

Globalization is a word that is used a lot today. It appears everywhere and sparks a lot of controversy. Many people think globalization is new and negative, and connected to only economic matters. It has actually shaped our world for a long time, especially in the area of art. The Peacock Room in the Freer Gallery in Washington, D.C. is a perfect example of globalization dating back to 1876. One can see by the beauty of the Peacock Room that its sum is greater than its parts due to globalization.

Because this history project explores the impact of globalization on art, a specific definition for globalization is necessary. Globalization is the result of influences from countries and cultures different from one's own and the resulting effects of those influences on one's original culture.

In order to clearly apply this definition to art history, a few specific examples must be illustrated before focusing solely on the Peacock Room. Even as long ago as 500 BCE, the impact of different cultures on one another is clear. The Romans stole the idea of the gods from the Greeks. They also took art objects from lands they visited. If you travel to Rome,

you will find several obelisks that the Romans took from Egypt when they conquered that civilization in 30 BCE. The Romans returned from Egypt with an obelisk and then later created their own version, following the original design. Hadrian, the emperor of Rome from 117 to 138 CE, created his own obelisk following the Egyptian design. Recently the Italians erected an obelisk to commemorate the Olympics in 1960.

The four horses that stand above St. Mark's in Venice are another ancient example of globalization. They were created in ancient Greece, around 4th century BCE, and placed in the ancient city of Constantinople (present day Istanbul), where they stayed until 1204. Then the Venetian army carried them off to Venice. In 1254 they were placed on the front terrace of St. Mark's Basilica. In 1797, Napoleon occupied Venice and took the four horses to Paris, where they were used for the design of the Arc du Triomphe du Carrousel. In 1815, the horses were returned to Venice, where they now stand. The influence of this original Greek work influenced art in Byzantium, Renaissance Venice, and 19th century Paris.

As China slowly opened to the west in the years between 1400 – 1700, Europeans sought to own all things Chinese. The Chinese porcelain industry made the best of this by producing products that Europeans would be. Plates, bowls, and vases were decorated with western-style house and designs and sold to Europeans. It is interesting to note that the English word for fine dishware is china.

During the last 300 years, globalization of art continued to be more and more widespread. In the middle of the 19th century, Japanese art was introduced to the west. Here we see a painting of young women admiring a Japanese screen. Gauguin, a French painter of the latter part of the 19th century, traveled to the other side of the world to be inspired by Tahitian culture and include this new “vision” in his painting. An exhibit of African masks in Paris inspired a new period in Picasso’s art in the early 20th century. The circle of influence in the art world has grown larger and larger over time. As recently as 1989, the Chinese born Harvard educated architect I.M. Pei placed an Egyptian-style pyramid in his design for a new entrance to the Louvre, the world renown museum in Paris.

The Peacock Room, the focus of this project, encompasses the art of the United States, Europe, China, and Japan. The location of the very room has changed cities and even continents. It was created in London, but it was moved to Detroit and is now located in Washington, D.C. The room was created by an American artist who had studied art in Paris and then moved on to London. One can quickly see that the Peacock Room is the epitome of globalization in art history before even looking at the contents.

The Peacock Room was originally the dining room of a grand house, owned by Fredrick Richards Leyland, in London. This room, in addition to

being a dining room, was also meant to hold Leyland's large collection of blue and white Chinese porcelain. As discussed earlier, Chinese porcelains were the rage in England during the 18th and 19th centuries. We even find images of Europeans painted on Chinese porcelains, which were the rage in China during the same time period. As much as Europeans wanted to own porcelain with Chinese images, the Chinese wanted to own porcelain (which they created) with European images. The exchange between the two cultures was extensive.

In the 1860's and 1870's art from Japan became very popular, and this interest in Japanese art was called *japonisme*. Japan was closed off from the world until 1868, until it was forced to begin trading with the West. Everything Japanese was interesting, and Whistler is credited introducing Japanese art to England.

Whistler discovered Japanese art in Paris, not Japan directly, where he acquired a large collection of Japanese vases. We can see his interest most clearly in the painting that was to become the centerpiece of the Peacock Room.

Whistler painted the *Princess from the Land of Porcelain* between the years of 1863-1864. Frederick Richards Leyland purchased the painting for his home shortly thereafter. This oil painting is a perfect example of "globalization" because it shows the most beautiful woman in

London, who was of Greek origin, wearing a Japanese kimono, standing on a Chinese rug with an Asian screen behind her.

Once Leyland had purchased the painting, he hung it in his dining room, along with his collection of Chinese blue and white porcelain. Leyland was in the middle of redecorating his whole house, which had been designed by a famous London decorator, Henry Jeckyll, in the style of a Venetian palace. When Whistler saw his beautiful painting hanging in what he thought was an awful room, he asked Leyland if he could make some minor changes.

Leland gave Whistler permission to make some changes to the original room and then went off on a business trip for about six months. During this time, from 1876 – 1877, Whistler worked on the room. He painted over the very expensive leather that Jeckyll had installed, covering it with blue peacocks and peacock feathers. Some might say he went over the top, because the room did not look anything like it did before Whistler began his work. It also did not look anything like Leyland imagined it would. The only wall that was unfinished when Leyland returned was the wall opposite the Princess. Leyland was angry that Whistler had gone wild with the design and covered up his beautiful leather. Whistler and Leyland argued over payment for the room and at last agreed on half of Whistler's original price. Secretly, Whistler snuck back in to Leyland's house and created a mural portraying two fighting

peacocks. One peacock represented Leyland--the rich peacock, and the other was Whistler--the poor peacock. Whistler called this painting *Art and Money*. Over time, it is said that Leyland grew very fond of the room, but not the painting of the peacocks.

One might ask why Leyland wanted Whistler's painting in his home. Whistler was very famous in his lifetime. In fact, he one of the most outstanding artists of the late 19th century. Whistler was very witty and also very particular, always needing everything to be perfect. This characteristic made him either very well liked or very hated. The same goes for Whistler's art. He was very risky with his work, but he really cared about harmony in his work and everything fitting in as a whole. He called his artwork symphonies or nocturnes. We can see that the Peacock Room, as an entirety, was a work of art in and of itself. It is one of Whistler's most important symphonies.

Whistler, as a man, is an example of globalization. He was born in the United States, studied art in Paris in 1855, and later lived in London. Whistler's experience in many different countries and places influenced him greatly and he was always looking for ways to add different components to his art.

The Peacock Room, in and of itself, is also an example of globalization. It was first created in London in 1876-1877. After Leyland's death, Charles Lang Freer purchased the entire room at an auction, and

he moved it across the Atlantic Ocean to his home in Detroit. Charles Freer was the son of a wealthy railroad owner and lived most of his life in Detroit. He was a passionate collector of art, especially Eastern art. When he purchased the Peacock Room, he had an addition put on his home to accommodate it. The addition also included a large area for Freer to view and store his collection of Chinese scrolls and paintings. On October 25th, I toured the Freer home in Detroit on Ferry Ave. after listening to a lecture about the Peacock Room by a renowned art historian, Linda Merrill, at the Detroit Institute of Arts. I was able to see Freer's "Peacock Room," except the room contained no art. All of the art is now in the Freer Gallery in Washington D.C.

Upon Freer's death, he wanted to donate his large collection of Asian art to the people of the United States. He worked with the Smithsonian Institute, and a special museum was constructed to house his collection. The Peacock Room moved from Detroit to Washington, D.C. in 1921 and was installed in a newly built museum, named for Charles Freer. Today the Freer Gallery of Art is known throughout the world. The Peacock Room takes up one corner of the museum. All of the original contents of the room are there with the exception of Leyland's Chinese vases. The museum is searching for donations to complete the room as it would have been in Leyland's day.

Using the definition of globalization as the result of influences from countries and cultures different from one's own, and how these influences affect and change one's original culture, we can see that the Peacock Room is a perfect example of many influences. We see in the painting created in London, by an American painter, of a Greek woman, wearing a Japanese kimono, standing on a Chinese rug, in front of an Asian screen, with a Ming Dynasty vase to her right. Around this painting, an artist created a whole room that beautifully housed Chinese porcelain and told an important story about the relationship between artist and patron. This room traveled from one continent to another, to end up housed in the national museum of the United States. Truly, the beauty of the Peacock Room is greater than its parts because of the influence of all these cultures—American, English, Japanese, and Chinese. Art is enhanced when cultures collide—and sometimes even when patron and artist do not share the same global vision.

Bibliography

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