



## Comment: World without Art

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**World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches** edited by *Kitty Zijlmans* and *Wilfried van Damme*, Amsterdam: Valiz, 2008, 461 pp., 42 b. & w. illus., £28.50

Originating in workshops organized by the editors at Leiden University, *World Art Studies* joins the small bookshelf of essential readings in the multidiscipline of 'world art studies', along with David Summers' magisterial *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism* (2003), John Onians' compilation of crucial conference talks in *Compression vs. Expression: Containing and Explaining the World's Art* (2006), and James Elkins' editing of vigorous roundtable discussions in *Is Art History Global?* (2007), to name other key texts in English. *World Art Studies* largely reflects the views of professional art historians. But it includes other voices, notably anthropologists (though only one philosopher and no scholars of mass visual communication or of new media). The judicious guidance of the editors has resulted in a balanced anthology that steers between focused analysis (heavy on useful bibliography) and sweeping synthesis.

I agree with many of the authors in their opinion, explicit or not, that world art studies is the only plausible general frame for art history on the global stage in the next fifteen years or so. Art history is not the only discipline, of course, that constitutes world art studies, and perhaps the editors took care to keep 'art history' out of the title of their collection. But presumably art history is the immediate concern of most readers of this review. And without world art studies, the discipline of art history has little prospect of maintaining a coherent project as a global enterprise – as practised and taught around the world – in relation

to worldwide phenomena of art and visual culture, past and present.

The question of *World Art Studies* is what this frame could contain, and more narrowly how art history contributes to it. It might be that art history will contribute little with regard to many matters world art studies must address. Indeed, some chapters make little reference – need make no reference – to art history. For its part, in professional art history the specifically bioevolutionary and neuropsychological concerns of world art studies (two of its inevitable moments as a multidisciplinary project) have met stiff resistance, at least outside such specialized areas as prehistoric art studies or the historiography of physiological aesthetics and perceptual psychology in art theory. But if *World Art Studies* is any evidence, the presumption among many contributors seems to be that art history might partly fulfil itself – at long last – in world art studies.

To be sure, art historians must now engage with collaborators who have not previously been part of the ordinary universe of academic art history – participants drawn from artworlds and traditions of thinking about visual culture outside the genealogies of Western aesthetics as well as interlocutors coming from newly voluble sciences of the aesthetic emergences and affordances in human forms of life. But all this seems to be giving art history a new lease on life, and evidently a welcome one. Just when we had been firmly told that the category of Art is pretty much dead for worldwide art history, that is, that an aesthetics of art should be relegated to the parochial province of 'a European development that has not been duplicated anywhere else' (to quote from the recent *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*),<sup>1</sup> it turns out to be very much alive – alive everywhere, and at all times. For the founding claim of *World Art*

*Studies*, virtually uncontested throughout its eighteen chapters, is that art is a ‘panhuman phenomenon’ (to quote the editors’ Preface, 7) or a ‘global occurrence’ (to quote van Damme’s perspicuous introductory essay, 54).

Art historians who have been running for cover in the withering fire of postcolonial multiculturalist critiques of art-historical aestheticism (critiques endorsed within such erstwhile heartlands of philosophical aesthetics as *The Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*) can now emerge into safety: world art studies would help us to see – force us to see – more fully than ever before that art-historical aestheticism and its ideology of Art, as a ‘European development’, is only one avenue of the study of art worldwide. For some purposes it may be one of the least apposite. Perhaps this is self-evident – a mere banality today in part because of the very success of world art studies. But global or world art histories of the recent past occluded this recognition because they had not found ways to make good fully on the earlier recognition (in both the historicism of Johann Joachim Winckelmann and the aesthetics of Immanuel Kant) that aesthetic judgment and consequently the forms of artistic expression (Kant’s ‘perfected ideals of beauty in the fine arts’) vary by environment and the social relations of the people who inhabit it.

In this view, in turn, the real burden of world art studies is not really to get art history to ‘go global’. As several contributors to *World Art Studies* point out, art history has been substantially global in theory (if not in all chronogeographical and cultural particulars) from the beginning, even as a ‘European development that has not been duplicated anywhere else’<sup>2</sup> – perhaps especially as a European development insofar as it has typically been European-derived art history that has told most stories of art specifically as global. Rather, the real burden of world art studies is to get a well-entrenched global art history to put art into new worlds of study. Here it must be able to draw as much on non-aestheticist or non-historicist traditions in European thought about vision, making, or representation (these might be biophysiological or neurocomputational) as on non-European traditions of thought about art, beauty, or ‘making [things] special’ (to use Ellen Dissanayake’s speculative identification of the adaptive or functional status of art in the evolution of our species, 252).

Admittedly there is some degree of uncertainty about this in *World Art Studies*. Many of the essays oscillate slightly between (a) *going-global in art history* (a process that was well under way by the end of the nineteenth

century even if it was politically reoriented and renewed in the multiculturalist postcolonialism of the 1980s) and (b) *worlding art in art history*, a project that might be described less as empirical (what art where and when) than as methodological (how to make sense of the what, where, and when of art worldwide). *World Art Studies* is precisely not an updated survey of arts around the world, though it cites such global projects of the past and the present (from Franz Kugler’s *Handbuch der Kunstgeschichte* of 1842 to Karl Woermann’s *Geschichte der Kunst aller Zeiten und Völker* in the early 1900s to art-history textbooks of the 2000s) and at least some of the authors can be read to criticize such conventional globalism because it lacks true methodological diversity. Rather, as its subtitle suggests, *World Art Studies* sets out to identify several ‘concepts and approaches’ through which such a world survey (as well as any delimited treatment of a particular region, period, or culture of art) might organize its presentation. Only one of these concepts and approaches is European aesthetic historicism and the kind of narrative of Art’s history specifically associated with its epistemology of *Bildung, Kultur, and Geist*.

Thus *World Art Studies* contributes to the *worlding of art* rather than to *globalizing art history*. Or more exactly, it tries to ensure that the globalization of art history (long one of the very criteria of art history) effects a *worlding of art*. Such *worlding* cannot and should not be taken for granted in any mere globalization – today more than ever. This is a fundamental theoretical advance.

Still, let me sound a note of caution and mild criticism. *World Art Studies* does not actually contain an essay by an art historian attempting to use European aestheticist historicism (that is, the ideology of the Aesthetic and the philosophy of Art’s history formulated in European thought since the mid-eighteenth century) to address the global history of art, though this would seem perfectly possible, or to address a tradition of art-making somewhere in the world outside the modern West, though this is extremely common. Indeed, and to the contrary, *World Art Studies* seems to presume that such an approach or concept would be wrong in just these two contexts (however ‘right’ if the topic were European-derived art since about 1750), or at least that it has had its day or that it could not really be relevant to world art studies today, let alone *maximally* relevant.

An opportunity has been missed here, I suspect. There are several reasons. Above all, the ideology of Art as aesthetic has often functioned in European historicism as an essential critical vehicle for

bemoaning the loss or impossibility of art – of identifying its crisis in social contexts of overwhelming utilitarianism and economism, of nationalism and imperialism, of capitalism and commodification, and of culture industry and mass marketing. This loss or impossibility – this context of art in the world – is surely one of the principal horizons for the very rise of world art studies as a response to the crisis of cultural possibility in human worlds as a consequence of their globalization.

Simply put, then, world art studies cannot afford to bypass critical aestheticist historicism, especially as it reached a discursive climax in such twentieth-century European self-disgust as Theodor Adorno's. (Adorno is nowhere cited in *World Art Studies*, despite his engagements with ethological theory, prehistoric art studies, or physiological aesthetics. But certainly none of the contributors wants to be taken, for example, to be advocating the global consolidation of 'world art' along the lines of the 'world music' that Adorno would have scorned, even if many arts globally are moving – clearly want to move – in exactly that direction.) Without the critical theory devised in Europe as the most self-critical and self-castigating analysis of modern Europe's relative lack of true art in global terms, world art studies needlessly hobbles itself. Indeed, its very critique of 'Eurocentrism' involves a merely partial ventriloquism of the critical theory of modern European mass art, that is, of art paraded as Culture: world art studies has tended to absorb the critical-theoretical deconstruction of Art, on the one side, without at the same time assimilating, on the other side, the critique of culture as false Art-making – as socially policing and distorting the subjective universality of free aesthetic judgment. This historiographical and theoretical amnesia threatens to leave us, I think, with the worst of two worlds: both with a culturalism of art without a critique of art as cultured and with a theory of culture as the ground of art without a critique of culture as the acculturation of art. Here world art studies would abdicate the global critical role it could play.

In saying all this, I might have to disagree with one part of the two-pronged position stated by James Elkins in his trenchant chapter 'Can We Invent a World Art Studies?' (as well as in other recent statements). He proposes that 'visual studies should experiment with avoiding Benjamin, Lacan, Foucault, Derrida, and the rest' (113, my emphasis), that is, and in sum, that it experiment with avoiding the critical theory of art (the question of the undoing of art in culture) and

the theory of art as critical (the question of art as the undoing of culture). I am not sure that Elkins could plausibly hold his ground if the term 'art studies' (let alone art history or aesthetics) replaced his 'visual studies'. But I have no beef with the method that he would experimentally substitute, namely, that we employ 'indigenous [aesthetic] texts as interpretive languages' (113). I would only be curious to know which of these languages would help anyone (indigenous to an artistic tradition in cultural crisis or not) to resist worldwide anti-art or anti-aesthetic tendencies in anything like the global terms that seem to be needed. Stated another way, indigenous aesthetic traditions can be identified by art history and they should be employed as art history. Conventional iconology usually does just this. And many of the essays in *World Art Studies* are remorselessly 'emic' in just this way, even though none has been written by an archaeologist of art (let alone a practising prehistorian) who must deal with visual-cultural traditions in which there happen to be no surviving 'indigenous [aesthetic] texts' or in which the indigenous texts simply are the artworks themselves.<sup>3</sup> But it remains to be seen which of these indigenous traditions of the interpretation of art (local or global) gives a truly effective critical purchase on world art, on art as worldwide, or on the crisis of the globalization of art.

Elkins vaguely identifies indigenous traditions of discourse on art, that is, indigenous canons of aesthetic judgment that must pertain to paintings or sculptures made therein. Conservative aestheticians in the cultural anthropology of art have been studying this relation for several generations – worldwide, and always in close interaction with indigenous texts, languages, and opinions. (In cultural anthropology, this research has often served to shore up pre-existing dogmas about the total coherence of aesthetic and other domains of social life as culture, as if indigenous traditions of art-making had no horizons of criticality and as if no account of art [*pace* Adorno et al.] could possibly do anything but see it as culture-building.) But this is far from an identification of globally diverse indigenous discursive traditions that explicitly recognize and interrogate the global diversity of art, let alone critically mobilizing their terms (if any) for the parlous situation of many arts worldwide in so-called globalization. And Elkins, of course, really means that indigenous traditions of discourse on art should be deployed to interpret traditions to which they are not indigenous – as European aesthetics has been deployed, for example,

to interpret the art of the Asmat of the Sepik watershed or of the peoples of the tundras of Inuit Nunaat, despite the ostensible ‘cultural-anthropological’ and vaguely ‘indigenizing’ politico-intellectual frame of the European and North American researchers who have investigated these aesthetics. Elkins’ proposition suggests a valid thought experiment. But many indigenous aesthetic traditions categorically dismiss the social value and critical relevance of any art outside the local culture’s, even when they have reasons to describe such alterity. Reverting to the main point, why, then, should we forego theoretical resources in which the aesthetics of art as a putative human universal in constant struggle with the global historical burden of its cultural falsification (its ‘anthropology’) has been a central topic?

If we set aside the critical theory of art derived from European aestheticist historicism, the contributors to *World Art Studies* have identified five ‘concepts and approaches’ relevant to a world art studies of the future. To use the section headings in *World Art Studies* as supplied by the editors, these are ‘historiography’ dealing with the rich history and present-day status of ‘global approaches in the study of art’, ‘multiple perspectives on the study of art’ (including ecology, geography, and anthropology), the ‘bioevolutionary basis of art-making and perception’, ‘comparative approaches’, and ‘intercultural exchanges’.

Addressed in the first section of the anthology, ‘global approaches’ to the study of world art not only recall the pan-global ambitions of previous generations of art historians (especially in German scholarship at the beginning of the twentieth century, the focus of erudite chapters by Ulrich Pfisterer and Marlite Halbertsma) in relation to certain present-day interests in general *Grundbegriffe* of art history worldwide. (Such interests might be exemplified in projects like Summers’ deployment of the principles and devices of Euclidean plane geometry to describe the emergent functions of ‘planarity’ and ‘virtuality’ – his variation on the second pair of Heinrich Wölfflin’s classification of ‘modes of vision’ or ‘modes of imaging’, limited by Wölfflin to European art between c. 1450 and c. 1700.) ‘Global approaches’ must also address the impact of present-day globalizing processes on all the vocabularies of art history, global or not: notably, the globalization of the transnational contemporary artworld, well described in Zijlmans’ essay, and the increasing visibility of non-Western intellectual and aesthetic traditions in professional art-historical

scholarship in the West and elsewhere, addressed in the chapters by Elkins and Cao Yiqiang. Presumably these traditions are adept in ‘indigenous texts as interpretive languages’ that could be relevant to the aesthetics, anthropology, and history of art. But in my experience the globalizing of art history cuts in many directions. As Cao Yiqiang reminds us, many non-Western scholars of (non-Western) art have been demanding exposure to the most abstruse refinements of European aesthetic historicism and critical art theory, perhaps because these traditions (as I have already intimated) might enable them to escape nationalist boosterism.

Though no single overarching opinion can be extracted from *World Art Studies*, the obvious preference of many contributors would be to resist all models of pan-global *kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (perhaps those proposed by Wölfflin and Summers as well as by Dissanayake and Onians in one section of *World Art Studies*) in recognition, supposedly, of the globalization, globalism, or global variety that art history must fully address today. For several authors, one only ‘goes global’ in world art history by worlding art and its study as decidedly *not* global, that is, as *not* dependent on global schemes of art history or universal models of seeing or imaging. This is only a superficial paradox.<sup>4</sup>

But within other approaches and concepts in world art studies, globalized general theory is perfectly credible: notably, the theory of evolutionary adaptation considered by Dissanayake or the theory of the ecological habituation of manual and visual processes involved in making art proposed by Onians. Their essays constitute the third section of *World Art Studies*, and represent what I would like to call the ‘environmental turn’ in the study of art – where environment (and environmental variation and change) must be treated not only as history on the real globe, the Planet Earth, but also in human worlds. A provocative and prescient chapter by Elizabeth de Bièvre, ‘Green Art Studies’, coupled with Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann’s lucid summary of his thinking about ‘The Geography of Art’, could properly be included under this rubric too. All of these projects seem to me to be more interesting avenues of worlding art – of putting it into the world – than merely globalizing art history as the historicist narrative of predictable cultural variation in aesthetics, and more likely in the end to attract a methodologically diverse community of global scholars to the study of art worldwide. None can be excluded from art history, for all remain as close to the founding concerns of art history as historicist *culturology*.

Still, evolutionary–developmental biology and neuropsychological aesthetics currently seem to remain anathema to many art historians. Therefore historicist culturology tends, *de facto*, to remain the main source of general theory in most academic art history worldwide. And here, the core doctrine of culture as historical sits uneasily with the two prongs of world art studies: with both the project of globalizing art (for cultures must be diverse at the level of their biosocial emergence, and it is logically possible to imagine cultures without art) and of worlding it (for culture is only one level of world, including the human worlds supposedly constituted in or as cultures). To be rhetorically stable, then, art-historical culturology must continually duck the seemingly embarrassing question of its own universalizing claim – its totalizing hypothesis of culture as the relevant human essence, despite its identification with inhumane nineteenth-century colonialisms and such non-humanistic disciplines as bacteriology.<sup>5</sup>

In this sensitive area, *World Art Studies* sometimes pulls its punches. The relation between both globalizing and worlding art history on the one side and ‘cultural diversity’ in the profession and pedagogy of art studies on the other side is not really treated in any sustained way, though it shadows virtually all of the chapters. One gets the impression that some authors see world art studies as the very mechanism of further or more complete cultural diversification. Others, however, seem to see world art studies as a way out of endlessly differentiating cultures as the most effective vehicle of our professional and pedagogical diversity. (Cultures are diverse one to the next; they are far less diverse within. And diversification within may not always be a question of cultures. It may be a question of *getting away* from culture to address variation.) The status of cultural diversification within a general approach that assumes the explanatory universality of culture in relation to a phenomenon, ‘art’, that is also said to have extra-cultural historical determinations – ‘evolutionary’ or ‘environmental’ determinations, for example – remains to be clarified. But on balance the editors have been wise to let this very question emerge organically; in many programmes of art history in Europe and North America, one can barely even ask it.

Of course, world art studies as the anthology represents it does suggest new approaches to culturology in art history, or at least updated concepts of it. Two sections of *World Art Studies* are devoted to ‘comparative approaches’ (that is, ‘intercultural

comparison and art’) and to ‘intercultural exchanges’ or ‘interculturalization’ as a historical process in art worldwide. Included in another section, two fine and bibliographically fulsome essays by Richard L. Anderson and Paula D. Girshick on the anthropology of art (largely assumed to be a project within cultural anthropology) also have obvious relevance.

All of these chapters tend to combine (or at least to assume) both the multiculturalist critique of art-historical aesthetics and the postcolonialist critique of culturological essentialism. I explicitly differentiate these critiques more radically than any of the chapters do, however, because it seems to me that they pull in different directions. The former takes us toward ‘globalizing’ and the latter toward ‘worlding’ art and art history. And I do not think they can be fully reconciled, as van Damme’s introduction acknowledges, without a third decisive term: both of them imply (even if currently they do not always specify) a definite relation to the non-cultural levels of the historical determination of art that are partly addressed in the other sections of *World Art Studies*. Intercultural comparison is impossible without a general frame of analysis (such as Summers’ deployment of Euclidean geometries of planar configuration) that notionally transcends or reduces cultural difference. And interculturalization could not be possible without natural and social processes that cause, support, or retain the emergent variations; they range from the strength and direction of winds and currents to the ecological suitability of exchanged goods. However focused on the level of culture, then, both multiculturalist and postcolonialist investigations may well converge in the ‘environmental turn’ that I have already mentioned. *World Art Studies* implies – in the end it is – *Studies of Art in the World*.

In itself, this theoretical direction and its attendant methodological experimentation do not directly engage the founding premise of *World Art Studies* – that art is a ‘panhuman phenomenon’, a ‘global occurrence’. It must be true that one of the historical fates of art in the world, like the fate of a species or a calculation, is to cease to be in it (this is the constitutive possibility that has been mourned proleptically by European art-historical aesthetics) or to have never entered it in the first place (the possibility recalled by *The Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* when it questions the universality of Art). Compared to art-historical melancholy and to philosophical scepticism and asceticism, however, *World Art Studies* is an optimistic collation, even Utopian. Because art is a global human affair, it says, eventually art history



must be world art studies.

But is this expectation simply a capitulation to globalization? It remains to be seen whether art – as human – remains vital in the world in a global world, that is, in a human world worlded today as putatively global. Indeed, this seems to be the unstated political uncertainty – the motivating anxiety – of *World Art Studies*, its call to intellectual action as well as its source of rhetorical instability. For this very reason, the continuing work of theoretical clarification in world art studies dialectically requires it to imagine viable human worlds without art, as Hegel did long ago in globally defining the empirical purview of aesthetic historicism, and even though in *World Art Studies* this vision would seem to be politically incorrect.<sup>6</sup> If there are viable human worlds without art, past or present, even logically possible ones, world art studies as a concept would be cut down to size – a size no grander than what is granted to any account of one culture of art, for art, as Hegel had it, might be seen (in a world history) to be only one world culture of being human, even if it happens to be our own as we humans have globalized it. In other words, whether in moving away from the dominance of the art history of Europe or in moving toward the world history of human art-culture, the groundwork has only begun to be laid for a critical world art studies.

#### Notes

- 1 Michael Kelly, 'Editorial Preface' in Michael Kelly, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, Oxford, 1999, vol. 1, xi. According to Kelly, philosophical aesthetics might be relevant to art historians only when 'their research involves art created in periods when aesthetics was still considered relevant', that is, when paintings, sculptures, and so on, were made according to the philosophy of Art or an 'ideology of the Aesthetic' developed in European or European-derived contexts of visual-cultural production (as well as other contexts of judgment about objects in nature) since the mid-eighteenth century. If this is so, aesthetics could be redefined productively (both more broadly and more simply) as 'critical reflection on art, culture, and nature'. And *World Art Studies* might be described as accepting and pursuing this very mandate. Still, artworks are probably best described as 'culturally emergent particulars', as Joseph Margolis has put it ('The historical ontology of art' in Michael Kelly, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, vol. 3, 390–4; and see his *Interpretation Radical but Not Unruly: The New Puzzle of the Arts and History*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 1995). I take this to mean not only that art is not to be found in every domain, phase, or level of human life – that it is a 'particular' and not a 'universal' feature of human forms of life. It might also mean that even in the domain, phase, or level of human culture it is an 'emergent' particular – not an immanent or an essential one, perhaps not even ubiquitous. How this subtle ontology might square with the more or less unqualified universalism of *World Art Studies* about art remains an open question.
- 2 Kelly, *The Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*.
- 3 For the sake of argument, we can set aside the question whether the use of any kind of 'indigenous texts' about art, European or not, should have any kind of primacy in historical or any other kind of interpretation, globalist or not, as Elkins' programme would seem to

assume. Just because people have talked and written about art and visual culture, whether their own or the production of others, does not entail that this discourse comprised their only or their preferred or their most revealing 'interpretive language'. Their material making and use of the artifact constituted its own self-regulating or recursive interpretation – arguably more revealing than their discourses about it. Indeed, in my opinion the deepest 'saying' or 'discoursing' about art simply is its making and showing.

- 4 *World Art Studies* does not contain reflections on the possible worldwide cultural and historical diversity or variation of seeing or imaging as such. It is not principally a world study of visual culture, that is, of the cultural constitution of human seeing and imaging. One of its central tenets – that art is a 'panhuman phenomenon' – might be challenged by visual-culturalist historicism, namely, that seeing or imaging varies systematically with styles of configurative expression and canons of depictive or other representation. For if the 'cultural constitution of vision' is the relevant 'panhuman phenomenon', we would need a worldwide inquiry into global phenomena of seeing and making (including the seeing and making of paintings and sculptures) that would only occasionally be concerned with the 'panhuman phenomenon' of art as culturally constituted. In this regard, it is not obvious whether world art studies as pursued in *World Art Studies* has emerged as a defensive antidote to visual-culture studies, as a possible partner, or as a completely different enterprise – or a little of all three.
- 5 The affiliation of classic early culturology, such as E. B. Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1871), and British and other European missionary and colonial incursions into relatively unmolested human ecologies around the world needs no elaboration. For the determinations of culture theory in the artificial cultivation of bacterial populations by Louis Pasteur and others, see Christopher Herbert, *Culture and Anomie: The Ethnographic Imagination in the Nineteenth Century*, Chicago, IL, 1992.
- 6 What world it is that lies notionally on the other side of the panhuman world of cultures of art (a possible world that world art studies works to keep at bay) is an intriguing question. *World Art Studies* gives no clear answer. It works hard to establish the prehistoric antiquity of art; it is as if there has never been human life before art. But this narrative is still out of alignment insofar as the phylogenesis of 'being human' likely encompasses hominid, hominoid, and primate evolution long before the evolutionary emergence of the 'facture' or 'form' sometimes identified in tools made by *Homo habilis* – the earliest manifestation of art plausibly cited in *World Art Studies*. (The most recent identification of this quality of Oldowan lithic technology is Summers', repeated by van Damme (31), and T. J. Clark's in 'More theses on Feuerbach', *Representations*, 104, 2008, 4–7; although Clark deals explicitly with Solutrean technology of the European Upper Paleolithic period, his qualified reference to 'species-defining' behaviour suggests a deeper time. Despite Summers' and Clark's persuasive descriptions, I remain somewhat sceptical: see 'The deconstruction of intentionality in archaeology', in Whitney Davis, *Replications: Archaeology, Art History, Psychoanalysis*, University Park, PA, 1996, 95–127.) It is interesting to see how this narrative, somewhat against itself, recognizes art (especially pictorial art) to be only one kind of hominid culture – that is, the culture carried specifically by 'modern humans'. Unlike some of the contributors, I would not put the crucial emphasis on putatively universal 'humanity'. Instead, I would emphasize a historically specific 'modernity' in the emergence of art-making as a hominid culture. Of course, because we are talking about a remote prehistoric modernity of hominid culture, the theoretical questions – Is art really 'panhuman'? Should 'panhuman' only mean 'modern human'? – tend to be overlooked. Equally important, what about a world after art? It is the seeming imminence of a humanity-without-art (or perhaps more exactly without all the arts of all cultures) in a fully globalized world that creates alarm. Commodification, computationalism and iconoclasm are some of the implied causes; all subsist in accommodation with contemporary globalization, and in part as its mechanisms. But little attention has been given to the role of world art studies itself in bringing about the end of art as a culturally emergent incomparable particular.