

ELIZABETH HARNEY AND RUTH B. PHILLIPS

PREFACE

The genesis of this book goes back to a colloquium entitled *Global Indigenous Modernisms: Primitivism, Artists, Mentors*, held in May 2010 at the Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts. The Clark's generous support of Ruth Phillips's proposal made possible a meeting of twelve scholars from the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Nigeria, South Africa, and the United Kingdom. All study twentieth-century modern arts created by indigenous artists subject to colonial rule. During two days of discussions, we explored the potential for using a comparative framework to reveal global modes of circulation, networks of communication, and common patterns of development to highlight the unique features that characterize different local iterations of modernism around the world.

The research presentations led us all to decide unanimously to reconvene a year later, in Ottawa, for a public symposium, where we could pursue a broader project and generate wider discussion. The editors of this volume organized the symposium, entitled *Multiple Modernisms: Transcultural Exchanges in Twentieth-Century Global Art*. The event began at the National Gallery of Canada then continued on the other side of the Ottawa River, at the Canadian Museum of Civilization (now the Canadian Museum of History), where Indigenous artists and curators from the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective presented a lively set of talks on Canadian indigenous modernisms. Papers from the symposium form the core of this book, and although two original Clark participants—Kobena Mercer and Susan Vogel—unfortunately could not continue with the project, three additional authors—Karen Duffek, Heather Igloliorte, and Erin Haney—contributed chapters that have broadened our book's scope in important ways. To reveal the shared as well as the distinctive aspects of indigenous modernisms, we sought geographic and cultural breadth,

yet this collection pretends neither to be comprehensive within the multiple modernisms framework, nor to represent all modernisms created by peoples identified as indigenous in colonial and neocolonial contexts. (We address the complexities of this designation in our introduction.) Rather, we have adopted a case study approach, which invites considerations of the complex webs of interaction among artists, intermediaries, objects, images, and texts produced by conditions of modernity and coloniality.

In George Kubler's book *The Shape of Time*, first published in 1962, he wrote of Western art that "the last cupboards and closets of the history of art have now been turned out and catalogued."¹ For the modernisms we explore here, however, art historians are only just beginning to open the doors to the cupboards. While the need for this book and its timeliness will, of course, be judged by its readers, two deaths that occurred during its preparation underscore the urgent need to document art histories, which are retained as much in the memories of the participants and the ephemeral traces left by their artistic projects as in any set of formally organized archives. Toward the beginning of this project, we lost Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, eminent Maori art historian, curator, and teacher, who contributed deeply to our knowledge of Maori modernists. Early on, he had encouraged Phillips to pursue the comparative project, and we had hoped to engage him as a contributor. Then, as the book was going to press, pioneering Anishinaabe artist Daphne Odjig passed away; her work, discussed at the Ottawa conference by contemporary Anishinaabe artist and curator Bonnie Devine, is only now receiving the broader attention it deserves. If, as many art historians today argue, a globalized world requires wide-ranging narratives of human cultural history, the assembly of the archive cannot be divorced from the work of reconceptualization and analysis, as each chapter of this book demonstrates.

This volume also has deeper roots in the two coeditors' career-long engagements with the modernisms created by indigenous and colonized peoples in Africa, North America, and elsewhere. Both have worked in museums initially founded to rectify the neglect of non-Western arts and cultures (Harney at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art and Phillips at the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology), and both have pursued teaching careers in Canadian universities during a period when First Nations and Inuit arts have steadily grown in prominence—not only affirming the vitality of Indigenous cultures but also countering the settler nation's own modernist appropriations. It would have been hard for either of us, trained in African art history and immersed in art worlds that were regularly electri-

fied by the politics of Indigenous art production, *not* to be intrigued by the parallel challenges of conceptualization, inclusivity, and canonicity that have characterized African and Indigenous North American modernisms—first silenced and marginalized, then primitivized and appropriated, then celebrated (albeit lost in a space between anthropology and art museums), and, finally, hailed as the global “contemporary.” That our intellectual trajectories belong to different generations—Phillips received her PhD in 1979 and Harney in 1996—indicates the persistence of problems of reception, periodization, and classification this book explores.

This collaborative project has forced us each to confront the overdetermined and overburdened intellectual categories we take to be natural in our respective subfields. In particular, it has both loosened and deepened our understandings of the metahistorical concepts of modernity, indigeneity, and primitivism. And though working together has brought forth many useful and telling comparisons and recognizable patterns of colonial-modern practices in the arts and in their systems of patronage, it has also demanded that we recognize these experiences of the modern era as contingent and volatile, produced through specific historical encounters, and in constant need of re-reading. The goals of the collaborative research project we formulated at the Ottawa meeting, *Multiple Modernisms: Transcultural Exchanges in Twentieth-Century Global Art*, were thus twofold: we aimed to begin the essential work of scholarly documentation of artists’ works and lives by assembling the research already done and by initiating new studies. Through our comparative framework, we also sought to enhance critical analysis of the cultural collisions and conceptual confusions that have informed the reception of these arts. Many of the contributors to this volume have built on the research presented here in three subsequent symposia focused on particular themes—*Modernists and Mentors: Indigenous and Colonial Artistic Exchanges*, in Cambridge, England, in 2013; *Indigenous Modernisms: Histories of the Contemporary*, in Wellington, New Zealand, in 2014; and *Gendered Making/Unmanned Modernisms: Gender and Genre in Indigenous and Colonial Modernisms*, in Johannesburg and Cape Town, South Africa, in 2016. This first of several planned publications is designed to introduce the scope and richness of the project while instantiating its potential to amplify the breadth of a discipline striving to reinvent itself on global terms.

Without the generosity of several funding agencies, the conferences described above—and this book—could not have come into being. At the Clark Art Institute, scholars Michael Holly, Mark Ledbury, Natasha Becker, Aruna

D'Souza, and the Clark's wonderful staff made our initial meeting not only intellectually stimulating but also hugely pleasurable. Funding for the Ottawa conference was provided by the 2010 Premier's Discovery Award in the Humanities made to Phillips by the province of Ontario; further generous support was provided by the National Gallery of Canada, the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Carleton University, and the University of Toronto. The able organizing team was headed by Kate Higginson and assisted by Crystal Migwans, Annette De Stecher, Stacy Ernst, Alexandra Nahwegahbow, Miriam Aronowicz, and Akshaya Tankha.

Profound thanks go to Nicholas Thomas, who from the beginning has shared with Phillips the overall intellectual direction of the *Multiple Modernisms* project and who procured grant funding from the Leverhulme Trust to support the second, third, and fourth conferences. Chika Okeke-Agulu and the Program in African Studies at Princeton University made possible an additional workshop in December 2015. We are very grateful for the invaluable help of our research assistant Lisa Truong, who communicated with the authors and assembled the manuscript with such efficiency, tact, and skill. Thanks also go to the Equity and Diversity Fund, the Dean's Contingency Fund, and the Vice Principal of Research Impact Fund at the University of Toronto Scarborough and to Dean John Osborne at Carleton for generous subsidies in support of publishing costs. We warmly thank Ken Wissoker for his encouragement and support of the project from its inception as well as the three anonymous reviewers for Duke University Press, whose rigorous feedback helped us to refine our introductory framing and sharpen the individual case studies. Jade Brooks and Olivia Polk have ably guided the book along its path to publication.

We offer our sincerest gratitude to our contributors for the penetrating insights at that initial workshop and those that followed each of our conferences. They patiently and positively responded to several rounds of editorial comments, and their input has continued to sharpen the focus of the project. Of course, we could not have pursued the research, travel, and writing required for this work without the loving support of our families. As always, we owe you a great thanks. Finally, the transcontinental friendships and collegiality, generated by our meetings, is one of this project's most precious legacies.

Note

1. George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1962), 12.