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ART OF THE AMERICAS REVISITED:
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO DECOLONISE A MUSEUM?

Abstract: The *Art of the Americas* exhibition (March – July 2018) at the Max Chambers Library, University of Central Oklahoma (UCO), USA, questioned the practices of assigning cultural objects to different academic disciplines and separate museums. The exhibition brought together diverse cultural objects from North, Central and South America. Using the exhibition as a threshold and a lens, this paper opens a broader conversation on decolonising museums that challenge the knowledge-building system in academic institutions. First, Shikoh Shiraiwa, curator, revisits *Art of the Americas* to re-examine his motives and positionality. Secondly, Olga Zabalueva dwells on the theoretical implications and importance of constantly re-assessing decolonial efforts. Third, we both explore how ingrained racial hierarchies have crystalised in certain academic disciplines. As a result, we further elaborate on the criticality of challenging institutionalised scholarship, concluding with theoretical pursuit of cultural and socially sustainable museum practice for the future.

Keywords: heritage; coloniality; decolonising museums; decolonising universities; decolonising knowledge; reflexive curatorship

Introduction

Museums and universities are 'one of the tools responsible for the production of modern systems of knowledge' and have 'helped to establish and maintain the control of knowledge and its production by the West', placing themselves as 'a very powerful epistemic technology'.[1] Contemporary museums are often the product of 'racist and colonial histories',[2] and only through the political activism and social movements of the 1960s and 1970s in the US, criticising museum displays of Native Americans, did universities and museums slowly shift their viewpoints to support the 'cultural self-determination' of native peoples.[3] Like museums, the 'foundations of universities remain unshakably colonial'.[4]

Under this technology, humanity materials are regularly assessed and labelled into academic disciplines and ethnographic categorisation, built on scientific racism as scholarship in the 19th and early 20th century in Europe and the United States. The domination of certain knowledge-production structures continues to this today. The system, though, has certainly brought myriad technological advances, enriching many aspects of people's lives in nations that have adopted this Euro-US-centric doctrine. Thus, this article paradoxically benefits from the exact system it is criticising, and the aim is not to demonise universities or museums, but to acknowledge the biased knowledge-building mechanism inherent to both types of institutions.

The decolonising museum is a rather vague concept that has been interpreted in various ways and through various practices in museums. We believe that the coloniality of knowledge[5] is an arbitrary condition in today's world, and our aim in this article is to stimulate conversations on just what it means to decolonise museums in a broader sense.

The 'participatory turn' in museums, coinciding with new museology in all its forms and practices, brought (relatively) new types of decolonial actions to cultural institutions. Academic studies have been discussing the importance of

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[1] M. Tlostanova, *Postcolonialism and Postsocialism in Fiction and Art: Resistance and Re-existence.* Palgrave Macmillan 2017, p. 74.

[2] T. Bennet, *Museums, Power, Knowledge: Selected Essays.* Routledge, London 2018, p. 2.

[3] T. Hill Tom and R. W. Hill, *Creation's Journey: Native American Identity and Belief.* Smithsonian Institution Press 1994, pp. 16-17. However, the criticisms on displaying and stereotyping Native American peoples and cultures were already ongoing around the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, such as by Emma C. Sickels (Baker 2010, pp. 105-111).

[4] G.K. Bhambra, D. Gebrial and K. Nişancıoğlu, *Decolonising the University.* Pluto Press, London 2018, p. 6.

[5] Coloniality, as distinct from colonialism, is an ongoing condition of the modern world, which describes the social, cultural and epistemic impacts of colonialism. This concept is linked to the Latin American school of thought and to such scholars as Aníbal Quijano and Walter Mignolo (Mignolo 2007).

'source communities' since the late 20th century and, in the early 21st century, museology started to ask crucial questions about heritage ownership, museum activism, equity and non-extractive relations with indigenous artists and curators.[6] At the same time, museum practice itself slowly began addressing such questions and adapting to new practices – for instance, Puawai Cairns, head of the Māori curatorial team at the Te Papa Tongaregawa Museum of New Zealand, argues for re-indigenisation instead of decolonisation to emphasise the invisible labour that colonial and subaltern 'others' are still investing in Westernised institutions.[7]

The first section of the paper has been written by one of the co-authors, Shikoh Shiraiwa, in the first person, while the second section is a response by Olga Zabalueva, the second co-author, and the two following sections are the product of joint writing and reflecting on the topic. Though the *Art of the Americas* exhibition serves as both material and a starting point for our thinking, the methodology for this text cannot be described as 'exhibition analysis'. On the contrary, we critically address the role of the curator through an analysis of positionality and reflexive auto-ethnography, and then examine the knowledge-production structures that allow this role to be read in certain ways.

Art of the Americas Revisited

The *Art of the Americas* exhibition encouraged audiences to view all its objects as equal, despite differences in time period, monetary value, origin and purpose.[8] Simultaneously, the exhibition challenged the relationship between museums and Western-based scholarship that institutionalised the categorising of material culture into art history, ethnology, archaeology[9] and other fields of study. I questioned whether this naturalised type of categorisation evident in museum practices had preserved a certain Western imperial and colonial ideology, continuing to reinvent socio-cultural, socio-political, socioeconomic

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[6]   B. Lynch, *Whose Cake is it Anyway?: Museums, Civil Society and the Changing Reality of Public Engagement*, in: *Museums and Migration: History, Memory, Politics* ed. L. Gouriévidis, Routledge, new York 2014, pp. 67-80; R.R. Janes, and R. Sandell. *Museum Activism*. Routledge, New York 2019; S. Vawda, *Museums and the Epistemology of Injustice: From Colonialism to Decoloniality*. "Museum International" 2019, vol. 71, no. 1–2, pp. 72–79.

[7]   P. Cairns, *Decolonisation: We Aren't Going to Save You. Center for the Future of Museums Blog*. "American Alliance of Museums". December 17, 2018. (https://www.aam-us.org/2018/12/17/decolonisation-we-arent-going-to-save-you/) (accessed: 30.07.2022).

[8]   S. Shiraiwa and O. Zabalueva, *Museological Myths of Decolonization and Neutrality*, in: *the Decolonisation of Museology: Museums, Mixing, and Myths of Origin*, ed. Y. Bergeron, M. Rivet, ICOFOM 2021. p. 206.

[9]   S. Shiraiwa, *Art of the Americas: Art Exhibition to Rethink Cultural Diversity and Equality*. Unpublished manuscript, typescript 2018, pp. 1-2.

and aesthetic hierarchies among nations, cultures, ethnic groups, races, genders, religions and other social and cultural groups. The Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD) normalised the universality of Western elite's heritage and material culture as a powerful hegemonic discourse.[10] Smith discusses if 'all heritage is intangible' and constitutes a repeated social and cultural meaning-making practice for the present.[11] In the *Art of the Americas* exhibition, all the materials were assumed to be transcultural and transhistorical, shaping parts of the present American identity (of all the Americas). Therefore, by mixing all the objects together, the exhibition broke from an academic categorisation of the materials, experimenting with new heritage and curatorial practices that emphasised all cultural production as equal in the context of the Americas.

One of four rectangle glass cases displayed an unidentified pre-Columbian double spout pottery with a jaguar handle facing west, placed on top of a seascape drawing by an English-born American painter named Edward Moran (1829–1901). Facing north, the case displayed two late 20th-century Mexican (possibly Guatemalan or Peruvian) festival masks. Facing south, it displayed a small clay figure of a serpent head (*Quetzalcoatl/Kukulcan*), assumed to be of *Teotihuacan* (Mexico, ca. 2nd century BCE to 8th century CE) origin, together with a human figure (ca. 1300 CE) from the *Chimu* culture, Peru, a terracotta mould from the *Maya* culture (Mexico, ca. 900 CE) and a contemporary Venezuelan American artist's mixed media work. Although clear limitations existed on how to display social and cultural diversity representative of the Americas in the University of Central Oklahoma's collections, the other glass cases presented an array of artwork by contemporary Native American, Black American and White American artists, including a 20th-century LGBTQ+ and Taos community in the United States.

My museological studies began with Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574), Johann Winklemann (1717-1768), Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), Michel Foucault (1926-1984), Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002), and other Western philosophers and historians, while Michelle Henning[12] introduced me to various theories and methods of museology. I also studied Tony Bennett[13] and Benedict Anderson[14] on the correlation between the nation-state and origin of modern-day museums, while Lee D. Baker[15] led me to question the

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[10] L. Smith, *Uses of Heritage*. Routledge, London 2006.
[11] Ibid. pp. 1-3.
[12] M. Henning, *Museums, Media and Cultural Theory*. Open University Press, UK 2006.
[13] T. Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*. Routledge, London 1995.
[14] B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso, London 2006.
[15] L.D. Baker, *Anthropology and the Racial Politics of Culture*. Duke University Press 2010.

neutrality of the modern-day scholarship. Amy Lonetree[16] first introduced me to the effort of decolonising museums and multivocality, while John Urry's idea of the 'gaze'[17] became part of the displaying method for *Art of the Americas*. Finally, Laurajane Smith[18] and Yosuke Kaifu[19] pushed me to examine the ambiguity of heritage, culture and ethnicity.

Curation is a difficult task. Donna Haraway views knowledge as partially situated because the 'knowing self is partial' and researchers seek 'the subject position... of objectivity'.[20] Charlotte Aull Davies adds that we typically research something we have a connection with, not something 'outside' of ourselves. Therefore, 'a process of self-reference' is important because the connection will potentially affect our research.[21] This process of self-reflection on *Art of the Americas* suggested by my co-author forced me to revisit how the exhibition was personal and what failures and hypocrisy I left there. Nikki Sullivan and Craig Middleton point out the misconception of 'museological practice', assuming that 'facts simply exist and can be accessed through rational observation', and that curators are merely tasked 'to share these neutral "truths" objectively'.[22] Museum curators 'rarely reveal themselves and their positionality', including the 'partial and contingent' nature of their work.[23] Admitting the flaws in our work often makes us vulnerable, not only with respect to professional integrity but also personal integrity. None of the exhibitions that I produced between 2013 and 2019 were neutral. Michael Ames states: 'Representation is a political act. Sponsorship is a political act. Curation is a political act.[24] Working in a museum is a political act'. I would add that writing an academic article is a political act, too.

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16 A. Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*. University of North Carolina Press 2012.
17 J. Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*. Sage Publication 1990; J. Urry, *The Tourist Gaze "Revisited"*. "American Behavioral Scientist", vol. 36, no. 2 1992, pp. 172-186. Urry states that 'the gaze' is a social construct (1990, 1) and that various 'discourses of seeing are constructed, reproduced, and transformed' through a 'particular configuration of time and space' (1992, 184). Moreover, 'Different tourist gazes involve particular processes by which the collective memory of a society is organized and reproduced' (1992, 184). By mixing various cultural objects, by shifting the gaze back at the audience, the *Art of the Americas* exhibition challenged the organised collective societal and national memory of cultural, ethnic and racial separations and hierarchies reinforced by museums and academic disciplines.
18 L. Smith, *Uses of...*
19 Y. Kaifu, *Where Did We Come From?* Bungei Syunsyu, Japan 2016.
20 D. Haraway, *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective*. "Feminist Studies", vol. 14, no. 3 1988, pp. 586-590.
21 C.A. Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography: A Guide to Researching Selves and Others*. Routledge, London 1999, p. 3.
22 N. Sullivan and C. Middleton. *Queering the Museum*. Routledge, New York 2020, p. 32.
23 Ibid.
24 M. Ames, *Biculturalism in Exhibitions*. "Museum Anthropology", vol. 15, no. 2 1991, p. 13.

The positionality of *Art of the Americas* reflected my 'non-white' and 'outsider' status in the United States, as I am originally from Japan. I lived in the Oklahoma City area from 2001 to 2019, pursuing higher education and gaining valuable work experience. During the years 2013–2019, I worked on the extraordinary collections at the university. Researching Sub-Saharan African cultural objects especially taught me about the ongoing coloniality of museum displays and narratives globally,[25] causing me to realise that my practice as a curator had been following a Western-centric system and, more significantly, that my views on non-Western cultural objects, including Japanese culture, reflected the practice of placing Western material culture and civilisation at the top of an imagined human hierarchy. Ironically, this meant that I had been self-cementing myself as a 'lesser being'. My decolonising pursuit had to start with deconstructing my colonial way of thinking and seeing. This extraordinary and complex process continues today.

Surprisingly, this self-assimilation with the Western-centric system started in Japan. Already in the 19th century, Japan had endorsed imperial Europe's nation-state building mechanism, internalising it to fit the newly constructed ethnographic context of the expanding Imperial nation. The Westernisation included importing the new term 'art' which was preferred over the already-existing 'craft' that represented the skill, concept, spirituality and aesthetics of Japanese cultural products.[26] This is evident in many art museums that house numerous Western traditional artworks as status symbols, reproducing cultural and social capitals that underline the superiority of the Western civilisation. With this recognition, I questioned: 'Who decides what art is?' 'Why is art considered superior to craft?' 'Why do people want to go to the Louvre?' 'Why the *Mona Lisa*?' Those inquiries provided the theoretical foundation for the *Art of the Americas* exhibition.

Furthermore, in the years 2015 and 2016, I faced systematic bullying at my workplace, and I further struggled with institutionalised discrimination that protected the abusers. My experience as an 'outsider' in the United States taught me that many social and cultural injustices are institutionalised and tightly guarded by existing bureaucracy, with discriminatory layers of class, race, ethnicity and language, among other forms of prejudice. However, most importantly, I realised that such forms of abuse are also opportunistic acts of power and control, as in my case the perpetrators of the actions were mainly other 'minorities' who created an illusion of immunity that 'minorities' cannot be abusers. The

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[25] I also managed Oceanian Arts, Native American and Oklahoman Arts, Latin American Arts, and European artwork collections.

[26] Y. Katoh, *Distance and Perspective Between Art and Craft – Contemporary Art and Metal Craftsman Yoo Lizzy.* "Nabizang" 2010, pp. 116-117. (accessed?).

trauma of this experience continually influences my positionality as a curator, researcher and educator.

In 2016, I moved to work at Archives and Special Collections in the university library, receiving support to explore both the theoretical and methodological development of exhibition displays. The Native American Heritage Month (November) exhibition at the height of the South Dakota Pipeline dispute[27] was curated and lectured on by a Native American (Southern Cheyenne/Kaw/ Chumash) artist. The exhibition further educated me about ongoing systemic racial, cultural and social discrimination towards indigenous communities in the United States, often reflected in museum practices. At the same time, the exhibition opening provided a safe space to discuss these sensitive issues.

The *Art of the Americas* exhibition also questioned why the term 'other/s' is mostly used negatively, placing such peoples as Black Americans and Native Americans into 'ever-fixed categories of some type of "Others"' as passive, powerless, and being-stuck',[28] when they were capable of gazing back and challenging those who gaze upon them.[29] Members of the social majority often represent social minorities at museum conferences, giving an illusion of equity and equality, underpinning the fact that power structures are still being preserved.

The *Art of the Americas* exhibition did contain several critical shortcomings, as the display was planned and executed solely from my perspective. This in itself gave rise to the question 'who gave the curator the right to represent the entire Americas?' On the one hand, I challenged the Western hegemony of standardised aesthetics and cultural capital value. On the other, I acted as the only authority narrating the cultural objects of the Americas without recourse to any multivocal process. Sonya Atalay (Anishinaabe-Ojibwe) explains that the aim of multivocal archaeology is to decentralise power in a way that equally combines both indigenous and Western concepts and practice, not to replace Western archaeology: 'The replacement of one power structure with another without changing the way power is perceived and enacted is pointless'.[30] In this respect, I failed. As Donna Haraway notes, while those who are 'claiming to see' from below are preferred, it is not an innocent position and still needs to be critically examined.[31]

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[27] Further reading (https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/plains-treaties/dapl) (accessed: 30.07.2022).

[28] S. Shiraiwa, *Art of the Americas...*, p. 3.

[29] S. Coleman and M. Crang. *Grounded Tourists, Travelling Theory Tourism: Between Place and Performance*. Berghahn Books, New York 2002; L. Smith, Uses of....

[30] S. Atalay, *Multivocality and Indigenous Archaeologies*, in: *Evaluating Multiple Narratives: Beyond Nationalist, Colonialist, Imperialist Archaeologies*, ed. C. Fawcett, J. Habu, J. M. Matsunaga, Springer Science and Business Media, New York 2008, p. 38.

[31] D. Haraway, *Situated Knowledges...*, pp. 583-584.

The *Art of the Americas* exhibition underlined my resistance to the abuse of power I had faced while reflecting on the Max Chambers Library's openness to letting me explore and experiment with different exhibition methods. In the end, it led me to explore 'decolonising museums' as a means of decolonising the academic knowledge-building system as a whole, since the system continues to preserve, reconstruct and reproduce Western views on humanity and knowledge as the global standard.

Rethinking curatorship: Bringing together theory and practice

From a museological perspective, exhibition analysis is a somewhat common task, especially part of a subfield known as *museography*. The term defines museum practice in a broad sense but also focuses specifically on means and techniques involved in exhibitions.[32] In this subsection, I address the issues raised by Shiraiwa from a theoretical standpoint, employing my 'double-outsider' position: as a museologist who 'studies' museums 'from the outside' but also as someone who has never seen the original exhibition.[33] As part of the inquiry, I also problematise the relationship between theory and practice, and the position of a distanced objective scholar, as well as traditional ways of conducting exhibition analysis as if approaching a ready-made product. In the first instance, our case is already in the past, with scarce empirical material available, but my point here is that excess of material does not always overshadow the curator's experience and the narrative implanted in the display. Only by addressing exhibitions as fluid *processes* of co-creation (performed both by human beings – curators, techs, visitors and non-humans, i.e. artifacts, labels and institutions) is it possible to look for more specific answers to the question implied in the title of the article: *What does it mean to decolonise a museum?*

Creating exhibitions that question the *status quo* and 'natural' hierarchies is nothing new in the museum world. One can name Fred Wilson's intervention *Mining the Museum* in 1993 as an iconic example of juxtaposing museum objects to contest the hegemonic narrative. At the same time, curatorial efforts can be perceived as problematic, as with the case of the *Into the Heart of Africa* controversial exhibition at the Royal Ontario museum in Canada.[34]

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[32] F. Mairesse and A Desvallées. *Key Concepts of Museology*. Armand Colin 2010.

[33] Nevertheless, it is necessary to acknowledge that both authors have experience as museum practitioners, which changes their positionality from an outsider to an insider. In this vein we see the combined value of museum theory and practice in addressing the issue of decolonisation.

[34] S. R. Butler, *Reflexive Museology: Lost and Found. In The International Handbooks of Museum Studies: Museum Theory*, John Wiley & Sons 2015, pp. 159–182.

The Dutch cultural theorist Mike Bal[35] has introduced the notion of 'expository agency' to refer how the subject (curator) exposes itself through an exhibition of objects. Bal suggests narratology as an analytical tool for museography and states that the 'thing on display comes to stand for something else, the statement about it. It comes to *mean*' (emphasis by author). Despite being aligned with post-structuralist scholarship of discourses and narratives, it also invokes the idea of an exhibition as a product, a statement or a work of art (compare also to Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's idea that 'museums, by their very nature, aestheticize what they show, even when the objects they display are not intended to be viewed as art').[36] The coining of the term 'exposure' also refers to the art of photography – and thus to the mechanism of the 'imperial shutter' suggested by Ariella Aïsha Azoulay.[37] The 'imperial shutter' defines colonial subjects by, among other things, extracting objects and displaying them in museums, freezing the 'historical' moment of source communities in time and space. Expository agency is also bound to the subject and embedded in power structures, but in this case the subject is posed as a narrator of the (hi)story and frames the views of the public by their way of thinking. However, as Bal points out, the intricacy of expository agency is not about the individual or their personal intentions: 'The success or failure of expository activity is not a measure of what one person "wants to say", but what a community and its subjects think, feel or experience to be the consequence of the exposition'.[38]

Addressing the case of *Art of the Americas* in retrospect creates an opportunity to reflect on the expository activity together: as museum scholars and practitioners, to revisit the idea of curatorial agency and to show curatorship as a complex process, not as a single-time act. By placing the making of the exhibition in a context – as Shiraiwa did in the previous section – we can trace the entanglements of museal and academic worlds, the ingrained power imbalance in the existing institutions, but also resistance as a form of curatorial statement. The very idea of decolonising the museum/exhibition space starts from questioning current norms and tacit arrangements of knowledge, which we explore in the following sections.

What is the problem with expository agency? As Bal notes in the case of *The Art of Exhibiting* (1996), the authoritative monological voice of the narrator constructs the narrative. Hence, even if this voice is critical, it is still con-

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[35] M. Bal, *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis*, Routledge, New York 1996.
[36] B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Reconfiguring Museums: An Afterword*, in: *Die Schau des Fremden. Ausstellungsdonzepte zwischen Kunst, Kommerz und Wissenschaft*, ed. C. Greweed, Franz Steiner Verlag 2006, p. 375.
[37] A.A. Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*. Verso, London 2019.
[38] M. Bal, *Double Exposures...*, p. 8.

strained by the same system of knowledge production. The same can happen quite often in the academic literature in the field of museology, for instance (our field of study): the explanatory voice of the narrator suggests a reading, but this reading is based on an entire corpus of respective disciplinary knowledge or on the critique of such knowledge. By exposing and problematising an issue, it is possible for an academic to be 'caught up in the very discourse she is exposing (denouncing)'.[39]

Museologist Kerstin Smeds[40] names the 'Cartesian principle of a subject (the observer) being separated from the object (the observed)' as one of the grounding principles of museums and exhibitions. It is, however, similarly grounded in a broader field of academic disciplines. She also argues that 'reflexive' exhibitions of contemporary museums, which focus on multimodality, pluralism and participation, reflect trends in science and philosophy to the same degree as those of the 18th and 19th centuries, but instead of taxonomies and positivism we now have 'phenomenology, (post)structuralism and information technologies'.[41] We can add post-colonial or decolonial museums and exhibitions to this list, as the museological theory currently tries its best in colonising/appropriating the decolonial discourse.[42]

The following section discusses the importance of moving forward from the rigid institutionalised tradition of collecting, governing and exhibiting the Other in museums. It does so by outlining the complicity of academic disciplines which lie in their foundation of constructing racial and cultural biases and hierarchies. As Shiraiwa argues in the previous section, by reassessing and reflecting on one's own curatorial position it is possible to start thinking about what it really means to decolonise museums and preconditions for doing so. In this paper, we are studying not only curatorship *per se* but also addressing the disciplinary structures that it was historically built upon in the world of Western modernity, such as the academic disciplines of archaeology, ethnology, history and art history, as well as Western aesthetics and visual practices.

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[39] Ibid.
[40] K. Smeds, *On the Meaning of Exhibitions – Exhibition Epistčmes in a Historical Perspective.* "Designs for Learning", vol. 5, no. 1–2 2012, p. 51.
[41] Ibid., p. 68.
[42] Currently, many university scholars (and museum practitioners) are actively engaging in decolonial discourse and challenging the earlier paradigms – they are doing so in university settings, making the institution also more self-aware than earlier. However, as we pointed out in the introduction, even this article benefits from the same knowledge structure and ingrained inequalities of university-based research.

Decolonising Museums and Decolonising Scholarship

Neil Curtis states that 'the language of much professional museum thinking' follows 18th- and 19th-century 'academic thought, with its origins in essentialism', and an essentialist[43] approach 'views the established beliefs and institutions of our modern heritage as not only real but true, and not only true but good'.[44] Western heritage of the academic knowledge-building system has been preserved as a universal 'truth' and 'good', and museums have reproduced this system.

Osamu Nishitani has suggested separating '*humanitas*' and '*anthropos*' into European (*humanitus*) and the rest (*anthropos*).[45] Ramón Grosfoguel has described the current world system as a 'Capitalist/Patriarchal Western-centric/Christian-centric Modern/Colonial World-System'.[46] Furthermore, Costas Douzinas[47] and Yoshinori Seki[48] have discussed that the notion of 'humanity' is ruled by the same Western imperial colonial Christian ideology that created the separation between the 'ruler', 'ruled' and 'savages (non-humans)', with modern-day human rights also being based on this 'separation'. Adding Teresa Pac's[49] discussion to that of Douzinas and Seki, human rights legalised the differences (the ruled and savages) and perceived social and cultural hierarchies, giving rise to a form of nationalism that excluded constructed/legalised 'others'.

The academic field of the humanities primarily derived from the Renaissance and Western Enlightenment, signifying a separation from the 'Christian God'. Nevertheless, the field preserved and institutionalised the fundamental views of European-white-male-Christians, and it has continued to act as a universal 'good' and hegemony to reproduce the knowledge within this system (academic disciplines, theories and methodologies) even in the present.

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[43] N. G. W. Curtis, *Universal Museums, Museum Objects and Repatriation: The Tangled Stories of Things*. "Museum Management and Curatorship", vol. 21, no. 2, 2006, p. 119.

[44] T. Brameld, Theodore, *Patterns of Educational Philosophy: A Democratic Interpretation*. World Book Company, New York 1950, p. 211.

[45] O. Nishitani, *Anthropos and Humanitas: Two Western Concepts of "Human Being"*. "Translation, Biopolitics, Colonial Difference", Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006, pp. 259--273.

[46] R. Grosfoguel, *Decolonizing Post-colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political-economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking, and Global Coloniality*. "Transmodernity: Journal of Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World", vol. 1, no. 1 2011, p. 12.

[47] C. Douzinas, *The Radical Philosophy of Rights*, Routledge 2019.

[48] Y. Seki, *The Paradoxes of Human Rights and the Rights of Challenging the Human Rights: Studies of Costas Douzinas*. "Hitotsubashi Law Studies", vol. 19, no. 1 2020, pp. 63-81.

[49] T. Pac, *Common Culture and the Ideology of Differences in Medieval and Contemporary Poland*. Lexington Books, New York 2022.

In the post-cabinets-of-curiosities museal landscape of modernity, two specific categories of museums can be distinguished – art museums and natural history museums.[50] According to Madina Tlostanova, 'Western memory was constructed, preserved and transmitted to future generations' through the history of art, while objects with non-European origins were largely represented in natural history museums, and only later did 'anthropological and ethnographic museums place non-Western and non-modern subjects', elevated by the progressivist view, into categories 'between the natural and the civilized worlds'.[51]

As Tlostanova and Walter Mignolo note, philosophy as a discipline still reproduces 'the Hegelian progressivist historicism' and imposes 'the Euro-modern normative frame ... onto all other ways of making sense of the world'. In this regard, general academic 'philosophy' and the very disciplinary borders are constructed as 'a part and parcel of coloniality', as 'a fundamental piece of the coloniality of knowledge'.[52] But what about separate disciplines that lie in the foundations of museums as institutions?

In the case of *archaeological* research, it has been greatly influenced by the nation-state ideology within its economy, politics and culture 'as interdependent parts of the modern world-system'.[53] Scientific archaeology developed through 'a specific stage of social development' to operate 'within a social context'.[54] Universities in the UK and US still dominate the field of archaeology globally, and their 'workforce remains overwhelmingly white'.[55]

This diversity problem in archaeology is crucial 'because archaeologists help shape humanity's understanding of the past' by claiming the authority to interpret archaeological evidence, which has lent support to 'structural racism'.[56] Archaeologists remain 'the gatekeepers of heritage' and too often reproduce the *status quo* of white leadership, however unconscious or unintentional.[57]

Ethnology and *anthropology* have certainly contributed to disciplined knowledge-production structures and the colonial project. Since the 19th century in

50   M. Tlostanova, *Postcolonialism and...*, p. 74.
51   Ibid.
52   M. Tlostanova and W. Mignolo. *On Other Possibilities for Philosophy and Humanity*. 2020. "East East". (https://easteast.world/en/posts/84) (accessed: 30.07.2022).
53   I. Wallerstein, *The Modern World-system I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-economy in the Sixteenth Century*. University of California Press 2011, pp. 3-11; B. G. Trigger, *Alternative Archaeologies: Nationalist, Colonialist, Imperialist*. "Man, New Series", vol. 19, no. 3, 1984, p. 356.
54   B. G. Trigger, *Alternative Archaeologies...*, pp. 357-358.
55   W. White and C. Draycott, *Why the Whiteness of Archaeology is a Problem*. July 7, 2020. "Sapiens". (https://www.sapiens.org/archaeology/archaeology-diversity/) (accessed: 30.07.2022).
56   Ibid.
57   Ibid.

the United States, anthropology has helped 'to shape the racial politics of culture and the cultural politics of race that we are still grappling with today'.[58] For its part, the study of physical anthropology in the US 'participated' in establishing a 'racial and racist ideology'[59] that justified creating racist policies, medical experiments and the economic exploitation of non-white 'others' who were different and unequal.[60] Ethnologists also played a 'critical role in cementing the racial politics of culture'.[61] Lila Abu-Lughod has discussed that the crucial dilemma of anthropology resides in the fact that the field is based on the 'assumption of a fundamental distinction between self and other', and its discourse enforces a separation that certainly carries 'a sense of hierarchy'[62] with it.

Both anthropology and sociology had denounced the 'notions of biological inferiority' by the 1920s,[63] understanding race as a social, not biological or genetic construct. Nevertheless, the United States, among other nations, still struggles to achieve racial equality, as evident in the global Black Lives Matter movement of 2020.[64]

The teaching of *art history* and *Western aesthetics* is done in the same vein as other academic disciplines. Although Hegel is often considered the father of art history, Wen C. Fong has discussed how his systemised approach to 'universal history of art' does not fit into the history of Chinese art production, since traditional Western painting emphasised the 'view of a spectator' while Chinese painting was done from the painter's viewpoint. Also, a coherent account of art history has existed in China since at least the 9th century: for example, *Record of Famous Paintings of Successive Dynasties* by Zhang Yanyuan, completed in 847.[65]

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[58] L.D. Baker, *Anthropology and...*, p. 4.

[59] M. Blakey, *An Ethical Epistemology of Publicly Engaged Biocultural Research*, in: *Evaluating Multiple Narratives: Beyond Nationalist, Colonialist, Imperialist Archaeologies*, eds. C. Fawcett, J. Habu, J. M. Matsunaga, Springer Science and Business Media, New York 2008, p. 19.

[60] W. White and C. Draycott, *Why the Whiteness...*.

[61] L. D. Baker, *Anthropology and...*, pp. 3, 69.

[62] L. Abu-Lughod, *Writing Against Culture*. In: *the Cultural Geography Reader*, ed. T. Oakes, P. L. Price, Routledge, London 2008, p. 466.

[63] L. D. Baker, *Anthropology and...*, p. 9.

[64] However, the rising popularity of ancestry DNA tests has prompted some researchers to again raise the same points initially ignited by the 'use of race and ethnicity as scientific classifications'. For reading, see A. Smart et al., *The Standardization of Race and Ethnicity in Biomedical Science Editorials and UK Biobanks*. "Social Studies of Science", vol. 38, no. 3 2008, pp. 407-423; D. Skinner, *Racialized Futures: Biologism and the Changing Politics of Identity*. "Social Studies Science", vol. 36, no. 3 2006, pp. 459-488; N. Abu El-Haj, *The Genetic Reinscription of Race*. "The Annual Review of Anthropology" vol. 36, 2007, pp. 283-300.

[65] W.C. Fong, *Why Chinese Painting is History*. "The Art Bulletin", vol. 85, no. 2, 2003, p. 259.

Peter K. J. Park has shed light on the insidious position of Hegel who continued Immanuel Kant's perspective. Despite an overwhelming amount of knowledge already being disseminated in the 17th century that histories of philosophy started with the ancient Asians and Africans,[66] Kant and Hegel structured their views of world history and history of philosophy by intentionally excluding peoples and societies in Africa and Asia, claiming they did not possess sufficient intellectual capacity and had a barbaric nature.[67] Both Kant's and Hegel's 'account of world history was strongly racist and imbued European philosophy with prejudicial history we are still trying to escape from'.[68]

In France, numerous ancient Egyptian cultural objects are housed and displayed as antiquity in the Louvre, and an influential US anthropologist, Samuel George Morton (1799-1851), suggested that most ancient Egyptians must have been white: their 'glory is linked to the superiority of white people, Americans included. Never mind puzzling details'. In contrast, other African and Oceanic cultural objects are housed in the Musée du Quai Branly (Museum of Non-European Art). With respect to such an identity-building process, Eviatar Zerubavel wrote that he was 'primarily interested not in what actually happened in history but in how we remember it'.[70] He has examined the social construction of timelines and how the social continuity of the past and social memories are produced and reproduced through 'mental bridging'[71] essential to the modern construction of the nation-state and identity-building.

Although Sub-Saharan African cultural objects pushed Western artists 'to define early modernism',[72] those art objects had to be promoted 'to the status of great art' from primitive and fetish status such as by Picasso in the early

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[66] P. K. J. Park, *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy: Racism in the Formation of the Philosophical Canon*, 1780–1830. SUNY Press 2014, p. 71. According to Park, Asians (Chaldeans, Jews, Persians, Indians, Phoenicians, and Phrygians) and Africans (Egyptians, Ethiopians, and Libyans).

[67] P. K. J. Park, *Africa, Asia, and the…*; M. A. Peters, *Why is My Curriculum White?* "Educational Philosophy and Theory", vol. 47, no. 7, 2015, pp. 641-46.

[68] M. A. Peters, *Why is My…*, p. 644.

[69] N. I. Painter, *The History of White People*. W. W. Norton and Company 2010, pp. 192-193.

[70] E. Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past*. University of Chicago Press 2003, p. 2.

[71] Mental bridging is 'a mental act' that 'we often try to ground in some tangible reality' such as 'physical surroundings' – 'relatively stable' elements, such as mountains, rivers and artificial monuments. 'As a result, they constitute a reliable locus of memories and often serve as major foci of personal as well as group nostalgia' that provides 'some sense of *permanence*'. This helps to 'promote the highly reassuring conservative illusion that nothing fundamental has really changed' (Zerubavel 2003, pp. 40-1).

[72] D. Murrell, *African Influences in Modern Art*. "The Metropolitan Museum of Art" 2008. (https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/aima/hd_aima.htm) (accessed: 30.07.2022).

20th century.[73] Education scholar Joe Kincheloe has suggested that African and Asian peoples were celebrated as long as they did not take an active role in shaping the history of art. The 'guardians of high art' preserved the greatness of Western art as universal, nonnegotiable and unchangeable even 'when viewed from different cultural or paradigmatic locations or in differing historical eras', thus making such art 'fixed, timeless, and transhistorical': the idea of 'great art is taught in a cognitive, social and educational context that is reductionistic in its decontextualization, historical amnesia and dismissal of the complexity of the dynamics that shape artistic production and reception'.[74]

Therefore, various academic disciplines underpinned hierarchies between art museums and other subject-oriented museums, institutionalising such hierarchical 'differences' as universal knowledge. Here again, the 'differences' meant to separate the rest from a white-European/white-North American/male/Christian framework. Achille Mbembe has discussed the modern knowledge-production structure as a 'Western Archive' that 'thrives on dichotomies' mainly inherited from the 19th-century Western system.[75] Such structures are part of the ongoing coloniality that we argue has been naturalised, further evidenced by the rise of new fields such as multivocal archaeology, critical museology and critical indigenous studies to counter the established perspectives and 'scientific methods'. It seems to require new fields and categorisations for, especially, non-Western and non-white perspectives to challenge the existing academic fields.

Correspondingly, the university system remains highly bureaucratic, with established defence mechanisms in place. New methods of study are often vulnerable to being appropriated by powerful institutions and scholars.[76] Furthermore, intellectual territorialism often discourages new ideas because the 'perspective of an outsider poses a threat to conventional thinking', especially 'when the outsider raises foundational questions to which there is no good answer'.[77] Just as museums are places for 'emulation' and 'mimetic practices'[78] that produce a literacy of various elements,[79] so too universities are not

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[73] F. Browning, *New Paris Art Museum Finds Many Critics*. "NPR". August 13, 2006. (http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5640888) (accessed: 30.07.2022).

[74] J. L. Kincheloe, *Says who? Who Decides What is Art?* "Counterpoints", 212, 2003, p. 57.

[75] A. Mbembe, and A. Bounia. *Session 1: Question of the Archive*. Online Seminar. *Decolonizing as a Verb: Reinterpreting Collections and Collecting*. South African Museum Association. November 25, 2020. ICOM-International Committee for Collecting, and ICOM-South Africa.

[76] S. Shiraiwa and O. Zabalueva, *Museological Myths of....*

[77] A. Loeb, *The Dangers of Intellectual Territorialism*. "Scientific American". August 31, 2020. (https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-dangers-of-intellectual-territorialism/)

[78] T. Bennett, *The Birth of...*, p. 30.

[79] The informatics scholar Shoji Yamada explains that the literacy of various elements can only be learned by mimicking (2002, 17).

innocent of emulating and reproducing the *status quo* through their 'unshakably colonial' foundations.[80] Decolonising practices within the colonial framework is pointless.

Moving forward from *Art of the Americas*

We emphasise that the ongoing process of decolonising museums means decentralising the power of Western knowledge-building mechanisms and promoting more equal cultural, societal and political practices. Respecting and balancing the elements of each human group's similarities and differences is the key to achieving social and cultural sustainability. US educator Jane Elliott has shed light on how differences constitute essential elements in constructing individuality and self-esteem. However, societal discourse frames the differences as a negative element, and this view needs to be shifted.[81] Yosuke Kaifu, a human evolution scholar, points out that migrations and intermarriages as well as cultural exchanges have occurred throughout human history. Therefore, there is no 'pure ethnicity' or 'pure culture'.[82] Although national and cultural borders may separate people by customs, language, religion, politics and ways of seeing the world, we most likely have had connections with each other throughout history, and museums are natural places to emphasise this connectedness.

However, modern Eurocentric knowledge implies that culture, ethnicity and race are fixed identities within imagined national borders.[83] Consequently, a modern idea of the nation-state with its linear notion of history, fuelled through the Western process of industrialisation, became the narrow perspective of human progression and a 'civilising' framework. 'Progress' brought technological and medical advances, made us healthier and provided advantages in terms of material culture and science, while decimating the knowledge and practices of many indigenous peoples that coexisted with nature in more environmentally sustainable ways.[84] Whatever it means to be 'civilised', we are struggling to find a way to combat climate crisis, ethnic and racial inequality, and modern-day slavery, often connected to the behemoths of wealth misdistribution and economic inequality.

Museums are cultural and heritage institutions that closely follow the 'Western Archive'[85] and nation-state apparatus, often forgetting that the national

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[80] G.K. Bhambra, D. Gebrial and K. Nişancıoğlu, *Decolonising the...*, p. 6.
[81] Oyi Sun, *The Racism Discussion with Oprah & Jane Elliot part 2*. "Youtube" video, 8:41, March 31, 2014. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZkIGASPrzM)
[82] Y. Kaifu, *Where Did We...*, pp. 206-209.
[83] T.H. Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives*. Pluto Press, London 2010.
[84] M. Tlostanova and W. Mignolo. *On Other Possibilities for....*
[85] A. Mbembe, and A. Bounia. *Session 1: Question of the....*

material culture they exhibit may be multicultural and transcultural, however ancient. The institution preserves the nation-state perspective and creates heritage through it, imagining values for the present society's context within the nation's framework. Any heritage is intangible,[86] imagined through the act of 'mental bridging'.[87] Therefore, the narratives of the materials are not fixed, but rather fluid. AHD[88] continually recreates the heritage of imagined Western superiority, largely fashioned through academic disciplines in the 19th and 20th century, which we are still struggling to move away from.

As knowledge-producing institutions, museums and universities have, whether consciously or unconsciously, worked to preserve the *status quo*, separating and framing human beings and materials in narrow categories when none of them exist as single units. Decolonising knowledge starts with questioning academic disciplines themselves, including their theories and methodologies.

The *Art of the Americas* exhibition, which belonged to both worlds as part of the university's library and museums, can also be seen as a *learning practice* of decolonial thinking within these frameworks, one which made it possible to question the tacit craft of curatorship based not only on the museal but also on academic hierarchies and categorisations.

We must acknowledge the flaws of the institutions and perspectives that have long been naturalised. They are neither neutral in their origin, nor at present. Before decolonising museums, we must deconstruct (or de-link ourselves from) university's knowledge-production mechanism, breaking its 'dichotomy' on universal 'truth' and 'good'. This may require shifting our foundational views and practices, since it is we as human beings who create knowledge and heritage, not institutions. Therefore, we can rethink and recreate them. Borrowing the idea from William White and Catherine Draycott,[89] all of us need to make contributions since this type of advocacy is specific neither to race, nor to ethnicity. Achille Mbembe argues for the criticality of *pluralising* the knowledge-production system 'to draw from the richness of all the archives of the world' and challenge the idea of uni-versity.[90] By decentralising power, with all of us on the same line, we can work together to recreate the scholarship mechanism and our heritage, however complex, uncomfortable and emotional.

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[86]   L. Smith, *Uses of...*, pp. 2-3
[87]   E. Zerubavel, *Time Maps....*
[88]   L. Smith, *Uses of....*
[89]   W. White and C. Draycott, *Why the Whiteness....*
[90]   A. Mbembe, and A. Bounia. *Session 1: Question of the....*

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WYSTAWA *ART OF THE AMERICAS – NOWE SPOJRZENIE.* CO TO ZNACZY ZDEKOLONIZOWAĆ MUZEUM? (streszczenie)

Wystawa Art of the Americas (marzec - lipiec 2018) w Max Chambers Library, University of Central Oklahoma (UCO), USA, zakwestionowała praktyki przypisywania dóbr kultury do różnych dyscyplin akademickich i prezentowania ich w oddzielnych muzeach Ekspozycja ta zgromadziła wspólnie różnorodne obiekty kultury z Ameryki Północnej, Środkowej i Południowej. Wykorzystując niniejszą wystawę jako kamień milowy ale też i soczewkę, artykuł otwiera szerszą dyskusję na temat dekolonizacji muzeów, rzucających wyzwanie systemowi konstruowania wiedzy w instytucjach akademickich. Po pierwsze, Shikoh Shiraiwa – kurator, ponownie odwiedza wystawę Art of the Americas, aby raz jeszcze zbadać swoje motywy i propozycje. Po drugie, Olga Zabalueva zastanawia się nad teoretycznymi implikacjami i znaczeniem ciągłej ponownej oceny wysiłków dekolonialnych. Po trzecie, autorzy wspólnie badają w jaki sposób niektóre dyscypliny akademickie ukonstytuowały zakorzenione hierarchie rasowe. W rezultacie dalej rozwijając wątek kwestionowania zinstytucjonalizowanego działania, dążą do kulturowej i społecznie zrównoważonej praktyki muzealnej w przyszłości.

Słowa kluczowe: dziedzictwo; kolonializm; dekolonizacja muzeów; dekolonizacja uniwersytetów; dekolonizacja wiedzy; kuratorstwo refleksyjne

Shikoh Shiraiwa is a doctoral candidate at the University of Helsinki, Finland. He began a joint programme with the University of Antwerp, Belgium, in 2021. One of his research interests is exploring the coloniality of the knowledge-building system of museums and academia, connecting with and questioning current decolonizing and sustainability discourses. His current research is funded by the Kone Foundation in Finland.

Olga Zabalueva is a doctoral candidate in Culture and Society (Tema Q) at Linköping University, holding master's degrees from the Russian State University for the Humanities and Lund University. She has worked as a museum professional in different cultural institutions in both nations. Zabalueva's research is, by nature, interdisciplinary and focuses on museology as a field of knowledge, museums and the (re)construction of identities, norm criticism and the active social position of a contemporary museum, memory and activism.

1. (This photo was taken by Shikoh Shiraiwa, curator of the exhibition. Courtesy of the Archives and Special Collections, Max Chambers Library, University of Central Oklahoma)

One of the four cases displays a small mask-like object made of brass and a black clay pot (c. 1100 CE) from Peru (Ica?), a Mayan 3-legged bowl (c. 900 CE) depicting the god of wind. A wooden festival mask (Peru/Guatemala/Mexico?) and the painting "Balkan Man" by a Taos artist, Walter Ufer (1876-1936).
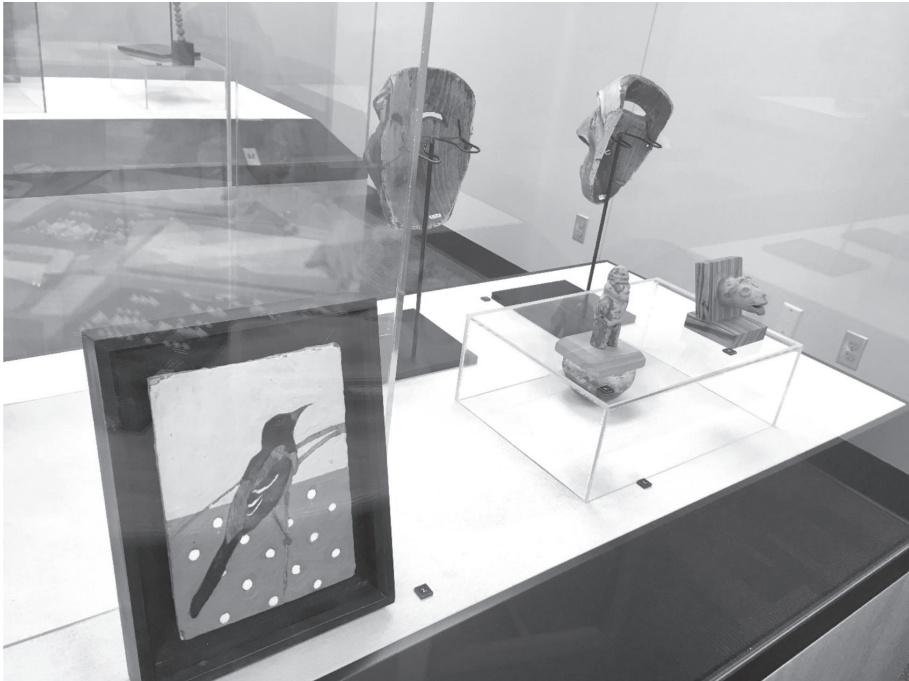
2. (This photo was taken by Shikoh Shiraiwa, curator of the exhibition. Courtesy of the Archives and Special Collections, Max Chambers Library, University of Central Oklahoma)

This picture was taken before the labels were placed and shows a mixed media work, "Cuadrillero Pintado", by a contemporary artist, Jose L. Rodriquez, on the left. To the right, there is a small human figure (ca. 1300 CE) from the Chimu culture, Peru, and a small clay serpent head assumed to be of Teotihuacan (ca. 2nd century BCE to 8th century CE) origin. Underneath those two objects is a terracotta mould from the Maya culture (Mexico, ca. 900 CE). The two masks are late-20th-century Mexican (possibly Guatemalan or Peruvian) festival masks.