

PREFACE

It must have been an extraordinary sight, seeing the earth rise on the horizon of the moon, and seeing for the first time with human eyes planet Earth as a little blue ball floating in the vast surrounding universe. The crew of Apollo 11 was the first to experience this spectacular view, but glued to their TV screens millions of people were able to share the moment. It was immediately clear how tiny our globe is, and indeed how fragile, but this panorama from space also emphasized our planet's singularity and unity.

In the same fashion, we believe, art should be contemplated as a global human enterprise, and it is this conviction that motivated us to produce this book. Our particular approach was also driven by a sense of urgency fueled by various recent developments, including the ongoing processes of globalization, the vast range of contemporary art production worldwide that draws in part on an equally vast range of local art traditions, and the re-evaluation of the discipline of art history in today's postcolonial era. Also, recent archaeological findings in Africa underscore the intimate interconnection between art and human beings; the visual arts may well be as old as *Homo sapiens* and have richly developed in multifarious directions once humans began to spread across the globe.

The new field of investigation known as world art studies first and foremost acknowledges art as a panhuman phenomenon. As such it aims to study art from all times and all regions of the world in an integrative manner and from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. Within this framework new concepts and approaches need to be developed and applied. This book represents the first effort devoted to this pursuit. Over the last few years, the editors organized a number of workshops at Leiden University to discuss and evaluate the structure and contents of this volume. The basic assumptions of these preparatory meetings were both sweeping and straightforward: art is global and can be approached from many disciplinary angles. This is why we invited colleagues from different fields of expertise (art history, anthropology, archaeology, and philosophy) to participate. We would like to thank all discussants for their suggestions and support.

To the contributors of this volume we express our sincerest gratitude for their willingness to engage in this exploratory undertaking. The volume has been longer in the making than we anticipated, and this is why we would also like to thank them for their patience.

The overall structure of the book elucidates the global and multidisciplinary approach we advance. The first section is devoted to the historiography of the study of art on a worldwide basis, the second to the meeting of disciplines and their multiple perspectives on the study of art. These sections are succeeded by three sections that focus on three guiding themes: the origins of art, intercultural comparison, and interculturalization in art. While paving the way for an art history conceived as world art studies, this volume also aims to open up the debate about art as a basic feature of our shared humanity, and thus to enhance our self-understanding as human beings. We hope that the journey through this volume may evoke some of the awe and wonder experienced by the first space-travelers.

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