and Woot is the founder of the Kuba Kingdom (the first king). These two characters are embodied together in the performance via a mask that typically features an elephant trunk-like headdress and a beard (sometimes made of raffia; Kuba artists are widely known for their work with raffia) symbolizing wisdom and age. Cowrie shells adorn these masks as representations of status and wealth. Ngaady a Mwash is the ancestral maiden, represented in performances via an elegant mask with decorative face paint, distinct coiffure, and many cowrie shells. Bwoom is Woot's competitor. Bwoom has distinctive facial features such as protruding forehead and chin, sunken cheeks, and a line of material (often beads) across his eyes, rendering him blind. [See a photo of the entire Bwoom ensemble here.](#)



Figure 7.9: Kuba Maker(s) from Democratic Republic of the Congo. *Helmet Masks of Woot (left), Bwoom (center), and Ngaady a Mwash (right)*. ca. 1950 CE. Wood, metal, glass beads, cowrie shells, fabric, pigment, fur (leopard), and leather (baboon), 21 ¾" left; 21 ¾" center; 13 ¾" right. UTA African Art Collection. Photos by Leighton McWilliams; [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

Often held at initiation ceremonies and funerals, the performances of this mask triad enacts a story of kingly triumph. Woot and Bwoom compete for Ngaady a Mwash's affections. Guess who wins... Woot (aligned with the creator god Moshambwooy) defeats Bwoom, becoming the first Kuba king and establishing the lineage of all Kuba kings to come after him. Woot is a member of the Bushoong ethnicity. This is the reason why only Bushoong men are eligible to be king. Some versions of the myth suggest that Bwoom is Woot's brother.

Other versions and scholarly research suggest a different layer to this story. Bwoom's facial features may associate him with the original occupants of Kuba Kingdom territory: the Twa people (Cornet 1978: 202). Like the Ituri Mbuti peoples discussed in "[What is important to us?](#)" the Twa are a pygmy society. The protruding forehead and sunken cheeks of the Bwoom mask may be an exaggerated way to represent facial features that are sometimes seen among pygmy populations. The competition between Woot and Bwoom may be a metaphorized storytelling of the conflicts between the Bushoong and the Twa. We don't know much at all about this conflict or what occurred between them. All we know is that the Kuba Kingdom developed, under Bushoong leadership, in lands originally occupied by Twa peoples who eventually became part of the Kuba Kingdom. This sounds a lot like a process of occupation and conquering. The story of the romantic hero of Woot defeating the different and inferior (and blind) Bwoom is a story that explains the current political situation. Scholar Jan [Vansina \(1987\) wrote a book entitled *The Children of Woot*](#) exploring this very topic. Every time the story is performed in public, the society is reminded about the foundations of power and, depending on the audience, their place in that hierarchy of power.

Let's expand beyond the Kuba Kingdom to consider kingly stories elsewhere. Have you heard of the *Shahnama*? It is probably the most famous Persian poem ever, commonly called the Book or Story of Kings, written by Abu Al-Qain Firdausi from 977 to 1010 CE. This poem is based on the long-established stories of Pre-Islamic Persian Kings from mythical beginnings, semi-historical legendary heroes, and recorded narratives of the Sasanian kings (the Persian dynasty eventually conquered by early Muslim leaders in the late 600s CE). Firdausi composed the poem entirely in the Persian language as a way to immortalize Persian heritage.

Figure 7.10 illustrates a page of a famous copy of Firdausi's *Shahnama*, known as the *Great Mongol Shahnama*. This illustrated manuscript was commissioned by Ilkhanid (aka Ilkhanate) leaders associated with the greater Mongol Empire in the mid 1300s CE. The painting depicts the most famous kingly hero of the Sasanian era: Bahram V (aka Bahram Gur).



Figure 7.10: Ilkhanid Maker(s) from Tabriz, Iran. [Bahram Gur Slays a Dragon from the Great Mongol Shahnama](#). ca. 1330-1335 CE. Opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper, 9" x 13.5". Cleveland Museum of Art Collection; [CCo Public Domain](#).

Bahram Gur lived in the early 400s CE and his reign was centered at the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon, Iran (Fig. 7.1). While he led a few conflicts with the Byzantines to the west and Kidarites to the east, Bahram Gur primarily is celebrated for his patronage of music, beneficence to his subjects, and his love of hunting. He particularly enjoyed hunting gurs (wild donkeys/onagers), thus his popular moniker.

Bahram Gur Slays a Dragon (Fig. 7.10) fantastically illustrates a mythical demonstration of Bahram Gur's prowess and hunting skill. We view the hero from behind, in his bright blue robes and golden armor, with a prominent golden halo. He plunges a sword into the belly of a gray and red spotted dragon. The dragon's head on the left points to the sky with its mouth open in apparent pain. The scaly serpent-like body of the dragon twists behind Bahram Gur, around a tree, and above Bahram's horse at the far right. It appears that Bahram Gur had already felled the dragon using his bow and arrow before the fatal blow.

Bahram Gur certainly lived and hunted as a Sasanian king but he probably didn't hunt dragons. This part of Firdausi's story is one example of the hype and fantasy that kingly stories often accrue over time. The lesson here is clear: Bahram Gur was a badass and a Persian king to remember. A later manuscript of the *Shahnama*, commissioned by Safavid ruler Shah Tahmasp around 1525 CE, includes paintings of Bahram Gur and other [famous Persian Shahs, such as Gayumars and his grandson Hushang, in a different style. "The Feast of Sada" events, as illustrated by Safavid court painted Sultan Muhammad](#), recall the mythical account of Hushang discovering fire after, of course, slaying a dragon.

Such mythical accounts can make kings seem like gods. If you remember from ["What is Divine?"](#), there are many stories about gods and how we view them. Shakyamuni Buddha is a curious case because many see him as a god today but he wasn't considered a god during his lifetime. As Buddhism spread into East and Southeast Asia, Buddha eventually transformed into various versions of divine beings. Shakyamuni Buddha's eventual god-like persona often reflects the fact that he is thought to have had many more previous lives than most of us, over 500 by most accounts. The stories of Siddhartha's previous lives are known as the *Jataka* tales (*jataka* literally means birth but refers to the many births, via reincarnation, of an individual within Buddhism). These stories are an important part of the canon of Buddhist literature, surviving in the Pali Canon of texts and other versions.

Dipankara Jataka (Fig. 7.11) depicts a previous life in which the Buddha met another Buddha, known as Dipankara

Buddha, that came before him. You read that correctly! According to the Pali Canon, Shakyamuni Buddha was not the only Buddha! There were many before him! He is just the most recent. Dipankara Buddha lived much earlier than Siddhartha's lifetime and is considered the immediate predecessor of Shakyamuni. In the sculpted panel, Dipankara Buddha is the largest figure, standing with a halo (symbolizing his enlightenment) and demonstrating the *abhaya mudra*. The man standing in front of Dipankara is Megha (aka Sumedha), one of the previous incarnations of Siddhartha. Megha throws flowers and fruits towards Dipankara, honoring him. Then, above and below the standing Megha, there are two additional depictions, one floating above with arms in a gesture of veneration, and the other hunched over at Dipankara's feet. This scene depicts the story of Megha meeting Dipankara Buddha and receiving a prophecy foretelling that in a future lifetime, Megha will be reborn as a prince, eventually reach enlightenment, and become a Buddha himself.



Figure 7.11: Gandharan Maker(s) from Pakistan. [Dipankara Jataka](#). ca. 100-150 CE. Schist with gold leaf, 8.75" x 8.5" x 1.5". The Metropolitan Museum of Art Collection; Public Domain.

Before we leave Dipankara and Megha, let's look back at *Shakyamuni Buddha* (Fig. 4.10) in "[What is Divine.](#)" These sculptures were made around the same time and quite close to one another. Check the maps (Figs. 4.1 & 7.1) to see how close Mathura, India, and Gandhara, Pakistan, are. In comparing these two sculptures, do you notice the different material? Red sandstone was the common sculpting stone in Mathura while Gandharan artists used local gray schist. Do

you notice the different representations of the robes and facial features? These differences relate to the influence that Gandhara felt from Classical Greek colonies in modern-day Afghanistan (what the Greeks called Bactria).

Established as a result of Alexander the Great's incursions into Central Asia, the Greco-Bactrian Empire was thriving a couple centuries prior to the production of these sculptures. Greek art and culture were imported into the Greco-Bactrian Empire and filtered into surrounding regions, like Gandhara, through trade and exchange. The Greek descendants and governors of Bactria were later reconquered by Mauryan Emperor Ashoka and converted to Buddhism, contributing to the fusion of cultures over several hundred years. Of course, the full story of the origins and development of Gandharan art is far more complex. Delve deeper with "[Inception of Gandhāra Sculpture](#)" (Khan 1965).

The Gandharan artists depicted Dipankara, Megha, and the attendants around them in garments draped like Classical Greek robes. Facial features like high foreheads, straight noses, and square chins, along with thin mustaches, reflect the styles of Classical Greek portraiture. On the flip side, *Shakyamuni Buddha* (Fig. 4.10) from Mathura reflects native Indian styles of sculpture. The robe is presented with thick ribbing at the arm and only as incised detail on the chest. The facial features reflect native Indian preferences of a rounded chin, short forehead, and largely proportioned eyes. The Gandharan example demonstrates the early globalization of the image of the Buddha. Shakyamuni Buddha transformed again and again as new peoples found value in his teachings.

The spectacle of stories

Recall the Kuba Kingdom performance of Woot's defeat of Bwoom. These performances were public displays of heritage and power. Performers wore those elaborate masks to take on the persona and mythology of those characters (only with permission of the current king, btw). Most societies have special traditions of performance involving theatrics, music, dance, spoken word, or a combination thereof. The costumes, the movement, the setting, and the sounds can all contribute to a spectacle that captivates an audience and ensures that the underlying message resonates with the community.



Figure 7.12: Dong Son Maker(s) from Red River Delta, Vietnam. [Ngọc Lũ Drum \(top surface pictured on the right\)](#). ca. 300-200 BCE. Bronze, 8.75" x 8.5" x 1.5". Vietnam History Museum Collection; [CC BY-NC-SA 2.5](#).

In ancient Vietnam, among the Đông Sơn (aka Lạc Việt) culture, bronze drums like the Ngọc Lũ Drum (Fig. 7.12) featured

prominently in public rituals and performances. When struck, the drum would produce a deep resonance, similar to large bronze gongs. Drums like this one would have been used at funerals, feasts, and military events.

The *Ngọc Lũ Drum* is considered particularly important in Vietnam because of the concentric rings of figural designs on the striking surface (for more detail, check out drawings of the figural scenes provided by the [Vietnam National Museum of History](#)). Circling a central starburst, the first circle features ritually adorned figures and musicians playing drums! Other instruments are depicted, too, as well as activities of rice agriculture. A leader, the most elaborately dressed figure, appears to preside over a procession of musicians, some of whom play inside a roofed structure with streamers (their hairstyles may indicate they are women). The two larger concentric circles feature images of deer, hornbill birds, and crane egrets. Bird imagery, including feathers, features prominently in the procession scene as well. The specific nature of the rituals for which drums like the *Ngọc Lũ* example were played are difficult to reconstruct. But these decorative scenes offer great clues!

Across the Pacific and back in Mesoamerica, public performances of the historic and present-day Maya recall their ancient past and reflect the colonial traditions brought by the Spanish. The elaborate Late Classic Maya dance performance illustrated in the *Vessel of the Dancing Lords* (Fig. 7.5) continued, somewhat transformed, until Spanish contact. As briefly described in [“Where Does Art Come From? An Introduction.”](#) in Guatemala, the Spanish conquest started around 1524 CE and continued until 1697 CE when the fiercely independent Itza Maya were defeated. One of the first Maya groups to be contacted and colonized was the K'iche. This initiated a period of immense change and cultural loss, but not extinction. The present-day Maya still practice many of the ancient traditions, including performance of the *Danza del Venado* (Deer Dance).

Venado Mask (Fig. 7.13) is a contemporary example of a mask worn to represent the deer in a performance about hunting and the interrelationships of humans and animals. The deer is the largest bodied mammal in Mesoamerica and has been hunted by Maya peoples for thousands of years. The *Danza del Venado* represents the sacredness of the deer and the importance placed in this source of meat. Public performances of this dance were a communal expression of this importance and the fertility of the land from which the deer derive. ~~SPANG~~



Figure 7.13: K'iche Maya Maker(s) of Guatemala. *Venado Mask*. ca. 1950 CE. Wood, horn, fabric, sequins, 18 x 10 x 5 ½". UTA African Arts Collection. Photo by Leah McCurdy; [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

Scholars suggest that the original *Danza del Venado* incorporated actual deer skulls as masks. As Spanish missionaries worked to convert Maya peoples to Catholicism, the use of animal skulls in ceremonial performances was discouraged. Thus, Maya carvers developed designs for painted wooden deer masks. The adornments primarily reflect the imported traditions of Spanish dress and embroidery. Today, performers that represent the venado character in the *Danza del Venado* also wear garments that reflect the Spanish colonial tradition. [View this video of a Danza del Venado performance in Cahabon Alta, Guatemala in 2007.](#)

Did you notice the masks of the hunters in the video? Those masks can serve double duty. At certain times of year, they represent the hunters in the *Danza del Venado* and at other times of year, they are used for characters in the *Baile de la Conquista* (Dance of the Conquest) (Fig. 7.14). This performance was created by a Spanish missionary experimenting with ways to convert Maya people to Catholicism. He came to understand the importance of storytelling through dance and performance within Maya culture. Thus, he developed a dance telling the story of the Spanish conquest of the K'iche Maya, focused on the defeat of the K'iche King, *Tecum Uman* (Fig. 7.14 center). Other Maya characters include shamans and *caciques* (chiefs) (Fig. 7.14 right). The ultimate victory of the Spanish by Pedro de Alvarado (Fig. 7.14 left)

symbolized the victory of the Catholic Church and cemented the presence of Catholicism in the lives of Maya people. The differences in skin tone among the masks in Figure 7.14 clearly demonstrate biased portrayals, with Alvarado's hair covered in gold. After the success of the *Baile de la Conquista*, many dances were created by Catholic officials to celebrate patron saints of individual towns. All of these dances continue to be performed today.



Figure 7.14: K'iche Maker(s) of San Sebastian, Retalhuleu, Guatemala. *Alvarado mask (left)*. ca. 1960 CE. Wood, pigment, 10 x 7 ⁷/₈ x 5 ¹/₈".

K'iche Maker(s) of Chichicastanango, El Quiche, Guatemala. *Tecum Uman Mask (center)*. ca. 1960 CE. Wood, pigment, 9 ¹/₂ x 7 ¹/₈ x 5 ⁷/₈".

K'iche Maker(s) of Chichicastanango, El Quiche, Guatemala. *Cacique Mask (right)*. ca. 1970 CE. Wood, pigment, 8 x 8 x 5".

UTA Guatemalan Mask Collection. Photos by Cheryl Mitchell; [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

While performances primarily focused on the movement of the human body are common around the world, another form of performance also features prominently in many communities: puppetry. There are many forms of puppetry, including those using 3D puppet forms controlled via strings or with a puppeteer's hand. Another form is shadow puppetry, wherein the puppeteer manipulates 2D puppets behind a screen and a light source projects the shadows of the puppets for the audience. Shadow puppetry can be traced across East Asia in China, Korea, and Japan. But in Southeast Asia, the tradition of *Wayang Kulit* of Java, Indonesia (Fig. 7.1), was probably influenced more by the puppetry traditions of India.

Figure 7.15 shows a *dalang* (Master Puppeteer of Java) performing a conflict scene between two male characters, depicted via painted buffalo hide puppets attached to buffalo horn or bamboo sticks. The *Wayang Kulit* puppets are designed with overlapping components and cut-out patterns so that the shadows they produce appear dimensionally and aesthetically complex. Set pieces of architectural facades (like that seen at the right of Figure 7.15) provide context for the scenes.



Figure 7.15: [A dalang \(Master Puppeteer of Java, Indonesia\) depicting fighting in a Wayang Kulit performance](#) (left) and [shadow image visible to theatre patrons](#) (right), 2013 CE. [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

Wayang puppet shows feature music, voice actors, and dynamic stories often about Hindu mythologies and Javanese cultural legends. The drama is heightened because the shows are traditionally held from midnight to dawn. [Check out historic photographs of Wayang shows and many examples of puppets here](#).

For our last excursion into stories, let's go to the movies. We're not going to Hollywood or Bollywood. We're going to [Wakaliwood](#). Wakaliga is an impoverished neighborhood of the Ugandan capital, Kampala. Isaac Nabwana established Ramon Film Productions in Wakaliga, popularly referred to as Wakaliwood, around 2005 CE. All original Wakaliwood films were extremely low-budget (like under \$200) productions focused on do-it-yourself prop construction and development of local acting talent. Nabwana trained adults and children in Kung-Fu and other martial arts, using Asian cinematic classics as his guide. Hear about Nabwana's journey from his own voice in "Meet the Steven Spielberg of Wakaliwood" from Great Big Story (Fig. 7.16).



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://uta.pressbooks.pub/wheredoesartcomefrom/?p=310#oembed-1>

Figure 7.16: ["Meet the Steven Spielberg of Wakaliwood"](#) uploaded by Great Big Story on YouTube (February 6, 2019).

Nabwana's most famous film is [Who Killed Captain Alex?](#) from 2010 ([original poster](#) sketched in Fig. 7.17). Dubbed "Uganda's First Action Movie," the film's storyline is as follows on [IMDb](#):

Uganda's president gives Captain Alex the mission to defeat the Tiger Mafia, but Alex gets killed in the process. Upon hearing the tragic news, his brother investigates to avenge Alex.

Wakaliwood films are often compared to the action films of Hollywood director Quentin Tarantino and Jean-Claude Van Damme. Martial arts sequences, gun battles, and chase scenes are common. Some viewers also find a dark comedic value in these films when the DIY props appear a bit too fake.



Figure 7.17: Digital Transformational Sketch by Marizela Garza of the original artwork: “Who Killed Captain Alex?” movie poster, ca. 2010 CE. [View the original artwork here](#). Refer to Figure 0.1 to view the transformational sketch process.

Films like *Who Killed Captain Alex?* were originally posted to YouTube for free. Nabwana also offered screenings of his films in Wakaliga for the local community. Today, Wakaliwood films are known around the world. Through social networks like a Kickstarter campaign, Nabwana has raised over \$10,000 for certain projects. *Bad Black* has been a hit with international audiences, including those of the Seattle International Film Festival in 2017. These stories of action and (often quite violent) adventure demonstrate the value of using what you have and endeavoring to tell the stories that are the most interesting to you. As Nabwana says, “It is passion that really makes a movie [in Wakaliga]” (Venema 2015).

The Wrap-up

Stories are an integral part of the human experience, past and present. We engage with stories in so many different ways, from tv and film to grandma’s kitchen. All societies have stories that they hold dear and that they eventually seek to

immortalize through visual storytelling. Art offers many different ways to express our stories and preserve the messages embedded within them. Think about the stories you want to ensure are preserved for future generations as you explore resources in the media and the scholarly literature below.

News Flash

- View [an animated film](#) illustrating the creation narrative of the Postclassic K'iche Maya creation narrative in the Popul Vuh.
- After watching [Who Killed Captain Alex?](#) check out the [Wakaliwood: The Documentary](#) also produced by Ramon Film Productions.
- To learn about Emily Kame Kngwarreye's successful museum exhibition in Japan check out the documentary film ["Emily in Japan."](#)
- To consider the bias and discrimination faced by Aboriginal Australians, watch this video produced by students and staff of The University of Sydney: ["Ask us anything: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people."](#)
- Check out the [Shumla Archaeological Research and Education Center](#) focused on documenting and protecting West Texas rock art for future generations, for which Dr. Carolyn Boyd is the founder and director.

Where Do I Go From Here? / The Bibliography

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8. Who Came Before Us?



Figure 8.1: Map and timeline of artworks discussed in “Who Came Before Us?” by Marizela Garza. Review image captions below for details about each artwork and copyright information.

Who came before us?

What is the past? What is history? What is time? As with [“What is Divine?”](#), we won’t be answering these questions here. Instead, we’ll be navigating some ways that cultures around the world have considered these questions. We’ve already considered how some cultures focus on history embedded in their ancestry. Remember the *Kwawkwaka’wakw* from [“What is Important to Us?”](#) for whom ancestors and ancestral mythologies are profoundly important? Speaking of mythologies, remember back to all the accounts of the origins of humanity in [“Will You Tell a Story?”](#) These are accounts of cultural histories that reflect sacred ways of viewing the world and the past.

As our ‘theory of mind of cultures’ from [“Who Am I?”](#) indicates and many examples we’ve already discussed in the previous chapters attest, different cultures answer these questions differently. In European and Euro-American traditions, history is typically presented as a timeline of events that occurred sequentially. Astrophysicists who scientifically study the nature of time at the scale of the universe suggest that time is directional. That jives with many people’s perceptions that events happened before, things are happening now, and other stuff will happen in the future. Those are discrete segments of time that we can experience. But, what about other ways of perceiving time?

Is time linear?

For many cultures, unidirectional and/or horizontal linear timelines are difficult to make sense of because in their understanding, time is not only linear; it is cyclical. To visualize this difference, check out Figure 8.2. To complicate things, Figure 8.3 illustrates how linear and cyclical perceptions of time actually mingle. We know that the rotation of the earth creates what we call the ‘rising’ and ‘setting’ of the sun each day (based on our perception from the earth’s surface). This is the daily cycle of time. But the moon’s orbit creates a different cycle of waxing and waning that (somewhat) corresponds to the Gregorian calendar of 28/29/30/31-day months. Most European and Euro-American communities recognize the seasonal cycles of temperate regions of the northern hemisphere (spring, summer, autumn, winter). Furthermore, the cyclical recognition of the rotation of the earth around the sun (i.e. one year) is also a major facet of the Gregorian calendar. In these ways, Europeans and Euro-Americans understand cyclical time, even if they prefer the simplified charts of one line forever progressing into the future. But what about longer timescales, like the ‘multiannual’ cycle illustrated in Figure 8.3? Let’s explore how the ancient Maya viewed time to consider these possibilities.

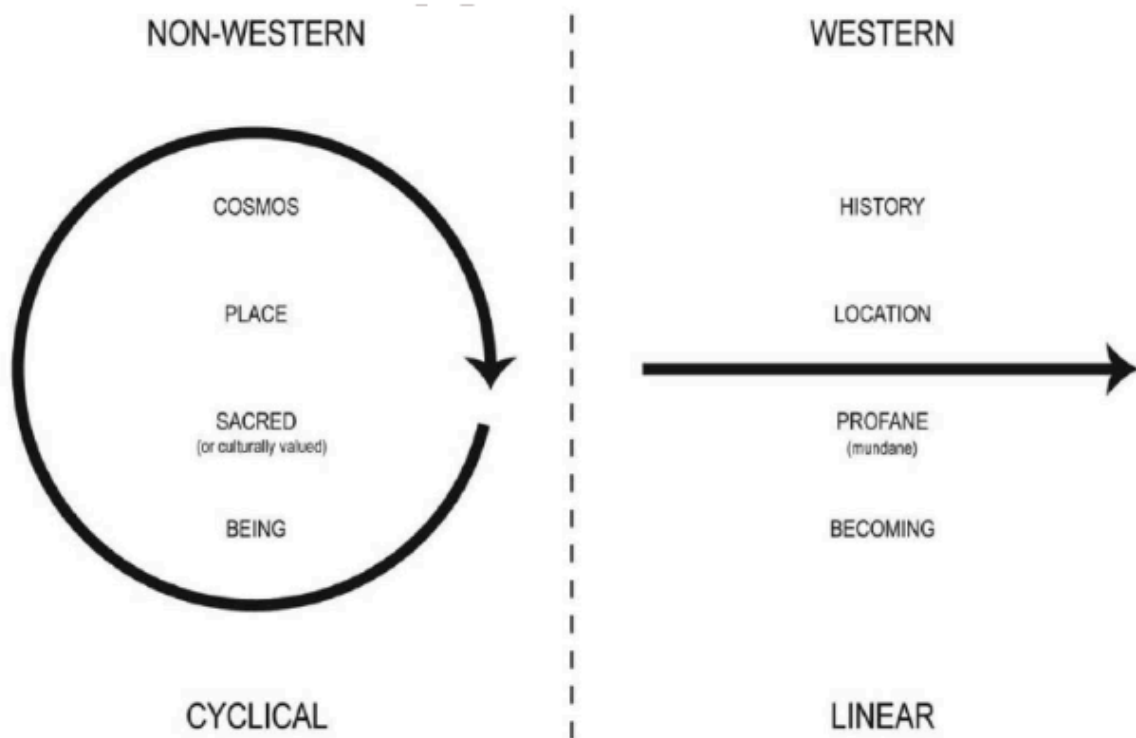


Figure 8.2: Illustration of two different ways of perceiving time: linear and cyclical. Image Source: Schaepe et al. 2017; used with permission.

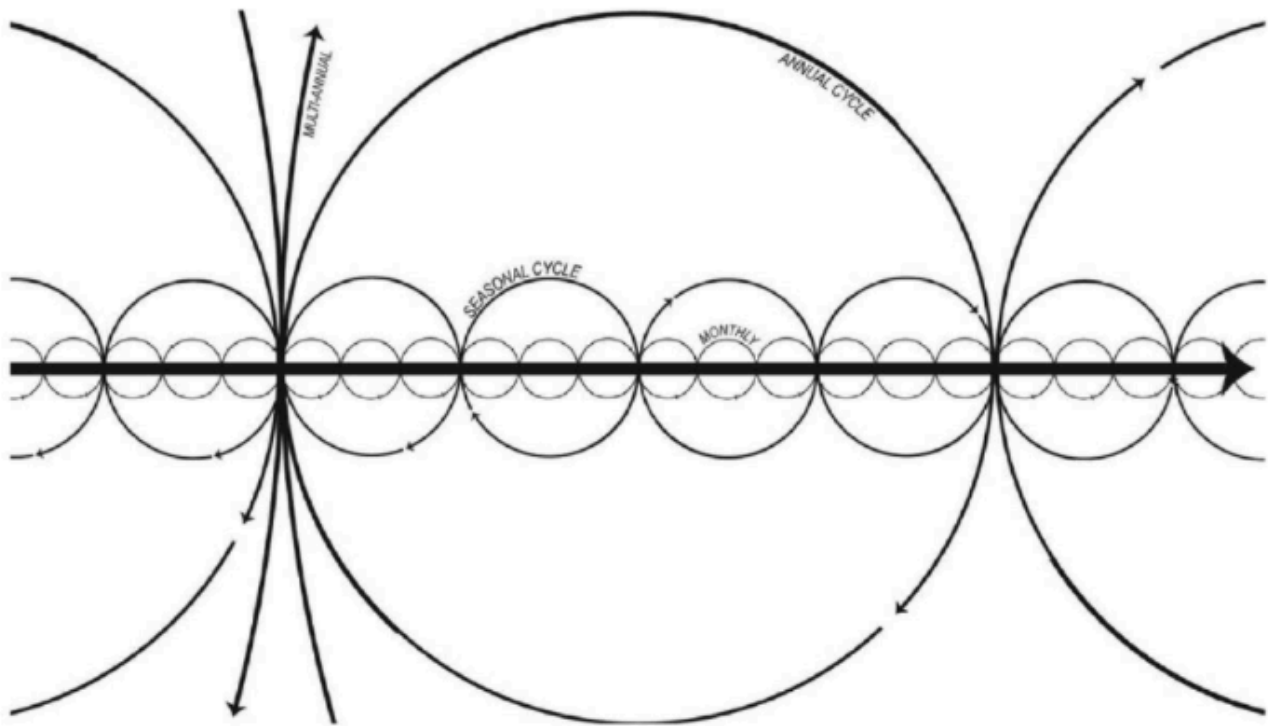


Figure 8.3: Illustration of the simultaneity of linear and cyclical perceptions of time, including multiple cycles that occur simultaneously. Image Source: Schaepe et al. 2017; used with permission.

The ancient Maya developed calendar systems (yes, multiple) that place great importance on these longer time scales while serving practical, daily needs as well. Two calendar systems focus on annual timescales: one that prioritizes agriculture (the *Haab'*) and one that prioritizes spiritual and ritual needs (the *Tzolk'in*) (both of these are still in use today). The *Haab'* calendar focuses on cycles of 20 *k'in* (days) called *winals*. Certain *winals* are more agriculturally productive because they fall within the wet season (when crops get sustained rain). The semi-tropical forests of the Maya region, and many other tropical cultures, recognize two cyclical seasons: the wet season and the dry season. The *Haab'* annual cycle is called a *tun* (year), comprising 360 days (18 *winals*) and 1 *winal* of only 5 days at the end of the year, called the *Wayeb*.

The *Tzolk'in* calendar cycles over a 260-day period (13 *winals* of 20 *k'ins*). The *Haab'* and the *Tzolk'in* cycle separately but are often recorded together. So, any given day will have a *Haab'* date and a *Tzolk'in* date. When provided together, these are called Calendar Round dates. The Calendar Round cycle completes when the first day of the *Haab'* and the first day of the *Tzolk'in* cycles align. This happens every 18,980 solar days, or 52 years.

| Maya calendrical term | English equivalent/similarity | Correlations |
|--|-------------------------------|--|
| <i>k'in</i> | day | |
| <i>winal</i> | week or month | 20 <i>k'in</i> |
| <i>tun</i> | year | <i>Haab</i> : 360 <i>k'in</i> (18 <i>winals</i>) + <i>Wayeb</i> (5 <i>k'in</i>) <i>Tzolk'in</i> : 260 <i>k'in</i> (13 <i>winals</i>) |
| <i>k'atun</i> | decade | 20 <i>tun</i> (7200 <i>k'in</i>) |
| Calendar Round completion | none | 52 <i>tun</i> |
| ' <i>B'ak'tun</i> ' (term developed by archaeologists) | century | 20 <i>k'atun</i> (144,000 <i>k'in</i>) |
| ' <i>Piktun</i> ' (term developed by archaeologists) | epoch | 20 <i>b'ak'tun</i> |

The 52-year Calendar Round cycle is only one example of how the Maya developed 'multiannual' time scales. The Long Count calendar is separate from the *Haab* and *Tzolk'in* and cycles on 20 *tun* (year) increments. 20 *tun* is a *k'atun* and 20 *k'atun* (400 *tun*) is a *b'ak'tun*, and so on (occasionally accounting all the way to '*alautun*' or cycles of 64,000,000 years). Wondering why the number 20 has come up so much? The Maya used a base-20 counting system, as opposed to the base-10 counting system dominant in Europe and Euro-America.

The ending of a *k'atun* or *b'ak'tun* was celebrated among the Maya. An individual may celebrate two or three *k'atun* during their lifetime but it would be much rarer to celebrate a *b'ak'tun*. The royal family would commission large stone monuments (called *stela/stelae* [P.S. a Greek-derived term applied to the ancient Maya]) recording *k'atun* or *b'ak'tun* dates, often instructing carvers to represent their portraits alongside the date. *Stela Depicting K'aloonte' K'abel* (Fig. 8.4) from the ancient city El Perú-Waka', in present-day Guatemala (Fig. 8.1), is one such monument.



Figure 8.4: Late Classic Maya Maker(s) from El Perú-Waka', Guatemala. [Stela Depicting Kaloomte' K'abel \(Stela 34\)](#). 692 CE. Limestone. The Cleveland Museum of Art Collection; [CCo Public Domain](#).

So, where is the date recorded on this stela? The Maya wrote calendar dates in hieroglyphs, according to the conventions of the hieroglyphic writing system. When carved in stone, hieroglyphic texts are often presented as text blocks, as seen at the top left and bottom right of *Stela Depicting Kaloomte' K'abel*. The text block on the top left describes Lady *K'abel*, her titles, reign dates, and description that the monument marks the end of a *k'atun*.

The lower right text block documents the Long Count date of that *k'atun* to 692 CE. Lady *K'abel* did not stand alone to commemorate this important passage of time. This stela was erected as part of a pair, [the second of which depicted her husband K'inich Bahlam II](#) and recorded the same Long Count date. Indeed, the cyclical nature of *k'atun* periods and the entire Maya perception of time is exemplified at El Perú-Waka'. The pair of stelae marking the 692 CE *k'atun* ending was erected in the same plaza as an earlier pair, also depicting Lady *K'abel* and *K'inich Bahlam II*, celebrating the 672 CE *k'atun* ending. The pair ruled over El Perú-Waka' for those 20 years and probably longer. They celebrated the cyclical passage of *k'atuns* and ensured that calendrical scholars and scribes continued to document the passage of time towards the forthcoming *b'ak'tun* and beyond.

(P.S. Speaking of Maya calendars, December 21, 2012 CE was not the Maya apocalypse; it was the ending of a *b'ak'tun*. In fact, it was the ending of the 13th *b'ak'tun* in a stretch of over 5,000 years from the creation date that ancient Maya calendrical scholars calculated based on creation narratives. The ancient Maya and the modern Maya in 2012 CE did not expect the world to end on that day. In fact, while it is rare to see units higher than *b'ak'tun* actually used, there is a fascinating inscription at the city of Palenque (present-day Chiapas, Mexico) which records the ending of the present *piktun* on October 13, 4772 CE. How could December 21, 2012 CE be 'the end' if the current *piktun* wasn't going to end for over 2000 years? Cyclical time is the key here. On December 21, 2012, one long cycle was coming to a close and another one was starting. It was a day of celebration, not fear.)

The Maya calendar system and understanding of time is quite complicated. To learn more check out [The Maya Calendar: A Book of Months, 400–2000 CE \(Lamb 2017\)](#). Also check out the very recent finding of the oldest known calendar notation in the Maya world ([Stuart et al. 2022](#)), which happens to be at San Bartolo, Guatemala, where the Maize God Mural was found! If you're wondering about Lady *K'abel* herself and why she's depicted as such a badass in *Stela Depicting Kaloomte' K'abel*, don't worry! We'll come back to her when we discuss status and hierarchies in "[Why Do They Have More Than Us?](#)" For now, let's explore more about how people understand the past, beyond the esoteric consideration of time cycles. Many cultures, first and foremost, look to the past through their recent ancestors.

Ancestors

Art often brings ancestors (deceased family members) back to life, and makes them present today. *Bulul Figures* (Fig. 8.5) of the Ifugao culture of the Philippines (Fig. 8.1) offer such direct ancestral connections. [Tiaralyn Valdez Torres and Khriselle Chelsea Daugard](#), students in Dr. Rick Bonus' course called "Critical Filipinx American Histories" at the University of Washington, offer their research on *Bulul Figures*, from a Filipinx perspective. First, let's consider the cultural context [Torres and Daugard \(2019, para. 1-3\)](#) offer about the Ifugao and the tradition of *Bulul*:

Prior to ... colonization, the Ifugaos were one of the most sophisticated and prosperous highland plutocracies in the entire Philippine archipelago. The state existed for over 2,000 years, and there was a council of elders that ruled and led with peace. This plutocracy ... brought about the best agricultural technology in Asia [for its] time. Massive rice terraces were built, which became enduring symbols of this province. Rice for the Ifugao is considered a prestige crop, so their cultures revolve around it. There are many feasts ... that are related to rice and the different aspects of rice farming. ... [Rice] is linked to community and spiritual well-being...

The villages [of the Ifugao] were often built around a [central] stone platform.... It was on this platform that social and spiritual rites were performed, such as the worship of deities and ancestors, as well as the consecration of [Bulul] figures ...

The bulul is a carved wooden statue ... used to guard [the] rice crop. They are carved from a single piece of wood and depict [abstracted] humans. These bulul ... represent the ancestors of the Ifugaos.... The statues have the figures either standing or sitting down [atop a stylized mortar, used to grind rice], and the male and female statues [represented by distinct genitalia] are usually found next to each other.... Among the different types of Ifugao figurative sculptures, the bulul are the most known and are the most abundant.



Figure 8.5: Ifugao Maker(s) of the Philippines. [Bulul Figures](#). Unknown date. Wood, approx. 15.25". Burke Museum Collection; [CC BY-NC](#).

Torres and Daugard (2019, para. 2) go on to discuss the circumstances of Spanish colonization in the region, including the fact that the Ifugao fought against colonization for hundreds of years, until the Philippine Revolution. *Bulul* continues to be valued among the Ifugao, demonstrating the importance of connections to history, through family ties. These connections don't stop if Ifugao or other Filipinx peoples decide to emigrate to other areas of the world. Check out the rest of ["The Bulul Statue: The Power of Rice Healing" \(Torres and Daugard 2019\)](#) to learn about how ancestral traditions reflect in contemporary Filipinx-American life.

An important part of the trajectory of ancestors, and the developments of history in many cultures, is the death of an important person. Among the peoples of the Mandak-Barak region of central New Ireland in Melanesia (Fig. 8.1), sculptures like *Uli Figure* (sketched in Fig. 8.6; [original here](#)) adorn funerals for *memai* (literally "speaker"). In the relatively small Mandak villages, *memai* are the leaders, drawn from the pool of middle-age or elderly men with political influence. When a *memai* dies, his position and legacy is honored through *malagan* (funerary ceremonies).



Figure 8.6: Digital Transformational Sketch by Marizela Garza of the original artwork: Mandak Maker(s) of New Ireland. *Uli Figure*. 1850-1950 CE. Wood, paint, fiber, shell, 52 x 16 x 13 ¾". The Metropolitan Museum of Art Collection. [View the original artwork here](#). Refer to Figure 0.1 to view the transformational sketch process.

Nearly life-size sculptures, like *Uli Figure*, are portraits of the deceased *memai* and reflect their power, as a newly minted ancestor. The facial features reflect this power, with prominent eyes (accentuated by black paint), open mouth with teeth bared, and large ears. The carvers of the central region of New Ireland are particularly known for incorporating the raised position of the arms as seen in this *Uli Figure*. The raised arms likely relate to the traditional funerary practices of the region. According to ethnographers who have observed such practices, *memai* corpses may have been “displayed in a seated position, [their] arms kept raised by threads, and [would be] buried or cremated in this position” (Heintze 1987: 51; citing Parkinson 1907: 274). In the case of *Uli Figure*, it appears that the arms are anchored in the raised position by a type of scaffolding, probably composed of sticks or broken spears, attached to the base and at the figure’s waist. This may reflect actual materials used to prop the deceased body up in front of their house during *malagan*. Feasting would occur as a way of honoring the deceased, consuming local foods such as taro, yams, and pigs.

Have you noticed the other anatomical details of the figure? Both a penis and breasts are prominent. *Uli* figures are intentionally intersex (comprising physical characteristics of both males and females). Mandak peoples view this combination of features as a way to represent the power of fertility, according to all human needs, that *memai* can

influence. Indeed, this power of fertility extends to animals and agriculture. This natural power is the foundation for the *memai's* ability to succeed in conflicts with other groups, and protect his community. *Uli Figure* wears a helmet or headdress that may reflect traditional garments worn by *memai* and reflect their dominance. The *malagan* memorialize the *memai*, ensuring that the ancestor is not forgotten and is respected as an important facet of a village's history.

Mandak peoples are also known to care for deceased family members in death by allowing the body to decay to bones. They collect and honor those bones as direct, physical representations of ancestors. This tradition of collecting and preserving ancestral remains (not in a grave but in a container within a living space) is common for many cultures, including the preservation of relics with Christian traditions, for example. The 'Fang' peoples (like the Kongo, comprising many distinct groups and arbitrarily combined by Western colonizers), primarily located in present-day Gabon (Fig. 8.1), preserve ancestral remains and produce arts to protect them. Figure 8.7 is a *Byeri Figure* that protects a basket container holding bone remains of family ancestors, as illustrated in Figure 8.8. Following applied Christian terminology (according to the Western biases of art history), the ancestral remains are often called relics and the basket containers are often called reliquaries.

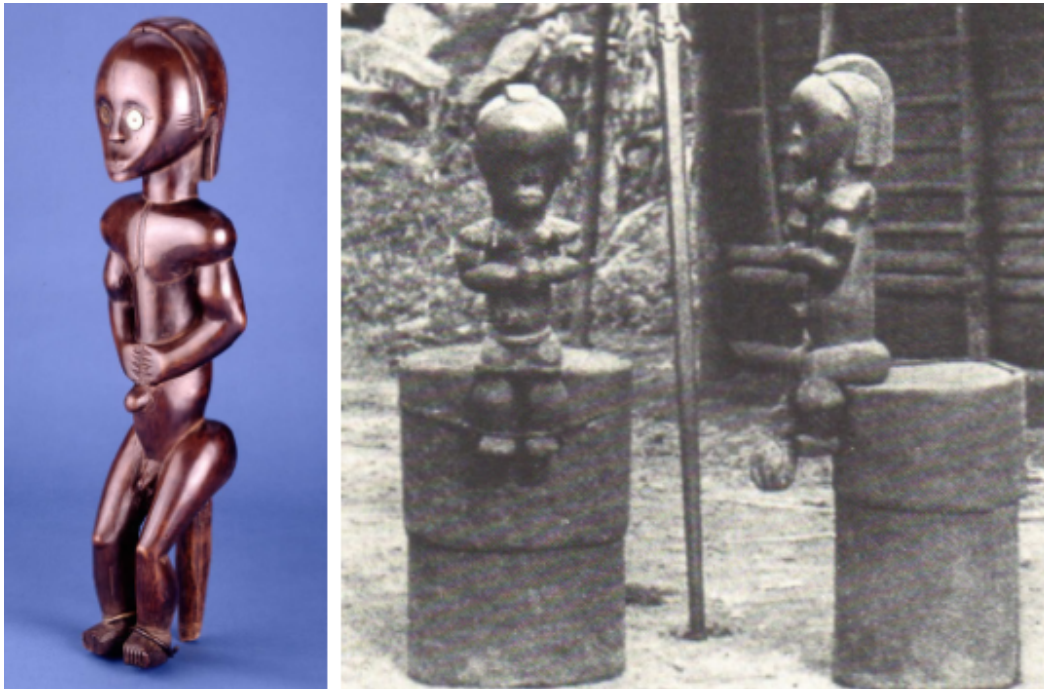


Figure 8.7 (left): 'Fang' Maker(s) of Gabon. [Byeri Figure](#). ca. 1800-1950 CE. Wood, brass, iron nails, 60.5 x 16 x 13.5 cm. The British Museum Collection. © The Trustees of the British Museum; [CC BY-NC-SA](#).

Figure 8.8 (right): 'Fang' Reliquary in Cameroon, 1914. Image Source: [Walker and Walker 1987](#).

The *Byeri Figure* would be secured in the top of a basket by inserting the projecting piece behind the legs into a hole in the basket top. Like the examples in Figure 8.8, *byeri* figures are carved in a seated position so that the figure appears to preside over a basket and inhibit anyone attempting to open it. *Byeri* figures often present muscular features with disproportionately large heads and shortened limbs. Prominence of the head likely reflects the importance of the skull, as it is one of the most likely portions of ancestral remains that will preserve long-term. *Byeri* figures are always defined as male with penises and coiffured hair from the mid-forehead down the back, according to the traditions of men's hairstyles among the 'Fang.' They are often decorated with ornaments such as the metal bangles at the ankles on *Byeri Figure* (Fig 8.7).

Ancestral remains within the protected basket could be from prominent male leaders, lineage founders (either men

or women), successful warriors, particularly fertile women who greatly increased the size of the lineage, and even ancestors highly regarded for their skills as artists. Reliquaries would be maintained and controlled by local ritual specialists, who have the spiritual knowledge that allow them to connect safely with ancestors. Like in the Nkisi tradition discussed in [“What is Important to Us?”](#) ‘Fang’ people would seek a local specialist’s help to consult the ancestors for particularly important needs or requests. Specialists would carefully remove ancestral remains from the basket and undertake the proper rituals to seek spiritual intervention.

You might question why ‘Fang’ people would choose to preserve ancestral remains in this way instead of burying their ancestors in a grave and visiting the grave for such rituals. It is important to note that for most of their history, ‘Fang’ peoples were highly mobile, moving around the forest to find the best resources as seasons changed and as animals migrated. The ‘Fang’ are dependent on the forest and must move according to the natural rhythms of forest life. This means that ‘Fang’ peoples do not live in permanent settlements, like villages. Only when Portuguese and French missionaries arrived in the region did ‘Fang’ peoples develop sedentary lifestyles and permanent villages. Their original mobile lifestyle was more in tune with the forest and the environment upon which they depend. Permanent settlement often involves the development of cemeteries or burial grounds where ancestors are permanently laid to rest in the ground. In contrast, mobile peoples would not benefit from permanent cemeteries, because they would be separated from their ancestors for long periods due to their movements.

Thus, mobile cultures like the ‘Fang’ peoples developed distinct mobile burial customs. The basket that contains the ancestral remains is very portable and easily transported as a family moves throughout the forest. This way the ancestors are always with the family and the history they represent is always present. As [Kathleen Berzock \(2008\)](#) notes, this practice “protected the remains, and embodied the deceased, keeping his or her force available to the living.” To learn more about the distinct types of reliquary figures among the ‘Fang’ and related peoples, check out [“Reliquary Head” \(Berzock 2008\)](#). Importantly, we understand that the relics themselves are the sacred objects, not the *byeri* carvings or the basket containers. Thus, if traveling space was tight or if leaving a place was rushed, *byeri* carvings could be left without any reservation. In fact, we know that many ‘Fang’ peoples would happily sell a *byeri* sculpture to a foreigner when asked because the sculpture was replaceable, not the remains.

Unfortunately, this practice of relic collection and storage was poorly understood and demonized by European missionaries, despite their knowledge of Christian practices of relic-keeping. After seeing that the ‘Fang’ peoples kept bones, especially within their homes and that specialists interacted with the bones on a regular basis, they assumed the worst and recorded that the ‘Fang’ were cannibals. There is no evidence that cannibalism was practiced among ‘Fang’ peoples. Europeans made incorrect interpretations based on misunderstandings of distinct burial customs.

As the Mandak and ‘Fang’ examples demonstrate, ancestral ties are often most significant across only a few generations, perhaps just the previous generation. But there are much older, and more distant, ancestral ties that other artists explore. For example, Texas-based intermedia artist Shayna Sutton explores the notion of “Mitochondrial Eve,” a person better known as the mitochondrial/matrilineal most recent common ancestor (aka Mt-MRCA) in her artwork called *Saartjie* (Fig. 8.9). FYI: The Biblical references to Eve should not be taken as anything other than a convenient journalistic title used to describe scientific results to the public. The original scholars who published on this in 1987 preferred the term “Lucky Mother” ([Cann et al. 1987](#); [Lewin 1987](#)).



Figure 8.9: Shayna Sutton. *Saartjie*. 2019 CE. Cardboard and other found materials, approx. 3'. Image Courtesy of Shayna Sutton, used with permission.

Let's get into the science a bit to understand who Mt-MCRA is. Everyone has mitochondrial DNA (that we inherit from our mothers) that relates to large pools of DNA, called mitochondrial haplogroups (aka matriline; the genetic lineage that runs through our mother, our grandmother, our great-grandmother, and so on). Studies of population-level human genetics indicate that all living people's mitochondrial DNA can be traced back to one mitochondrial haplogroup started by one woman in the past. Therefore, all living humans (at any given time) are related through their matriline to one original female ancestor. It is important to note that this ancestor changes as populations change and certain mitochondrial haplogroups die out over time, so there is not one fixed Mt-MCRA. But the idea holds that we are all related through matriline developed in Africa. Current scholarship pinpoints the current Mt-MCRA, relevant to all currently living people's ancestry, to a woman living in East Africa between 100,000 – 230,000 years ago. This mt-MCRA was living among other women (and was the descendant of many women before her) who contributed to their own mitochondrial haplogroups that have since died out.

Shayna Sutton was intrigued by the idea of Mt-MCRA, and the importance of Africa, to every human's oldest ancestry. As Sutton learned about important women of Africa, she found connections forming between her and them. She developed an awareness of her long, long-ago ancestors in the stories of strong African women, such as Saartjie "Sarah" Baartman. Saartjie was a woman of the KhoiKhoi peoples of present-day South Africa (Fig. 8.1; formerly known as "Hottentot," a derogatory term, and conflated with Bushman or the San peoples). The KhoiKhoi and San peoples (sometimes conflated as KhoiSan) were viewed with racism by British and Dutch colonizers. In particular, the physical features of KhoiKhoi women, such as large buttocks and thighs, were mocked and exaggerated in public media like the illustration *A pair of broad bottoms* (Fig. 8.10).



Figure 8.10: William Heath (printer) of London, England. [A pair of broad bottoms](#). 1810 CE. Ink on paper, 340 x 248 mm. The British Museum Collection. © The Trustees of the British Museum; [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

She is only known by names provided to her by colonizers: Sarah Baartman by English-speakers, Saartjie (meaning 'little Sarah') by Cape Dutch (Afrikaans) speakers, and eventually 'The Hottentot Venus' by the French media. In her early 20s, Saartjie was separated from her family, potentially from a husband, and worked (in enslaved conditions, though not formally enslaved) for many Dutch families in Cape Town, South Africa. In 1810 CE, Saartjie travelled to London with two profit-motivated Dutch men. Alexander Dunlop and Hendrik Cesars (with whom Saartjie may have been in love) contracted her to exhibit herself for London audiences keen to see an 'exotic specimen.' (Recall the enslavement and incarceration of Mbuti man Ota Benga almost 100 years later, as discussed in "[What is Important to Us?](#)")

In 19th century CE Europe, African women often were sexualized, in addition to being racialized. When Saartjie's exhibitions became widely known (through public media like in Fig. 8.10), many people in Britain fought against this treatment, including those deeply involved in the abolition of slavery in Britain in 1807 CE. Legal appeals did not achieve any change and Saartjie continued to be exhibited across Britain and Ireland. In 1814 CE, Saartjie was sold to an animal trainer in France, where slavery had not been effectively abolished yet. The 'Hottentot Venus' title in France illustrates how sexualized Saartjie was. As [Holmes \(2007: 4\)](#) notes, Venus was "simply a synonym for sex." While most illustrations of Saartjie suggest that she was entirely nude in exhibition, evidence demonstrates that she steadfastly chose to cover her genitalia with a garment common among KhoiKhoi women, even refusing additional money to remove it. Saartjie may have endured sexual abuse during her time in Europe and contracted syphilis. She died in 1815 CE of an unknown inflammatory illness.

Horribly, the *Museum d'Histoire Naturelle d'Angers* and later the *Musée d'Homme* in Paris were allowed to display

Saartjie's corpse. Her body was exhibited to the public until the mid-1970s CE. It wasn't until an appeal from South Africa's then-president Nelson Mandela that Saartjie was returned to her homeland and buried overlooking a river in 2002 CE.

Like contemporary artist Zanele Muholi discussed in ["What is Beautiful?"](#), many contemporary African American women can relate to Saartjie's experience with respect to the exaggerated depiction of their bodies, the assumed access the public feels to their bodies, and sexualization of Black bodies that remains ever-present in public media. In *Saartjie*, Sutton offers her vision of her ancestor, proudly wearing garments and ornaments traditional to her culture, and viewing herself in the mirror. Sutton asks us to consider how Saartjie saw herself and how her experiences influenced that self-perception. **SPANG**

In addition, Sutton sculpted *Saartjie* using found materials such as cardboard. This choice intentionally represents the needs of African American women and many women of the global Africa diaspora to figure out how to use what they have at their disposal. Sutton transforms a material often perceived as 'trash' into a representation of heritage and strength. Though she is not Mt-MRCA, we are all related to Saartjie through our matriline. *Saartjie* is an ancestor to whom we can all feel a connection and from whom we can draw inspiration.

Past present

There is a common thread across the artworks discussed thus far of bringing the past into the present or, differently put, understanding how the past and the present are inevitably tied together. Unlike the European and Euro-American horizontal timeline visualization of past versus present, many of the examples here show that we should not separate dots on a line and call it history. The past is ever-present.

Japanese painter Tosa Mitsuoki reflected upon the presentness of the past in his painting on a large room screen called *Flowering Cherry and Autumn Maples with Poem Slips* (Fig. 8.11). This was a favorite subject of Mitsuoki, featured in several other paintings including [this one](#) and [this one](#). Mitsuoki was the 'head of the court painting bureau' in Edo, Japan, and thus was a high ranking member of the court literati. Do you recall our discussion of Edo period literati in ["What is Important to Us?"](#)



Figure 8.11: Tosa Mitsuoki from Japan. [Flowering Cherry and Autumn Maples with Poem Slips](#). 1654/81 CE. Ink, color, gold, and silver on silk panel screens, each 144 x 286 cm; 864cm in total length. Art Institute of Chicago Collection; [CCo Public Domain](#).

In particular, Edo literati would travel into the countryside in small groups to observe the seasonal changes during spring and autumn. Viewing the bright red leaves of a cherry tree in autumn would inspire them to recall poetic verses that they studied as part of their path to becoming a member of the court and attaining scholar-official status. In these gatherings, these poetic reflections would be inscribed on *tanzaku* (slips of paper) and attached to branches throughout a particularly beautiful tree. This is the scene that Mitsuoki painted in *Flowering Cherry and Autumn Maples with Poem Slips*. For Edo literati, classical poetry was ever-present. Therefore, the beautiful words and thoughts of previous generations of learned people were ever-present. The quoting of classical poetry would demonstrate one's knowledge and one's esteem for the past. ~~YANG~~ Mitsuoki's cherry tree scene is a physical manifestation of the value of the past and tradition.

In addition to a reverence for classic literature, Mitsuoki is known for revitalizing a traditional style of painting known as *Yamato-e* (大和絵; literally 'Japanese painting'), contrasted to *kara-e* (唐絵; literally 'Chinese-style painting'). *Yamato-e* is known for selected subjects surrounded by abstracted clouds and low-lying mist ('floating cloud'), natural or narrative subject matter, and (when figural) detailed depiction of garments and hair. Do you recognize these features in *Flowering Cherry and Autumn Maples with Poem Slips*? There are no figures but the primary subject, the cherry tree, is from nature and highly detailed in front of a stylized background of swirling clouds and mist, created via the contrast of paint and gold leaf. In this and his many other similar works, Mitsuoki relates his artistry to the past in several ways, playing an important role in the preservation of traditional art and literature.

The preservation of tradition and heritage depends on valuing the past. If you don't see any value in the past, then what's the point in preserving it? Mitsuoki and the Edo literati obviously saw value in the past. Among contemporary artists of the American Southwest, the arts of spiritual traditions are continued, albeit somewhat modernized, to ensure that knowledge relevant to those arts is not lost. The treatment of Native Americans in the United States has resulted in significant losses, both tangible and intangible. Native American communities lost their lands and even their rights to occupy their ancestral homelands in most cases. In addition, US authorities forced Native American communities to assimilate, including requiring many native children to attend so-called '[Indian Schools](#)' to be educated according to

Euro-American, Christian, and English-language traditions. This assimilative education resulted in vast losses of native language speakers, native spiritual knowledge, and cultural interest.

In recent decades, efforts from within Native American communities have focused on revitalizing ancient and historic knowledge and traditions, inviting current and future generations to preserve the past. For example, many native artists focus on producing artworks reflective of important spiritual traditions, such as the Katsina (also spelled Kachina) tradition among the Hopi and related Puebloan groups (introduced in [“Will You Tell a Story?”](#)). Katsinam (plural for Katsina) are ancestral spirits who visit the living in the late winter through early summer (between the spring and summer solstices). When not among the living, Katsinam reside in the *sipàapuni* (the spiritual realm, aka the Flower World). Recall the *sipàapu* feature of kivas (the conduit of connection between the living and spiritual worlds and from which the first humans emerged)? Given their supernatural associations, the Katsinam travel upon clouds and bring the rains that nourish the land and crops. Katsinam also serve as the moral compass of the community and as instructors on how to live a good life. There are many different Katsinam, with many different roles and associations to plants and animals. [Read about many Katsinam on the Peabody Museum “Rainmakers from the Gods” exhibition website.](#)

The Hopi maintain a ritual calendar focused on the time of year when the Katsinam visit the earth. During the period of visitations, Hopi communities celebrate sequential ceremonies honoring the Katsinam as they arrive and offer their blessings. These ceremonies often occur over many days and incorporate activities expected of men, women, and children. One of the earliest depictions of Katsinam, dating to as early as 1425 CE, is found on a [Sitkyatji Polychrome Bowl now housed at the Arizona State Museum](#). The Katsinam figures on that bowl are performing ritual actions, like in Katsinam visitation ceremonies. By the 1700s CE, Hopi artists began producing sculptures of Katsinam (often called “dolls”) from the roots of cottonwood trees. They were simplified human forms with supernaturally enlarged heads and adornments worthy only of Katsinam, as seen in the *Palhik Mana Kachina* (Fig. 8.12). These figures were presented to children as instructional aides to learn gender roles and expectations for good behavior (all year round). *Palhik Mana Kachina* has an elaborate headdress, incorporating symbolism of rain clouds, that would probably inhibit a child actually playing with this figure. Instead, such highly adorned *Katsina* figures likely would have been displayed.



Figure 8.12: Hopi Maker(s) of Arizona. *Palhik Mana Kachina*. 1920-1930 CE. Wood and pigment. Dallas Museum of Art Collection. Photo by Leah McCurdy.

Many historic carvers such as the famous Jimmy Kewanwytewa (aka Jimmy K) followed these traditional practices of carving and style, producing *Katsinam* both for internal Hopi use and for sale to tourists. He never signed those meant as gifts for Hopi children, because they were gifts from the *Katsinam* themselves, but he did sign those examples made for sale and there is a large market for his works today. Jimmy K. often demonstrated his carving techniques at the Museum of Northern Arizona, as seen in this [documentary by Periscope Film in 1960 CE](#).

The generation of Hopi artists after Jimmy K, starting in the 1970s CE, shifted their production of *Katsinam* figures to attract more business from the tourism market. These newer *Katsinam* designs focus on realism of the body and represent action poses, as if a human is wearing a costume of a *Katsina* and dancing. Contemporary versions of these later *Katsinam* sculptures are often sold on eBay or Amazon today.

Traditional arts usually undergo processes of transformation to make them palatable to tourist audiences. This means that the aesthetic values of tourists (mostly Europeans and Euro-Americans with disposable income) are prioritized. This is why we see the trend towards naturalistic representation of bodies in the contemporary *Katsinam* figures.

Sometimes, the tourist arts overshadow the originals and are more familiar to most audiences than the more authentic, and abstracted according to traditional Hopi aesthetics, sculpture in Figure 8.12. Unfortunately, this process of transformation, and loss of original aesthetic values, is commonplace today. Take a moment to look around the giftshop at the next museum you visit or check out the cultural arts on offer at your next airport layover to see what survives and what is transformed. How much do you think is authentic and how much is for tourist appeal?

Recently, many contemporary artists have been questioning how the past is curated to offer particular histories, highlighting the contributions of white men, for example, while undermining the significance of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) people in society. Peruvian artist Ana De Orbegoso takes those questions one step further in her 2017 series called *¿Y qué hacemos con nuestra historia?* (So What Do We Do with Our History?). After we recognize the biases of history, what are we supposed to do then? This should remind you of our discussions in [“Where Does Art Come From? An Introduction.”](#)



Figure 8.13 (left): Moche Maker(s) of Peru. [Portrait Vessel of a Ruler](#). 100 BCE – 500 CE. Ceramic and pigment, 28 x 14 cm. Art Institute of Chicago Collection; [CCo Public Domain](#).

Figure 8.14 (right): Ana De Orbegoso. [Neo-Huaco #3](#). 2017 CE. Resin and gold plate, 24.1 x 15.2 x 15.2 cm. Art Institute of Chicago Collection. © 2017 Ana De Orbegoso.

One of the works in this series, *Neo-Huaco #3* (Fig. 8.14), reflects the unique ceramic traditions of the Moche culture in northern Peru. So-called portrait vessels, like *Portrait Vessel of a Ruler* (Fig. 8.13) are some of the most well known artworks from the Moche. They demonstrate large-scale production (via molds), the status of leaders, and symbolic imagery often featuring birds (for example, painted on the headband of the leader in Fig. 8.13). One of the most recognizable features of such Moche vessels is the stirrup spout (not because cowboys used them but because the top looks like a horse riding stirrup). Any Peruvian who has visited the national museums and taken history courses in school

will be able to identify a Moche vessel among the many other ceramic traditions of the Andes (including the distinct ceramic traditions of the Paracas and the Nasca discussed in [“What is Important to Us?”](#)). De Orbegoso chose this quintessential form so that her audience knows exactly what history she is questioning. It’s not any old history, world history, or the history of China. She’s questioning the history of Peru.

By offering a gold plated version of a portrait vessel, De Orbegoso highlights the colonial pursuit of gold that led the Spanish *conquistadores* from the Tairona region, across the Amazon, and to the Andes (as discussed in [“What is Divine?”](#)). This eventually created what we now call Peru today. ‘So What Do We Do with [that] History?’ Can we really call the *Portrait Vessel of a Ruler* ‘Peruvian?’ It was made long before the Spanish colonized the region and before the term ‘Peru’ existed. The Moche didn’t see themselves as Peruvian and would not have classified themselves alongside all of the cultures that occupied lands within Peru’s boundaries today. Should only the people who live in the northern region of Peru where the Moche originally lived consider the Moche part of their history? Should only people who can trace their DNA back to the Moche consider the Moche part of their past? What do we do with all that messy history?

Importantly, De Orbegoso removes the facial features, offering a faceless portrait. [Andrew Hamilton \(2020, para. 7\)](#), a curator at the Art Institute of Chicago (AIC), which owns De Orbegoso’s *Neo-Huaco #3*, notes that “its mirrored surface allows Peruvian viewers to gaze upon this ‘portrait vessel’ and see their own reflection, offering them a visual and material connection to these ancestors.” This is one way to view this object and correlates to the importance of ancestors in many cultures discussed here. But what about another interpretation? By making this portrait faceless, is De Orbegoso exposing the losses of history: the losses that occur when objects like *Portrait Vessel of a Ruler* are removed from their original location, their original cultural context, and put on display in a museum in Chicago? What do we do with that history of loss of culture? How do Peruvians and Moche descendants feel about such losses? We’ll explore that question more in [“Why Do People Take What Doesn’t Belong to Them?”](#)

De Orbegoso is part of a large number of contemporary artists who transform historical imagery and art to engage with the past in new ways. In another interesting example, Cameroonian artist, Pascale Marthine Tayou, reflects upon the Nkisi tradition of Kongo peoples (discussed in [“What is Important to Us”](#)) in *Sauveteur 3* (Figs. 8.15 and 8.16). Tayou combines contemporary materials such as glass, plastic bags, and found objects, recreating the visual image of an Nkisi. The ‘throw-away’ materials do not feel the same as the medicine bundles or nails pounded into the historic wooden figures. Those scraps of metal and intimate bundles were representations of need, offered as a form of payment for spiritual intervention. Tayou’s object is also an accumulation, but of remnants and trash.

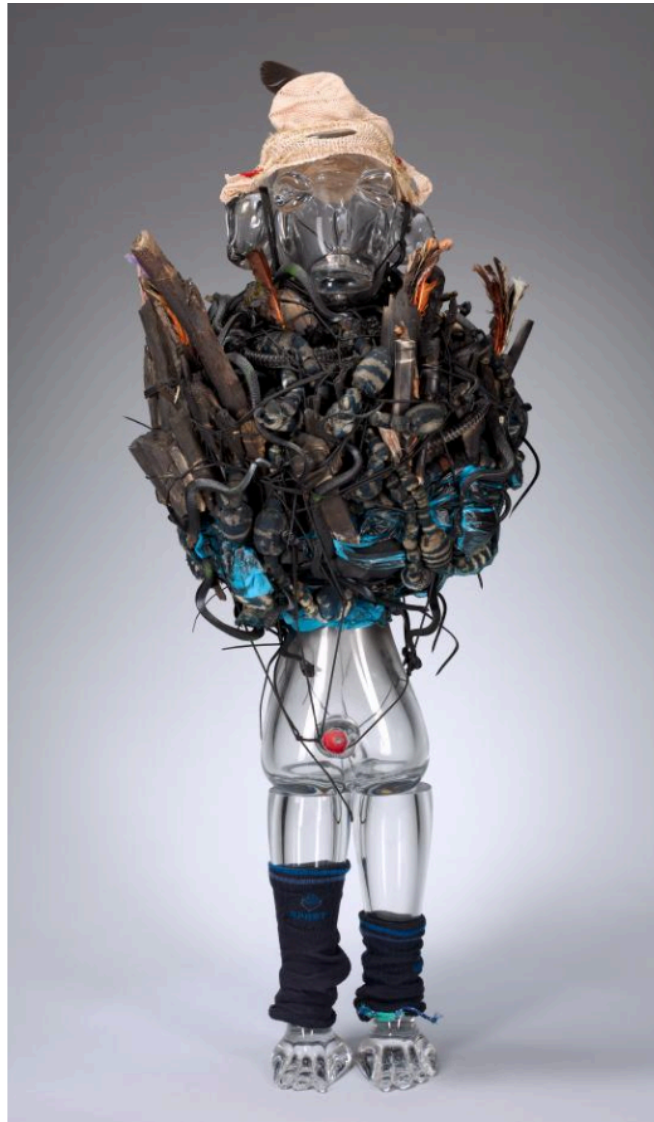


Figure 8.15: Pascale Marthine Tayou. [Sauveteur 3](#). 2014 CE. Crystal, raffia, cloth, rubber, plastic bags, chicken feathers, wood, paint, tempera, nail polish, string, foam, plastic, adhesive, and other mixed media, approx. 52". © Cleveland Museum of Art Collection.



Figure 8.16: Detail of Figure 8.15.

As Figure 8.16 illustrates, this pile of trash is encircled by many black plastic snakes, all open jawed and barring their teeth, as if protecting the mass of junk. This contemporary Nkisi feels like a commentary on what the world inevitably does with its history. We collect as much of the material remains of our history that we can into a big pile (read: museums and collections), and fiercely protect that mass of stuff against any attempts to remake or reform our conception of that history. We guard our history from change because it makes us feel insecure to think that history may not be what we've been taught it was. For example, European colonizers of the Kongo region wrote that the Kongo peoples were barbarous and in need of salvation because they practiced 'magic' and produced 'fetishes.' This demonization of Kongo practices made Europeans feel good about themselves. Challenging the veracity and motives of this history challenges the way many people will see themselves today. In the vein of De Orbegoso's question, "So What Do We Do with Our History?", Tayou's *Sauveteur 3* asks us to consider another related question: "So What Do We Do When Our History Is Not What We Want It To Be or What We Thought It Was?"

The Wrap-up

Did you get a "Doctor Who" vibe from this chapter? This 'timey-wimey' stuff can make your brain hurt. But it's important to remember that, like it or not, history is here to stay. History is what makes the present and sets up the future. Ignoring the past or wishing it was different doesn't help us figure out what to do now and how to do stuff in the future. We aren't

all going to agree on what that stuff should be but we shouldn't ignore what history and our ancestors have to teach about how things turned out for them. Continuing exploring these questions and ideas through the News Flash links and by checking on scholarly voices recommended below.

News Flash

- Shayna Sutton is on Instagram! Check out @shayna.anyahss
- There have been several documentaries and films focused on Saartjie, such as [“The Life and Times of Sara Baartman” \(1998\)](#) and [“Venus Noire” \(2010, French-language\)](#)
- Ana De Orbegoso is on Instagram! [Check out @anadeorbegoso](#).
- [Pascale Marthine Tayou gave an Artist Talk to Art Basel in 2010](#).

Where Do I Go From Here? / The Bibliography

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9. Where Do Babies Come From?



Figure 9.1: Map and timeline of artworks discussed in “Where Do Babies Come From?” by Marizela Garza. Review image captions below for details about each artwork and copyright information.

Where do babies come from?

This may seem like a silly question but it’s fundamental to our lives. We were all born. Most people have sex during their lives. People make babies and procreate new generations to support families, perpetuate societies, and build futures. Sex, pregnancy, birth, and childcare are fundamental aspects of humanity, even though all people do not participate in all aspects. Procreation involves both women and men, although women are most associated with pregnancy, birth, breast-feeding, and childcare. Many homosexual partnerships involve parenting as well. Thus, gender is not intrinsically tied to parental roles. As discussed in the “Who Am I?” chapter, traditional gender roles often dominate in ancient

and contemporary societies, though not always in the ways Europe and Euro-America considers traditional today. Oftentimes, the representation of a woman's body with emphasized features implies procreation. Moreover, this link of an accentuated woman's body to procreation generally symbolizes fertility, or the ability to procreate. Human fertility has and continues to be an important facet of global arts, with a linked focus to fertility of animals and the earth.

Women's bodies

One of the most famous women in all of art history is [Venus of Willendorf](#). You've seen her, right? This small limestone carving depicts a faceless woman with large breasts, a thick stomach, an exposed vulva, and weighty thighs. The Venus' skinny arms rest atop her breasts. A sculptor living during the Upper Paleolithic period (ca. 24,000–22,000 years ago) in present-day Austria carved this representation of a woman's body, emphasizing the areas that relate to procreation, pregnancy, birth, and childcare. This sculptor specifically chose to depersonalize this depiction, ignoring details of the woman's specific identity. Because of this generalized and emphasized depiction of women's procreative aspects, scholars dubbed this figure a Venus, referencing the Roman religion's goddess of love, beauty, and motherhood. This name is anachronistic (the Roman religion developed millennia after the creation of this sculpture), but scholars use the term for interpretive meaning suggesting that this figurine represented human fertility and the importance of the woman's body in procreation for its Paleolithic audience. This type of object, of which many are known, likely held ritual significance to its culture and may have been a burial offering.

Depictions of emphasized women's bodies and the significance of fertility are not unique to ancient European art. For example, remember back to our discussion of *Yakshas* and *Yakshis* in the Vedic and Brahmanical traditions of ancient India in "[What is Divine?](#)" These figures are spiritual entities of nature, fertility, and abundance. *Yakshi* (Fig. 9.2) is much larger than the *Venus of Willendorf*, being created as architectural decoration for monuments at the pilgrimage site of Sanchi in India (Fig. 9.1; check out "[Why Does Size Matter?](#)" for more on Sanchi). You've probably noticed that despite the size difference, the *yakshi* sculpture reflects similar strategies of emphasis. The *yakshi's* breasts, hips, and thighs are her most prominent features, as well as the adornments on her chest, waist, wrists, and ankles. While facial features were carved for this figure, they are of a general character. In contrast to the *Venus of Willendorf*, this symbol of women's fertility is not in a static pose. She is actively twisting her leg around the trunk of a tree and reaching up to touch the branches. Brahmanistic mythologies indicate that *yakshis* were fertility spirits who could make trees fruit. This power of the *yakshi* relates to her gender and her emphasized features associated with procreation. The fruits of women's wombs (i.e. children) are akin to the fruits that spring from the mango tree at the *yakshi's* touch.



Figure 9.2: Indian Maker(s) of Sanchi, India. [Yakshi from Mahastupa Gate 1](#). ca. 50-100 CE. Sandstone, 65 x 47 x 18 cm. The British Museum Collection. © The Trustees of the British Museum; [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)

In their unique way, the native Jōmon people of ancient Japan produced clay figurines that depict women's bodies with emphasized features relevant to procreation. The Jōmon period spanned millennia of indigenous cultural development, prior to immigration from mainland Korea and China, and focused on the island of Hokkaido (Fig. 9.1). In 1952 CE, Japanese scholar [Okamoto Tarō](#) (trans. Reynolds 2009) began serious study of this period, described in "[On Jomon Ceramics](#)," while most scholars still focused on developments after mainland influence.

Most known for clay arts, Jōmon peoples created storage and ritual vessels with cord-marked (aka *jōmon* in Japanese) texture, or impressions of cord/rope into the clay surface for aesthetic appeal and functionality. Imagine how difficult carrying a large and heavy water jar a long distance with a smooth-sided clay vessel would be! That jar would definitely slide from your hands and drop on your toes. This cord-marked texture makes such vessels more functional and was used to embellish ceremonial clay figurines known as *Dogū* (sketched in Fig. 9.3; [original here](#)), representing a woman's body with emphasized hips and thighs, as well as small but pointed breasts.



Figure 9.3: Digital Transformational Sketch by Marizela Garza of the original artwork: Jōmon Period Maker(s) of Japan. *Dogū*. ca. 1000-400 BCE. Ceramic. Tokyo National Museum Collection. [View the original artwork here](#). Refer to Figure 0.1 to view the transformational sketch process.

Another major feature of most *dogū* is the large stylized eyes that many scholars casually say resemble goggles or coffee beans. These figures often have elaborate headdresses or coiffures, though the *dogū* illustrated in Figure 9.3 has suffered some loss. Check out the [original photo](#) to see the cord-marked texture embellished decorative patterns on the figure's torso and shoulders. These decorations probably represent tattooing or body painting practiced by Jōmon women. Swirling, tendril-like patterns encircle the figure's breasts, accentuate the curvature and width of the hips, and cover the broad stomach and back with visual interest. **PANG**

The artist that produced this figurine and the many others like it prioritized specific features of women's bodies relevant to procreation and painstakingly applied decoration to represent the importance of this entity. *Dogū* demonstrated to scholars that, like many global cultures, human fertility and its relationship to women's bodies was very significant to Jōmon people. Further, Jōmon artists produced figurines representing men later in time, possibly reflecting the development of men's leadership roles within the society.

To the southeast of the Japanese archipelago, the Islands of Palau of Micronesia in the Pacific (Fig. 9.1) are home to the Palauan culture. The Palauans probably arrived in Micronesia around 1000 BCE, migrating via outrigger canoes. Over time, they developed unique traditions that place significance on women's bodies as representations of fertility and procreation. This cultural value most often manifests as decoration on the east facade of structures the Palauans call *Bai* (sketched in Fig. 9.4; [original here in Fig. 3](#)). These *Bai* are men's assembly halls, chiefly audience rooms, and deliberation chambers. [Palauan Bai \(Meeting House\): Parts and Depictions as a Pictorial Representation of Palau \(Tellei n.d\)](#) thoroughly details this architectural tradition.

As you walk into the *Bai*, your attention is drawn to the imagery above the entranceway. One recurring image is known as *dilukai*, the representation of a nude woman in an open-legged position with exposed vulva, typically with arms elevated above her waistline (seen in the 4th register from the top in Fig. 9.4). The *dilukai*'s eyes are open and very visible. She wears adornments such as armbands. In later examples, *dilukai* were often represented wearing skirts and thus their vulvas were not visible. These later *dilukai* examples are not traditional but reflect changes in Palau due to colonization. Most people agree that the original meaning of the *dilukai* was as a symbol of fertility, procreation, birth, and society as a whole (i.e. all the men that enter the *Bai* are the result of procreation, birth, and the input of women). Some also suggest that *dilukai* reflect the tradition of women open to sexual encounters staying in or near the *Bai* to find partners. Later, colonial groups referred to these women as prostitutes, but the preconceptions laden in that English term do not apply to these Palauan women. In fact, Palauan women held important prestige and power both economically and socially.

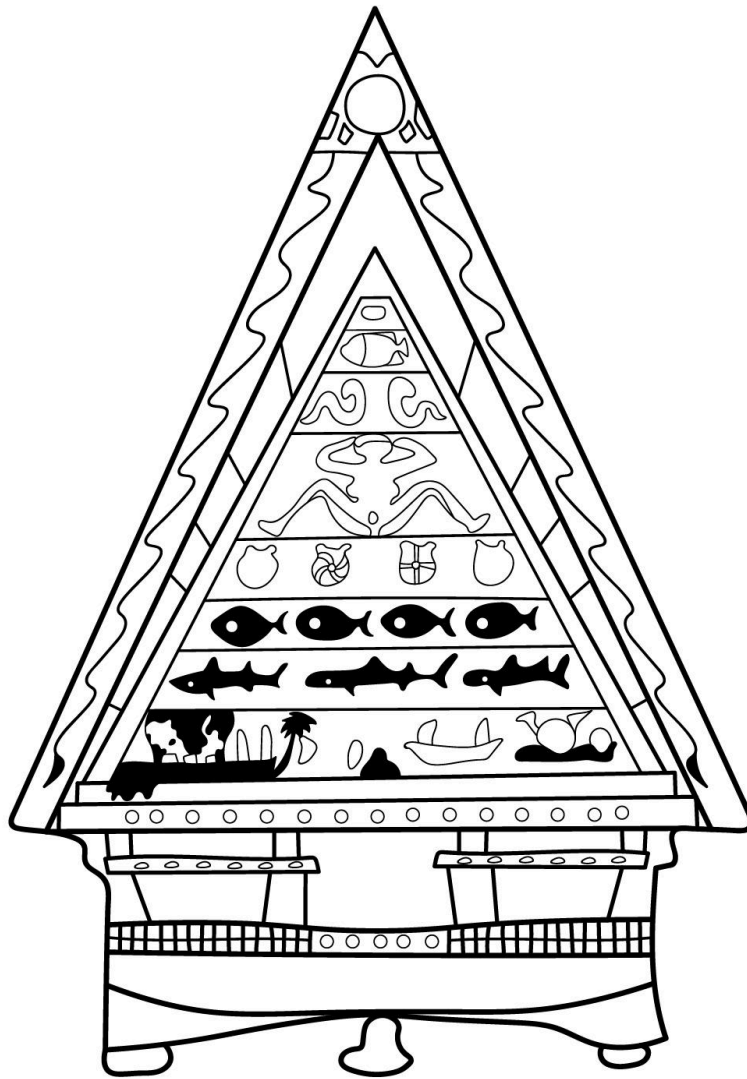


Figure 9.4: Digital Transformational Sketch by Marizela Garza of the original artwork: Palauan Maker(s) of Palau. *Bai Melekeong*, ca. 1783 CE. In situ. [View the original artwork here \(Fig. 3\)](#). Refer to Figure 0.1 to view the transformational sketch process.

The claims of prostitution derived from Spanish missionaries, hoping to convert Palauans to Catholicism. In this process, missionaries demonized indigenous beliefs and traditions. The *dilukai* was a target of such demonization because this representation of women did not fit Catholic belief structures. Missionaries created new stories claiming that *dilukai* images represented ‘loose women’ who disrespected their families by having extra-marital sex. These fabricated legends often involved a brother creating *dilukai* images to shame his errant sister. These creations are examples of cultural misunderstanding, intolerance, and closed-mindedness, some of the hallmarks of colonialism. For Palauans, *dilukai* are representatives of fertility and the generative force of new life, a force to which we are all associated.

Depicting sex

In addition to the frequency of women’s bodies in art, there are many examples of global artworks depicting sex. A *Māori*

artist from Aotearoa (Fig. 9.1; present-day New Zealand) carved a small wood box that served as a *wakahuia* (feather box) to store ornaments for special occasions (Fig. 9.5). Such boxes were repositories of spiritual power and symbols of tribal legacy in Māori culture. This box features intertwining figures with traditional stylized faces/masks, known as *wheku*. On the top panel, the body forms intersect as in sexual activity between women and men. This relatively abstracted representation of sex highlights the need for human fertility and abundance to ensure the survival of the Māori people. The figures probably represent the primordial parents *Rangi* and *Papa*, who through their union and fertility are the ultimate sources of life in Māori mythology. There also are examples of sexual depictions in more representational, or literal, manner.



Figure 9.5: Māori Maker(s) of Aotearoa (New Zealand). [Wakahuia](#). ca. 1750-1800 CE. Wood, haliotis shell, greenstone, 9.4 x 43 x 9.8 cm. The British Museum Collection. [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Remember the Moche culture of northern Peru (Fig. 9.1) introduced in [“Who Came Before Us?”](#) In addition to portrait vessels of fancy rulers, Moche artists created unique painted ceramic vessels that clearly depict erotic activity and sex. For example, a *Handle Spout Vessel* (Fig. 9.6) depicts a couple erotically embracing, while other examples include more explicit images of sex, such as some illustrated in [“Moche Sex Pots: Reproduction and Temporality in Ancient South America”](#) (Weismantel 2004). This sculptural and painted vessel depicts two seated figures, a woman on the left and a man on the right, with their arms wrapped around each other. In this case, the woman’s body is not represented with the types of emphasis we discussed previously, but with a relatively detailed face, slightly amorphous body, and open legs revealing her vulva. The man appears to be touching her exposed vulva with his hand.



Figure 9.6: Moche Maker(s) of North Coast, Peru. [Handle Spout Vessel Depicting a Couple in an Erotic Embrace](#). 100 BCE – 500 CE. Ceramic and pigment, approx. 8". Art Institute of Chicago Collection; [CCo Public Domain](#).

The couple is sculpted atop a squat cylindrical vessel with painted motifs. Behind the couple, the artist applied the vessel's spout, known as a handle spout. Take a closer look at this spout. Do you think it would have been easy to use this object for pouring liquids in and out? Not really, right? These vessels were probably produced for ceremonial and/or decorative value. Many Moche vessels depict sexual activities that are not only about producing children. Thus, we should question whether the Moche were purely focused on fertility and offspring or whether these depictions of sex reflect personal pleasure and the cultural value of eroticism itself.

Let's travel across the Pacific to South Asia to consider other examples of erotic art. At Khajuraho, India (Fig. 9.1), the rulers of the Chandela Dynasty commissioned temples with high relief exterior sculptures depicting sexual activities that also appear to relate more to pleasure than procreative needs. The Chandelas followed the Tantric movement of Bhakti Hinduism and worshiped the god Shiva (related to but distinct from the Tantric Buddhist traditions of Tibet discussed in ["What is Divine?"](#)). In Hinduism, pleasure (*kama*) is accepted as one goal of life, along with wealth/power (*artha*), duty (*dharma*), and release/salvation (*moksha*). In Tantric Hinduism practiced by the Chandelas, sex and the

pleasure of sex were important facets of life, but one must not overindulge. To dive into this tradition more, check out [“Secret Yantras and Erotic Display for Hindu Temples” \(Rabe 2000\)](#).

Shiva is the prime example of sexual union without overindulgence, mastering one’s sexual impulses. Before Shiva was depicted in the human-like *Nataraja* (Fig. 4.7) and other forms, he was (and continues to be) represented as an erect *linga* (phallus), often in very representative forms or more abstract pillar-like forms, as in *Shiva Linga* (Fig. 9.7). This erect penis reflects Shiva’s status as a procreative force and his ability to sustain an erection but not give into the feeling of release. Such control and self-discipline were highly valued by the Chandela’s Tantric tradition. Thus, while pleasure is represented, there is an underlying spiritual meaning to erotic depictions within Hinduism as well. In many of the temples at Khajuraho, the Shiva *linga* sculpture is housed in the *garbhagriha* (“embryo or womb chamber”) at the center of the temple that symbolizes a womb into which Shiva procreates the cosmos.



Figure 9.7: Khajuraho Maker(s) of Khajuraho, India. [Shiva Linga in the Garbhagriha of the Vishvanatha Temple](#). 999 – 1002 CE. Stone, approx. 18”. In situ. [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

Another dimension of sex in art is the representation of homosexuality. In many global traditions, the normalized depiction of sex occurs between women and men. In some cultures, there are additional normalized sexual relationships depicted in art. You may be aware of Greek vases representing erotic acts between men, oftentimes an older man and a younger man. Some scholars also point to images of homosexual relationships between women on Greek vessels. In the Greek context, homosexuality was accepted as part of many men’s experiences, especially with respect to their involvement in sports. In feudal and Edo period Japan (Fig. 9.1), homosexuality was an established facet of samurai

culture and accepted within mainstream society. The book [Male Colors: The Construction of Homosexuality in Tokugawa Japan \(Leupp 1995\)](#) covers this topic in depth.

Edo period artworks such as *Samurai and Wakashu* (Fig. 9.8) illustrate homosexual relationships. In this hanging scroll painting on silk, the younger man on the left is looking back towards the seated older man on the right who is pulling at the younger man's long sleeve in a seductive gesture. The ensemble worn by the younger man identifies him as a *wakashu* (young man) and an *onnagata* (actor in *Kabuki* theater who played women's roles). *Onnagata* often engaged in sexual relationships with patrons. The older man's hairstyle and robes identify him with the samurai class, someone of high status who would patronize *Kabuki*.



Figure 9.8: Miyagawa Issho from Japan. [Samurai and Wakashu](#). 1689-1780 CE. Ink and color on silk hanging scroll, 70.25" x 22.5". The Metropolitan Museum of Art Collection; Public Domain.

The setting of the painting is intimate and reflects a sexual relationship between these men. While depicted infrequently, such relationships were not taboo or illegal in Japan until recent times. One of the oldest novels in the world, [The Tale of Genji](#), describes protagonist Prince Genji pursuing sexual relationships with both women and men. Interestingly enough, that story was written by a woman, Lady Murasaki of the Heian royal court around 1000 CE! While heterosexual

unions were important for procreation and lineage sustainability, homosexuality was an appropriate form of sexual expression for Japanese men and women from many walks of life. Homosexual relationships was legally defined in Qing Dynasty China with respect to Confucian hierarchies. To explore this topic, check out [Matthew H. Sommer's \(2007\) "Was China Part of a Global Eighteenth-Century Homosexuality?"](#)

Pregnancy and birth

Sex between men and women often results in pregnancy. Many women strive to be mothers from an early age and/or understand that they are expected to fulfill that role for their families. As pregnancy leads to birth, the mother and baby undergo a strenuous and taxing process. (Unfortunately, we often ignore the stress pregnancy and birth inspire in fathers.) While depictions of pregnant women are rare in the Western Canon, famous allusions to pregnancy exist, like northern Renaissance painter [Jan van Eyck's *The Arnolfini Portrait*](#). Birth is not a typical subject matter either, except as generalized décor on objects like [birth trays of the Italian Renaissance](#), for example.

Pregnancy depictions are relatively frequent among several ancient cultures that lived along the central coastal region of west Mexico, collectively known as the Western Mexico Shaft Tomb Tradition in present-day Nayarit, Jalisco, and Colima (fig. 9.10. For example, *Kneeling Pregnant Woman* (sketched in Fig. 9.9; [original here](#)) derives from Nayarit and likely was provided to someone as an offering in their shaft tomb. This figure represents a high-status woman with a nose ring, large ear jewelry, necklaces, and armbands. Her breasts are swollen with milk for the forthcoming baby and her hands rest at the center of her pregnant belly. In this kneeling position, her vulva is exposed and open, possibly indicating that this woman is close to the actual process of birth. In many cultures, birthing in a lying position, like in most hospitals today, is not typical. Women often kneel, squat, or use a special birthing chair with materials beneath to protect the baby as it descends. Also, did you notice her facial expression? Her grimace may indicate that she is currently experiencing contractions and/or attempting to push. Artists of the Western Mexico Shaft Tomb Tradition didn't just focus on imagery of pregnancy (though that was a popular theme). Check out ["Archaeological Interpretations of West Mexican Ceramic Art from the Late Preclassic Period"](#) (Day et al. 1996) to see additional ceramic examples.

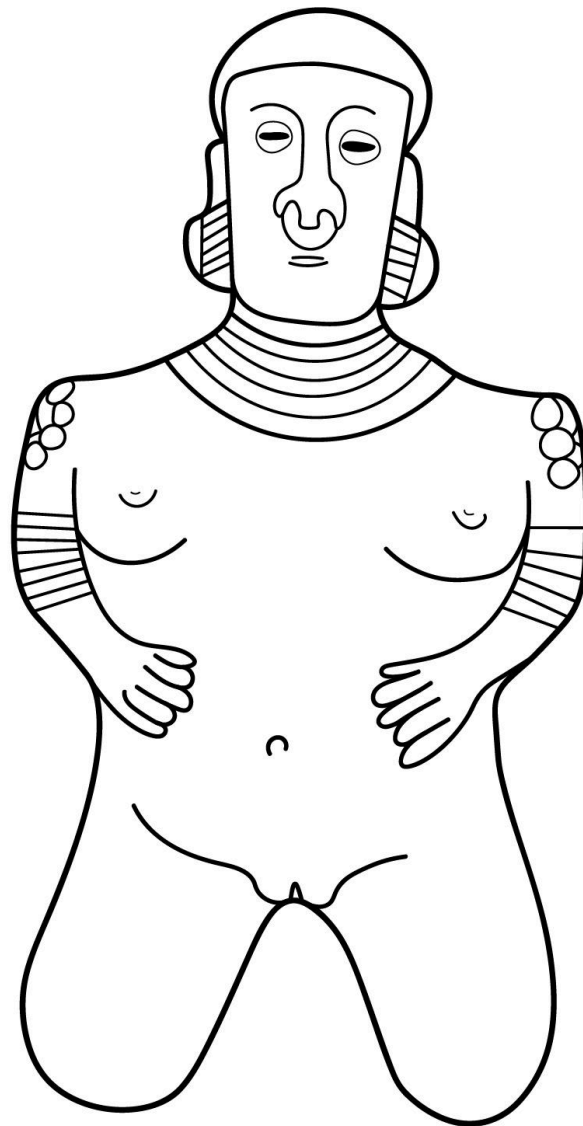


Figure 9.9: Digital Transformational Sketch by Marizela Garza of the original artwork: Western Mexico Shaft Tomb Tradition Maker(s) of Nayarit, Mexico. *Kneeling Pregnant Woman*. 300 BCE – 300 CE. Ceramic. The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. [View the original artwork here](#). Refer to Figure 0.1 to view the transformational sketch process.

Modern Mexican artist Frida Kahlo found these ancient Mexican sculptures personally impactful. Along with her partner Diego Rivera, Kahlo invested heavily in the notion of *mexicanidad* (idea/feeling of being Mexican) with strong links to indigenous traditions. In addition, Kahlo held a deep-seated, though never rewarded, desire to become a mother. Have you heard the story of her accident and subsequent battles with health issues? Injuries during her youth complicated her ability to conceive and led to intense feelings of loss. She expressed these feelings in her artworks by incorporating imagery of mothers and children, breastfeeding, and pregnancy. In her 1938 CE painting *Four Inhabitants of Mexico* (sketched in Fig. 9.10; [original here](#)), Kahlo incorporates a depiction of a distinct Nayarit pregnant figure, in this case standing, along with a portrait of her younger self and figures illustrating change over time in Mexico.

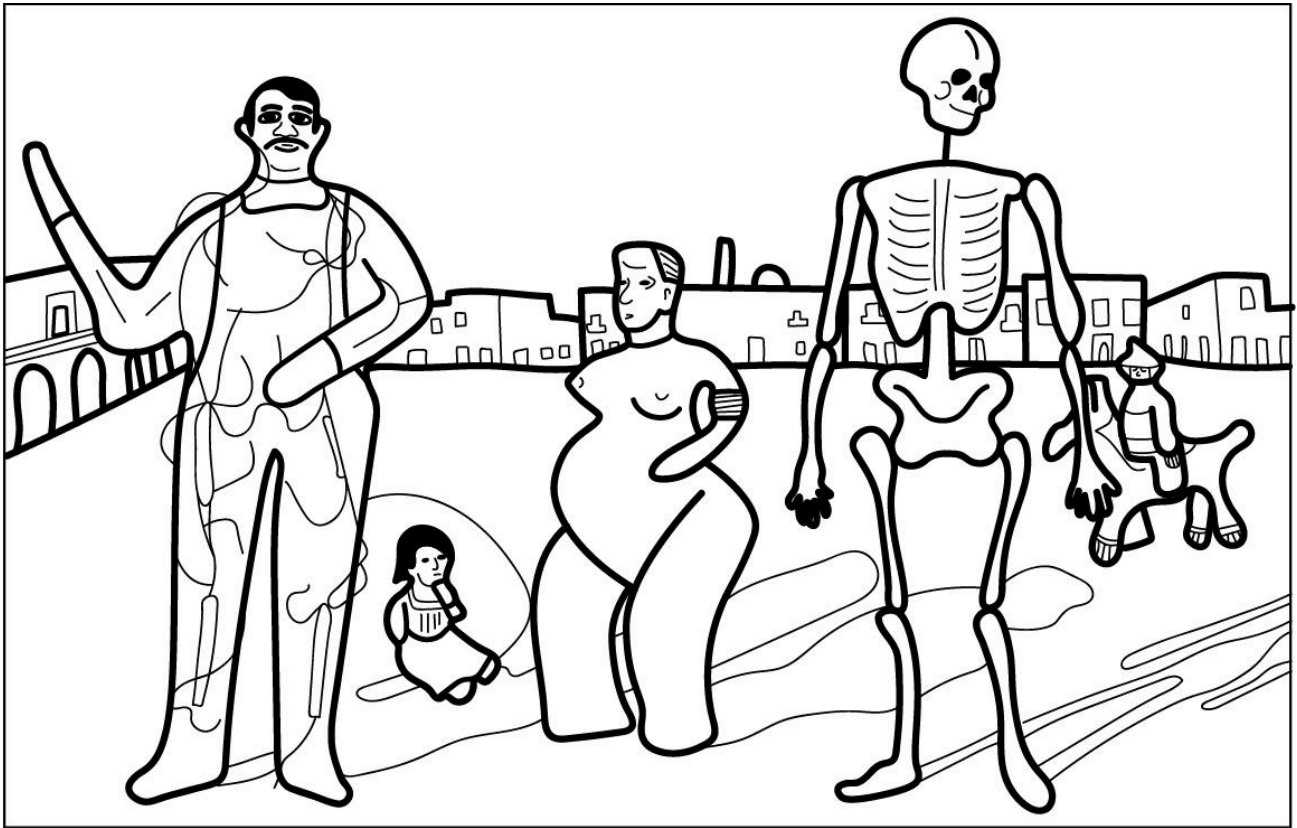


Figure 9.10: Digital Transformational Sketch by Marizela Garza of the original artwork: Frida Kahlo of Mexico. *Four Inhabitants of Mexico*. 1938 CE. Oil on canvas. Unknown Collection. [View the original artwork here](#) © Frida Kahlo. Refer to Figure 0.1 to view the transformational sketch process.

Children and childcare

After the stresses of pregnancy abate, then comes the joy, attention, and stress of caring for children. The depiction of children in global arts is relatively rare. When seen, children often accompany a mother figure. Such mother and child scenes typically relate to the care offered by the mother to the infant. In the Western Canon, such representations often focus on religious meaning such as the relationship of Isis and Horus in Egyptian mythology or the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ in the Christian tradition, as mentioned in [“Where Does Art Come From? An Introduction.”](#) Artistic reflection upon the mother-child relationship spans human cultures, reflecting the importance of fertility, procreation, and parental care.

One important example of the prioritization of children and parental care comes from the Akan-speaking cultures, including the Asante Kingdom of present-day Ghana (Fig. 9.1). Often casually called ‘dolls,’ the Akan *akua’ba* tradition holds mythological significance and utmost social resonance. The mythology is focused on a woman named *Akua* who could not get pregnant. Childbearing is a prime expectation for Akan women. Furthermore, Akan cultures are matrilineal, prioritizing mothers in family identity and status as opposed to the prominence of fathers in patrilineal systems (dominant in Europe and European settlements). Thus, an Akan woman like *Akua* needs to have children to represent her family well. In the story, *Akua* hoped for a female child to sustain the matriline through her daughter. To ensure a good outcome for *Akua*’s plans to procreate, she consulted a religious specialist and received a carving representing an ideal child, later called an *akua’ba* based on this mythology (in the Akan language, *ba* means child). While

many *akua'ba* feature a single figure, *Akua'ba* in Figure 9.11 represents a mother holding a child on her lap. The mother could be *Akua*, or her eventual daughter who will have daughters of her own.



Figure 9.11: Akan/Asante Maker(s) of Ghana. *Akua'ba*. ca. 1900 CE. Wood, pigment, 15 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 6 $\frac{3}{8}$ ". UTA African Art Collection. Photo by Leighton McWilliams, [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

The figure features a large round forehead and elongated neck, both features of ideal beauty and wisdom in Akan culture. This ideal child/mother is adorned with ornaments at the neck and ankles to represent status and prosperity. When *Akua* received her *akua'ba* in the story, she was tasked with treating it as a real child and carrying it on her back. This performance brought the blessing of fertility and successful birth upon *Akua*. Some young Akan girls receive an *akua'ba* to practice child rearing from a young age. This matrilineal mythology continues to impact new generations.

Most of the *akua'ba* surviving today date to the 1900s CE. There is a much older art tradition in Africa that reflects childcare from millennia ago. In the Sahara Desert where the borders of present-day Algeria, Libya, and Niger meet (Fig. 9.1), the caves and rocky outcrops of Tassili n'Ajjer protect over 25,000 rock paintings created as early as 7000 years ago. [Rock Art of the Tassili n'Ajjer, Algeria \(Coulson and Campbell 2010\)](#) illustrates the variety of art found in this region. The most famous ancient Tassili painting is known as *Running Woman* (fig. 9.12 left), though she is most likely dancing in a ceremony relating to fertility. A painting from the later Pastoral period (ca. 5000-2000 BCE) at Tassili depicts a bare-

breasted woman tugging at a rebellious child behind her (sketched in Fig. 9.12 right; [original here pg. 30](#)). This mother and child scene probably featured in a larger painting illustrating cattle herding and semi-mobile daily life.



Figure 9.12 left: Round Head Period Maker(s) of Tassili n'Ajjer. [Running Woman](#). 6000-4000 BCE. Pigment on rock. In situ. [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

Figure 9.12 right: Digital Transformational Sketch by Marizela Garza of the original artwork: Pastoral Period Maker(s) of Ozaneare, Tassili n'Ajjer. *Mother and Rebellious Child*. ca. 5000-2000 BCE. Pigment on rock. Image source: [Visona et al. 2001, 30](#). Refer to Figure 0.1 to view the transformational sketch process.

Pastoral period paintings at Tassili n'Ajjer reflect the cultural development of cattle domestication and agriculture in the area that we now know as one of the driest places on earth. You are probably asking yourself, don't cows (and people for that matter) need fresh water? Yes, of course, you are right! As briefly mentioned in ["Where Are We Going?"](#), there was much more abundant water in the Saharan region thousands of years ago. In fact, geological and archaeological investigations have shown that the environment of the ancient Sahara has cycled between desert and savanna for at least 7 million years. The people who painted *Running Woman* and *Mother and Rebellious Child* happened to live during one of the savanna environments. With reliable availability of freshwater, these people began to domesticate animals and farm crops. This lifestyle included moving seasonally with cattle herds. As *Mother and Rebellious Child* shows, this lifestyle also included the most human experiences we can imagine: a mother trying to get her child to move along already!

As many of you can attest, children grow so quickly! Soon, teenagers are testing boundaries and getting ready for adulthood. This sort of preparation typically occurs at home. In Muslim societies, as young girls of wealthy and high-status families grow, they live in harem (*ḥarīm*) spaces. The harem is not an erotic zone of forced nudity and male pleasure, but European ["Orientalist"](#) artists and writers frequently misrepresented it as such. Consider these misunderstandings more by exploring [Intimate Outsiders: The Harem in Ottoman and Orientalist Art and Travel Literature \(Roberts 2007\)](#).

The harem consists of spaces protected from more public areas of a family home, reserved for women and children to carry out daily activities. Ottoman painter Osman Hamdi Bey produced many works depicting harem life, often depicting daughters of the household, such as those in *Two Musician Girls* (sketched in Fig. 9.13; [original here](#)). On the left, a

standing girl in a conservative, embroidered robe strums a Turkish *tanbur* while a seated girl in similar dress holds a tambourine. These girls play in a well-appointed room with painted wall tiles, carved stone balustrades, multiple woven carpets, and intricate wood paneling. Their slippers are discarded on the floor in front of them, indicating the security and familiarity of the harem space. These are not the exposed and overtly sexualized harem women of most Western [Orientalist](#) depictions.



Figure 9.13: Digital Transformational Sketch by Marizela Garza of the original artwork: Osman Hamdi Bey. *Two Musician Girls*. 1850–1900 CE. Oil on canvas, 39 x 58 cm. Pera Museum, Istanbul, Turkey. [View the original artwork here](#). Refer to Figure 0.1 to view the transformational sketch process.

Hamdi Bey was a bureaucrat in the Ottoman government in addition to his work as a painter, art curator, and archaeologist. He grew up in Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire (Fig. 9.1), and spent many years in France. He trained with prominent Orientalist and Romantic artists of the day, focusing on a realistic and detailed style as well as scenes of “oriental” life (a term derived from the Latin *oriens*, as described in [“Where Does Art Comes From? An Introduction”](#)). Unlike his French mentors, Hamdi Bey represented an ‘insider’s’ view of Muslim society and harem spaces. Most of the French Orientalist painters would not have been allowed to enter harem spaces, and thus would only

have second-hand accounts or their imagination from which to develop their imagery. Erotic imagination often dictated European and Euro-American depictions of such spaces, despite the 'insider' images produced by artists like Hamdi Bey.

Fertility beyond humans

It will be no surprise to you that artists have represented procreation, fertility, and offspring beyond humans. We witness procreation and pregnancy in animals, such as pets or livestock, and we benefit from the fertility of the earth on our dinner plates. The importance of fertility also extends to animals and plants. Without animal procreation, would societies with large populations have enough meat to eat? Without agriculture and the propagation of plants, would large societies have enough to eat, period? Probably not. Throughout human history, there is a correlation between population growth and the development of agriculture and animal domestication. While hunting and gathering lifestyles are very successful for small groups, they cannot sustain large populations. The significance of plant, animal, and human fertility are interconnected. For humans to be fertile and produce new generations, they must have enough food. For families to maintain their agricultural and animal holdings, they need many hands to carry out the necessary work.

One example of representing the domestication of animals comes from ancient west Mexico, like *Kneeling Pregnant Woman* (sketched in Fig. 9.9; [original here](#)). The Colima culture lived to the south of the Nayarit culture along the Pacific coast and practiced a similar funerary tradition of shaft tombs with large amounts of offerings. The Colima tradition is known for producing ceramics with red/orange polished finishes and canine imagery. *Dog* (Fig. 9.14) is thought to reflect an ancient hairless breed, similar in lineage to the Chihuahua today. Most Colima dog sculptures are pot-bellied and have aggressive facial expressions. Some scholars suggest that *Dog* (Fig. 9.14) isn't just rotund but also pregnant. In general, weight-bearing reflects dogs' roles in life, likely intentionally over-fed and fattened for meat consumption. The facial expression reflects their role as protectors of the home, which is often much more aggressively taken up by female dogs (instinctually protecting a litter). These sculptures represent real-life domesticated companions and resources. Archaeology conducted to investigate Colima tombs revealed that most deceased people were provided with a ceramic dog, probably to serve as protector and guide in the afterlife.



Figure 9.14: Western Mexico Shaft Tomb Tradition Maker(s) of Colima, Mexico. [Dog](#). 1-200 CE. Ceramic and pigment, approx. 120 x 18". Art Institute of Chicago Collection; [CCo Public Domain](#).

Like humans and animals, the earth is fertile and generative. Natural productivity of the earth is harnessed and increased through agriculture. Agriculture became so important to most human societies that deities of agriculture became some of the most important spiritual entities, such as the Maize God of the Olmec from ["What Is Divine?"](#) and the Maize God of the Maya from ["Will You Tell A Story?"](#) Western traditions also value agriculture through divinities. For example, San Isidro Labrador (Saint Isidore the Farm Laborer) is the Catholic patron saint of agriculture in Spain and the Americas.

In West Africa, agriculture is crucial to livelihoods, even in the arid savanna south of the Sahara. Bamana people of present-day Mali (Fig. 9.1) have practiced agriculture since at least the 1600s CE, growing sorghum, millet, corn, and vegetables. The Bamana *Ci Wara* men's society teaches young men farming skills, inspired by and named after *Ci Wara*, a divine being known to be half-man, half-antelope. This society performs dances with large, ornate crest masks, such as the *Ci Waraw* (Fig. 9.15; the final 'w' connotes multiple, as in this pair). The masks from the UTA African Art Collection (Figs. 9.15) do not retain the original basketry at the based on the wood sculpture that would serve as the 'hat' to secure the crest to a performers head.

These masks feature stylized hybrid forms combining antelope horns, elongated snouts and plump bodies of aardvarks, and potentially the scaly patterning of pangolins (all native animals to the Bamana region). Chevron patterns are often

carved into the curved elements of the neck (as in Fig. 9.15 left), symbolizing sun rays and the importance of the sun in agricultural productivity.

Ci Wara masks are always danced in pairs, one representing men (Fig. 9.15 left) and the other representing women (Fig. 9.15 right) with children (the smaller figure atop the larger figure's back). The social performance recounts the story of *Ci Wara* teaching farming to the Bamana people, and the continuation of agricultural success among the young generations. Check out photographs of the dances performed with these headdresses in "[Antelope Headdresses and Champion Farmers: Negotiating Meaning and Identity through the Bamana Ciwara Complex](#)" (Wooten 2000). The procreative powers of the earth, animals, and humans are combined in these important ceremonies.



Figure 9.15: Bamana Maker(s) of Mali. *Ci Waraw*. ca. 1900 CE. Wood, pigment, metal, fiber, 57 ½" (left), 44" (right). UTA African Art Collection. Photos by Leah McCurdy and Cheryl Mitchell; [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

While the Bamana grow grains, the Abelam people of the north coast of Papua New Guinea in Melanesia (Fig. 9.1) grow yams (known as *waapi*, *ka*, and *jaambe*) as their staple crop. In this tropical forest, agricultural lands are cleared by burning and then crops are carefully cultivated, primarily by men. The season of yam growing involves many taboos to ensure peaceful, successful growth. These taboos include not eating certain food, abstaining from sex, and quieting any

social conflict. These behavioral controls are paramount because the yams are paramount; they embody *ngwaalndu* or ancestral spirits linked to each farmer and his family.

In addition to this supernatural context of fertility across generations, yam production among the Abelam relates directly to politics and power. Each Abelam man has a *tchambera* or *sumbura*, an exchange partner, with whom he competes to produce the longest, and therefore most successful, yams. Some Abelam yam varieties have grown to 10 feet long! In harvest ceremonies, partners present yams to their rivals. These long yams are symbolically human, given their ancestral associations and prestige. Yams are decorated with masks, such as the *Tje Yam Mask* (sketched in Fig. 9.15; [original here](#)). There are many photographs of the elaborate displays of long yams with masks in [Growing Artefacts. Displaying Relationships: Yams, Art, and Technology Amongst the Nyamikum Abelam of Papua New Guinea \(Coupaye 2013\)](#).

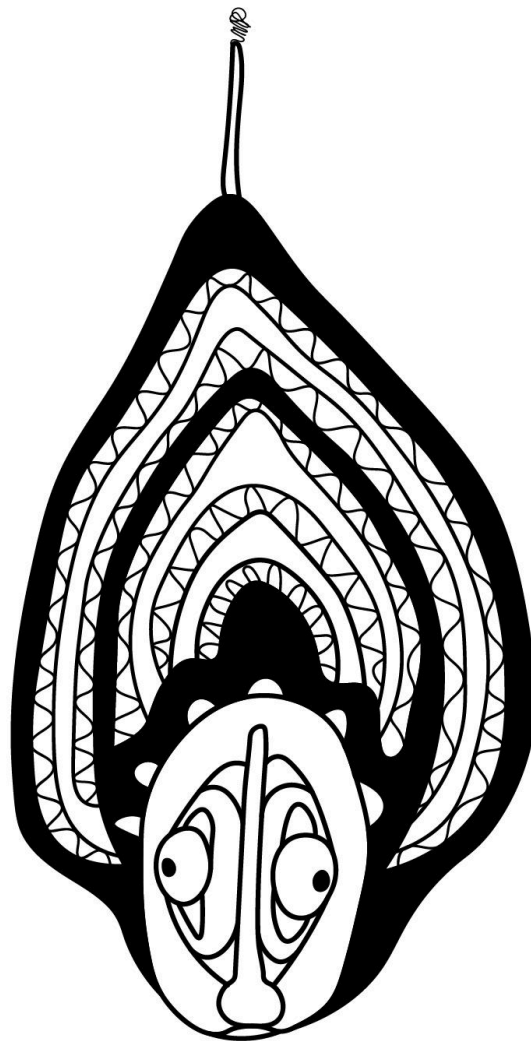


Figure 9.16: Digital Transformational Sketch by Marizela Garza of the original artwork: Abelam Maker(s) of Maprik, Papua New Guinea. *Tje Yam Mask*. ca. 1950 CE. Natural fiber and pigment. National Gallery of Victoria, Australia. [View the original artwork here](#). Refer to Figure 0.1 to view the transformational sketch process.

Using basketry techniques, these masks are woven to represent a face with eyes, linear nose, and small mouth as well as large plumage with patterns reminiscent of feathers. Real feathers and other adornments are often added to the

masks. The masks are painted to accentuate the yam during its presentation as a human-like entity. Songs accompany the presentation, creating a spectacle of the harvest and of farmers' ability to produce extraordinary yams and to metaphorically procreate the human population. Consensus will dictate which man has shown the most prowess. That man earns political status and may take on a leadership role in the community. This is known as an ascribed leadership system, whereby leaders earn their position versus inheriting status through their family line. Among the Abelam, fertility is not only crucial to sustaining life and ensuring new generations will carry on the society. A man's relationship to fertility of the earth is the foundation of political power.

The Wrap-up

There is much more to learn about how sex, women's bodies, pregnancy, children, and fertility are expressed in global arts. The next time someone asks you "where babies come from" share some of your art history knowledge. To pursue these ideas further, check out the following media and scholarship to expand your knowledge and make your own connections.

News Flash

- Hannah Gadsby's stand-up comedy special "Douglas" features art historical gags, including the Venus of Willendorf and many famous artworks of the Western Canon.
- Check out the online magazine [The Better India article "Mystery of the Pompeii Lakshmi"](#) to learn about a yakshi figure found in a Roman house in Pompeii!
- Dogū and related Jōmon pottery feature in the video games "The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild" and "Animal Crossing."
- Maori and related Polynesian cultures are depicted (somewhat problematically) in the Disney movie "Moana."
- Frida Kahlo is a legend, and rightly so! There have been many documentaries created about her life, including the 2005 Emmy award-winning film "[The Life and Times of Frida Kahlo](#)."
- The Bamana culture is featured alongside the nearby Dogon culture in a [Smithsonian National Museum of African Art short film called "Toga Nu and Cheko: Change and Continuity in the Art of Mali."](#)

Where Do I Go From Here? / The Bibliography

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10. What Happens When We Die?

VICTOR TSAO; EMERY MARTINEZ-BLAS; AND LEAH MCCURDY



Figure 10.1: Map and timeline of artworks discussed in “What Happens When We Die?” by Marizela Garza. Review image captions below for details about each artwork and copyright information.

What happens when we die?

Death is inescapable. Yikes! There’s really no way to spin that. Death as an abstract concept is confusing and frightening. The threat of an eventual demise feels hard to imagine when we are just living our everyday lives. It becomes somewhat easier to approach when there is a face to put on this mother of all fears. Many cultures have a depiction of death incarnate, which is often presented in quite literal terms and usually gendered male. Along with masculine features,

personified death often appears as a skeleton. This makes sense. Bones and skulls serve as a metaphor for mortality, as well as chilling imagery. Death is scary-looking because death is scary!

Let's take a look at one of these skeletal images of death, in this case probably divine death or a death god. In *Skull Vessel* (Fig. 10.2) from the Wari culture of Peru's coastal desert (Fig. 10.1), we see a skull-faced figure with large unnerving eyes and tall protruding horns. These features are rendered on the round ceramic vessel along with a toothy smile that curves with the vessel. This gives the face dimension and simulates the curvature of an actual skull. The depiction of the skeletal nasal openings (not a fleshy nose) exaggerate the skull-like appearance of this face. Twin spouts mimicking horns sit on top with a curved handle that connects the sprouts. This configuration makes this object an [Andean double-spout-and-bridge vessel](#), a common form of pottery the Wari learned from earlier Andean cultures such as the Nazca. While the form is similar, the color palette is unique to the Wari, with the combination of black, yellow, and red. The unsettling quality of this vessel speaks volumes about how the Wari perceived death. In fact, it may represent a Wari death god.



Figure 10.2: Wari Maker(s) of Pachacamac, Peru. [Skull Vessel](#). ca. 500-900 CE. Earthenware with polychrome slips, 5.75" x 7" x 5". Cleveland Museum of Art Collection. [CCo Public Domain](#).

The Wari were very influential on a later culture that is much more well-known today: the Inka. *Supay* was the Inka god of the dead as well as the demons in the *Uku Pacha* (underworld). He was characterized as a powerful force of nature, an embodiment of chaos to whom people would plead for a good afterlife. The Wari death god in *Skull Vessel* is not the exact same as the Inka *Supay* but there are probably many similarities between them, including their literal and menacing imagery.

You may also be familiar with the literal death imagery of the Aztec and Spanish influenced *Dia de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) celebrations on November 1 and 2. These traditions relate to the Aztec deities called [Mictlantecuhtli](#) ("Lord of Mictlan") and [Mictecacihuatl](#) ("Lady of Mictlan"). Three guesses what Mictlan is... yep, it's the underworld! Like the *Supay*-like Wari deity, Mictlantecuhtli and Mictecacihuatl were usually represented in skeletal form, oftentimes as a full-body skeleton with various adornments, including flowers. *Dia de los Muertos* takes on the Aztec tradition of literal

death imagery and connection to the souls of the deceased (who return among the living on certain days of the year), but is practiced on Catholic holidays: All Saints Day and All Souls Day. This mixture of indigenous and colonial traditions is called syncretism, and is a facet of many present-day burial customs and traditions related to death. Frida Kahlo incorporated such syncretism into her work. Look back at *Four Inhabitants of Mexico* (sketched in Fig. 9.10; [original here](#)) in “[Where Do Babies Come From?](#)” to see how Kahlo incorporated literal imagery of death there.

A good afterlife

In addition to the overarching concern about death itself, most people wonder about what happens after death. Some people think nothing happens and many people believe in an afterlife (existence after physical death on earth). While many traditions have different views about what constitutes an afterlife, many share the overarching idea that there are good or bad options for the afterlife. Most people hope for a good one. So, how do we ensure we will have a good afterlife? Every culture has a different answer to that question.

The ancient Egyptian ‘Book of the Dead’ is a famous example. One’s fate in the afterlife required a journey through the *Duat* (underworld; realm of the dead). Instructions were written and depicted for the deceased to overcome the perils of the journey, and be found worthy at the end. *Two Excerpts from the Papyrus of Ani* (Fig. 10.3) illustrate the endgame, the last phase of the *Duat* journey.



Figure 10.3: New Kingdom (19th Dynasty) Maker(s) of Thebes, Egypt. [Two Excerpts from the Papyrus of Ani \(frame 1 left, frame 2 right\)](#). ca. 1250 BCE. Pigment on papyrus, 25.5” x 17”. The British Museum Collection © The Trustees of the British Museum. [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

Ani is the deceased, depicted as the male figure dressed in white linen (second from the left in frame 1 and the far left figure in frame 2). After battling monsters and reciting countless incantations, Ani arrives at the Hall of Judgment (frame 1). His life deeds are judged by the seated deities depicted in a row at the top of frame 1. Then, his heart is weighed by Anubis (the jackal-headed god kneeling at the scale) against *maat* (symbolizing order, balance, harmony, and morality), usually represented by a feather. If Ani’s heart is equal to *maat* (i.e. balanced), he can proceed into the final stage. If not, he will be devoured by the hybrid crocodile, lion, hippopotamus deity, *Ammit* (right of the ibis bird-headed deity *Thoth*, who is the record-keeper of the *Duat* events).

Ani’s heart passes the test! Guided by Horus (the falcon-headed deity holding Ani’s hold in frame 2), Ani kneels before Osiris (King of the Underworld), seated in a pavilion throne with his wives and daughters behind him (far right frame 2). Osiris welcomes Ani into the *A’aru* (Field of Reeds), a paradisiacal version of life on earth. By visualizing this journey in

detail in Ani's individual version of the 'Book of the Dead,' the idea is that Ani will be more likely to actually reach the 'Field of Reeds,' the good Egyptian afterlife.

Ani's papyrus scroll was created during the New Kingdom period (ca. 1550 – 1077 BCE) in Thebes, Egypt (Fig. 10.1). This type of afterlife instruction manual was common during that period, both for people who could pay an artist to make their own individual 'Book of the Dead' or more generic versions. But there were many previous evolutions of this information. For example, in the Old Kingdom (ca. 2686 – 2181 BCE), King Unas built a tomb for himself with the first known Pyramid Texts around 2315 BCE. These were carved hieroglyphs on the walls of his tomb that gave him very similar instructions to those written and illustrated on Ani's papyrus. They included incantations, poetic pleas to deities, and knowledge about the creatures one would face in the *Duat*. Eventually, the Pyramid Texts evolved into the Coffin Texts during the Middle Kingdom (ca. 2055 – 1650 BCE), which were not inscribed on tomb walls but on coffin surfaces. Then, the very handy papyrus scroll versions like Ani's developed and were placed inside the coffin so they were readily available to the deceased soul.

This is a fascinating trajectory of a society innovating ways to deal with the afterlife. It has inspired many movies and other media, such as "The Mummy" series (1999, 2001), usually plotting fantastical (and inaccurate) events interspersed with ancient Egyptian elements. But there are more accurate, and still entertaining, media examples out there based on these traditions. For example, UTA art student Emery Martinez-Blas developed a comic based on the Pyramid Texts and the visual qualities of King Unas' tomb called "Neheb is Dead!" Figure 10.4 is the first page of the comic but there is [much more!](#)



Figure 10.4: Emery Martinez-Blas. *First page of 'Neheb is Dead' Comic*. 2021 CE. Courtesy of Emery Martinez-Blas @ Emery Martinez-Blas. [Read the full comic here.](#)

Overall, the Pyramid Texts and the Book of the Dead are Egyptian guides to achieving a good afterlife. Other cultures approach death, and the stages of death, differently. Let's consider the traditions of Tibetan Buddhists. Introduced in [“What is Divine?”](#), Tibetan Buddhism was just gaining steam in Tibet (Fig. 10.1) during the Yarlung Dynasty (which eventually became the Tibetan Empire), ruled by King Songtsen Gampo (618–650 CE). In 641 CE, he strategically married Princess Wencheng of the Chinese Tang Dynasty to the east, solidifying peaceful relations between the two empires. As part of her extensive dowry, Princess Wencheng brought the statue of *Jowo Rinpoche* (Fig. 10.5) to Tibet, an extremely important event to the growth of Buddhism in Tibet.



Figure 10.5: Traditionally attributed to celestial architect Vishwakarma. [Jowo Rinpoche](#). 640s CE. Metal with semiprecious stones, pearls, paint, and gilding, 5'. In situ: Jokhang Temple, Lhasa, Tibet. [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

The *Jowo Rinpoche* statue was installed in the Jokhang Temple in Lhasa, Tibet (Fig. 10.1) and became one of the most sacred images in Tibetan Buddhism. Tibetans believe that the statue was crafted by celestial architect Vishwakarma in the exact image of the 12-year-old Shakyamuni Buddha, who requested its creation so that his likeness would be preserved after death. Thus, *Jowo Rinpoche* is a proxy for Shakyamuni himself. His hands are held in the *dhyana* (meditation) and *bhumisparsha* (calling the earth to witness) mudras. Remember what that means from [“What is Divine?”](#) He's just reached enlightenment! He is seated in the traditional *padmāsana* (lotus position) upon a throne of gold and

jewels. He wears a five-petal crown, each petal containing a bejeweled image of different manifestations of the Buddha. Remember that as Buddhism migrated out of India, it morphed and various forms or manifestations of the Buddha developed, such as the ‘Laughing Buddha’ discussed in [“What is Divine?”](#) These manifestations came to represent distinct concepts and needs within communities.

The *Jowo Rinpoche* is covered in layers of gold applied over many years. The direct application of gold (foil and powder) to the Buddha’s body and face is a sign of devotion and honoring of Buddha’s teachings, an act of ‘loving kindness’ and the ‘transfer of good merits.’ Pilgrims and worshippers donate money as offerings, which is equated into an amount of gold. Monks grind gold pellets into powder, and brush the gold onto the face and body of the *Jowo Rinpoche* and other sacred statues in the Jokhang Temple on behalf of those who purchase offerings. Pilgrims and worshippers can also pay to provide for the ceremonial redressing of the *Jowo Rinpoche*. The video [圣地圣法圣迹 大昭寺 \(Dazhaosi / Jokhang Temple\); 圣地圣法圣迹 \(Holy Land, Holy Relics\)](#) (Fig. 10.6) documents a gold application ceremony and other rituals associated with *Jowo Rinpoche*.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://uta.pressbooks.pub/wheredoesartcomefrom/?p=435#oembed-1>

Figure 10.6: [“圣地圣法圣迹 大昭寺 \(Dazhaosi/ Jokhang Temple\); 圣地圣法圣迹 \(Holy Land, Holy Relics\)”](#) uploaded by 佛弟子 on YouTube (Mar 31, 2017). Key Timestamps: Minute 3:55 – Painting gold onto face of Guanyin Bodhisattva; 6:42 – Preparation of gold for brushing onto *Jowo Rinpoche*; 8:50 – Painting gold onto body of *Jowo Rinpoche*; 10:45 – Dressing of *Jowo Rinpoche*

This offering is also an important part of the rituals practiced by the faithful during periods of sickness, when death is imminent, and in the days after a person’s death. An important concept relating to death in Tibetan Buddhism is that of a *bardo*, intervals of time in one’s life with a set beginning and end. A person passes through six *bardos*, three of them occurring close to or after death, when one is in a stage of existence prior to rebirth. [Rinpoche \(1993\)](#) offer these details about the final three *bardos*:

- The *bardo* of the moment of death: lasting from when death is imminent until actual death, traditionally designated as three and a half days.
- The *bardo* of *dharmata*: lasting from actual death until the onset of visions and appearances of deities. In this stage, the individual feels peace and intense awareness. This stage lasts for around three weeks.
- The *bardo* of becoming: starting when the *bardo* of *dharmata* ceases and ending when one is reborn. In this *bardo*, the person comes to realize that he or she is deceased, and attachment to the past life fades as the new life approaches. This stage lasts 24 days.

During and after a person’s death, many ceremonies are performed by the living to guide the deceased in death. For example, the body is turned to face the Jokhang temple, where the *Jowo Rinpoche* sits, on its way to burial out of respect for the sacredness of that site. On the seventh day after death, letters written in gold containing the deceased’s name are burned in butter lamps before the *Jowo Rinpoche*. The 49th day after death is particularly significant, as this is when the three *bardos* occurring during and after death will have completed. This day contains the most ceremonies, and is the most common day for offering to Jokhang temple monks for gold application on the *Jowo Rinpoche*. Check out [“Tibetan Ritual for the Dead” \(Sangay and Kilty 2011\)](#) for more details.

Given its religious significance, the *Jowo Rinpoche* at Jokhang Temple is a major pilgrimage site for Tibetan Buddhists, who believe it necessary to see the image at least once during their lifetimes. To emphasize their devotion and strive

for a better future, many pilgrims travel long distances from their homes by foot, completely prostrating themselves to the ground every three steps. As a result, a pilgrimage can take several years to complete. To them, it's all worth it, because the *Jowo Rinpoche* is a category of sacred object known as *kutsab* in Tibetan, believed to radiate benevolence and possess the power of *thongdrol* (liberation through seeing). This means that simply viewing a sacred object will bring positive energy and good fortune, without necessarily needing to recite *mantra* or meditate. It is deemed the same as meeting Buddha and receiving his blessings in person. *Kutsab* objects are also believed to pacify sickness and negativity and reverse harm from bad spirits and enemies. Thus, people come to the *Jowo Rinpoche* when a person is sick in order to gain the blessings of the Buddha and restore the individual to health (Fig. 10.7).



Figure 10.7: [Pilgrims Prostrating before the Jokhang Temple](#). Photo by Nathan Freitas; [CC BY-SA 2.0](#).

A related though distinct tradition of Buddhism known as Pure Land Buddhism or Amidism, developed first in China and then migrated into Korea and Japan, becoming particularly popular during the shogunates (military states) of medieval Japan (Fig. 10.1). *Shoguns* ruled over feudally-organized lands whereby they were the ultimate leaders (technically serving under the Emperor but power was effectively stripped from the imperial family during this period). *Shoguns* provided land rights to the *daimyo* (nobles loyal to the *shogun*), offered jobs to the *samurai* (warriors who protected those lands), and provided security and livelihoods to *No* (farmers and other food producers, aka 'peasants'), *Ko* (artisans and craftspeople), and *Sho* (merchants). As we discussed in ["What is Divine?,"](#) *Shinto* was primarily associated with the imperial family, who the *shoguns* saw as competitors to power. While *shoguns*, *daimyo*, and *samurai* didn't renounce *Shinto* beliefs, they didn't favor them. In many cases, these upper classes of the feudal system favored Zen Buddhism and its practices of meditation, discussed in ["What is Beautiful?"](#) But what about the lower classes?

No peasants of the feudal shogunates took up Pure Land Buddhism, focused on *Amida* Buddha (aka *Amitābha*), another of the many different manifestations of Buddha. *Amida* is a celestial buddha, known as ‘The Buddha of Immeasurable Light and Life,’ who presides over the *buddhakṣetra* (Pure Land; Buddha Land; Western Paradise). Depicted in *Welcoming Descent of Amida Triad* (Fig. 10.8) with two *bodhisattvas*, *Amida* glides towards the viewer upon clouds from *buddhakṣetra*. *Amida* is radiant with light and is depicted with all the symbols of a Buddha (perhaps you can make out his extended earlobes?). So, who is the viewer of a hanging scroll like this? Those No peasants are (depending on whether they could afford a hanging as nice as this one).



Figure 10.8: Muromachi Period Maker(s) of Japan. [Welcoming Descent of Amida Triad](#). 1400s CE. Silk and human hair embroidery hanging scroll, 43” x 14.5”. Cleveland Museum of Art Collection; [CCo Public Domain](#).

Amida and his *bodhisattvas* will come to the deathbed of anyone who calls them with sincerity and the desire to reach *buddhakṣetra*. Hangings like *Welcoming Descent of Amida Triad* would be given a special place near the bed of a dying person, so that they would remember to call to *Amida* at the moment of death. This is the only requirement, the only spiritual obligation. Pure Land Buddhism is distinct from other forms of Buddhism, especially Zen Buddhism, for example, because it is not focused on the endurance efforts of long meditations and self-denial. Most peasants don’t have the opportunity or time to meditate every day for long periods of time, because they are working all day. Thus, Pure

Land Buddhism became very popular among this class, offering an open invitation to buddhahood just by remembering to devote one's thoughts to *Amida* upon death.

If you take these simple steps, *Amida* will ensure that you are reborn in *buddhakṣetra*, a paradisiacal land. This new existence allows one the time to meditate and take the path to enlightenment that only some are privileged to take while on earth. *Amida* and the *bodhisattvas* will guide all those who reach *buddhakṣetra* to enlightenment, so that they will achieve *nirvana* and not be reborn again, thus achieving liberation from suffering. This guaranteed path to buddhahood would have been unknown to the peasant classes of Vedic period India, until the Pure Land tradition developed and enlightenment was open to all.

Grave goods

Most Buddhist traditions focus on eschewing material/worldly things in life and in death. Thus, burial of a Buddhist monk would not involve extensive offerings or burial goods. But for many peoples around the world, burial is a ceremonial process whereby goods are offered to the deceased to take with them into the afterlife. The more goods in your grave, the better your afterlife will be.

For example, prior to the influx of Buddhism, Chinese culture focused on indigenous spiritual systems, such as ancestor worship and nature-focused spiritualism (known as “philosophical” Daoism today, which later developed in a powerful organized religion in China). During the earliest periods of recorded Chinese history, the Shang Dynasty (1766–1046 BCE), new types of grave goods were being offered to the highest status people.

The Shang Dynasty was established during the beginning of the Bronze Age in China (Fig. 10.1). This period ushered in new, innovative techniques in smelting and extracting tin and copper to create bronze alloys (hence the name), allowing for fabrication of durable and long-lasting weapons, tools, and ceremonial objects. Bronze ritual vessels decorated with spiritual designs were of particular value among the Shang. One of the most significant forms of these bronze vessels was the *ding* (鼎), a large cauldron used for storage, cooking food, and making religious offerings to ancestors and deities. ~~SHANG~~ These *ding* were objects of power commonly buried in graves of the Shang aristocracy and royalty to accompany their owners into the afterlife.

One of the most significant examples of *ding* in China is the *Houmuwu Ding* (Fig. 10.9) from present-day Henan Province of central China. *Houmuwu* (后母戊) literally means “Queen Mother Wu” in Mandarin, referencing the official title of the dedicatee of this vessel, Queen Fu Jing, one of the wives of Shang King Wu Ding. Not just a consort to the king, Fu Jing was regarded as a powerful authority on agriculture in her own right.



Figure 10.9: Shang Dynasty Maker(s) of Anyang, China. *Houmuwu (Simuwu) Ding*. ca. 1150-1100 BCE. Bronze 15" x 15.25" x 10". National Museum of China Collection. Photo by Victor Tsao; [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

Weighing over 1800 pounds, the *Houmuwu Ding* is the largest and heaviest artifact of bronzeware uncovered in China. It has protruding edges, a rectangular body and four feet, as well as two vertical handles which were most likely used to transport the *ding* on a pole (because one person could not handle this thing alone). The ancient Chinese viewed the earth as square and the heavens as round, thus a squared *ding* firmly rooted to the ground by four feet would represent stability, important to both the current life and the afterlife.

The *Houmuwu Ding* also exhibits a *taotie* (饕餮) pattern common on many *ding* throughout the Shang Dynasty. *Taotie* were ancient mythical monsters portrayed as gluttonous beasts, represented on the *Houmuwu Ding* as a motif of zoomorphic masks cast around the edges of the main body of the *ding*. Check out the leg in the foreground of Figure 10.9. Do you notice a rounded rectangular eye with a slit for a pupil? Above that, the face features a curving horn. You should be able to make out an ear, snarling mouth, and tusks that emerge from the straight nose ridge, which actually serves as the axis of symmetry for the same features on the other side of the leg. In most *taotie* designs, two profile heads are arranged symmetrically to also make a frontal face view. You may be able to make out a flatter example at the top and bottom of the band designs on the flat body of the *Houmuwu Ding* as well.

The exact meaning of these *taotie* motifs is not yet clear. Some scholars suggest that it is simply a product of the casting process without meaning, while others think that these *taotie* faces may have to do with religious ceremonies or wishes for a good harvest. These hybrid creatures may have associations to fertility and agricultural success. Between the

taotie motifs are dense cloud and thunder patterns that suggest a connection to rain and the divine. In addition, the handles are decorated with tigers with a human head in their mouths. (Tigers were worshipped as guardian gods during the Shang dynasty.) The very fact that such a large piece of bronzeware, with detailed ornamentation, was created testifies to the level of skill and organization in Shang society. Many different workers and craftsmen would have been responsible for the mining, smelting, mouldmaking, pouring, casting, and final assembly of this one *ding*! Indeed, the bronze casting techniques in China are unique, relative to all other bronze casting methods around the globe. To learn more, check out [“Casting Bronze the Complicated Way” in Lothar Ledderose’s \(2000\) *Ten-thousand Things: Module and Mass Production in Chinese Art*](#).

The *Houmuwu Ding* was buried with Fu Jing (for whom it was named). Another lady in King Wu Ding’s life named Fu Hao also was buried at Anyang. Her tomb (Fig. 10.10) is a rare case because it was found intact, so we can see the variety and amount of objects offered to her in death. [Ebrey and colleagues \(n.d\) in “A Visual Sourcebook of Chinese Civilization”](#) provide the following list of items found in Fu Hao’s tomb:

- 468 bronze objects including 130 weapons, 23 bells, 27 knives, 4 mirrors, and 4 tigers or tiger heads
- 755 jade objects
- 63 stone objects
- 5 ivory objects
- 564 bone objects including nearly 500 bone hairpins and over 20 bone arrowheads
- 11 pottery objects
- 6,900 pieces of cowry shell

Fu Hao had several *ding*, one very like the *Houmuwu Ding*, and many other bronze vessels, including a wine jug in the shape of a hybrid dog owl! Fu Jing likely had just as many or more objects in her tomb but it was not found intact, thus the exact knowledge of all the objects she was buried with is lost.



Figure 10.10: [Tomb of Fu Hao preserved in Anyang, China](#). Photos by Gary Todd; [Public Domain](#).

About 4000 years later, the *Houmuwu Ding* is celebrated in China today. It is proudly exhibited in the National Museum of China in Beijing and is on the official list of Chinese National Treasures (国之重器), forbidden from being taken outside of China for exhibition. And, bronze production didn’t stop with the Shang Dynasty! There were incredible examples produced during the proceeding Zhou Dynasty, such as the group of [massive musical bells made for Marquis Yi](#). And like *Houmuwu Ding*, Marquis Yi took his bronze bells with him into the afterlife. Check out [“Shang and Zhou Period Bronze Musical Instruments from South China” \(Gao 1992\)](#) for more on how bronze and music mix.

Most ancient Chinese tombs were subterranean (underground). But many cultures around the world, including historic Chinese groups, developed above ground tomb traditions. For people who could afford them, massive tomb structures

would mark a gravesite in awe-inspiring fashion. Talk about taking something with you into the afterlife! What about a whole palace!! That's what the Mughal emperors of India wanted (and expected) in their afterlife.

Check out the *Tomb of Humayun* (Fig. 10.11) near Delhi, India (Fig. 10.1) as an example.. Humayun was the second Mughal emperor and his tomb offers a picture of his position, status, and afterlife. The structure incorporates the typical red sandstone of northern India, with white marble accents. The contrast of red and white is typical of the Indo-Islamic architectural style, developed first by the Sultanate of Delhi (the first Islamic rulers of India). The Mughals perfected this style, adding octagonal forms, the *ogee* arch (squat pointed forms), and large marble 'onion' domes (because their form resembles an onion-y pointed orb shape). The central, tall building in Figure 10.11 is where Humayun's body was interred. His coffin sits in a central octagonal hall under the main dome. The lower surrounding structure resembles typical Mughal designs for horse stables or storage rooms, both demonstrating the wealth and power of the owner. Such a tomb transfers that wealth and power from life through death into the afterlife.



Figure 10.11: Mughal Maker(s) of Delhi, India. [Tomb of Humayun](#). 1558 CE. bronze, 154'. In situ. [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

Humayun and his successors (Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan) all built elaborate tombs in India (but Shah Jahan ended up being buried in the tomb he built for his favorite wife: [the Taj Mahal](#)). Humayun's father and the founder of the Mughal Dynasty, Babur, died in Agra, India, but wanted to be buried in Kabul, Afghanistan (his primary capital), so his tomb is there. Babur's tomb structure is relatively modest. What is impressive are the gardens and water features that surround the tomb (his tomb site is known as *Bagh-e Babur*; *bagh* means garden). Babur followed the Persian-derived custom of

his forebears, the Timurid Dynasty of Central Asia (present-day Uzbekistan mostly). Persian gardens were and continue to be legendary.

Dating back to the Achaemenid Persian Empire and probably much earlier, Persian gardens were usually organized as a grid with strong symmetry and rectangular boundaries of various planted beds and water features. Generally, there was a fountain at the center of the garden and channels that fed the fountain water towards the edges of the garden. These gardens came to be known as *charbagh* in Persian (four-square garden), because there would be four squares of plants around the central fountain. The order and symmetry of the layout reflects the perfect harmony of a paradise, thus they are also known as 'paradise gardens.'

As Muslims conquered Persia and came to learn about ancient Persian traditions, the idea of a garden with abundant plants and water resonated with them through the story of Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden. Furthermore, within the Muslim tradition, the good afterlife is in *Jannah*, the idyllic paradise garden where you want for nothing and there is perpetual bliss. In practical terms, early Muslims originated in the Arabian Desert and likely would have seen a place dedicated to water and abundant growth as particularly valuable. The *charbagh* was like an oasis in the desert. All these factors led to the incorporation of *charbagh* into Islamic architectural traditions, especially tombs. Babur's tomb is an excellent example, as is Humayun's. Have you noticed the large pool of water in the foreground of Figure 10.11? Check out [a plan of the complex here](#) (the right side is the main garden with centralized tomb structure). Humayun's tomb building sits at the center of a four-square garden. Four fountains radiate from the building. Each square of the garden is subdivided by water channels (symbolizing the 4 rivers of *Jannah* that offer water, wine, milk, and honey as described in the *Qur'an*) and pathways, presenting a very ordered landscape.

Recently, Humayun's tomb complex underwent a restoration, led by [the Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme](#) and the Archaeological Survey of India. Do you notice the scaffolding around the dome of the two small pavilions on top of the main tomb structure in Figure 10.11? Those efforts have revitalized this vision of paradise and the social value of this tomb complex. It honors a deceased leader, maintaining cultural connections to the past for contemporary people, and it offers those people opportunities for economic growth through tourism. We'll consider many more examples of monumental architecture and its role in society in ["Why Does Size Matter?"](#)

Body and soul preparation

In the establishment of a grave or tomb, objects and structures are quite important in most traditions. But the preparation of the deceased for the afterlife is also very important, and can incorporate grave goods such as textiles. One of the most famous examples of body preparation is ancient Egyptian mummification. We won't go into that here but check out ["Mummification" \(Ikram 2010\)](#) in the UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology and follow the scholarly resources suggested there for more info.

After the reigns of ancient Egyptian leaders, Persian, Greek, Roman and then Byzantine and Coptic leaders (who were mostly Orthodox Christians) held the territories of Egypt. Between 639-646 CE, Muslim leaders of the early period of expansion right after the Prophet Muhammad's death conquered Egypt and took power from the Copts. This ushered in a long period of so-called 'Islamization' and establishment of new cities, such as al-Fustat (which eventually became known as 'Old Cairo' and today is part of the large urban area of Cairo). By 969 CE, most of the population of Egypt was Muslim and new leadership took power, the Fatimids, challenging the overarching rule of the Abbasids, seated at Baghdad in present-day Iraq. The Fatimids inherited long-established traditions of Egypt, such as linen production.

Ancient Egypt was a hub of linen production which focused on fibers from flax plants for thousands of years. In addition to being used for body wrappings in the mummification process, linen was the primary material used for clothing in

ancient Egypt. In fact, there is an incredibly preserved linen item, called the [Tarkhan Dress](#), dated to 3482-3103 BCE and is considered the oldest piece of women's clothing in the world. Check out "[Dressing for the Ages](#)" ([Lobell 2016](#)) for more.

Linen production continued through Greek, Roman, and Byzantine periods in Egypt, becoming an important trade commodity throughout the Mediterranean over time. As the Fatimids took control in Egypt, linen production boomed, with both *khāssa* (exclusive for the *caliph*) and *‘amma* (public and commercial) factories. Most of these factories were located in the northern Nile Delta region (Fig. 10.1), where flax plants grow readily and there is easy access to trade routes throughout the Mediterranean. Linen textiles called *tiraz* were the primary fashion during this period, identified by a horizontal calligraphic inscription like those in *Two examples of Tiraz* (Fig. 10.12). *Tiraz* made by the *khāssa* factories would be inscribed with the *caliph*'s name, the factory name, blessings, and praise of Allah and the Prophet Muhammad. These would be given as gifts from the *caliph* to honored officials and worthy subjects. In addition, *‘amma* factories would produce lower-quality *tiraz* with inscription bands featuring general blessings. The top example in Figure 10.2 is inscribed with نصر من الله (Naṣr min Allāh or "Victory from God") repeated 6 times ([Golombek 2021a](#)). The bottom example contains a more traditional inscription, reading:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ... نصر من الله لمعد أبي تميم الإمام المستنصر بالله أمير المؤمنين صلوات الله عليه وعلى (الأئمة

الطاهرين المهديين؟) ومحمد خاتم النبيين

"In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful; . . . victory from God to Ma'add Abi Tamim, the Imam al-Mustanṣir Billah, Commander of the Faithful. Blessings from God upon him and upon the pure and guided Imams and on Muhammad, the Seal of the Prophets" ([Golombek 2021b](#)).



Figure 10.12: Fatimid Maker(s) of Egypt. *Two Examples of Tiraz*. ca. 1050-1150 CE. Linen tabby, silk tapestry-woven decoration, 11.2 x 40.2 cm ([top](#)), 82 x 57 cm ([bottom](#)). Aga Khan Museum Collection; [CC BY NC 2.5](#).

Tiraz were possessions during life and usually worn as special garments. Then, due to their special status, they were used as *kafans* (shrouds) for a deceased body in death. Interestingly, contributor Dr. Lina Jammal also suggests that the phrase نصر من الله (*Naṣr min Allāh* or “Victory from God”) often seen in *tiraz* implied their eventual funerary use, since that phrase reflects an important passage in the *Qur’an* that foretold the death of Prophet Muhammad.

The procedure for wrapping a body in a *kafan* derives from the *hadith* (“Traditions,” written accounts from the Prophet Muhammad and his closest followers). Muhammad himself was covered in cotton cloth upon his death in Mecca. In Fatimid Egypt, *tiraz* textiles were used because of their similarity to plain cotton cloth described in the *hadith* and the symbolism of the inscriptions upon them. Excavations have shown that the inscription bands were aligned over the deceased’s mouth or eyes, as if the person was speaking or reading the praise of Allah and blessings in death. The bottom example in Figure 10.12 would have been large enough to cover a body in full. But the top example is smaller and may have been one of several *tiraz* covering an individual, with it placed at the head. Upon burial, the body covered with a *kafan* (*tiraz* or otherwise) was usually placed with the head pointing towards Mecca. Such burial practices are why many

of the linen *tiraz* in museums today survive; they were buried in the arid environment of Egypt and not disturbed for hundreds of years. Some survive better than others (as exemplified in Fig. 10.12).

Let's consider a distinct tradition of body preparation across the world, back in Mesoamerica. Remember the Aztec gods of death mentioned above? Well, while the Aztec were developing a huge empire around their capital Tenochtitlan (present-day Mexico city), a contemporaneous Mesoamerican culture known as the Zapotec, was thriving in present-day Oaxaca (Fig. 10.1). Eventually, the Aztec conquered the Zapotec, but there was a long history of independent Zapotec culture prior to Aztec intervention. It first developed around 700 BCE and enjoyed a large population growth between 200-700 CE, aligned with (but distinct from) neighboring cultures of the early Classic Maya and of Teotihuacan. Zapotec people still live in Oaxaca today, some maintaining their traditional practices despite first Aztec, then Spanish conquest. We've learned about ancient Zapotec burial practices from studying these surviving traditions in historic Zapotec communities.

The Zapotec practice a 40-day mourning period after the death of a loved one. First, the body is set up in the home for a community viewing for several days. This is a social event that allows all members of the community to grieve together. After the body is taken from the home to be buried, the family will prepare a 'flower body' (a mound of flowers assembled to look like a human body), to replace the deceased's physical body in the home. Becoming a spirit is the ultimate progression of one of the fundamental principles of life; the cycling/balance between *nayaa* (wet, green, fresh) and *nabidxi* (dry) aspects of the universe. Seasons change from wet to dry, grass from green to brown, then living creatures from flesh to bone. Wetness is associated with the state of living and dryness is associated with the state of dying. The flower body would be a way to simulate the longer process of decay/drying of the loved one's body and be a way to remember them during the grieving process. This ritual also helps ease the spirit into the afterlife and not stray.

The Zapotec are also known to create ceramic funerary urns. Some of the examples from the Classic period are very elaborate, such as *Funerary Urn* (Fig. 10.13). This example likely depicts a Zapotec leader or priest, with a huge feathered headdress, large earflares, a cape-like garment and feathered collar, as well as a chest adornment. Zapotec urn figures are often seated in this cross-legged position but are also seen standing. The storm god *Cociyo* is depicted in the feathered headdress, aligning this figure with one of the preeminent gods of the Zapotec spiritual system.



Figure 10.13: Classic Period Zapotec Maker(s) of Oaxaca, Mexico. *Funerary Urn (front and side view)*. ca. 350-500 CE. Terracotta, 52" x 43" x 31". Cleveland Museum of Art Collection; [CCo Public Domain](#).

These are called urns because the elaborate figure on the front conceals a cylindrical vessel behind that scholars first suspected would contain ashes. But, as more and more of the urns were investigated, archaeologists couldn't find chemical signatures inside them (by analyzing the composition of the interior pottery that usually absorbs traces of the substances once contained within them). Some scholars suggested that they were once filled with water, explaining the lack of signatures. But the historic Zapotec funerary customs may offer a clue. Other scholars suggest that these urns would hold the remains of the flower bodies after the 40-day period when the spirit is guided to join the spirit world. In the hot and humid climate of Oaxaca, flowers would not last long and if placed in a ceramic vessel without a covering, would disintegrate quite quickly, perhaps not leaving a trace after over 1000 years. In "What Will I Get Out of It?" we'll discuss an example of chemical analysis on ceramics that did result in signatures... of a substance you most certainly would recognize!

Whatever was contained in these vessels, most agree that the figures they represent are probably portraits of the deceased. (Some that represent hybrid creatures probably served as guardians of tombs instead of portraits.) Thus, these vessels would serve as another visual means to remember the deceased. Urns are usually found in niches outside tomb chambers. They may have been placed outside the tombs after the 40-day rituals concluded in the deceased's household. It is likely that tombs would be visited regularly and the funerary urns would be a visual reminder of the deceased for the visitors. Ancestor worship is important with Zapotec culture to this day, including rituals to invite ancestral spirits to offer their blessings at wedding ceremonies, for example.

Memories of death

Ancestor worship is fundamentally about the memory of death and those who have died. This memory can be incredibly deep, hundreds or thousands of years depending on the tradition. Different cultures perceive death in different ways and thus approach the memorializing of death differently. Let's explore a couple traditions you may not have heard of.

The Djenné culture, centered on the town of Djenné -Jeno in present-day Mali (Fig. 10.1), combines indigenous traditions and incorporates practices adopted from Muslim groups trading and migrating across the Sahara desert from North Africa. Archaeology in the region has been lacking, so we're not quite sure what is characteristic of indigenous Djenné art and what shows evidence of the adoption/adaptation of artistic practices brought in via Muslim contact and settlement. One type of art that probably has strong indigenous roots focuses on figural ceramic objects like *Male Figure* (Fig. 10.14). Such objects are thought to have been provided to the deceased as burial goods and served as memories of previous losses during life.



Figure 10.14: Djenné Maker(s) of Djenné- Jeno, Mali. [Male Figure](#). ca. 1300-1600s CE. Terracotta, 7.75". Cleveland Museum of Art Collection. [CCo Public Domain](#).

It is difficult to observe *Male Figure* without a feeling of sadness. Notice the hunched back, crossing arms in a gesture that appears like a self-hug for comfort, and the legs pulled in close and anchoring a sickened body. This man's skin is covered in what appear to be bulbous sores or pustules. His eyes are swollen with inflammation and he may have an open wound on his forehead. He is unadorned and naked. It is difficult not to feel pity for him.

This is not the only terracotta figural sculpture from Djenné that seems to represent illness and depression. Other examples have larger open lesions. Some have sores only on one part of their body, such as the back. So, what is it? Scholars have asked whether this is representative of a disease, potentially a plague, that affected many people within Djenné society. Some have suggested leprosy. In addition to figures obviously suffering from this illness, Djenné artists produced [sculptures of figures embracing](#), perhaps in gestures of mourning and grief after loved ones died from this illness. Those figures often have swollen eyes as well, probably reflective of the puffiness that develops after lots of crying.

While our knowledge of Djenné culture is limited, scholars suggest that these sculptures may have been produced as memories of a previous generation that suffered dearly due to a terrible disease. These figures could have been produced during the period of the disease but if it was truly as terrible as it seems, it is likely that artists would not devote their efforts to representing it while it was ravaging the community but developing images of benefit to those afflicted (such as images of gods, etc.). Thus, it makes the most sense that these sculptures would be memorials to a past that was still close in people's memories but far enough away that the disease was not affecting the society at large anymore. Other terracotta figures from the Djenné, representing deities like a mother goddess, probably would have been set up at temple shrines or homes for private worship. These disease and mourning figures may have been used in the same way, but targeting ancestral memory and connection to the past. Eventually, they probably were buried with people of the surviving generation, who remembered the diseased generation. Check out the [Djenne section on Art & Life in Africa by the University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art](#) for more about Djenne terracotta figures.

These memories of deceased loved ones can be cornerstones of earthly lives, especially if ancestor worship is an important spiritual tradition. This is the case for the Asmat people of present-day Irian Jaya, Indonesia (the western half of the island of New Guinea in Melanesia; Fig. 10.1). Asmat carvers created monumental sculptures called *Bisj Poles* (Fig. 10.15), incorporating multiple human figures, stacked atop each other, with projecting decorative wing-like structures, called *tsjemen* at the top. They would always be painted but most examples that reached European and Euro-American museums were stripped of their original paint, like all the examples in Figure 10.15.



Figure 10.15: Asmat Maker(s) of Irian Jaya, West Papua, Indonesia. *Bisj Poles*. Late 1950s CE. Wood, paint, fiber, approx. 18'. The Metropolitan Museum of Art Collection. Photo by Leah McCurdy. [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

The tallest *Bisj Poles* in Figure 10.15 is about 18 feet tall! To carve one, a team of Asmat men need to source a mature tree and extract the whole thing, roots and all! Then, the carving can start. [Check out this photo of a team of carvers using scaffolding to create several bisj poles](#). The tree's projecting roots are used to create the *tsjemen*, carved with intricate patterns of curved, interlacing patterns, faces, and sometimes figures. The *tsjemen* often project from the body of the uppermost carved figure.

So, who are those figures? If you look carefully at the photo on the right in Figure 10.15, you'll notice that the figure is represented with a penis and, thus, is male. This is the case for all figures carved on *bisj* poles. They are the warriors who have recently died and become ancestors of the village. These warriors usually died in specific circumstances: a village raid. Deaths may occur in defense of one's own village against another raiding party or during the raid of a neighboring village. These so-called 'headhunting' raids aren't only about collecting trophy heads or cannibalism. These raids also involved collecting resources for food and production, perhaps in revenge upon a community that previously raided one's own village for such resources.

This aspect of revenge is important to the Asmat because they believe that all deaths, except for those of the very young and very old, were caused by an enemy, no matter if violence was involved or not. These malicious acts must be avenged and the men's society of warriors takes on that challenge. In a long ceremony, the men prepare a *bisj* pole, depicting their fallen ancestors, and erect it for all to see. The men gather for a rally to remember the ancestral warriors and prepare for a raid. They seek to decapitate those who caused the death of their loved ones. By taking the head of another warrior, one takes on their essence and prowess. Mythological accounts suggest that warriors would also take on the names of those they have decapitated. The more names one has accumulated, the more one has demonstrated their prowess as

a warrior. The heads of the enemy would be brought back to one's village and used to initiate the next generation of warriors. To learn more, check out [“Asmat headhunting and the initiation of male adolescents” \(Pouwer 2010\)](#).

As you might imagine, these practices were highly demonized by colonial and missionary Europeans. But it is important to understand that these acts of violence against others are not carried out in a vacuum. They are part of a belief system and part of the approach to death in Asmat culture. For example, people who refer to Asmat headhunting as an evil practice usually don't know that the Asmat also remove the skulls from their loved one's deceased body (after a period of decomposition), including the skulls of mothers that are preserved in a family for many generations. These skulls are important objects of memory kept in households. This is not a 'scary' or 'evil' practice to the Asmat. It is part of the cycle of life and death. Like the family-focused ancestral skulls of individual households, the monumental *bisj* poles serve as objects of memory for a whole community.

The Wrap-up

We started this chapter with the literal imagery of death, often incorporating skulls or skeletal forms. And we've ended with trophy and ancestral heads as objects of memory. Each of these examples and those in-between reflects a way of thinking about death, and dealing with the psychological crisis we often feel when faced with our own mortality and/or the loss of our loved ones. Euro-Americans use a lot of metaphors to describe death and the afterlife: 'the great beyond,' 'passing,' 'kicked the bucket.' Other cultures prefer to not be metaphorical about death and approach it for what it is, in literal and straightforward ways. Art and architecture offer means to express these cultural approaches to death, while honoring those who have died.

News Flash

- The animated films [“Coco” \(2017\)](#) and [“The Book of Life” \(2014\)](#) incorporate imagery and concepts of indigenous and colonial origin of Dia de los Muertos
- The 007 James Bond film [“Spectre” \(2015\)](#) is set in Mexico City on Dia de Los Muertos. The fictional parade scene in the film inspired the Mexican government to hold an annual parade on October 29, starting in 2016!
- The Houmuvu Ding is featured in the video game [Animal Crossing: New Horizons](#) as “Tremendous Statue”.
- The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts' [“Play It! Chinese Bronze Bells” virtual exhibition](#) allows you to play a set of bells to see how they sound different.
- The short film called [“Muxes” \(2016\)](#) documents another important part of Zapotec culture, the non-binary gender tradition of muxes.
- The Asmat Culture is featured in the documentary “The Search for Michael Rockefeller” about the disappearance of Michael Rockefeller in Asmat territory during an anthropological study.

Where Do I Go From Here? / The Bibliography

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II. Why Does Size Matter?



Figure II.1: Map and timeline of artworks discussed in “Why Does Size Matter?” by Marizela Garza. Review image captions below for details about each artwork and copyright information.

Why does size matter?

Don't worry! We won't be getting into self-conscious comparisons among young men in this chapter. We're talking about what scholars call monumentality, the practice of creating massive and/or imposing and/or enduring features. SPOILER: No aliens required.

These features are what we call monuments (like *Stela Depicting Kaloomte' K'abel* [Fig. 8.4] from “[Who Came Before Us?](#)”) and monumental architecture. We often marvel at the accomplishments of ancient people and curate lists like the

'Seven Wonders of the Ancient World' discussed in [“Where Does Art Come From? An Introduction”](#) or [“New7Wonders of the World” developed by the New7Wonders Foundation](#). The old list featured only monuments from the Mediterranean region and thus is dominant in architectural histories focused on the Western Canon. The new list offers global representation, demonstrating that monumentality is not a Western thing, but a human thing. Have you ever wondered why humans are so fascinated by big things like buildings and why people spend huge sums on trips to see monuments around the world?

Big things and how they impact us

Humans have an innate interest in things that are big, probably because the scale difference between huge structures and our weeny bodies demonstrates an inescapable truth... we are small in comparison to the world around us. Remember *Streams and Mountains without End* (Fig. 6.11) from [“What is Important to Us?”](#) In that chapter, we focused on the inscriptions scholar-officials inked onto the scroll, but the painting itself exemplifies a tradition relevant to monumentality. The *shan shui* ('mountain water') landscape of *Streams and Mountains without End* also includes house structures, fences, and people. Fig. 11.2 provides a detail.



Figure 11.2: DETAIL of Northern Song Dynasty Maker(s) of China. *Streams and Mountains without End*. ca. 1100-1150 CE. Ink and color on silk hanging scroll, approx. 14” x 7’ painting (36’ total scroll length). Cleveland Museum of Art Collection; [CCo Public Domain](#).

Most importantly, these human-made features and the humans themselves are dwarfed by the mountains. Typically, this sort of imagery is presented on a vertical hanging scroll with a towering mountain lurking over a body of water and tiny humans in the foreground. This painting tradition is thought to reflect the Daoist idea that nature is preeminent and

humans must learn humility through the observation of nature. For most people, standing at the base of a mountain or a monumental building inspires humility.

On the other hand, there is another way to view monumentality: from the point of view of powerful people. Let's dive into some theory. Sociologist Thorstein [Veblen \(1899\) in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*](#) developed the concept of “conspicuous consumption” to describe how people buy more or higher-quality goods than they practically need. This consumption/acquisition of luxury goods is often done in view of others (at a market, on display in one's house, etc.) and thus is conspicuous (noticeable, and even attracts attention). P.S. Veblen was critical of this practice, also calling it “wasteful” consumption.

So how does this apply to monuments? Archaeologist Bruce Trigger (1990) applied Veblen's concept of conspicuous consumption to ancient architecture in [“Monumental Architecture: A Thermodynamic Explanation of Symbolic Behaviour.”](#) Trigger argues that monumental architecture was one of the, if not the most, paramount luxury goods in ancient societies. To build a monumental structure like the El Castillo acropolis (Fig. 11.3) at the ancient Maya site of Xunantunich, Belize (Fig. 11.1), for example, someone would have to control/consume the energy (labor) of other people. The patrons of El Castillo (many rulers of Xunantunich) could not have built the structure themselves (and it certainly wasn't aliens). Instead, Xunantunich rulers exercised social and political power over people with less status by commissioning their labor to produce a monument, thereby ‘consuming’ the labor of others.



Figure 11.3: Aerial photo of the remains of El Castillo acropolis, Xunantunich, Belize (top). Image courtesy of Juan Carlos Fernandez Diaz. Virtual reconstruction of the northern facade of the final phase of El Castillo construction (bottom). Image by Leah McCurdy. [CC BY 4.0](#).

This labor would have been highly conspicuous. The ancient Maya often built their cities on hilltops, and cleared them of most forest growth to make way for massive structures and plazas. Thus, as masons constructed buildings as tall as El Castillo (over 120 feet in its final phase), they would become more and more visible to local communities living in the valleys around the hilltops. Those living closest would be able to see people working at the top of El Castillo from their household patios. Furthermore, any travelers, such as neighboring kings, using the vast river systems in the region would see El Castillo on the hilltop. Such travelers may even be invited into the city to see the construction unfolding. Thus, conspicuous consumption of labor would be visible not just to local people but to others, such as elites of other territories. Other kings were probably the drivers of conspicuously consumptive behaviors. Humans want to show off what they have, and they often want to compete with their peers by having the most stuff. Being able to build big in your city is consistent with those human drives, and still continues to this day.

Contrary to popular notions, laborers in ancient Maya construction projects were not necessarily forced to participate. There were some forced laborers, like enslaved political captives, but they were not the majority. Instead, specialized and unspecialized laborers, drawn from the local population, likely participated in annual building campaigns during the dry season. Their labor was probably exchanged as a form of 'tax' or tribute to the local leader, in exchange for protection (both physical and spiritual), social networking (like in royally-sponsored marketplaces), and/or redistributed resources (like food for a family that does not produce their own food). FYI: This labor system also applies to ancient Egyptian monumental construction. Slaves did not build the pyramids. Recent archaeology has uncovered a large village near the Giza Pyramids built specifically to house and feed laborers (and their families in many cases) in relative comfort. Check out [Dr. Joyce Tyldesley's \(2011\) summary of new insights in "The Private Lives of the Pyramid Builders."](#) Again, no aliens. ~~SPANG~~

Let's say that a king got greedy and started overtaxing people for their labor (wanting to build so much and so fast that labor demands inhibited people's ability to focus on their personal needs). What could the people do about that? Many early Maya archaeologists thought that laborers had no choice but to work, and therefore no real individual agency (remember that concept from "[What is Beautiful?](#)"). Recently, scholars have started to take community agency into account. If one king got greedy, people could move away to the territory of a less consumptive king. That's not an easy thing by any means (leaving the homestead one has established, etc.) but it's an example of a 'bottom-up' (versus a 'top-down'/elite-centric) view of the past. Regular people could make decisions to change their circumstances and enough people did it together, leaders would get the message. For example, in [Maya Society under Colonial Rule, Nancy Farriss \(1984\)](#) describes the practice of colonial-period Maya people "vot[ing] with their feet" by walking away from colonial leaders who exploited them to live elsewhere. Archaeologists focused on the 'bottom-up' perspective of people living around Xunantunich suggest that this was practiced by the ancient Maya as well (Robin et al. 2010). So, if a king got greedy, potential laborers might walk away. This possibility would keep most kings from getting greedy.

Has this discussion made you re-think any recent purchases? Is buyer's remorse setting in? Most people in Europe and Euro-America conspicuously consume to some extent. Next time you take a drive down a tree-lined avenue with McMansions, conspicuous consumption should cross your mind. Those McMansions are some of the most ubiquitous monuments of our era. Let's discuss other monuments you know (probably) before diving into the details of some monuments you probably don't know.

The monuments you know

You've heard of the Forbidden City (Fig. 11.4), right? If you're not sure about the term but recognize some features in Figure 11.4, you've probably seen Disney's *Mulan* or other popular media that depict the Forbidden City, or the larger Imperial City within which the Forbidden City sits. Unfortunately, such media often get pretty important facts about the city wrong. For example, *Mulan* was supposedly set in the Han Dynasty (202 BCE – 220 CE; we'll talk about the Han

in “[Why Do They Have More Than Us?](#)”). The Forbidden and Imperial City, as we know them today and as depicted in *Mulan*, were not constructed until the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 CE) and first occupied in 1420 CE. Thus, the Forbidden City did not exist during the Han Dynasty, and *Mulan* could not have talked with the Emperor on the steps, as in that famous fireworks scene at the end of the film. That’s a Disney ‘oops’, among many.

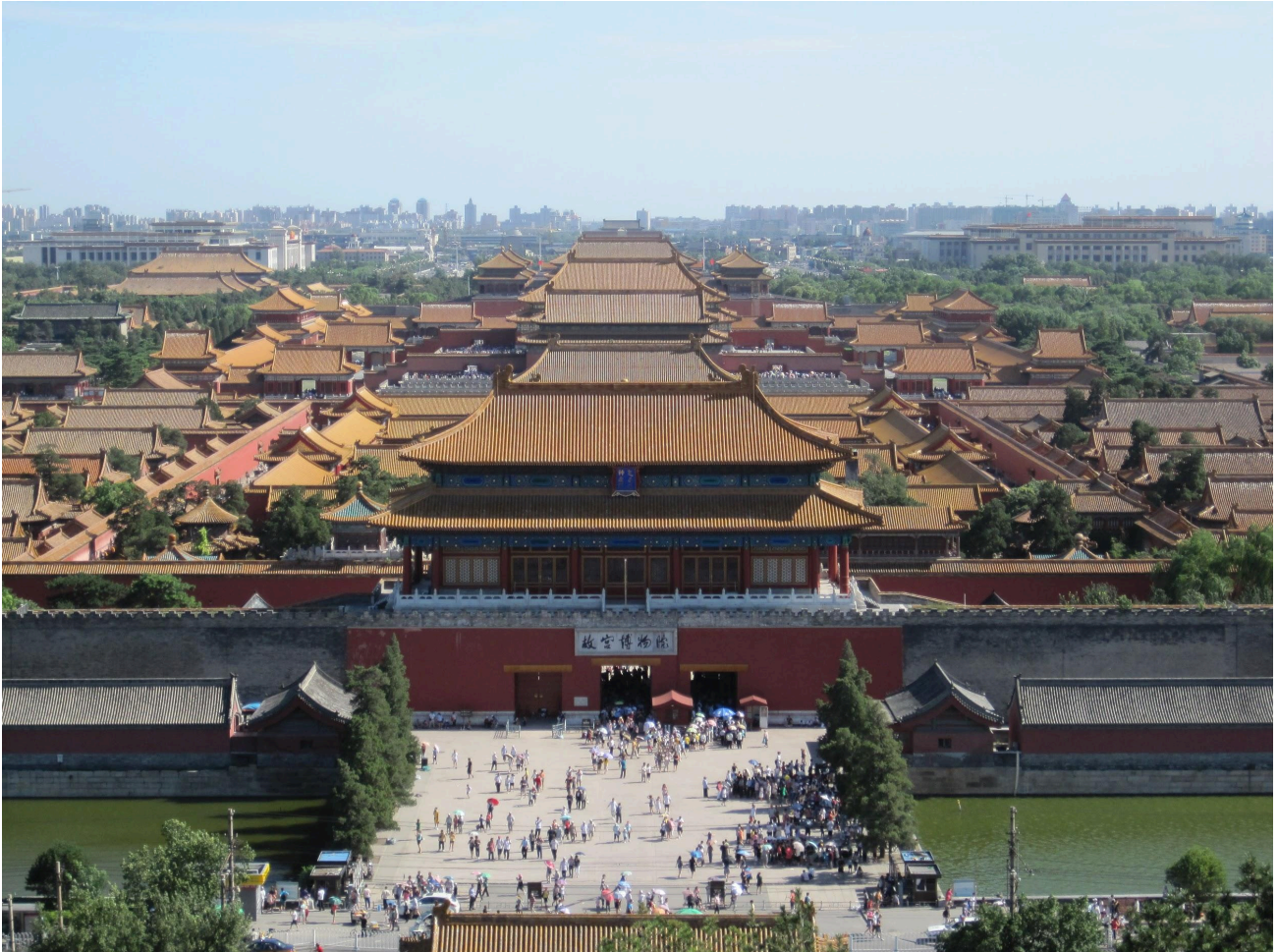


Figure 11.4: Ming Dynasty Maker(s) of Beijing, China. *Forbidden City Complex viewed from Jingshan Park*. 1406-1420 CE. 72 hectares. In situ. Photo by Victor Tsao. [CC BY 4.0](#).

So, what was the Forbidden City for? It was a huge palace built in the Ming Dynasty capital of Beijing (Fig. 11.1). The name (*Zijin Cheng* in Chinese) gives away one of its key features: access was limited, if not forbidden. Only the emperor had full access to the city while the imperial family and high officials had limited access. Certainly no one outside those highest circles would be allowed to enter. This all changed when the final Chinese imperial dynasty (the Qing Dynasty; 1644-1911/12 CE) was overthrown in the Chinese Revolution. From 1914-1925 CE, the palace transitioned into the Palace Museum, one of the most important tourist locations in China today. Did you notice all the tourists in Figure 11.4?

The Forbidden City is heavily influenced by the principles of *feng shui* (literally “wind water”; the practice of arranging things according to a philosophy of space and environment, wherein cardinal directions and natural elements are particularly important). For example, the primary buildings of the Forbidden City, such as the *Taihedian* (Hall of Supreme Harmony), face south in reverence of the sun. The emperor’s dragon throne sits in the *Taihedian*, atop three levels of white marble platforms that dwarf any visitor in the surrounding plaza.

The *Taihedian* is the largest surviving wooden building in China. The building exemplifies ‘traditional Chinese

architecture' through the use of a pillared structure, bracketing system supporting a ceramic tile roof, and perhaps the most visually prominent feature: upturning eaves (Fig. 11.5). Let's talk about the roof first. Look closely at Figure 11.5. Notice at the end of the eave (the projecting part of the roof), there are circular outlines arranged in a continual horizontal row. What are those? They are simulated ends of bamboo stalks! In fact, traditional curved roof tiles are arranged to simulate pole-like features that descend from the roof ridge to the edge. Any guesses that those pole-like features were? Yep ... bamboo stalks! Before the invention of ceramic tiles, roofs were surfaced with bamboo. Bamboo is an auspicious (and highly renewable) plant in China, symbolizing prosperity and longevity. That's a good material for the roof over your head! When ceramic tiles came on the scene, they simulated the original bamboo roof surface.



Figure 11.5: [Detail of roof system at the Taihedian](#). Image Courtesy of [秋水平湖](#). [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

Continue looking closely at Figure 11.5 to notice the layers of supportive brackets on the underside of each eave. This exemplifies the traditional *dougong* bracketing system. Ceramic tile roofs are super heavy! Then add all the finials and sculptures (which we'll talk more about in ["Why Do They Have More Than Us?"](#)). Then add layers of snow in the winter, and you may have some worries about that roof coming down on you! That's where the wooden bracketing system comes in. Brackets extend from the walls of the building to the eaves, ensuring that the weight of the roof is balanced. At the *Taihedian*, the lower roof level depicted in Figure 11.5 has four layers of brackets while the upper level has five layers. Want to see *dougong* in more detail? [Check out Jie Zhang and colleagues \(2018\) article "Experience the dougong construction in virtual reality,"](#) including the video below the article.

The *dougong* system is what supports the signature upturning eaves. Most scholars think that the upturned roof corners

have both a practical and aesthetic function. Practically, curving the eaves up helps to prevent damage due to snow build-up (which can be quite high in this northeastern part of China). Visually, the curving corners of the roof appear like wings, perhaps of an auspicious phoenix, about to take flight (see Fig. 11.4). This offers a mystical and metaphorical aura to these large buildings that goes beyond humbling a visitor due to size by adding spiritual and cosmological power to the mix.

What other monuments have you heard of? Does Figure 11.6 ring any bells? The *ahu* and *moai* of Rapa Nui are extremely famous around the world, but perhaps not by those names. Rapa Nui is the indigenous name of the place that Europeans called Easter Island or *Paasch-Eyland* (the original name from Dutch explorer Jacob Roggeveen in 1722 CE) (Fig. 11.1). This place wasn't a barren, uninhabited island; it was home to the Rapa Nui culture. Roggeveen's visit was not a peaceful one. It ended in the death of a Rapa Nui chief and a dozen others. Spanish slave raiding from the Peruvian coast, forced migrations, and diseases eventually devastated the Rapa Nui population, contrary to Jared Diamond's incorrect 'ecocide' theory in *Collapse*. To learn more about this 'ecocide' theory and why it's wrong, read "[What Really Happened on Easter Island?](#)" (Jarman 2018) to learn more.



Figure 11.6: Rapa Nui Maker(s) of Rapa Nui (Easter Island). [Ahu Tongariki with Moai \(Restored\)](#). ca. 1250-1500 CE. Basalt, over 200 m (total length) x 5.6-8.7m tall (moai). In situ. [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

If you are familiar with Squidward's house in *Spongebob*, you've seen how so-called 'Easter Island Heads' are presented in popular media. ~~SPANG~~ As Figure 11.6 demonstrates, these monuments are certainly not just heads. All *moai* were carved with a torso, arms usually placed beneath the belly bulge, and curvature of the upper hips. The head of each

moai typically is large in proportion to the body features. These are monolithic (carved from one stone) basalt statues and range up to 33 feet tall and over 80 tons. Figure 11.6 also illustrates a feature that is often lost in popular media: all *moai* would have worn a *pukao* (a separate, often contrasting, stone representing a headdress or hairstyle). Only the *moai* second from the far end in Figure 11.6 retains its *pukao* today.

Ahu are the platforms built to showcase a collection of *moai*. Each statue is a monument itself but as a collection, the constructions like *Ahu Tongariki* (Fig. 11.6) are a form of monumental architecture, designed and arranged to impact local communities. Importantly, *moai* were never intended to be presented individually. Photos of individual *moai*, often leaning on hillsides, document the several abandoned statues that were never transported to their final *ahu* setting. That begs the questions that many archaeologists have attempted to answer: how did the *Rapa Nui* transport these monoliths from the quarries located on the volcanic hills of the island interior to the coastal regions where all *ahu* are found?

It wasn't aliens! Archaeologists have developed several hypotheses about how human laborers transported *moai* based on archaeological evidence and discussion with *Rapa Nui* people today. Two of the primary hypotheses suggest that transportation was achieved through log rolling and/or upright shimmy-ing ([illustrated by Fernando Aptista for National Geographic here](#)). All of these methods required large groups of participants and thus would be conspicuous to the wider community.

So, who do the *moai* represent? The answer harkens back to our "[Who Came Before Us?](#)" chapter. Any guesses? They are portraits of ancestral chiefs, the previous community leaders who continued to protect the community in death. The *moai* look out over the community (i.e. into the island and not out to sea like erroneous reports state). Recent archaeological surveys suggest that *ahu* locations may have been chosen based on their proximity to freshwater sources like springs and ponds ([DiNapoli et al. 2019](#)). Freshwater is a protected resource in most island societies. You've got plenty of water, but not necessarily enough to drink. Thus, the ancestral chiefs would protect a valuable resource while overseeing the living community. These *ahu* sites also likely served as ceremonial spaces where rituals to honor the previous leaders took place. After learning this about the *moai*, Anecia Smith re-imagined what the colonial encounter could have been like in [Thank You Ancestors!](#)

While the *moai* are commonly known today, you may not know that just before Roggeveen and other European arrivals, *Rapa Nui* spiritualism was changing. There was a shift away from the *moai*-focused ancestor worship to Birdman rituals, associated with the god *Makemake*. The Birdman role was earned each rainy season by a *Rapa Nui* man through a feat of prowess and strength. Scholars suggest that this shift in focus may explain why several carved *moai* were abandoned on hillsides during the transportation process. The Birdman tradition took hold so much so that the *Rapa Nui* started disassembling *ahu* and recarving *moai* to reflect the new spiritual focus. This history has only recently started to come to light as scholars actually ask *Rapa Nui* people about their own history. Go figure...

The monuments you may not know

Now, let's consider some other monuments that don't make it into most history books. Imagine another small island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, where coral reefs are abundant and trees crowd the coastline. You probably don't expect this little island to host one of the largest architectural complexes known in Polynesia. Temwen island is part of the present-day Federated States of Micronesia (Fig. 11.1; north of Melanesia and east of the Philippines) and associated with the larger Pohnpei island. Pohnpeians of the Saudeleur Dynasty built over 90 artificial islands and interlacing canals atop a coral reef off the Temwen coast starting in 1200 CE (Fig. 11.7). Over 500 years, the complex, known as *Nan Madol* or *Soun Nan-leng*, grew into a city with a royal palace (the *Nan Dowas*), religious center dedicated to an agricultural deity called *Nahnisohn Sapw* (the *Powe*), fortress, marketplace, government buildings, homes for 500-1000 people, and tombs.

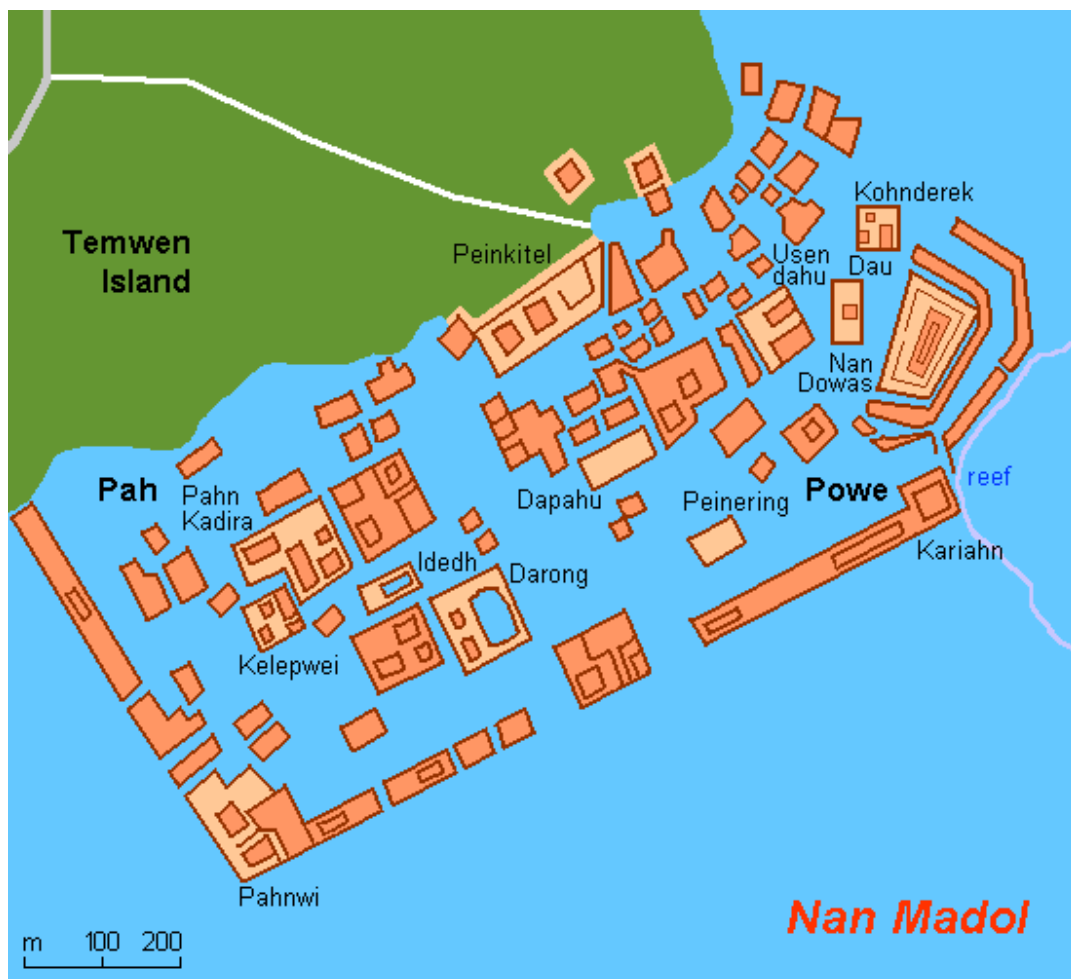


Figure 11.7: [Reconstruction of Nan Madol complex](#). Image by Sumaru; [CCo Public Domain](#).

The building methods of the Pohnpeians are unique to the region. Scholars are unsure how the builders were able to securely sink large basalt boulders atop the coral reef and stabilize them for construction of buildings. However they did it, they were successful because the complex survives to this day. The above-water structures (Fig. 11.8) feature a stacked construction method of large basalt stones, similar to log cabins. Importantly, the Pohnpeians did not require any bonding materials. Their construction methods produced stable structures without the need for mortar or adhesives, with the tallest walls reaching 25 feet in the *Nan Dowas*. This technique is a type of dry construction that is relatively rare around the world, and leads us to our next stop: Zimbabwe.



Figure 11.8: Pohnpeian Maker(s) of Temwen, Micronesia. [Nan Madol](#). ca. 1200-1700 CE. Basalt masonry, approx. 600 x 1200'. In situ. [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

Zimbabwe is a country in southern Africa (Fig. 11.1) that only recently gained independence from British colonization in 1980 CE. That colonial history will come up a bit later but first, let's consider the monumental architecture of this region, known as *zimbabwes*, or stone houses primarily reserved for leaders. The largest of all *zimbabwes* is the *Great Enclosure* (Fig. 11.9) of the ancient city known as Great Zimbabwe. Like the Pohnpeians, the builders of Great Zimbabwe perfected a dry masonry technique using local granite.

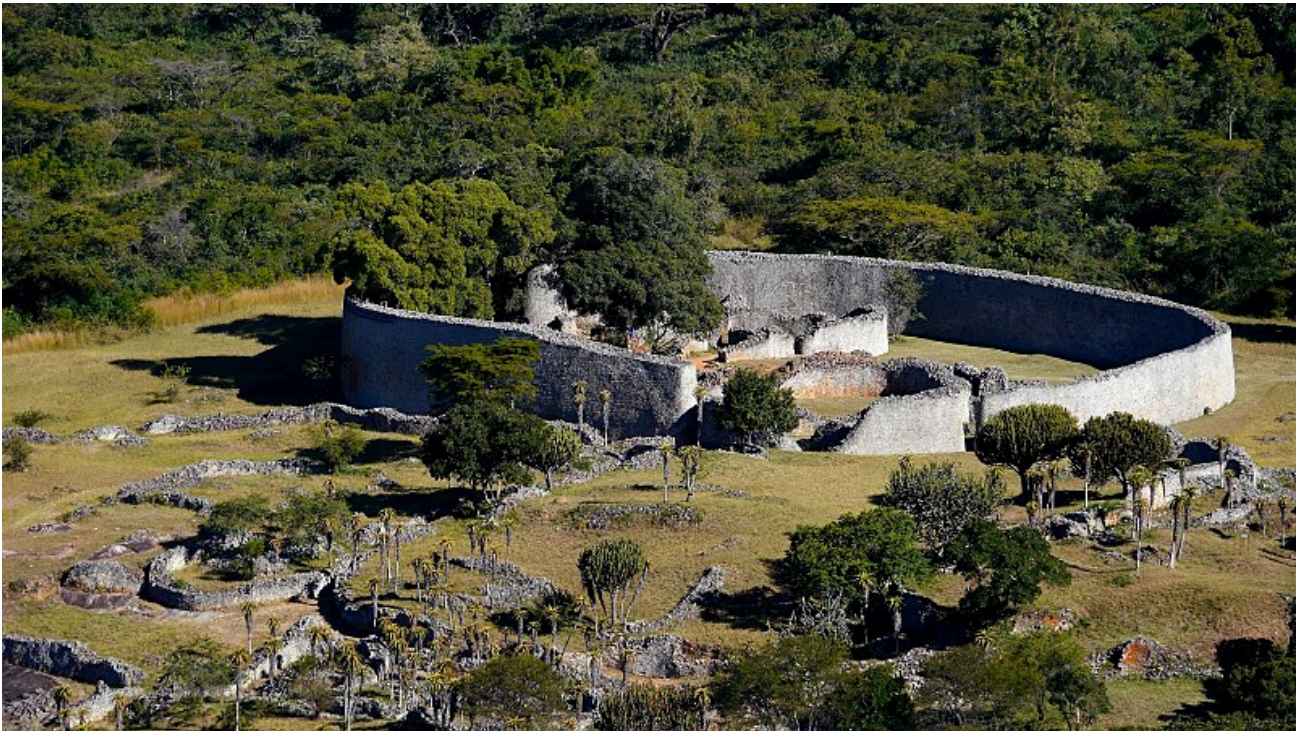


Figure 11.9: Ancestral Zimbabwean (Shona) Maker(s) of Great Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe. [Great Enclosure](#). ca. 1200-1450 CE. Dry masonry, approx. 820' (circumference) x 36' max. height. In situ. [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

The dry stone technique was used to construct circular walls that surrounded and subdivided living and ceremonial spaces. The *Great Enclosure* likely hosted the king's palace and court. The interior of the *Great Enclosure* originally featured many small buildings constructed using wet clay soil, known as *dhaka*, and thatched roofs. In front of the *Great Enclosure* in Figure 9 are the so-called 'Valley Ruins,' which were smaller walled compounds probably housing elite families and officials devoted to the kingly court. Farther from the *Great Enclosure*, archaeologists have found evidence of *dhaka*-based houses and compounds scattered across the landscape. These were the homesteads of cattle herders that lived around Great Zimbabwe and contributed to its large ranching and trade economy. Artifacts found at the site attest to long-distance trade relationships with the Swahili peoples of the East African coast, and through them, to the Indian Ocean trade networks including the Arab World, India, and China. The population of Great Zimbabwe probably reached around 20,000 people around 1350 CE.

Great Zimbabwe is also known for the monumental Hill Complex, located across the valley from the *Great Enclosure* (Fig. 11.10). As the name implies, the Hill Complex is higher in elevation and overlooks the entire city and surrounding homesteads. Zimbabwean builders created a series of enclosures among the enormous boulders of the granite outcrop atop the hill. Most scholars think that the Hill Complex served ceremonial purposes because it features a naturally occurring cave/echo chamber within the outcrops that amplifies voices across the valley landscape. This natural feature was enhanced by monumental construction and decorative features such as the 'Zimbabwe bird' sculptures. Check out ["The Soapstone Birds from Great Zimbabwe" \(Huffman 1985\)](#) to learn more.



Figure 11.10: [View of the Great Zimbabwe Hill Complex from within the Great Enclosure](#). Photo by Jürgen Kehrberger; [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

Great Zimbabwe is not only monumental in scale and achievement but in historical significance for other reasons. After initial contact by the Portuguese, other Europeans made their way to southern Africa. By the 1820s CE, land grabbing had pushed a faction of indigenous Zulu peoples, called the Ndebele, from the southern coasts north into what we call Zimbabwe today. In the 1880s CE, a British mining company run by Cecil Rhodes received mining rights from the Ndebele leader, focused primarily on local gold and coal resources. Rhodes then convinced the British government to grant him and his company a royal charter (meaning colonizing rights) to the region. This established what is known as “company rule” (also relevant to the British East India Company), whereby the company’s leadership (i.e. Cecil Rhodes) takes on political authority of the chartered region and combats local insurrections through force (with the armed British South Africa Police). Through war and political moves, Rhodes eventually ruled over what became known as Rhodesia, which later split into northern territories (present-day Zambia) and Southern Rhodesia. During this time, Rhodes welcomed European settlers, displaced indigenous populations, and instituted some of the most racist laws known in Africa at the time. In 1925 CE, Southern Rhodesia officially became part of the United Kingdom/British Empire.

Throughout this period of Rhodes’ rule, African independence/nationalist movements were growing in response to terrible colonial treatment. Rhodes sought a way to justify white rule and developed a propaganda strategy centered on Great Zimbabwe. When the first Portuguese viewed Great Zimbabwe and other similar cities, they weren’t convinced that Black Africans could have achieved such grandeur, fueled by the racist mindsets of the colonial period. Rhodes ran with this idea and hired Theodore Bent (an amateur archaeologist) to conduct excavations at Great Zimbabwe. No matter what was actually found, Bent was to report that evidence revealed the identity of Great Zimbabwe’s builders as non-Black peoples. There were many potential candidates for these builders: King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, Phoenicians, or Arabs. From 1906 to 1929 CE, archaeologists David Randall-MacIver and Gertrude Caton-Thompson

both reported scientific evidence that Great Zimbabwe was built around 1200 CE (thus much too late to have been built by Solomon/Sheba or the Phoenicians) and held no evidence of Arab occupation, except for small trade goods. In [Caton Thompson's \(1931: 199\)](#) words:

Examination of all the existing evidence ... still can produce not one single item that is not in accordance with ... Bantu [indigenous African] origin and medieval date. This interest in Zimbabwe ... should ... to all educated people be enhanced a hundred-fold; it enriches, not impoverishes, our wonderment at their remarkable achievement ... for the mystery of Zimbabwe is the mystery which lies in the still pulsating heart of native Africa.

UTA Student Zlata was inspired by Gertrude Caton-Thompson so she applied her drawing skills to produce a comic strip about Gertrude's contribution to the understanding of Great Zimbabwe. Check it out [here](#).

Unfortunately, Caton Thompson did not change the minds of many Rhodesians, who continued to claim that non-Black people built the ruins. They weren't about to give up the justification for their settlement since previous non-Black settlement was already present (according to their made-up evidence). This continued into the 1970s CE, after much more archaeological evidence attested to Black African origin and linked to the living Shona culture, subjugated under Rhodesian colonial authority. An archaeologist working at Great Zimbabwe in the 1970s CE said,

I was told by the then-director of the Museums and Monuments organisation to be extremely careful about talking to the press about the origins of the [Great] Zimbabwe state. I was told that ... the government was pressuring them to withhold the correct information. Censorship of guidebooks, museum displays, school textbooks, radio programmes, newspapers and films was a daily occurrence. Once a member of the Museum Board of Trustees threatened me with losing my job if I said publicly that blacks had built Zimbabwe. He said it was okay to say the yellow people had built it, but I wasn't allowed to mention radio carbon dates... ([Frederikse 1990](#)).

Such attempts to withhold history and subjugate a culture's heritage are monumental actions themselves. They impact people profoundly. This suppression lit a fire under the independence/nationalist movement in Southern Rhodesia. A guerrilla war began in 1968 CE while the United Kingdom and Southern Rhodesia struggled internally. In 1980 CE, democratic elections were held and the Zimbabwe African National Union took power, gaining independence from Britain. The new leaders chose that name Zimbabwe to keep their heritage at the forefront of the nation's identity. [They also featured a Zimbabwe Bird on the national flag](#). Things have not been easy for Zimbabwe since independence but there now is full recognition that the builders of Great Zimbabwe, who achieved monumental things, were the native Black ancestors of the people living in the country today.

How about another example of dry construction? Time for a trip back to Peru. We've mentioned the Inka in passing in previous chapters, but let's dive into the details here. You've probably heard of Machu Picchu, a relatively isolated palatial and administrative compound along the vast Inka road system. Machu Picchu is a travel photographer's dream! But the Inka built much more than that! In fact, on the outskirts of the Inka capital of Cusco, Inka builders constructed a massive fortress and temple complex called *Sacsayhuaman* (Figs. 11.11 and 11.12).



Figure 11.11: Inka Maker(s) of Cuzco, Peru. [Sacsayhuaman with detail of walls](#). 1438-1471 CE. Dry masonry, approx. 400 m max. length, 6m wall height. In situ. [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).



Figure 11.12: Inka Maker(s) of Cuzco, Peru. [View of Sacsayhuaman with landscape in the distance](#). 1438-1471 CE. Dry masonry, approx. 400 m max. length, 6m wall height. In situ. [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

Do you notice the stones in the walls, particularly the lowest wall, in Figure 11.11? Make sure to notice those stones in comparison to the tourists in front of them... talk about monumental! These are called megaliths because they are monoliths but are much larger than typical building stones. The largest stones range from 12-18 feet tall. The walls are dry constructed with precise masonry joints (the contact zones between stones that usually hold mortar but don't in dry construction). The precision is key with megalithic stones. The stones are carved to fit like a jigsaw puzzle, basically

interlocking via gravity and friction. The walls of *Sacsayhuaman* that remain today survive intact due to the skill of Inka masons. Unfortunately, much of the *Sacsayhuaman* complex masonry does not remain in its original location anymore because the Spanish removed and recarved stones to build their houses and cathedrals in colonial Cusco.

Despite this loss at the site, we can still observe one of the interesting design choices of *Sacsayhuaman* architects that enhances its monumentality. Take a long look at Figure 11.12. Do you notice the patterning of light and shadow across the facade? That is a result of the projecting design of the walls. Instead of being linear, the walls were designed as a stepped or zigzag pattern ([easily seen when viewed from above](#)). At specific times of day, the sunlight casts shadows of the projecting parts into the recesses. Do you notice anything similar to that patterning in Figure 11.12? Cast your eyes to the landscape behind *Sacsayhuaman*. The mountains surrounding Cusco feature the natural undulating pattern of ridge and valley, creating shadows in the valleys. The *Sacsayhuaman* architects copied this in their walls. Thus, *Sacsayhuaman* is like the mighty mountain (extremely important when building a fortress) and cosmologically linked to the dominant forms of the Andes mountains across the Inka empire. As the Song Dynasty painters illustrated for us, mountains are the most monumental thing and our architectural monumentality can only attempt to compare.

Monumental connections

Some monuments offer that feeling of monumentality and cosmological significance to honor one individual. We've already covered one of these in "[What Happens When We Die?](#)": Humayun's tomb! Many funerary traditions around the world feature monumental architecture as the main signifier of the identity of the deceased person. Don't the Pyramids of Giza pretty clearly indicate that the person buried within isn't just a regular guy but one of the most important people in the society? That's the point! The Old Kingdom kings of Egypt (not yet called pharaohs, btw) were the political and social leaders, with strong divine connections (again, they were not yet considered gods themselves). What about the tomb of a religious leader?

Let's talk about *stupas*! *Stupa* is the Sanskrit word literally meaning "heap," as in a heap or mound of something. This describes the process of creating funerary monuments for special figures in ancient India: either cremating the deceased and collecting the ashes or positioning their body in a meditation posture and then heaping a lot of soil on top of the ash container or body to create a mound, called a *stupa*. Most of these *stupas* were just compacted dirt but eventually, the mounds of very important people's graves were protected with brick or stone. One of the most famous such mounds is called the *Mahastupa* (Fig. 11.13), or great *stupa*, which protects the remains of one of the most important religious leaders of ancient India: Shakyamuni Buddha.



Figure 11.13: Mauryan and later Maker(s) of Sanchi, India. [Mahastupa](#). ca. 50 BCE – 400 CE. Brick and stone masonry, 106' diameter x 42' tall. In situ. [CC BY-SA 1.0](#).

As you know, Shakyamuni lived around 500 BCE, maybe dying in the 400s BCE after many decades of teaching the Middle Way. By that time, he had already gathered many followers. Upon the Shakyamuni's death, his followers cared for his remains by cremating him. But Shakyamuni was particularly special. So, according to the Buddhist canon, his followers created multiple reliquaries, dividing his ashes, and established *stupas* at significant locations that represented the stages of Shakyamuni's life.

Over the years, Buddhism grew and by around 250 BCE, a dominant leader in India, named Ashoka, converted from the Brahmanical tradition to Buddhism. Ashoka's conversion was quite dramatic. The story goes that Ashoka was fighting against the peoples of Kalinga in east-central India, trying to expand his empire (which was based in northern India). During the battle, Ashoka and his men killed all the Kalinga fighters. Despite victory, Ashoka could only feel remorse. The battle was a massacre. Ashoka looked around the battlefield and asked himself, "What have we done?" At that moment, he turned towards the Buddhist path of moderation, compassion, and nonviolence. As the leader of a large territory, he spread Shakyamuni's teachings to many people. He did this by erecting monumental pillars and commissioning a grand *stupa* along the trade routes (to reach the most people). The precise trajectory of Shakyamuni's remains from the original *stupas* to the *Mahastupa* is not known, but *Mahastupa* is said to contain relics of the Buddha.

In Ashoka's day, the *Mahastupa* was just a large mound protected by brick, and may have featured a wooden *vedika* (fence). Rulers following Ashoka commissioned the encircling stone *vedika* and monumental *toranas* (gateways), positioned at the cardinal directions. The *toranas* feature detailed carvings illustrating the Shakyamuni's enlightenment

story and *jatakas* (as discussed in [“What is Divine?”](#)). In addition, the *toranas* feature the Vedic and Brahmanical imagery that was taken up by Buddhist arts to maintain familiarity with existing traditions. In fact, the *Yakshi* sculpture from [“Where Do Babies Come From?”](#) (Fig. 9.2) was originally attached to one of the *Mahastupa toranas*.

This funerary monument is a bit different from other tombs or funerary architecture you might be familiar with because it is a very active site that people visit on pilgrimages. Buddhists practice circumambulation around the *Mahastupa*. Circumambulation can be practiced by anyone and basically means walking around or walking in a circle, but it is more than that for Buddhists. It is a meditative practice (a form of walking meditation) focused on the presence and imagery of the Buddha. The *vedika* separates the outer world from the inner world. When one enters one of the four *toranas*, one passes into the inner world and releases the outer, material world from one’s mind. *Stupas* also feature a *yasti* (seen at the very top of Fig. 11.13), or spire that typically holds three umbrella-shaped objects called *chattras*. These umbrellas/parasols represent royalty, reflecting Shakyamuni’s noble origins and Ashoka’s patronage. The *yasti* forms a central axis for the *stupa*, directly over the Buddha’s relics protected inside.

As people walk within the *vedika*, they are close to the massive mound and to the relics of the Buddha. This presence inspires meditative insight. One might also circumambulate in the company of a monk who can help explain a particular concept, using the carved imagery as illustrations. Did you notice the second level in Figure 11.13? There’s an inner and elevated circumambulation path that was built later. It features its own stone *vedika*, creating an even more intimate meditative space alongside the mound. In this way, a funerary monument becomes a temple.

As we’ve discussed, Buddhism didn’t stay in Nepal and India for long. It spread quickly north to Tibet and south to Sri Lanka. From Sri Lanka, Buddhism spread across the ocean to Southeast Asia and became particularly influential in Indonesia. Buddhism became the official tradition of the Sailendra Dynasty of the island known as Java today (Fig. 11.1). Over a century after the Buddha’s death, the Sailendra rulers commissioned the largest Buddhist temple in the world. *Borobudur* (Fig. 11.14) is a temple that builds upon the imagery of an Indian *stupa* but takes it to another level.



Figure 11.14: Sailendra Dynasty Maker(s) of Kedu Valley, Java, Indonesia. [Borobudur](#). ca. 700–800 CE. Stone, approx. 2520 m sq. In situ. [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

Borobudur features nine platforms, with six square platforms stacked at the bottom and three circular platforms at the top. Each platform is connected via four staircases, each positioned at the cardinal directions. At the very top, there is a central stupa. Throughout the temple, there are over 500 statues of the Buddha and almost 100 miniature stupas.

The overall design is a hybrid of indigenous Javanese spiritual architecture, focused on the simulation of mountainous forms (because indigenous ancestor worship acknowledged that *hyangs* [ancestral spirits] lived in the mountains of the

island) and imported Buddhist architecture. In fact, archaeologists have documented an early building at the site (buried deep beneath the temple seen today) that was probably devoted to indigenous ancestor worship before the Sailendra created their Buddhist monument.

So what do you think happens at *Borobudur*? Circumambulation! ... on steroids. There are nine levels to circumambulate, each reflecting a different component of Buddhist teaching. There are almost 1,500 carved panels depicting important events in the Buddha's lives and other compelling imagery to help pilgrims meditate. This unique Javanese architectural form serves the traditional practices of Buddhism very well but also incorporates the ideals of the indigenous spiritual system, offering connections to local origins and the wider world.

Eventually, the people of Java and many others in Indonesia converted to Islam and monuments like *Borobudur* were no longer used. Islam developed in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, where the Prophet Muhammed lived, and spread quickly across Asia, building a vast network of connected *masjids* (mosques). This facet of monumental connection is incredibly important in Islam. All *masjids*, anywhere in the world, are designed to face Mecca and a particular structure in Mecca: the *Kaaba*, which sits within the *Masjid al-Haram* (Fig. 11.15).

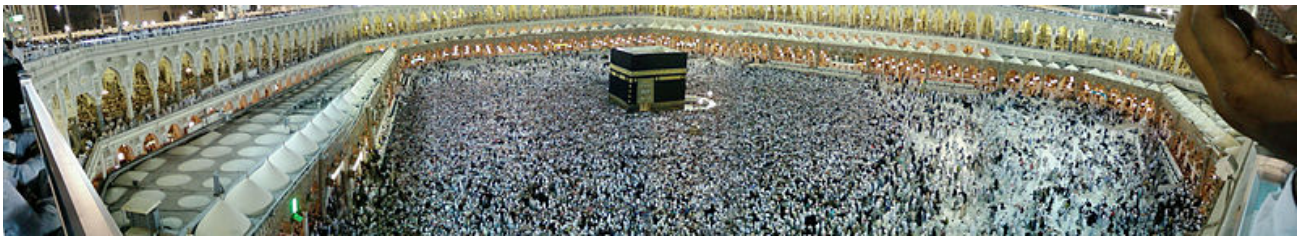


Figure 11.15: [Interior View of the Masjid al-Haram with the Kaaba, Mecca, Saudi Arabia, in 2007 CE](#). Photo by Bluemangoazz; [CC BY 3.0](#).

The *Kaaba* is a long-lived holy place. Muslims believe that the *Kaaba* was built by Abraham and his son while other believe that the structure was originally erected by pre-Islamic Arab peoples of the Arabian desert. Arab peoples called Bedouins lived migratory lives around the desert and would congregate in Mecca (one of the few permanent settlements in the region, centered on an oasis) at certain times of year. According to their histories, the original *Kaaba* shrine was their primary destination as a centralized place to worship their gods. Mecca and the *Kaaba* were already extremely significant to the societies of the Arabian desert. In the late 500s and early 600s CE, Prophet Muhammed and the earliest Muslims challenged the leaders of the Quraysh, a prominent Bedouin tribe, for control. Their conflict had political and spiritual dimensions, with tension between the polytheistic non-Islamic Arab beliefs and the monotheistic beliefs of Islam. Eventually, the Prophet Muhammed and his followers overthrew the Quraysh and established permanent Muslim presence in Mecca.

The *Kaaba* has been preserved to this day as a small (approx. 36 x 42 x 43') structure of marble and limestone, protected by a special black embroidered covering called the *Kiswah*. The *Masjid al-Haram* surrounding the *Kaaba* has grown immensely over time, including through multiple rebuilding, and is now recognized as the largest *masjid* in the world. Patrons have expanded the *masjid*, adding more and more space to accommodate the vast number of Muslims who make the annual *Hajj* (pilgrimage) to Mecca (almost 2.5 million in 2019 CE) and/or visit year round. The *Hajj* brings pilgrims to the *masjid*, to direct their prayer toward the *Kaaba* and practice the *tawaf* (ritual circumambulation around the *Kaaba*). In fact, in recent years, a three-story temporary structure has been erected in the courtyard surrounding the *Kaaba* to allow more pilgrims to practice *tawaf* at one time.

As noted above, all *masjids* are connected to the *Kaaba* and to Mecca. One of the most interesting contemporary *masjids* in the world is the *Faisal Masjid* (Fig. 11.16), designed by Vedat Dalokay for Islamabad, Pakistan. Like all *masjids*, the *Faisal Mosque* contains a prominent wall, called the *qibla* wall, within which a niche or similar feature, called a *mihrab*, is

located. Architects today often experiment with *qibla* and *mihrab* traditions. For example, Dalokay created a faux-niche out of a large sculpture of an open *Qur'an* (see in the far left of Fig. 11.17 above the worshippers) for the *Faisal Masjid*.



Figure 11.16: Vedat Dalokay. [Faisal Masjid](#). 1986 CE. In situ: Islamabad, Pakistan. Photo by Usmanmiski; [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).



Figure 11.17: Vedat Dalokay. [Faisal Masjid interior](#). 1986 CE. In situ: Islamabad, Pakistan. Photo by Rizmi Tahir; [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

Dalokay incorporated links to traditional features like mosaics on the *qibla* wall. Dalokay's design provides the traditional spaces for worship (prayer hall) and congregation (courtyard) but the overall visual quality of the *masjid* does not feature traditional domes, columns, and arches of famous historic *masjids*. Check out the Great *Masjid* of Damascus (Fig. 11.18) to explore traditional *masjid* design.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://uta.pressbooks.pub/wheredoesartcomefrom/?p=458#oembed-1>

Figure 11.18: [“The Umayyad Mosque Damascus”](#) uploaded on YouTube by an architect (July 15, 2019).

In fact, the *Faisal Masjid* resembles a Bedouin tent, created from a large textile stretched over supports and anchored to the ground by ropes ([check out some traditional Bedouin tents here](#)). Figure 11.17 illustrates the intentional placement of windows to simulate the pops of sunlight entering a tent through small openings in the fabric covering. This design choice clearly highlights the origins of Islam in the Arabian desert. As Fig. 11.16 also illustrates, beyond the main prayer space (the tent-like structure), the complex also includes a large courtyard dominated by a pool of water. This is a

traditional feature in *masjids*, used to clean one's feet before entering the prayer hall and alluding to the importance of water in the desert.

The other features of note are the four towering *minarets*, towers traditionally used by a *muezzin* to call the local community to prayer (by projecting a spoken/sung message from a height). It is important to note that Dalokay is a Turkish architect from Istanbul who studied [the grand Ottoman-era masjids there](#). Ottoman architects were known for so-called 'pencil' minarets that were tall and slender, as seen at Hagia Sophia today. Dalokay was clearly inspired by those origins for the design of his minarets. The *Faisal Masjid* incorporates traditional requirements through contemporary experimentation. It is connected to Mecca and the *Kaaba*, as all *masjids* should be, but it offers a distinct way of engaging the past.

Speaking of connections, in the next section we're moving from Mecca across the Red Sea (separating the Arabian Peninsula from north Africa) to Ethiopia (Fig. 11.1). There are strong historical connections between these regions, primarily relating to trade across the easily navigable sea. Another important connection occurred during the Prophet Muhammed's lifetime. When he and his early followers were kicked out of Mecca by the Quraysh, Muhammed went to Yathrib (now Medina, Saudi Arabia) but sent many of his followers across the sea into the territory of the Orthodox Christian Kingdom of Axum (which spanned present-day Ethiopia, Eritrea, and eastern Yemen). Around 615 CE, when early Muslims needed refuge, the Axumites welcomed them. This event became known as the first *hijra* (migration) and marks an important example of interfaith relationships that we will continue exploring in ["Can we live together?"](#)

Beyond built monuments

So, what monuments are the Axumites of present-day Ethiopia known for? In the early periods, they carved and erected [tall towers to mark royal graves](#). Kings descended from the Axumites continued the tradition of stone carving and accomplished quite a unique architecture feat.

Firstly, we must recognize that architectural monuments don't necessarily have to be built, meaning from the ground up, stone on top of stone. There are rare cases when builders are actually carvers, chiseling buildings out of cliff sides or bedrock. This is called 'rock-hewn' or 'rock-cut' architecture. Many examples are Buddhist and Hindu cave temples and monasteries [such as the famous Ajanta caves](#) in India. Another set of spectacular rock-hewn examples were commissioned for Lalibela, Ethiopia, by an Axumite descendant, King Gebre Mesqel Lalibela. He sought to recreate Jerusalem, one of the most important locations within the Christian religious tradition, on his doorstep. Eleven rock-hewn churches were produced to make this vision a reality. The most famous is *Bete Giyorgis* (Figs. 11.19 and 11.20).



Figure 11.19: Zagwe Dynasty Maker(s) of Lalibela, Ethiopia. *Bete Giyorgis (Church of St. George) facade*. ca. 1150-1250 CE. Volcanic tuff, approx. 25 x 25 x 30m. In situ. Photo © UNESCO/Francesco Bandarin; [CC BY-SA 3.0 IGO](#).



Figure 11.20: Zagwe Dynasty Maker(s) of Lalibela, Ethiopia. [Bete Giyorgis from ground level](#). ca. 1150-1250 CE. Volcanic tuff, approx. 25 x 25 x 30m. In situ. Photo by Bernard Gagnon; [CC BY-SA 3.0 IGO](#).

Just take a moment to consider what you are seeing in Figure 11.20. Carvers started from the rock surface that the photographer is standing on, removing an immense volume of stone to isolate a cross-shaped structure in the center of a square pit. You may be wondering... “okay, but how do you get down to the actual church?” There’s a built-in/carved-in staircase! The carvers also created a series of artificial caves (entered from the sidewalls) that housed priests and served as tombs.

Rock-hewn architectural processes are quite distinct to ground-up processes. For example, carvers have to know exactly what form they want to achieve before they begin. If you are building by stacking stones or wood, you can design as you go (to an extent) but carving takes a lot more planning. It also is more labor intensive, so much so that the carvers who worked on these rock-hewn churches were said to have remarkable religious devotion (to stick with it). But, no human is perfect, right? So the story goes that when carvers got fatigued and laid down their tools, angels would pick them up and continue the carving. Thus, Ethiopians believe that the rock-hewn churches were only completed with divine intervention.

While the Lalibela rock-hewn churches are Christian monuments, rock-cut architecture in this region probably started among the pre-Christian Axumites and may have been inspired by the traditions of India described above. Just like Great Zimbabwe, Ethiopia engaged in Indian Ocean trade networks that brought items and ideas from distant lands. We’ll explore those processes in the next chapter [“What Do I Get Out of it?”](#)

The Wrap-up

This chapter was pretty monumental, huh? (I seek no pardon for that pun. It was very intentional!) We humans get a kick out of big things. Have you ever visited any of the “world’s largest” tourist attractions often stationed along highways in the US? For some reason, we get excited about the World’s Largest Ketchup Bottle (in Collinsville, Illinois) or the World’s Largest Grandfather Clock (in Kewaunee, Wisconsin). Consider what role monumentality plays in your life by exploring media and scholarly sources on the topic.

News Flash

- Check out [“Inside Mecca,”](#) a documentary about the pilgrimage and its major sites.
- The Faisal Masjid is featured in [Khalid Hosseini’s famous novel *The Kite Runner*](#) (which was made into a [film](#)).
- In addition to Squidward’s House, a moai is portrayed in the 2006 comedy film [“Night at the Museum.”](#)
- The 1987 epic biographical film [“The Last Emperor”](#) follows the life of Pu-yi, the last emperor of the Qing Dynasty, and heavily features the Forbidden City.
- Check out the video game [“Civilization VI”](#) to explore a virtual version of Nan Madol!

Where Do I Go From Here? / The Bibliography

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12. What Will I Get Out of It?

LEAH MCCURDY AND VICTOR TSAO



Figure 12.1: Map and timeline of artworks discussed in “What Will I Get Out of It?” by Marizela Garza. Review image captions below for details about each artwork and copyright information.

What Will I Get Out of It?

Remember all the way back to [“Who Am I?”](#) and our discussion of egocentric infants who (hopefully) eventually develop a ‘theory of mind’ of others. This is an important part of social life but it doesn’t mean that humans lose their egocentric biases altogether. Even if we understand that we’re not the only ones dealing with problems and that cultures other than our own can have distinct ways of thinking about the world, we still often think and react selfishly. Do you give all of

your money away to the first person who asks? Of course not. You need that money to buy food and afford a place to live (unless you follow Shakyamuni as a monk, renounce all possessions, and live solely on the generosity of others).

As discussed in [“Why Does Size Matter?”](#), conspicuous consumption often results in people owning and showing off possessions well beyond what anyone actually needs. We earn and save more money than our ancestors ever dreamed and/or rack up debt so we can buy jet skis and fancy shoes. This excessive consumption usually means that you, the buyer, are purchasing from a seller, who almost always is also seeking to make money for themselves and thus, make a profit off you. Exchanges of goods and services, in capitalistic economies, necessarily set up a competitive relationship between buyers and sellers. Buyers want to pay as little as possible and sellers want to profit as much as possible. Today, we often focus on another dimension of competition, that between multiple sellers of the same or similar goods. Who can offer the lowest price that will make them a profit but attract the most buyers?

Have you already asked yourself how this relates to history and art? Great question! Some of the first examples of record-keeping, that eventually led to writing systems, were developed to account for exchanges between ancient buyers and sellers. Accounting records can be pretty boring to look at but they can also be beautiful and become art! Then, there’s all the amazing stuff that ancient people conspicuously consumed!

Business deals

Let’s start with accounting records. You’ve probably seen a small clay tablet like [this one](#). That *Proto-Cuneiform tablet with seal impressions: administrative account of barley distribution...* sounds super boring, but it isn’t! It represents one of the earliest forms of record-keeping and the beginnings of cuneiform, one of the first writing systems in the world! Cuneiform and the Sumerian culture that developed it in ancient Iraq are considered part of the Western Canon and thus, are widely-known in Europe and Euro-America. A lesser-known record-keeping system developed around the same time in the Indus River Valley between present-day Pakistan and India (Fig. 12.1). *Seal with Two-Horned Bulls and Inscription* (Fig. 12.2) exemplifies Indus record keeping and how it interfaces with traditional arts like naturalistic figure carving.



Figure 12.2: Indus Maker(s) of Indus Valley, Pakistan. [Seal with Two-Horned Bull and Inscription](#). ca. 2000 BCE. Steatite, 1¼" x 1¼". Cleveland Museum of Art Collection; [CCo Public Domain](#).

First question: why the hump-backed bull? The fatty hump, fleshy neck, and droopy ears are hallmarks of the Zebu bull (scientifically known as *Bos taurus indicus*) native to the Indian subcontinent. Zebus were domesticated early in the Indus Valley and became symbols of wealth and status. So, we already know a few things about the person who owned this object: they either were wealthy and socially important or wanted to represent themselves as such.

Next, check out the shadows in the Figure 12.2 photo. They indicate that the Zebu is carved not as projecting relief but as inset relief. The Zebu image is a 'negative' carving designed to produce a 'positive' image when the object is impressed into a malleable material, like clay or wax. The carved object that holds the negative imagery, as in Figure 12.2, is called a seal. It was used like a rubber stamp is used today, not to transfer ink to paper, but to transfer the negative carved image into clay. The resulting clay object (that would be kiln fired for durability) is an impression (or print) of the seal imagery and can be reproduced over and over again. So, what were those clay impressions used for?

Domesticated animals like Zebus were exchanged between Indus buyers and sellers, alongside other products like agricultural grains, manufactured goods like textiles and garments, as well as prestige items like jewelry and decorative pottery. When you buy or sell goods, you want to know which are yours and which belong to others. Indus merchants developed this system of clay impressions of stone seals to identify goods. The clay impressions could be attached to string or wood that would be affixed to an animal, a bag of grain, a door to a storage area, etc. Beyond markers of status, what information should the seal contain to adequately serve these purposes? They've got to include the identity of the people engaging in the exchange, right? Most scholars think that the symbols above the Zebu on the seal (Fig. 12.2) identify the owner of the seal, and thus the person engaging in transactions for which this seal was used.

The symbols are part of an ancient writing system, known as Indus or Harrapan script, that can't really be read yet. It is basically undeciphered, meaning scholars don't know what spoken language the symbols derive from, what the symbols represent, or what inscriptions like that in Figure 12.2 say. But, they have some guesses. Decipherment is a complex problem, so check out the summary in "[Cracking the Indus Script](#)" (Robinson 2015) or dive fully into [Corpus of Indus Seals and Inscriptions, Vols. 1-3](#) (Parpola et al. 1987-2019). Most scholars suggest that inscriptions like that in Figure 12.2 identify the status, social role, and/or family name of the owner of the seal. For example, some seal inscriptions incorporate the symbol of an arrow, which scholars think represents the role of a warrior. Other symbols may represent roles of priests, merchants, farmers, or even rulers. Some symbols probably represent locations, such as the origin of a family household. Decipherment is ongoing, so watch this space!

So, what would Indus people pay each other with? What was their currency? We don't know! They probably used a barter system where buyers and sellers negotiated how many bundles of grain equated to one Zebu, etc. But there may have been some objects that served as currency (a medium of exchange of mutually agreed upon value). For example, many coastal cultures around the world used shells as currency. Yapese peoples of Micronesia historically used *rai* (stone money; massive monolithic stones), as currency, made famous by "Spongebob Squarepants." These weren't meant to be mobile, like small shells in your pocket. Exchanges were negotiated without the physical exchange of stone currency (mostly). Ownership of a specific stone transferred from person to person based on verbal transactions, without needing to move any massive stones around the island. Check out "[Hard Currency: Stone Money of the Yap Island](#)" (Tuerenhout 2015) to learn more and see a photo of how *rai* could be moved if needed.

Some other interesting currencies include *Spade Currency* (Fig. 12.3; aka hoe currency) of West Africa (Fig. 12.1). These are large objects forged from iron that resemble the shape of agricultural tools such as spades (shovels) and hoes or other utilitarian objects like spears. These objects are not actually used as tools but reflect the importance of agriculture, hunting, and protection within society. They also relate to the production of food that is often the basis of small-scale exchanges, for which so-called 'Pennies' or thin iron rods such as in Fig. 12.4 could be used as currency.



Figure 12.3 (left): Afo Maker(s) of western Nigeria. *Spade Currency*. ca. 1950 CE. Metal, $33 \frac{1}{8} \times 20 \frac{7}{8}$ ". UTA African Art Collection. Photo by Leah McCurdy; [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

Figure 12.4 (right): Kissi Maker(s) of Sierra Leone. 'Pennies' (50). ca. 1950 CE. Metal, $10 \frac{1}{4}$ ". UTA African Art Collection. Photo by Leah McCurdy; [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

Spade Currency would not be exchanged for a bag of rice. Like Yapese *rai*, spade currency held very high value and thus would be exchanged in large-scale transactions, for example equating to a herd of cattle in a negotiation of bridewealth (the exchange of family resources between a groom and bride's family prior to marriage). The high value of spade currency derives from the fact that the objects comprise a large amount of iron, a metal that has its own intrinsic resource and labor value.

Spade currency can also be made out of other metals, including copper, bronze, or brass. Each metal has its own intrinsic value. For example, in the Benin Kingdom, brass was highly prized because it never tarnishes and thus symbolized longevity and beauty. Among the Kissi of present-day Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea, iron is prized because of the immense labor required of blacksmiths to produce objects like the 'Pennies.' The Kissi view iron as a material requiring intense human engagement (through blacksmithing). Iron objects are imbued with a soul through the production process and must be treated reverently. One does not just toss iron objects around; one cares for them (like others care for paper money or coins). This intrinsic value of the material makes iron excellent as currency for the Kissi. The same sort of value-laden meaning was attributed to gold in Europe, which eventually became the standard for most global currencies today.

Exports and imports

Ancient exchange systems like that of the Indus or Kissi were mostly internal, but there is evidence that both also traded outside their culture. For example, the Indus traded with contemporaneous groups in present-day Iran and Iraq. In fact, people specialized in translation between cuneiform, Linear Elamite (from ancient Iran), and Indus script to facilitate trade. These transactions were early examples of trade along what eventually became known as the Silk Roads, connecting East Asia to Western Asia and the Mediterranean (Europe and North Africa). Other major ancient

trade routes included the sea and land routes of the Indian Ocean, connecting Southeast Asia, the Indian Subcontinent, the Arab World, and East Africa. Arabs were the first to develop major trade relationships with Sub-Saharan African cultures (from their bases in North and East Africa). Eventually, European peoples like the Portuguese started their own relationships in Sub-Saharan Africa as they navigated the coasts.

Starting in the 1420s CE, Portuguese explorers sailed down the western coast of Africa aiming to establish trade routes for commodities such as spices and ivory, considered to be luxury goods in Europe. They found plenty of these resources, particularly ivory, in the homeland of the Sapi peoples, who were well-established expert ivory carvers and craftsmen living in present-day Sierra Leone and Guinea (Fig. 12.1; where the Kissi peoples live today). Sapi is the name given to these people by the Portuguese. We do not know what they called themselves.

The Portuguese were so impressed by the level of skill exhibited by the Sapi craftsmen that they commissioned special works of ivory art to present as exported gifts, sometimes called tourist items, to the European patrons funding their explorations. One such patron you may have heard of was [Prince Henry the Navigator](#), (not actually a navigator) who funded many expeditions along the African coast. Such commissioned works often incorporated artistic elements of both the indigenous Sapi culture and European motifs, creating a distinct style of Sapi-Portuguese (aka Afro-Portuguese) ivories.

Saltcellar (Figure 12.5) is a prime example of this blended style, where elements of both cultures are clearly visible throughout the work. For starters, the physical form of the *Saltcellar* was a cross-cultural hybrid style. The general shape was created based on European prototypes of containers that held salt shown to the Sapi craftsmen by the Portuguese. However, the rounded forms on the saltcellar were likely Sapi in origin, representing either a dried gourd (used for storage, cooking, and ritual purposes in West Africa), or the primeval egg from which all life emanates according to Sapi tradition. This imagery would be particularly relevant to the Sapi since they associated salt with birth, life, and good health.



Figure 12.5: Sapi-Portuguese Maker(s) of Sierra Leone. [Saltcellar](#). 1490-1530 CE. Ivory, 31 x 13,8 x 13,5 cm. The British Museum Collection © The Trustees of the British Museum; [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

So, are you asking why the Portuguese commissioned Sapi artists to make saltcellars in the first place? Salt was an extremely valuable commodity in Europe during this period. The display of large quantities of salt in ornate ivory receptacles was a symbol of wealth and status, perfect for the European expedition patrons back home. *Saltcellar* and the many objects like it would not stay in Africa but would grace the dinner table of an explorer's patron or other elite person who wanted to show off their connections to 'exotic' Africa.

Other evidently European influences on *Saltcellar* include the Madonna and child (representing the Virgin Mary and Jesus) at the very top of the lid (though the larger figure appears more like an armored soldier than the Virgin Mary), and the depiction of 'Daniel in the Lion's Den' (a story for the Old Testament of the Abrahamic tradition) on the lowest register of the base. The portrayal of Christian motifs and stories marks the beginning of Christian missionizing in the region. Prior to Portuguese contact, foreign religious influence had come via the Trans-Saharan trade routes and focused on Islam. By 1400 CE, many of the people living in large communities in West Africa were Muslim (while those in smaller communities or living mobile lifestyles usually retained indigenous belief systems). The Portuguese were the first to introduce Christianity, particularly Catholicism, to the region. Although the Portuguese did not maintain a lasting colonial presence in Sierra Leone and Guinea, Portuguese colonies in other regions such as Angola and Mozambique remain highly Catholic today.

Although commissioned by Europeans, many traditionally Sapi elements are prominently displayed on the *Saltcellar*.

Revered ancestor figures like *Nomoli* (Fig. 12.6) are representative of the Sapi carving style without foreign European influence. Do you notice similarities between the *Nomoli* figure and the figures on the *Saltcellar*? The head size is emphasized compared to the body. The eyes are prominent, as are broad noses and full lips, keeping to indigenous proportional traditions rather than European ones. In the art of many African cultures, the head is often large in relation to the body, highlighting its importance as the seat of intelligence and thought. When commissioned to produce saltcellars for Portuguese merchants, Sapi carvers drew upon their long-held carving traditions.



Figure 12.6: Sapi Maker(s) of Sierra Leone. [Nomoli](#). Early 1400s CE. Soapstone, $9\frac{3}{8}$ " x $4\frac{7}{16}$ " x $4\frac{15}{16}$ ". Cleveland Museum of Art; [CCo Public Domain](#).

Saltcellar also features four serpents encircling and hanging from the central donut shape. In Sapi mythology, serpents were associated with water spirits called *ninnegané*, said to be extremely beautiful, with bright scales and smooth hair, and inhabitants of hidden underwater abodes filled with riches. According to tradition, *ninnegané* were born from the egg of a python, and an individual who found such an egg should take it home to incubate. The resulting serpent would provide fortune and riches for the individual and their family. In addition, the serpent was seen as a 'master' of iron. Blacksmiths would seek permission from *ninnegané* spirits prior to extracting or smelting the metal. After viewing the many iron weapons and tools of the Portuguese, the Sapi may have thought the Portuguese were in control of the

ninnegané and their presence promised fortune and wealth. Depiction of serpents on *Saltcellar* alludes to this linkage between Sapi mythology and their Portuguese contacts.

Lastly, zoom into Figure 12.5 to spot the growling dog on the right side of the bottom register. Dogs, often portrayed in a state of alarm or frenzy, frequently make appearances on Sapi-Portuguese ivories. To the Sapi, dogs could see and feel things that were invisible to humans, often barking themselves into a frenzy over apparently nothing at all. Including dogs on the *Saltcellar* may represent a cultural tradition focused on alert dogs, especially if they alert one to the presence of strangers or spirits. Their presence may also be due to European influences such as hunting scenes on woodcuts shown to the Sapi artisans.

Today, the Sapi are nowhere to be found. They were displaced by the Mani invasions in the 1500s CE. The Sapi people scattered in West Africa and were likely absorbed into surrounding cultures. The Mani were ancestors of the contemporary Mende people who make up 30% of the Sierra Leonean population today and live alongside the Kissi peoples. To consider how the historic Sapi-Portuguese hybrid arts influenced later peoples of Sierra Leone and Guinea, check out [“Afro-Portuguese Echoes in the Art of Upper Guinea” \(Hart 2007\)](#).

Let’s explore the relationships of export and import in another region. Remember *Bowl with Calligraphic Inscription* (Fig. 6.9) in [“What is important to us?”](#) *Bowl Emulating Chinese Stoneware* (Fig. 12.7) is an earlier type of calligraphic bowl, before Samanid artists started experimenting with inscribing text around the rim. The title *Bowl Emulating Chinese Stoneware* already tells you that ceramic production, and ceramic objects themselves, were exchanged between potters of the Abbasid Caliphate (an Islamic kingdom) in Iraq and Chinese potters. This bowl incorporates two glazes, one of local origin and one emulating glazes of Chinese origin. The blue adornments, including the Arabic inscription reading غبطة *ghibta* (happiness/felicity), were produced from the mineral cobalt, which is easily obtained in Iraq and was used for many pigments and dyes. The white glaze ground simulates “whitewares” from Tang Dynasty China, which eventually led to the production of porcelain.



Figure 12.7: Abbasid Caliphate Maker(s) of Iraq. [Bowl Emulating Chinese Stoneware](#). 800s CE. Earthenware with blue and opaque white glazes, 2 3/8" x 8" diameter. The Metropolitan Museum of Art Collection; Public Domain.

The whiteware technique was learned by Abbasid potters through observation of Tang ceramics, imported into present-day Iraq along the Silk Roads. As Tang ceramics came in, their own ceramics went out, exported into China where the rich deep cobalt blue glaze became highly appreciated. Soon, Abbasid merchants were exporting mineral cobalt, not just ceramics with cobalt glazes, to China, where potters eventually developed the coveted blue-and-white porcelain tradition. If you've seen Chinese porcelain on TV or in popular media, it probably was blue-and-white porcelain. All the beautiful historic blue-and-white examples from the Ming Dynasty and all the imitation dinnerware sold in shopping malls today owe their existence to trade between Western and East Asia!

Some exchanges are not so equitable. For example, many of the artworks discussed in this book were acquired via colonization. We'll discuss some of the most inequitable examples of colonial 'acquisition' of art, where no exchange was taking place at all, in "[Why Do People Take What Doesn't Belong To Them?](#)" For now, *Ahu'ula* (Fig. 12.8) is an example of an object obtained through exchange during colonial contact, but the story behind it reveals that it was not equitable, either in the physical sense or in the sense of power relationships.



Figure 12.8: Kānaka Maoli Maker(s) of Hawai'ian Islands. *Ahu'ula*. ca. 1750-1892 CE. 'Tiwi feathers, oo feathers, and olona fibre, 49 x 68.5 x 0.8 cm. The British Museum Collection; [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) © The Trustees of the British Museum.

You've heard of Captain Cook, right? He's known for lots of things. Let's focus on his third voyage (1776-1780 CE) when in January 1779, he landed at Kealahou Bay on the island of Hawai'i (after first landing in Kauai in 1778) (Fig. 12.1). There, Cook and his crew met *Kalani'ōpu'u* (the king of the island of Hawai'i) and *Kamehameha I*, the future king and leader of the *Kānaka Maoli* (the indigenous term for Hawai'ian people). The *Kānaka Maoli* were gathered at Kealahou Bay for the *Makahiki* festival honoring the god of agriculture, fertility, and peace, *Lono*. The *Kānaka Maoli* welcomed Cook and his crew warmly.

Many people have speculated that the *Kānaka Maoli* attributed Cook's arrival at that beach during that month to the promised return of *Lono* via canoes from the sea (since Cook had a massive sailing ship anchored offshore). This warm reception may have reflected the reverence paid to *Lono* but many *Kānaka Maoli* have challenged this interpretation, suggesting that the leaders were being hospitable and welcoming to a visitor with obvious prestige during the peacetime of the *Makahiki* festival (when war was forbidden due to the prescriptions of *Lono* worship).

Cook and his crew stayed on Hawai'i for a month. There are many stories about their activities during that time, including feasting and exchanging prestige objects. The *Kānaka Maoli* gifted many prized objects to Cook and his crew, including *ahu'ula* like that in Figure 12.8. An *ahu'ula* is a traditional feathered cape worn by elite *Kānaka Maoli* men and warriors, along with a *mahiōle* (feathered helmet). Talk about conspicuous consumption! A cape would require several hundred thousand feathers from multiple birds to construct. But scholars think that birds were only captured and a

small number of feathers removed at any one time, rather than being killed. Birds were meaningful to the design and patterning of the *ahu'ula* as well. Imagine the *ahu'ula* in Figure 12.8 stretched over someone's shoulders. Wouldn't it look like that person had wings?!

It is said that King *Kalani'ōpu'u* exchanged the *ahu'ula* and *mahiole* he wore at Kealakekua Bay for European prestige items, including iron tools and firearms. In addition to these pleasantries, stories also indicate that Cook's crew engaged in consensual and/or nonconsensual sex with *Kānaka Maoli* women during their stay (which resulted in the spread of several sexually-transmitted diseases previously unknown on the islands). The journals of Cook and his crew differ on these accounts from the viewpoint of the *Kānaka Maoli*, who indicate that the sailors abused the welcome of the leaders so much that there was rejoicing when they left. Cook's departure also coincided with the end of the *Makahiki* festival (keep this in mind!).

Unfortunately, just after departing, one of the masts of Cook's ship was damaged. The crew sailed back to Kealakekua Bay to make repairs. It is said that Cook and his crew abused the *Kānaka Maoli* hospitality again on this second visit and eventually, conflicts broke out. There were a series of boat thefts and hostage-taking attempts (including Cook attempting to kidnap King *Kalani'ōpu'ui*) on both sides, and eventually armed conflict developed on the beach. Cook, other sailors, and several *Kānaka Maoli* were killed in this battle. The *Kānaka Maoli* removed Cook's body from the site and provided him with a funerary ritual reserved for honored people. Eventually, Cook's crew was able to give him a burial at sea (according to British naval customs) with some of Cook's remains returned by the *Kānaka Maoli*. Cook's crew eventually returned to Britain where the gifts from the *Kānaka Maoli* were presented to diplomats and royalty, making their way into the British Museum collections by the 1890s CE.

The exchanges between Cook, his crew, and the *Kānaka Maoli* demonstrate how contact relationships can begin as amicable and/or relatively equal through exchange but eventually morph into conflict. By the time another British crew arrived in the archipelago again, *Kamehameha I* was well on his way to uniting all the islands into what the British called the Kingdom of Hawaii. Hawaiian royalty established trade relationships with the British, with the establishment of the first sugarcane plantation, and transformation of the native economy, in 1835 CE. During the mid and late 1800s CE, the British and American governments fought over control of trade and politics in Hawaii and participated in a number of uprisings against rival Hawaii royals who were loyal to the opposing side. The US annexed Hawaii as a territory in 1898 CE.

Like in Hawai'i, British colonists had strong influence in the colony they called the Gold Coast, known after independence as Ghana. The first Europeans to create settlements in Ghana were the Portuguese who built a coastal fort called *Castelo da São Jorge da Mina* (Elmina Castle) in 1482 CE. Their intentions were clear from the beginning; *mina* means 'mine' in Spanish. Ghana contains large gold deposits. The British, Danish, and the Dutch succeeded the Portuguese in control of the Ghanaian coast for many years, building a large port for the West African slave trade over time (within which African kingdoms participated). Eventually, a kingdom called *Asante* (aka Ashanti; with royalty deriving from the native *Akan* culture from which the *akua'ba* tradition discussed in ["Where Do Babies Come From?"](#) derives) developed in the early 1600s CE and was thriving by 1717 CE. The *Asante* invaded the European-controlled coast, eventually forcing the Dutch out and signing treaties 'of friendship' with the British African Company of Merchants. After some less-than-friendly events, the British fought four Anglo-*Asante* wars from 1824-1900 CE, eventually burning the *Asante* capital at Kumasi, and acquiring *Asante* territory. Ghana gained independence from Britain in 1957 CE.

From the 1500s to the 1800s CE, millions of Africans were enslaved in West and central Africa and transported across the Atlantic to the Americas. Transatlantic slave trade routes were administered at various ports along the coasts, including Elmina Castle and other forts built by the Portuguese, British, Spanish, French, Dutch, and Danish. The Gold Coast colony accounted for over 10% of the total African slave trade between 1650 and 1900 CE. Around 2 million enslaved people died onboard the ships, due to horrific conditions. Those that reached the Americas were spread from the colonial coasts of North America, the Caribbean Islands, throughout Spanish Central American coasts, and across

Portuguese and Spanish colonies of South America. Most enslaved Africans were forced to work for Euro-America landowners, often on cotton and sugarcane plantations.

Speaking of sugarcane... what can it make, other than granulated sugar? Alcohol. Sugarcane can be processed and fermented to produce ethanol, or ethyl alcohol (aka drinking alcohol). When combined with flavors, rum can be produced from sugarcane, along with other liquors like Brazilian *cachaca*. Liquors produced via slave labor in the Americas were introduced into West Africa by Europeans, leading to huge markets for imported alcohol in the region. Contemporary Ghanaian artist El Anatsui uses metal bottlecaps and aluminum wrappings from liquor bottles to produce stunning works of art like *Seepage* (Figs. 12.9 & 12.10). Listen to Anatsui describe the meaning behind these materials in *El Anatsui links three continents through liquor* (Fig. 12.11).



Figure 12.9: El Anatsui. *Seepage*. 2007 CE. Aluminum liquor bottle caps and copper wire. Blanton Museum of Art Collection. Photo by Leah McCurdy; [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).



Figure 12.10: El Anatsui. Detail of *Seepage*. 2007 CE. Aluminum liquor bottle caps and copper wire. Blanton Museum of Art Collection. Photo by Leah McCurdy; [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://uta.pressbooks.pub/wheredoesartcomefrom/?p=475#oembed-1>

Figure 12.11: [“El Anatsui links three continents through liquor”](#) uploaded by El Anatsui – Seane Institute on Vimeo (July 13, 2021).

Anatsui describes the visual links to *Kente* cloth in the video. *Kente* is a traditional woven textile in *Akan* culture, typically worn on special occasions and mostly by wealthy people who can afford woven fabrics. Anatsui’s works also often allude to another *Akan* textile tradition, called *Adinkra*. Dyed fabric is stamped with *Adinkra* symbols to produce patterned textiles, traditionally worn by royalty and elites at funerals. Today, *Adinkra* is seen throughout Ghana, worn by all people, and representative of heritage. *Adinkra* symbols relate to the vast tradition of *Akan* proverbs and metaphors that pass wisdom between generations. By choosing to relate to long-established *Akan* traditions of *Kente* and *Adinkra*, Anatsui may be reflecting upon whether generational wisdom has done its job in combating the impacts of alcoholism and related social concerns. This is a question that is applicable everywhere, not just in Ghana.

Let’s not leave this section on a sad note. Let’s move from alcoholism to choco-holism! The history of chocolate involves a ton of trade. Chocolate comes from cacao beans, which form in pods, which grow on trees native to the Amazon. As far as we know, early Amazonians didn’t domesticate cacao trees but they did collect wild cacao pods and create chocolate from wild beans. They traded cacao pods and beans for other goods and over time, cacao made its way north into present-day Mesoamerica. Archaeologists originally thought that the earliest evidence of cacao in Mesoamerica was found in Honduras and Belize, until a group of researchers applied a chemistry technique to pottery from Mexico and Guatemala! Check out [“Oldest Chocolate in the New World” \(Powis et al. 2007\)](#) for all the details.



Figure 12.12: Mokaya Maker(s) of Mexico. [Barra Pottery from Paso de la Amada](#). 1700-1300 BCE. Ceramic. Regional Museum Collection, Tuxtla Gutierrez, Chiapas, Mexico. Photo by Alejandro Linares Garcia; [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

Barra style ceramic vessels (Fig. 12.12), made by Mokaya people of the Pacific Coast of present-day Mexico and Guatemala (Fig. 12.1), are not the art-iest vessels in the world. But many of them provide evidence of ancient trade and consumption. Based on techniques developed in collaboration with the Hershey Institute, archaeologists used liquid chromatography and mass spectrometry (LC/MS) to test whether Barra vessels retained the signature chemical compounds of cacao (theobromine and caffeine). You guessed it... they did! This evidence demonstrates that Mokaya were choco-holics by

1900-1750 BCE. Archaeologists also found that Pre-Olmec peoples of the Gulf Coast region were storing chocolate in their ceramic vessels around 1750 BCE. There's enough evidence of cacao consumption in the Pacific Coast to suggest that they weren't just seeking cacao pods through trade but planted their own and were farming cacao.

By the Late Classic Period, the Maya were choco-holics, too. In fact, *Vessel of the Dancing Lords* (Fig. 7.4 in [“Will You Tell A Story?”](#)) is specifically identified as a ‘cacao-drinking vessel’ in the upper band of hieroglyphs. But, if you're thinking it would serve some sweet, milky hot chocolate of today, no luck. Ancient Mesoamericans preferred their cacao drink room temperature and bitter. Still, it was chocolate! And, of course, cacao didn't just stay in Mesoamerica. They traded it to northern neighbors as well. Eventually, cacao reached the Fremont peoples of present-day Utah by 750 CE along [long-distance trade routes illustrated in this map by the Natural History Museum of Utah](#). Along those routes, cacao also made its way into the hands of Ancestral Puebloans at Chaco Canyon (also discussed in [“Will You Tell a Story?”](#)). Check out [“Cacao in Chaco Canyon” \(Mozdy 2016\)](#) to learn about finds by archaeologist Patricia Crown. And, yes, archaeologists can devote their entire career to chocolate!

Diffuse ideas

While consuming and profiting directly relates to tangible objects (like liquor bottles and cacao pods), the processes of exchange also incorporate intangible exchanges of language, ideas, and beliefs. This intangible movement and exchange is often called cultural diffusion, as ideas spread out from their origin point into neighboring and even far-afield regions. In [“Will You Tell a Story?”](#), we discussed the diffusion of Greek artistic ideals, especially the depiction of the human body and facial features, into the Gandharan region (present-day Pakistan). That diffusion influenced the depiction of Buddha and his *jatakas* like the *Dipankara Jataka* (Fig. 7.11). In [“What is Divine?”](#), we discussed the diffusion of Buddhism itself, from its origins in the Indian subcontinent into Tibet and into Southeast Asia. The massive *Borobudur* temple complex in Java (Fig. 11.14; [“Why Does Size Matter?”](#)) evolved from original Indian *stupas*, demonstrating the diffusion of Buddhist architectural styles. What else evolved from *stupas*?

Pagodas! As Buddhism began spreading into Tibet and along the Silk Roads into China around 250 CE (maybe as early as 68 CE), traditional Chinese architectural (TCA) style was already well established. The style wasn't exactly the same as the eventual Ming Dynasty style seen in *The Forbidden City* (Fig. 11.4; [“Why Does Size Matter?”](#)) but it was close. Check out the Han Dynasty *House Model* in [“Why Do They Have More Than Us?”](#) to see an early example. As the idea of the *stupa* reliquary travelled into China, it morphed from a mound shape and became a tiered tower. That tower form seems to have strong visual resonance with the *yasti* (spire) feature of most Indian *stupas*, discussed in [“Why Does Size Matter?”](#).

As is characteristic of the TCA style, the original pagodas were built of wood, with projecting eaves supported by intricate *dougong* bracketing systems. They were probably square or circular towers. Eventually, hexagon and octagonal towers developed. As far as we know, none of those earliest wood pagodas survive in China today (though we know of several from written accounts, such as [Luoyang quielan ji \[A Record of Buddhist Monasteries in Luoyang\] by Yang Xuanzhi from around 547 CE](#)). By around 400 CE, pagodas were also built out of brick or stone in China. *Songyue Pagoda* (Fig. 12.13) is the oldest surviving brick pagoda, built with an octagonal base and 14 successive eaves that form a conical top. Figure 12.16 details the brickwork beneath each eave at *Songyue Pagoda*. This is a simplified way of representing the wooden *dougong* system of TCA in a new material.



Figure 12.13 (left): Northern Wei Dynasty Maker(s) of Henan, China. [Songyue Pagoda](#). 523 CE. Brick. In situ. Photo by Siyuwj; [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

Figure 12.14 (center): Mahan Period Maker(s) of Iksan, South Korea. [Wanggung-ri Pagoda](#) 익산 왕궁리 오층석탑. ca. 400 CE. Stone, 8.5 m. In situ. [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

Figure 12.15 (right): Maker(s) of Kyoto, Japan. [Pagoda of Daigo-ji Temple](#). 951 CE. Wood. In situ. Photo by Motokoka; [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).



Figure 12.16: Northern Wei Dynasty Maker(s) of Henan, China. [DETAIL of Songyue Pagoda](#). 523 CE. Brick. In situ. Photo by Siyuwj; [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

Once Buddhism reached China, it was not long before it reached Korea, around 372 CE. *Wanggung-ri Pagoda* (Fig. 12.14) is one of the oldest Korean pagodas, which are typically built of stone and rectangular, using similar stacking techniques

beneath the eaves to simulate layered brackets. Buddhism reached Japan around 550 CE. From that point until today, Japanese pagodas are built of wood. TCA style had been influential in Japan prior to the introduction of Buddhism but merged with Shinto architectural style (as seen in *Naiku Shrine* [Fig 4.12 from [“What is Divine?”](#)]). The *Pagoda of Daigo-ji Temple* (Fig. 12.15) was built with a square base using these merged wood building techniques. Check out those *dougong*! All of these examples demonstrate the change that occurs through cultural diffusion.

Givin’ and gettin’

Let’s end our discussion of trade and exchange with ceremonial exchange. You probably know what that is even if you’ve never practiced it. Heard of Hanukkah or Christmas? These are Jewish and Christian traditions of ceremonial gifting. Today, these traditions focus on reciprocal gift exchange, whereby you are (typically) expected to give someone a gift if they give you one. Reciprocal ceremonial exchange is seen in many parts of the world. One of the most interesting examples requires a canoe!

Off the northeastern coast of Papua New Guinea in Melanesia (Fig. 12.1), there is a small archipelago inhabited by Massim peoples, known as the Trobriand Islands (named after a French naval lieutenant in 1793 CE). The Massim system of ceremonial exchange is known as *kula* and was made famous in Europe and Euro-America by anthropologist [Bronislaw Malinowski \(1932\) in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*](#). *Kula* is a practice of venturing out from one’s home island in a specifically adorned canoe towards the island of one’s *karayta’u* (exchange partner) to participate in ceremonial exchange.

Before you get in your canoe, you have to ‘buy into’ the *kula* system by purchasing the appropriate types of objects that are exchanged. You can’t just exchange anything (at first); you’ve got to come with either a [mwali \(white shell armband\)](#) or a [soulava \(red shell disk necklace\)](#). If you can’t afford a *mwali* or a *soulava*, then you can’t participate in the *kula*. Thus, the *kula* is exclusive to the wealthiest people in society, typically the chiefs.

So what does a fancy *kula* canoe look like? [Check out this photo of a contemporary example](#), based on historic designs. Didn’t expect that, did you? Maybe you thought *kula* canoes were dinky vessels for only one person. On the contrary, you need a well-appointed canoe to navigate ocean waves! It’s got to be sturdy, large enough to fit a crew to work the sail, and present your identity to your *karayta’u* as you arrive. *Canoe Prow* (Fig. 12.17) was salvaged from an historic *kula* canoe. Do you notice a similar t-shaped painted object on the canoe in the photo linked above? That’s a similar prow decorated in the traditional style.



Figure 12.17: Massim Maker(s) of Trobriand Islands. [Canoe Prow](#). Before 1922 CE. Wood and pigment, 27.5 x 4 x 38.3 cm. The British Museum Collection. [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Kula canoe prows are carved from wood and painted red, black, and white. They always feature curvilinear designs that resemble ocean waves. Carvers often include human figures (as seen at the top center of Fig. 12.17) representing ancestors, and sea birds. Much of the imagery is abstracted scrolls, spirals, and knots. These canoe prows are designed to stand out against the blue of the ocean and the brown of the sand so that when you arrive, your *karayta'u* recognizes you and prepares for *kula* exchange.

Exchanges always begin with announcements and honoring of the partners. Then, *mwali* and *soulava* are exchanged (based on where the destination is within the chain of islands). After that, *karayta'u* may host their visitor in their home, offer them food, or trade other items with them. Anthropologists think that *kula* ceremonial exchange serves an important social function. The Trobriand Islands are small and Massim populations on each island are small. If you were only to trade and interact with the people on your home island, you would be really limited. Thus, off-island trade is crucial. Off-island relationships are also crucial to avoid the negative consequences of inbreeding. If you produce offspring with someone who is too close to you genetically, there can be significant issues for the child. In addition to trading objects, *kula karayta'u* could develop social relationships that would build marriage partner networks to ensure healthy genetic diversity in their island populations. Multidimensional exchange like this also occurred along the Silk Roads, across the Indian Ocean, and throughout the Americas.

The Wrap-up

How has trade and exchange impacted your life? How do you assign value to objects? Do you participate in any

ceremonial exchange practices? As these examples in this chapter demonstrate, while the objects exchanged are important, it is often the intangible outcomes of exchange that impact us the most. As you explore the News Flash links and check out the scholarly resources below, consider what role exchanges, ceremonial or everyday, play in your life and within your communities.

News Flash

- Want more info about the Indus? Pursue the [Harappa.com Blog](#) where you can read about [Haider Ali's transformed VW Bug dedicated to Mohenjo-Daro!](#)
- Check out a documentary created by anthropologist Gina Knapp in 2017 called ["Updating Kula."](#)
- El Anatsui is on Instagram! @elanatsuiart
- Check out ["The Pacific: In the Wake of Captain Cook with San Neill,"](#) a documentary about Cook's voyages and his controversial legacy

Where Do I Go From Here? / The Bibliography

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13. Why Do They Have More Than Us?



Figure 13.1: Map and timeline of artworks discussed in “Why Do They Have More Than Us?” by Marizela Garza. Review image captions below for details about each artwork and copyright information.

Why do they have more than us?

Remember Shin Suk-ju from the Joseon Dynasty in [“Who Am I?”](#) Shin’s rank meant he was high in the social hierarchy, as dictated by the (Neo-)Confucian philosophical and spiritual tradition. Shin had more wealth, status, and power than other people in his society. Like resources and wealth, social status is ‘held’ more by some people in society than others. This status difference, or social disparity, means that some people have more ability to attain their goals than others. Generally speaking, those with higher social status are higher up the social hierarchy and hold more power in society, that is more power to get what they want. History has shown that high status people often seek wealth, notoriety, and

more power than they already have. They could also seek prosocial things like equality, peaceful end to conflict, or educational opportunities.

Hierarchies

Neo-Confucianism, based on the earlier Confucian tradition, was all about social order. Confucianism took hold in China in the Han Dynasty, serving as the model for government bureaucracies and the organization of growing populations. Confucianism applied not just to governments but to households and family hierarchies. The Han Dynasty *House Model* (Fig. 13.2) is a visual representation of familial order and filial piety, structured via the representation of a traditional Han Chinese dwelling. The order of the dwelling (represented by well-built walls, defined decorative features, and the figures that appear to guard the upper story) indicates the order of the family that occupies it. Like many of the ceramic objects we have discussed thus far and those in [“What Happens When We Die?”](#), this model was created as an object for the afterlife, buried with someone so that they would have the same status, luxuries, and order in death.



Figure 13.2: Eastern Han Dynasty Maker(s) of China. [House Model](#). 100-200 CE. Glazed earthenware. British Museum Collection. [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) © The Trustees of the British Museum.

This model also offers a picture of traditional Chinese architecture (TCA), as applied to homes. Remember our discussion of monumental examples of TCA in the Forbidden City in [“Why Does Size Matter”](#) and how TCA was used to design pagodas across East Asia in [“What Will I Get Out of It?”](#) Those monumental and ceremonial examples would dwarf the two-tiered house represented in the *House Model* but they use the same architectural principles and style. Notice the simulated ends of bamboo and ridges of the ceramic tile roofs. Notice the projecting eaves and *dougong* brackets supporting them. Also notice the finials at either side of the uppermost roof ridge and at the corner of each eave. The *Taihedian* (Hall of Supreme Harmony) in the Forbidden City also sports finials (Fig. 13.3), but what difference do you notice between its finials and those of the *House Model*?



Figure 13.3: [Detail of roof system at the *Taihedian*](#). Photo by 秋水平湖; [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

The *Taihedian* has so many more! In fact, the *Taihedian* and other structures in the Forbidden City have the most finials on any building. The finials are a representation of status. Households with more status have more roof sculptures. The imperial household has the most of all, over a dozen. *House Model* has six finials, indicating that the household is not imperial, but still holds status, probably within a smaller community. The other obvious difference you may have noticed is that the *House Model* finials are floral while the *Taihedian* finials are figural, representing dragons primarily. This difference also reflects status disparities. Only the Emperor is so directly associated with dragons. Roofs were like billboards, broadcasting the family’s status to the neighbor. This representation of status ensured that all visitors and passersby knew who their neighbors were and how much reverence was expected to maintain Confucian order and hierarchical standards.

Kings at the top

What has been the highest status distinction in most social hierarchies? In patriarchal societies (those in which men hold leadership positions), the king or emperor sits at the top of the social ladder. Representations of kings and other royalty are not rare. In fact, art history generally focuses on objects made for and about high status people and royalty because that is often what survives from the past. Royal people had the resources to commission high-quality and long-lasting objects, maintained as keepsakes over time. In addition, royalty were frequently depicted as subjects in artworks. Depictions of royalty are prominent in the Western Canon. Just think of all of those portraits of Henry VIII and Louis XIV. The *Lewis Chess Set* (Fig. 13.4) involves the representation of royalty but has an interesting history linking it to traditions outside Europe.



Figure 13.4: Scandinavian Maker(s). [Selection of Lewis Chess Set](#). Late 1000s CE. Walrus ivory. National Museum of Scotland Collection; [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

The *Lewis Chess Set* was found on the isle of Lewis in northern Scotland but was probably made in Norway during the late 1100s CE (Fig 13.1). Unlike most chess sets today, the pieces are not overly abstracted forms focused on headgear. These pieces are figural representations of medieval kings, queens, bishops, and knights. Despite the specific medieval European flavor of this famous set, chess is not a game of European origin. It originated as *chaturanga* in the 500s CE India, featuring military positions of *Padàti* or *Bhata* (foot-soldier; pawn today), *Ashva* (horse; knight today), *Gaja* (elephant; bishop today), and *Ratha* (chariot; rook today). The *Raja* (king) and *Mantri* or *Senapati* (advisor; queen today) were the highly-valued positions, reflecting the social and political hierarchies of the time in India.

Eventually, this game of India was introduced to the Sassanid Persians of present-day Iran (ca. 600 CE). The primary position became the *Shah* (Persian for “king,” replacing *Raja*) but gameplay generally remained the same. In the mid-600s CE, Muslim leaders took over Persia and took over this game. By the time Muslims came to control Spain (to be detailed in “[Can We Live Together?](#)”), the game, now called *shatranj*, travelled into Europe. At first, the Christian church enforced prohibitions against chess, because it, like many other games, was linked to gambling. This did not stop the spread of the game. Eventually, the queen position replaced the advisor, reflecting the importance of women leaders in medieval Europe. Christian positions such as the bishop became commonplace, to reflect the necessity of Christian politics in medieval European culture. Over time, chess has taken on an intellectual character, associated with high-status entertainment and sophistication within Western traditions.

Just before the *Lewis Chess Set* was carved in Norway, the Kingdom of Ife, centered at the city called Ile-Ife (in modern-

day Nigeria; Fig 13.1), started to skyrocket in population size and trade around 1000 CE. Like among the Igbo-Ukwu (remember *Shell* in “[What is Beautiful?](#)”), metalworking was an important pursuit, serving both functional needs and aesthetic values in Ife society. Ife metalworkers were recognized for their skill in bronze casting using the lost-wax method. Learn more about West African lost-wax metal casting techniques in “[Brass Casting in West Africa](#)” (Dark 1973). Ife artists expertly represented their kings in bronze (and ceramic), as in *Portrait of an Ife King with crown* (Fig. 13.5).



Figure 13.5: Ife Maker(s) of southern Nigeria. [Portrait of an Ife King with crown](#). ca. 1000 CE. Heavily leaded zinc-brass. British Museum Collection. [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) © The Trustees of the British Museum.

The king of Ife was the pinnacle of society and humanity. Depicted with fine regalia and strong pose, this king possesses more *ase* and *ewa* than anyone else in the kingdom. *Ase* is one's energy and power. *Ase* resides in the head and is expressed through speech. A king's *ase* is very potent. Thus, the mouth of a king, and even the mouth of a sculpture representing him, must be covered to protect those lesser than him. The small holes forming a pathway around the king's mouth and chin were likely used to insert a fabric veil for this purpose. [Contemporary leaders of the Yoruba tradition \(considered descendants of Ife culture\) still shield their faces with veils or beads to ensure that they do not harm others.](#) A king's *ase* is spiritual power and is evidence of his divinity. While this object is called a portrait, it may have been

created more for a symbolic function: containing the *ase* of previous kings, to enhance and support the current ruler's power.

You have probably noticed the deft naturalism of this depiction. In this case, bronze artists focused on idealized naturalism to exemplify the king's *ewa*, or true beauty. In Ife society, the king was the model of *ewa*, defined by high *ase*, physical beauty, and good character (or *iwa*). The youthfulness of this rendering with supple skin, full lips, and formal stature demonstrates the goodliness of the leader, through physical traits of his divine being.

Almost a millennia after this bronze was created, a scholar named Leo Frobenius encountered it and many other Ife artworks. Frobenius wrote that Ife sculpture is “[e]loquent, of a symmetry, a vitality, a delicacy of form, directly reminiscent of ancient Greece... It is proof that once upon a time, a race far superior to the negro had settled here” ([Frobenius 1913, 88-89](#)). Like those studying Great Zimbabwe in the early 1900s CE, Frobenius suggested that Black Africans, those who lived in Nigeria when he visited, could not have produced such striking naturalism and formal beauty. Instead, he attributed those achievements to Classical Greece. He even suggested that Ife was Atlantis of Greek myth. Ife was not Atlantis. It was a spectacular cultural group uniquely built by Black Africans.

If only Frobenius knew that there was another Black African culture that lived before the Ife, called the Nok in Central Nigeria (Fig. 13.1). Like ‘Sapi,’ ‘Nok’ is a contemporary name attributed to this ancient group; we don’t know what they called themselves. We do know that they produced spectacular terracotta sculptures as early as 500 BCE (contemporaneous with the Classical Greeks). Nok artists represented the elite members of their society in full form, often in crouched or seated positions (Fig. 13.6). These figures sport elaborate coiffures and/or headdresses as well as ornaments at the neck, wrists, and ankles, demonstrating their resources and status. Nok figures often are depicted in very specific postures with specific hand gestures that were likely originally very meaningful, potentially for ritual activities undertaken by elites. There’s much more research to be done on the Nok to understand their society (including whether they had kings, chiefs, or a different kind of political system) and how they relate to later cultures like the Ife.



Figure 13.6: Nok Maker(s) of central Nigeria. *Elite Woman (left) and Elite Man (right)*. 500 BCE – 200 CE. Terracotta, pigment, 19 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 9 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (left), 27 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 11 $\frac{7}{8}$ ". UTA African Art Collection. Photos by Leah McCurdy and Cheryl Mitchell; [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

So, Nok came before Ife; what came after Ife? The city of Ile-Ife lives on today, seen as a place of heritage by Yoruba people. For a long time, Yoruba culture thrived as an independent society, eventually meeting European travelers. By the 1880s CE, the British Empire installed official colonial administrators in Yorubaland and other areas of West Africa. The *Door for the Afin* (Fig. 13.7) represents a visit made by Captain Ambrose of the British military to the Yoruba city of Ikere in 1899 or 1901 CE. Ambrose, with his entourage, was greeted by a Yoruba *Ogoga* (king). Organized in panels, the left side illustrates the *Ogoga* and his court and the right side focuses on Captain Ambrose and the people who accompanied him.

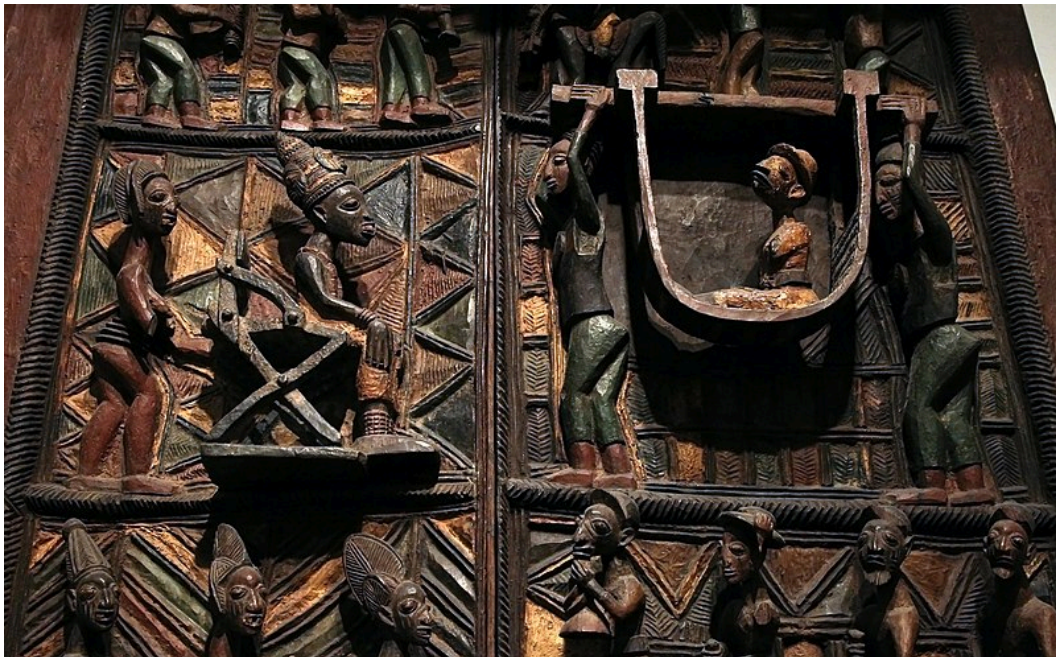


Figure 13.7: Olowe of Ise. [Door of the Afin \(overview and detail\)](#). 1910-1914 CE. Wood and pigment. The British Museum Collection. [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) © The Trustees of the British Museum.

In the second panel on the left side, the *Ogoga* sits in a traditional chair. Behind him stands his senior wife (wife of highest rank). Above in the first panel are gift-bearers, holding out objects to be presented to the visitor. Below in the third panel, the king's other wives stand with babies cradled in back slings. The fourth panel probably depicts the *Ogoga*'s servants while the fifth panel depicts bound prisoners, potentially slaves.

In contrast to the *Ogoga*, *Ambrose* is being carried in a litter (a carriage-like transportation method fully supported by

people). Above him in the first panel, a mounted figure on horseback leads men carrying packages above their heads, known as porters. Below Ambrose, porters carry more goods. In the fourth panel, pairs of porters are bound at the wrist, with one hand free to secure the boxes they carry. These boxes probably represent the stores of cowrie shells collected as taxes by the British. We see another set of bound prisoners in the bottom panel.

The carver of the *Door for the Afin* was Olowe of Ise, a high-status Yoruba artist of the late 1800s and early 1900s CE. Over his career, he was commissioned by kings to create monumental arts for their palaces. While created in his workshop by many hands, Olowe's style is very recognizable. His figures often have elongated features with active postures and textured detail to represent depth in the high relief (see how high in the Fig. 13.7 detail!) Olowe also used distinctive facial features for most figures in his works, focused on large eyes, large noses, and full lips.

This door was created for the entrance to the courtyard of the *Afin*, the king's palace. Thus, it was commissioned for a place of prestige and political resonance. What is the message here? This is probably a representation of authority. By the time Olowe carved this door, the British Empire and other European powers controlled nearly all of the continent, but not all in the same ways. Some imperial territory was run through autocracy and foreign domination but the Yoruba had a different arrangement with the British, known as 'indirect rule.' Colonial administrators like Captain Ambrose oversaw a number of local leaders, who remained in authority of their own territory but were ultimately answerable to the British. This meant that the *Ogoga* actually had power. Notice the representation of the *Ogoga* and Ambrose. The *Ogoga* sits regally attended in stately formality. Ambrose sits awkwardly in a sort-of hammock and is physically smaller than the *Ogoga*, appearing almost child-like. This 'hierarchy of scale' whereby one figure is represented as larger than another (no matter what body size differences there may have been in real life) clearly demonstrates the *Ogoga*'s status.

Created by a Yoruba artist for a Yoruba king, the *Door for the Afin* defies the general colonial landscape of powerless indigenous people and powerful colonial leaders in Africa. Importantly, Olowe made this door for the entrance to the *afin* (the king's palace) and thus for the portal through which visitors like Captain Ambrose would access the palace. Most historians and other scholars focus on British colonial records to learn about this period of Yoruba history. Here, we focus on how the Yoruba represented themselves to the colonizers. We'll consider many other examples of defiance in ["Why Do I Have To Do What You Say?"](#)

Beyond the king

Who's bigger than a king? An Emperor! Emperors rule over empires, distinct from kingdoms because they incorporate many territories through military and diplomatic expansion. Remember the Mughals from ["What Happens When We Die?"](#) Babur's son and successor, Humayun, had a son and successor, Akbar, who came to rule the empire from his capital in present-day India.

Akbar commissioned writers and artists to produce the *Akbarnama* (stories of Akbar's reign). The *Akbarnama* was a manuscript of hundreds of pages, or folios, incorporating calligraphic text and careful illustration. In the folio titled *The Young Emperor Akbar Arrests the Insolent Shah Abu'l-Ma'ali* (Fig. 13.8), Akbar sits leaning on a large cushion in the golden, hexagonal throne. Akbar is only 13 years old in this story, just months after he became emperor. Beneath and above him, detailed carpets and fabrics cover almost every surface. A landscape in the background is inspired by Safavid painting styles (remember the Safavid *Qur'an folio* from ["What is Beautiful?"](#)). A palatial fort is in the distance with white onion domes, like those soon to be employed in the legendary Taj Mahal (built by Akbar's grandson, Shah Jahan). The camels and horses just beyond the fabric enclosure draw our eye but not as much as the scene of struggle happening in front of the young emperor.



Figure 13.8: Basawan, Shankar, and other Mughal Maker(s). [The Young Emperor Akbar Arrests the Insolent Shah Abu'l-Ma'ali](#). 1590-1595 CE. Opaque watercolor and gold on paper. Art Institute of Chicago Collection; [CCO Public Domain](#).

The man in the orange robe being manhandled by guardsmen is Shah Abu'l-Ma'ali, a member of Humayun's entourage. Akbar came into power because Humayun battled with maintaining control of his empire. Upon taking the throne, Akbar sought to broadcast his power and his strength in contrast to his father's perceived weakness. Some did not see these shows of strength in a positive light and began rebelling against Akbar. After Abu'l-Ma'ali oversaw an assassination attempt, he was arrested, brought to court, presented by Akbar's advisor Bairam Khan (central standing figure), and hanged. The men in the foreground appear to be in chaos, some threatening others with weapons. Such conflicts were common in Akbar's day. He envisioned a unified Mughal India under his reign. This meant that he conquered independent regions to instill Mughal rulership. Some people didn't like that.

[Another version of the Akbarnama, held at the Victoria and Albert Museum \(V&A\) in London, illustrates Abu'l-Ma'ali's final fate.](#) The differences in these manuscript folios illustrate stylistic differences between designers and painters in Mughal imperial workshops. The arrest scene was designed by a famous Mughal artist, Basawan. The V&A example was designed by Jagan, another imperial workshop artist. Both compositions show dynamic forms, with strong action. Both

compositions also incorporate figures, architecture, and landscape. Jagan's work used more saturated colors that give the painting a flatter quality. Basawan employed tints and shades that support the saturated tones of Akbar's throne, Abu'l-Ma'ali's robe, the yellow tent fringe, and the deep blues of the carpets. In addition, Basawan created a circular composition, framed by the white fabric enclosure, encircling Akbar and his captive. Jagan's composition incorporates panels of text, whereas Basawan's folio highlights the imagery to tell the story. This comparison of two Mughal miniature paintings demonstrates the great variation we find among such paintings.

Mughal rule of India came to an end because of colonization by the British Empire, first initiated by the British-owned East India Company (ca. 1600 CE). As the British gained control of India, surrounding areas were affected, such as the Sikh Empire of Lahore (Fig. 13.1; present-day Pakistan). The Sikh Empire was the political seat of the Sikh religion, a spiritual practice focused on meditation and devotion to the words of God. Sikhs were often at odds with Hindus and Muslims of the region, but the great Mughal leader Akbar was a proponent of religious freedom. When Akbar overtook Lahore, imperial rules allowed the Sikhs to maintain their religious traditions. But with Akbar's death and the accession of his successors Jahangir, Shah Jahan, and Aurangzeb, this changed. Sikh leaders were persecuted, arrested, and killed.

The Mughal Empire slowly declined as the British took hold. This left room for the Sikhs to regain their previous territory and political authority. By the early 1800s CE, the Sikhs had re-established their empire. Depicted in miniature portraits (Fig. 13.9), the Maharaja Sher Singh and his wife ruled the Sikh Empire in the 1840s CE. A little over an inch tall each, these miniatures use similar painting techniques as the larger *Akbarnama* folios. The detail of the adornments, facial features, and even visible strands of hair reflect the quality of painting and the tiny size of implements such as squirrel hair brushes. Eventually, the British started encroaching on Sikh territory, resulting in the Anglo-Sikh Wars. By 1849 CE, Lahore was under British imperial rule.



Figure 13.9 left: Company School Maker(s) in Delhi, India. [Maharaja Sher Singh, King of Lahore](#). ca. 1850 CE. Gouache painting on card. The British Museum Collection. [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Figure 13.9 right: Company School Maker(s) in Delhi, India. [Wife of Maharaja Sher Singh](#). ca. 1850 CE. Gouache painting on card. The British Museum Collection. [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Did you notice that the Maharaja's wife is depicted in the same style and glamor as the Maharaja himself? In some societies, queens and empresses, even princesses, can attain the same social status as kings and emperors. In these cases, women take on roles at or very near the top of the social hierarchy. We've already discussed the status of women in matrilineal cultures, like the Akan from ["Where Do Babies Come From?"](#) Some cultures even follow a matriarchal political structure, wherein women are the primary leaders. For the Maya people of ancient Mesoamerica, women were

not the only leaders but they held important political and social positions, often represented in arts in similar ways to kings.

Remember *Stela Depicting K'loomte' K'abel* (Fig. 8.4/13.10) from "[Who Came Before Us?](#)" In that chapter, we focused on the calendar dates present in the stela. Now, let's focus on the lady! Known in English as Lady Waterlily-Hand, *K'loomte' K'abel* was a royal princess of Calakmul (present-day Mexico) and became queen of El Perú-Waka' (Fig. 13.1) by marriage to *K'inich Bahlam II*. She ruled with him for 20 years as a military governor and earned the title *K'loomte'* (Supreme Warrior). This probably meant that she held more political authority than her husband. A burial that is thought to be the resting place of *K'loomte' K'abel* was found at El Perú-Waka' with robust skeletal remains providing evidence for her abilities as a warrior.



Figure 13.10: Late Classic Maya Maker(s) from El Peru Waka, Guatemala. [Stela Depicting K'loomte' K'abel \(Stela 34\)](#). 692 CE. Limestone. The Cleveland Museum of Art Collection. [CCo Public Domain](#).

Check out *K'loomte' K'abel's* stature as represented in her stela! Depicted in a mixed profile and frontal view, she is decked out with adornments such as an elaborate feathered mask headdress, large ear flares, latted fabric *huipil* garment, necklace of royal faces, belt depicting a deity, a shield, and an immense scepter. An elaborately adorned short-

statured person stands beside her in the bottom left, holding two objects each in an outstretched hand. This figure wears distinct regalia that indicates he is a court attendant and the hieroglyphic inscription just above his head records his name as *Pah Tuun Ahk*. Review [“Who Came Before Us?”](#) to read about what the other two larger text blocks document.

As in this somewhat abstracted portrait of *Kaloomte’ K’abel*, Maya artists favored idealized facial features, such as long noses that created a straight line from the forehead. They used mixed views like this to present as much information about a subject as possible. They combined figural forms and texts as visual composites. In some cases, Maya artists focused on more naturalistic renderings. [Check out this small 3D figurine in ceramic to consider the representation of Maya women in more realistic fashion.](#) These were the sort of arts that inspired early archaeologists to apply the term ‘Classic’ to a portion of Maya history. However, Maya art overall is known for characteristic abstraction, as seen in this stela or the *Maize God Mural* in [“Will You Tell A Story?”](#). You can learn more about ancient Maya women from many different perspectives in [Ancient Maya Women \(Ardren 2002\)](#).

Gods Above Us All

There is another plane of hierarchy that goes beyond family, kings, queens, and even emperors. As discussed above, the Ife king was divine. He was a god on earth. This merging of political and religious power is relatively common among human societies. Entities that are fully supernatural, with no mortal component at all, often surmount earthly hierarchies, having more power, wisdom, energy, etc. than any other entities. All cultures have their own systems of divine hierarchy, some polytheistic (many gods), some monotheistic (one god), and some pantheistic (everything has a divine force; like in Sikhism or Japanese *Shintō*). Oftentimes, the social hierarchies that we mere humans strive to climb relate to and/or are dictated by spiritual hierarchies.

The Lega people of eastern Central Africa (Fig. 13.1; present-day Democratic Republic of the Congo) worship a divine triumvirate (group of three main deities), each with their own supernatural role. *Kalanga* is the promiser who aids mortals in acts against their neighbors (traditions often referred to as sorcery by Western scholars). *Kenkunga* is the reassembler while *Ombe* is the hidden. Outside Lega culture, little is known about these deities, especially *Kenkunga* and *Ombe*. This lack of information is due to the Lega Bwami society.

Remember the *Kòmò* society we discussed in [“What is Important to Us?”](#) Like that society (within a society), the Bwami society has its unique goals, focused on degrees of community power, reflected in one’s attainment of hierarchical social status. The Lega have village chiefs that hold mundane power but the Bwami society offers a pathway towards spiritual power, probably associated with developing closer and closer ties to *Kalanga*, *Kenkunga*, and/or *Ombe*. Bwami society workings are very secret, especially as one reaches to higher levels, but any Lega person has the opportunity to join voluntarily. One’s journey in the Bwami society often relates directly to one’s wealth because upward movement requires payment. (Currencies have differed overtime, from agricultural products like manioc and banana to iron ore and now gold.) Despite the monetary costs, Bwami Society has great benefits, including “teach[ing] filial respect, marital fidelity, nonviolence, and cooperation” ([Cameron 2002, 48](#)).

Many-headed Figure (Fig. 13.11), sometimes referred to as a “Janus Figure” (but not associated with the character of Janus in Roman mythology), is an object of the Bwami society. Carved of ivory, this figure has two heads, each with two faces, stacked atop abstracted limbs. Drilled dots accentuate the edges of heart-shaped faces, characteristic of Lega depictions. Long, slim noses frame deeply set eyes, with lids that protrude to slit-like eyes. Pointed chins exaggerate the heart-shaped forms and appear like pointed mouths, though no mouth opening is present.



Figure 13.11: Lega Maker(s) of Central Africa. *Many-headed Figure*. 1925-1950 CE. Ivory. The Cleveland Museum of Art Collection. [CCo Public Domain](#).

The use of ivory for this sculpture indicates that it was associated with one of the highest levels one could attain within the Bwami society. Lesser objects were carved of wood. Objects focused on human heads like *Many-Headed Figure* probably relate to the importance of the skulls of ancestors in the most secretive parts of the Bwami society. In particular, multiple heads in this depiction reference the wise *Sabitwebitwe* of Lega myth. Like *Sabitwebitwe*, elders of the Bwami society attain great wisdom, as if they could see out of many sides of their head. Scholars also find that the most abstracted and complex a sculpture is, the more likely it is to feature in ceremonies reflecting the highest levels of knowledge and secrecy within the Bwami society, because the features can be read in many different ways.

In addition to their unique spiritual/political structure of the Bwami society, the Lega also have a unique view of objects and art itself. As scholar [Carolyn Dean \(2006\)](#) writes in her article entitled "[The Trouble with \(the term\) Art](#)," the Lega use the term *masengo* to describe objects like *Many-headed Figure*. Translating to "heavy things," this title is given to items that "exist apart from mundane activities and are endowed with special powers..." ([ibid](#), 26). What scholars call "art" is valued beyond aesthetics or social meaning by Lega people. *Masengo* are objects of supernatural importance, with spiritual weight and gravity within Bwami society. Scholars like [Dean \(2006\)](#) suggest that the term "art" does not

do justice to the value of *masengo* for the Lega. These issues often lead to questions about whether objects like *Many-Headed Figure*, now held at the Cleveland Museum of Art, should be on display and/or owned by any group other than the Lega. We will discuss these ideas more in [“Why Do People Take What Doesn’t Belong to Them?”](#)

Speaking of taking, let’s discuss the relationship between the Lambayeque and the Chimu. On the northern coast of present-day Peru (Fig. 13.1), the Lambayeque culture (also known as Sicán) thrived for hundreds of years as descendants of the Moche. They honored a (probably mythical) figure called *Naymlap*, represented in the *Tumi* (Fig. 13.12). Standing in regal attire, with fanned headdress, large earflares, and arms on his stomach, *Naymlap* founded Lambayeque by sailing from the south to the north and landing in their eventual territory. After the founding, Lambayeque became known for their artistic style and prowess in metalworking and use of special materials like turquoise.



Figure 13.12: Lambayeque/Chimu Maker(s) of North coast Peru. [Tumi](#). 1375-1470 CE. Gold with turquoise inlay. Art Institute of Chicago Collection. [CCo Public Domain](#).

Then, around 1375 CE, the Lambayeque were overtaken by the growing Chimu Empire (also known as Chimor). At the Chimu capital called Chan Chan, and many other strongholds, captured Lambayeque artists were organized into workshops for producing high-quality artworks for their Chimu overlords. The Chimu *ciudadelas* were walled palatial

compounds with huge storage areas for tax revenue, royal burials, and the workshop quarters were prized Lambayeque artists were highly isolated. In addition to their labor, the Chimu took Lambayeque legend for their own. Naymlap became a *Chimu* mythical hero. His image adorns this *Tumi*, a ceremonial (non-functional) knife worn by Chimu elites. The workmanship and imagery is Lambayeque, but the object is Chimu.

In addition to the mythical/spiritual focus on *Naymlap*, this example shows that social disparity is not just internal to individual societies but can play out cross-culturally. In this case, the Chimu conquered the Lambayeque and instituted a hierarchical system of leadership over that previously independent culture. In other words, the Chimu colonized the Lambayeque. Colonization often creates the ultimate forms of social disparity, where colonizers have power and the colonized do not.

One of the most horrific examples of colonization occurred not too far from the Lega people discussed above. In 1885 CE, King Leopold II of Belgium established the “Congo Free State” in Central Africa. This was a unique colonial situation. Rather than being controlled by a colonizing nation (like Britain, France, Germany, etc.), the Congo Free State was in theory “free and open” to all business endeavors from any nationality and was personally owned by Leopold II. It was anything but a ‘free’ state.

Leopold II was interested in forest resources such as palm oil and rubber. To extract as much as possible, colonial officials of the Congo Free State created a system of labor that sanctioned violence. For example, if a man could not provide the quota of rubber required of his family, officials could cut off his ear, cut off the hands of his children, rape or take hostages from his family, or burn down his village. Other quotes focused on mineral mining through the Congo. The violence and terror of the Congo Free State is thought to have escalated to a point that half of the population was killed (some estimates of up to 10 million people), amounting to a genocide. Eventually in 1908 CE, the Belgium parliament stepped in, removing Leopold II and those willing to follow his orders of violence. Despite these changes, the Belgian Congo, as it came to be known, still perpetrated violence and exploitation against native populations.

While the history of the Congo Free State relates to our considerations of how far the question of “why do they have more than us” can go, it also relates directly to the art world. One result of Leopold II’s colonial venture was the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Brussels, Belgium, established in 1898 CE. [In its original form](#), huge exhibition spaces displayed innumerable objects from the Congo Free State, such as Lega *masengo*, of immense cultural value to Central African peoples. To learn more about the Congo Free State, check out [European Atrocity, African Catastrophe: Leopold II, the Congo Free State, and its Aftermath \(Ewan 2002\)](#) and [King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa \(Hochschild 1999\)](#). With [a recent renovation](#), the galleries appear more modern, and there are attempts at contextualizing the violent history and its legacies, but the question remains: is this museum justified, given its implication in the horrors of social disparity? We’ll consider this question deeply in [“Why Do People Take What Doesn’t Belong to Them?”](#)

The Wrap-up

Our thoughts are often comparative. We ask “why do they have more than we do.” This is a natural response to inequality and sometimes these questions lead to change. For example, if civil rights activists in the US hadn’t asked why do white people have more than black people, this country’s history would have been very different. That history isn’t perfect and we are still dealing with the need for equity in society today. But the questioning of inequality is the starting point. We can ask it directly in our own lives and we can ask it of the past, around the world. Social disparity is not confined to white and black people in the US. Examples included in this chapter certainly demonstrate that. If these issues hit close to home or spark an interest, make sure to check out the resources and academic readings below to contextualize your personal experience.

News Flash

- The Disney Studios movie “Mulan” supposedly was set in the Han Dynasty, incorporating many tenets of the Confucian tradition. EXCEPT... MULAN NEVER WOULD HAVE CUT HER HAIR!!
- The Lewis Chess Men inspired the wizard chess set played by Harry Potter and Ron Weasley in the film Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets, based on the book by J.K. Rowling.
- Emperor Akbar and the Mughal Empire feature in the 2008 Bollywood historical drama Jodhaa Abkar.
- Chimu (and Lambayeque) art styles feature in The Emperor’s New Groove by Disney Studios (but, problematically, they are conflated with many other ancient Andean art styles).
- In addition to the academic books about “Congo Free State,” there are two documentaries: [“King Leopold’s Ghost” directed by Pippa Scott](#) and [“Congo: White King, Red Rubber, and Black Death” directed by Peter Bate](#).

Where Do I Go From Here? / The Bibliography

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14. Why Do I Have to Do What You Say?



Figure 14.1: Map and timeline of artworks discussed in “Why Do I Have To Do What You Say?” by Marizela Garza. Review image captions below for details about each artwork and copyright information.

Why do I have to do what you say?

As children, many of us want independence and freedom so we ask why we always have to do what our caregivers say. Then, as we get older, we may disagree with family members, political leaders, or institutions that make decisions that affect us. In response to these disagreements we can practice defiance, or resistance to the authority or expectation that we dislike. In the arts, defiance can be overt and clear or it can be subtle and hidden.

In “[Why Do They Have More Than Us?](#)”, we considered social hierarchies and social disparity. We focused on kings,

emperors, and colonizers often at the top of a hierarchy. Kings and colonizers don't want to topple those hierarchies down. They want them to stay in place for as long as possible, because that's how they stay in power. Those who defy social hierarchies choose to resist the disparity, actively commenting on it and making change. This sort of defiance is often entangled in postcolonial movements of recent centuries and decades, wherein organizations or whole societies want change from the colonial order and try to determine what their independent society will be like. Let's start with resisting an established art style and then move into expressions of social and political defiance.

Making your own style

Have you ever heard someone referred to as 'eccentric'? Generally, this means that they don't follow the rules or social norms, and others think they are odd. Many artists have been called eccentric. A group of Japanese artists of the Edo period have been labeled "The Eccentrics" by recent scholars because of how much their style and content diverged from the norms of their day. One of the most famous of this group was Soga Shōhaku, who favored historic painting styles reaching back hundreds of years to the Muromachi period (the same time when the *Karesansui* in "[What is Beautiful?](#)" was created). Shōhaku is described as "unconventional" ([DMA 2017](#)) or as a "madman" who produced "weird" imagery ([Editors 2021](#)). *Lions at the Stone Bridge of Mount Tiantai* (Fig. 14.2) is an excellent example of his style.



Figure 14.2: Soga Shōhaku from Japan. [Lions at the Stone Bridge of Mount Tiantai](#). 1779 CE. Hanging scroll, ink on silk. The Metropolitan Museum of Art Collection; Public Domain.

This hanging scroll produced with ink on silk is almost 4 feet tall, a scale that impacts the viewer immediately. The subject matter is even more impactful. A lion overlooks a deep cliff near the center of the painting. A huge arch rises above the lion, with jagged cliffs receding in the distance. As we look closer, we realize that the lion at the center is not alone. There are hundreds of lions in a frenzy of movement. Some lions have already fallen from the topmost arch, descending into an uncertain mass of clouds.

Shōhaku depicts a narrative here, but in a very surreal way. The original story centers on a lioness who is determined to find which of her cubs are the most resilient. The lioness throws her cubs from the cliff's height to test them. ~~IF~~ **IF** they survive the fall or find a way to avoid it and return back to her, they are part of the deserving, resilient bunch. Now we see why all the lions are racing up this terrifying landscape!

As the title shows, Shōhaku illustrated this narrative with reference to an actual place: Mount Tiantai in Zhejiang Province, China. This area features a natural stone arch over a waterfall. The Tiantai landscape is dramatic. The arch could serve as a bridge, if it wasn't so perilous to cross. But a bridge to where, you ask? Legends associated with the Tiantai sect of Buddhism say this is a bridge to paradise.

This supernatural landscape is uniquely imagined by Shōhaku. The cliff faces are impossibly sharp and high. The arch looms menacingly above the lions, almost determining their fate by its very appearance. Shōhaku exaggerates the verticality of the hanging scroll by elongating the cliff forms and driving our eye from the very bottom right corner to the top center quickly (once our concern for those lion cubs begins). The circular cloud edges and organic shapes of the lions' bodies offer contrast to the highly geometric landscape features.

Shōhaku employs many mainstays of traditional Chinese painting, which was very influential on Japanese painting styles: mountain/water combinations, middleground mist, identifiable brushstrokes, and varied tonality. But his offering is unique and did not follow the norms of Japanese painting during his time. Some scholars suggest he simply did not like Edo period painting styles, preferring historic styles aesthetically. Some scholars suggest he was a rebel, bent on rattling cages and defying the status quo. Whatever the case, he certainly had a vision and is a clear example of how an artist can ask himself "why do I have to do what my painting master told me to do?" To learn about how Shōhaku and "the lineage of eccentrics" influenced contemporary Japanese artists such as Takashi Murakami, check out "[Lineage of Eccentrics: The Popularization of Art History, or Rewriting Japanese Art History](#)" (Choi 2019).

Social defiance

Remember Akbar from "[Why Do They Have More Than Us?](#)" Remember Basawan's swirling composition? Mughal miniature painting continued after Akbar's death, when his son, Jahangir, took the throne. Jahangir was like his father in some ways but instructed his court painters to depict him differently than his father did. Akbar preferred action scenes and drama. Jahangir preferred metaphorically significant depictions of his position, in defiance of social expectation.

Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Sheikh to Kings (Fig. 14.3) is another Mughal miniature painting designed to emphasize the emperor, dazzle the viewer with color, and send a message. Starting from the top we see a delicate border and two floating nude cherubs, one covering its face and the other with a bow and arrow. Yes, cupid makes an appearance in Mughal India! Below the cherubs, our eye is overpowered by the huge circular halo and starburst centered on a seated man's head. Three guesses who that is!

Yes, that is Jahangir, the resplendent emperor. He wears an intricate fabric headwrap, jewels, and sheer garments. He rests against a plush pillow on a circular throne. The throne platform is supported by an hourglass, framed by intricate gold and jewel-encrusted designs. Another set of cherubs collaborate at the base of the hourglass inscribing written

praise of Jahangir. Next to the cherub in green robes, there is a footstool that Jahangir would use to step into and out of the throne. It is elaborate and includes an inscription as well. More on that in a moment.

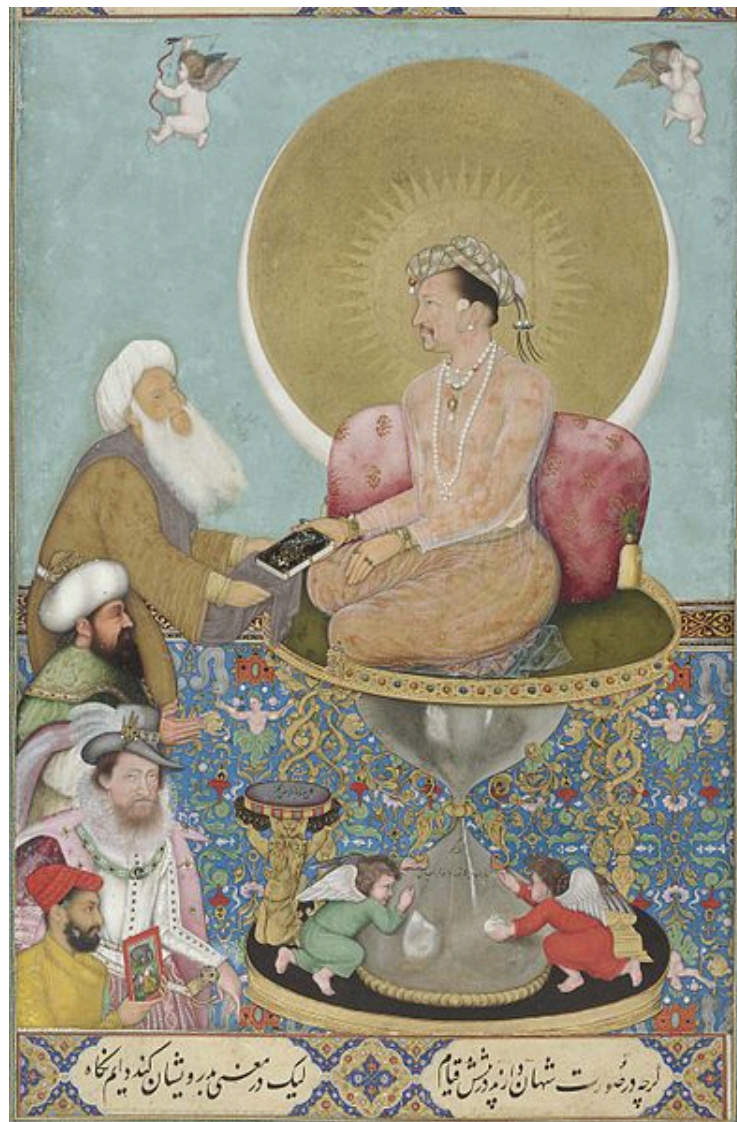


Figure 14.3: Bichitr from India. [Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Sheikh to Kings](#). 1615-1618 CE. Opaque watercolor, gold, and ink on paper. © Freer/Sackler: The Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art Collection.

You're probably wondering who the four figures on the left are. Starting at the top, we see an old man with a long white beard in a plain white head covering, wearing plain brown robes. Below him, we see a less aged man with his hands together, wearing a regal green robe and what appears to be a fur head covering. Unlike all the other figures, the third man looks out at the viewer. He wears garments very distinct from the others. His feathered hat, pink cape, and buttoned shirt frame his haughty face, sporting a wiry beard. His left forearm rests on the hilt of his sword. Lastly, in the bottom left corner, we see the youngest man, bearded and wearing a red turban with a yellow robe. This young man holds a book.

Jahangir also holds a book. He is interacting with the old man at the top left, giving the book to him. This generous act is an important part of the message of the painting. The position of the gift receiver is as well. This old, bearded man is a Sufi (a Muslim person who practices a particularly devout life focused on mysticism). The other men below him, dressed

to distinguish their high status, do not receive anything from Jahangir. The green robed man is probably an Ottoman Sultan who would visit Jahangir's court (or send officials to visit for him). The pink caped man is probably James I of England, the successor to Queen Elizabeth I. To learn more about European visitors to Jahangir's court, check out [The Mughal Padshah: A Jesuit Treatise on Emperor Jahangir's Court and Household \(Flores 2015\)](#).

Jahangir does not dote on kings. He prefers to interact with the holy man. From the emperor's seat, this is a form of social defiance. He is defying the expectations that at his level in society, he should engage with peers ruling other lands. Instead, this painting demonstrates that he values the common man more than foreign emperors and that he relates more to a devoted religious person than to powerful politicians.

Yes, we've not identified the fourth man yet. Well, he's the person who made this painting possible: the designer! His name is Bitchitr. We know this because the inscription on Jahangir's footstool is Bitchitr's signature. Bitchitr also hints at his occupation by holding the book, an example of the final product that would contain all his separate miniature paintings like this one, originally intended as folios in a book like the *Akbarnama*. We can know one more thing about Bitchitr: he is Hindu. His yellow robe clearly indicates that he practices Hinduism in Muslim-controlled Mughal India. Early Mughal leaders fostered pluralism in their empire, for Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and others, a topic which we will explore more in ["Can We Live Together?"](#). These leaders defied the norms of religious control and oppression often seen in territorial empires.

Political defiance, then

Leaders like Jahangir are often the most well-placed people to defy social, religious, and political norms because of how much power they hold. Let's consider some other politically-charged examples of defiance. First, have you ever thought of a horse as a symbol for your government?

If you lived in ancient China and participated in scholarly culture, you certainly would have answered yes to that question. Throughout Chinese history, especially in periods such as the Tang dynasty (when the *Equestrienne* figure in ["What is Beautiful?"](#) was made), horses served as icons for the government, its impact on people, and the status of society as a whole. The horse icon was particularly important in the scholarly community made up of government officials, men of leisure, and other intellectuals. Talk about high status and hierarchies!

China, like most countries, changed hands many times and consisted of many different ethnicities. In 1279 CE, a new era of government in China, powered by an invading force, was established under the Yuan Dynasty. Can you guess who that invading force was and what obstacle they scaled to conquer China? Yes, we're talking about the Mongols from the Eurasian Steppe (present-day Mongolia) invading over the Great Wall of China. (FYI: Prior to the Ming Dynasty that succeeded the Yuan, the Great Wall was not as 'great' as we see it today. The Ming government expanded and enhanced the wall as a response to the Yuan takeover.)

The Chinese government was dominated by the Han ethnicity and had long considered Mongols to the north a threat. There were successful small invasions from time to time but in the late 1200s CE, Kublai Khan (grandson of Genghis Khan) accomplished what previous Mongol leaders had not: full takeover of China. The Mongols waged a protracted invasion against the then-ruling Song Dynasty but that was not all the Song leaders were dealing with. Ethnically Jurchen armies from Manchuria were invading as well. In fact, Jurchen advancement required that the Song move their capital from northern China (at Bianjing/Kaifeng, close to the border with Mongol lands) to the south (Lin'an/Hangzhou). According to the traditions of Chinese history (written by ethnically Han historians), the Song Dynasty was a prosperous period of native Chinese (Han) rule that ended in conquest.

As you might expect, people who had become used to Song leadership in China weren't too happy that they had new

leaders. The Yuan Dynasty was not well-loved by a particular group of scholar-officials now known as the Song Loyalists. When the Yuan took power, the Song Loyalists were the dissenters. You might imagine that they couldn't really speak their minds out in public. But, these scholar-officials did have some weapons in their intellectual arsenal: the skillful use of imagery and metaphor to publicize messages to one's peers. Many of these men were literati poets and painters.

One scholar, Ren Renfa, used his skill to depict the choice that officials had to make when the Yuan Mongols took over. Do I pledge my loyalty to this new government and remain a 'fat horse'? Or do I maintain my loyalty to the conquered Song and become a 'thin horse?' Ren's painting *A Fat and Thin Horse* (Fig. 14.5) illustrates this dilemma. ~~SPANG~~ The so-called fat horse is standing proudly, perhaps even prancing, with a gleaming speckled coat, well-maintained mane, and well-fed body. By contrast, the so-called thin horse bows its head. Its mane is missing or unkempt. The thin horse is beyond thin to the point of emaciation from lack of food. Its tail is curled beneath its hind legs like a scared dog.



Figure 14.4: Ren Renfa 任仁发 from China. [A Fat and a Thin Horse](#). 1254-1357 CE. Handscroll, ink and colors on silk. Collection of the Palace Museum 故宫博物院, Beijing. Public Domain.

You may have already noticed another strong distinction between the way Ren Renfa depicts these horses. They are both bridled with typical horse headgear, but the fat horse's rein flows freely onto the ground while the thin horse's rein encircles its neck. Have you surmised the visual metaphor? A thin horse is not just starving and depressed but controlled by others. Ren offers this contrast to reflect the mental, and even physical, states of those who pledge loyalty to the Yuan (fat horse) or remain Song Loyalists (thin horse). There were officials who made the thin horse choice, such as another famous painter of this time Gong Kai ([check out his related painting Emaciated Horse](#)). Stories of Gong's life during the Yuan period include homelessness, begging, and other losses.

Song loyalists like Gong Kai were defying social norms and newly created power structures. Ren Renfa saw the choices before him and probably chose to be a fat horse. While the symbolism of horses is particular to China, you probably can think of ways that government officials in a country where you have lived have represented themselves as either loyal or not to the ruling group at any given time. In Yuan China, that was primarily done through art. Check out [The World of Khubilai Khan \(Watt and Hearn 2010\)](#) to learn more about arts during the Yuan Dynasty and the dynasty's founder.

Political defiance, today

In more recent years, political dissent has related strongly to underrepresented identities and those without the privileges of power. Women artists of the 1980s CE challenged the art world and the Western Canon by bringing the political approach of feminism into their radical artworks. The most famous group associated with this movement is the Guerrilla Girls, a collective of anonymous artists in New York City starting in 1985 and continuing today. Their group

name refers to guerrilla warfare wherein tactics beyond formal military norms are used to win in conflict situations. The Guerrilla Girls also dubbed themselves “the conscience of the art world” (Fig. 14.6).



Figure 14.5: Guerrilla Girls. [*Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?*](#) 1989 CE. Color offset lithograph on white wove paper, 278 x 710 mm (approx. 11" x 28"). © Art Institute of Chicago Collection.

The Guerrilla Girls used unconventional methods to broadcast a political message to the art world. *Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?* is a large-scale poster originally created for the advertising spaces on New York City buses. The Guerrilla Girls undertook a visual campaign to challenge museums, particularly calling out the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. Along with the primary title, the Guerrilla Girls incorporated clear evidence of bias for men artists in the Met’s modern art collection.

Like Hank Willis Thomas, the Guerrilla Girls appropriated imagery to build this work. In this case, they appropriated a portion of famous French painter Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres’ [*Grande Odalisque*](#) from 1814 CE. You may recognize Ingres’ painting even if you have never studied Western art because it is that famous, as a part of the Western art tradition of lounging nude women in luxurious surroundings (this is also an example of Orientalist painting as discussed in [“Where Do Babies Come From?”](#)).

Looking back at *Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?*, you’ll notice that the Guerrilla Girls have only used the Odalisque’s body and the feather fan she holds. They have replaced her head with a gorilla baring its teeth, as if the Odalisque is wearing a gorilla mask. The image presents an objectified woman’s body as if she is part of the Guerrilla Girls, putting on an anonymous identity and joining the cause. Just as they intended, the Guerrilla Girls shook up the New York City art scene in the 1980s CE and greatly contributed to the continuing dialogues that challenge the institutions of the art world, including museums (more on that in [“Why Do People Take What Doesn’t Belong to Them?”](#)). UTA Student Andrea Macias used the Guerrilla Girls as a comparative example in an essay, entitled [“The people without faces and their fight against the unjust.”](#) focused on a work by Mexican photographer, Issac Guzman.

In this discussion of political defiance in art, you may be thinking that we’ve neglected someone. Indeed, we cannot have this conversation without discussing Ai Weiwei, a contemporary artist from China. He is a very prominent artist and public figure today, coming to public acclaim by producing huge installations in high-profile museums such as the Tate Modern in London. You have probably encountered his work often called [“Sunflower Seeds,”](#) originally exhibited at the [Tate in 2010 CE and titled 1-125,000,000.](#)

The original title is important context to understanding this work. Ai commissioned local artists of Jingdezhen, the porcelain capital of historic China, to mold, fire, and paint millions of life-sized sunflower seeds. The exhibition

consisted of a several inches thick layer of these individually created seeds across a vast floor. Ai created this mass of seeds as a reflection upon the imagery of early communist China wherein founder Mao Zedong was presented as the sun with sunflowers open before him, with seeds pointed in his direction (Fig. 14.7). During the ‘Cultural Revolution’ of China, children would sing a song praising Mao, “Red Sun, Chairman Mao, Every Sunflower faces you.” This was a common visual metaphor of the time, with the seeds of these sunflowers representing the Chinese people. They respond to Mao, like sunflowers open up to the sun every day. This popular idea may derive from the fact that sunflower seeds have been a common snack for many Chinese people for a long time. [Redefining Propaganda in Modern China \(Johnson 2020\)](#) offers tons of detail about Mao-era political imagery.



Figure 14.6: Digital Transformational Sketch by Marizela Garza of the original artwork: Chinese Maker(s). Mao Zedong depicted on a 1960's poster declaring 'revolutionary committees are good'. ca. 1960 CE. [View the original artwork here](#) @ Universal History Archive/Universal Images Group via Getty Images. Refer to Figure 0.1 to view the transformational sketch process.

The interpretations of the meaning of *Sunflower Seeds* / 1-125,000,000 vary. Some commentators focus on Ai's creation of a massive amount of small objects like the mass production of commercial products in China today, but ironically every one of the millions of seeds was handpainted. Many people see this as a challenge to the common, often derogatory, assumptions about the cheapness of goods 'Made in China.' At another level, scholars consider Ai's presentation as a visual representation of the dichotomy between the individual and society. Presented as a vast sea of seeds, viewers might focus on the high quantity and the implications about the large population of China since seeds represent Chinese people in Maoist imagery.

But, take another look at the poster with Mao and the sunflowers. Do you get the feeling that those seeds are represented for their individuality and uniqueness? Probably not. The poster shows the seeds as cohesive, contained, and reverent, not as individuals but as a whole. Ai often talks about the tension between the individual and society. Which is more important? Communist nations say society. Democratic nations say the individual. Do you lose one if you

prioritize the other? Ai doesn't have answers to these questions. He is posing the questions so that you can consider how you would answer them and how governments around the world address them.

Ai has not abandoned the sunflower image in more recent years. In 2020 CE, he created a limited print run of surgical masks as a philanthropic project at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Printed Mask* (Fig. 14.8) was purchased from Ai's online platform with proceeds donated to humanitarian relief. Recognize the imagery? Sunflower seeds! Ai printed several other designs on surgical masks in this series, including his famous middle finger and *feishu*, a Chinese mythological creature.



Figure 14.7: Ai Weiwei. *COVID -19 Mask*. 2020 CE. Medical mask, ink, approx. 6.5 x 3.75". Private Collection.
Photo by Leah McCurdy. [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

There are many ways to interpret Ai's project and the choice of sunflower seed imagery on masks used to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. If we follow the interpretation that the seeds represent people in society (and the question of individuality versus the whole), the implication of 'social distancing' efforts during the pandemic reflects a meaning that many commentators brought to the media during the pandemic. Self-imposed and/or government-mandated isolation of individuals impacts society. Yes, it was a measure to slow the spread of the disease but it also resulted in significant loss of social connection. It resulted in social losses to ensure individual survival. Again, Ai does not provide answers but asks us to think about the questions.

Decolonialism, Postcolonialism and Defying Loss

Review the discussion of decolonialism and postcolonialism in [“Where Does Art Come From? An Introduction.”](#) Don't those movements sound a lot like political and social defiance? Art often plays a large role in decolonial and postcolonial movements. Think back to the Song Loyalists and the use of imagery and metaphor to speak their mind. They used artistry to present an unfavorable opinion. In colonial settings, opinions in defiance of colonialism are often not tolerated and/or result in violence. Such art can hide its 'true feelings' through metaphor and symbolism. Postcolonial art often has a literal or straightforward character because some of the pressure of colonial norms lifts through independence. Furthermore, postcolonial arts often respond to losses of cultural heritage and knowledge.

Some cultures see the preservation of cultural heritage as an important postcolonial mission. Located in an island archipelago in central Polynesia, the people of Tonga hold traditions very dear. Importantly, the Kingdom of Tonga is the only surviving indigenous monarchy (wherein the kings and queens today descend from an unbroken line of indigenous leadership) in the Pacific. While the Kingdom of Tonga borrowed significantly from the British, their tradition of leadership is indigenous and linked to the lineage of Tongan rulers since the earliest chiefs. It is also important to note that Tonga was colonized by the British but Tongan kings retained their power (unlike other colonized groups). In this distinct way, Tongan culture was impacted by colonization and their arts today take on a postcolonial attitude about cultural heritage and preservation.

Above all other arts, Tongan peoples honor the traditions of barkcloth production and use (similar yet distinct to the Pongo barkcloth traditions of the Mbuti discussed in [“What is Important to Us?”](#)). Barkcloth is the most important *koloa* (valuable and prestigious item) in Tongan society and its production is gendered: only women create barkcloth and undertake its decoration. Scholar [Adrienne L. Kaepler \(1990, 63\)](#) learned through her anthropological fieldwork in Tonga that *koloa* are not just beautiful objects, but they have agency that actually regenerates Tongan culture. This cultural power of barkcloth derives from its makers: Tongan women.

Barkcloth (Fig. 14.9) represents a high quality example of such artworks that would be used in ritual presentations, weddings, funerals, as well as for clothing and bed coverings. As demonstrated in Figure 14.9, Tongan barkcloth is stored in rolls. This relates to one of the ways to view barkcloth, especially at ritual presentations. [Kaepler \(1990, 66\)](#) experienced many examples of the unrolling of barkcloth which is seen by Tongans as a process of unveiling and revealing. These unraveling events would be accompanied by lyrical storytelling and dancing providing the narrative context to the barkcloth. Barkcloths often relate to the particular histories of villages or the great deeds of a chief. These communal events wherein barkcloth and related narratives are the stars of the show provide evidence to Kaepler's understanding that barkcloth and the women who produce it are honored as the perpetrators of Tongan culture. Barkcloth is the roadmap of the stories Tongans tell and the women who make them are the ultimate storytellers.



Figure 14.8: Tongan Maker(s). [Barkcloth](#). Before 1978 CE. Bark, 93.2 x 46 cm (approx. 36.5 x 18"). The British Museum Collection. [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Another important facet of postcolonial arts is identity seeking in the wake of independence. This is particularly true of the postcolonial movement of India. As already mentioned, India gained independence from the British Empire, alongside partitioned countries Pakistan and Bangladesh, in 1947. Imagine that you are a citizen of a country that for hundreds of years has been part of a colonial system. Suddenly, your country is independent and must make its own name on the world's stage. This is not easy. Many countries continue to face very rocky roads in postcolonial periods economically, politically, and socially. In social movements, artists and scholars start posing questions you are familiar with already: Who am I? What are we about?



Figure 14.9: Transformational Sketch by Diana Villagomez of the original artwork: Ravinder Reddy. *Devi*. ca. 2017 CE. Multimedia, approx. 15'. [View the original artwork here](#) © Ravinder Reddy.

One famous contemporary artist from India offers monumental statements addressing such postcolonial concerns, in artworks such as *Devi* (sketched in Fig. 14.10; [original here](#)). Ravinder Reddy creates massive fiberglass heads representing women of Hindu India. These women are adorned with beautiful polychrome hairstyles made of flowers. Their yellow/gold skin tones and staring eyes are particularly striking to the viewer. Remember Bichitr's self-portrait in *Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Sheikh to Kings* (Fig. 14.3)? His yellow robes signify that he belonged to the Hindu tradition (unlike Jahangir who is Muslim). The bright gold and yellow tones in Reddy's work reflect the prominence of Hinduism in India and reinforce the allusion he makes to representation of women protecting many Hindu temples today.

Each set of monumental eyes given to these women demonstrate assertiveness and even confrontation. The attitude of these sculptures is Reddy's response to the postcolonial questions of Indian identity. Reddy looks to the women of his daily life. They are his picture of India and where the future of India, as a continuing growing independent nation, lies.

Many critics and scholars have noted that Reddy's monumental heads sit at a crossroads between pop art and folk art, between global pop culture and age-old Hindu traditions of India. As evidence of this, the first exhibition where his

monumental heads made an appearance was titled “Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions.” Striving to maintain traditions but feeling the tensions of contemporary globalization are hallmarks of postcolonial arts that work to defy the norms of colonial power.

The Wrap-up

We all have our traditions and tensions that sometimes conflict with each other. We all wage battle against forces we want to repel at some point in our lives. Many artists throughout time and across the world have taken these tensions, struggles, and battles against the powers that be as the central focus of their work. They become a voice in large social and political struggles. Their voices can sometimes define a movement. Continue exploring the artists discussed in this chapter and other examples of defiance in art by checking out the media recommendations and scholarly sources below.

News Flash

- Hank Willis Thomas is active on Instagram [@hankwillisthomas](#). He also contributes to the [@forfreedoms](#) project on Instagram.
- Do you like the Guerrilla Girls’ attitude? Check out their official website at [guerrillagirls.com](#).
- Check out Ai Weiwei’s documentaries including “Disturbing the Peace” (2009), “Hua Hao Yue Yuan” (2010), “So Sorry” (2011), and “Coronation” (2020).
- Curious about how you would make Polynesian barkcloth? There are process videos on YouTube demonstrating “[Harvesting the Mulberry](#),” “[Processing the Mulberry](#),” “[Dying the Cloth](#),” and “[Making Dyes and Painting the Cloth](#).”

Where Do I Go From Here? / The Bibliography

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15. Why Do People Take What Doesn't Belong to Them?



Figure 15.1: Map and timeline of artworks discussed in “Why Do People Take What Doesn’t Belong to Them?” by Marizela Garza. Review image captions below for details about each artwork and copyright information.

Why do people take what doesn’t belong to them?

When it comes to theft and art, you may think of thrilling heists like in the movies [“Ocean’s Eight” \(2018\)](#) or “The Thomas Crown Affair” ([1999](#) or [1968](#)). Or you may have watched the recent documentary [“This is a Robbery: The World’s Biggest Art Heist” \(2021\)](#) about the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum heist in 1990. These are the highly publicized or imagined losses that the public connects to the art world. But there are many less visible types of loss and theft that don’t get

talked about as much. In this chapter, we'll talk about colonial theft and related museum acquisition, repatriation/ restitution debates (regarding return of the objects to the country or owner of origin), looting (illegal removal of cultural objects from their place of origin), ideologically-motivated destruction, intellectual theft, and the impacts of these losses. The title of this chapter implies a notion of ownership over ancient and historic arts. But it is important to fundamentally consider the question of ownership. Does anyone actually own the past and objects or monuments that represent that past?

These topics aren't fun like heist movies but some examples are quite famous, like the removal of marble sculptures from the Acropolis in Athens, Greece, between 1801-1812 CE. The so-called 'Elgin Marbles' (Fig. 15.2) were taken by the British Lord Elgin as his personal property, claiming he had permission from the Ottoman government that ruled Greece at the time. Outcries of looting and vandalism from the British public compelled him to not keep them. But he didn't return them to Greece. He sold them to the British government. Eventually, the marbles went into the British Museum collection, where they remain today.

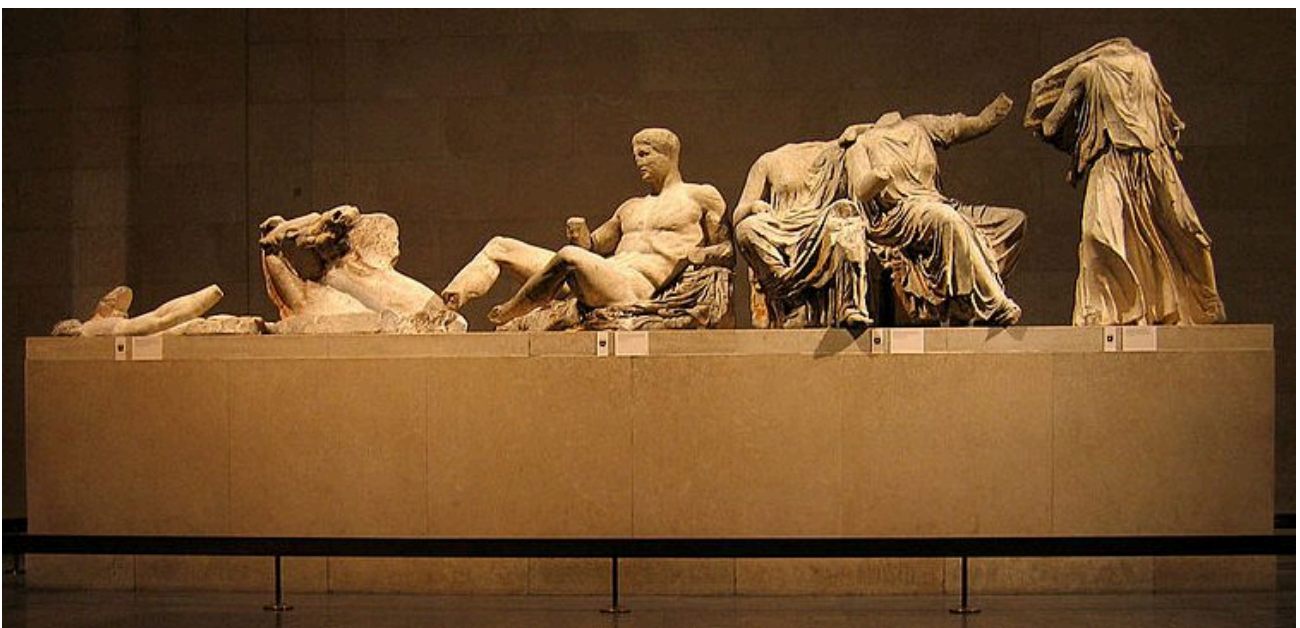


Figure 15.2: Greek Maker(s) of Athens, Greece. [Sculptures from the Acropolis \(as displayed at The British Museum\)](#), ca. 447-438 BCE. Marble. The British Museum Collection © The Trustees of The British Museum. Photo by Andrew Dunn. [CC BY-SA 2.0](#).

After Greece gained independence, they wanted the Acropolis sculptures back, calling for repatriation. The British Museum continually denies [repatriation requests by the Greek government and international bodies like UNESCO](#). The Greek government and many citizens feel the loss of these art objects are a loss of their heritage and the practical potentials that heritage offers local communities (like economic benefits from tourism). Threats like looting and other forms of cultural destruction are long-established and continuing (sometimes growing), impacting the identities, heritage, and perspectives of cultures that have been poorly treated, underrepresented, and ignored.

How did this stuff get here? Why is it here?

Most museum-goers don't ask these questions as they view objects, but we will. Remember Ana De Orbegoso's *Neo-Huaco #3* (Fig. 8.15) from ["Who Came Before Us?" Andrew Hamilton \(2020, para. 7\)](#), curator at the Art Institute of

Chicago (AIC) that owns De Orbegoso's artwork and the *Portrait Vessel of a Ruler* (Fig. 8.14), states that Neo-Huaco #3 "emphasizes the commodification of Andean antiquities and the contemporary art market...." Why would De Orbegoso focus on that topic? [Check out the AIC catalog page for Portrait Vessel of a Ruler, and open the Provenance section near the bottom.](#) Provenance refers to the record of ownership of an object. The AIC offers this information:

Eduard Gaffron (1861–1931), Lima, Peru, from 1892 to 1912, then Berlin; [then] by descent to his children Mercedes Gaffron [in] Berlin then [in] Durham [South Carolina] and Hans Gaffron (1902–1979) [in] Berlin, then Chicago; sold to the Art Institute, 1955.

Gaffron was a German ophthalmologist who lived in Peru for 20 years, during which time he collected over 11,000 antiquities. Gaffron sold many objects to other collectors outside Peru and retained many that eventually were inherited by his children (Mercedes and Hans), who sold *Portrait Vessel of a Ruler* (along with many other objects) to AIC in 1955. This provenance starts with Eduard Gaffron in Peru. But De Orbegoso likely also wants us to ask: how did Gaffron get an object like the portrait vessel in the first place?

[Hamilton \(2020, Fig. 7\)](#) includes a [historic photograph](#) in his essay of another German researcher who participated in the extraction of ancient Peruvian objects and seven people noted as "unidentified huaqueros" in the caption. The term *huaquero* is an amalgamation of an indigenous word, *huaca* (*waqa*), from the native *Quechua* language of the Andes and the Spanish suffix *-ero*, used to describe specific activities/roles related to objects (i.e. *vaquero* [deriving from *vaca* (cow)] equates to herdsman or 'cowboy' in English). Within indigenous communities today, *huaca/o* (gendered via the grammatical requirements of Spanish) retains its original meaning: an object or thing that is sacred. All ancient objects and buildings are paid reverence by being called *huacas/huacos*. Thus, *Portrait Vessel of a Ruler* is a *huaca*. De Orbegoso creates her own term, *Neo-Huaco*, by playing on this ancient term. So, *huaqueros* and *huaqueras* were people within Spanish-controlled Peru with specific roles related to *huacas*.

What were these roles? You guessed it... they were hired by foreigners, like Gaffron, to dig up ancient sites in the Peruvian desert, collect *huacas* of all kinds, and help the foreigners transport the *huacas* back to cities like Lima. Then, the *huacas* were eventually exported to Europe, the US, and elsewhere. How did all of this start, you ask? You guessed it, again... Spanish colonization. As discussed in "[What is Divine?](#)", Spanish *conquistadores* and colonial leaders had a lust for gold that led them to dig up graves and temples across Peru. They employed or enslaved local people to help them do that. The *huaquero* role was born.

With *Neo-Huaca* #3, De Orbegoso may be reflecting upon this history of foreigner-led extraction of ancient remains with the help of local people, the very people who consider such objects sacred. We can ask how force, economic need, loss of cultural knowledge, and other factors influenced these activities. Locals also led independent looting activities, usually selling objects to foreigners to make a profit. Such local looting continues to occur today all over the world, where people in need see an opportunity to profit from the value placed on ancient objects by the art market.

De Orbegoso's work relates to another set of objects, the so-called 'Shroud of Gothenburg' and 88 other Paracas textiles, similar to *Woven and Embroidered Mantle* (Fig. 15.3), from Peru (Fig. 15.1). How did they get to Gothenburg, Sweden, you ask? In 1929 CE, Peru established legislation to protect its antiquities (after folks like Gaffron had removed so many things in previous eras). Political changes just a few years later meant that leaders protecting *huacas* were ousted from their jobs and archaeological sites were unprotected. Looting activity skyrocketed between 1931 and 1932 CE, even as reports were made to the authorities. While we do not know exactly who the looters were, we know that 89 Paracas textiles were removed from the mummies they originally encased. In fact, these looters carelessly tossed the mummified remains onto the ground and left them exposed. This indicates that the looters were not indigenous people, most of whom held strong feelings of ancestry and reverence for the Paracas culture.



Figure 15.3: Paracas Maker(s) of Peru. [Woven and Embroidered Mantle](#). ca. 300 BCE – 200 CE. Camelid fiber, 61 x 115". Cleveland Museum of Art Collection; [CCo Public Domain](#).

The 1929 antiquities law was set up to combat looting and exportation of such *huacas* from Peru. It wasn't enforced due to the political turmoil. Because of this, a Swedish diplomat named Sven Karell was able to illegally export the Paracas textiles to Sweden, eventually forming part of the collection of the National Museums of World Culture in Gothenburg. Peru began requests for repatriation in 2009 CE, after the Gothenburg museums did an exhibition exposing the illegal circumstances of the objects. The process was long, with the museum citing the fragile condition of the textiles, but in June 2014 CE, Gothenburg began a long-term repatriation effort to the *Museo Nacional de Arqueología* (MUNA), starting with 4 textiles. The entire collection was to be repatriated by 2021 CE, though the coronavirus pandemic probably affected these plans. No matter when the entire collection is back in Peru, it needs extensive conservation, since ancient textiles are extremely fragile. Check out "[Analysis of Paracas fibre material from the Gothenburg Collection](#)" ([Javer 2017](#)) for analysis of the first 4 textiles already returned to Peru. MUNA will incur high costs for treatment and storage, hopefully to be recouped by increased tourism to the museum.

The Gothenburg example is one of the success stories that are increasing in recent years. These include cases where ownership is totally transferred or where other agreements are put in place. For example, while the British Museum denies Greek claims for repatriation of the Parthenon marbles, they did accept an agreement with the Kwakwaka'wakw First Nation. Remember the *Transformation Mask* (Fig. 6.4) from "[What is Important to Us?](#)" [Another Kwakwaka'wakw transformation mask was the subject of repatriation claims](#) focused on recovering objects obtained in bad faith and sold by the Canadian government.

In 1876 CE, the Canadian government passed the 'Indian Act,' which banned all indigenous peoples from practicing potlatching (as described in "[What is Important to Us?](#)"). In 1921 CE, *Kwakwaka'wakw* Chief Cranmer defied the law and Canadian authorities raided Chief Cranmer's potlatch and arrested the participants. Some were imprisoned and some were released after they agreed to surrender approximately 750 cultural objects to the officials that conducted the raid. Most of these objects were handed to the Canadian government and eventually displayed in the Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC) while some were sold to the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) and smaller museums like the Cranmore Ethnographical Museum in Kent, England. The masks sold to Cranmore were eventually transferred to the British Museum. The Kwakwaka'wakw U'mista Cultural Centre requested the return of these objects, eventually receiving repatriated objects from CMC and NMAI. But their dealings with the British Museum

were different. They negotiated a “long-term loan” of [this mask](#) in 2005 CE. This means that the British Museum still owns the object (and display it in exhibitions when it wishes, such as the 2017 “Where the Thunderbird Lives” show in London) but allows the U’mista Cultural Centre to display it in their own space most of the time.

There’s another ongoing repatriation debate that involves the British Museum that you may have heard of, or learned about based on some recent popular media. Are you a fan of “[Black Panther](#)” (2018)? That film features a scene where the character Killmonger visits the West African gallery of a museum (marked as the “Museum of Great Britain” on a building sign) displaying (fictional) Wakandan objects (Fig. 15.4 – CONTENT WARNING: This video depicts physical violence). A verbal confrontation between Killmonger and a museum curator violently culminates in the death of the curator and other museum workers. Killmonger and his accomplices take several Wakandan objects, seeking Vibranium as a valuable resource. He also describes the loss of cultural heritage and the thefts of the colonial era that resulted in African objects being exported to European and US museums.

CONTENT WARNING: This video depicts physical violence.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:

<https://uta.pressbooks.pub/wheredoesartcomefrom/?p=519#oembed-1>

Figure 15.4: “[Black Panther \(2018\) – Museum Heist](#)” uploaded by The Cheat on YouTube (May 2, 2018).

In fact, Killmonger asks the curator about several objects on display. The curator says that the second object is from “the Edo people of Benin, 16th century” (Fig. 15.4). Firstly, the filmmakers should have edited the dialogue for historical accuracy because it sounds like the curator is saying that the Edo people lived in the present-day country of Benin. They didn’t. They lived in the present-day country of Nigeria. The Edo established one of the most powerful pre-colonial states of Africa, known as the Kingdom of Benin, centered at Benin City in present-day Nigeria (Fig. 15.1). That name was not attributed to the present boundaries of Benin (the country) until 1975 CE when it replaced the name Dahomey, as the French colony of Dahomey dissolved.

Getting back to that second object Killmonger asks about... check it out at minute 0:40 in Figure 15.4. This isn’t a real object (and Vibranium isn’t real, btw). The filmmakers created an object that strongly resembles [a carved ivory object representing Queen Iyoba from the Kingdom of Benin](#) but changed its appearance to look like Benin brass sculptures, such as *Uhunmwun Elao* (Fig. 15.5). Thus, the object in the film is an amalgamation and inaccurate but serves to represent the important tension between the descendants of the Kingdom of Benin in Nigeria today and the British Museum (not so subtly alluded to by the sign “Museum of Great Britain”).



Figure 15.5: Benin Kingdom Maker(s) of Benin City, Nigeria. [Uhunmwun Elao](#). 1700-1850 CE. Brass, 12 ¾". Art Institute of Chicago Collection; [CCo Public Domain](#).

Uhunmwun Elao was cast by expert brass smiths within the palace guild to honor a recently deceased *Oba* (king). The head is a portrait of the *Oba*, identified by the sumptuous adornments of coral beads and the scarification marks beneath the eyes and on the forehead, illustrating the great prestige and experience of this leader. Though distinct, this portrait recalls the *Portrait of an Ife King with crown* (Fig. 13.5) with a strong focus on naturalism and stately presence. *Uhunmwun Elao* was a prominent feature on an altar dedicated to the deceased *Oba*'s memory, created and maintained by his successor. [An intricately carved elephant tusk](#) would be inserted in the hole in the top of the portrait. The tusk carving would offer information about the *oba*'s reign and his prowess.

The AIC currently owns/holds *Uhunmwun Elao*. So, you asking yourself how this portrait of a dead Benin king ended up there, right? [Let's check out the Provenance section on the AIC website again:](#)

Oba Ovonramwen, (r. 1888-97, died 1914), Benin City, Kingdom of Benin, before 1897; possibly taken during the British military raid. [To] Dr. Hans Meyer (died 1929), Leipzig, Germany, from 1900 [Receipt from Jacques Seligmann and Company in curatorial file]; by descent to Mrs. Hans Meyer, 1929; sold to Jacques Seligmann and

Company, New York, N.Y., 1933; sold to Mrs. George W. Crawford (née Annie Laurie; married Russell B. Aitken, 1957; died 1984), 1940; by descent to Russell B. Aitkens, 1984; sold, Christie's, New York, April 3, 2003, sale 1278 (The Russell B. Aitken Collection of African, American Indian, and Oceanic Art), lot 62, to the Art Institute.

Before a German, an American, another American, a third American, and then an American art institution owned this object, it was the property of an *Oba* of Benin. Then, the AIC notes it was “possibly taken during the British military raid.” What raid, you ask...

By the 1890s CE, the Kingdom of Benin was in control of their territory, unlike many other African kingdoms under colonial rule at that time. The Benin *Obas* were successful in trade and in protecting their territory through Portuguese, Dutch, and British contact, eventually monopolizing regional trade of palm oil, rubber, and ivory. The British leaders of the Niger Coast Protectorate (a British colony in present-day southeastern Nigeria) sought ways to break the Benin Kingdom's economic hold, including making it a British colony (thereby profiting from their economic success). In 1892 CE, a British official visited the *Oba* with a proposal to annex the kingdom and offer security as a British protectorate. The *Oba* originally considered this a friendly trade agreement but soon realized it was a deception targeting colonization. In response, the *Oba* prohibited British occupation and trade in Benin lands.

The British did not take kindly to being barred from going where they wanted. Several British attempts to enforce colonization failed but led to additional measures by the *Oba*, such as embargoing palm oil trade. This hit the British in their pocketbooks, inspiring disdain for the Benin Kingdom (which was already quite high due to British views of how Benin slaves were treated as well as human sacrifice practices). A rogue British military official, James Robert Phillips (without approvals from his commanding officers), sent a message to the *Oba* indicating that he was coming for peace talks. Instead, he invaded across the Benin Kingdom border with 250 African soldiers (recruited into the British colonial army) disguised as porters and musicians. Benin leaders feared a surprise invasion on Benin City and encouraged the *Oba* to attack them first. The *Oba* did not want to go on the offensive but several chiefs did. They attacked the disguised British forces in January 1897 CE, killing 8 combatants and injuring around 40.

As a response to this attack, the British military mounted the so-called ‘Benin Punitive Expedition’ in February 1897 CE. Punitive refers to punishment; the British set out to punish the Benin leaders. Thousands of British soldiers invaded Benin City and surrounding villages. While sacking and burning, British forces killed tens of thousands of people, as estimated by [Dan Hicks \(2021\) in *The British Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Cultural Violence and Cultural Restitution*](#). The *Oba* was captured and exiled. As part of this violent action, British officials looted Benin palaces and shrines amassing over 2500 objects, very likely including *Uhunmwun Elao* and objects directly reflecting the heritage of Benin leaders. Photographs from this period of looting, such as [this one](#) and [this one](#), document the destruction and collection of war booty, including [cans of palm oil at the feet of the soldiers](#).

Any guesses where those 2500 Benin objects went? Some went into private collections of those who participated in the raid, and before the end of 1897 CE, many were auctioned off to German museums and private collectors, other European museums, including the British Museum, and institutions in the US. Who got the profits from those sales, you ask? The British military did. This was Phillips' original motive, which becomes clear when you read his letter seeking permission to invade: “...I have reason to hope that sufficient ivory would be found in the King's house to pay the expenses [of the invasion].” He didn't expect all the cast brass artworks, stores of palm oil, and other goods in addition to the ivory looted from Benin City.

Currently, the British Museum holds around 900 objects looted during the ‘Benin Punitive Expedition.’ The *Ethnologisches Museum Berlin-Dahlem* holds approximately 530 objects and 1,130 objects are retained within Germany overall. Many other looted objects are held in French and US institutions. In 2000 CE, *Oba* Ovonramwen's descendants issued a repatriation claim to the British Parliament ([which you can read here](#)), focused on this request:

“All the cultural property belonging to the *Oba* of Benin illegally taken away by the British in 1897, should be

returned or [the British should pay monetary compensation, based on the current market value] to the rightful owner, the Oba of Benin.”

The British Museum has refused to fulfill this request, stating that they purchased the objects legally and did not participate in the looting. The British Museum also consistently says that the *Oba* of Benin, and/or Nigeria, cannot care for the objects as state-of-the-art museums in Europe can. Recently, the British Museum has discussed creating long-term loan agreements, like with the U'mista Cultural Centre, to allow Nigerian institutions to display objects permanently.

Despite not actually participating in the looting, France agreed to return Benin objects in 2018 CE (though they have yet to actually return anything as of 2022). In addition, Germany acknowledges that the plundering of the Benin Kingdom was an act of war and that retaining objects obtained as booty and sold for military profit is not right. In July 2022, Germany signed an agreement to return over 1000 Benin objects ([This Day 2022](#)). The physical return should coincide with the completion of a new museum in Benin City, called the Edo Museum of West African Art. This museum project has come about through the [Benin Dialogue Group](#). This would be one of the institutions in Nigeria to take on long-term loans from the British Museum if that proposal moves forward.

More destruction

These cases of looting are just a few of the many circumstances that have led to objects being illegally and/or unethically removed from their place of origin. Looting is one form of destruction that reduces and/or destroys cultural heritage and the information that we can learn from it. For example, Wallis Budge, a curator of Egyptology at the British Museum, illegally removed the *Papyrus of Ani* (Fig. 10.3) from Egypt in 1888 CE by CUTTING THE SCROLL INTO 37 PIECES! This allowed him to box the flat sheets up and travel with it easily. That's why the papyrus is shown in 'frames' in [“What Happens When We Die?”](#). They are segments cut by Budge so he could steal it from Egypt. Do you think it stops there? No. Budge was paid 150 pounds by the British government as a “gratuity.” He got a tip for stealing the *Papyrus of Ani*!

Other forms of destruction are much bigger in scale, such as the bulldozing of ancient sites. Hopi artists Michael Kabotie and Delbridge Honanie illustrated just that in their large mural painting *Hopi Visions* (Fig. 15.6). The entire composition visualized the Hopi past, present, and a hopeful future. The past section, seen on the first/leftmost panel, includes a *kiva*, an illustration of the creation story emergence, and an image of *Pueblo Bonito* discussed in [“Will You Tell a Story?”](#). Then, the imagery shifts to the Spanish colonial period, Catholic missionizing, and the [Pueblo Revolt of 1680](#). The middle panel represents the flourishing of Hopi culture through agriculture, social life, and the *Kachina* traditions (discussed in [“Who Came Before Us?”](#)). The third panel takes a turn to the modern period, beginning with a bulldozer removing an ancient Hopi site to build a highway. The land is scarred and history is removed with the swipe of a machine. The mural continues by visualizing some of the current issues Hopi people face, including alcoholism, drugs, and obesity. Despite these challenges, the mural ends with a picture of interconnectedness, intercultural conversation, and hope. Kabotie and Delbridge incorporated the image of the bulldozer to literally visualize destruction, loss, and what happens as cultural heritage takes a back seat to ‘progress.’



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://uta.pressbooks.pub/wheredoesartcomefrom/?p=519#oembed-2>

Figure 15.6: Michael Kabotie and Delbridge Honanie, *Hopi Visions*, 2016 CE, pigment on board. Traveling Exhibition at the Dallas Museum of Art. Video by Leah McCurdy; [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

Can you think of another example of destructive acts that result in cultural heritage loss? You may be aware of the ideologically-motivated destruction of the *Bamiyan Buddhas* (Fig. 15.7 left) of present-day Afghanistan (Fig. 15.1). These were two monumental sculptures, one of Shakyamuni Buddha and one of *Vairocana* (Celestial) Buddha (the form he assumed after nirvana), carved into niches on the side of a large cliff in the Bamiyan Valley. Looking at the site today, you won't see anything other than two empty niches that once held the monumental sculptures (Fig. 15.7 right). The Bamiyan Buddhas were explosively demolished in 2001 by the Taliban.

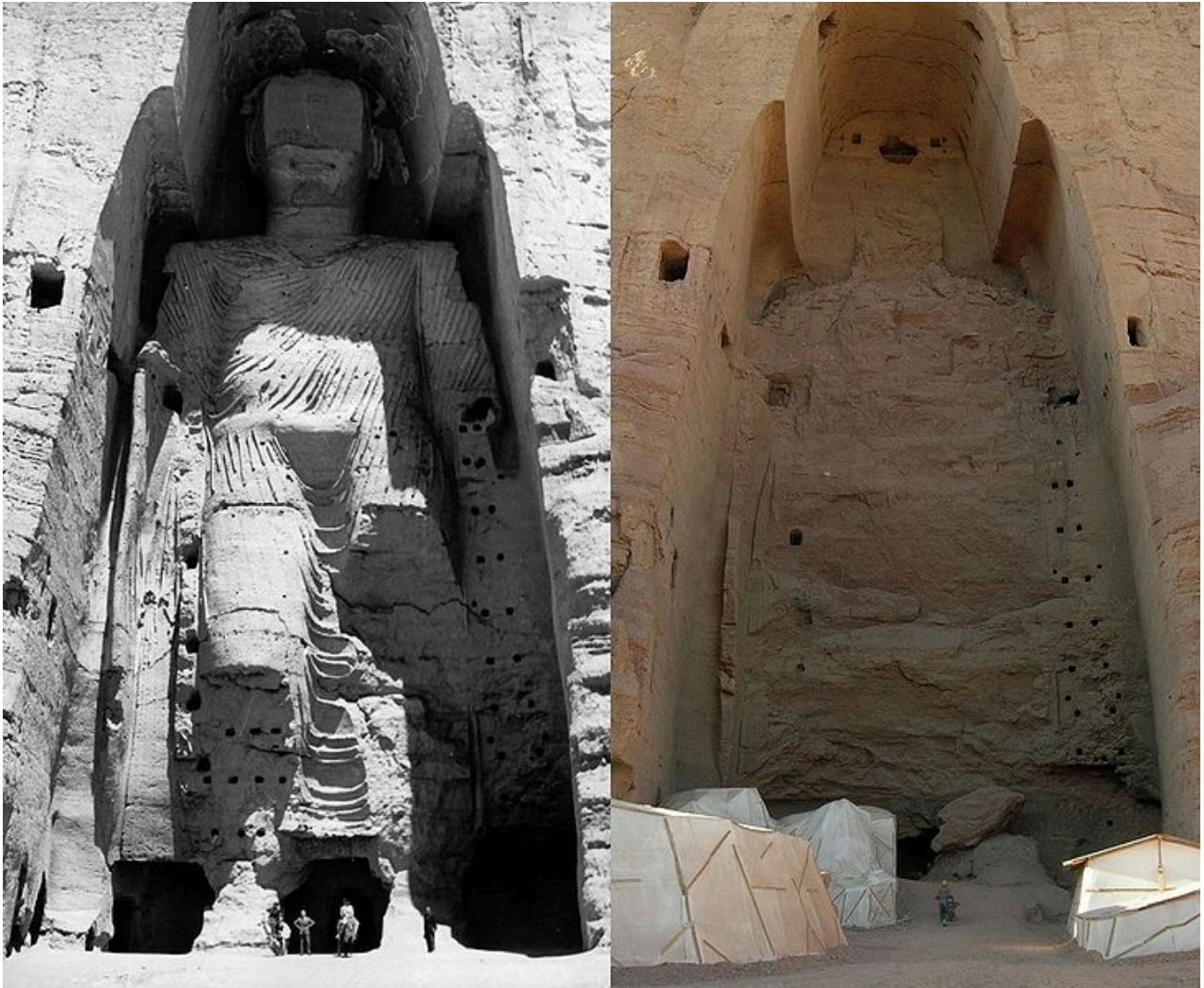


Figure 15.7: [Destruction of larger Bamiyan Buddha before \(1963\) and after documented by UNESCO \(2009\).](#)
Image by UNESCO, Tsui, & Liberal Freemason; [CC BY-SA 3.0](#)

Before we talk about their destruction and the reasons behind it, let's dive into the history and significance of the Bamiyan Buddhas. They were carved between 550–650 CE in the Gandharan style, that syncretic mix of Ancient Greek and Buddhist artistic traditions that developed as a result of the invasion of Alexander the Great and subsequent Greek settlement in Bactria, as discussed in [“Will You Tell a Story?”](#).

Both Bamiyan Buddhas were carved in high relief into niches in the cliffside. High relief means that the form of the sculpture projects far enough outward to be mostly independent from the background, but is not completely free from the rock face behind. The heads of the Bamiyan Buddhas were carved ‘in the round,’ meaning fully independent of the cliffside like a freestanding statue. The high relief at the base is important because it allowed worshippers to

circumambulate the Buddhas, like at the *Mahastupa* ([“Why Does Size Matter?”](#)), inside the niches. In addition, the Buddhas were once brightly painted (like ancient Greek sculptures), and historical records by Chinese monk Xuanzang reference their glowing copper faces, hands, and adornment with precious gems. Just imagine how impressive they would have looked in their prime!

Bamiyan was a center of Buddhist activity even before the construction of the two Buddhas, and there already existed (and still exist today) hundreds of Buddhist caves carved into the cliffs. In addition, Bamiyan was located at a key position on the Silk Roads, with caravans frequently passing through the valley. For many of these caravans, Bamiyan was either their last stop before (if traveling east), or their first stop after (if traveling west) crossing a dangerous stretch of the Silk Road. As you can imagine, crossing vast stretches of empty, unpopulated areas across the Hindu Kush mountains and Taklimakan Desert while carrying lots of valuable goods was extremely risky due to factors such as armed bandits and robbers, intense heat and cold, sandstorms, and poisonous snakes. As such, the giant Buddhas served to provide either an opportunity to pray and make offerings for a safe journey ahead, or a comforting and relieving presence for someone thankful to have made it through that section of the Silk Road unharmed.

After towering over the Bamiyan Valley for almost 1400 years, the Buddhas were systematically destroyed by the Taliban in 2001 CE. Taliban leader Mullah Omar ordered the destruction of all non-Islamic monuments and figures throughout Afghanistan in February of that year. Despite international pleas, the Buddhas were brought down in March over the course of several weeks by Taliban forces through a combination of anti-aircraft artillery, mines, rockets, and dynamite (which goes to show how strong these Buddhas physically were!). The Taliban recruited local people to place explosives, including Sayid Mirza Hussain (Behzad and Qarizadah 2015).

So, we've got to ask: why did the Taliban want to destroy non-Islamic imagery? Multiple reasons come into play. Buddhism had long since faded as the predominant religion in Afghanistan following Muslim conquests, and Afghanistan was almost fully Islamic by 1000 CE. In the 1990s, the Taliban seized control of Afghanistan from the former Soviet-backed Afghan government following a long civil war after the collapse of the USSR. As an Islamist movement, the Taliban adhered very strongly to literalist principles of Islam and harshly enforced Islamic Sharia law, a law code based on the words of the *Qur'an*, the Hadith, and consensus developed over time. As we discussed in [“What is Divine?”](#), the *Qur'an* restricts the imitation of *Allah's* creations and influences interpretations about figural imagery within many Muslim communities. Some fundamentalist or literalist interpretations see all anthropomorphic representation of a spiritual nature as heretical. The Taliban and previous Islamic governments/empires of Afghanistan throughout history had often dealt with this by destroying the faces of religious figures, a practice called iconoclasm. In fact, the Bamiyan Buddhas had had their faces forcibly removed at some point (see Fig. 15.7 right), actions which many experts attribute to previous acts of iconoclasm.

So why did the Taliban shift from their previous policies regarding icons to destroying the Bamiyan Buddhas completely? Evidence points toward a Taliban reaction against the international community. In fact, the Taliban had previously sworn not to destroy, but even to protect and conserve, the Bamiyan Buddhas and other Afghan pre-Islamic artifacts. However, in 2001, international sanctions had recently been imposed on the Taliban government over its reluctance to extradite terrorist Osama bin Laden. Furthermore, the Taliban had been intensely frustrated by offerings of foreign aid not to its citizens suffering from hunger and drought, but solely for the restorations of the Bamiyan Buddhas. Deeming this a double standard, the Taliban destroyed the statues to send a message of strength, indignance, and unwillingness to bow down to the demands of foreigners. Following the destruction, the Taliban even flew in journalists to visit the area where the Buddhas once stood to report their destruction to the wider international community.

The Taliban's actions remain controversial, especially given the recent 2021 withdrawal of US forces, swift Taliban take-over, and establishment of a new Taliban-based government in Afghanistan. It is up to you to learn more and consider your opinion on the matter. There is no doubt that there was a great loss at Bamiyan and it affects the cultural heritage of millions of people. [“Between Cult and Culture: Bamiyan, Islamic Iconoclasm, and the Museum” \(Flood 2002\)](#) offers additional information but, as always, shouldn't be the only source of your investigation to learn more.

If you hadn't heard of the Bamiyan Buddhas, chances are that you've heard of more recent ideologically-motivated destruction of cultural heritage, by ISIS/ISIL in Syria and northern Iraq. Like the Taliban, ISIS/ISIL was motivated to remove non-Islamic imagery from the regions of their control. Using public media forums, they published videos of destruction of artworks at museums with sledgehammers and bulldozing entire archaeological sites, including a long-lived Christian monastery, Dair Mar Elia, in present-day Mosul, Iraq. Figure 15.8 records the destruction at Nineveh, Iraq, taken by UNESCO officials. Nineveh was one of the capitals of the Assyrian Empire (Fig. 15.1) The Southwest Palace of Nineveh was built in the 700s CE and was devastated by bulldozing and explosives in 2017. These examples demonstrate that destruction of ancient heritage is not just a thing of the past, with bad characters like Wallis Budge. It continues and takes many forms today.



Figure 15.8: [Destruction by ISIS at Nineveh, Iraq, documented by UNESCO in 2017](#). Photo by UNESCO; [CC BY-SA 3.0 IGO](#).

Appropriation and its impacts

Looting and destruction are extremely devastating, not only as physical loss but as cultural loss. There are other losses that do not necessarily remove objects from their place of origin but factor into the loss of cultural heritage and/or acknowledgement. This sort of loss can occur through appropriation (using pre-existing imagery for your own purposes, sometimes without permission or credit given to the original artist).

We've already mentioned appropriation in art by Hank Willis Thomas and the Guerrilla Girls in [“Why Do I Have To Do What You Say?”](#) You may have heard of Appropriation Art (with capital 'A's) that developed in the 1960s CE. It focused on intentional and subversive appropriative acts. Just think of [Andy Warhol's Campbell's Soup Cans](#). Before that art movement, a more tacit form of appropriation was common practice, especially among young artists who learned skills by copying the masters relevant to their region. This was how all the revered artists of the Renaissance, for example, developed their skills and built their own styles. As discussed in [“Where Does Art Come From? An Introduction,”](#) in the 1800s CE, European artists started being influenced by imported arts from around the world. Vincent [Van Gogh actually copied Japanese prints in oil paint](#). Eventually, Van Gogh moved on from copying and incorporated elements of Japanese influence into a unique Impressionistic approach. Van Gogh was quite open about his interest in Japanese art and did not hide the fact that it influenced him.

An early artist of the modern movement, Amedeo Modigliani, was clearly influenced by African masks that were flowing into Europe in the early 1900s CE, exported via colonies like Leopold II's 'Congo Free State' discussed in [“What is Important to Us?”](#) and French West Africa. Works such as *Madam Pompadour* (Fig. 15.9), *The Red Bust*, and *Tete* are characteristic of Modigliani's portrait-focused style: highly elongated forms (particularly noses and necks), simplified facial shapes, deemphasized eyes and mouths, and attention to hairstyles or head adornments (like hats). ~~SPANG~~ Each of these features is also characteristic of certain African mask arts, particularly those of Central and West Africa. Do you notice these features in the *Guro Mask* (Fig. 15.10) and “Fang” *Ngil Mask* (Fig. 15.11)? We know that Modigliani was exposed to African masks such as these, was fascinated by their style, and appropriated elements into his paintings. In fact, some scholars suggest that Modigliani's identity as a Jewish man in 20th century Europe may have influenced his interest in the arts of “outsiders” to “mainstream” (i.e. Christian) European culture of the time.



Figure 15.9: Amedeo Modigliani (Italian). [Madam Pompadour](#). 1915 CE. Oil on canvas, approx. 26 x 20". Art Institute of Chicago Collection; [CCo Public Domain](#).



Figure 15.10 (left): Guro (possibly) Maker(s) of Côte d'Ivoire. [Mask](#). Before 1951 CE. Wood, monkey hair, 26 x 14.5 x 12 cm. The British Museum Collection; [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) @ The Trustees of the British Museum.
 Figure 15.11 (right): “Fang” Maker(s) of central Gabon. [Ngil Mask](#). ca. 1950-1980 CE. Painted wood, fiber, 6' 5 3/4". UTA African Art Collection. Photo by Leighton McWilliams; [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

Scholars trace Modigliani's introduction to African arts to his apprenticeship with Constantin Brâncuși, a prominent Modern artist who challenged the Western Canon by looking to 'exotic' and 'primitive' cultures for inspiration, along with others like Paul Gauguin (in quite problematic ways [\[Goddard 2008\]](#)). Another of these artists was Pablo Picasso.

You may be surprised to hear that Picasso was influenced by African art, if you only listen to what Picasso said on the matter. For example, a newspaper quoted Picasso as saying, “African art? Never heard of it!” Unlike Van Gogh and Modigliani, Picasso chose to appropriate features of African art, in famous works like [Les Femmes d'Alger \(O. J. R. M.\)](#), without giving credit to this influence.

Scholars have documented his perception of African art began with visits to the *Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro* (eventually the *Musée de l'Homme*) in Paris only months before the completion of *Les Femmes d'Alger*. He and many of his artist friends eventually owned African arts (check out [this photo of him with African sculpture in his studio in 1908](#)). Picasso described his artistic style as 'primitivism,' seeking to “liberate an utterly original artistic style of compelling, even savage force” (Hunter and Jacobus 1977: 135-136). Like many male artists of his time (and today), Picasso believed in the age-old Western Canon narrative of the 'genius' artist who innovates and originates (but does not appropriate). Thus, he highlighted that he did not 'borrow from' nor was he 'influenced by' African art, but that he recognized an interest in evoking the metaphysical through abstract means in many African arts, which was an important facet of his own approach to art.

During Picasso's lifetime, famous exhibitions like the 1913 Armory Show (aka International Exhibition of Modern Art) displayed works like his alongside 'tribal' objects, delineating the linkages that Picasso felt were beneath him. More

recent exhibitions have continued this dialogue, such as the Museum of Modern Art exhibition by William Rubin and Kirk Varnedoe in 1984 and “Primitivism Revisited: After the End of an Idea” in 2006–2007 CE (curated by students, btw!).

The title “Primitivism Revisited: After the End of an Idea” demonstrates that ‘primitivism’ is now recognized as an incredibly biased and problematic term. Remember the discussion of terms like ‘exotic,’ ‘savage,’ and ‘tribal’ in [“Where Does Art Come From? An Introduction”](#)? The dichotomy of ‘civilized’ and ‘uncivilized’ is a creation of Western history and was a big part of the colonial projects of Cecil Rhodes (from [“Why Does Size Matter?”](#)) and Leopold II (from [“Why Do They Have More Than Us?”](#)). Setting up this difference allowed European and Euro-American colonists to feel better about their practices, since they felt superior to those they colonized, enslaved, and treated poorly. Artists of the Modern period couldn’t yet see past the prejudice of Western history but did see through the tropes of Western art, so long prioritizing naturalistic figures and landscapes. The Impressionists, Cubists, and others challenged the expectation for realistically rendered bodies and realistic landscapes, so vaunted as ‘civilized’/‘high’ art, by considering what they saw as the opposite: ‘uncivilized’/‘low’ art. Check out [“The White Peril and L’Art negre: Picasso, Primitivism, and Anticolonialism”](#) (Leighten 1990) to consider this topic in depth.

This turn involved heavy appropriation without the type of credit we would expect today. It is through research on artists like Picasso that we have seriously questioned appropriation, especially that across cultural/ethnic boundaries, as a way of making art. Are artists allowed to borrow from other artists (visually, in content, in meaning) without clearly acknowledging that influence? Can you do it if you won’t profit from it? Appropriation Art definitely added to that conversation. It continues to be a subject of controversy and legality, as the next example demonstrates.

To understand this next example, let’s discuss an important tradition of Aboriginal people of present-day northern Australia. Remember Emily Kame Kngwarreye from [“Will You Tell a Story?”](#) Her experiences as an artist began from within the Ahalkere Aboriginal community, focused on traditional arts of the desert. In the northern territories and islands off the coast of Australia, distinct Aboriginal communities practiced unique artforms, such as ‘bark painting’ or ‘plank painting.’ *Plank Painting* (Fig. 15.12) represents three figures, with features of birds and amphibians (potentially in hybrid forms), on a relatively small plank of wood. Oral histories identify these painted figures as ancestral spirits who move through Dreamtime (refer back to the discussion of Aboriginal spiritual thought in [“Will You Tell a Story?”](#))



Figure 15.12: Aboriginal Maker(s) of Clack Island, Australia. [Plank painting](#). Before 1882 CE. Ochre on wood, approx. 5.5” x 23”. The British Museum Collection. [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Unfortunately, *Plank Painting* was taken from Clack Island by members of the *Alert*, a British Royal Navy ship that navigated the Pacific between 1878 and 1882 CE. The medical officer of the *Alert*, R. W. Copping, published an account (with at least four editions) of the voyage in [Cruise of the “Alert”: Four Years in Patagonian, Polynesian, and Mascarene Waters \(1878–82\)](#) wherein he describes:

A careful hunting of the holes and crevices in the face of the cliff resulted in the acquisition of some portable specimens of native art in the shape of drawings on old pieces of driftwood, on *Melo* shells, turtle skulls, and tortoise shell. These luckily afforded us good examples of the style of art, and were accordingly, and without

many conscientious scruples as to the sacred rights of ownership, carried off in triumph and deposited on board (Coppinger 1899, 192).

The *Alert* crew effectively stole these items from Clack Island, which was an incredibly important location for the *Yidhu Warra* Aboriginal people. The island served as a ceremonial hub to honor the recently deceased and the ancestors of the Dreamtime. The sailors of the *Alert*, by the open admission of the medical officer, disregarded the rights of the creators and keepers of these objects, scooping them up as treasures of British exploration. The items collected by the *Alert* eventually made their way to London and became possessions of the British Museum.

The 'sacred rights of ownership' mentioned by Coppinger did not receive specific official treatment until well after the Clack Island incident. What is called Native Title in Australia (or Aboriginal Title in Canada or Customary Title in New Zealand) started to develop with the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act* of 1976 but was not effective until 1993 CE with the *Native Title Act*. This law is meant to ensure that indigenous peoples of Australia have rights to traditionally held lands, including the 'property' upon those lands. Rights to land are important and were very long overdue by 1993. But there are other rights that indigenous Australians had to fight for.

Aboriginal artist John Bulun Bulun is known as the foremost voice that "push[ed] the boundaries of Australian intellectual property law" to benefit indigenous peoples ([Hardie 1997, 1](#)). The case *Bulun Bulun v. R&T Textiles* (1998) focused on the use of Bulun Bulun's imagery called [Magpie Geese and Water Lilies at the Waterhole \(1980, ochre on bark\)](#) by R&T Textiles, a t-shirt manufacturer in Queensland, Australia (BAC 2021). By the 1980s, Bulun Bulun was a well-known Aboriginal artist whose work was published, like Kngwarreye's, by gallery owners, museums, and art scholars. Bulun Bulun was especially known for his associations with [Maningrida Arts & Culture](#). In 1997 CE, most Australians, including the people at R&T Textiles, did not consider the arts of Aboriginal people to hold the same intellectual property rights that were attributed to ethnically European Australian artists. Bulun Bulun's design was appropriated by R&T Textiles, printed on t-shirts, and sold without his consent. This was not the first time something like this happened. Bulunbulun saw this as an opportunity to change things for indigenous people and took the company to court.

The first hurdle in these legal battles was deciding whether indigenous art could be considered original, and thus protected under Australian copyright law. This question of originality relates to the 'ownership' of ancestral knowledge and, therefore, relates to recognition of Native Title. To understand the indigenous point of view, law writer Martin [Hardie \(1997, 3\)](#) cites Howard Murphy's (1992) book *Ancestral Connection* and John Bulun Bulun himself stating that "paintings are one manifestation of the ancestral world" because they represent "ritual knowledge (*madayin*)" handed down by the ancestors. Bulun Bulun demonstrated that *madayin* underpins all his artworks, that it is not public knowledge, and therefore that it is proprietary/owned privately. Thus, his artworks are subject to copyright law. The Australian courts agreed and Bulun Bulun's case established precedent for indigenous peoples to retain the rights to their art, like any other artist might.

The official recognition of indigenous intellectual property rights in Australia is an important milestone along the trajectory of global indigenous rights and recognition. In the US, there has been a long history of denying the intellectual property of Native Americans, before copyright law even existed. European settlers of North America started using the Mississippi River as a primary route in the late 1600s CE. Along the way, they came in contact with numerous Native American settlements and observed huge complexes of earth mounds, such as those at Cahokia near present-day St. Louis, Missouri. These earth mounds were not random accumulations of dirt but human-built platforms supporting large wooden structures, like *Monk's Mound* at Cahokia (Fig. 15.13). Hernando De Soto even noted in his journals about witnessing mounds being built in the southern Mississippi region in 1541 CE. Some very special mounds, called effigy mounds, weren't platforms for buildings but were built to represent sacred animals, such as *Serpent Mound* (Fig. 15.14 and check out [an aerial photo of the entire complex here](#)). These were ceremonial gathering places and may have served astronomical observation rituals. These examples were built in different time periods by different cultures but represent the longevity and diversity of the mounds.



Figure 15.13: Middle Mississippian Maker(s) of Cahokia. [Monk's Mound](#). ca. 900-1100 CE. Earth, approx. 955 x 775 x 100'. In situ. National Archives and Records Administration Collection; Public Domain.



Figure 15.14: Adena or Fort Ancient Maker(s) of southern Ohio. *Serpent Mound (on the ground)*. ca. 300 BCE -1000 CE. Earth, approx. 1350'. In situ. Photo by Leah McCurdy. [CC BY 4.0](#).

Any guesses whether the Euro-Americans who encountered these mounds gave credit to Native Americans for creating them? You guessed it... Nope. As they learned about Native Americans and about the land they lived on, Euro-Americans (who definitely wanted that land for their own settlements) developed what archaeologists call 'just-so stories.' These are narratives that feel 'just-so' or 'just-right' because they explain the world according to what we want to believe (not what is actually true). Euro-American settlers developed various mythologies about who may have built the fascinating mounds (ignoring the eyewitness accounts of Native Americans building them), collectively known as the 'Myths of the Moundbuilders.' The term 'moundbuilders' was developed to describe this unknown group of people and to theorize who they were. Maybe they were giants who could easily and quickly move dirt and rocks long distances? Maybe they were people from Israel who came here well before the first European colonists? Maybe they were writers of tablets "found" near the mounds? Nope, nope, and nope. Euro-American settlers were unwilling to acknowledge creatorship, intellectual property, and ownership of Native Americans.

By 1894 CE, Cyrus Thomas published the [Report on the Mound Explorations of the Bureau of Ethnology](#) after years of scientific excavations that disproved all previous theories and myths and proved that the ancestors of currently-living Native American cultures built the mounds. The cultures of the 1890s CE were no longer building mounds due to impacts like European-borne disease, conflict, and migration. Unfortunately, Thomas' work and the work of many recent archaeologists to document the achievements of Native Americans is still not part of mainstream awareness of American history. Cahokia and Serpent Mound rarely make it into our textbooks. To learn more about "just-so stories"

and archaeology, check out [Frauds, Myths, and Mysteries: Science and Pseudoscience in Archaeology \(Feder 2011\)](#). The lack of recognition and prejudice continue to impact Native American communities today.

Many contemporary Native American artists grapple with what has been lost or taken from their culture through the formation of the United States out of their ancestral lands. For example, Zig Jackson (Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Tribes) created *Indian Photographing Tourist Photographing Indians, Crow Fair, Montana* (Fig. 15.15). The photograph depicts a tourist visiting the Crow Fair (a public event) at the Crow Indian Reservation in Montana taking a picture of two elderly *Apsáalooke* (Crow) people sitting in lawn chairs. The woman with the camera appears to be taking a candid shot of the elderly couple, who appear to be partaking in fair activities. If she is a journalist or media professional, the woman would be required to get the couple's consent to publish their photograph but she doesn't have to get their consent to take it. In fact, it looks like the elderly couple is surprised and/or isn't pleased to be the subject of her photo.



Figure 15.15: Transformational Sketch by Diana Villagomez of the original artwork: Zig Jackson. *Indian Photographing Tourist Photographing Indians, Crow Fair, Montana*. 1991 CE. Gelatin silver print. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. [View the original photo here](#) © Zig Jackson.

Zig Jackson was visiting that Crow Fair in 1991 CE and saw this scene play out, choosing to document it with his own camera. As a Native American man, he recognized the presumption of the white woman in capturing the likeness of the elderly couple. To many white American audiences, imagery of elderly Native Americans evokes the 'out of time' or 'stuck in the past' or 'naive in the face of progress' stereotypes ascribed to Native American culture. You may have seen another related stereotype, the 'Crying Indian', in a famous commercial: *Keep America Beautiful* (Fig. 15.16).



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://uta.pressbooks.pub/wheredoesartcomefrom/?p=519#oembed-3>

Figure 15.16: ["Keep America Beautiful: The Crying Indian \(1970\)"](#) upload by reelblack on YouTube (July 4, 2020).

The curated Native American image used in that commercial derives primarily from the portrayal of Native Americans in western genre films, including famous characters like [Tonto](#). In the commercial, the ‘Crying Indian’ represents the ideal state of nature and attachment to the land that should inspire everyone to not litter or pollute. In fact, the actor, known as ‘Iron Eyes Cody,’ is not Native American but Italian-American Espera Oscar de Corti. By wearing a feather, long braids, hide clothing, and moccasins, de Corti transformed into the expected image of a Native American.

Zig Jackson observing and documenting the white photographer in *Indian Photographing Tourist Photographing Indians, Crow Fair, Montana* was turning the gaze onto the image/stereotype makers. Jackson documents how stereotypes get made and perpetuated. As we view Jackson’s photograph, we should question what the woman with the camera did with the images she shot that day, where they might be published, what campaign they may have been used for, and whether they perpetuate stereotypes about Native Americans.

There are many other stereotypes of Native Americans, such as the ‘Redman’ stereotype seen in Disney’s 1953 CE version of “Peter Pan” (Fig. 15.17). The stereotypical and problematic terms ‘savage’ and ‘wild’ often are applied to Native American traditions and individuals such as ‘Ishi,’ the so-called ‘last wild Indian.’ He was a member of the Yahi culture of Deer Creek (present-day California) that lived outside of Euro-American settlement for as long as they could. All of his family members died due to conflicts with white settlers and he was taken into custody by police officers ‘for his own good’ in 1911 CE. He was considered ‘wild’/‘uncivilized’ and was transferred to University of California, Berkeley, where he was studied by anthropologists and eventually became a live-in janitor. He died after 5 years there.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:

<https://uta.pressbooks.pub/wheredoesartcomefrom/?p=519#oembed-4>

Figure 15.17: [“Peter Pan – What Makes the Redman Red \(English\)”](#) uploaded by peterpan3401 on YouTube (Aug 8, 2013).

‘Ishi’ had his community, identity, and personal choice taken away. He never revealed his personal name (‘Ishi’ just means “grown man” in the Yahi/Yana language) and never lived among Native Americans again. Upon his death, his body was autopsied against his wishes and his brain was preserved in museum collections until 1999 CE. In 2000, his remains were returned to his descendants, following the [Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act \(NAGPRA\) of 1990](#). His remains were buried in an undisclosed location. The losses and thefts that ‘Ishi’ endured are unimaginable.

The story of ‘Ishi’ deeply affected contemporary artist James Luna (1950–2018 CE). As a member of the La Jolla Indian Reservation in California, Luna identified with ‘Ishi’ on a personal level and reflected upon what he went through as an exhibit at UC Berkeley. These reflections inspired a performance and installation artwork called *The Artifact Piece* (Fig. 15.18). The body in the display case, with various labels, is actually James Luna himself. Luna would lay in the display case, with his chest rising and falling with his breath (clearly demonstrating life), while visitors read the labels about his personal items, visible scars on his body, and his still ongoing life. He challenged the ever-present idea that Native Americans are dead or dying out. ‘Ishi’ was the ‘last of his kind’ and many representations of Native Americans in museums focus on bones of deceased people. Luna said this work was a reaction to how his community was represented in museums and to the public:

We were simply objects among bones, bones among objects, and then signed and sealed with a date. In that framework you really couldn’t talk about joy, intelligence, humor, or anything that I know makes up our people.



Figure 15.18: James Luna. [The Artifact Piece](#). First performed 1987. Performance © James Luna; Photographer unknown.

Luna was also known for his performance called *Take a Picture with a Real Indian* (Fig. 15.19), first performed in 2001. You'll see in the video below that Luna presents himself in various ways to see how audience members will react based on their perceptions of what a 'real Indian' should be. He continued to evolve this performance, eventually locating it in front of the Columbus monument at Union Square in Washington D.C. on Columbus Day, which many people prefer to call Indigenous Peoples' Day (October 12 annually). To see more of Luna's work, read "[Remembering James Luna \(1950-2018\)](#)" (Hill 2018).



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://uta.pressbooks.pub/wheredoesartcomefrom/?p=519#oembed-5>

Figure 15.19: "[Vantage Point – “Take a Picture with a Real Indian” \(James Luna performance\)](#)" uploaded by Smithsonian NMAI on YouTube (Sep 29, 2010).

The Wrap-up

The historic treatment of and impacts on Native American communities are prominent reasons why we develop land acknowledgement statements like the one presented at the beginning in "[How to Read this Book.](#)" Did you skip over that? We want to make sure you read it and understand why it is there. Our institutions, businesses, and homes occupy land that Native American groups consider ancestral lands, part of their Native Title or ancestral right. The process by which the United States was created involved undermining indigenous systems of thought and stewardship of the land for the benefit of Euro-American settlement. This cannot be forgotten or ignored. For that reason, we provide the land acknowledgement statement for the University of Texas at Arlington, the institution that sponsored the development of this book, again:

The University of Texas at Arlington respectfully acknowledges the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes upon whose historical homelands the university is located. Their ancestors resided here for generations before being violently

displaced by US settlers and soldiers in the mid-1800s CE. We recognize the historical presence of the Caddo Nation and other Tribal Nations in the region, the ongoing presence and achievement of many people who moved to the area due to the Indian Relocation program of the 1950s and 1960s CE, and the vital presence and accomplishments of our Native students, faculty, and staff.

Check out the *Native Land* resource below to consider the native associations specific to where you live, work, or go to school. And check out the other links and scholarly resources to continue thinking about the intersections of art and loss.

News Flash

- The non-profit [Native Land](#) created a map of the Americas documenting the native groups who originally lived in and/or were displaced from locations across the continent.
- Go beyond “What Makes the Redman Red” in [Disney’s 1953 “Peter Pan”](#) to consider how Native American traditions are appropriated throughout the film, and in the live-action adaptation [”Hook” \(1991\)](#).
- Check out the podcast [“Stuff You Missed in History Class” episode focused on Peruvian archaeologist Julio Tello](#), who worked his whole career to reduce the loss of Peruvian archaeological heritage.
- The [Bamiyan Buddhas were reinstated, in a way, via 3D projection](#) to commemorate the 20th anniversary of their destruction.

Where Do I Go From Here? / The Bibliography

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[Thomas, Cyrus. 1894. *Report on the Mound Explorations of the Bureau of Ethnology*. Washington D.C. BAE \(Reprinted 1985 by Smithsonian Institution Press\).](#)

16. Can We Live Together?

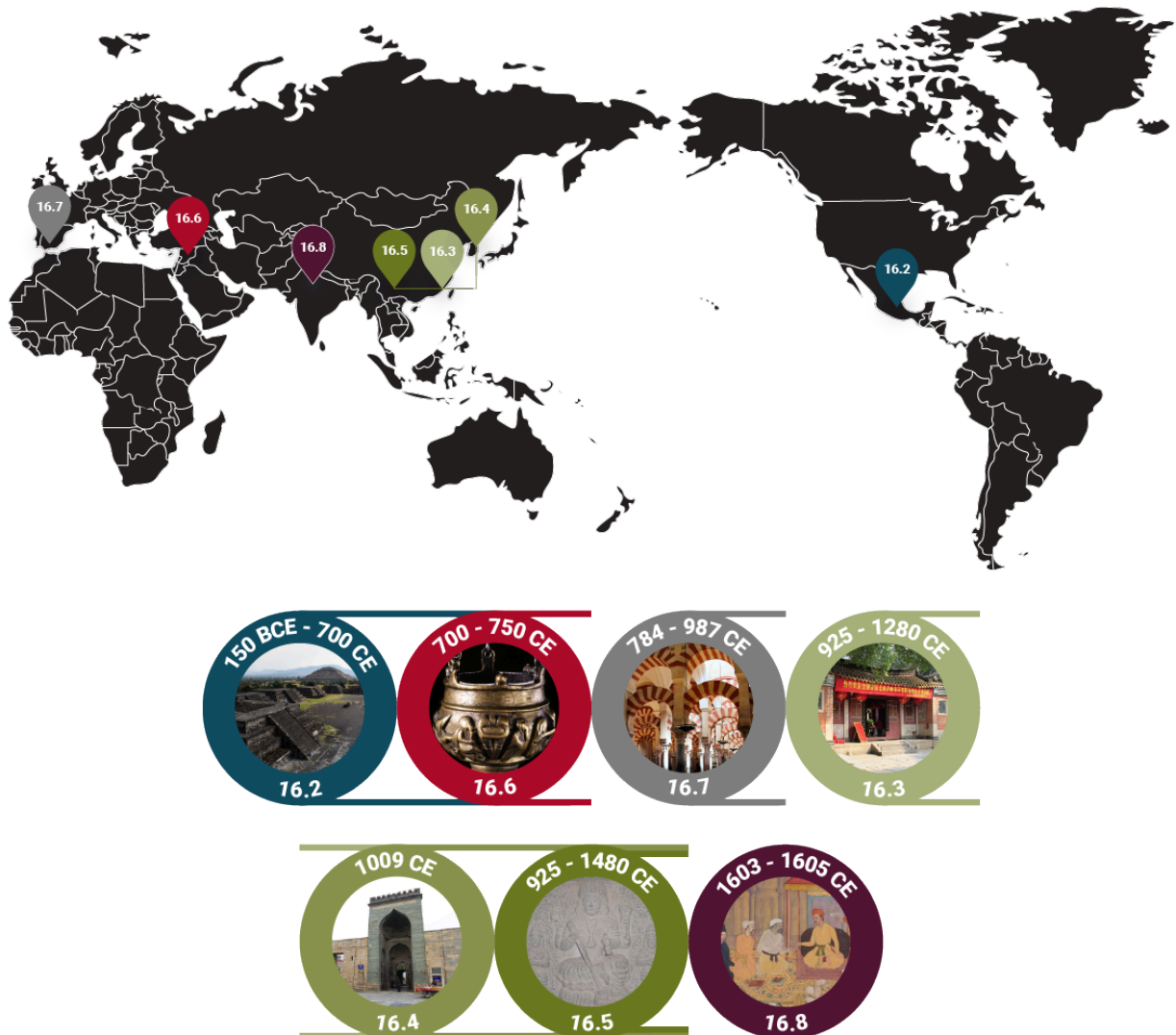


Figure 16.1: Map and timeline of artworks discussed in “Can We Live Together?” by Marizela Garza. Review image captions below for details about each artwork and copyright information.

Can we live together?

We’ll end with this question. It can be a really tough one. Can we accept differences, ‘agree to disagree,’ and be neighbors with people who don’t look or believe like us? Our minds usually thrive when we are in the company of people we know and who make us comfortable. If we don’t feel comfortable, stress can develop. Oftentimes, comfort derives from familiarity, similarity, and shared experiences. This is a long-established thing about our human brains and perceptions. But the world and human societies have changed drastically since our brains first evolved.

We live closer and in more diverse communities than ever. So, what happens now? Do we segregate ourselves into racial communities? That's what 'Jim Crow' Laws did from the 1880s to the 1960s CE in the US and what the American Civil Rights Movement sought to undo. The legacies of segregation are still present in many communities today. Biases of class, faith, or race/ethnicity make living together difficult in all countries around the world. There are some isolationist communities that prefer to be insular and reduce their engagements with the outside world, such as the Amish in the US or the Mennonites who live throughout North and Central America. In certain periods such as the early Edo period, Japanese society practiced quite strict isolationism with few exceptions.

But that doesn't mean that it is impossible to live in multicultural, interfaith, and collaborative communities. In fact, there is a concept for just that: pluralism. [The Pluralism Project \(2021\)](#) of Harvard University defines it as "an ethic for living together in a diverse society; not mere tolerance or relativism, but the real encounter of commitments." [The Ismaili \(2020\)](#) defines pluralism as "an ethic of respect which values the beauty and strength of diversity," importantly recognizing that it is "a work in progress."

If communities are willing to be pluralistic, then the question transitions from 'Can we live together?' to 'How do we live together for the benefit of everyone?' By no means is this an easy thing. But, it is important to recognize that it isn't a novel thing. It's been done before! The examples of pluralism in past societies discussed below don't mean that there was absolute harmony and idyllic living 24/7 but these examples do show that pluralism can work.

Pluralism at Teotihuacan

To start, let's head back to Teotihuacan in the Valley of Mexico (Figs. 16.1 and 16.2). Remember the many residential *barrios* of Teotihuacan introduced in ["What is Important to Us?" Review this map](#). Those neighborhoods were organized around the ceremonial core of the city, according to the social status of the occupants. Royals and nobility lived closest to the ceremonial buildings and commoners lived farther away.



Figure 16.2 (left): [View from "Pyramid of the Moon" looking toward the "Avenue of the Dead" and the "Pyramid of the Sun" at Teotihuacan, Mexico, in 2018](#). Photo by Gzzz; [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

Figure 16.2 (right): [View from "Pyramids of the Sun" looking toward residential areas of the city, at Teotihuacan, Mexico, in 2013](#). Photo by MongeNajera; [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

Archaeological evidence suggests that the residents of at least one high-status residence, the Tetitla complex, were not local people but immigrants probably from the Maya region to the east. They may have emigrated to Teotihuacan as ambassadors on behalf of the king of a Maya polity, such as Tikal (which was known to have a relationship with Teotihuacan in the Early Classic period; check out ["The Arrival of Strangers': Teotihuacan and Tollan in Classic Maya History" \[Stuart 1998\]](#)). These immigrants in Teotihuacan lived there for many years. They established a lavish household,

with objects reflective of their Maya heritage, that would have identified their origins to visitors. Family members were buried with objects that demonstrated their origins, such as Maya pottery.

Farther out in the city, the so-called 'Merchant's Barrio' was home to people focused on trade, particularly with the Gulf Coast region (where the descendants of the Olmec lived). These merchants may have been Gulf Coast immigrants themselves, establishing a commercial base in Teotihuacan while maintaining ties with their home culture through trade. These Gulf Coast merchants also adorned their homes and graves with objects deriving from their presumed homeland. In addition, archaeologists have determined that people associated with the region of Oaxaca, on the eastern Pacific coast of present-day Mexico, established a barrio on the west side of Teotihuacan. These people may have been from the Zapotec culture, discussed in ["What Happens When We Die?"](#) There were several other 'enclaves' of immigrants who over time became familiar participants in Teotihuacan social life. Many archaeologists refer to Teotihuacan as a multicultural ancient city because of this evidence of difference and coexistence. Check out ["Corporate Life in Apartment and Barrio Compounds at Teotihuacan, Central Mexico" \(Manzanilla 2009\)](#) for details on the archaeological data that supports these conclusions.

It is important to recognize that many school textbooks and public media tend to conflate the cultures of ancient Mesoamerica as all one culture. We discussed this in ["What is Divine?"](#) regarding the 'Mother Culture' moniker given to the Olmec. This concept presumes that all Mesoamerican cultures derive from the Olmec and/or owe their cultural successes to Olmec forerunners. That's not the case. There was incredible cultural diversity in ancient Mesoamerica. For example, the Formative/Preclassic period included the unique developments of the Mokaya choco-holics (from ["What Will I Get Out of It?"](#)), the Maya, the Olmec, the Zapotec, and numerous other cultures. Most of these peoples were in contact with each other but lived according to their own autonomy. Over time, those contacts grew and innovations of hybridization grew, too. Eventually, we see the pluralistic urban society of Teotihuacan emerge in Mesoamerica. There were others, too. But much of the original diversity of the later periods was discounted, conflated, or misunderstood by the Spanish and other colonial forces. Unfortunately, a lot of knowledge about pluralistic societies in Mesoamerica at the time of Spanish contact has been lost. They definitely existed, not in absolutely harmony of course, but in ways that demonstrate social success and multicultural cohesion.

Interfaith pluralism in Quanzhou

Another very diverse historic community developed in the city of Quanzhou (pronounced choo-wen-jo) in present-day Fujian province of southern China (Fig. 16.1). Quanzhou is located across the Taiwan Strait from the island of Taiwan. It served as the largest and most successful port city during the Yuan Dynasty of China and continued well into the modern period. Famous travelers such as [Marco Polo](#) and [Ibn Battūtah](#) visited Quanzhou. Arab travellers and traders that settled in this port city nicknamed it Zayton, after the beautiful flowers planted on the coastline to impress visitors. The city became home to many of these seafarers, eventually developing into a multicultural urban setting. Places of worship surviving from just before and during the city's heyday attest to interfaith pluralism within this historic city.

As you might expect, Quanzhou preserves a Daoist temple, *Fashi Zhenwu Temple* (Fig. 16.3) built during the Tang or Song Dynasty, that reflects one of the primary indigenous spiritual traditions of China. The temple is a relatively modest example of traditional Chinese architecture (TCA). Do you notice the tile roof, upturned eaves and roof ridges (appearing like wings of phoenix about to take flight), the brick walls, and stone platform upon which all of that rest? *Fashi Zhenwu Temple* is certainly not as large or grand as the buildings of the Forbidden City, discussed in ["Why Does Size Matter?"](#), but the native character of Chinese tradition is certainly present.



Figure 16.3: Tang or Song Dynasty Maker(s) of Quanzhou, Fujian, China. [Fashi Zhenwu Temple](#). ca. 925-1280 CE. In situ. Photo by ZhangZhugang; [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).



Figure 16.4: Song Dynasty Maker(s) of Quanzhou, Fujian, China. [Masjid al-Ashhab / Qingjing Si entrance](#) (left) and [secondary structure](#) (right). 1009 CE. In situ. [CC BY SA 4.0](#).

Not too far away, the *Masjid al-Ashhab* (Fig. 16.4) is also preserved in Quanzhou, and happens to be the oldest Arab-style *masjid* in China. As early as the 700 CE (only a century after the death of the Prophet Muhammad), *masjids* were built in TCA style in Guangzhou (to the south of Quanzhou), such as the [Huaisheng Masjid](#). Eventually *masjids* like *Masjid al-Ashhab* were built with pointed arches, crenellations, and domed features. The builders of *Masjid al-Ashhab* chose an architectural style reflecting Islamic India and Pakistan, locations from which many of the migrants to Quanzhou

originated. The fact that this *masjid* still stands and represents the origins of Islamic immigrants attests to the pluralistic history of Quanzhou. To learn more about all kinds of *masjids* in China, check out [“China’s Earliest Mosques” \(Steinhardt 2008\)](#).

Speaking of India, archaeologist Wu Wenliang excavated the site of a Hindu temple in Quanzhou during the 1930s CE. He uncovered a carving of Shiva (Fig. 16.5), suggesting that the historic temple was dedicated to Shaivism. The style of the stone carving indicates that the temple was built by people who originated from Tamil Nadu, India (and/or people who preferred Tamil style carving). The temple doesn’t exist anymore, nor do the 10-12 other Hindu temples built around Quanzhou during the Song and Yuan Dynasties. Many of the fragments found by Wu are preserved in the Quanzhou Museum of Maritime History. As the Shiva temple, the *masjid*, and the Daoist temple demonstrate, the history of Quanzhou is pluralistic, allowing for diverse faiths to develop and maintain spaces of worship simultaneously.



Figure 16.5: Song or Yuan Dynasty Maker(s) of Quanzhou, Fujian, China. [Carving of Shiva from a Hindu Temple](#). ca. 925 – 1480 CE. Quanzhou Museum of Maritime History Collection. Photo by BabelStone; Public Domain.

Pluralism within historic Judeo-Christian-Muslim communities

Some of the most prominent cross-cultural differences today, often highlighted in the media, derive from faith

differences. For example, tensions between Judeo-Christian majority countries of Europe and Euro-America and Muslim majority countries of Western Asia often make the headlines. Mostly, the tension is political and does not actually reflect the feelings of most Muslim, Jewish, and Christian people. Tensions have been hyped over and over again throughout history, culminating in poor understanding on all sides. History textbooks showcase wars and political conflicts. But what about the frequent, everyday experiences of pluralism that existed in the past? Let's look at some examples relevant to contemporary tensions within the Judeo-Christian-Muslim community.

After the death of Prophet Muhammad, there were disagreements about who should lead the Muslim community. These disagreements contribute to the divide between *Sunni* and *Shi'a* Muslims today. Over about 30 years, four *caliphs* (successors/leaders) took power, all dear friends, confidants, and family members of Prophet Muhammad (Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali in that order; collectively known as the *Rashidun* caliphate). In 661 CE, a clan known as the Umayyads took power (defeating Ali) and established the Umayyad Caliphate.

Umayyad leaders moved their political capital from the Arabian Peninsula north into the Levant (while the spiritual capital remained at Mecca). The Umayyads first moved into Jerusalem (present-day Palestine and Israel) and then into Damascus (present-day Syria). This meant that they interfaced with, and came to rule over, Jewish and Christian populations. Popular knowledge in Western media might lead you to think that this period in Jerusalem, for example, was a bloodbath... Nope. That false image is influenced by the quite exaggerated European descriptions of the Crusades (which occurred much later between 1095-1291 CE). In fact, Umayyad rule in the Levant was marked by interfaith and intercultural tolerance for the most part, specifically expressed as an important tenet of Islam by Prophet Muhammad. It is important to note that there was considerable internal tension and conflict between the *Sunni* and *Shi'a* communities, but external conflicts were minimal during this time.

For example, the first Umayyad *caliph*, Muawiyah, was given the nickname *al-Mustanir as-Samah* (enlightened and tolerant). One of his wives was Christian and many officials in his government came from Christian backgrounds, such as the father of St. John of Damascus of the Orthodox Church. After establishing his authority through conquest and/or diplomacy, Muawiyah appointed non-Muslim governors to regions that corresponded to their backgrounds (meaning local Christian leaders governed Christian villages). These governors assessed taxes as local representatives of Muawiyah's government and received funding for public works, such as the construction of churches. This period also offered more religious freedom to Jews than had been afforded to them under previous Byzantine Christian rule of the region. The same religious freedom was often not allotted to non-Abrahamic populations (including polytheistic groups), however.

During the later part of the Umayyad reign in present-day Syria, an artist named Yaqub produced *Incense Burner* (Fig. 16.6) for Orthodox Christian patrons. The primary motifs around the bowl feature scenes of the Annunciation (the angel Gabriel's message to the Virgin Mary that she would conceive a child who would become a savior), the birth of Jesus Christ and his baptism, the Crucifixion (nailing of Jesus Christ to a cross by Romans in Jerusalem), and the tomb of Jesus (the site of the resurrection story of Jesus Christ). Each of these events are deeply tied to the Christian tradition. Importantly, they all relate to the Islamic tradition, which recognizes Jesus Christ as an important figure, but do not hold as much weight as the events during Prophet Muhammad's lifetime, for example.



Figure 16.6: Umayyad Caliphate Maker(s) of Syria or Palestine. *Incense Burner (left) and detail of bottom (right)*. ca. 700-750 CE. Bronze, 11 x 10". The David Collection, Copenhagen, Denmark.

Most importantly for our purposes here, the base of *Incense Burner* (Fig. 16.6 right) also features a carving of the Madonna and Child surrounded by an Arabic inscription in early Kufic script. [The David Collection \(1994\)](#), which owns this object, translates the inscription as: "In the name of Allah, made by Yaqub, son of Ishaq from Damascus." It is possible that Yaqub identified with the Muslim tradition but produced this object with specific Christian imagery for use in a Christian setting. It would have been used by a priest to spread the smell of incense within a church. The Arabic inscription is clearly visible on the underside of the vessel. We cannot definitively say that Yaqub was Muslim, since Arabic was the dominant language of Damascus at that time and non-Muslims were known to invoke it. However, it seems likely that a Muslim artist's name and Muslim sentiments about Allah would have been present in a Christian church around 700 CE, without any concern.

When the Umayyads moved to Spain, after being defeated by the Abbasid Dynasty in 750 CE, they established a kingdom in southern Spain called *Al-Andalus*, centered on the city of Cordoba. This move involved conflict and political negotiation with the Catholic establishment in Spain. Despite this political tension, the Umayyads of Spain worshiped alongside Christians in churches for many years. The *Mezquita* (aka The Great Mosque of Cordoba; Fig. 16.7) was used by Christians and Muslims simultaneously until an Umayyad leader purchased the church in a peaceful agreement and remodeled it to specifically suit traditional *masjid* design. In these periods, Muslim *caliphs* and Christian kings of Spain mostly supported *convivencia* (co-existence), whereby the religious faith of regular people was not persecuted, as long as taxes were paid. The violent conflicts were between political leaders, not everyday citizens (except for those men and women drafted into the service of a leader's military).



Figure 16.7: Umayyad Emirate Maker(s) of Cordoba, Spain. [Interior of La Mezquita/The Great Mosque of Cordoba](#). ca. 784-987 CE. In situ. Photo by James (Jim) Gordon; [CC BY 2.0](#).

These political conflicts between Muslim and Catholic leaders in Spain included the *Reconquista* (re-conquering) undertaken by several Catholic kingdoms over time. This started as early as the 770s CE. But the *Reconquista* really gained steam in 1085 CE when the Umayyads suffered a significant defeat at Toledo. Soon thereafter, inspired by the long-running *Reconquista* and spurred by the Pope, European kings started the Crusades as a ‘holy war’ against Muslims, with the goal of re-taking the Levant and cities like Jerusalem.

The Crusader Kingdoms of Christian mercenaries took and lost power over many battles in the Levant but overall, Muslims retained power. Famous Muslim leaders such as *Salah al-Din* (aka Saladin) developed strong diplomatic relations with Crusaders and granted amnesty to all common (non-elite and non-military) Christians. The stories of the Crusades that made their way back to Europe fixated on slaughter, barbarous ‘Saracens’ (medieval English term for Muslim person), and Christian persecution, that was actually relatively minimal. In fact, most of the *tiraz*, discussed in [“What Happens When We Die?”](#), that survive today were imported into Europe during the Crusades, as tokens of the Holy Land. The Arabic calligraphy and design of a band of embroidery became highly influential in early Modern and Renaissance depictions of Christian religious figures, such as in [Adoration of the Magi by Gentile de Fabriano \(1423 CE\)](#). To consider multiple perspectives on the Crusades, check out [“The Islamic View and the Christian View of the Crusades” \(Chevedden 2008\)](#).

While the Crusades continued in the Levant, another Muslim force, called the Almoravids from North Africa, invaded *Al-Andalus* in 1086 CE and established a distinct Muslim kingdom. In 1212 CE, other European powers aided the Spanish kingdoms in their *Reconquista* against this new Muslim power. Eventually, in 1492 CE, the *Reconquista* succeeded in its mission as the Kingdom of Aragon (King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella) pushed out the remaining Muslim leaders. This came on the heels of the Spanish Inquisition started in 1478 CE, which somewhat reversed the previous *convivencia* approach. The Spanish Inquisition did not just target Muslims, but Jews as well, forcibly converting or expelling non-

Christians based on a religiously-motivated judicial process. Many Jews emigrated to the Levant, which by the 1290s CE was back under full Muslim leadership. (FYI: The Spanish Inquisition got its own bad reputation during the Protestant Reformation; check out resources recommended below).

Eventually, the Ottoman Empire provided refuge to Jews who were being persecuted and expelled all over Europe from 1300-1650 CE. During that period, the Ottomans are considered by many scholars to have fostered a government of religious pluralism through their *millet* system, which is an institutionalization of the *convivencia* approach. *Millet* refers to the interrelated Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities focused on the traditions of Abraham/Ibrahim, with each *millet* representing a specific faith group such as Armenian Orthodox Christians, Jews, or Roman Catholics. These groups were allowed to practice their traditions without persecution, as long as they paid their taxes. It is true that the *millet* system required non-Muslims to pay higher taxes than Muslim citizens.

Remember *Hagia Sophia* from [“What is Divine?”](#) (Figs. 4.14 - 4.16)? That structure was originally built by Byzantine Orthodox Christians. It was then converted into a *masjid* by the Ottomans after they conquered Constantinople/Istanbul. They could have torn the structure down, demolishing the Christian legacy. But like most Muslim leaders before them, they followed the guidance of Prophet Muhammad, accepting those of Abrahamic beliefs. Overall, the Ottoman Empire is known for religious tolerance and even pluralism. For more on this topic, check out [“Islam and Toleration: Studying the Ottoman Imperial Model”](#) (Barkey 2005). We must also acknowledge that things changed in the Ottoman Empire around the period of World War I, when ethnic persecution of Armenians led to what many scholars refer to as an ethnic genocide.

Another empire that is particularly tied to religious pluralism during most (but not all) of its history is the Mughal Empire of India. Remember Humayan ([“What Happens When We Die?”](#)), the father of Akbar ([“Why Do They Have More Than Us?”](#)), the father of Jahangir ([“Why Do I Have To Do What You Say?”](#))? We’ve already seen *Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Sheikh to Kings* (Fig. 14.3), demonstrating religious over political devotion. You may think that Akbar was more focused on political matters than his son if you only see images like *The Young Emperor Akbar Arrests the Insolent Shah Abu'l-Ma'ali* (Fig. 13.8). On the contrary, Akbar was very interested in religion and spiritualism. His court was open to diverse religious traditions and one of his favorite wives was Hindu. Importantly, Akbar was probably dyslexic and so did not rely on reading to learn and explore ideas. He welcomed interfaith discussion about spiritual matters and invited visitors to his court to learn through dialogue.

Akbar Presiding over Religious Discussion (Fig. 16.8) illustrates a scene in the *Ibadat Khana* (House of Worship) at Akbar’s capital, Fatehpur Sikri near present-day Agra (Fig. 16.1). This space was dedicated to theological discussion every Thursday evening in which *Sunnī* and *Shī'a* Muslims (including those of the Sufi mystical tradition), Hindus, Christians, Buddhists, Jains, Zoroastrians, and atheists participated. This illustration depicts a scene from the *Akbarnama* and has been preserved with its [corresponding page of text](#) by the Chester Beatty Collection. The text was written by court historian Abu'l-Fazl, the calligraphy was created by Muhammad Husayn Kashmiri, and the image in Figure 16.8 was illustrated by court painter Narsingh.

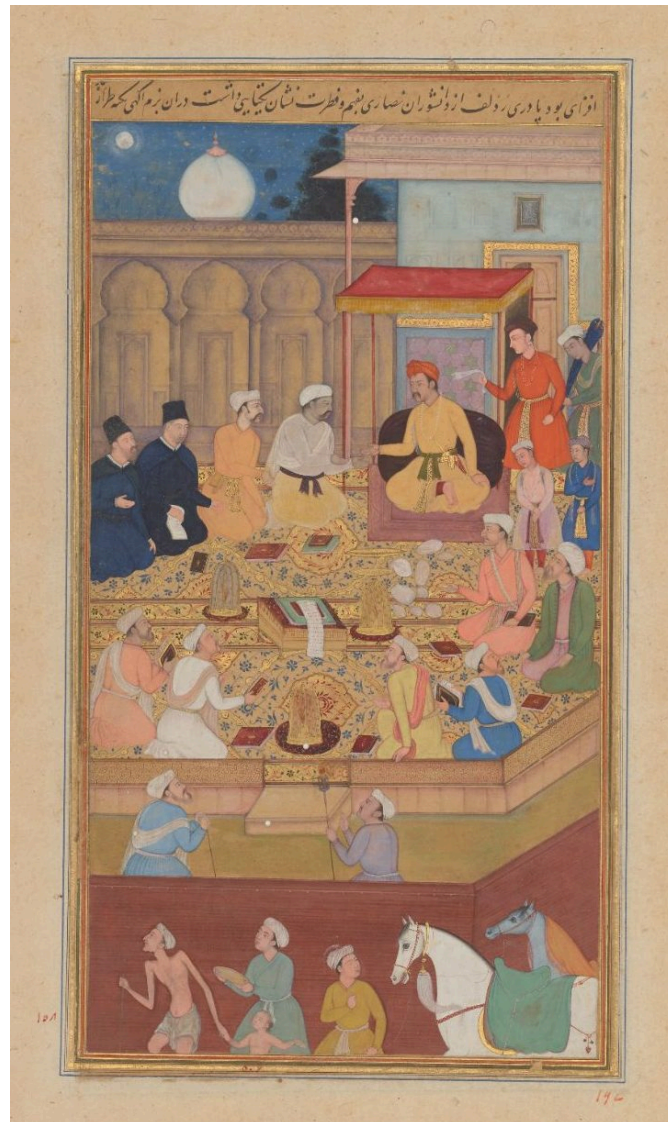


Figure 16.8: Narsingh of Agra, India. *Akbar Presiding over Religious Discussion*. 1603-1605 CE. Opaque watercolor and gold leaf on paper, 434 x 268 mm. Chester Beatty Collection, Dublin, Ireland; [CC BY-NC 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

A group of Muslim officials of the Mughal court surround Akbar (seated in a small elevated pavilion in a yellow robe). Two figures on the far left, dressed in dark blue robes with conical hats, are identified as Rodolfo Acquaviva and Francisco Henriquez. They were Catholic Jesuit priests who visited Fatehpur Sikri in 1578 CE. The discussion participants, including the Jesuits, hold books and manuscripts, several of them open as if the holder just quoted passages during the debate. The discussion seems lively, with several figures gesturing, leaning forward, and actively conversing with neighbors.

Interestingly, Narsingh illustrates four people and two horses walking outside the red sandstone city walls at the bottom of the composition. These people are not part of the discussion but appear to represent the populace around the city. There is a low-status and apparently almost starving man (potentially an ascetic) guiding a child. Then, a man in a teal robe holds an object, potentially a food item. Then a man in a yellow robe with a feather adorning his turban controls the two horses' reins. The adult figures appear to differ according to their resources and status. Perhaps this is a line of citizens hoping to speak with Emperor Akbar about their varying concerns. Or perhaps these are representatives of the

social spectrum of people in Akbar's diverse realm who will be affected by religious decisions or decrees that result from discussions in the *Ibadat Khana*.

The Wrap-up

Religious pluralism or pluralism of any kind is not just a political move. These practices have strong impacts in regular peoples' lives every day. The people of Teotihuacan, Quanzhou, Jerusalem, Cordoba, and Agra lived in multidimensional communities, not without conflict but mostly with the security that they could practice their values and traditions according to their own wishes without the threat of violence. The economics of tax policies made some people rich and some people quite poor in many of these cities. Those are not insignificant facts of history to ignore. But it is also important to remember that co-existence and pluralism have been practiced before, encouraged social growth over time, and led to some of the most interesting and inspiring aspects of our human past. Consider these lessons and how they relate to your life as you explore the media and scholarly resources below.

News Flash

- The Youtuber "Blondie in China" offers a view of Quanzhou that expands upon our discussions of religious pluralism there in "[Quanzhou: Where world cultures meet](#)" (2019).
- Check out [4K aerial footage of Cordoba](#), including the Mezquita!
- Have you seen the version of the Spanish Inquisition from "The Monty Python" crew? Those portrayals are quite extreme. Check out the [BBC documentary "The Myth of the Spanish Inquisition" \(1994\)](#) for a more realistic picture.
- Did you check out the 2008 Bollywood historical drama *Jodhaa Akbar* already? If you haven't yet and are interested in Akbar's religious pluralism, you must! It features the story of Akbar and his favored Hindu wife, Jodhaa.

Where Do I Go from Here? / The Bibliography

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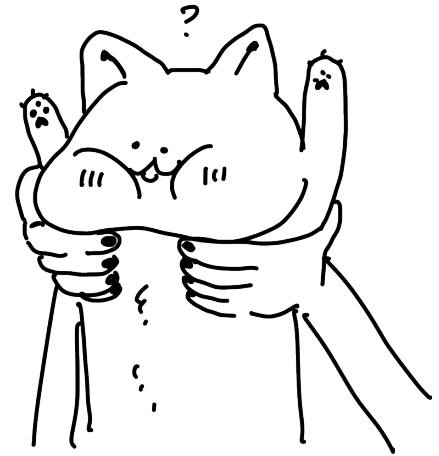
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Hey, you made it to the end!
have this cat.

-Vy☺



17. Neheb is Dead by Emery Martinez-Blas

EMERY MARTINEZ-BLAS

Here's the full comic developed by Emery Martinez-Blas based on ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts and the tomb of King Unas. Make sure to check out ["What Happens When We Die"](#) for context. © Emery Martinez-Blas.













18. We will Never Be Perfect and That's Okay by Celeste Smith

An example student research essay

*** Students, please remember, that any unacademic use of this essay (i.e. plagiarism) submitted in class will result in failing the course.

(Cover page start)

We Will Never Be Perfect and That's Okay

Celeste Smith

College of Liberal Arts, the University of Texas at Arlington

ART 1317: Art of Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Indigenous Americas

This essay follows Prompt 1 and APA citation style. I am a native English speaker and writer, so I am comfortable writing in this language. This is my second research paper. Constructive criticism is welcomed and always appreciated.

(Cover page end)

(Essay start)

We Will Never Be Perfect and That's Okay

Expectations often rule our lives, such as the expectations that come with stereotypes about people we meet. We even ascribe expectations to objects, especially those objects that we make or use to create. As a classical musician, I often place unwarranted expectations on my instrument. Some artists challenge expectations to ask their audience to think before assuming. In this paper, I analyze one artwork from the series *Translated Vase* (Figure 1) by Yeesoookyung to consider how she tackles the myth of a masterpiece and helps us reflect on how stereotypes affect our lives.



Figure 1: Yeesookyung, *Translated Vase*, 2015. Collection and image source: Yeesookyung and Art Institute of Chicago.

Translated Vase began in 2002 as Yeesookyung transformed destroyed pots into assemblages of the unexpected (Kim, 2022). It is not uncommon for Korean master potters attempting to reproduce historical styles to smash vessels because of the smallest of flaws (ibid). This practice ensures the rarity and value of those that survive the reproduction process (Yeesookyung, n.d.). Yeesookyung steps in at the point of destruction to collect raw material for her work. She assembles 3-D puzzles of vessels, sealing the cracks and joins with gold to hold everything together (Yeesookyung, n.d.). The artist states “From the moment of destruction, I obtain a chance to intervene and fabricate new narratives with my own translation” (ibid).

In Figure 1, the gold joinery creates a maze across the light green and white fragments pieced together. The light green ceramics in the top half of the piece are reproductions of Goryeo period (918-1392 CE) celadons while the bottom half is dominated by reproductions of white Joseon period (1392-1897 CE) porcelains (Yeesookyung, n.d.). While the artwork has a cohesive feeling of form, handles, spouts, and bulbous curves stick out to catch our eye and make us consider the source of this material.

Each piece of reproduction carries the burden and weight of what a masterpiece should be. Perfectionism determines which will remain intact and which will be broken and discarded (Kim, 2022). We can see the same thing in each of us as individuals today. We carry the weight of what society, school, or family expects of us. Rejection can feel like one is being discarded, just as a master potter discards what is flawed. That is more than enough to break a person and for them to question their utility and place in the world. Yeesookyung’s practice is about saving these rejected imperfect individuals and making something beautiful from the ensemble. This work is inspiring if applied at the human level of care for those who have been ill-treated.

Yeesookyung’s work relates to that by Ai Weiwei, especially 1-125,000,000 (*Sunflower Seeds* (Figure 2). Both artists build assemblages from small, unique, and seemingly pitiful things. Ai Weiwei challenges the idea of expectations in a different manner, by displaying the dichotomy and tension between an individual and society (McCurdy, 2022b). Are we viewed as a whole mass or are we viewed as different individuals by our governments? This directly connects to *Mao Zedong depicted on a 1960’s poster declaring ‘revolutionary committees are good’* (Figure 3) and how the people of China were being depicted as sunflowers in the poster facing Mao Zedong who is in front of the sun (ibid). Through this poster,

we can see this leader saw the people more as a cohesive and contained whole and less as each person being their own individual (ibid).

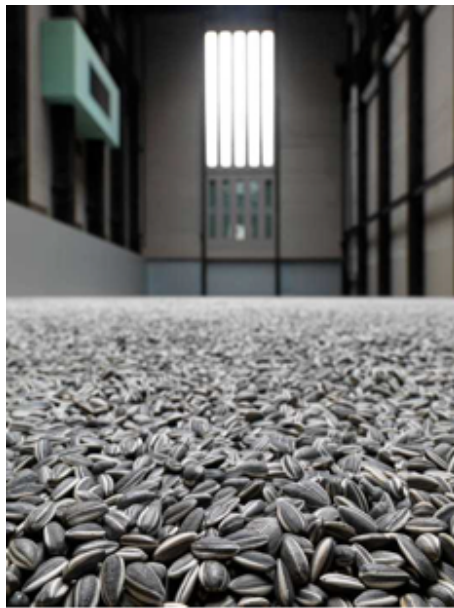


Figure 2: Ai Weiwei. Sunflower Seeds. 2010. Source: Tate Modern Exhibition.



Figure 3: Chinese Maker(s). Mao Zedong depicted on a 1960's poster declaring 'revolutionary committees are good'. 1960. Source: © Universal History Archive/Universal Images Group via Getty Images.

Ai Weiwei's work sparks questions like: what are expectations and stereotypes that come with being seen as a whole and as an individual? Looking at the poster of Zedong, it's obvious there was an expectation for the people as a whole to conform and accept the new ideas that came along with the political shift towards communism in People's Republic of China. Because of this, people outside of China often assume that the people of China are brainwashed because they have pride in their country's achievements (Vulture, n.d.). This is obviously an oversimplification. Ai Weiwei is only one example of someone from China challenging the history and policies of the Chinese government. There are many more. Every person is individual in their way just like each sunflower seed Weiwei commissioned is not the same, and just like each piece of the *Translating Vase* (Figure 1) series will never be the same.

The world is tainted by negative stereotypes, and we might even catch ourselves perpetuating them without thinking. The photo *Indian Photographing Tourist Photographing Indians, Crow Fair, Montana* (Figure 4) by Zig Jackson captures this process. A tourist or journalist photographs an elderly Native American couple, who don't appear pleased (McCurdy, 2022c). Native American culture is often stereotyped as being stuck in the past or blind to progress (ibid). These stereotypes derive from the western depiction of the Native American being the dying people/culture, in need of a

white savior, or incapable of being civilized or educated (ibid). The tourist's choice of an elderly couple as her subject could be motivated by the 'dying Indian' stereotype (ibid). This stereotype was also problematized by James Luna in art performances like *Artifact Piece* (Figure 5), wherein he used his own living body to humanize Native Americans for museum goers.



Figure 4: Zig Jackson. Indian Photographing Tourist Photographing Indians, Crow Fair, Montana. 1991. Source: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. © Zig Jackson.



Figure 5: James Luna. *The Artifact Piece*. First performed 1987. Performance © James Luna; Photographer unknown; Source: chegg.com.

Instead of being seen by westerners as people that deserve their individuality and identity away from these stereotypes, Native Americans are often viewed as this alien-like population that needed to be “studied” to be understood (ibid). There were many instances where Native Americans were treated as science experiments because of this deep refusal to accept that these are real people who simply have different cultural backgrounds, beliefs, and physical features. These harmful expectations and stereotypes can even lead to exceedingly harmful actions, such as the mass deportations forced via the Indian Removal Act (Saunt, 2022).

Too often the beauty of people, their culture, and their individuality is ignored and trampled over because they do not meet the criteria of what powerholders expect. African cultures have often been treated in this manner, as savage groups who can never meet the expectations of ‘civilization,’ and thus can be “taken” as property. Famous examples such as the British Punitive Expedition against the Benin Kingdom of Nigeria demonstrate the violence which can result from notions of superiority (based on a series of unfounded and irrelevant expectations) (McCurdy, 2022c). The theft and sale of thousands of Benin bronzes, such as *Uhunmwun Elao* (Figure 6), and other objects by the British totally ignored the autonomy and history of Benin people and artists.



Figure 6: Benin Kingdom Maker(s) of Benin City, Nigeria. Uhumwun Eiao. 1700-1850 CE. Brass, 12 ¾". Source: Art Institute of Chicago Collection.

The social and political state known as 'civilization' is often considered a 'perfect' state which can only be achieved after a progression towards goodness and rightness. This view descends from European history and does not account for the unique circumstances and differences of experience around the world. Perfectionism is a common human drive, as seen in the work of the Korean master potters, but it should not dictate the perception and treatment of people. We all have seen the ugly face of expectations and stereotypes as well as the effects they have on you or the people around you. Yeesoookyung, Ai Weiwei, Zig Jackson, James Luna, and those fighting for the repatriation of Benin bronzes today (see McCurdy, 3033c) show through their work that one's identity should not be determined by others' expectations. We are more than shattered ceramics, a number without a face, and the untrue depictions that the media puts out into the world.

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19. The Post-Colonial Igbo Identity by Chinamerem Ahuchaogu

An example student research essay

*** Students, please remember, that any unacademic use of this essay (i.e. plagiarism) submitted in class will result in failing the course.

(Cover page start)

The Post-Colonial Igbo Identity

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ART 1317: Art of Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Indigenous Americas

This essay is following Prompt 2, and is in APA format with Chicago style citation frequency. I am a native English speaker and have written a couple of research papers.

(Cover page end)

(Essay start)

The Post-Colonial Igbo Identity

What does it mean to be “African”? This would be a difficult enough question to answer, but it is complicated even further by the lasting effects of Europe’s colonial era. Colonization violently disrupts the core identity of a culture and the people within it. To explore how colonization affects an individual’s perception of the world, I interviewed my 73-year-old grandmother, Celine Nwaturuocha of the Igbo tribe of Nigeria.

Mrs. Nwaturuocha has a very different identity than me, as I am a younger agnostic male who was raised by Igbo parents in the United States, and she is an older Christian woman raised completely within Igboland and Igbo culture. She has spent most of her life in her village in Imo State, Nigeria. When she was born, Nigeria was still completely controlled by the United Kingdom. Nigeria’s “independence” came when she was 6 years old. While on a video call, for each artwork, I sent her the image and asked her for her opinion on it without any context. I then explained the context of the artwork and asked for her opinion on the art and the culture surrounding it. The call took about an hour.

The first artwork we looked at was *Scramble for Africa* (Figure 1) by Yinka Shonibare MBE (McCurdy et al, 2022b). The artwork depicts headless figures adorned in “tribal” clothing, around a table with a map of Africa on it (ibid). As the name informs, this represents the Scramble for Africa, or the period of European imperial expansion throughout the African continent (ibid).



Figure 1: Yinka Shonibare MBE from Nigeria/UK. *Scramble for Africa*. 2003 CE. Life-size fiberglass mannequins, chairs, table, Dutch wax printed cloth. The Pinnell Collection, Dallas; View the original artwork here @ Pinnell Collection/Yinka Shonibare.

Mrs. Nwaturuocha's first impression of *Scramble for Africa* was that it looked very nice. She recognized and liked the fabrics that the figures were wearing, and talked about how the price of those fabrics are very expensive now. When I gave the context that the piece represents the colonization of Africa from a critical point of view, she said that she still liked the piece, as long as there are no "devilish" connotations. When asked to elaborate, she explained that the effects of British colonization on Igboland are not so bad to her, because they are also the ones that brought us Christianity. She feels that non-Christians can do whatever they want, as long as they let Christianity be practiced.

I then explained to Mrs. Nwaturuocha the meaning behind the fabrics the figures are wearing. They are originally wax knockoffs of batiks, a cloth indigenous to Indonesia (McCurdy et al, 2022b). These knockoffs were created by the Dutch East India Company when the Dutch were in control of Indonesia (ibid). However, they were not popular among the indigenous people of Indonesia, so the Dutch sent them to West Africa (ibid). Now they are part of how the outside world views Africa, and even how many Africans view themselves (ibid). Mrs. Nwaturuocha responded that she did not know the fabrics weren't indigenous to West Africa, and this interested her. However, she insisted that the fabrics are still nice.

Clothing is an essential component of a culture's identity, and while cultures evolve and take influence from other cultures, many core aspects of West African identity have confused and harmful origins. This is a major point in Zanele Muholi's *Bester I, Mayotte* (Figure 2), focused instead on the specific history of South Africa (McCurdy et al, 2022b).

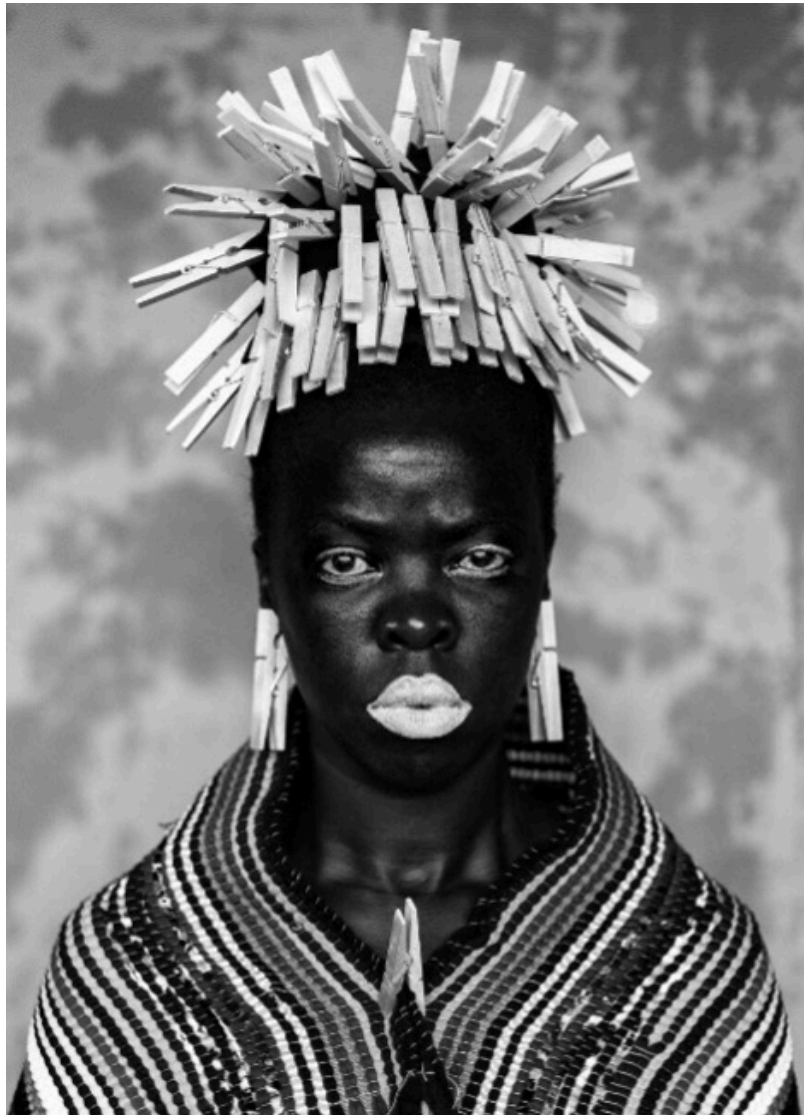


Figure 2: Zanele Muholi, *Bester I*, Mayotte, 2015, from *Zanele Muholi: Somnyama Ngonyama, Hail the Dark Lioness* (Aperture, 2018). © Zanele Muholi. Courtesy of Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town/Johannesburg, and Yancey Richardson Gallery, New York.

This piece is all about the Western perception of Africa and the people from there. Muholi depicts herself as a “savage” being adorned in an elaborate clothespin headdress and “tribal” cloth (McCurdy et al, 2022b). Through this piece, we can see that the elements implanted in African cultures for profit are often weaponized against them with harmful stereotypes. All of this confuses a cultural identity as we struggle to figure out what is “ours.”

The next artwork I showed to Mrs. Nwaturuocha was the *Qur’an Manuscript Folio* (Figure 3) by the Safavid Period Maker(s) of Herat, Iran (modern-day Afghanistan) (McCurdy et al, 2022b). This is an incredibly decorated page from a 16th century Qur’an with dynamic colors and intricate calligraphy (ibid). It is clear from this page that aesthetic appeal is critical in this culture. How one writes in this culture is reflective of their soul (McCurdy et al, 2022a).

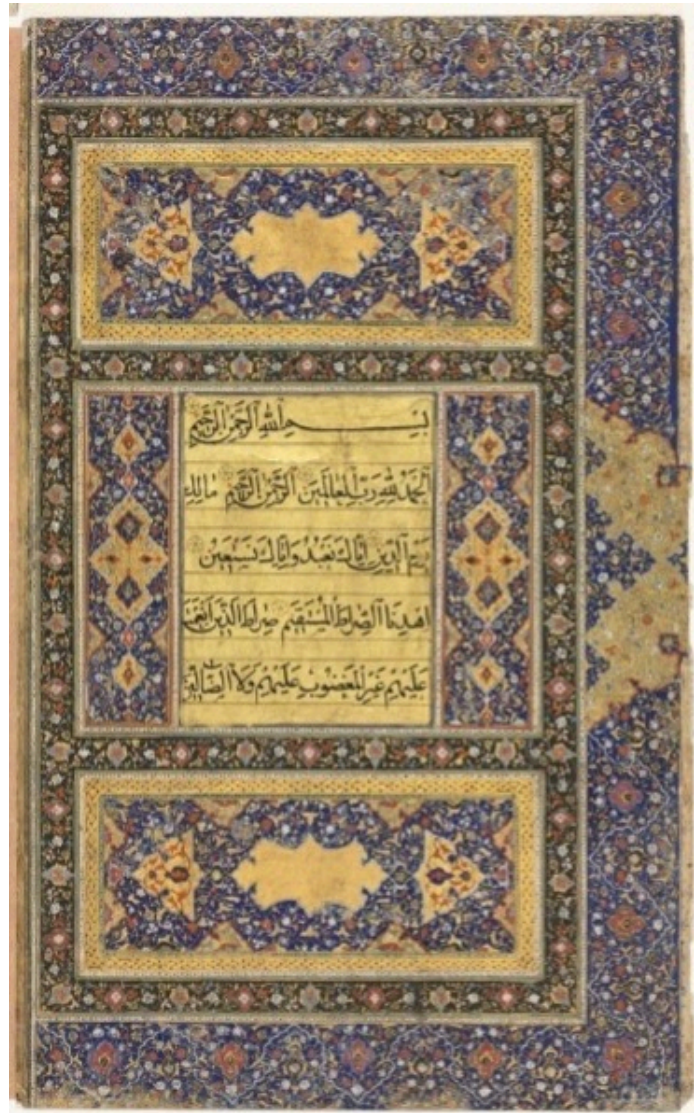


Figure 3: Safavid Period Maker(s) of Herat, Iran (modern-day Afghanistan). *Qur'an Manuscript Folio*. 1500s CE. Ink, gold, and colors on paper. The Cleveland Museum of Art Collection; [CCo Public Domain](#).

When I showed this to Mrs. Nwaturuocha, she recognized it as the Qur'an immediately. She commented that it's mainly the "northerners" that are associated with it, and as a Christian, she's not comfortable with it. The "northerners" she refers to are the Hausa-Fulani peoples that populate northern Nigeria. In the colonization of Nigeria, over 200 different tribes were grouped in with each other with no regard for their respective beliefs and cultures (Staunton, 1999, p. 514). In the mid-20th century, violent tensions rose across the board, especially between the majority-Christian Igbos and the majority-Muslim Hausa-Fulanis (ibid). These tensions led to the Biafran War and genocide, in which over one million people died (Gribbin, 1973, p. 49). Many of these people were Igbo, and many of them children (ibid). They were deliberately starved out by the Nigerian government, who were heavily aided by the British government (O'Sullivan, 2017, p. 17). This period caused many traditional Igbo practices to die out, as upkeeping them took a backseat to staying alive. Violent tensions from the war still exist today. Mrs. Nwaturuocha was in her late teens when war broke out, and is still apprehensive about Islam. Even without the religious context, she stated that she doesn't like it aesthetically because she doesn't know what it means. The violence caused by colonization not only stifles the practices in one's own culture, it also can prevent people from appreciating aspects of different cultures, due to the scary connotations they may have.

In Islam, writing is of the utmost importance because it has spiritual connotations. This importance can be seen in a variety of material outcomes including architecture, like in the changes made to Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, Turkey (Figure 4) and on an inscribed ceramic bowl (Figure 5) (McCurdy et al. 2022b). Likewise, writing was once critically important in Igbo culture as well, and still is in some areas. Uli is a traditional Igbo practice of body painting predominantly on women, by women (Willis, 1989, p. 62) (Figure 6). Special symbols are painted on a woman's body that can represent love, beauty, and other concepts (ibid). It is often done for rites of passage in a woman's life, like marriage, the birth of her first child, or when she obtains a title status (ibid). It is primarily a female practice because of its association with Ala, the female deity of the earth in the traditional Igbo belief system (ibid, p. 63).



Figure 4: Byzantine and Ottoman Period Makers of Constantinople/Istanbul, Turkey. [Hagia Sophia](#). 537 – 1500 CE. In situ. Photo by Arild Vagen; [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).



Figure 5: Central Asian Maker(s) of Nishapur, Iran. [Bowl with Calligraphic Inscription](#). 900s CE. Earthenware, slip-painted and glazed, approx. 14” diameter. Aga Khan Museum Collection; [CC BY-NC 2.5 CA](#).



Figure 6: Young Igbo Girl with Uli Body Painting (p. 1). (n.d.). <https://jstor.org/stable/community.12032154>

When I asked Mrs. Nwaturuocha about this practice, she responded that it is something that is rarely done at her village – only by some people and on very special occasions. She said that she personally doesn't like it, as she likes to be "simple," and when asked why it is dying out, she replied that it is likely the result of Christianity. However, she doesn't see this as a bad thing; in her view, Igbo people "respect the vow to God so much" that they are willing to let go of these things. The imposition of Christianity on Igbo culture has pushed out many traditional practices and beliefs, as they are often seen "demonic." What many Igbos see as "Igbo culture" can be heavily skewed by European influences.

The next artwork I showed Mrs. Nwaturuocha was the Asa Kate Mask of the Astrolabe Bay people of Papua New Guinea (Figure 7). This mask represents the spirit Asa, who is an important figure in the life of a young Astrolabe Bay man of Papua New Guinea (McCurdy et al, 2022b). The Astrolabe Bay people have a tradition of circumcision, and this event is a key point in a boy's transition to manhood (ibid). Boys must overcome their fear of Asa's "bite" (circumcision) to become men (ibid).



Figure 7: Astrolabe Bay Maker(s) of Papua New Guinea, Melanesia. [Asa Kate Mask](#). 19th century CE. Wood. Minneapolis Institute of Art Collection; [CC Public Domain](#).

Mrs. Nwaturuocha initially thought that it was from a Nigerian tribe. She said that people often keep things like this for spiritual reasons, to respect their forefathers, or even as decoration. However, she doesn't like it because she feels that these deities should be left in the past now that we have Christianity. When I gave more context about the mask and the surrounding culture, it seemed to strengthen her aversion. She expressed concern for children that are raised in these traditional beliefs without access to Jesus, and feels that these other deities around the world and in Igbo culture are invalidated by Christianity.

The Asa Kate Mask is visually similar to the "mmanwu", or masquerades, that are present throughout Africa, including Igboland. One such masquerade is Agboghọ Mmụọ, or the maiden spirit (McCurdy et al, 2022b). These masks and the performances that accompany them represent the Igbo ideal of feminine beauty: spiritual, gentle, nurturing, and dynamic (ibid).



Figure 8: Igbo Maker(s) of Nigeria. *Two types of Agbogho Mmuo Masks*. 1900-1950 CE. Wood, fabric, pigment. Art Institute of Chicago Collection ([left](#)) [CCo Public Domain](#); UTA African Art Collection ([right](#)) [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

I showed Two Types of Agbogho Mmuo Masks (Figure 8) to Mrs. Nwaturuocha, and she recognized similar masquerades from her village. According to her, people in similar masks perform these masquerades around celebratory periods, and some use the masks as decoration. To her, these performances and decorations are purely for entertainment and don't have spiritual connotations anymore. Because of this, she is okay with them and even likes them to some degree.

After explaining to Mrs. Nwaturuocha how Agbogho Mmuo is supposed to represent the ideal woman in Igbo culture, she seemed pleased. She stated that most of the masquerades in Igbo culture depict men and concepts surrounding men, so it is nice that there are also masquerades that depict women. This was a more positive response than I was expecting, and it illustrates the importance of gender representation within a culture. However, this resonance is only possible for Mrs. Nwaturuocha if the traditional, spiritual connotations are completely divorced from the art. This is the ultimatum for many traditions in colonized cultures; either they get left in the past, or they survive as shells of what they used to be.

The practice of colonization leaves long-lasting effects on the identity of a culture. The violence and confusion it causes can skew how a people view their culture, themselves, and the outside world. It is important that we all set out to rid ourselves of the stereotypes and negative connotations that we obtained from colonial practices – to see ourselves with our own lenses, and be cautious of the lenses we use to view others. We have a long way to go, but it is more than worth the effort.

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20. The people without faces and the fight against the unjust by Andrea Macias

An example student research essay

*** Students, please remember, that any unacademic use of this essay (i.e. plagiarism) submitted in class will result in failing the course.

(Cover page start)

The people without faces and their fight against the unjust.

Andrea Macias Estrada

College of Liberal Arts, the University of Texas at Arlington

Art 1317: Art of Africa, Asia, Oceania, and The Indigenous Americas

This essay follows Prompt 1 and is in APA style citation. I am not a Native English speaker but I am comfortable speaking or writing in English. This is my first research paper.

(Cover page end)

(Essay start)

The people without faces and their fight against the unjust.

Liberty is one of the greatest things a person could ever have. Education, jobs, and democracy are all things that would not be accessible without it. It is also the thing that many people still seek and continue to fight for. Throughout history, we've seen what happens when communities are stripped away from such power and are left defenseless, a shadow amongst the rich and powerful with nothing to depend on but each other and whatever resources they are left with. Unfortunately, many of these communities, people, and parts of history have faded away over time because of this cruelty. But many are still here, continuing to live and fight for a better future and treatment no matter the restrictions and threats that those in power may hold against them. In this case, we will explore Isaac Guzman's "Dia de Los Fieles Difuntos." (Figure 1) piece as an example of the power that communities and social movements hold as well as why it is so important for us to question and stand up against the unjust treatment of undermined communities.

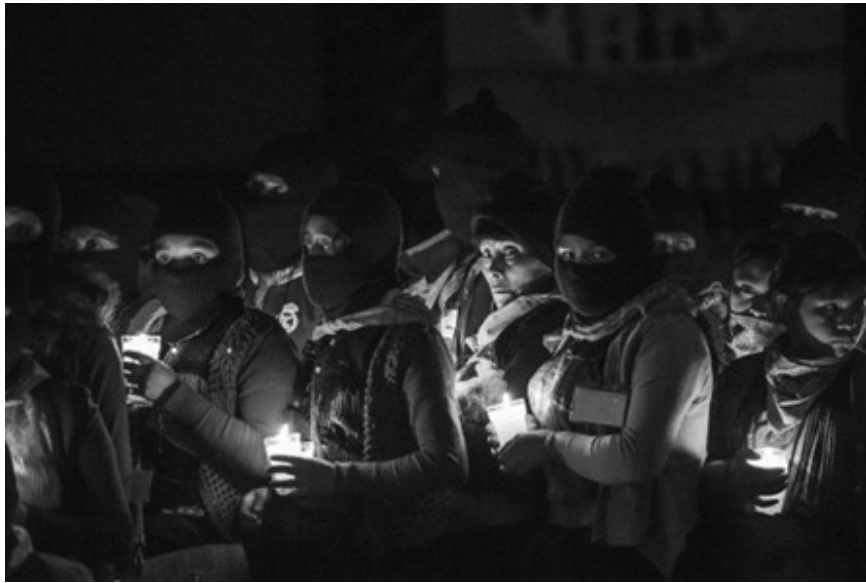


Figure 1: Isaac Guzman, “Dia de los fieles difuntos.” Embers burning in the dry grass collection. Oventik, Chiapas. 2018. Collection and image source: Batsi Lab.

“Dia de Los Fieles Difuntos.” (Figure 1) translates to the well-known Mexican holiday, Day of the Dead, where families and friends commemorate their lost loved ones in a day full of all sorts of festivities. In Isaac Guzman’s photograph (Figure 1) we see the E.Z.L.N community, also known as the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, hold a candle-lit ceremony in remembrance of the people lost in the battles of January 1994 in San Cristobal De las Casa, Chiapas, Mexico. (Guzman, n.d.) The picture is captured in black in white as Guzman captured the moment with a film camera and with nothing else to illuminate the scene but the candles that people hold, perhaps intensifying the feeling of grief that comes along with learning the story behind the photograph (ibid). The people here are seen looking into the camera, their sadness, and tired eyes obvious to the viewer as they are the only thing that can be seen through their masks. The image leaves the viewers with many unanswered questions but mainly as to who these people are and what their story is.

The E.Z.L.N is a political group in Chiapas, Mexico, mostly composed of the Tzeltal, Tzozil, Chol, Tjolobal, Zoque, Kanjobal, and Mame indigenous communities (Reyes Godelmann, 2014). The group was founded in 1983 as a union against the Mexican Government for its mistreatment of the indigenous communities, unfair land distributions, and lack of democracy for its native population (Britannica, 2017). On January 1st of 1994, the group marched into the city of San Cristobal and made itself public, declaring war on the Mexican Government and taking over San Cristobal along with three other towns on the same day. After a series of violent days, EZLN and the Mexican Government came to an agreement and settled the battle. Despite their victory, it was not until years later that a portion of their agreements were met (Ibid). Meanwhile, the Mexican Government had spent its time funding paramilitary groups to take the EZLN down and take back the land. (Ibid). As of 2001, the Mexican Government granted its indigenous populations freedom of autonomy (Reyers Godelmann, 2017), and as of today the Zapatistas control the majority of Chiapas and have put in place their own laws and government to protect their community (Britannica, 2017) (Klein, 2019). Although they still deal with the trauma and loss that came during and after the rebellion they continue their fight. Opening up a world of new opportunities for their members and inspiring many others to join the cause (ibid).

Connections Throughout History



Figure 2: Ren Renfa from China. A Fat and Thin Horse. 1254 – 1357 CE. Handscroll, ink and colors on silk. Collection of the Palace Museum Beijing, Public Domain.

Guzman's E.Z.L.N piece can be related to that of Ren Renfa's "A Fat and Thin Horse." After the Yuan Dynasty came into place in China it was not taken well by the people who still supported the old Government, but alas they could not speak freely about it as any contradictions to the Yuan Dynasty could have endangered them (McCurdy, 2022b). However, a group of scholars now called the Song Loyalists still found ways to support what they believed in and used art as a format of political expression (ibid). Similarly, the Zapatistas faced many dangers from the Government when it came to being a part of the liberation movement. On December 22 of 1997, 45 men, women, and children were massacred in their own homes in Acteal, Mexico for suspicion of conspiring with the E.Z.L.N (Changiz, 2020). This was a clear indication of the many dangers that came with being a member or supporter of the EZLN. But also of how necessary it was for a stand to be made against the oppression and abuse of the native people of Mexico. Nevertheless, the Zapatistas continued their fight and supporters like Issac Guzman have followed them in the process, capturing moments in photographs to help spread awareness about their cause and history (Guzman, n.d).



Figure 3: Aboriginal Maker(s) of Clack Island, Australia. Plank Painting. Before 1882 CE. Ochre on wood, approx. 5.5" x 23". The British Museum Collection. CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

The "Plank Painting" of Clack Island, Australia is another great piece with a similar concept to that of the E.Z.L.N. The Aboriginal people in the islands of Australia often used bark as canvases and painted many of their sacred stories and ancestors onto these pieces of wood (McCurdy, 2022c). These paintings were often held on Clack Island because of its spiritual importance to the Yidhu Warra people, similar to the painting themselves, the land was used to honor their passed loved ones and ancestors (Ibid). Like many other non-western art pieces, these paintings were stolen by an exploration group and eventually sold off to a Museum with complete disregard to the importance of these items and where they came from (ibid). In the case of the Zapatistas, The Mexican Government planned to privatize their communal farms as part of the North American Free Trade Agreement, also known as NAFTA (Britannica, 2017). Of course, the government did not consider how privatizing these lands would affect its indigenous communities and

completely disregarded them when it came to making this decision. Because of its rich natural resources, a large majority of Chiapas's indigenous population works in agriculture as it is one of the few ways the people can provide for themselves and their families (Reyes Godelmann, 2014). Without their communal farms, many of these people would be left without any form of income leaving them to starve, and worsening the percentage of poverty amongst the native people (ibid). Thus EZLN made itself public on January 1st, 1994. The same day that NAFTA went into effect (Britannica, 2017).



Figure 4: Middle Mississippian Maker(s) of Cahokia. Monk's Mound. ca. 900 – 1100 CE. Earth, approx. 955 x 775 x 100'. In situ. National Archives and Records Administration Collection: Public Domain.



Figure 5: Adena or Fort Ancient Maker(s) of southern Ohio. Serpent Mound (on the ground). ca. 300 BCE – 1000 CE. Earth. Approx. 1350'. In situ. Photo by Leah McCurdy. CC BY 4.0.

Similar to the way the Indigenous people of Chiapas were ignored from their own lands and of their ownership over them “Monk’s mound.” and “Serpent mound.” are other cases in which Natives were disregarded and denied of what was rightfully theirs (McCurdy, 2022c) *Monk’s Mound* is one of the many mounds that was built by Native Americans along the Mississippi River (late 1600s CE) (ibid). Some of these mounds were created to support structures, while other mounds such as *Serpent Mound* have more spiritual meanings and were meant to represent animals that were sacred to the Native Americans (ibid). Despite the obvious involvement of the Natives, Euro – Americans denied the idea and instead fabricated mythologies about creatures that could have built the mounds instead (ibid). Refusing to credit the Natives for their hard work, creativity, and land. This denial of indigenous communities and what is rightfully theirs is not uncommon and has been seen throughout history time and time again, and it is exactly what the EZLN fights against and hopes to eradicate. In hopes of receiving better treatment and credit for themselves and for the many other indigenous communities in Mexico.



Figure 6: Ai Weiwei. COVID-19 mask. 2020 CE. Medical mask, ink, approx. 6,5 x 3,75". Private Collection. Photo by Leah McCurdy. CC BY 4.0.

Ai Weiwei is an artist that released a collection of medical masks amid 2020, and although he left no indication or description of what the project was about, it clearly had to do with the ongoing epidemic (McCurdy, 2022b). At the time that Ai released his project, masks had become a part of the everyday life of many people across the world. Many felt unsafe without the masks and urged others to use them, while many others refused to do so and felt that it was not necessary and perhaps even a violation of their autonomy. The usage of masks became a conflicting topic and eventually a part of people's identity and an indication of how they felt about the sickness. Similarly, the EZLN wear masks as a part of their identity (Schools for Chiapas, 2014b). Like other rebel groups, the EZLN have a trademark of their own and are commonly recognized by the black ski masks or red bandanas that they wear over their faces. The masks are a message, an indication of who they stand with and what they believe in. They are, of course, also used for protection as they keep their identities safe from those against them (ibid). Nonetheless, masks are clear to be more than just a fabric but also a part of who we define ourselves to be.

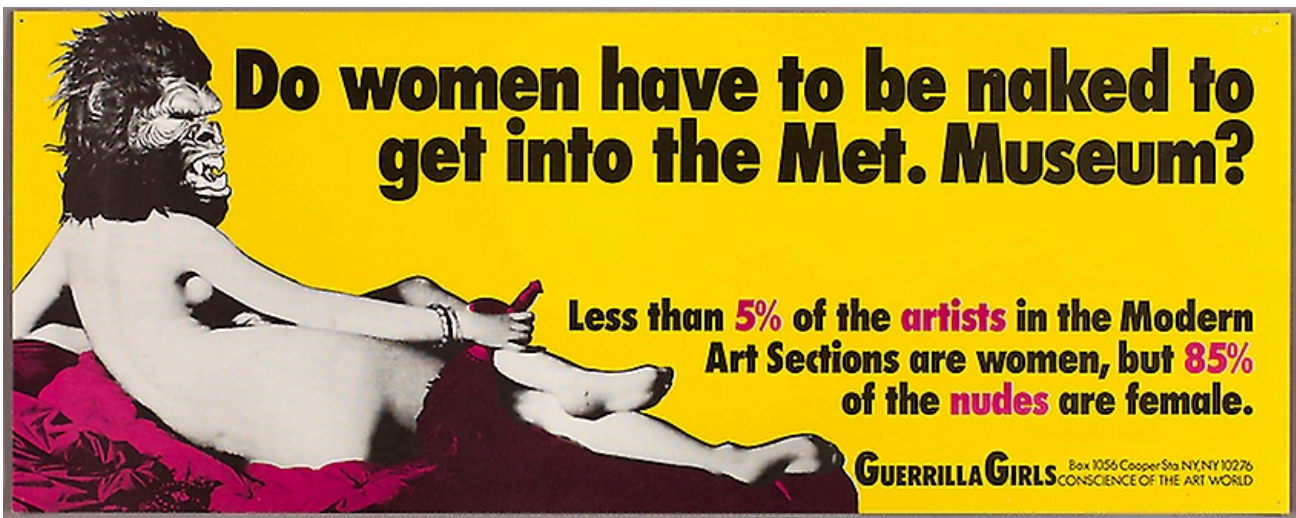


Figure 7: Guerrilla Girls. Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum? 1989 CE. Color offset lithograph on white wove paper, 278 x 710 mm (approx. 11" x 28"). © Art Institute of Chicago Collection.

Women were and continue to be a major part of the EZLN movement. The Zapatistas not only challenge the government and colonialism but the patriarchy as well. Within the group, women have the ability to take on the roles of leaders, healers, teachers, and have a voice in community affairs (Kelin, 2019). They even made up to a third of the movement's soldiers when it first began (Ibid). And it was a year before the EZLN made itself public that they had passed *The Women's Revolutionary Law* (Marcos, 2014). Their first guerilla movement that granted women within the Zapatista movement the right to education, healthcare, income, and positions of leadership as well as the freedom to choose who they marry and how many children they want. As well as have any rape or violence made against them to be severely punished (Schools for Chiapas, 2014). Similarly to the Zapatista movement, The Guerrilla Girls challenged the patriarchy in their own way. Using guerilla tactics, just as the Zapatistas did, to promote their art and movement (McCurdy, 2022b). The Guerrilla Girls movement brought to light the discrimination against female artists and artists of color that took place in many well-known museums (ibid). Over time the Guerrilla Girls broadened their movement to many more social injustices and today continue to challenge the patriarchal ways and open new doors for women in their communities, just as the women in E.Z.L.N do.

The abuse and ill-treatment of undermined communities have been seen throughout all of history, and although much of it has changed a lot of this abuse still carries on in the modern day. That is why groups such as the EZLN and Guerrilla Girls (Figures 1 & 7) are so important, and why the history of those such as the Native Americans and Yidhu Warra people cannot be forgotten (Figures 3 & 4). It is the bravery of those who are willing enough to take a stand against the unjust that creates a pathway toward a better future. The impact that the EZLN has left on the Mexican and Indigenous communities is one that will last for many generations to come, and one that will inspire many others to take a stand as well. That is why it is so important to have their stories be known, and why it is so important to challenge the unjust, as even the weakest of voices can always become a part of something much bigger.

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21. The Tale of John Bartholomew and Slink by The Landromat (Landry Willis)

The Tale of John Bartholomew and Slink by The Landromat (Landry Willis)



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:
<https://uta.pressbooks.pub/wheredoesartcomefrom/?p=1412#oembed-1>

22. Thank you Ancestors!

Thank you Ancestors! by Anecia Smith

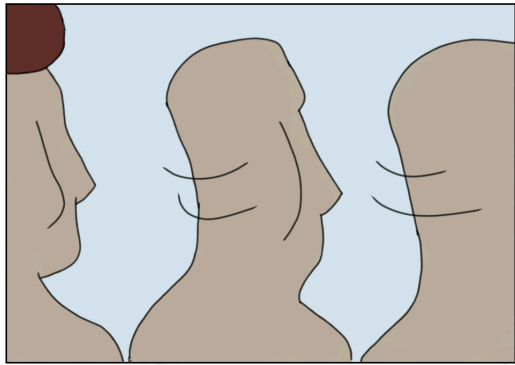
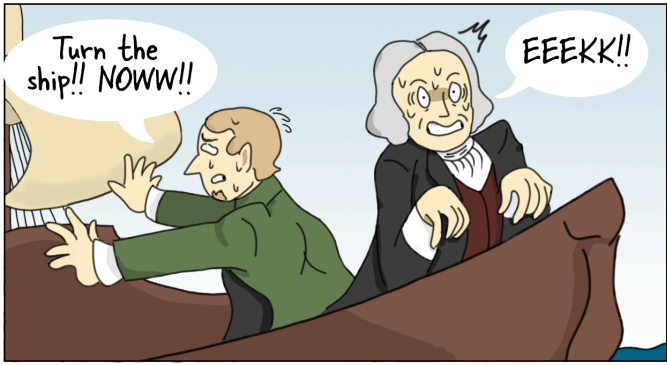
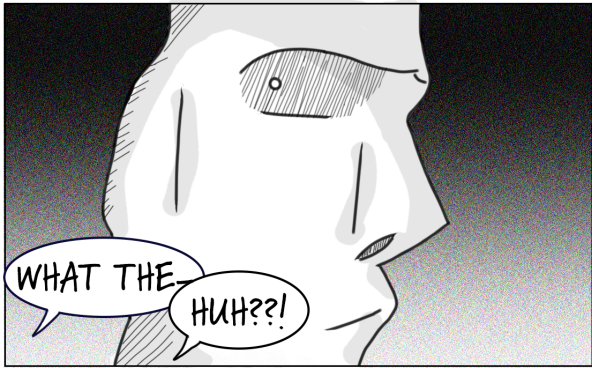
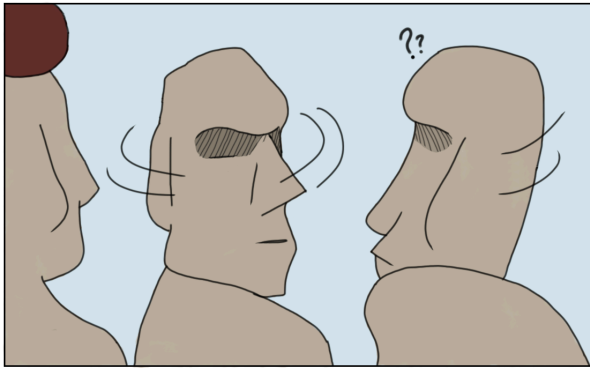
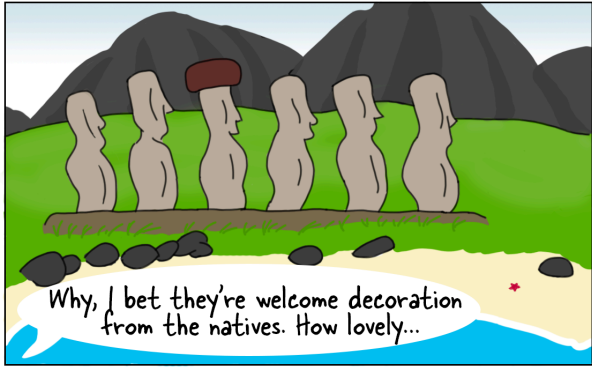


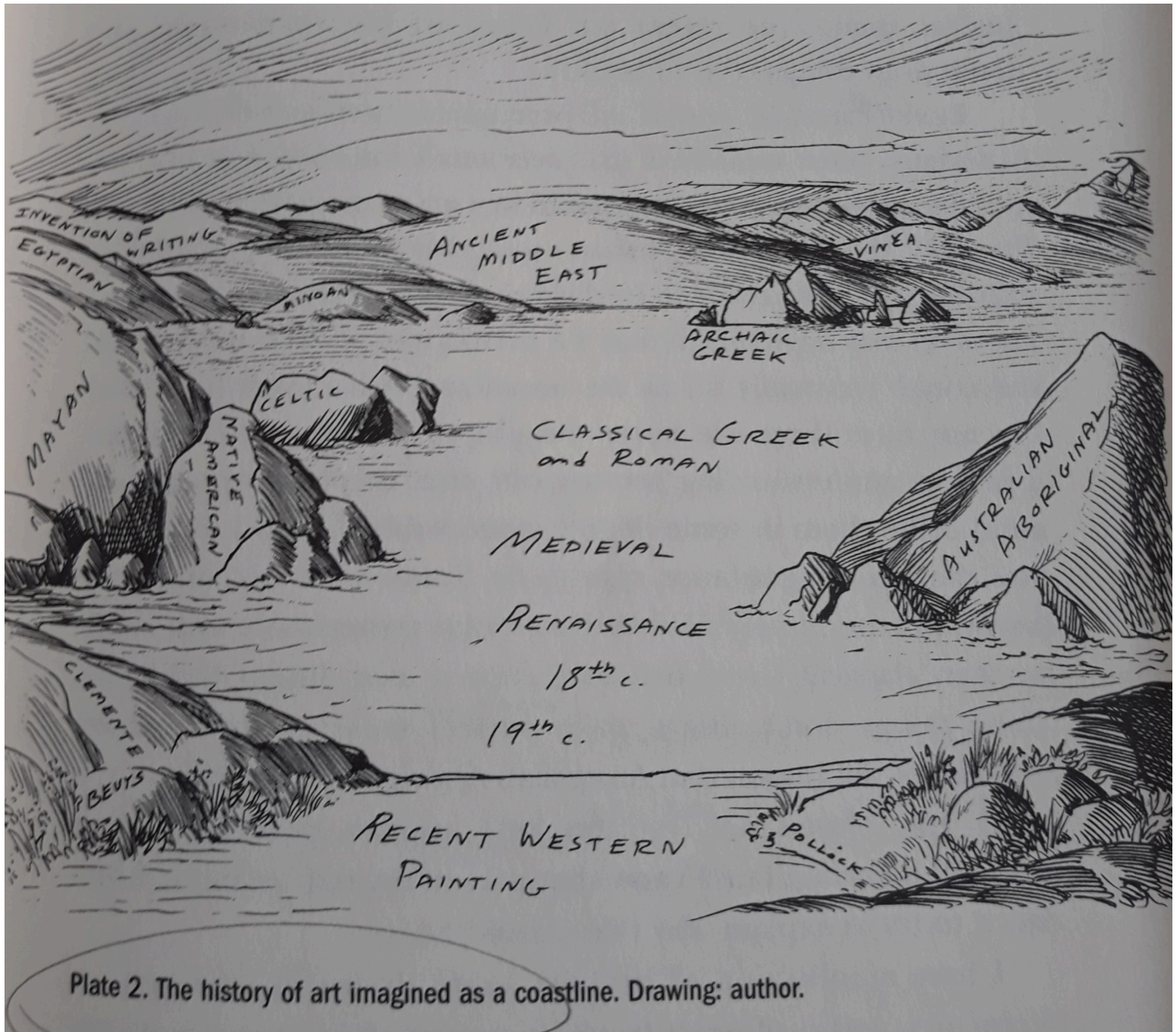
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Mental Maps of Art History

All Mental Maps of Art History examples below are published in Elkins, James. 2002. *Stories of Art*. London: Routledge.



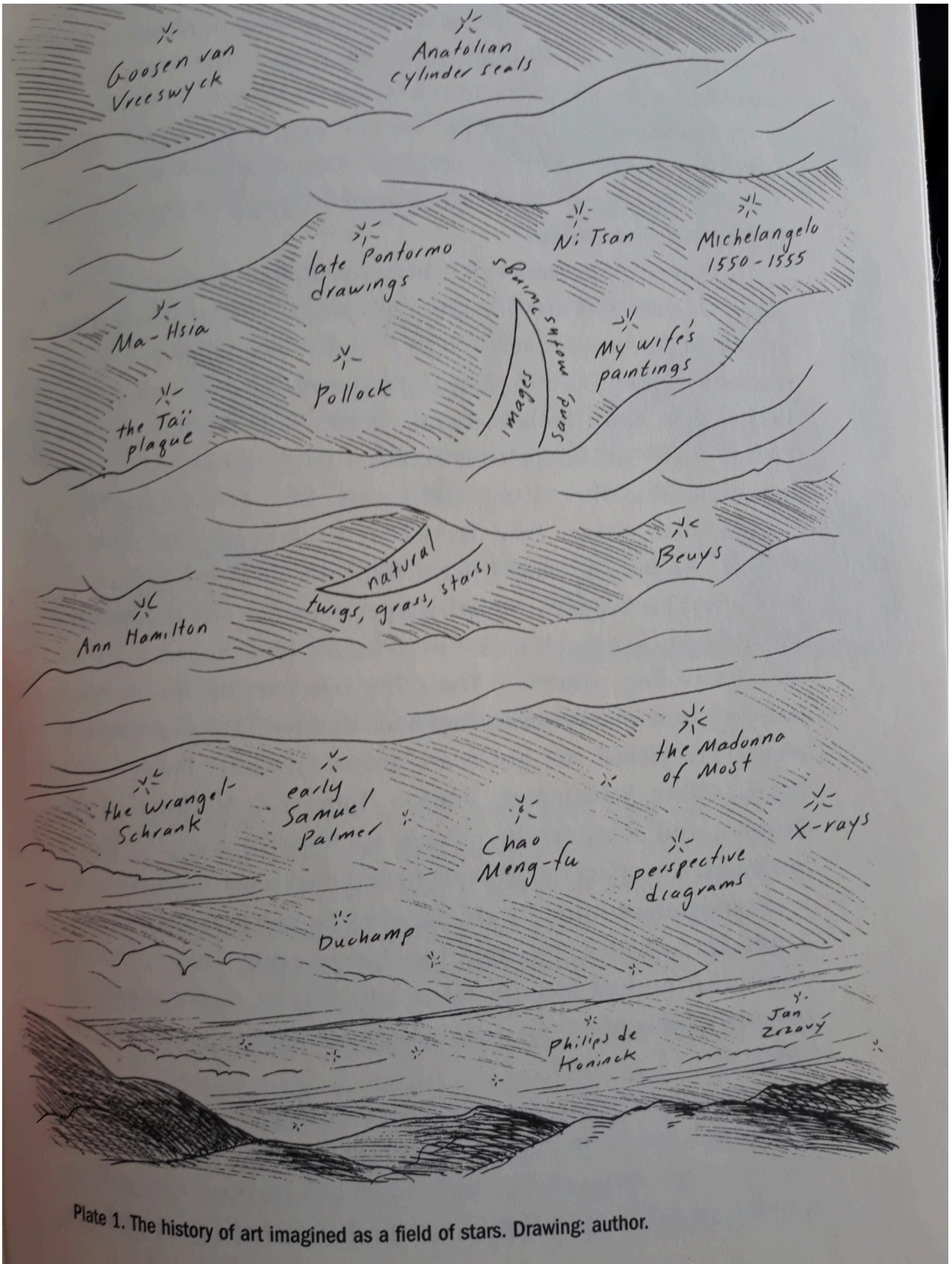
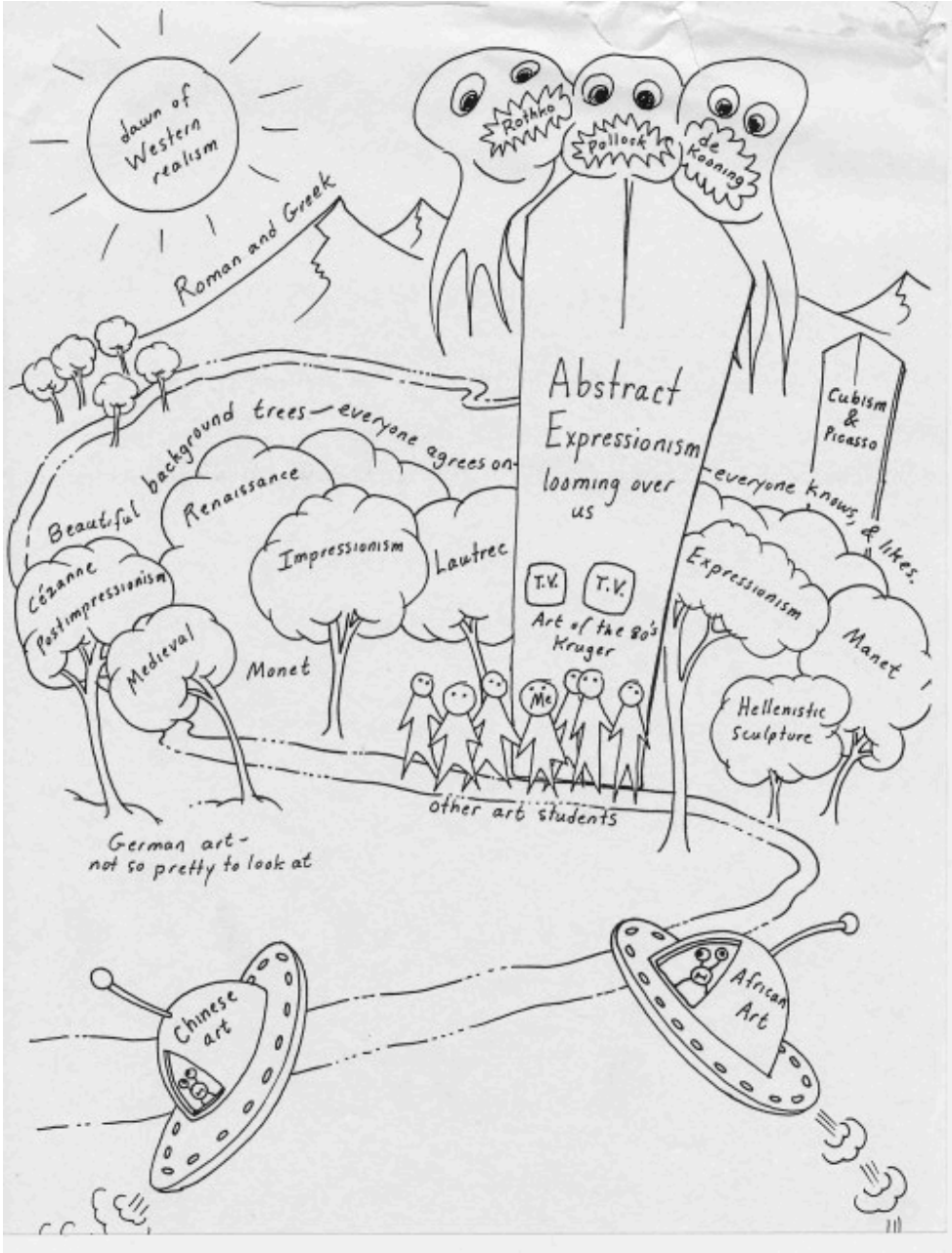
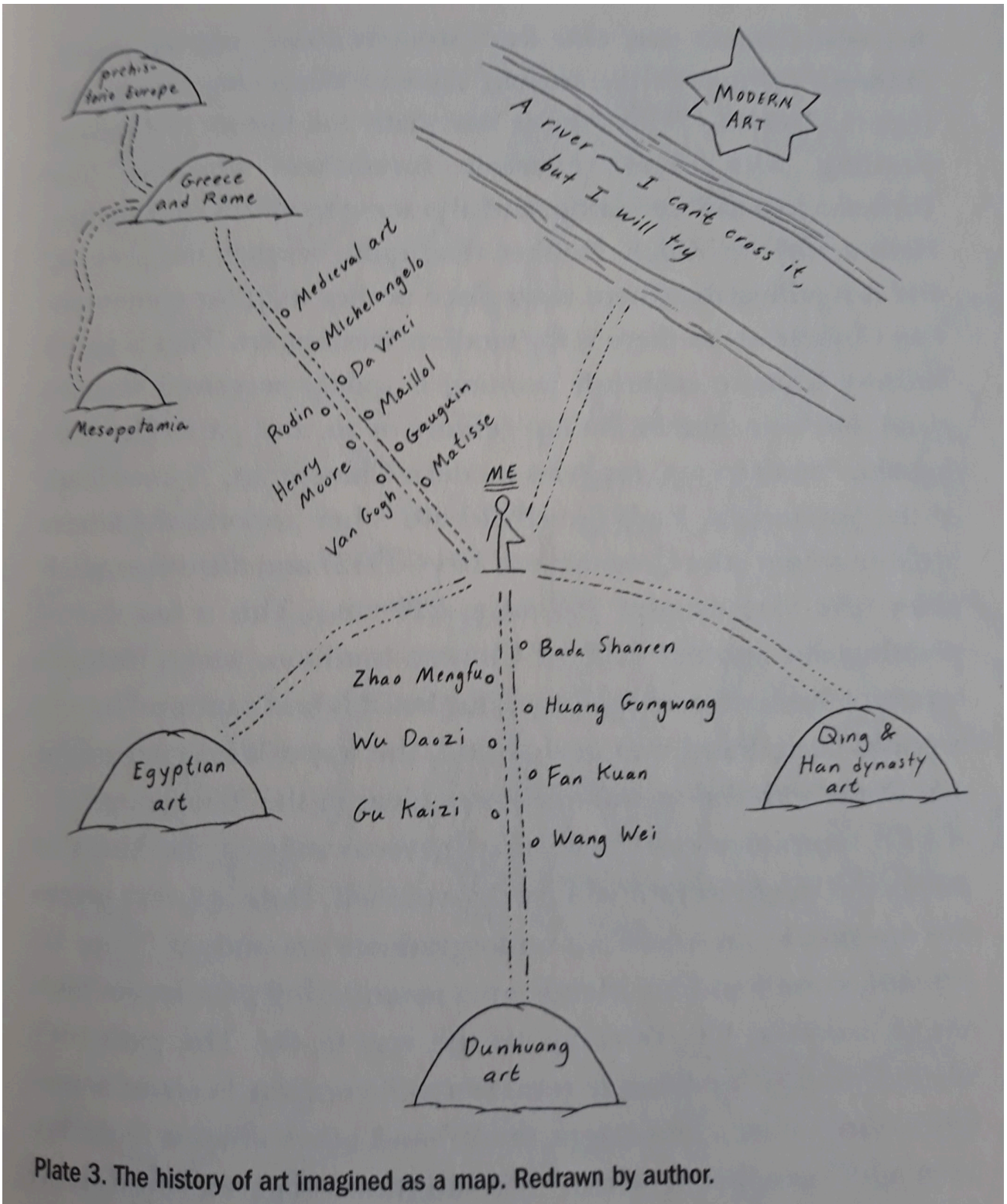


Plate 1. The history of art imagined as a field of stars. Drawing: author.





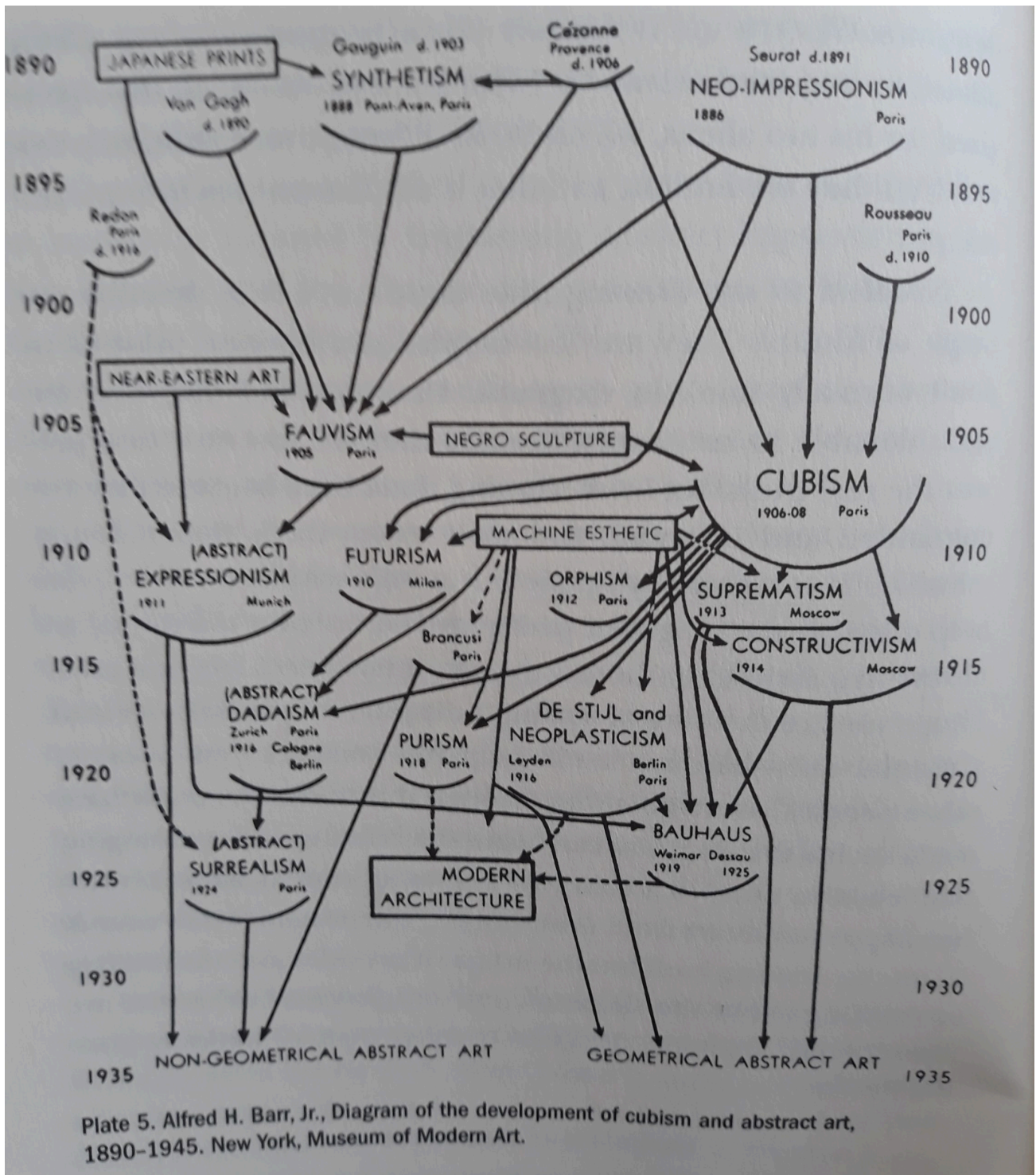


Plate 5. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Diagram of the development of cubism and abstract art, 1890-1945. New York, Museum of Modern Art.