Becoming and Being at the Crossroads: Challenging Borders at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia

by

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This paper explores how the Museum of Anthropology (MOA) at the University of British Columbia (UBC) creates exhibitions on conditions associated with globalization, such as transnationalism and migration. This has been a particular focus of the museum since the completion of an expansion project, officially titled “A Partnership of Peoples” (2006-2010), which sought to establish MOA as an internationally renowned museum of world art and culture. Guided by art historian Saloni Mathur’s question, “what kind of ideological work is sustained by [a] particular notion of the ‘global’?” this paper explores how MOA portrays an increasingly globalized world through exhibitions, as well as the “work” these exhibitions accomplish on both a discursive level and the level of individual viewers. These topics are explored through the analysis of two temporary exhibitions: *Border Zones: New Art Across Cultures* (2010) and *Safar/Voyage: Contemporary Art by Arab, Iranian and Turkish Artists* (2013). In addition to focusing on the selection and arrangement of particular works in the gallery space, this paper examines the discourses used to speak about the “work” done by each exhibition. When combined with theories of performativity, embodiment, and narrativity, this discursive analysis demonstrates how these exhibitions opened up pathways for viewers to participate in the exhibition space and become certain types of global subjects. Through examining the discourses employed in each exhibition and the pathways they opened for viewers, this paper argues that both *Border Zones* and *Safar/Voyage* created translocal spaces in which viewers were encouraged to become crossroads. The tension between local and global embodied by the concepts of the crossroads and translocalism is also a tension that reflects MOA as a whole. Ultimately, this paper calls for greater attentiveness to the borders that may be unintentionally reconstructed by the discourses applied to exhibitions on conditions of globalization.
Lay Summary

This paper examines the discourses used in two past exhibitions at the Museum of Anthropology (MOA) at the University of British Columbia: Border Zones: New Art Across Cultures (2010) and Safar/Voyage: Contemporary Art by Arab, Iranian and Turkish Artists (2013). Questions asked include, how does each exhibition portray a globalizing world? What kinds of global subjects do these exhibitions encourage visitors to be? And how do these exhibitions reflect MOA as an institution and reveal particular challenges the institution faces? This paper argues that both exhibitions created translocal spaces that encouraged viewers to adjust to multiple ways of seeing and experiencing the world. This paper also calls for greater attentiveness to the borders museums may unintentionally reconstruct in exhibitions on global issues.
Preface

This thesis is an original intellectual product of the author, A. Adler. The fieldwork discussed throughout was approved by the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB) under the title “Questioning Borders at the UBC Museum of Anthropology (MOA),” BREB number H16-00455.
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So far, life has been a journey that has taken me to places I never thought I would see and people I could not have anticipated meeting. I must acknowledge the role of everyone I have met in teaching me and helping me to form a small part of my self.

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And to my whole family, your invisible presence and unwavering belief in me gives me strength. I am a child of bridges because of you. *Siempre se llevo conmigo.*
Introduction

Hereafter; when they come to model Heaven
And calculate the stars, how they will wield
The mighty frame; how build, unbuild, contrive
To save appearances; how gird the sphere
With centric and eccentric scribbled o'er

-John Milton, Paradise Lost

Two assertions seem to have become facts regarding Western museums.¹ The first is that, since their inception in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, these museums have been intimately connected to and have reinforced the nation-state through the organization of objects and the control of visitor bodies in space.² The second is that this role is being challenged by conditions associated with globalization, such as migration and transnationalism, which have led to the questioning of the bounded nation-state and notions of “pure” national and ethnic identities.³ This questioning challenges the neat grids that “gird the sphere” of our world as people, images, and even the museum itself through the spread of so-called “global” museums like the Guggenheim, cross and re-cross increasingly porous borders.⁴ And yet, some are engaged in the perpetual task identified by Gabriel in Milton’s Paradise Lost: trying to “save appearances” and “gird the sphere” that is our world with borders to make certain identities visible and knowable for control and/or protection.⁵ Noting these trends, scholars and museum practitioners are

¹ Museums in Europe and North America.
⁵ Appadurai, “Disjunction and Difference,” 303-304
attempting to determine the methods we should use to represent this shifting landscape and the people therein, a task that leads us to confront previous museum practices.\(^6\)

In response to this predicament, art historian Saloni Mathur asked in a 2005 article titled “Museums and Globalization,” “how, then, should we begin to assess the range of emergent museum practices and counter-practices within an era of globalization?” And, given that these practices seek to portray a globalizing world, “what kind of ideological work is sustained by [a] particular notion of the ‘global’?”\(^7\) This paper will examine one space that is attempting to address the shifting borders of our world: the Museum of Anthropology (MOA) at the University of British Columbia (UBC) in Vancouver, Canada. Mythologized as a center of collaborative work with First Nations in British Columbia, MOA has also positioned itself at the forefront of questioning the boundaries between cultures and disciplines. According to current director Anthony Shelton, this has especially been the case since the completion of an expansion project, officially titled “A Partnership of Peoples” (2006-2010), which led MOA to “develop a more comprehensive critique of museum practice” through a "reflexive rereading of modernism and the disciplinary boundaries it composes.”\(^8\)

But what does this critique look like? What visions of the global is MOA constructing and/or reflecting to counter old models and ways of thinking? And what “work” do these visions accomplish on a discursive level? To examine these visions of the global, this paper examines two exhibitions that sought to advance MOA’s post-renewal goals of questioning the boundaries of cultures, disciplines, and the museum space itself: Border Zones: New Art Across Cultures (2010) and Safar/Voyage: Contemporary Works by Arab, Iranian and Turkish Artists (2013). This paper focuses, in part, on the selection and arrangement of particular works in the gallery spaces of each exhibition. However, by replacing Mathur’s “ideological work” with “discursive work,” this paper also examines discourses used

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\(^7\) Mathur, “Museums and Globalization,” 698 & 703.

by staff members and reviewers to construct, explain, and understand each exhibition and its effects on viewers. To flesh out the latter condition, this paper draws on theories of performativity, embodiment, sense making, and narrativity (all concepts that are intertwined) to examine the different ways viewers could engage with each exhibition. All of this is examined through a review of exhibition catalogues, archival materials, exhibition reviews, public programming materials, and conversations with curators and the director of MOA. An examination of exhibitions, their arrangements, and associated discourses reveals specific constructions or reflections of the global as well as practices and counter-practices being employed at MOA to confront global issues.

After two sections, one on the background of MOA and its relationship to certain changes within museology, and the other on the methods and theoretical orientations employed in this study, this paper launches into an examination of each exhibition and its associated discourses. The section “Border Zones: Becoming a Crossroads” discusses discourses employed in Border Zones, the embodied and performative experiences these discourses encouraged and, in turn, the particular vision of the global and global subjectivity this exhibition constructed. The following section, “Safar/Voyage: Navigating the Crossroads,” examines the world constructed in Safar/Voyage mainly through the intentionality of the artists, the particular propositions made by their works, and the arrangement of these works in the gallery space. The final section is a concluding section that uses the information gathered in the analysis of each exhibition to reflect on the discursive work being done at MOA.

This paper argues that both Border Zones and Safar/Voyage created translocal spaces that opened pathways for viewers to become crossroads in a global landscape. The concept of the crossroads is drawn from the writings of Chicana feminist scholar Gloria Anzaldúa. For Anzaldúa, the crossroads entails being a “spider-woman” able to stand on multiple soils simultaneously. While Anzaldúa speaks of being caught between essentialized worlds (in her words: “one foot on brown soil, one on white, one in straight society, one in the gay world, the man’s world, the women’s”),9 we do not have to view the crossroads as simply the point where two distinct roads meet. All roads are connected. As individuals move from one

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road to another, they bring with them previous travels and experiences. Thus, a single road is not necessarily a distinct entity; it is, in fact, composed of and connected to many roads, both literally and figuratively. Further, Anzaldúa portrays the crossroads as a physical, embodied experience fraught with emotion and conflict. She, for example, feels torn at the crossroads and expresses feelings of “guilt nagging [at the] throat,” of the hair on the back of her neck rising from fear of those who wish to confine her to a single road. A crossroads is not an easy place to be. In order to function in all the roads that form a crossroads, one must learn different skills, behaviors, and ways of being. Crossroads are thus spaces where multiple groups, voices, and perspectives are held in tension, a tension that is conflicting but also potentially productive.

In terms of the exhibitions in this study, it is not only viewers who were placed in a crossroads. The work accomplished in a given exhibition is not restricted to a particular gallery space or the set period of time in which an exhibition takes place. Exhibitions also affect (and reflect) the museum and its practices as a whole. Thus, this paper will also show that, through studying these exhibitions, one can see how MOA itself is also at a crossroads. This thesis, therefore, functions on multiple levels. On one hand, it is a case study of exhibitions that address issues surrounding globalization and outlines how MOA constructs and reflects a world that is dealing with these conditions. However, this paper also acts as an institutional study, seeking to outline how exhibitions mirror tensions that MOA faces on a larger, institutional level. Looking at these tensions allows us to reflect on the simultaneous importance and danger of the conflict inherent in a crossroads. After all, to privilege or mythologize one road would be to restrict MOA to a single future and purpose, to split it with labels and re-gird it in a closed circle that ultimately may inhibit its post-renewal goals.

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How to Analyze a House: On MOA and Methods

MOA

Michael Ames, director of the Museum of Anthropology (MOA) from 1974 to 1997, referred to MOA as a “house.” MOA’s current location (which opened in 1976, although MOA itself was established in 1949 in the basement of UBC’s Koerner Library) was designed by architect Arthur Erickson to mimic a First Nations longhouse, albeit a concrete one. In both its architecture and mission, MOA is posited as being intimately connected to place. It is not only located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded land of the Musqueam people, but is also situated within the ethnically diverse area of Metro Vancouver. In April 2013, the Vancouver Sun published an article based on the research of geographer Daniel Hiebert stating that by 2031, “Whites will be a distinct visible minority in Metro Vancouver.” Hiebert’s analysis of census data predicts that the largest ethnic groups in Metro Vancouver “will be Chinese, followed by South Asians, Filipinos, Koreans, and west Asians (such as Iranians).” According to a map produced by a group of Richmond-based real-estate agents, people from Mainland China dominate the immediate area around MOA, further East in downtown Vancouver, one finds enclaves of people from Iran, Mexico and the Philippines, as well as enclaves from India and the Philippines to the South and Southeast. Vancouver is thus an area in which several groups converge and interact on a daily basis. It is therefore the perfect location for the exhibitions in this study – Border Zones: New Art Across Cultures (2010) and Safar/Voyage: Contemporary Art by Arab Iranian and Turkish Artists (2013)—as both exhibitions address the borders constructed between and around cultures and include works linked to the different communities in Metro Vancouver.

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13 Ibid.
MOA is not only physically connected to place, but also discursively. Since its inception, MOA was intended to be a home for the objects inside and the peoples it serves, a premise embodied by the goal, articulated by founders Audrey and Harry Hawthorn, to be a “living museum.”\textsuperscript{15} This notion of the “living museum” and the different actions that support it have varied throughout the institution’s history, from the presence of First Nations artists carving in and behind the museum, to collaborations with living communities on how to best display their material culture.\textsuperscript{16} This notion fits within what Clapperton identified as the “conscious effort [of MOA staff] to distance their institution from the colonialism inherent in early museum object collecting practices and representational techniques.”\textsuperscript{17}

Early museum collecting, organizational, and representational practices are often linked to public museums of the late 18\textsuperscript{th} century. Scholars have associated these museums with the organization of objects and art in a single narrative or universal history, pedagogy, didacticism, and the positioning of viewers as passive recipients of knowledge organized by curators.\textsuperscript{18} Anthropology museums in Europe and North America from the late 19\textsuperscript{th} to early 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries were also influenced by these practices.\textsuperscript{19} These museums organized objects according to function and/or geographic area and, in some cases, also included detailed dioramas of daily life and object use in non-western cultures.\textsuperscript{20} This fed on desires for the exotic, and portrayed non-western cultures as static, unchanging, and, therefore, bounded.\textsuperscript{21} In line

\textsuperscript{19} Shelton, “Museums and Anthropologies,” 65.
with other modernist museums, early anthropology museums were places for the privileged power of the
gaze and spaces where viewers could attempt to grasp the “other.”

These early techniques were challenged in the mid to late 20th century. The Critique of
Institutions movement in the 1960s, for example, revealed how museum representations are socially
constructed and controlled by a small set of elite actors with political power.22 Around this same time, in
1969, William Sturtevant wrote about the declining importance of anthropology museums, reflecting a
crisis of representation that was highlighted later in James Clifford and George Marcus’s Writing Culture:
The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography (1986), James Clifford’s The Predicament of Culture (1988),
and George Marcus and Michael Fischer’s Anthropology as Cultural Critique (1986). These works
“raised pertinent epistemological and methodological issues related to anthropological practice, especially
those relating to cultural representation and scientific authority,” issues that also extended to anthropology
museums.23

In Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes (1992), Ames notes, “both museums and the profession of
anthropology…need to be reformed if they are to play useful roles in contemporary democratic society.”24
Additionally, citing the importance of anthropologists to museum work, Duncan Cameron wrote in 1971,
“social history and the insights of the anthropologist must be used to develop techniques of interpretation
that will put collections…in a more realistic perspective.”25 In both of these statements, anthropology and
museum critique are interwoven. This is a connection also drawn by Pedro Lorente in his chapter on the
development of “critical museology.”26 Just as artists “parod[ied] the relationship between art and the
dominant political and economic institutions and elites,” critical museology “fields a relentless incredulity

23 Porto, Nuno. 2007. “From Exhibiting to Installing Ethnography Experiments at the Museum of Anthropology of
John Wiley & Sons: 176.
24 Ames, Cannibal Tours, xiii.
25 Ibid., 24; Cameron, “a Temple or the Forum,” 18.
26 Lorente, JP. 2015. “From the White Cube to a critical Museography: The Development of Interrogative, Plural
and Subjective Museum Discourses.” In From Museum Critique to the Critical Museum, eds. K. Murawska-
Muthesius and P. Piotrowski. Ashgate.
to…meta-narratives” and “question[s] the view that there can be a robust universal standard by which the value of objects can be ascertained and meaning assigned.”

In the context of MOA and Canada as a whole, First Nations have also played a large role in critiquing museums. Compared to other ethnic groups, First Nations only make up 2% of Metro Vancouver’s overall population. However, this has not diminished their presence at MOA, especially given the early ties forged by Audrey and Harry Hawthorn with First Nations communities in British Columbia. Given this relationship, MOA also confronts issues faced by First Nations, such as “internal colonization [and]…dispossession of land.” On a national scale, the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples encouraged improvements in the representation of First Nations art and culture. Following boycotts of the controversial exhibition The Spirit Sings (1988) at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, Alberta, the Task Force issued a report in 1992 encouraging museums to work with First Nations communities as partners. This included addressing repatriation claims, creating training programs for First Nations, and improving access to collections.

Eilean Hooper-Greenhill refers to the museum ushered in by critical stances both inside and outside of academia as the “post-museum,” and Ruth Phillips (director of MOA from 1997 to 2002) considers this museum as part of the “second museum age.” Compared to the modernist museum, the post-museum invites visitors to make their own meaning, reveals the hidden histories of objects, and acknowledges the historical and social context of knowledge, objects, visitors and the museum itself (a task Ames also associated with the project of critical museology). The post-museum is an “educational instrument” that tries to relinquish the “intellectual control [that] has largely remained in the hands of the

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31 Phillips, Museum Pieces, 12.
32 Ibid., 14.
34 Hooper-Greenhill, Museums and the Interpretation, 139 & 145; Ames, Cannibal Tours, 5.
To do this, museums have experimented with various post-colonial and post-modern methodologies such as collaboration and autoethnography, which Mary-Louise Pratt considers “literate arts” of the “contact zone,” a name given to spaces where various cultures interact.

MOA has confronted colonial history and tried to incorporate critical practices since its inception, although the methods for doing so have varied throughout its history. Perhaps the best embodiment of MOA’s attempts to usher itself into the second museum age is the fifty-five million dollar Renewal Project (2006-2010), officially entitled “A Partnership of Peoples.” The Renewal Project led to the creation of new technical and research facilities, staff offices, temporary gallery spaces, and visible storage space. The idea for this expansion partially grew out of the recommendations of the Task Force report, which is reflected in the project’s title and the inclusion of Musqueam, Sto’lo, and the U’mista Cultural society as partners in the grant application. However, the Renewal Project was also a response to the increasingly diverse and shifting nature of the museum’s public due to globalization. According to Ruth Phillips, under whose leadership discussions about the project began, the Renewal Project sought to enhance the museum’s capacity to serve as a living museum and “explore even more radical ways of sharing power and developing multivocal understanding of collections.”

The Multiversity Galleries perhaps best embody a multivocal understanding. Compared to MOA’s old visible storage room in which objects were herded into glass cases with improper lighting and classified according to world region and cultural group, the 11,000 sq. ft. Multiversity Galleries is filled with sleek Milan glass cases and organized according to the post-colonial concept of “multiversity” developed by Paulo Wangoola and Claude Alvares. Multiversity acknowledges the existence of different knowledge systems and does not organize objects in a universal historical trajectory or according

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36 Ibid., 57; Pratt, Mary Louise. 1991. “Arts of the Contact Zone.” Profession.
to “accepted museological categories.” The Multiversity Galleries are intended to “give the presentation and voice of interpretation back to originating communities” and to “stimulate new dialogues between cultures.” According to Phillips, dialogue is integral to “contributing to the erosion of the modernist universal values” under which museums traditionally operated. This is increasingly important as modernist values are challenged by globalization, a force that breaks down barriers in areas such as art and culture, and reveals fluidity, fragmentation, and multiple traditions and narratives “jostling for space.” Under these conditions, museums are pressed to become spaces where ideas about identity and national belonging can be expanded and where groups can reconnect with and speak on behalf of their experiences. Further, museums that wish to serve an increasingly globalized, multi-cultural public must also confront the reconstruction of borders in the face of fluidity.

By adding spaces for dialogue, the Renewal Project strove to question borders between cultures and allow MOA to tackle global issues such as, in Shelton’s words, “fairness, equality…human rights…[and] the elimination of intolerance and prejudice in an ever more closely knit world community.” Present in this statement is the call for museums and anthropology to take global issues, or issues faced by communities affected by globalization, and create spaces that prompt responses to them. This is perhaps in line with Bracha Ettinger’s call for spaces that move “from simply experiencing art [and culture] to social and political acts of caring and witnessing.”

41 Ibid.
45 Take, for example, the most recent U.S. election, whose outcome has been interpreted as a gesture against globalization.
In the 2009-2010 Annual Report, Shelton noted, “the launch of these new facilities [after the Renewal] signals a new era and a new global focus for the museum.” This global focus was also supported by the addition of two temporary exhibition galleries. The 5,800 sq. ft. Audain Gallery in particular, is the standard size for most temporary travelling exhibitions and thus allows MOA to “accept large traveling exhibitions that usually bypass Vancouver due to lack of space.” With its concrete floors and whitewashed walls, the Audain Gallery presents a white-cube aesthetic similar to most major art museums and galleries, although the lighting and walls can be rearranged depending on the exhibition on display. The second temporary exhibition gallery, the O’Brian Gallery, continued to exist in its original, pre-Renewal Project form with a low ceiling, carpeted floors, and a distinctive curved concrete wall that perhaps make it appear less like a typical gallery. Nonetheless, with the addition of galleries to accommodate international traveling exhibitions and temporary exhibitions developed by MOA curators and local communities, MOA hoped to, in the words of Anthony Shelton, “take its position as one of the world’s most sublime and best museums.”

**Methods**

From tales of its beginnings to discussions of its current role, there is a mythic quality to descriptions of MOA. At a ceremony for MOA’s re-founding in 1976, University of British Columbia (UBC) president D.T. Kenny referred to MOA as a “house of spirits” and James Clifford on his travels to the museum in the late 1990s noted, “everything [in the Great Hall] is larger than life, but accessible, translating to some degree the presence of [the] simultaneously monumental and intimate carvings.” Saloni Mathur in her article on MOA’s fiftieth anniversary referred to MOA as “a somewhat famous artifact” and Shelton said in a 2009 interview, “MOA has huge symbolic as well as intellectual capital in both the popular and academic communities, and is one of the towering institutions of Canadian liberal

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49 Director’s Statement in the 2008-2009 Annual Report.
thought.”\textsuperscript{51} How, then, to understand this so-called “artifact” as it seeks to continue propelling itself into the future and confronting not only its obligations to place, but also the larger world in which it, and Vancouver, are located?

I will return to my modified version of Mathur’s question: “what kind of [discursive] work is sustained by [a] particular notion of the ‘global’?” My notion of “the global” draws on the discourse of “global art” outlined by art historian Hans Belting. According to Belting, “Global art is contemporary and in spirit postcolonial; thus it is guided by the intention to replace the center and periphery scheme of a hegemonic modernity, and also claims freedom from the privilege of history.”\textsuperscript{52} It is best to understand this against the concept of “world art,” a term that was used by modern\textsuperscript{53} museums to refer to objects collected from the non-Western world.\textsuperscript{54} These objects were associated with primitivism, collected for nostalgic purposes, and seen as embodiments of the spirit of modernity in non-western cultures, an idea that assumes a universal aesthetic and historical progression.\textsuperscript{55}

Belting traces the origins of global art to the 1989 exhibition Magiciens de la Terre organized by Jean-Hubert Martin at the Centre Georges Pompidou and the Grande Halle at the Parc de la Villette in Paris. This exhibition placed non-Western and Western artists on equal footing in an exhibition that did not follow a particular narrative or historical trajectory. Despite its flaws, Magiciens was deemed the first to “curate art in a truly postcolonial way” and to take into account how globalization “provided a place for artists who for a long time had been excluded [from major art museums] with the label world art.”\textsuperscript{56} The notion of the global advanced by Belting and Magiciens de la Terre thus envisions a world in which there are no boundaries between a so-called center and periphery, West and non-West. It is one premised on interconnections, varying histories, and conversation across cultures. Global art also stands in opposition

\textsuperscript{53} When I use the word “modern” or the phrase “modernist museum” in this paper, I am referring to the notion of this museum as outlined earlier in the section on the history of MOA.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.,180.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.,182.
to the version of globality advanced by large survey museums like the British Museum or the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which purport to be global on the basis that they contain collections from around the world. These museums ultimately “hid[e] behind the concept of the universal museum while reactivating the long history of Euro-western power within which museums have emerged and evolved.”

When I ask, then, what notion(s) of the global MOA is constructing and reflecting, I am asking how staff members construct a world in accordance with the features of globality advanced by the notion of global art. How do they create conversation and interconnection while acknowledging varying histories?

Drawing on the Foucaultian tradition of discursive analysis, one can view the museum—in this case, MOA — as an apparatus. According to Foucault, the apparatus consists of technologies and “of discourses, institutions, architectural arrangements, regulations, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophic propositions, morality, philanthropy etc.” The vehicle through which I am looking at how MOA constructs the global is the technology of the exhibition, which is “in its raw, neutral state, a population of events in the space of discourse in general.”

Discourse consists of both language and practices. It is “a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic,” but it also “influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others.” Discourse structures ways of being and acting in the world, it dictates what can and cannot be done or said. In the case of exhibitions, discourses also permeate how we talk about exhibitions and their goals.

Both Border Zones: New Art Across Cultures (2010) and Safar/Voyage: Contemporary Works by Arab, Iranian and Turkish Artists (2013) focus on conditions of globalization and global art (such as transnationalism and the simultaneous porosity and salience of borders), and display how certain artists are reflecting on and navigating these conditions. We must keep in mind that “the global” and

60 Hall, “Power, Knowledge, and Discourse,” 72.
globalization are not simply themes of our time, they are lived conditions. Thus, when I ask what discursive work these exhibitions do, I am, in part, considering how they are recreating the lived nature of globality, the different experiences of being a global subject, whether that subject is constantly migrating or situated in one place that is connected to many others. Studying how the global is constructed in each exhibition will also help us to understand what existence(s) or way(s) of being potentially emerged from the pathways produced by particular discourses.

For *Border Zones*, I will examine these pathways and ways of being via the phenomenological experiences prompted by the exhibition and its works. For *Safar/Voyage*, I will examine these pathways via the artists’ intentionality and the arrangement of their works in the gallery space. For both exhibitions, I examined catalogues, online articles and blogs, and documents kept in the archival fonds for each exhibition in MOA’s Harry and Audrey Hawthorn Library and Archives. Here, I was able to review artist statements, public programming materials and curator correspondences with artists and other staff members. Archival and scholarly research was further supplemented by interviews with the curators of each exhibition and the museum director, which took place from September to October 2016. Given that this a retrospective study, I could not talk to viewers who experienced each exhibition. However, artist statements, newspaper articles, blogs, and internal and external reviews helped me to understand the pathways opened for viewers to act within and make sense of each exhibition. I do acknowledge, however, that individuals in rather privileged positions have written these documents. That is, artists, scholars, journalists, and laymen with a particular degree of cultural capital. However, the retrospective nature of my research and the fact that visitor studies were not conducted has limited my abilities to engage with a large sample of the general public.

In both exhibitions, the ways of being that emerged made a particular proposition as to how we should navigate a global climate in which borders are ever shifting, de-constructed, and re-constructed. Additionally, focusing on pathways opened in each exhibition counters the top-down nature of Foucaultian discursive analysis. As indicated by Gayatri Spivak, Foucault can be seen as “conserv[ing] the subject of the West, or the West as subject” by valorizing “of the oppressed as subject,” assuming that
humans are simply products of discourses and can only act within a given discursive realm, not against it. Foucault makes very little room for subjectivity and the concrete experiences of individuals within a given discourse. Discourses can create a frame within which action can occur; however, by also looking at what Fiss et al. refer to as “sense-making” (how people make sense of spaces and events) via performativity and narrativity, we can shift our attention to what actors can do within the spaces produced by discourse. If we continue with the metaphor that MOA is a house, it is, like any house, a space where there are certain rules and rituals. But, a home is also a space for others to make themselves comfortable, a space for dialogue and co-habitation. Thus, it is appropriate to not only look at the discursive construction of exhibitions, but also the pathways opened for viewers to participate in and make sense of a given exhibition. These pathways are both the physical pathways viewers can travel within a given exhibition, and the more internal pathways or pilgrimages opened for visitors via interactions with an exhibition and its associated works. In the process of making sense along these pathways, viewers can engage in dialogue rather than being passive recipients.

Despite its top-down nature, Foucaultian discursive analysis offers some useful questions. When analyzing apparatuses that advance discourse, Foucault says we must ask, “How can they be defined or limited?...What articulation are they capable of?...What specific phenomena do they reveal in the field of discourse?” and “what is the specific existence that emerges from what is said and nowhere else?” In this study, I not only examine what discourses MOA curators are drawing on in exhibitions on global conditions and how these visions of the global fit with notions of globality advanced by global art discourse, but I also seek to understand what emerges here, at MOA, and “nowhere else.” Corinne Kratz and Ivan Karp note that what is “global” will vary from place to place and from one institution to another. Thus, I must also ask how do these exhibitions reflect, function within, and impact the space

62 Ibid.
that is MOA? What does the placement of these exhibitions in MOA reveal about the discourses that are being used here for exhibitions on processes of globalization? And, by evaluating what MOA is doing with particular discourses, what can we learn about this institution and how it is negotiating its future trajectory? In this way, I consider how exhibitions not only reflect and utilize discourses formulated somewhere else, but also modify discourses to fit particular, institution-specific goals and trajectories.
Constructing and Performing the Global

*I am a wind-swayed bridge, a crossroads inhabited by whirlwinds.*
-Gloria Anzaldúa, “La Prieta”

**Border Zones: Becoming a Crossroads**

The 2010 exhibition *Border Zones: New Art Across Cultures* was the inaugural exhibition after the completion of MOA’s Renewal Project “A Partnership of Peoples.” It also coincided with the Vancouver 2010 Cultural Olympiad that took place 22 January – 21 March 2010. The lead curator of this exhibition was Karen Duffek, curator of Contemporary Visual Arts and Pacific Northwest. Duffek was a graduate student at UBC and began her career at MOA doing exhibitions on Northwest Coast First Nations contemporary art. One of her first exhibitions, *Bob Boyer: A Blanket Statement* (1988), brought a Metis artist from Saskatchewan to Vancouver where he was largely unknown. When reflecting on *Border Zones* in relation to her early career, Duffek states that *Border Zones* was a “broader foray into other parts of the world and tried to make connections between indigenous artists from here…with other artists around the world.” While thinking about this exhibit, Duffek was influenced by two phenomena:

I…was looking at what kinds of shows were being done internationally and I saw shows…[that] kind of struck me as leaving something out. Because there was a…much needed attention being paid to migration and mixed identity and kind of uprootedness and the need to recognize people as not having to be rooted and identified in a bounded sort of way. And at the same time I was so involved here in the Northwest Coast with artists who were very engaged in trying to protect things that were being lost or threatened.

The exhibition therefore addressed two ideas about borders: borders as “spaces of encounter and exchange” and also as spaces of “protection and exclusion.” These topics were addressed through the

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65 This Olympiad began before and continued throughout the Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic games. According to its website, the Olympiad was “a series of multidisciplinary festivals and digital programs showcasing the best in Canadian and international arts and popular culture.”


67 Ibid.

68 “Border Zones: New Art Across Cultures” borderzones.ca: The Ideas Behind the Exhibit.

works of twelve contemporary artists\textsuperscript{69} from around the world, which were installed in MOA’s two, then brand-new, temporary exhibition galleries: the O’Brien and Audain Galleries.

Boundaries became places of exchange in works like Rosanna Raymond’s performance \textit{Cling to the Sea} (2010), which involved the recitation of a poem in front of a tapa-printing board from MOA’s Frank Burnett collection. According to Raymond, this performance was intended to create \textit{va} (a Samoan word for space). By creating \textit{va} she sought to establish a relationship “between Frank, the collections, and myself, creating a shared space where we all come together to reactivate, reinvigorate, retranslate, and reciprocate.”\textsuperscript{70} Similarly, Thamotharampillai Shanaathanan’s \textit{Imag(in)ing Home} (2009) – a series of glass coke bottles filled with objects that Vancouver’s Sri Lankan diaspora associates with home – was conceptualized as a “laboratory” where “individual stories are allowed to collude with each other” as viewers imagine what “home” means to them. On the other end, installations like Marianne Nicholson’s \textit{Wanax’id: to hide, to be hidden} (2010) and John Wynne’s \textit{Anspayaxw} (2010), reinforced boundaries. Nicholson’s black glass bentwood boxes with photographs that could not be seen unless viewers looked into the boxes from above, were not “working to facilitate understanding across cultural boundaries,” but “point[ed] to the fact that some cultural boundaries are there for good reason.”\textsuperscript{71} Similarly, \textit{Anspayaxw}, an audio and photograph environment based on a research project Wynne conducted with speakers of the endangered Gitsanimaax language in the Skeena River area of British Columbia, deliberately “edited and remixed [audio] to resist easy interpretation.”\textsuperscript{72}

Border Zones also confronted borders by bringing contemporary art into an anthropology museum. The exhibit introduction refers to contemporary art as “increasingly significant as a site where

\textsuperscript{69} Hayati Mokhtar and Dain Iskandar Said, Tania Mouraud, Marianne Nicolson, Edward Poitras, Rosanna Raymond, Thamotharampillai Shanaathanan, Prabakar Visvanath, Laura Wee Lây Lâq, John Wynne, Ron Yunkaporta, and Gu Xiong.


cultural values are being both produced and contested.” Duffek stated, “Border Zones, for me, it kind of builds on that history of anthropological changes of the past few decades and their kind of merging or fuzzying that boundary between art and anthropology or contemporary art and anthropology.” This is a permeable boundary noted by Marcus and Myers who stated that contemporary art “has come to occupy a space long associated with anthropology, becoming one of the main sites for tracking, representing, and performing the effects of difference.” When speaking about Border Zones, Shelton acknowledged this trend; however, he stated, “but anthropology museums had never really looked at borders using contemporary art.”

The mixing of the often-separated disciplines of art and anthropology in Border Zones is reinforced by the inclusion of works made with diverse media and methods whose content cannot be easily placed on either end of the constructed anthropology/contemporary art spectrum. According to Wynne, Anspayaxw, is meant to “problematize the ethnographic gaze and to highlight the subjectivity and mediation involved in the process of translating lived experience into archive material, or indeed art.” The images and sounds are derived from anthropological fieldwork, but are edited and mixed like a work of sound art. In this way, Anspayaxw “hang[s] in the border zones between anthropology and art.”

Similarly, Shanaathanan’s Imag(in)ing Home is based on collaboration with Vancouver’s Sri Lankan community, a method employed in both anthropology and relational aesthetics. The boundaries between disciplines were even challenged by seemingly straightforward installations, such as Laura Wee Láq’s series of five ceramic pots, On Capturing Positive and Negative Space. The label for this piece asked, “At what point is a vessel or container considered sculpture?” implying that the boundaries between ethnographic object and art are not so neatly defined. As stated by Scott Watson, On Capturing...
Positive and Negative Space was a work that bridged traditions, but also disturbed neat boundaries between spaces as it “segue[d] from the carvings of [MOA’s] Great Hall to the pots and tiles of the former Czechoslovakia” in the museum’s Koerner European Ceramics Gallery.80 Visitors could enter Border Zones from either the Great Hall, which contains an entrance to the O’Brian Gallery, the Multiversity Galleries, which has an entrance to the Audain gallery, or by passing the Bill Reid Rotunda to the main entrance of the Audain gallery. Both the Great Hall and Multiversity Galleries contain what might be considered more “traditional” material culture, such as Northwest Coast carvings. Moving from these spaces to the contemporary art in the O’Brian and Audain galleries, visitors confronted the boundaries of the institution itself.

The digital catalogue, a fluid and evolving document that could be accessed and interpreted by a wide audience, also confronted institutional boundaries. Duffek pointed out that a digital catalogue “absorbs commentary as it builds through the course of an exhibit” and “gave us a way of doing something new that allowed people to respond over time to these works.”81 Thus, Border Zones was not intended to be an entity bounded in space and time, a concept perhaps best embodied by Gu Xiong’s Becoming Rivers (2010). This piece consisted of photographs, an imaginary map of two rivers coming together, and 1,500 small white boats that were hung from the ceiling of the Audain Gallery so that they appeared to be floating across into the O’Brian Gallery and out the glass windows of the museum. The label for this piece asked, “How can different cultures intertwine through personal journeys, and move together into a new space?” Embodied in this piece, then, is the implication that this exhibition moves beyond the space of MOA, beyond the year 2010 and the museum’s re-opening.

Ultimately, Border Zones’ confrontation of borders on multiple levels is linked to the exhibition’s main philosophical propositions. On one hand, the exhibition sought to create a space for disturbance. In his welcome to the exhibition, Shelton located Border Zones within “MOA’s new program of bold,
engaging, and sometimes disturbing future exhibitions.”

On the other hand, as Duffek wrote, “This exhibition invites us all to step into the border zones of our own lives.” This suggests that the exhibition was not only about recognizing the borders that permeate our world and our lives, but also about performing the condition of being located in a border zone, a crossroads where multiple experiences intersect. Duffek said herself, “trying to perform borders and border crossings, that is kind of part of the intention.” This is also suggested by the inclusion of an excerpt from Gloria Anzaldúa’s poem “Borderlands: La Frontera” in the exhibit introduction: “To survive the Borderlands/you must live sin fronteras/ be a crossroads.” Therefore, just from viewing these propositions, we can surmise that Border Zones sought to create a vision of the global that involves certain ways of being and acting and thus allows certain kinds of subjects to emerge. But what kind of subjects emerged? How was this created? And what did this accomplish?

Like the works it included, Border Zones was a multilayered exhibition that cannot be easily placed into any classificatory framework. Especially prevalent were the overlapping discourses of postcolonialism, postmodernism, globalization, and translocalism. Postcolonialism can be described, in part, as an “attitude or position from which the decentering of Eurocentrism may ensue.” It includes “the repudiation of post-Enlightenment metanarratives” and the creation of spaces where “experimental cultures emerge to articulate modalities that define new meaning-and memory-making systems.” The discourse of postcolonialism was present, for example, in Karen Duffek’s blog post “(White) Gloves Off.” Here, Duffek reflected on the installation Abishekam, which involved the ritual cleansing of one of MOA’s bronze Vishnu statues by local Hindu priest Prabakar Visvanath. Duffek stated that the ritual

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83 Exhibit Introduction. See note 63.
84 Karen Duffek in discussion with the author, September 2016.
transformed the statue from “an artifact to contemplate as sculpture” to “a sacred vessel for the Vishnu deity to enter and perhaps gaze upon the worshippers.”

However, the deity in Abishekam was not only enabled to gaze upon its worshippers, but also upon viewers and the museum. We can perhaps conceptualize this ritual as an act of mimesis in that it is the reproduction of a Hindu ritual within the space of a museum. However, mimesis is not simply the act of copying. Mimesis also “refers to a wider process of world making that involves the mediation between different worlds and people and between different symbolic systems.” Mimesis thus forms interconnections between the different worlds it crosses. In Abishekam, the Hindu temple and the “temple” of the museum essentially became intertwined. This mimetic crossover is a postcolonial strategy that “turn[s] the exoticist gaze of anthropology back on the viewer.” Through the intertwining of two temples, the deity was not only activated to gaze back upon the Hindu community, but was perhaps also gazing back at the museum. In fact, Abishekam consisted of both a video showing the cleansing ritual and a live-stream image of the deity, newly activated, sitting back in its case in the Multiversity Galleries. Here, the figure and the visitor were both gazed upon and gazing at each other. As implied by the title of Duffek’s post, Abishekam not only involved the removal of the white gloves used to handle museum objects, but also the removal of the so-called “white” colonial gaze. In line with postcolonialism, this piece thus facilitated a questioning of Eurocentric museum practices—such as the placement of ritually active objects inside glass vitrines—and created a space for new modalities (i.e. ritual practices) previously excluded from the museum space.

According to Deepika Bahri, “postcolonial discourse is the host climate generated by the development of postmodern theory.” Thus, one of the other discourses circulating around Border Zones is the discourse of postmodernism. Kwame Anthony Appiah has referred to the post- in both

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postcolonialism and postmodernism as a “space-clearing gesture.”\(^{91}\) That is, both discourses involve the carving of spaces for experiences that were not accommodated by the universal trajectory of modernism. Further, postmodernism, according to Robin Boast, “assumes a critical ambiguity to definitive interpretations and positions within the museum.”\(^{92}\) Like postcolonialism then, it maintains skepticism towards premises of modernism and the modernist museum, such as strict borders between cultures and universal narratives. This is a skepticism also stimulated by globalization. Although globalization is indeed a lived condition, it is also what Fiss et al. call an “umbrella construct.”\(^{93}\) As a discourse, globalization, questions, “the conventional Enlightenment subjectivities (national, imperial, modern) [which] are refracted in multiple identities (local, regional, transnational, global, sexual, urban and so forth).”\(^{94}\)

At the same time that postcolonialism, postmodernism, and globalization are questioning the borders of various constructs, they are also destabilizing “the dichotomy between self and other.”\(^{95}\) As embodied by the connections formed in *Abishekam*, there is a degree of entanglement that comes with destroying borders. We see this, for example, in Edward Poitras’ *Cell* (2010). *Cell* reconstructed a post office and a small cell-like structure in the Audain Gallery. Similar to the surveillance video footage in *Abishekam* (also located in the Audian Gallery) *Cell* included a monitor outside the cell-like room that displayed live surveillance footage of the visitors inside. In this work, the self became other and “the spaces of the museum, the institution, the prison cell, the reserve, the nation, the world and the galaxy” are questioned and revealed as “cells that are distinct but at the same time are overlapping, intersecting, and embedded.”\(^{96}\) Viewers were prompted to contemplate this reality through Poitras’ question on the label: “Imagine your car running as it warms up, and then imagine a polar bear drowning. Is there a

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\(^{92}\) Boast, “Neocolonial Collaboration,” 64.
\(^{93}\) Fiss et al., “The Discourse of Globalization,” 32.
\(^{94}\) Pieterse, “Multiculturalism and Museums,” 125.
\(^{95}\) Ibid.
connection? Is there a connection between the civil rights movement and now? And why is there a post office in the museum?"

In line with the questioning of modernist museum practices facilitated by the discourses of post-colonialism and postmodernism, there was no dominant narrative uniting all of the pieces in *Border Zones*. Visitor reviewer Pauline A. Johansen noted, however, that the questions in each label created “cohesion and linkage,” a sort of thread running through the exhibition. 97 According to Pedro Lorente, who tried to discern what methods could be used distinguish a museum that has employed a critical museological approach, “question marks” are an indicator of the “the impact of critical thinking in museum praxis.” 98 Although we must be critical of the use of questions, as they may be used simply because they are “in vogue” in current museum practice, questions can counter modernist didactic narratives by engaging viewers and inviting them to be introspective and make their own meaning. Questions, in general, also provoke conversation. The particular questions asked in the labels for each work in *Border Zones* – for example, Cell’s question asking viewers to contemplate overlapping spaces and events, or Becoming Rivers’ question about how different cultures intertwine—also recognize the necessity of conversing across boundaries, both cultural and geographic. In this sense, *Border Zones* also adhered to ideas advanced by global art discourse, and encouraged viewers to be more than just passive spectators.

Despite creating an environment for visitor wandering and introspection, both Johansen and visitor reviewer Nigel Haggan said the exhibition created a disturbance. Johansen stated, “This is not a relaxing exhibit…Instead, rather like a bumper car you bang up against images, sounds and materials.” In a similar vein, Haggan’s review is titled “A Necessary Discomfort.” In this way, the exhibition also disrupted the interiority of visitor wandering and introspection. This is seen in Hayati Mokhtar and Dain Iskandar Said’s *Near Intervisible Lines* (2006), a video installation consisting of four video channels. The right channels combine to present a seemingly static and seamless image of the horizon on the Malaysian border. 97 Johansen, Pauline A. “Questioning Borders.” *borderzones.ca: The Ideas Behind the Exhibit.* [http://www2 moa.ubc.ca/borderzones/reviews_vreview_01.html](http://www2 moa.ubc.ca/borderzones/reviews_vreview_01.html) (Accessed June 15, 2016).

98 Lorente, “From the White Cube,” 120.
coast, which is juxtaposed with the monitor on the left showing local peoples walking across the sand or sitting beneath a makeshift tent singing. In their conversation about this piece featured in the catalogue, Mokhtar and Said speak about these two sides as the land objectified versus the lived experiences of the land.\footnote{“A Conversation about ‘Intervisible Lines’” borderzones.ca: The Ideas Behind the Exhibit. \url{http://www2.moa.ubc.ca/borderzones/video_inter_part1.html} (Accessed June 15, 2016).} Said, in an email correspondence with Loretta Todd, said the artists felt that the landscape in their installation could stand for all landscapes; viewers could thus fill the right screen with “[their] own landscape.”\footnote{Ibid.} However, visitor meditation on an undisturbed horizon was ultimately challenged by the local people on the left screen, who show how the piece “of course spoke of itself as a specific place.”\footnote{Said, Iskandar, email to Loretta Todd, January 28, 2010.} Similarly, Tania Mouraud’s video *Face to Face* (2009), consisting of “the incessant movement of trains backward and forward, the dance of cranes plunging their claws into piles of metal” presents a “contemporary symphony from which there is no escape.”\footnote{Petit, Pierre. “Face A Face/Face to Face.” borderzones.ca: The Ideas Behind the Exhibit. \url{http://www2.moa.ubc.ca/borderzones/features_tm.html} (Accessed June 15, 2016).} These are perhaps the crashing voices of a world with porous borders, the voices that, even in our introspection, we cannot ignore.

*Border Zones* thus presented a space where viewers must continually adapt as they move from one piece to another. In the Audain Gallery, spaces of quiet meditation like *Near Intervisible Lines* were countered by *Face to Face*’s noisy symphony. Viewers transferred from the English language in *Cling to the Sea* (and the majority of the exhibition) to the Gitsanimaax language in *Anspayaxw*. In this way, *Border Zones* seemed to suggest that if the horizon of our world is shifting, then we must adapt. However, it indicated that we must not only adapt mentally, but also physically. Present in statements written for several of the included works is the primacy of embodied experiences and a degree of performativity. Mieke Bal indicates that performativity focuses on securing the effect of a given act.\footnote{Bal, Mieke. 2002. *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*. University of Toronto Press, 178.} It is not simply about performing (i.e. speaking or moving one’s body), but about the effects that actions have on the viewer and what they reveal to the viewer. A bit similarly, embodiment “consider[s] the ways in which political, social, economic, and discursive formations intersect with the operations and felt immediacies of
bodies.” Embodiment therefore highlights how socio-cultural conditions are experienced at both the physical and emotional levels. This challenges the Cartesian mind/body duality that has dominated Western modernist thought. Although Bal does not mention embodiment, embodied experience seems central to performativity, for the act only reveals something when it is physically and emotionally processed. Both embodiment and performativity transform viewers into participants and introduce them to particular realities.

We can see the emphasis on the body and performativity through commentary about each of the works in Border Zones. In fact, it seems that most of the works demanded viewer participation. Gina Farley’s article on Near Intervisible Lines stated that viewing this video was a “physical experience” and Marianne Fujita stated that Cell “actively engages our bodies,” challenging visitors to recognize their presence in the museum via the question “why is there a post office in a museum?” Rosanna Raymond created va in Cling to the Sea with her voice and body as she physically led viewers through the museum and, in Raymond’s words, created “new narratives.” Further, Marianne Nicholson’s piece demanded that viewers lean over the glass bentwood boxes and Imag(in)ing Home ignited memory, leading viewers to recall their experiences of home. Memory, in Bal’s words, is a “stage director,” it makes the viewer a performative subject, allowing them to register, for example, the physical and emotional impact of being separated from home. Throughout this exhibition, then, viewers’ bodies were engaged in a particular way each time they encountered an installation and made sense of it.

Through encouraging embodied experiences, we can surmise that Border Zones not only engaged viewers, but also allowed them to become particular kinds of subjects and granted viewers particular capacities. The presence of questions and the inclusion of works that encouraged physical engagement with the space invested viewers with agency. They could physically become crossroads—ducking around

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105 Fujita, “Embed, Divide.”
107 Bal, Travelling Concepts, 186.
paper boats, leaning over bentwood boxes, following Rosanna Raymond as she moves through the museum, going on an internal pilgrimage while gazing at an image of the horizon—allowing each piece to introduce them to a particular experience. In this case, the physical condition of being a crossroads may correspond to the mental and physical readjustments that Dewdney et al. identify as the *habitus* of individuals who constantly migrate: “those who transmigrate become adept at recognizing the consequences that follow a change of...context. The shift in pace, the change in volumes of speech, the difference in uses of colour, all become more readily anticipated by those who get used to moving from one site of settlement to another”"108 Thus, as viewers made sense of the installations in *Border Zones*—a sense-making that was facilitated by embodied and performative experiences—they were introduced to and allowed to physically experience the reality of being a global subject, of being crossroads where many roads or worlds intersect simultaneously.

However, *Border Zones* revealed that while being a crossroads entails adjusting to different cultures, experiences, and ways of being and seeing, harmony is not easy and perhaps is not even possible (enter the frustrated voice of Anzaldúa: “This task—to be a bridge, to be a fucking crossroads”).109 As the visitor reviews indicate, *Border Zones* was not an easy space to be in. It was, in line with its philosophical propositions, a disturbance. Said and Mokhtar focused on being in a similar space of conflict when creating their piece. As Gina Farley points out “Hayati and Dain both knew [the Malaysian] landscape in their childhood. For them, there is a sense of belonging/non-belonging to this part of Malaysia; fractured memories that offer a kind of restlessness.” In relation to this, the artist’s said, “we come with that baggage upon the land and the moment when we meet them [the native populations] there is that gap.”110

There is a sense then, that there are certain experiences and understandings that the artists and us as viewers may never be able to connect to, either because we emerge from different places and experiences, or because, even within the same place, we experience the world differently. This is translocalism coming into play.

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108 Dewdney et al., *Post-Critical Museology*, 301.
110 “A Conversation about ‘Intervisible Lines.’”
While postcolonialism, postmodernism, and globalization break down borders and reveal an overlapping reality, translocalism tempers these premises. The term “translocal,” coined by Arjun Appadurai, “describe[s] the ways in which emplaced communities become extended, via the geographical mobility of their inhabitants, across particular sending and destination contexts.”\textsuperscript{111} In line with global art discourse, translocality is a “condition that leads away from the existing opposition of global versus local.” However, translocality “always faces the contradiction between those two.”\textsuperscript{112} It acknowledges the importance and necessity of movement and interconnection—what Okwui Enwezor has termed the “will to globality”—but also acknowledges, “localities continue to be important as sources of meaning and identity for mobile subjects.”\textsuperscript{113} Thus, despite globalization’s breakdown of the boundaries between self and other, there is also a “contradiction between the [global and the local].”\textsuperscript{114} In fact, Appiah, in his discussion of postmodernism, notes, “postmodern culture is global—though that emphatically does not mean that it is the culture of every person in the world.”\textsuperscript{115} There are, then, postmodernisms; particularity is still present. Thus, although postmodernism and its associated discourses break down borders, they also allow “the same proliferation of distinctions that modernity had begun.”\textsuperscript{116} In Cell, the paper pieces of a border are tacked onto a corkboard, a gesture that simultaneously trivializes the border and reminds us that it is always there. Marianne Nicholson’s Wanax’id: to hide, to be hidden, according to Duffek, shows how “there’s this need to actually construct boundaries for the sake…of protecting this cultural knowledge that has been almost destroyed through colonization.”\textsuperscript{117} Overall, Border Zones served as a reminder that while we may live in an interconnected world, borders are still highly present, sometimes necessary, and are perhaps felt most deeply at a local, personal level.

This observation not only applied to Border Zones itself, for this exhibition also created a

\textsuperscript{112} Korton and Hou, \textit{How Latitudes}, 45.
\textsuperscript{113} Conradson, “Translocal,”168; Korton and Hou, \textit{How Latitudes}, 44.
\textsuperscript{114} Korton and Hou, \textit{How Latitudes}, 45.
\textsuperscript{115} Appiah, “Is the Post,” 343.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 346.
\textsuperscript{117} Karen Duffek in discussion with the author, September 2016.
dialogue with the larger space of MOA on both a physical and discursive level. In regards to the latter, *Border Zones* elicited tensions circulating around the borders between art and anthropology in MOA’s larger intellectual environment. When speaking about curating the exhibition Duffek said,

I also wanted to do something that made sense in a museum of anthropology, so it wasn’t just a matter of ‘let’s pretend we’re in the Vancouver Art Gallery’ and do something that’s just presenting contemporary art. What relevance does it make in a museum of anthropology where we’re dealing with forms of cultural expression? Where…we’re representing cultures? 

Here, a distinction is drawn between two major Vancouver museums, MOA and the Vancouver Art Gallery. Both Oivind Fuglerud and Dana Claxton—a social anthropologist at the Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo and a Lakota First Nations artist and associate professor at UBC, respectively—also drew on the constructed anthropology/art divide in their critiques of *Border Zones*. Fuglerud said that contemporary art exhibitions like *Border Zones* might be “an easy way out for ethnographic museums.” While not well supported or explicated, Fuglerud’s critique seems to imply that the inclusion of contemporary art can obscure the importance for anthropology museums to converse with communities and critique their own practices. Further, Dana Claxton stated, “classic anthropological sites becoming sites of contemporary art is a grey zone, and a challenging proposition to accept.” She asks, “Are former and continuing sites of anthropological engagement even places for contemporary art? Can the stigma of the anthro/entho gaze ever be shed in these sites?” This “gaze” is that which binds particular groups to fixed geographic areas or past time periods and deems certain cultural expressions as “other.”

Underlying Claxton’s review is a similar assumption to Fuglerud’s review: that global contemporary art can lead to a “homogenous aestheticization” within the anthropology museum. Quoting Anna Tsing, Rodney Harrison points out, “all forces of globalization are driven by modernist striving for

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118 Karen Duffek in discussion with the author, September 2016.
universals.” As one of these universals, homogenous aestheticization potentially gives “rise to an ‘abstract, global solidarity that undoes the specifics of the exploitation of the subject’” and glosses over inequalities and colonial legacies. Considering Fuglerud’s critique, Duffek said, “I worry that we are doing too many contemporary art shows now” versus, for example, “good research into the historical art form” to support “Northwest Coast community members and artists and ceremonialists.” Questions like “can the anthro/ethno gaze ever be shed?” or “are we focusing too much on contemporary art?” may ultimately ensure that MOA maintains its mission to serve local communities. Thus, a subtle distinction between art and anthropology may be drawn to keep the tensions between the centripetal force of the local and the centrifugal force of the global alive.

There appears to be, then, a tension between emphasizing global interconnections and addressing local issues and colonial legacies. This is a tension that we see when we examine the work *Border Zones* did in relation to the larger space of MOA. While the Great Hall relies on an aesthetic approach that treats Northwest Coast carvings as works of art capable of being universally appreciated, *Border Zones* reminds us that certain things cannot be universally understood. Like the voices in *Anspayaxw* or the chanting in the procession that followed the ritual cleansing in *Abishekam*, not everything can be accessible to the viewer. This is a tension that *Border Zones* did not attempt to resolve, perhaps intentionally. Like Gu Xiong’s boats, it indicated that we, and perhaps MOA itself, are moving towards an uncertain future where we will face these realities for which we must be prepared. In a future where borders are being simultaneously broken down and built up, where we will encounter multiple voices that we cannot always understand, we must be ready and open to readjustment. By encouraging viewers to mentally and physically engage in this readjustment, *Border Zones* perhaps tried to invest its viewers with this ability to adjust to life at the crossings of many roads.

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121 Ibid., 126.
122 Karen Duffek in discussion with the author, September 2016.
**Safar/Voyage: Navigating Crossroads**

*Safar/Voyage: Contemporary Works by Arab, Iranian, and Turkish Artists* (2013) was the first major exhibition of artists from these origins to take place in Vancouver. It was also one of the most expensive and, at the time, most attended show in the museum’s history. According to an article in *The Georgia Straight* written in July 2013, more than 46,000 people visited the exhibition since it opened in April 2013. Co-curated by Fereshteh Daftari, curator of *Without Boundary: 17 Ways of Looking* at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in 2006, and MOA Curator of Education Jill Baird, this exhibition brought together the works of sixteen artists described as being of Arab, Iranian, and Turkish origins. Anthony Shelton locates *Safar/Voyage* within the same category of MOA exhibitions as *Border Zones*, a category that “examined…borders, trans-geographical populations, and globally constructed identities, through the medium of contemporary art.” Based on my conversation with Jill Baird, the idea for this exhibition originated within MOA’s network of artists and patrons. Discussions leading up to *Safar/Voyage* began after a “friend of the museum” saw an exhibition of Arabic calligraphy at the British Museum and thought that a similar exhibition should be done at MOA. Initially, this calligraphy exhibition was to be co-curated with local Iranian artist Parviz Tanavoli. Eventually, however, the conversation shifted to the need to do an exhibition that was less “narrow and predictable,” which led to the decision to focus on contemporary art.

Similar to *Border Zones*, *Safar/Voyage* was based on the notion that contemporary art is a site where cultural values are contested. According to Fereshteh Daftari, *Safar/Voyage* also recognized that “contemporary art is now an expanded field – inclusive of geographies that until recently had escaped the

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attention of Western art centres.”

Thus, this exhibition, similar to global art exhibitions like *Magiciens de la Terre*, sought to introduce new modalities and ways of seeing that had been previously overlooked by the contemporary art world. Another main goal of *Safar/Voyage* was to challenge the notion of a bounded geographic and cultural region called “the Middle East.”

As indicated by Derek Gregory’s essay “Middle of what? East of where?” in the exhibition catalogue, the label “Middle East” emerged from “European and eventually American discourses of diplomacy, geopolitics, and security.” Many “associations and assumptions…are smuggled into the world under [The Middle East’s] luggage label” as one-to-one correlations are drawn between this region and notions both exoticizing and negative. Like all labels, “Middle East” is an attempt to grasp a particular part of the world and make it readable and knowable. This is linked to a way of organizing the world that Timothy Mitchell calls the “world as exhibition, the creation of a neatly ordered and bounded space.” To become a neatly bounded space, the Middle East, its culture, and people, are reduced to discrete objects that are then carefully organized to evoke a larger meaning, such as the trajectory of the nation in which they are displayed.

The desire to grasp a particular part of the world is thus linked to the techniques of the modernist museum. In challenging this desire and the notion that there is a bounded region called the “Middle East,” *Safar/Voyage* was, in part, a postcolonial gesture.

Co-curator Jill Baird saw *Safar/Voyage*’s goals as consistent with her work at and before MOA. Originally a student of filmmaking and printmaking, Baird began working at artist run centers before becoming a student assistant at MOA. Her Masters at UBC focused on a collaborative education program that she created alongside Musqueam weaver Deborah Sparrow. According to Baird, although *Safar/Voyage* “was a totally new area of cultural production and artists I didn’t know before…the realm of experience was very familiar to me.” She located her work on *Safar/Voyage* within a “certain kind of

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129 Ibid., 40
131 Ibid., 413.
thinking” that permeates collaborative work: “[the] thinking that these kinds of places have to start representing a broad range of experiences and knowledge in unique and interesting ways, and you cannot do that through the voices, experiences, knowledge of one person. So it can no longer come through the curatorial.”

Fereshteh Daftari describes Safar/Voyage as “a visual essay, a constructed odyssey” in the company of sixteen artists who are positioned as witnesses and guides. All of the artists included in Safar/Voyage originate from and maintain ties to the “Middle East,” but live elsewhere. Further, the “Middle East” is itself an area where the borders of identities are constantly shifting, especially in the present environment of conflict. In order to destabilize the category “Middle East” and move away from bounded understandings of identity the exhibition was organized around the idea of journey. Viewers were encouraged to forge their own paths through the works, which were arranged in both the O’Brian and Audain Galleries. Further, through a variety of public programs—from inviting high school students to practice planning the exhibition to presenting public lectures on Persian gardens – Baird and her team established, in her words, “multiple access points and multiple opportunities for people who engage with it to go somewhere, move themselves somewhere.”

One of the main philosophical propositions of this exhibition was that it was “an open-ended experience, enabled through encounters with fragments of itineraries and a choice of paths.” The itineraries and paths opened by each work were structured, in part, by the intentionality and experiences of the artists. Bal has critiqued traditional art historical practices of assigning intentionality. On one hand, she points out that intentionality is actually an entanglement between the art historian/viewer and the author of a given work. Further, given the murkiness of discerning “true” authorial intention, the impact that an image has on the viewer cannot be determined by looking at intentionality or even to what

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132 Jill Baird in discussion with the author, October 2016.
133 Ibid.
134 Daftari & Baird, Safar/Voyage, 8.
Bal terms “externalities” (cultural and historical circumstances) alone.\textsuperscript{136} Essentially, works of art engage viewers in a narrative that unites “the pictorial subject and the external viewer.”\textsuperscript{137} This articulates with Bal’s thoughts on performativity. In performativity, viewers “respon[d] to the…address of the work, which reaches out…from the past of the work’s making into the present” and engage with the work in a way that is not “pre-scripted” by its author.\textsuperscript{138} Narrativity is thus also less top-down compared to intentionality, which implies that the experience of a work of art is only created by the author. As prefaced by Daftari’s use of the word “encounter,” \textit{Safar/Voyage} also opened up a space for narrativity and entanglement between viewers and the works on display.

Narrativity is an essential component of the journey and central to the creation of pathways in \textit{Safar/Voyage}. In the introductory essay to the catalogue, Jill Baird and Anthony Shelton relate the notion of journey to the postmodern concept of “nomadic aesthetics.”\textsuperscript{139} Nomadic aesthetics, involves the creation of “figurations” or “materialistic mappings of situated i.e. embedded and embodied, social positions.”\textsuperscript{140} Figurations bring forth the rhizome, which, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is “a map” that is “non-linear, multi-layered, and “has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overspills.”\textsuperscript{141} Any point in the rhizome is connected to all others, forming a web in which objects “do not so much occupy unique and distinct parcels of geometric space in the world” but “exude the world…spill over the world.”\textsuperscript{142} By creating a rhizome, nomadism aims to disrupt the ability to neatly categorize and seeks to create a web of relations that crosses borders and is thus more consistent with our presently globalizing world.\textsuperscript{143} Given that narrativity and performativity also create a degree of entanglement, these are essential components of nomadic aesthetics. However, on what discursive level(s) do the approaches of narrativity, performativity, and nomadic aesthetics operate? How

\textsuperscript{136} Bal, \textit{Travelling Concepts}, 275.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 279.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 186.
\textsuperscript{139} Daftari & Baird, \textit{Safar/Voyage}, 4.
\textsuperscript{141} Deleuze and Guatarri, \textit{A Thousand Plateaus}, 23.
\textsuperscript{143} Braidotti, \textit{Nomadic Subjects}, 4 & 11.
did *Safar/Voyage* open pathways for engagement? And what kind of subjects potentially emerged from this engagement?

*Safar/Voyage* was structured as a progressive zooming-in from “lofty observations,” to cities, and then to an existential space that is simultaneously internal and external. It began in the Audain Gallery, where viewers were first confronted with Farhad Moshiri’s *Yek Donya (One World)* (2007), a tapestry with a borderless map of the world constructed from two thousand Swarovski crystals. This work was situated on a partition wall directly in front of the entrance. To the left of this work was Mona Hatoum’s *Hot Spot* (2006), a stainless steel globe with glowing neon-red continents. While these works may seem to echo the colonialist desire to encompass the world, this is not the case. Hatoum’s globe presents itself as a world “unwelcoming and fraught with danger.”

Born to a Palestinian family in Beirut, Hatoum has lived in the United Kingdom since the breakout of the Lebanese Civil War in 1974. Edward Said referred to her work as “hard to bare” and as “locking together familiarity and strangeness” in a way that challenges “the idea of a single homeland” or the easy repair of a fragmented identity. Many of her works take familiar items and distort them in a way that challenges viewers’ conceptions: a room divider with bullet holes (*Grater Divide*, 2002), a child’s cot with cheese wire instead of a mattress (*Incommunicado*, 1993), a wheelchair whose armrests have been replaced with knives (*Untitled (Wheelchair)*, 1998). In these works there is a tension between memory’s recollection of what certain objects are used for and the fact that this use is no longer possible. This is similar to the tension between knowing where you are from yet being unable to return, “identity as unable to identify with itself.” At the same time, Hatoum’s distorted works call for new conceptualizations, not unlike migrants, refugees, and exiles. *Hot Spot* presents a globe, something familiar, but this is not a globe one can easily approach. It is a pulsating sphere Daftari describes as containing “veins or inflamed nerves” whose glowing red

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146 Ibid. 109.
lights, according to Baird, “chang[e] how you look and how the people you’re with look.”[^147] **Hot Spot** encouraged viewers to change their frame of reference, revealing how the exhibition would not present a world that could be easily grasped. This is a world in which borders are fraught and potentially dangerous. The veins of the globe connected with viewers’ veins and cast viewers in a red glow that reminded them that we are interconnected in this fraught world.

Next to **Hot Spot**, Moshiri’s *Yek Donya* was perhaps more inviting. In this piece, the absence of boundaries dissecting each continent expresses how globalization is erasing boundaries. This piece does not, however, present “a simple utopian vision, an innocent message of peace.”[^148] Instead, it may point to how “the global flow of capital…has turned the entire world into an alluring market” in which everything is equally for sale.[^149] Nearby, Ali Banisadr’s *The Merchants* (2009), with its beautifully frenzied scene of figures from different time periods and places engaged in “wheeling and dealings,” perhaps presents this world as market.[^150] Although influenced by the scenes in Persian miniatures and the works of Hieronymous Bosch and Pieter Bruegel, Banisadr began making drawings based on the sounds and vibrations he experienced while living through the Iranian Revolution. *The Merchants* draws on the frenzied brushstrokes used to express these sounds, and also presents a composition typical of Banisadr’s paintings: the bottom of the painting presents a scene of chaos and, as it lifts up, “the painting becomes lighter and there is some kind of a hope” as the scene transforms into something like ether.[^151]

On one hand, the ether in Banisadr’s painting speaks to the fuzzy nature of boundaries.[^152] Ultimately, by dissolving borders, the artists in *Safar/Voyage* exercise the power to push back against the borders imposed on them. However, the ether also speaks to the more transcendental or, in the words of

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[^147]: For Daftari’s statement, see Daftari & Baird, *Safar/Voyage*. Baird’s statement is from a discussion with the author in October 2016.


[^149]: Ibid.

[^150]: “Talk Between Fereshteh Daftari and Ali Banisadr @ MoCA,” YouTube video, 31:49, posted by “Gallerie Thaddaeus Ropac,” February 20, 2013, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JQky02bYdf4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JQky02bYdf4)

[^151]: “Ali Banisadr’s Impassioned Landscapes,” YouTube video, 24:14, posted by “Bloomberg,” May 6, 2016, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j7G06ZvCtMU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j7G06ZvCtMU)

[^152]: Ibid., 25.
reviewer Hadani Ditmars, “ephemeral” aspects of the works displayed in the exhibition. In the O’Brian Gallery, Kutlug Ataman’s video *Strange Space* (2009) shows a man (the artist himself) wandering blindfolded through the region once known as “Mesopotamia,” a “modern man tiptoeing across an ancient land…perhaps seeking his path, his identity.” Nearby, Youssef Nabil’s *I Will Go to Paradise* (2008) presents a quadriptych showing the artist approaching the sea at sundown, entering it and, in the final scene, disappearing altogether. According to Geeta Kapur, “with allegories of home and journey, departures and death, work and apotheosis, a subjective quest becomes a politically measured space for transcendence.” In this way, the internal, subjective quests embodied by each of these works are themselves postcolonial gestures. The internal landscape cannot be mapped or accommodated into the world as exhibition; it is ephemeral.

The subjective quests of the artists in *Safar/Voyage* are not impenetrable, however. In all of these pieces, viewers are not only witnesses to the artist’s wanderings, but are also invited into the journey. Ataman’s *Strange Space* video, for example, was enclosed between two walls, creating a narrow passage that allowed viewers to be brought into the experience of wandering. Back in the Audain Gallery, Susan Hefuna’s *Woman Cairo* (2011), a mashrabiya or screen usually placed over a window to ensure a woman’s privacy, and Nazgol Ansarinia’s *Rhyme and Reason* (2009), a Persian carpet, also encouraged visitor participation. In these works, both Hefuna and Ansarinia draw on seemingly innocuous objects of the home to highlight larger issues within their respective societies. Daftari referred to the mashrabiya, as the “architectural equivalent to veiling” allowing women to look out but preventing men from looking in. Hefuna’s mashrabiya, however, invites the viewer’s scrutiny, for it is only after gazing at the screen for a certain period of time that they can see the words “Woman 2011 Cairo” written on its surface. Similarly, Ansarinia’s carpet, upon first glance, looks like a typical Persian carpet. It is only after close examination that viewers will notice the “quotidien events, urban narratives, and contemporary street life creep[ing]

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into a household item.”  

This includes scenes of schoolgirls in uniforms facing a principal, a group of dancing girls and drinking men, and women riding motorbikes. Baird recalled viewers’ interactions with this work: “I mean I can’t tell you how many people who think they know about Iranian carpets touched it and turned it over.”  

After close inspection, Rhyme and Reason destabilized viewers’ perceptions. As expressed by Baird, “the artist on two levels is kind of working with your notion of the stereotypical. What comes out of Iran? Well, beautiful carpets. Made in this place, not that place. Made in this way, not that way. So she feeds into that in one way and then turns it upside down.”  

This resonates with a comment made by Rasheed Araeen on the postcolonial nature of Magiciens de la Terre: “the question is no longer only what the ‘other’ is but also how the ‘other’ has subverted the very assumptions on which ‘otherness’ is constructed by dominant culture.”  

Works like Mitra Tabrizian’s photograph Tehran, 2006 and Tarek Al-Ghoussein’s untitled self-portraits (2002-2006), which present figures in seemingly distant, quiet contemplation, also provide a means for visitor engagement. Here, self-absorption may actually open up a realm for viewers to interact with the individuals in these images, to place themselves in their shoes. This is a concept we can understand through mimesis. In the introductory essay to the Safar/Voyage catalogue, Baird and Shelton quote Walter Benjamin: “Ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars.”  

This quote is used to discuss how museums have traditionally fixed certain colonial and neo-colonial ideas to objects. In his essay “Doctrine of the Similar,” Benjamin articulates a fear that we have lost our ability to “read the stars” (to read greater webs of meaning) because of our need to draw one-to-one correlations between objects and ideas. However, when discussing the effects that mechanical reproducibility would have on the ‘aura’ of objects, Benjamin, according to Michael Taussig, posited that mimetic machines like the camera would create “a new sensorium involving a new subject-object relation” a sensorium that would

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156 Daftari & Baird, Safar/Voyage, 17.
157 Jill Baird in discussion with the author, October 2016.
158 Ibid.
160 Daftari & Baird, Safar/Voyage, 2.
essentially allow us to read constellations, relations, and webs of meaning.\footnote{Taussig, Michael T. 1993. \textit{Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses}. New York: Routledge, 24.} Photography, then, can be conceptualized as a type of mimicry that sets up certain relations. This relation, Taussig proposes, creates a “reenchanting modernist magical technology of embodied knowing.”\footnote{Ibid.} Technology collapses the boundaries between observers and observed and opens up the optical unconscious. Bal describes the activation of the optical unconscious as the process by which an image “linger[s] on [the] retina” as the viewer tries to make sense of the image via memory. This makes the viewer into a performative, participating subject.\footnote{Bal, \textit{Travelling Concepts}, 187-188.} The optical unconscious demands that we learn to read the rhizomatic maps connecting self and other, past and present that are created as we make sense along our journeys.

The Benjamin quote articulates with the quote by Nawal El Saadawi at the opening of Gregory’s essay in the catalogue: “we have to have the courage to change the language.”\footnote{Daftari & Baird, \textit{Safar/Voyage}, 39.} The only way to change the language—i.e. the one-to-one correlation between the “Middle East” and a certain concept—is to read the stars, to connect with the artists and their works. Appropriately, in the Audain gallery, Tabrizian’s \textit{Tehran, 2006} was hung on the wall perpendicular to Hefuna’s \textit{Woman Cairo}. Hefuna’s screen invites viewers to observe closely, maybe even to step behind a screen that traditionally forms a border. Placing this piece next to \textit{Tehran, 2006} may ask viewers to step behind the seemingly passive and self-absorbed faces of the individuals it portrays, to step into their shoes and ask, “what does it feel like to be human in Tehran in the year 2006?” While this ability to step into the subjects’ shoes may be deemed a neo-colonial gesture, the filling of seemingly empty figures with viewers’ thoughts and expectations, this may not be the case when we pair it with other works in the exhibition. The nearby \textit{mashrabiya} confronts the viewers’ scrutiny with the defiant “Woman 2011 Cairo” and, in the neighboring O’Brian Gallery, the seemingly self absorbed figure of Tarek Al-Ghoussein wears a \textit{keffiyeh}, the headdress traditionally worn by Arab men (and one many have come to associate with terrorists) as a “symbo[l] of resistance.”\footnote{Ibid., 26.} In these instances, the artist gazes back at the viewer, another reversal of the colonial gaze that reminds

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Ibid} Ibid.
\bibitem{Bal} Bal, \textit{Travelling Concepts}, 187-188.
\bibitem{Daftari} Daftari & Baird, \textit{Safar/Voyage}, 39.
\bibitem{Ibid.} Ibid., 26.
\end{thebibliography}
viewers that these works are still located in particular places and cultures, and that the artists refuse to be accommodated into an Orientalizing exhibitionary order. Despite allowing viewers to participate and open their optical unconscious, these works reminded viewers that they cannot fully “fill [the works] with private, incidental, and direct memory thoughts.”\textsuperscript{166} The works in Safar/Voyage prompted viewer participation, ultimately eliciting conversation and interconnection. At the same time, however, they acknowledge the specificity of the situations of individuals within places like Iran, Turkey, and Palestine. This is, like in Border Zones, translocality at work, the acknowledgement of both the “will to globality” and the fact that “localities continue to be important as sources of meaning for mobile subjects.”\textsuperscript{167}

Like the flaming veins of Hatoum’s Hot Spot, there is something that cannot be fully grasped about these works and the particular experiences of the artists. So then what? If Safar/Voyage opened up space for viewer participation, but tempered that participation with specificity, what was the result? I would like to posit this result by looking at two final works included in Safar/Voyage: Taysir Baniji’s Hannoun (1972-2009) and Ayman Baalba\'ki’s Destination X (2010). Hannoun consists of a white-washed room on a raised platform scattered with red pencil shavings and a picture of Batniji’s studio in Gaza on the far wall. Batniji links Hannoun to a series of performative projects “that evoke notions of memory, erasure, non-being, and destruction/construction.”\textsuperscript{168} In a video on the website created for Safar/Voyage, Batniji, born in Gaza, tells the story of his trip from Tel Aviv to Italy. He recalls feelings of sadness as he watched the land recede in the window, of asking how he will return, and of being pulled aside at the airport because his passport, under “identity,” referred to him as “undefined.” The designation “undefined” created a condition of immobility, an inability to move either forward or back. Batniji states that, while viewing Hannoun, viewers will feel frustration “at being kept outside” by the “psychological barrier” of the platform. Hannoun is thus a place “accessible and inaccessible at the same time.”\textsuperscript{169}

\textsuperscript{166} Bal, Travelling Concepts, 187.
\textsuperscript{167} Korton and Hou, How Latitudes and Conradson, “Translocal,” 168.
The inaccessibility of Hannoun was expressed by Baird, who described the installation as a place “where you can stand in front of something and, you know, wonder why the artist would be shaving red pencils into poppies for three days...what does it mean? Well you can’t step on it. Why can’t you step on it...Why can’t you go there?” Memory tells the viewer that in the museum space, they can move closer to the photograph of Batniji’s studio. Memory, once again, is the stage director; it prompts viewers’ desires to do something, to participate, just as Batniji’s memory of his studio in Gaza prompts his desire to return. But, the platform with the field of pencil shavings frustrates viewers’ ability to reach the studio. On one hand, this introduces viewers to the reality that the artist must face on a daily basis. However, it may also prompt them to think about how they can cope with this reality of never reaching the studio. Is there a solution?

Ayman Baalbaki’s Destination X also prompts viewers to adjust to the unfamiliar. One of the most popular works in the show, Destination X consisted of a rusty car stacked with belongings that were acquired from MOA staff and volunteers. The installation reflects the reality of many families in Baalbaki’s home city of Beirut who had to flee during the Lebanese Civil War. Destination X is a product of Baalbaki’s desire to combat historical amnesia, the erasure of realities in Palestine. This installation was situated behind the partition wall in the Audain Gallery that displayed Yek Donya. After circling around the partition wall and passing Hatoum’s Hot Spot viewers, in the words of MOA tour guide Rhys Edwards, “bump[ed] into” Destination X. According to Edwards, most viewers’ automatic reaction was to smile and laugh. While this might seem odd for a piece with weighty connotations, Edwards explains that laughter is a way of making sense of the unknown. Destination X introduced a predicament, something that needed to be understood, questions to be answered: why is this car loaded with belongings? Where is it going? Here, as in all of the pieces in Safar/Voyage, the artist’s memories reached out to viewers, impressed themselves on the optical unconscious, invited participation. Questions initiated

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170 Jill Baird in discussion with the author, October 2016.
172 Ibid.
a search for a way to accommodate disjuncture, to fit *Destination X* into one’s own frame of reference/journey/memories, and perhaps to learn more about the artist and his experiences. Baird expressed, “When you walked into *Safar*...you got it when you saw the car loaded with everybody’s belongings...You could read the work as a Vietnamese who came to Vancouver in the ‘80s, you could read the work as a Syrian who had just finally got out of Greece...even people who have just had to move.”*173* *Safar/Voyage* thus connected with Vancouver, its multiethnic community, and its ongoing history of migration. Further, although *Destination X* introduced the viewer to an unknown, according to Edwards, “rather than positing the unknown as a threat, or invasion, it invites us to embrace it, through humour.”*174*

In relation to the larger space of MOA, *Safar/Voyage* operated in a manner that is both similar and different to *Border Zones*. Both exhibitions tempered the notion that all knowledge and cross-cultural understanding can be conveyed by a universal aesthetic. Further, the works in both exhibitions highlighted cultural and situational specificities that need to be attended to. However, *Safar/Voyage* did not use this specificity to stop viewers in their tracks. Instead, it prompted viewers to go further. Baird notes that there was a “beautiful tension” when *Safar/Voyage* was viewed next to the Multiversity Galleries:

You open the drawer and you see something that’s within your frame of reference: ok I know what a textile is, I understand a drum, that’s a teapot, that’s a mask. But, then I come to *Hannoun* and I have this white cube full of pencil shavings: I don’t know this. I like that kind of back and forth. ‘Cause maybe it will tell you that actually looking at the teapot doesn’t actually get you to know either. Each of them require further steps. Right? Some more inquiry, some kind of question of yourself...almost like a provocation or invitation to do another step.*175*

In this way, *Safar/Voyage* invited viewers to go beyond their frame of reference, beyond the easy one-to-one correlations with which we are saturated. This is not dissimilar from the concept of Multiversity that MOA introduced with the Renewal Project. The exhibition thus sought to expand the space of MOA and motivate viewers to notice the myriad connections between objects housed in the museum, the outside

173Jill Baird in discussion with the author, October 2016.  
174Edwards, “Laughter into Tears.”  
175Jill Baird in discussion with the author, October 2016.
world, and themselves. The lack of a strict narrative and the ability to wander, the multiple access points, the way in which the works and their imaginary landscapes drew viewers into the rhizome via narrativity while subverting essentialization all played a role in making this experience a possibility. These methods are, like Border Zones, part of the overlapping discourses of postcolonialism and postmodernism. Further, like Border Zones, Safar/Voyage required viewers to be crossroads, able to adjust and shift their ways of seeing in relation to the artists’ works. However, the world presented by Safar/Voyage was perhaps less of a “bumper car.” It did present a world in which borders challenge a free-wandering journey. But, it was also a world in which borders have the potential to dissolve, particularly through relations. In this way, Safar/Voyage perhaps also taught viewers how to navigate a crossroads when they are invited beyond the border of untranslatability: with curiosity and innovation to find ways to make room for various experiences, as well as a degree of sensitivity to the specificity of these experiences.

In the end, there was also a sense of hope in Safar/Voyage, one embodied by Parviz Tanavoli’s – an Iranian sculptor who, in his words, completes a “seasonal migration” from Vancouver to Tehran to Dubai – bronze sculpture Oh Persepolis II (1975-2008). Inspired by the ceremonial capital of ancient Persia, Oh Persepolis II embodies both nostalgia and fear over the potential destruction of Persepolis, a place for cultural expressions such as the annual Shiraz Arts Festival. In terms of nostalgia, Tanavoli, when speaking about the frame around the cuneiform-like text at the center of the sculpture, notes, “one frames what is precious.” However, he also notes, “Remembering Persepolis and reflecting it on a wall is not just nostalgia, it is also to show that even now, good things can be made.” Tanavoli has experienced firsthand the fluctuating borders of “censorship and the freedom of expression” in the “Middle East”: in 1979 he was blacklisted from exhibiting and selling his work in Iran, in 2011 his home in Tehran was broken into by local authorities who seized 11 of his sculptures, and in 2016 his passport

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176 Daftari & Baird, Safar/Voyage, 21.
was seized in Iran, preventing him from returning to Vancouver.\textsuperscript{178} Despite all of this, Tanavoli’s statement that “good things can be made” offers a sense of hope. We see this hope also in the ether of Banisadr’s paintings and in the release of the figure of the artist in Youssef Nabil’s quadriptych. But, this is an active hope. The artists and their works were and are not still, they confront borders and engage with viewers so that they can do the same.

Conclusion

The street reader looks at an experience as something that's alive and moving or about to move, whereas the academic looks at the flattened out, abstract theory on these pages that is not connected to the actual experience.

-Gloria Anzaldúa, “To(o) Queer the Writer –Loca, escritora y chicana”

Both Border Zones: New Art Across Cultures (2010) and Safar/Voyage: Contemporary Works by Arab, Iranian, and Turkish Artists (2013), are products of the post-renewal period at the Museum of Anthropology (MOA) at the University of British Columbia. All of MOA’s directors – from Harry Hawthorn to Michael Ames to Ruth Phillips to current director Anthony Shelton – have written, in one form or another, about the role MOA can play in broader museum critique and in standing as a “bulwar[k] against closed society.”

The Renewal Project, through the introduction of new state of the art facilities and gallery spaces, and through exhibitions and public programming, sought to place MOA at the forefront of confronting the challenges posed by globalization. These challenges were present in the contemporary works included in both exhibitions: the protection of cultural heritage, the inability to return home or find a stable sense of place and identity because of contested and ever-shifting borders. Border Zones and Safar/Voyage both reflected particular visions of our globalized world. Border Zones presented a world where multiple voices/cultures are jostling for space, voices that we must be ready and willing to adjust to. Safar/Voyage presented a world in which borders are fraught, challenging our ideas of home and self, but also permeable and capable of being transcended. Further, both exhibitions created spaces that acknowledged multiple voices, encouraged interconnectivity, and introduced other ways of seeing and experiencing the world.

The question, “what kind of [discursive] work is sustained by [a] particular notion of the ‘global’?” can also be framed thus: “what do the discourses employed in each exhibition do?” and “what do these exhibitions reveal about the discourses they employ?” Both exhibitions drew, in part, on the interconnected discourses of postcolonialism, postmodernism, and globalization. These discourses entail

179 Anzaldúa, The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader, 172.
the creation of exhibition spaces that encourage performativity, narrativity, and embodiment, which create a degree of entanglement between viewers, the artists, and the works in the exhibition. This breaks down modernist notions of bounded identities and opens spaces for visitor participation. On one hand, the connection between discourses like postcolonialism and methods such as performativity, reveals that a top-down discursive analysis is not, by itself, very useful. We must not only assess the pathways created by certain discourses, but also how viewers can act within these pathways to forge their own understanding of the global experience. This is the answer I propose, for now, to Mathur’s question “how, then, should we begin to assess the range of emergent museum practices and counter-practices within an era of globalization?” After all, postcolonialism, postmodernism, and globalization are not discourses only; they are lived conditions “something[s] that [are] alive and moving or about to move.”181

Now to the question “what kind of [discursive] work is sustained by [a] particular notion of the ‘global’?” By introducing new ways of seeing and opening pathways for viewers to adjust to new views and experiences, both Border Zones and Safar/Voyage invited viewers, if they were willing, to participate in a globalizing world by becoming crossroads. While a crossroads, to return to Anzaldúa, entails being able to stand on multiple soils, this does not entail dissolving the particularity of each of these soils. After all, both exhibitions reminded viewers that a universal understanding is not entirely possible. There is a tension between being rooted in a place and connecting to many others, a tension between holding on to what is distinct, to what binds us to a given place (i.e. memory), while being open to and willingly adjusting to others. This tension was brought about in the process of performing, embodying, and narrating in each exhibition. It is a tension that also tempers the borderless, homogenizing vision of the global that can be advanced by postmodernism. This is also a tension that leaves certain pathways closed.

It is not only viewers, but also the museum itself that must navigate the tension of being at a crossroads. MOA is connected to a variety of translocal populations and is thus a place that must negotiate a simultaneous particularity and universality: “a place of world arts and cultures with a special

emphasis on First Nations peoples and other cultural communities of British Columbia, Canada.”  

Part of the discursive work being done by the exhibitions examined in this paper thus includes challenging the museum and its practices. We see this in the critiques of *Border Zones* written by Claxton and Fuglerud. Both of these critiques signal that MOA is challenging disciplinary borders between anthropology and art and that this brings some discomfort. In reflecting on this, we can also reflect on another question posed in the methods section of this paper: “what is the specific existence that emerges from what is said [at MOA] and nowhere else?” As expressed by Clifford, “different histories lead into…different engagements with modernity/postmodernity, different ‘nostalgias.’” The curators of both *Border Zones* and *Safar/Voyage* sought to find ways to root exhibitions on global issues in the local context and history of Vancouver. This is essential for a museum that seeks to have a focus on both the world and local communities, such as First Nations whose struggles with the aftermath of colonization prove Appiah’s point that there may not be a “post” in postcolonial or postmodern. However, by connecting the local to the global and challenging the boundaries between viewers and the works on display, these exhibitions also revealed that the global and local are perhaps not so easily separated.

This condition, and the tensions between local and global are factors that MOA staff members are likely aware of. It is the tension of translocalism and the specific existence that emerges from what is said at MOA. This tension is definitely not one that appears nowhere else. But, it is a tension that must be approached with caution. Yes, some borders are there for a reason and collapsing borders can gloss over inequalities, but too many borders create further divides. García Canclini points out that “artistic actions” including exhibitions, “cannot reconcile the world by annulling differences and inequalities. Nor can they deal on their own with national or ethnic identities unless they want to take on the fissures and contradictions.” Too much attention to the local ultimately cuts us off from the global and vice versa. MOA seems to be trying to negotiate these tensions by acknowledging local colonial legacies (both those

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184 Canclini, *Art Beyond Itself*, 126.
of British Columbia and those faced by local immigrant populations) and employing methods that may be considered postcolonial and/or postmodern (opening the optical unconscious, employing nomadic aesthetics etc.). This is how it is dealing with its status as “artifact” while propelling itself into the “second museum age.”

But, can/should it go further? Studying Border Zones and Safar/Voyage and their attempts to reflect global conditions reminds me that curators are sometimes like cartographers, girding and re-girding the world, trying to address ever shifting boundaries, trying to create pathways for viewers to connect to others and learn about new experiences. In Paradise Lost, Gabriel portrays this as a futile task, a sort of punishment for sinful humans who will never be able to truly understand the world. The futility argument may be true. It has been noted that postmodernism and postcolonialism, discourses created in response to the breakdown of certain borders, ultimately draw on the same boundaries as modernism. Do we continue, unintentionally, to create borders by drawing on these discourses? Even as I write this paper, I note that my use of translocalism creates a subtle distinction between global and local, even though the two are interconnected.185 Is there a way to get beyond the divide between local and global? Are the discourses of postcolonialism and postmodernism still too binary? And if we cannot get beyond the divide, if, as these exhibitions indicate, it is necessary that we hold on to certain borders to protect specificity, how can we do so in a way that reminds us that, in the end, we all fade into the same ether? How can we use the tension inherent in globalization productively? For, as Bracha Ettinger indicates in her discussion of how art facilitates co-emergence, preventing encounters and interconnections can thwart the mission to stand against ignorance, cutting us off from ethical compassion and the movement “from simply experiencing art [and culture] to social and political acts of caring and witnessing.”186

185 I also acknowledge the critique advanced by Kratz and Karp that the distinction between global and local creates a binary vision that ignores other “geographical and temporal units and identities that are emerging,” such as the unbounded, imaginary spaces created by some diasporic populations.
186 Evans and Ettinger, “Art in a Time of Atrocity.”
References


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