

# Transcultural Histories of Art and Artisanal Epistemologies

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Knowledge to Be Made

Edited by Claire Farago, Susan Lowish, and Jens Baumgarten

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## Coda

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### Collaborations, Transformations, and Continuing Conversations

*Susan Lowish, Jens Baumgarten, and Claire Farago*

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# Coda

## Collaborations, Transformations, and Continuing Conversations

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Throughout the journey to this book's completion, recurring discussions were held by the three editors. These exchanges took the form of fortnightly, online meetings where time was spent deep in conversation about a wide range of topics, from health to weather, to politics, recent events, exhibitions, artworks, ideas, and new or forgotten significant publications. We rigorously debated, shared, and discussed key texts that both informed and were informed by our deliberations. We decided to include here just a small fragment of one such talk, to highlight some of the thinking around themes emerging in our respective specializations, and in the field of Art History more generally. Within the precious space of our mostly uninterrupted, generative, intellectual discussions, a generous, transformative, but contemplative energy was evident. What follows is a brief extract, transcribed and then lightly edited by the three authors, to provide insight into the thought processes and ideas that helped shape this volume in its early stages, and sustained it during its long gestation. Our thoughts have, of course, developed and grown in the fullness of time. What is most clear from this excerpt is that the passion and excitement for ideas was never separated for long from the work that inspired it, and the desire to engage with objects and processes of making.

**Claire Farago (CF), Susan Lowish (SL) and Jens Baumgarten (JB)**

CF: What happens when different signifying practices collide and transform one another? The test case for the visual register is applicable to words, but the notion of a homogeneous cultural world isn't. How are Indigenous knowledges concerned with those types of issues? Also, how is the current focus on Indigenous knowledges dealing with the fact of cultural transformation? We've come into this moment of the ascendancy of Indigenous knowledge/Indigenous voices in a certain part of the field, but it's not central everywhere. European Art History continues its march towards progress.

We don't need to have a unified voice. In fact, that's not a good idea, but to have a dialogical space, a conversational space is important.

SL: I've got two thoughts on that. The first is that we are still going through a period of truth-telling and of rethinking past narratives, filling in the gaps or trying to fill in the gaps, to complete the story, and reveal structures of power. That was the aim of my first book; I found every reference to Australian Aboriginal art as far back in time as I could trace it and then deconstructed the main ideologies behind the key themes informing those texts.<sup>1</sup> It was an eye-opening exercise, and not very pleasant. More than a form of historical revisionism, at its best, this truth-telling can have restorative effects and be the

start of a healing process.<sup>2</sup> I'm not suggesting my book attempted that, and it seems to me that there is still a very long way to go for this to happen in the field of art history.

The other thought I had is about the importance of treaty and voice. Which, in terms of art history, is really the institution making a declaration of what it has done wrong, making an apology, and offering a hand of reconciliation and a listening ear to Indigenous voices. A recent example in the field of museum studies was the Apology to Tasmanian Aboriginal People issued by the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, in concert with the Royal Society of Tasmania, and the responses to these statements by members of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community.<sup>3</sup> These apologies and the responses to them are important historical documents and also very moving, but, as authors Rebe Taylor and Zoe Rimmer note: "Apologies alone do not instigate change; they have no legal or political effect. They must be accompanied by effective truth-telling: respectful, deep listening, active empowerment of Aboriginal voice, and prioritizing space for First Peoples' perspectives."<sup>4</sup> Moreover, most apologies by institutions accompany a hand back of some sorts. That is well beyond the scope of this book. I mean, how do you even do that in art history? It's even more difficult to do in an entirely academic/English/written format and context.

CF: I know. I mean, in *Reframing the Renaissance* (1995) there wasn't much else there. That book included a call out at the end: to write those other chapters. I was saying "I know this is incomplete. It's just the beginning. Write those chapters that are missing, do more along these lines" because my main emphasis in that volume was what if we change the national cultural model, which is about taxonomy and permanent structures, into an intercultural, trans-, or cross-cultural model which emphasizes change and opens up boundaries and always has a historiographical element to it.<sup>5</sup>

SL: For me, it is more an issue of structural change than finding a new model. For example, imagine a meeting of non-Indigenous art historians in a remote Indigenous community. All flying in together and visiting the art center. All sitting together and talking to one another in English, part of a pre-designed project with little, if any Indigenous input in its conception. If any collaboration was garnered on the ground, the foundations would have been fraught, and it would have been more of a negotiation of proper payment for performance than anything concrete or meaningful. I mean it would be quite farcical really. Even the venue, the art center, is built upon the model of a museum, a gallery, an archive, and a shop. It's a model of an historically white institution on Indigenous land. Even with generations of Indigenous agency, it's the place that most replicates the Western spaces these art historians know so well. They are kind of cocooned and safe within a small theatre, which was set up, you know, on that tried-and-true teaching space of ancient Athens and there they sit and talk to one another. Meanwhile, outside the building, the chaos, beauty, order, multilingualism, and bureaucratic disfunction of contemporary life in "the extractive zone" co-exists with age-old traditional practices.<sup>6</sup> Importantly, these practices have not remained unimpacted or unresponsive, but in certain fundamental respects they have remained unchanged and are inextricably linked to the specifics of place and immediate connections.

I want to know what kind of work is being done to bridge the gap between these different worlds and ways of being. I can think of only one example, again from museology rather than art history, and sadly (or perhaps aptly) there's very little written about it, although there is a film.<sup>7</sup> The "Milingimbi Makarrata" was a meeting of museum professionals from around the world and traditional owners on the lands of the Yolngu people in central Arnhem Land, held in 2016. Its aim was to bring about understanding between these two groups over cultural heritage, specifically the responsibilities of holding

cultural heritage from so-called remote communities in museums and other institutions in city centers around the world.<sup>8</sup>

What I found most interesting about this project was that it was held in the form of an Indigenous ceremony, rather than an academic conference. This was perhaps partly because the lead Yolngu instigator, Joseph Neparrnga Gumbula, had passed away in the year before, and many family members were still clearly mourning that loss. But Makarrata also refers to a ritual spearing, a retribution of sorts, and one can't help feeling that the event might have been in some way orchestrated as a face-to-face reckoning with those institutional representatives – self-designated carers of First Nations communities' collections. While there was goodwill created at the conclusion of the event, it is unclear what specific outcomes have resulted or whether there has been any further exchange and discussion between museums and members of the community of Milingimbi.<sup>9</sup> A troubling element is that most of the attendees have since changed jobs and may have taken all that goodwill, understanding, institutional memory, and on-the-ground knowledge with them.

Also, it's making me think what art historians can do to make structural change happen within the discipline of art history. I mean it's one thing to have Indigenous voices, but what of the context? What are the terms of the conversation? What do non-Indigenous ears hear? What is understood?

CF: And I think that's a really important point of allowing people with knowledge, whether it's about the environment or cultural history or whatever it is, to have those people be representing or speaking on behalf of that knowledge, because no matter what we do when we speak for others we're coming at it from our own knowledge base.

SL: Indeed. In the Australian context, there's been an interesting series of publications on Indigenous Knowledges edited by First Nations Museum curator Margo Neale.<sup>10</sup> Her approach has been for each book to be a collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors. Very much geared towards the general public, and covering topics as diverse as astronomy, plants (including medicinal), design (as in architecture and engineering), fire (farming and land care), law, and innovation, these volumes are introductory and explanatory but, key to our discussion, there is not a specific volume dedicated to "Art." Instead, there are examples of what we would recognize as "art" interspersed throughout the different volumes – mostly artworks are used as illustrations.

A chapter in the first volume, *Songlines*, which looks at how memories can be "stored" through art, song and a particular Indigenous connection to country, is titled "Art is Culture Made Visible," which recounts the Kungkarangkalpa (Seven Sisters) Tjukurrpa (Dreaming) and various other notable artworks to frame a narrative. Written by the non-Indigenous contributor, Lynne Kelly, a former high school mathematics and science teacher, this chapter is focused on demonstrating the various ways in which art stores memory. As we know, "art" is so much more than this.<sup>11</sup> But when art is used in the service of explaining Indigenous knowledge in this way, it can become quite one-dimensional. Neale gives some further insight in her introduction to the most recent volume on Indigenous innovation when she writes that "Aboriginal knowledge is an embodied and integrated system" and also that "Aboriginal art works speak for the land and the sea. This truism was recently echoed by contemporary artist and law man Djambawa Marawili, who said, 'Land and sea can't talk; we have to talk for them.'"<sup>12</sup>

So, art is more than its definition, and Aboriginal visual work is more than art. But I feel very strongly that the listener needs to also be able to articulate why it's important for them to hear what is being said. Because too often it's like, oh, here's the Indigenous

voice we need to fill that gap and too easily it can be the end of the conversation, you know, we've got that covered now. But we never really explain from a disciplinary perspective why it's important to us to have that. Why is it important for the institution of art history to prioritize Indigenous voices? What is to be gained? What is the gap? What are the lessons? How do we articulate that? And then how do we respond in a respectful way, rather than in a romanticized way?

CF: Right. I read those views in your paper, and I see those issues articulated in *Arctic Amazon: Networks of Global Indigeneity* edited by Gerald McMaster and Nina Vincent, 2023.<sup>13</sup>

JB: I agree completely. That's one of the main issues to think through. An open art history. Art history is very narrow in its epistemological model. This is one of the problems. I think there are many cases where art history is narrow and delayed in receiving other kinds of knowledge, knowledge systems, and theoretical aspects. My ideas were coming from McMaster's text, which I really like. I appreciate it a lot. I think it is great to have this reading. It was great to bring together important issues that the Indigenous movement and Indigenous art have been facing in the last 10–20 years, but also before that, from pre-colonial and colonial genocide to contemporary aspects. Many years ago, I had this idea that would be very interesting to combine different knowledge systems, including Indigenous knowledge systems. I have one observation to make, though. You know, when McMaster refers to the question of object and thing, he criticizes the European/Western point of view. I just thought it was very funny because if we come back to the question of language, it is a very English problem. You know, in English, you only have thing and object. In German, for example, you will have a third term "*Sachen*." The German word "*Sachen*" can be translated into English as "things" or "items." It can refer to objects, belongings, possessions, or simply general things in a broad sense. The word "belongings" can be translated into German as "Besitztümer," "Eigentum," or "Habseligkeiten." There are also synonyms for *Sachen*, which are also very specific in German: Kram, Zeug, Stoff, Krempel, Material.

That is really exactly what McMaster refers to as Indigenous. So, there is a problem, you know, because they both want to open up to include other Indigenous knowledge systems, but it unifies the European view. So just from this example, *Sachen*, in German it can mean your clothes, it can mean all your belongings when I say [pack your *Sachen*/pack your things] but in English you don't have a word but in German you can say all your belongings but it can be very formal. So, it's a case, and it's a verb used somehow. Just to bring all this together, I would like not to diminish the differences. But what I would like to think about is not to fall into a new dichotomy because it should be more about dialogue. The European world is much more various than the imperialistic Anglo-Saxon system. If you go out of that system, it's not a problem. You know, I don't want to say English is the problem, but the problem is this internalized view, not which people are English, but that all congresses [important conversations] are conducted in English. So, it is an imposed system by this practice. Also, the knowledge systems of the European side can be very ranked. Claire, you said this in the beginning: there is no pure culture.

And just to add another observation, a very specific one, but then to bring it to a broader contemporary context. In the last few weeks, two extensive archaeological sites were discovered in the Amazon.<sup>14</sup> They were found by airborne laser mapping that could penetrate the forest canopy to reveal settlement sites underneath. And they were found on the Equatorial part of their Amazon, exactly where I visited, very near to the Andes. They found that there was a network of different, very complex cities. So, it's a different

culture that has been there for more or less 500 years, and then it disappeared. Now that they've found it, they don't know why it disappeared or why it didn't maintain, and this brings me to the question of very often, and this is also not expressed explicitly, but sometimes it's implicitly, that Indigenous cultures are pure cultures. They are original, and, therefore, they are pure.

CF: Definitely – there's a lot to unpack here. Pure, unchanging, timeless: that's the old nineteenth-century thing again, you know, the industrial-age European longing for tribal purity. It's totally the European construct about the other that the other is pure, an undisturbed, primitive society caught in amber, and somehow like their own imagined distant past. I mean, Europeans created the myth of a pure, uncontacted Amazon to serve their own needs. The archaeological finds are amazing, no doubt about it, but as McMaster's co-author Nina Vincent tells us, the Amazon is not a wild jungle, but a cultural forest maintained by people who have inhabited the region for at least 11,000 years, intervening in the ecosystem using traditional knowledge which shows that the environment is inextricably and dynamically connected to people and the more than human world.<sup>15</sup> To think in terms of possible connections and intersections takes time and work beyond the initial aerial laser mapping and entails collaboration with contemporary Indigenous knowledge holders. And it is important not to treat Indigenous knowledge as another resource for extractive processes. In the same volume, *Arctic Amazon*, artist Pitseolak Pfeifer, born and raised in Iqaluit, Nunavut (formerly known as Frobisher Bay, Northwest Territories, Canada), pointedly asks, what is the return to us when scientists seek Indigenous opinions and advice?<sup>16</sup>

JB: It's like the continuation of the biblical reading, which the Portuguese made when they came to South America. They said this is like a paradise. Paradise is original without sin. And then they had a problem with cannibalism. Cannibalism did not fit. But this is a problem, especially for contemporary art and contemporary art production. I think McMaster's book is really a great text, and it's a great way of publishing it with the accompanying exhibition, all the images, and so on. But you know, he immediately comes to the term it's Art, but on the other hand, it's political when there are other knowledge systems, which I think is great. But you know to use the term "Art" is a problem. And I think, therefore, when we think about using the term "creative process" it fits better because it's broader, but I think these are all things which we should address, not to say we have an answer for all this, but to put the finger in the wounds left to say, "OK, here we need really more reflection, how can you call it?" You know because in the text McMaster refers to visual sovereignty. I love the term "visual sovereignty" because it's exacting to talk about visibility, and it deals with the body in the Amazon context, but it's used differently in the Arctic context. I really loved it there because it's trying to find terms other than "Art."

I wanted to look for an example of a very famous Indigenous artist who committed suicide. He was very famous, and the art world bought a lot of his paintings. And he felt that he was abused. The art market abused him, and he had no solution.<sup>17</sup> He found no way out of this dichotomy, you know, on the one hand, to show his creative expressions, to show it to the colonizer's world, but not to be devoured by it. So, the art market was like, "Oh, I buy everything from you" and he had no possibility to get out of that. And I think that is a different problem, because the art market is also a problem for European artists. I know it's not the same, but you know it's also problematic, and, therefore, I think for the contemporary world and the art market, that's an even more complex question than for formal or older ways of dealing with art.

When McMaster writes the problem is Modernity, I agree with him, but the colonizing process started in the early modern times, and in early modern times Europe had a very different way of thinking about objects because there's a magic in them and I love the early works of Horst Bredekamp, where he has written about this idea that every object has its magical qualities.<sup>18</sup> It's exactly not just an object which has a value, and I can sell it and so on now, but you know that the world was still enchanted (to use the Weberian term). That changes exactly with modernity, but not completely, and this is the pleasure I derive from reading the McMaster text.

SL: McMaster's text also covers issues arising from Covid, from climate change, the great wildfires that attack with such frequency, and the devastation caused by rising sea levels. These are global problems that require collaborative solutions and there are lessons to be learned from history. I mean, that's really putting it as simply as possible and that's why in this volume, we are not prioritizing one approach, idea, or time, over any other. In our book, we're recognizing that there's all this wonderful stuff [*Sachen*] from other cultures and other languages, including other European languages and cultures that can help us deal with what we're going through today.

An example that perhaps illustrates what I mean is a recent work by Quandamooka Artist from Moreton Bay/North Stradbroke Island in South East Queensland, Megan Cope (Figure 11.1).

Constructed from Burogari (Cyprus Pine), Kinyinyarra (Sydney Rock Oyster) shell and stainless-steel trace wire, *Kinyingarra Guwinyanba* is described as "a living, generative land and sea artwork that demonstrates how art can physically heal country that has



Figure 11.1 Megan Cope, *Kinyingarra Guwinyanba*, 2022. Courtesy the artist and Milani Gallery, Meanjin/Brisbane. Photo: Cian Sanders.

been colonized through the practice of ecologically restorative and ancestral processes.”<sup>19</sup> While the work has attracted much interest globally, and the artist has spoken at climate events alongside Indigenous artists from around the world, I am pessimistic about the possibility that art can have any great impact on what seems to be an inevitable, man-made end to our slide into monocultural, plastic, toxic death.

CF: In the case of Megan Cope’s work, art *is* making an impact one oyster bed at a time. But seriously, art is a discursive category – and there are many ways of thinking about art. Art can be a thing, an event, its status as art is always context-driven, whether we’re talking oyster beds or bananas taped to the wall with duct tape.<sup>20</sup> Historically, art has been used to evaluate the humanness of people – something I’ve been studying is how the discourse on art and the idea of human exceptionalism have been entangled. Human ingenuity has long been thought the necessary ingredient to master nature. Climate is another factor – where you were born, was thought to determine your capabilities. These are ancient Greek ideas that had an enormous impact in early modern Europe and beyond. Art by itself – what is that? Changing the discourse by understanding this history of our categories and assumptions is imperative.

Alongside this anthology, over the past six years I’ve written a 350-page book centered on these issues with reference to the climate crisis and environmental degradation caused by unregulated extractive forms of transnational capitalism, a burgeoning topic in eco-criticism today.<sup>21</sup> My line of argument maintains that the discourse on art became entangled with notions of human exceptionalism in the sixteenth century during the initial phase of economic globalization that accompanied European expansionism. Debates since the 1530s focused on how to define the humanity of Indigenous peoples who were not mentioned in any ancient text. The issue was that if they were not fully human, they could not own property and they could themselves be treated as property in the same way as domestic animals and used to extract gold, silver, wood, and other material resources to benefit their conquerors. On the other hand, the ability of Amerindians to be Christianized depended on their fully human (fully rational) status. This tension and the relationship between art/*techné* and moral character runs throughout the European (and European-inflected) discourse on art and political theory for the next five hundred years and it is still with us today.

The classification of the arts was a significant factor in amplifying longstanding neo-Aristotelian notions of human exceptionalism by claiming not only that humans are superior to other animals in their cognitive abilities, but also that entire groups of peoples are superior to other groups based on the assumption that it is possible to judge the mentality not only of individuals but entire societies by examining their shared cultural practices, their arts. The ever-expanding applications of ancient authority for classifying humans and all other animals established in the sixteenth century serve as a major source of distinctions between biology and culture today, and are therefore of central relevance to contemporary efforts to transcend dualistic modes of thinking such as the categorical distinction between nature and culture itself grounded in Western metaphysics.

We’re still living in the aftermath of a slave society in the US. In India it’s the caste system and now Modi’s ultra-nationalism. Human exceptionalism, meaning the idea that some groups of humans are more exceptional than others, is especially a problem in the United States right now and we are very likely to be suffering from these problems for quite a while. So, we have to change the discourse. Today, efforts to bring the social and the biological together in numerous fields are moving beyond the inherited Eurocentric dichotomy between nature and culture. As we discuss in the Introduction and I elaborate

in my own chapter, it has, in fact, once again become an open research question to investigate how biological and social processes are interrelated.

Art has always been an important way to change the discourse, and I encourage us to think of the more-than-human in cultural terms. Elephants have cultural practices, too. Many other kinds of creatures incorporate creative thinking and problem solving, and yet we're still stuck with this Aristotelian distinction between humans and everybody else based on their mental abilities and especially their creative abilities. Remember that at the round table for CIHA when we were talking about Ingold, I asked Jeanette [Peterson]: "Is there a concept of originality in the non-European system of Indigenous knowledge that you have been studying?" And she said there wasn't. So, we have to be careful with that too. I think the way to approach this at the present juncture might be to just point out problems and how careful we need to be, not to define the solutions, but to define the moment of conversation that we should be having.

SL: I would be interested to hear more about the relationship between originality and innovation. Lynette Russell, an Australian historian with Aboriginal ancestry, writes: "Innovation is at the very core of First Nations being and living." She continues by stating: "the term 'Indigenous innovation' ... refer[s] to interesting, ingenious and original ways in which Australia's Indigenous peoples have responded to specific challenges, be they environmental, cultural, social, or the result of internal or external influences." She equates innovation with resilience and resourcefulness, and there is a key material dimension which is also emphasized: "new raw materials, ideas and concepts have been seamlessly incorporated into Indigenous cultural repertoires." Importantly, Russell reminds us that "First Nations' history has an integrity and a significance that sit outside of global (Western) narratives of cultural development and progress." This is despite the less than generous assessment of Australian Aboriginal innovation that occurred during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when "early historians and archaeologists tended to depict Indigenous Australian cultures as inherently conservative and tradition-bound" and "innovation was thought to be the antithesis of Australian Indigenous cultures."<sup>22</sup>

CF: The European history of the concept of ingenuity and innovation is tricky, quite complicated when it comes to art as a discursive category. I appreciate Lynette Russell's revisionist history, but there is still more to the story. At the end of the eighteenth century, certain terms were used interchangeably to describe the astonishing creativity found in many "primitive" arts. *Ingegno*, ingenuity, inventiveness, all connoted native wit or natural ability with various shadings but, in the absence of the classicizing representational skills taught in academies of art, ingenious "ornament" and "decoration" were often presumed to be due to a lack of reason as well as lack of the skill that separated them from the "civilized" peoples of Europe. All manner of art, all kinds of artistry, were lumped together as "ingenious" and "full of invention," but excluded from the category "fine art" if not accompanied by reason, defined in terms of the rationalized program of study offered at art academies. The historical hierarchical ordering of humans based on the kind of art they make, judged by European standards, deserves much more thought in a transcultural framework. I don't want to derail us now, but these thought structures are still very much with us today – though, of course, it's much better when the critical values are inverted, and Indigenous ingenuity is praised without reference to a Eurocentric binary.<sup>23</sup>

JB: I wonder if you are familiar with the work of Viktoria Schmidt-Linsenhoff.<sup>24</sup> She was the first German art historian who not only started with feminist art history, but also with post- and decolonial theory with and for artists in a moment when nobody in Germany wanted to hear it. She was also an early modernist. In our conversations, we

agreed that we didn't want to diminish in any way the violence, the cruelty of the early colonization in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Actually, it started in the fifteenth century, but the good thing about those times was that the categories were still open. This is a very important aspect because I would say the eighteenth century is crucial for understanding when the categories of European thinking somehow became closed; in a certain way, with Kant, they are closed; these are the philosophical categories, and that's it.<sup>25</sup> So, there's an idea that there's nothing to be done anymore and this is related to Modernity. So, I think it's kind of capitalism and all that you said about the nineteenth century, but also it has to do with a knowledge system that is closed from the late eighteenth century on.

I don't want to say, "Oh, it would have been so wonderful to live in the sixteenth century," and I would never change my modern life for one in the sixteenth century, but what I wanted to stress and also to relate to the Indigenous knowledge systems in a certain way, I want also to question that somehow the Indigenous knowledge systems of 400 years ago were the same as they are now. I also don't want to say that there's progress, but they are dynamic like everything else. I remember a historical anthropologist;<sup>26</sup> there are very few in Brazil, but she's really great, and she's written about exactly this, which was very complicated because the sources are all European sources. She said she had no Indigenous sources, so in order to enter a certain comparison from a description of the European colonizers of Indigenous knowledge systems, politics, and so on, and to think about also how the Indigenous society, the Indigenous community, was 400 years ago. Also to bring in the dynamics and acknowledge that Indigenous is neither pure, nor completely stable, because they are modifications, transformations and perhaps of one Society, but not of others. And that brings me to one last point about the format. To collectively question, we need somehow a dialogue and perhaps we can transform our approach. We are three voices within billions of other voices.

CF: That's an interesting idea, I mean, there have been a number of publications in recent years that maintain this dialogue format, as if it were an interview or a conversation. This collaborative Coda, in a very limited sense, does just that.

SL: While conversations from different perspectives can be illuminating, and some recent examples emphasize disciplinary distinctions together with Indigenous perspectives, there remains the restrictive formats of the English language and the academic book.<sup>27</sup> Some of the most recent publications on the topic of Indigenous knowledges are based on oral presentations from research colloquia convened online, but still Indigenous contributors wrote their chapters in English. The authors note: "Indigenous knowledge emerges as a repository of intergenerational observation, and wisdom that can be continually reinterpreted and applied to new contexts for the empowerment of Indigenous communities in Australia and elsewhere."<sup>28</sup> They promote applied research and collaborative approaches, but also use artworks as illustrations and describe them as part of a larger network: "knowledge is traditionally taught and conveyed through rich bodies of ceremonial law that integrate oratory, song, dance and design."<sup>29</sup> Throughout this volume art is most often referred to as "visual designs."

Another recent development is Indigenous-only events and publications – and publications by Indigenous authors that only cite other Indigenous authors.<sup>30</sup> While this is not a problem, as there is a huge weight of writing about Indigenous peoples' art by non-Indigenous people, it is difficult to think about how these measures enable greater equity of access which are important steps needing to be made towards improving inclusivity.

JB: There are also several initiatives in Brazil to rethink the theoretical framing of museums in the context of artisanal epistemologies and the objectives of their publics.

A central concern can be found in direct relation to numerous specific communities, which include Indigenous groups, residents of a favela (they would call themselves communities to avoid this pejorative term), and members of the LGBTQIA+ community in specific neighborhoods of São Paulo. Ilana Goldstein and Andrea Rabinovich have organized as coordinators of the “Chair Kaapora”<sup>31</sup> and the “Chair for Sustainability,” respectively, at the Federal University of São Paulo, within the Pro-reitoria de Extensão (Vice-Rectorate for Extension, which means organizing events for the general public). These new approaches to museums originated not from a wish to shut down traditional museums but to rethink ideas of the public within and/or for and by local communities. They organized five workshops to discuss their origins, challenges, and future plans focused on the following topics: (1) Indigenous museums; (2) museums and peripheries; (3) museums and communities; (4) museums and territories; and (5) museums and local traditions.<sup>32</sup> These projects must be understood as a form of counter-museum and resilience. In their different approaches, it is possible to experience cultural manifestations that already put into practice the theoretical debate of artisanal epistemologies.

CF: Jens, these efforts in Brazil exemplify a productive way forward for museums by positioning themselves as advocates for communities’ interests and mediators between the state and community groups. In bringing our wide-ranging conversation to a close, I want to emphasize that it has been a largely unquestioned assumption that museums are by nature *representational* artifacts that make legible the beliefs, attitudes, mentalities, intentions, or ideologies of people, collectively construed through individual specimens. One of the most difficult lessons to *unlearn* has been the logic of representational knowledge itself. Democratization understood in terms of representation reinforces essentializing notions of cultural identity if it does not consider the *processes* of concept formation, appropriation, and re-signification when concepts migrate to new settings. The concept of artisanal epistemology opens the history of culture without this reference to a norm, nor is the discourse situated in a narrative of cultural development.

It’s useful to keep in mind that all cultural artifacts are irreducibly multivalent – that is, all images and all material things even performances by their nature refuse absolute meaning. A material approach to knowledge-making can make significant theoretical contributions to the ongoing debates on decolonial approaches, especially in heterogeneous societies with complex relationships to authority. They raise new questions and elicit attention to vocabulary to describe these processes unavailable in the framework of a homogeneous national culture that was built into the foundations of all the human and social sciences professionalized in nineteenth-century Europe. The “trans-” in transculturation *contests* the discursive category of “culture” as it has been used to designate the life world of groups as internally cohesive and linguistically homogenous spheres. Instead, “transcultural” focuses on the dialogical processes through which forms emerge in local contexts within circuits of exchange.

SL: Conceptualizing “artisanal epistemology” in transcultural terms means recognizing that Indigenous knowledge is embedded in skills that are passed down, applied in everyday situations, tied to ways of living, and intimately related to spiritual systems that are deeply connected to Country. These activities are the equivalent of knowledges in the western episteme.

CF: While in many instances across the globe the systems of handing on knowledge have been severely crippled by events too catastrophic to comprehend, there remain strong relations between cultural memory and making. The world cannot be reduced to a mere resource if subject and object are deeply interconnected. Such an approach to

epistemology requires that the object of knowledge be pictured as an actor and an agent, not a passive screen, ground, or resource: the world encountered in such knowledge projects is an active entity whose boundaries are not fixed.

Agency has been the subtext throughout our conversation and agency is key to all the studies in *Knowledge to Be Made*. The move to grant agency to material objects has placed the epistemology of situated knowledges at the center of discussion since the late 1980s. In the words of Donna Haraway, a leading voice in eco-criticism today whose feminist approach to science and technology studies resonated far beyond her own field, objectivity has to derive from particular and specific embodiments.<sup>33</sup> Haraway's concept of "situated knowledges," like more recent approaches to pluriversality and worldmaking, means that objectivity is only possible through the joining of partial views into a collective subject position that creates communities based on concrete circumstances.<sup>34</sup>

JB: These ideas of Haraway are very close to those of José Luis Martínez. His work aligns with themes central to perspectivism – such as the coexistence of multiple worldviews and the significance of Indigenous epistemologies.<sup>35</sup> Martínez's research delves into Indigenous narratives and visual representations, exploring how Andean communities construct and express their identities and histories. However, he never indicates it directly. What would all this mean for art history? Perhaps a transcultural art history would not be able to overcome its implicit ontological dualism, whereas transcultural art histories in the plural would be able to do so by considering altogether different ontologies and epistemologies – and we would not want to get rid of thinking about categories of creativity completely, because epistemic systems are necessary for understanding questions of visibility, materiality, and sensorial regimes.

\* \* \*

Subjectivity is performed in and through the materiality of knowledge practices of many kinds. Our conversation focused on the futurity of Indigeneity, but all the chapters in this book recognize difference in a relational way, although they do this in radically different contexts. When we began this project, with the initial call for papers, we did not provide a definition of artisanal epistemologies. We wanted to see how people responded to that call, and we were delighted to see just how many different connections, similarities and resonances were created through bringing all the various topics, objects, materials and makers into contact/relation with each other. Now we invite our readers to find their own connections and add their own stories.

## Notes

- 1 Susan Lowish, *Rethinking Australia's Art History: The Challenge of Aboriginal Art* (Routledge, 2018).
- 2 Joanne Willmot, Jen Hamer, Damien W. Riggs, and Shoshana Rosenberg, "Healing from Intergenerational Trauma: Narratives of Connection, Belonging, and Truth-Telling in Two Aboriginal Healing Camps," *Settler Colonial Studies* 14, no. 2 (2023): 125–139, doi:10.1080/2201473X.2023.2260547.
- 3 See: TMAG, "Apology to Tasmanian Aboriginal People," Accessed 5 December, 2024. [https://www.tmag.tas.gov.au/about\\_us/apology\\_to\\_tasmanian\\_aboriginal\\_people](https://www.tmag.tas.gov.au/about_us/apology_to_tasmanian_aboriginal_people); Royal Society of Tasmania Apology to Aboriginal People of Tasmania, accessed December 5, 2024. <https://rst.org.au/royal-society-of-tasmania-apology-to-aboriginal-people-of-tasmania/> and Esme Ward, 2020. "The Tide of Change: Open Letter from Our Director." Manchester, UK: Manchester Museum. Accessed December 5, 2024. <https://documents.manchester.ac.uk/DocuInfo.aspx?DocID=46431>.

- 4 Zoe Rimmer and Rebe Taylor, “An Analysis of the 2021 Apologies by the Royal Society of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery to the Tasmanian Aboriginal Community,” *Australian Historical Studies* 54, no. 1 (2022): 77–90, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1031461X.2022.2117390>.
- 5 Claire Farago, ed., *Reframing the Renaissance: Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America, 1450–1650* (Yale University Press, 1995).
- 6 Macarena Gómez-Barris, *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives* (Duke University Press, 2017).
- 7 ALPA, “Makarrata,” YouTube, accessed 6 December, 2024. [https://youtu.be/66U9-MyWZPE?si=9-nIOS-1L\\_EWE3Wh](https://youtu.be/66U9-MyWZPE?si=9-nIOS-1L_EWE3Wh).
- 8 Lapulung Dhamarrandji, Stuart Porteous, Lindy Allen, Louise Hamby, eds. *Makarrata: Bringing the Past into the Future: Milingimbi, 11–14 August 2016* (Australian National University and Museum Victoria, 2016).
- 9 Beatrice Voirol, “Decolonization in the Field? Basel – Milingimbi Back and Forth,” *Swiss Journal of Sociocultural Anthropology* 24 (2019): 48–57.
- 10 The series of eight volumes begins with Margo Neale and Lynne Kelly, *Songlines* (Thames and Hudson Australia, 2020).
- 11 Donald Preziosi and Claire J. Farago, *Art Is Not What You Think It Is* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).
- 12 Margo Neale, “Introduction” in Marcia Langton and Aaron Corn, *First Knowledges Law: The Way of the Ancestors* (Thames and Hudson Australia 2023). Accessed December 3, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, p.11.
- 13 Gerald McMaster and Nina Vincent, *Arctic Amazon: Networks of Global Indigeneity* (Goose Lane Editions and Wapatah Centre for Indigenous Visual Knowledge, 2023).
- 14 H. Prümers, C.J. Betancourt, J. Iriarte, et al. “Lidar reveals pre-Hispanic low-density urbanism in the Bolivian Amazon,” *Nature* 606 (2022): 325–328, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-022-04780-4>.
- 15 Nina Vincent, in McMaster and Vincent, *Arctic Amazon*, 85, with further references.
- 16 Pitseolak Pfeifer, “Becoming Intimate,” in McMaster and Vincent, *Arctic Amazon*, 162. See further discussion in Farago, *Writing Borderless Histories of Art* (Routledge, 2025), Fugue 5.
- 17 See further the chapter in this volume by Jens Baumgarten and Vinicius Spricigo.
- 18 For his early approaches to the socio-political background of iconoclasm, see Horst Bredekamp, *Kunst als Medium sozialer Konflikte. Bilderkämpfe von der Spätantike bis zur Hussitenrevolution* (Suhrkamp Verlag, 1975); and Horst Bredekamp, *Vicino Orsini und der Heilige Wald von Bomarzo. Ein Fürst als Künstler und Anarchist* (with photographs by Wolfram Janzer), 2 vols. (Wernersche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1985). See further, Horst Bredekamp, *Image Acts: A Systematic Approach to Visual Agency*, ed. Elizabeth Clegg (Walter de Gruyter, 2018).
- 19 See: Megan Cope, “Kinyingarra Guwinyanba” <https://www.megancope.com.au/works/kinyingarra-guwinyanba>.
- 20 In the tradition of Marcel Duchamp’s iconic mounted and signed urinal (1917), Maurizio Cattelan’s conceptual artwork, *Comedian*, sold for US\$6.24 million at a Sotheby’s auction in New York on 20 November 2024. Oscar Holland, “Viral banana artwork has sold again – this time for 6.24 million,” *CNN 21 November 2024*, <https://tinyurl.com/58bdkfun>.
- 21 There is no opportunity in the present format to develop the argument, but see my fully documented study, *Writing Borderless Histories of Art: Human Exceptionalism and the Climate Crisis* (Routledge, 2025).
- 22 Ian McNiven and Lynette Russell, *Innovation: Knowledge and Ingenuity* (Thames & Hudson Australia, 2023), 21–24.
- 23 See further Farago, *Writing Borderless Histories of Art*, for an extensively documented study of this history from the sixteenth through the nineteenth century.
- 24 Viktoria Schmidt-Linsenhoff, *Interventions: Postkoloniale Perspektiven von Kunst- und Kulturwissenschaft* (Transcript Verlag, 2010).
- 25 Farago, *Writing Borderless Histories of Art*, Fugue 3, discusses Kant, his predecessors and followers along the lines that Jens Baumgarten is sketching here.
- 26 Cristina Pompa, *Religião como tradução: Missionários, Tupi e Tupaiá no Brasil colonial* (EDUSC 2003).

- 27 Stephen Gilchrist, "Six Paintings from Papunya: A Reflection," in Fred Myers and Terry Smith eds. *Six Paintings from Papunya: A Conversation* (Duke University Press, 2024), 85-89, <https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478059776>.
- 28 Marcia Langton, Aaron Corn, and Samuel Curkpatrick, *Indigenous Knowledge: Australian Perspectives* (Melbourne University Press, 2024). Accessed December 16, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central.
- 29 Langton et al., *Indigenous Knowledge*, 15.
- 30 See for example: Katya García-Antón, ed. *Sovereign Words: Indigenous Art, Curation and Criticism* (Office for Contemporary Art Norway, 2018). <https://oca.no/publications/sovereign-words-indigenous-art-curation-and-criticism/read>.
- 31 The Kaapora Chair of Traditional and Non-Hegemonic Knowledge aims to carry of ways of living, knowing, and expressive forms of Indigenous people, traditional populations, Afro-Brazilians, and other non-hegemonic or counter-hegemonic groups concerning the production of knowledge at the university. The main objective of Kaapora is to promote courses, lectures, debates, workshops, collaborative research, and artistic expressions led by experts from these groups. <https://kaapora.unifesp.br/?view=article&id=33:equipe&catid=2>.
- 32 You can find open access streams of all five workshops online: 1. workshop <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KeKiAE1G1KM>; 2. workshop <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRRLn-gLuRc>; 3. Workshop <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nv9tyXDRI4c>; 4. Workshop <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQa4f7681GY>; 5. Workshop <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RwnibThi7ew>.
- 33 Donna Haraway's original publication was "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (Autumn 1988): 575-599. On ecocriticism, Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Duke University Press, 2016).
- 34 They are similar designations for an active counterforce to the leveling processes of global capitalism. Post-colonial literary critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak introduced the term "planetarity" in 2003 to signal efforts in Comparative Literature that counter the destructive effects of economic globalization. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (1983) (Columbia University Press, 2003), 71-102. "Pluriverse" designates "the coexistence of a multipolar world order" as a universal project that counters the hegemonic effects of global capitalism. See: Walter Mignolo, "Foreword: On Pluriversality and Multipolar World Order," in *Constructing the Pluriverse: The Geopolitics of Knowledge*, ed. Bernd Reiter (Duke University Press, 2018), at 92. On worldmaking, see: Pheng Cheah, *What Is a World? On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature* (Duke University Press, 2016), and discussion in the chapter in this volume by Claire Farago, "Theoretical Introduction," with further references.
- 35 See discussion in this volume by Jens Baumgarten and Vinicius Spricigo, "Transcultural Discourses and Practices."