



1. CONVERGING CULTURES

Introduction

The development of technology has made possible instantaneous contact between cultures. However, the need for international communication is not a recent phenomenon; it has always been crucial for the development of nations. Very few cultures have remained in complete isolation over the course of their existence, except only the most geographically remote or intentionally isolationist. A combination of trade, war, exploration, colonialism, and imperialism has brought cultures into contact. Cross-cultural exposure and influence on artistic production have been constants throughout history.

Trading Materials and Techniques

Since trade began, societies have produced exquisite materials and beautifully crafted objects that others have collected and replicated, with modifications reflecting technological limitations, cultural relevancy, and personal taste. Materials and objects that have had widespread cultural impact include ceramics--notably porcelain, glassware, leather, and metalwork.

The development of the Silk Road facilitated the exchange of materials, techniques, and technology between civilizations. The Silk Road was a trade route that linked existing trade routes connecting the Middle East, the Mediterranean, China, Central Asia, and parts of northern India. The rise and expansion of the Roman Empire in the West and Han China (206 BCE-220 CE) in the East provided the peace and stability necessary for the Silk Road to develop into northern and southern branches separated by the Taklamakan Desert.

Travel along the Silk Road, often dangerous, involved trekking over high mountains between grasslands and deserts. To exchange luxury goods, merchants traveled partway to meet their counterparts. As the name Silk Road suggests, silk played a key role in the international trade that connected countries and cultures for centuries. It was a luxury good for trade as well as a form of currency.¹ Numerous other goods were traded as well. Caravans heading east carried gold, precious stones, metals, ivory, coral, spices, tea, paper, and china, while westbound caravans traded in furs, ceramics, incense, cinnamon, rhubarb, and bronze weapons.

In addition to the exchange of merchandise, traders came in contact with diverse cultures, lifestyles, and religions, and were exposed to the various social structures and political relationships between countries. Buddhism, for example, spread from India to China because of trade along the Silk Route, similar to the way Islam spread along trans-Saharan routes in medieval West Africa.²



Figure 1. *Traveling Coffer*; lacquer over leather, bamboo, wood, metal mounts; Chinese; Southern Song or Yuan Dynasty, ca.1250; H: 17 ¼ in. (43.8 cm.), W: 28 ¾ in. (72.1 cm.), D: 15 in. (38.1 cm.); Brooklyn Museum of Art, Brooklyn, New York. Photograph courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum of Art.

The traveling coffer in Figure 1 (pg.5)—17 inches long—is thought to have been a luxury item used to transport other luxury items. Created in the city of Wenzhou on China’s south coast, the trunk has a style of decoration that reflects a shared Asian and Islamic aesthetic. After thick black lacquer was spread over the coffer’s body, gold leaf or colored lacquer was applied to designs engraved on the surface. The techniques used to produce the intricate ornamentation—*qiangjin* (“engraved gold”) and *qiangcai* (“engraved color”)—developed in China under the Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279). The designs on the lid and side panels are similar to those found in Islamic book decoration, art, and architecture.³

China is also where porcelain originally developed as early as the Shang Dynasty (1600-1046 BCE). The development of this special kind of ceramic, formed by heating *kaolin* (a type of clay) in a kiln, was a gradual process that took several thousand years, undergoing many different changes and transformations throughout different dynasties.⁴ During the Yuan Dynasty (1280-1367), the practice of underglaze cobalt blue decoration became widespread. This became the most popular of all Chinese ceramics internationally, exported to the Middle East and to Southeast Asia.⁵ In a letter written in 1812, the French Jesuit priest Père D’Entrecolles (1664-1741) noted that “the whirling flames and smoke which rose at different places made the approach to Jingdezhen remarkable...one would think that the whole city is on fire.”⁶

While porcelain was imported and imitated by many countries, first in Korea and Japan, perhaps the most remarkable and beautiful porcelain-like ceramics created outside of China were from the northwestern Anatolian city of Iznik in present-day Turkey. By the 14th century, the Islamic world—especially the Ottoman and Safavid Courts—had long admired and collected Chinese pottery.

In the late 15th century, Ottoman artisans attempting to emulate Chinese blue-and-white porcelain began to produce blue-and-white fritware. They added silica and glass to clay and covered it with liquid clay, or slip, to imitate the hard, white body of Chinese wares. Then they painted floral scrolls, arabesques, and other designs in a deep cobalt blue onto the white surface, which they covered with a colorless, shiny glaze.⁷ The example in Figure 2 (pg.7), a dish with an elaborate grape-and-leaf design that covers the entire plate, is a kind of fritware made primarily of crushed quartz.



Figure 2. *Dish with Grape Design*; stone-paste painted under colorless glaze; Iznik, Turkey; Ottoman period, late 16th century; H: 2 5/8 in. (5.9 cm.), W: 12 3/4 in. (32.5 cm); Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. Photograph courtesy of the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Galleries, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.



Figure 3. *Porcelain Plate*; porcelain with underglaze blue decoration under colorless glaze; Jingdezhen, Jiangxi Province, China; Yuan Dynasty, mid-14th century; Diam: 18 in. (45.7 cm); the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Photograph courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Sometimes artistic influence has moved between two cultures in both directions. While Ottoman artists created Chinese-style porcelain in the 15th century, Figure 3 (pg.7) shows an example of Chinese porcelain from the mid-14th century that incorporates Islamic design. The Yuan Dynasty plate features imagery of a fish, probably a sea perch, as it swims through a dense growth of aquatic plants. A blossoming lotus scroll twines endlessly in the circular cavetto, bordered with a diaper pattern,⁸ the small, repeated geometric shapes that are connected to one another around the rim. The surface is divided into concentric bands of disparate patterns, a variation of the Arabic text and line decoration on Islamic metalware.⁹ The cobalt compounds that produced the rich blue color had been used in Egyptian sculpture and Persian jewelry as early as 3000 BCE, adding another layer of regional influence.

Islamic artisans developed a number of other innovative techniques that other cultures embraced or adopted. In addition to inlaid metalwork, woodwork, and textiles, beautiful glass was commercially produced in areas controlled by the Mamluks (present-day Syria and Egypt) during the 13th and 14th centuries. Luxury items made of glass were collected in Southeast Asia, northern China, and Europe, as well as among wealthy patrons in the Islamic world. In Damascus, glass was manufactured on a wide scale, often decorated with animals, birds, flowers, and foliage.¹⁰ Enameled and gilded glass was the best known and, historically, the most treasured type of Islamic glass. This decorative technique involved using an oil-based medium and a brush or a reed pen to apply gold and/or enamels (powdered opaque glass) to a glass surface.

Gilt and individual enamel colors have different chemical qualities, so the temperatures at which they are fixed permanently onto glass differ. The process of applying colors one at a time and then fixing them would have been labor intensive and involved heating and reheating the vessel, which could have altered its shape. Therefore, it is likely that Mamluk glassmakers developed a process that made it possible to apply all the colors at once and fix them during a single firing in the kiln, which prevented the colors from running into each other.¹¹

During the late fourteenth century, production declined significantly as workshops closed throughout the entire Persian region. It is not completely understood what provoked this decline. It is possible that the destruction of Damascus in 1400 by the Mongolian warlord Timur the Great (1336-1405) prompted craftsmen to move to Italy. Furthermore, in 1453 Constantinople fell to the Turks, which led to further instability in the region. Nonetheless, the popularity of the enameled glass did not decline in the Western world. By the late 15th century, the center of production for most enameled glass shifted to Venetian workshops, where artisans mastered and modified the difficult art of glassblowing.



Figure 4. *Pilgrim Flask*; free-blown glass, enameled and gilded; Venice, Italy; ca. 1500-1525; H: 12 3/8 in. (31.4 cm); Robert Lehman Collection, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Photograph courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

One particularly beautiful and ornate example of Venetian blown glass is a pilgrim flask from around 1500, (Figure 4, on pg. 9), decorated with motifs and patterns that show Islamic influence. This influence is still evident today in the ornate glass created on the Venetian island of Murano.¹²

Venice served as the main European trading partner of the Mamluks. Having driven the Crusaders from the Holy Land during the late 13th century, Mamluks profited from their position as intermediaries between South and Southeast Asia and Europe in the trade of spices and other goods. In the late 14th century, when the fortunes of the Mamluk elite declined, artisans from Damascus and Cairo created metalwork featuring inlaid silver and gold for European export. As new designs developed that reflected European tastes in the 15th century, Venice played a key role in the Mediterranean trade of Islamic metalwork. Wealthy Venetians acquired Islamic metal objects to decorate their homes, and local craftsmen copied the techniques Islamic artists had mastered.¹³

The Muslim power with the greatest longevity and reach was the Ottoman Empire, with which the Venetians had commercial and diplomatic relations during the 15th century. The trade relationship had a significant impact on decorative arts produced in Venice, which incorporated Ottoman techniques and motifs. Products included furniture, textiles, metalwork, and pottery.¹⁴

Sultan Mehmet II (a.k.a. Mehmed II, 1432-1481) became the powerful 21-year-old ruler of the Ottoman Empire, when in 1453, he captured Constantinople (later renamed Istanbul), the capital of the Byzantine Empire. He claimed the title “Caesar of Rome” (*Kayser-i Rûm*) and described himself as “the lord of the two lands and the two seas,” referring to Anatolia and the Balkans and the Aegean and Black Seas.¹⁵ Aware of the accomplishments of the developing Italian Renaissance, he sought to commemorate his military achievements with appropriate works of art.

Conscious of the power of portraiture—despite Muslim strictures against imagery—Mehmet II brought Italian painters, sculptors, and bronze casters to his court. Inspired by ancient Roman coins, he commissioned several medals with his portrait. The Venetian painter Costanzo da Ferrara (ca. 1450-ca. 1524) created the one regarded as the finest.¹⁶ In 1479—the year after a peace treaty was signed between Venice and Constantinople—Gentile Bellini (1429-1507), the official Venetian court painter, went on a diplomatic mission to Constantinople, where he painted the portrait in Figure 5 (1480, repainted in the 19th century), on page 11.



Figure 5. Attributed to Gentile Bellini (Italian, 1429-1507); *The Sultan Mehmet II*; oil (19th century repaint) on canvas; 1480; H: 27 ½ in. (69.9 cm.), W: 20 ½ in. (52.1 cm); The National Gallery, London, UK. Photograph courtesy of the Bridgeman Art Library.

The portrait is decidedly Western in style while simultaneously highlighting the sitter's origins. Mehmet II, identified as *Victor Orbis*, or Conqueror of the World, is depicted almost in profile, surrounded by a golden arch, the universal symbol of triumph. He wears a deep red caftan with a luxurious fur mantle, and a large white turban covering a red *taj*, the Sultan's identifying headdress and a mark of his status as a Muslim. Draped on a ledge is an elaborate jeweled carpet, symbolic of the riches and artistry of the Islamic empire. Bellini stayed approximately a year and half in Constantinople, producing other works during his residency, including a highly decorative gouache with Arabic text depicting a seated scribe.¹⁷

Commerce and Colonization

Of all the European countries, Portugal was the first to send ships south and west into the Atlantic Ocean, initiating Europe's connection to the rest of the world.¹⁸ Explorers reached Ceuta in Morocco in the early 15th century and, by 1488, Bartholomew Dias (1451-1500) reached Africa's farthest tip, at the Cape of Good Hope. By the end of the 15th century, Vasco da Gama (1460-1524) rounded the tip of South Africa, opening direct communication between Europe and the city-states of the East African coast and India. By the 16th century, forts and settlements, linked by cargo-carrying ships, were set up on the coasts of the Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific Oceans, firmly establishing Portugal's unique empire that was based on trade, rather than territory.¹⁹

In the 15th century, the many maps, books, manuscripts, paintings, and prints that circulated throughout Europe promoted a greater understanding of world geography and cultures.²⁰ In addition, a number of advantages contributed to making Portuguese voyages to Africa successful. Unlike other harbors, Lisbon provided shelter, where sailors could dock unthreatened and merchants could safely unload their wares. While the rest of Europe was ravaged by the Black Plague, Lisbon and the rest of Portugal remained relatively isolated from the disease. Exposure to Islamic expertise in mathematics and maritime technology helped Portugal develop a fleet able to sail the challenging Atlantic Seas.²¹

The nation, however, also suffered from chronic poverty. It has been suggested that the ultimate crisis driving Portugal to expand was the high cost of bread and a hungry population.²²

While traveling down the West African coast, Portuguese mariners established sugar plantations and gained access to such goods as spices, fabrics, gold, and ivory, which they called "white gold." Merchants imported luxury items carved in ivory, many of which were specifically made for the Portuguese trade. The 16th-century saltcellar shown in Figure 6 (pg. 14) was carved in Benin, Nigeria. It may have been used as a gift for the wealthy patrons of Portuguese voyages. Salt, used to preserve meat, together with

pepper and other spices for flavoring food, were highly sought-after commodities, making up 90 percent of Portuguese cargoes in the first half of the 16th century.²³ This saltcellar features four figures with faces, beards, and attire that indicate they are Portuguese—tall patterned hats with feathers on the brims, ornate knee britches, buttoned doublets, and crosses hanging from beaded chains around their necks. Works such as this saltcellar reflect a shared African and Portuguese aesthetic in a style called Bini-Portuguese, because it is associated with the royal art of Benin.

Ivory workshops in Benin and Sierra Leone were well-established before the arrival of the Portuguese. The hybrid aesthetic that developed brought together the European use of tableaux, or scenes, with the African tradition of frontally positioning static human forms.²⁴

After colonizing parts of Africa, the Portuguese sailed around the entire continent, eventually reaching India, China, and Japan. Portuguese Jesuits arrived in Japan in 1549, shortly after the initial exploratory fleets landed on the island. Francis Xavier (1506-1552), a Jesuit missionary, achieved access to the imperial court in Koto, securing patronage of the powerful *daimyo* (feudal lord) of the Otomo clan in the west of the island, thereby establishing a foundation for a mission at Nagasaki. He left Japan soon afterward, but his successors continued to seek converts. It has been estimated that by 1582, the number of Christian converts totaled 150,000. Kyushu, where trading ships docked, became the primary Jesuit center for trade.²⁵ The Kyushu *daimyo*, who wanted to protect his share of the trade with China, had acknowledged that the religious Portuguese captains respected the Jesuits because they were learned.

But then a rising military ruler, Toyotomi Hideyoshi (ca. 1536-1598), took over Kyushu with the support of a formidable army. Hideyoshi was displeased with Jesuit intervention in local politics in Kyushu. In addition to having a fortified stronghold in Nagasaki and other settlements, aggressive Jesuit proselytizing had already converted a large and growing group, including some local *daimyo* and lesser warriors.²⁶ Offended by tales of their intolerance toward Buddhism and their undying loyalties to Rome,²⁷ on July 24, 1587, Hideyoshi issued a decree ordering Christian priests to leave Japan. Traders, however, were welcome to remain.



Figure 6. Edo artist, Court of Benin (Nigerian); *Saltcellar with Portuguese Figures*; ivory; 15th-16th century; H: 7½ in. (19.1 cm); the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Photograph courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art/Photo by Max Yawney.

The Jesuits in Nagasaki were supported by commercial activities there. The Portuguese had already been established in nearby Goa and Malacca, and they profited from China's ban on Japanese ships, which came about because of allegations of piracy. China allowed Portugal to establish a settlement at Macao in 1557 and a structured pattern of trade was established. Beginning in 1571, the so-called "Great Ship," also known as the "Black Ship," would sail yearly from Goa to Macao, loaded with silk, gold, rhubarb, and sugar, depart for Nagasaki in June or July, and remain there for several months, selling to Japanese merchants²⁸ and loading silver, which was highly valued in China.



Figure 7. Kano School (Japanese); *Namban* ("Southern Barbarians" in Japan); ink, color, and gold on paper; Edo period, 17th century; H: 60 ¼ in. (153 cm.), 130 ½ in. (331 cm.); The Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. Photograph Courtesy of the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

The interchange between Portuguese Jesuits and merchants and the Japanese was recorded on lavishly gold-leafed *byobu* (folding) screens (Figure 7, pg.15), commissioned by Japanese warlords, rich merchants, and the *daimyo* to show off their newly acquired wealth and power.²⁹ The screens depict the Portuguese as *namban*, or “southern barbarians,” a term for foreigners who traveled to Japan from Macao in the south.³⁰ The 60 screens that survive, created mostly between 1590 and 1614, portray the arrival of the Spanish-style galleon ships at Nagasaki, filled with missionaries, merchants, and sailors docking and unloading cargo. The Japanese are depicted going about their usual business or curiously observing the foreigners, with their odd manners and unfamiliar dress. The pantaloons, pointed shoes, and tall, brimmed hats worn by the Portuguese contrast with the long, flowing robes and fans, pipes, or swords held by the Japanese.³¹ As has often been the case throughout history, cultures converged when economic interests—manifested through trade—were linked to the expansion of religion.

One of the most dominant colonial powers in history has been Great Britain, which gained control of India through the efforts of the East India Company. Soon after the first East India Company voyage was launched in 1601, Britain wanted to expand its trading power in the area, so it sent Sir Thomas Roe (1581-1644) to create a strategic agreement with Mughal Emperor Nuruddin Salim Jahangir (r.1605-1627). Roe secured exclusive rights to live and build factories in Surat and other areas, while providing the emperor with a means to obtain goods from Europe. The East India Company had a monopoly on trade in cotton, silk, indigo, saltpeter, and tea. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, British influence in India far exceeded any other power, and its commercial presence was only matched by its Dutch rival.³² At the Battle of Plassey in 1757, the British scored a major military victory that would lead to even greater control of the region. The enormous wealth gained from the Bengal treasury and access to a massive source of provisions and taxes allowed the Company to strengthen its military might significantly, opening the way for British colonial rule, mass economic exploitation, and cultural domination in nearly all of South Asia.

During British colonial rule in India, many British soldiers decided to remain in the region, leaving England behind. Detailed accounts of the soldiers’ time there have been culled from journals and diaries. In one entry, the author wrote, “The aspect of English society in India is splendid. The government house at Calcutta is completely an eastern palace. Its two principal apartments are decorated with pillars covered with the cement called *chunam* which makes them resemble Paria marble ... The quarter called Chouringee is described as a village of palaces, strangely contrasting with the Black Town, a huge assemblage of mud and thatched huts, similar to the poorest cabins of the Irish peasantry.”³³

Prior to the invention of photography, members of the East India Company who moved to India bought or commissioned paintings by Indian artists to commemorate their time in the region. These works would come to be known as “Company paintings,” distinguished from other Indian paintings by their materials and style. They were primarily painted on English paper, made by a number of British companies specifically for display in the humid climate. Indian artists abandoned jewel-like gouache painting in favor of the more Western medium of watercolor. These artists learned about Western painting through imported European prints that had been traded.³⁴

One such watercolor, painted by Dip Chand (active 18th century) depicts William Fullerton of Rosemount (1744, Figure 8) on page 18, who joined the East India Company in 1744 and served as a surgeon in Calcutta in 1751. Fullerton is shown sitting on rug and smoking a hookah while three male Indian attendants stand ready to wait on him. He is engaging in a local custom, but his uniform distinguishes him from the other figures in the painting. While this particular example does not demonstrate a sophisticated grasp of dimensional illusion, other Company artists often incorporated shading and detailed linear perspective of the surrounding area.³⁵ By placing Fullerton in a prominent, authoritative position, the artist depicts colonial power dynamics, exposing a British audience to indigenous cultural activities, products, and décor.

When the British were in India, many Indian women bore children fathered by members of the East India Company. Children of mixed lineage were often excluded from both Indian and British sectors of society. This phenomenon also has occurred in other places where cultures have converged.

In the New World colonies of Latin America, Spanish colonizers not only produced children with the native indigenous population, but also with slaves brought from Africa. The variety of possible offspring was documented in what is known as *casta* paintings (Figure 9, pg.19), a genre that appeared in Mexico in the 18th century. These paintings vary in quality and size, but all demonstrate the preoccupation with racial hierarchies of the Spaniards who commissioned them. Many were sent to Spain as souvenirs. Although mixed marriages were permitted and common in the New World, an individual’s socioeconomic status was determined at birth, with each caste having different privileges and obligations.



Figure 8. Dip Chand (Indian, active 18th century); *Portrait of East India Company Official (probably William Fullerton)*; opaque watercolor (gouache) on paper; 1760-1763; H:10 ½ in. (26.2 cm.), W:9 in. (22.7 cm.); the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK. Photograph courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London/Art Resource, NY.



Figure 9. Unknown artist (Mexican); *Human Races (Las Castas)* (Mexican); oil on canvas; 18th century; H: 40 7/8 in. (104 cm.), W: 58 1/4 in. (148 cm.); Museo Nacional del Virreinato, Tepotzotlan, Mexico. Photograph courtesy of Schalkwijk/Art Resource, NY.

The intent of the paintings was not to suggest that the races coexisted harmoniously. Rather, the goal was to address the growing insecurity about status among the elite. The paintings promoted the illusion that Mexican society was ordered and hierarchical, with socioeconomic class defined largely by race. Emphasizing racial differences was a strategy Spanish civil and religious authorities used to exert their control over the population.³⁶

Casta paintings were assembled in sets that included 16 to 30 small vignettes. Each depicted a man and a woman of different races with one or two of their potential offspring, all shown with generic facial features and stereotypical costumes and settings. Names for the three main groups were *mestizo* (Spanish-Indian), *mulatto* (Spanish-Black), and *zambo* or *zambaigo* (Black-Indian).³⁷ The paintings conveyed that it was most desirable to be a descendant with purely Spanish blood. Among the many artists who produced these works was the noted indigenous Zapotec painter, Miguel Cabrera (1695-1768).

Hybrid Images

Other art produced in Latin America incorporates images from both colonial and indigenous cultures. The conversion to Christianity of so-called “non-believers” was one of the primary motives of the Spanish conquest, especially once the Council of Trent (1545-1563) acknowledged that indigenous peoples were valid subjects for salvation.³⁸ It is said that when Hernán (a.k.a. Hernando) Cortés (1485-1547) reached the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan, he replaced the images of native gods with crosses and images of the Virgin Mary. This act demonstrated that Cortés understood the relationship between image and power, and how vital these images were to transforming spiritual beliefs, which, in turn, would help to organize a new society. Images were essential to Roman Catholic conversion practices at the time of Cortés because the indigenous populations spoke different languages. This prompted the production of much religiously themed art between the 16th and 19th centuries throughout Mexico and much of Latin America.³⁹ Such art also provided visual proof of the progress made by missionaries, legitimizing the Spanish conquest and colonization of the New World.

One strategy for converting the native population was to have them build churches and create Christian-themed art. Colonizers did appreciate indigenous creative capabilities. Spanish clergy stationed in the New World such as Juan de Zumárraga (1468-1548), the first Bishop and Archbishop of Mexico, praised indigenous children for their cleverness “especially in the art of painting.” Fray Toribio de Motolinia (1482-1568) described how, in only four days, Indian artists completed various frescoes for the exterior walls of the Capilla de Belen in the Franciscan monastery of Tlaxcala.⁴⁰ Fray Pedro de Gante (1480-1572) set up an artisan center for Indians and introduced them to masonry, carpentry, and ironwork as well as sculpture and painting. A

commercial market for their artwork developed both in the New World and in Europe.

Through the institution of the Roman Catholic Church, Spanish colonizers gained access to Aztec riches—especially gold—to add to their growing wealth. Catholic images and products were imported and distributed to Latin America, then appropriated by the native population to create products for export to Europe. The combination of spirituality and commerce solidified Spain's political influence, enabling it to reap economic rewards.

Although the Spanish conquerors and missionaries did everything in their power to obliterate the influence of indigenous spiritual beliefs, certain elements survived persecution. Catholic religious festivals, such as Corpus Christi, were “Andeanized” by incorporating different existing Inka (a.k.a. Inca) costumes. Such efforts served to construct a new identity based on the colonial relationship, but left aspects of the original culture intact.⁴¹ Indigenous artists also created new forms of artwork by incorporating pre-Columbian iconography within the artworks dedicated to their newly-adopted religion. An early and often cited example is a 16th-century wall painting in Cuauhtinchan, Mexico.⁴² The central portion, which was copied from a European engraving, seems like a standard Annunciation scene, but this is framed by an eagle and a jaguar, animals central to Aztec mythology and representative of Cuauhtinchan.⁴³ Similarly, an indigenous embroidered work from Guatemala depicts the double-headed eagle and cross of Spanish royalty, the monogram of Our Lady (*Nuestra Señora*), and a marker for the Order of Carmelite nuns, indicating that the embroidery was done under convent instruction. But the artist also included figures in headdresses and the *quetzal* bird that is native to Central America, creating a work of hybrid imagery.⁴⁴

Numerous religious works integrated symbolic images from Andean cosmology with those from the Catholic Church. *Our Lady of Cocharcas Under the Baldachin* (Figure 10, pg.22), painted by a Peruvian artist in 1765, illustrates a procession in which an enormous statue of the Virgin and the infant Jesus, surrounded by pilgrims and celebrants, is being carried up a mountain in the Peruvian Andes. The baldachin, or canopy, above their heads reflects the Spanish practice of placing brocaded fabric—often imported from Baghdad—over an altar, but it also refers to the Inka practice of using parasols to shield the heads of nobility. The cloak of the Catholic Virgin is decorated in the Inkan tradition of wrapping sacred figures, or *huacas*, in intricately woven cloth. Most striking is the pyramidal shape of the enrobed Virgin, which alludes to the Andean concept of the Earth Mother, Pachamama, and her sacred mountain manifestation.



Figure 10. Unknown artist (Peruvian); *Our Lady of Cocharcas Under the Baldachin*; oil on canvas; 1765; H:78 ¼ in. (198.8 cm), W:56 ½ in. (143.5 cm); Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York. Photograph courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum.

It is likely that Christianity was brought to Ethiopia during the fourth century. The kingdom was located along major international trade routes connecting India and the Roman Empire. Emperor Ezana's interest in solidifying a trading relationship with Rome may have prompted his conversion to Christianity, which also offered a way to unify the many diverse ethnic groups of the kingdom. The emperor was the first world leader to decorate coins with an image of the cross.⁴⁵

The production of religious art begun during Ezana's reign continued for centuries, although much of it was destroyed during Islamic incursions in the sixteenth century. Surviving examples were produced during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the capital and trading center Gondar, where art workshops were established. The artists created manuscripts and icons that depicted Christian imagery with a distinctly Ethiopian aesthetic—simple forms, vibrant colors, and bold outlines. The icon below (Figure 11) is a diptych depicting Mary and the Christ child on the left side, and the Covenant of Mercy—in which Mary intercedes on behalf of the pious—on the right. Some diptychs like this were small enough to be worn as pendants by the nobility.⁴⁶



Figure 11. Gondar Workshops (Ethiopian); *Double-sided diptych*; tempera on wood; 17th-18th century; 6 ½ in. (16.5 cm.), W: 6 5/8 in. (16.9 cm.), D: 1 3/8 in. (3.5 cm.); Newark Museum, New Jersey. Photograph courtesy of Newark Museum.

Imagery appropriated from one culture by another has included secular as well as religious subject matter. During the mid-19th century, European artists developed a fascination with Japanese decoration and art. Prior to the mid-nineteenth century, trade with Japan was nearly impossible and little was known of Japan's art or culture. This was due, in large part, to the seclusionist policies of the powerful *bakufu*, a military entity separate from the imperial court and *daimyo* (feudal lords).

However, in 1854, American Commodore Matthew C. Perry (1794-1858) signed the Treaty of Kanagawa, a "General Convention of Peace and Amity" with *bakufu* negotiators to open the Japanese ports of Shimoda and Hakodate to foreign vessels and sailors in need of safe haven.⁴⁷ By the 1860s, most restrictions had been lifted, opening trade for the countries of the West. Almost immediately, different art forms from Japan began flooding into Western countries. Most notable, perhaps, were the *ukiyo-e* prints—"pictures of the floating world" by Japanese masters such as Hokusai Katsushika (1760-1849), Utagawa (Ando) Hiroshige (1797-1858), and Kitagawa Utamaro (ca. 1753-1806), whose work is seen in Figure 12 (pg.25). These woodblock prints, which depicted fleeting moments of everyday urban life, influenced a number of European artists living in Europe, including Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890), Paul Gauguin (1848-1903), Edgar Degas (1834-1917), and James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903), as well as the American expatriate Mary Cassatt (1844-1926).

In April 1890, the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris hosted an important exhibition of Japanese woodcuts, which many artists attended, including Degas and Cassatt. Cassatt was one of the few American and female artists active in the circle of nineteenth-century Impressionists, having settled in France permanently in 1874. After viewing the exhibition, she wrote to fellow artist Berthe Morisot (1841-1895), "Seriously, you must not miss it. You couldn't dream of anything more beautiful. I dream of it, and don't think of anything else but color on copper."⁴⁸ Soon afterward, Cassatt began experimenting with different print techniques such as aquatint, drypoint, etching, and hand-coloring in an attempt to emulate the flat planes and simple lines of Japanese woodcuts. Her innovative technique was a highly inventive combination of printing processes that earned her critical admiration in Europe and America.⁴⁹

In 1890-91, Cassatt created a print series—as was the custom in Japan—that she exhibited at the Durand Ruel Gallery in Paris.⁵⁰ Like many *ukiyo-e* prints, Cassatt's ten works in the series focus on the lives of women. In prints such as *The Fitting* (Figure 13, pg.26), the artist presents the viewer with access to an intimate interaction between a seamstress and her client that a male artist would not have had.⁵¹



Figure 12. Kitagawa Utamaro (Japanese, 1753-1806); *Chûbon no zu* (*Picture of the Middle Class*); oban woodcut; Edo period, ca. 1794-1795; H:14 1/5 in. (36.3 cm.), W: 10 in. (25.3 cm); Print Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, The New York Public Library, New York. Photograph courtesy of The New York Public Library/Art Resource/NY.



Figure 13. Mary Cassatt (American, 1844-1926); *The Fitting*; drypoint and aquatint etching on off-white, moderately thick, moderately textured laid paper; 1890-1891; (Image) H: 14 13/16 in. (37.6 cm.), W: 10 1/8 in. (25.7 cm.); (Sheet) H: 17 1/4 in. (43.8 cm.), W: 12 in. (30.5 cm.); Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York. Photograph courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum.

The American-born, British-based artist James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903) was particularly enamored with the art and culture of Japan, which he introduced to London society. He acquired many art objects from Japan, including pottery as well as prints. As Whistler's work developed, his earlier pieces integrated Japanese objects that he had collected; later he would only use Japanese shapes and designs in creating his paintings and prints.⁵² *Early Morning* (1878)⁵³ reflects his move away from naturalistic representation to a Japanese-influenced aesthetic. The work depicts the industrial urban landscape of London's Battersea district across the Thames as a foggy abstraction in an asymmetrical composition.⁵⁴

What most intrigued Whistler about Japanese art was its foreignness. His understanding was limited; some of the works he owned and used in his paintings were misidentified Chinese pieces. Furthermore, he had a dismissive attitude toward the Japanese artists that influenced him. Mortimer Menpes (1855-1938), a former assistant of Whistler's, once tried to explain that the Japanese artist Kyosai (1831-1889) was a great master of painting. "This is my method," Whistler retorted. "This Kyosai must be a wonderful man, for his methods are my methods."⁵⁵ This Eurocentric attitude of cultural authority characterized contemporary British political and economic imperialists. Nonetheless, Modernism became a period deeply influenced by cultures outside of Europe, resulting in an unprecedented variety and diversity of work.

While the influence of Japanese aesthetics on Western art grew, the end of Japan's isolation affected the arts there as well. One of the first artists to integrate Western techniques into Japanese art is Kuroda Seiki (1866-1924). Seiki was born into a wealthy family and educated in both French and English. In 1884, Seiki went to Paris to prepare for a career in law. By 1887, however, he abandoned law and began a career as a painter. Seiki enrolled in the Académie Colarossi, one of the principal private art academies in Paris, where he studied Western-style painting, specifically *plein air* and Impressionist painting. In addition to his talent, his financial background and fluency in French brought him a great deal of success in France, an unprecedented accomplishment for a Japanese artist in the Western world.⁵⁶ Upon his return to Japan in 1893, Seiki opened the Tenshin Dōjō, a painting school based on the model of a private French art academy. He also served as a cultural ambassador for Japan and represented the Japanese Ministry of Education at the 1900 Paris Universal Exposition.

For the Exposition, Seiki presented two paintings, including the triptych *Wisdom, Impression, Sentiment* (1897-1900), shown in Figure 14 (pg.28). The three panels present three female nudes, allegorically representing the three words in the title through their expressions and gestures. Unlike the highly stylized female figures and white skin depicted in Japanese woodblock

prints, Seiki adopted a Western palette and style of painting, as well as an idealized vision of how the female body should be portrayed.⁵⁷ But the gold background recalls the gilded folding screens popular in Japan during the late 16th and early 17th centuries.

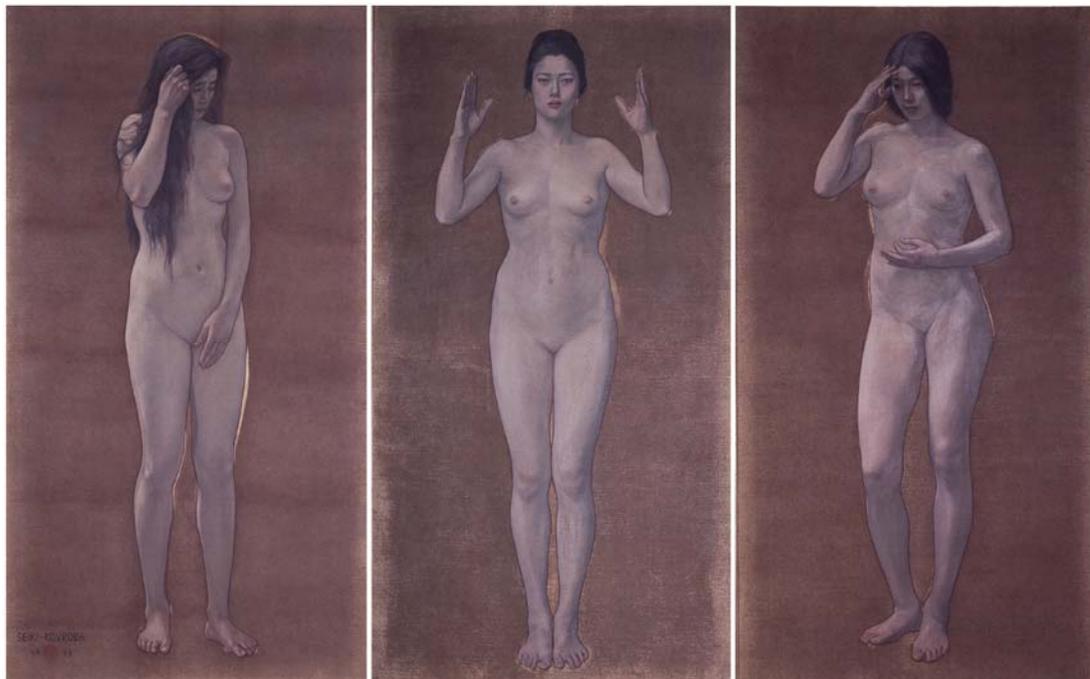


Figure 14. Kuroda Seiki (Japanese, 1866-1924). *Chi Kan Jo (Wisdom, Impression, Sentiment)*; oil on canvas; 1897-1900; H: 70 4/5 in. (180 cm.), W: 39 1/5 in. (99.8 cm.); Kuroda Memorial Hall, National Research Institute of Cultural Properties, Tokyo, Japan. Photograph courtesy of the National Research Institute of Cultural Properties, Tokyo, Japan.

Globalization of Culture

Advances in communication technology have made it possible for different cultures and communities to exchange information and ideas instantaneously. As a result, the United States has had a pervasive influence on global culture, and has been perceived as a major threat responsible for wiping out regional and local traditions. This is an issue contemporary artists like Miguel Luciano (b.1972) are addressing in their works.

Born in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Luciano explores the complicated relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico. After the Spanish-American War in 1898, Spain ceded Puerto Rico (along with Cuba, the Philippines, and Guam) to the United States. Unlike Cuba, however, Puerto Rico did not gain full independence from the U.S., but was declared a commonwealth in 1952. It has its own government, but remains subject to U.S. jurisdiction and

sovereignty. Although Puerto Ricans may enlist in the United States military, they may not vote in U.S. elections or host embassies.



Figure 15. Miguel Luciano (Puerto Rican, b.1972); *Pelea de Gallos* (*Fight of the Roosters*); acrylic on canvas; 2002; H: 60 in. (152.4 cm.), W: 48 in. (121.9 cm.)
Photograph courtesy of the artist.

Such contradictions and colonial patterns are the subject of Miguel Luciano's work, which is often satirical in tone and uses elements from popular culture. He has said, "My work addresses playful and painful exchanges between Puerto Rico and the United States—questioning a colonial relationship that exists to the present and problematizing the space between the two cultures. I am interested in examining how colonial subordination is extended through globalization as communities have shifted gears from a production-based society to one that is grounded in consumption. From cereal boxes and children's books...my work draws upon a range of visual references, often reorganizing popular, religious, commercial, and consumer iconography into new hierarchies—creating meaning anew from a site of resistance."⁵⁸

For the work *Pelea de Gallos* (2002), shown in Figure 15 on page 29, Luciano has taken inspiration from cockfighting, a popular sport in Puerto Rico. Criticized for being inhumane, the sport is a major source of revenue on the island, generating nearly \$42 million in 2004.⁵⁹ Luciano has appropriated two bright cartoon images from advertising: Cornelius, the rooster mascot from Kellogg's Corn Flakes boxes, and Picu from Pollos Picu, a Puerto Rican poultry company. The two roosters are caught up in a macho fight to the death, bleeding profusely, in an image that is simultaneously hilarious and grotesque, with no side spared. In the bottom right corner, Colonel Sanders, the face of Kentucky Fried Chicken, is transformed into "San Colonel Sanders," a typically Latin American image of a *santo* (saint), shown in a tropical setting with a deliberately antiqued appearance. He is seen feeding fried poultry to the chickens, a parody of a factory farming practice that contaminates the livestock. Luciano creates Pop Art with a colonial twist, a sharp critique of the postcolonial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico.

While not as overtly political as Luciano, Japanese artist Takashi Murakami (b.1963) touches on many issues of an ever-changing global community. Growing up in post-World War II Japan, Murakami witnessed his country grappling with the rebuilding of its society after decimation by the atomic bombs that ended the war. Eager to close the door on the past, the Japanese embraced American popular culture, especially cartoons. A geeky youth subculture—*otaku*—developed an obsession with the sci-fi and fantasy worlds of *anime* (animation), *manga* (comic books), video games, and collectible, sexually suggestive figurines of characters.

For Murakami, *otaku* culture reflects Japan's postwar impotence. He asserts that for the most part serious artists in Japan did not address the nightmare of World War II and the humiliation of defeat. *Otaku* imagery translates the painful truths about Japan's World War II experience into the childlike forms of cartoon fantasy. This has allowed both artists and viewers to avoid confronting the thorny issues tied to the power struggles between the U.S. and Japan as wartime enemies and economic rivals in the postwar era.

Murakami is known to sugarcoat his anger and bitterness about his country's militaristic history and its passive present with a joke. His sculpture *Miss ko2* (1997) simultaneously seems to celebrate and criticize *otaku* culture.⁶⁰ The first three-dimensional figure Murakami created is essentially an *otaku* figurine blown up into a six-foot-tall fiberglass figure, thereby blurring the boundary between “fine art” and Japanese popular culture. The artist worked for two years with Kaiyodo, the main fabricator of *otaku* figurines. *Miss ko2* is based on a video game character “the fighting *bisyoujo*” (Japanese slang for a beautiful young girl), who wore a waitress uniform from the popular chain restaurant Anna Miller’s. Her coquettish pose and erotic features echo those common to *otaku* figurines. She has no Asian features, but long blonde hair that cascades down her back, extremely fair white skin, long legs barely covered by her mini skirt, a tight blouse, and a miniscule waist. A Chicago-based collector bought *Miss ko2* for over \$500,000 at a Christie’s auction.

The pop culture amalgam of Murakami’s work has resonated with a very wide audience, making him an international superstar. He is continuing an artistic practice with a long history. As a result of cultural confluence and influence, visual art has been created through a wide range of hybrid styles, innovative forms, and repurposed signs and symbols brought into new cultural contexts.

In the United States, we are accustomed to believing that we are the primary site of cultural convergence--a consequence of the “melting pot” concept often retold in American popular culture. However, it is clear that this phenomenon is widespread. The historical prevalence of trade, exploration, war, and colonialism caused a clash and synthesis of cultures prior to the creation of this country. During this time, other societies and nations came to blend their cultures together, forming wholly unique expressions as a result of cross-cultural influence. Moving into the 21st century, technological improvements, especially the development of the Internet, have brought a new level of cultural accessibility and interaction. As shown in this chapter, although cultural convergence is not a new trend in art and cultural history, the significance of these trends has greatly increased as technology continues to improve and access to information becomes easier. In fact, in this day and age, it would be very difficult to produce a cultural object without it being, in some way, influenced by a culture outside of what one would consider one's own. The convergence of cultures remains a product of economic, political, and technological forces, but the art objects produced by such convergences are ever-shifting reactions, collaborations, and interchanges.

Endnotes

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