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In Search of a Global Ministry of Higher Education?

Situating the Pedagogy of Global Art Histories in South Africa

Would one travel around the world in 48 hours, from Art Dubai, to the São Paulo Biennial, to the trendy gallery in Hong Kong? At first it seems as if art has gone global (Belting 2009). The heterogeneous field of art historiography in a global perspective has been characterized as “urgently useful, for as long as it doesn’t settle down into a set of disciplinary orthodoxies able to be reproduced within the universities” (Harris 2013). While programme/s in world art studies, with its “cross-disciplinary approach to global art systems” (Venbrux / Rosi 2003) were inaugurated in the 1990s, the global turn in contemporary art has very recently generated a growing emergence of related study courses. In this regard, it has been asked whether the “implementation in study courses [is] symptomatic of a (self-)surmounting of the Global North” (Leeb et al. 2013). Whether in the global north or the global south, global art histories tend to contain locational trajectories, even more so, given that the field of art history has frequently been embedded in national culture and politics (Elkins 2006, Preziosi 1989). After all, there is no *Global Ministry of Higher Education*. My study addresses the paradox of developing studies with a global perspective in the light of local entanglements of higher education. In particular, I address what it means to situate the pedagogy of global art histories in South Africa. I discuss how higher education in South Africa has been shaped by the “tradition of selective borrowing” of foreign policies, with regard to national education departments but also in terms of education activists (Kallaway 2002). In this context, I discuss how “most departments of fine arts at South African universities adopted the European traditions of the discipline” (Nettleton 2006). Specifically, I acknowledge South African art historians’ recent call for a “process of *meaningful transformation*” (Makhubu / Simbao 2013), marking two decades after the end of Apartheid, in order to take “both the changes and continuities in educational borrowing and research” (Chisholm 2002) into account. Could the institutionalization of global art histories leave the dichotomy of either local or either global behind – in order to imply both critical locality *and* critical globalism?

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