

CROSS-CULTURAL EXCHANGE

WE LIVE IN A GLOBAL WORLD. THE INTERNET CONNECTS US ALMOST IMMEDIATELY WITH PEOPLE LIVING thousands of miles away. Air travel takes us to destinations our ancestors only imagined visiting. But is this interaction with people from other cultures something new?

The history of art proves that cultural exchanges have occurred for millennia. In fact, the intersection of cultures has provided fertile ground for artistic inspiration and creativity. This resource looks at examples, from the fourteenth through the twentieth centuries, to explore the kind of art that may be made when cultures meet.

- How do materials, motifs, and ideas travel across the globe?
- What happens when they arrive at a destination?
- How does art from one culture change or inspire the art of another?

These questions and the larger context of cross-cultural exchange can be explored in myriad ways. Here, we'll take four distinct approaches: Trade, Travel, Living Abroad, and Merging Cultures.

Trade

TRADE PROVIDED ONE OF THE EARLIEST MEANS FOR artists to be exposed to other cultures. For example, an exquisite work of art might be produced at one royal court and then transported to another to be offered as a diplomatic gift. An artist working at court could study and adopt styles and motifs found on these foreign works of art. Common objects, like jugs holding oil or wine, were traded commercially among cultures and had a similar influence on artists who saw them. Both of these means of cross-cultural exchange have been documented among ancient cultures around the world.

Contact between the Near East and China was well established by the time our first example appeared. *Foliated Platter* was made in China around 1340–68. Its various design motifs point to Buddhist and Islamic cultures. The blue color comes from Persia (present-day Iran), where the mineral cobalt was mined, and the porcelain material is from China.

What explains this combination of elements from different cultures? At one level, availability. The Silk Road, a network of trading routes on land and sea that extended more than five thousand miles, joined Mediterranean cultures with those in East Asia. This historical network was at its height from the second century BCE until about the fourteenth century, and made a wide variety of products available to various cultures and regions. This availability led to artistic curiosity and experimentation.

The Silk Road introduced luxury goods to a large international market, creating a demand and also a market for imitations. The kind of blue-and-white ware seen in the *Foliated Platter* inspired countless variations until well into the nineteenth century and even today. From elaborate serving pieces to small, decorative tiles, blue-and-white ware was made for the middle classes and royalty alike. And it all began in the exchange of products by merchants working their way along the Silk Road centuries before.

Travel

TRAVEL ALSO INSPIRES ARTISTIC EXCHANGE, AS PEOPLE returned home from foreign cultures with new ideas. European travelers—such as Englishman Sir Wyndham Knatchbull-Wyndham, pictured in the enclosed portrait—engaged in a kind of time travel to ancient Greece and Rome.

These ancient cultures were home to early democracies, innovative ideas, and artworks that are among the finest in Western civilization. A tour through France and Italy yielded access to a number of surviving ruins, as well as collections of important ancient sculptures. Such tours became standard for young men (and, later, women) of wealth and social standing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the trip was called the Grand Tour.

In addition to its importance as education, the Grand Tour also inspired new versions of the classical style. In the eighteenth century, when Sir Wyndham made his tour, architects developed plans for private estates and public buildings that resembled the ancient temples seen on the Grand Tour. Because of the emergence of new democracies at this time (such as those in America and France), the new forms of classical art were often associated with these political ideals. Even Americans took the Grand Tour, Thomas Jefferson making his between 1784 and 1789. His home in Virginia, Monticello, was directly inspired by Roman architecture he saw on his tour.

Living Abroad

LIVING ABROAD HAS APPEALED TO GENERATIONS OF artists and writers. It can provide a new setting and new inspirations. For example, a large community of Americans lived in Paris in the 1920s, including author Ernest Hemingway, composer Aaron Copland, and artist Alexander Calder, among others. Cross-cultural exchanges have often flourished in communities made up of foreigners engaged in artistic, business, or military activities.

In this resource, we consider the city of Lucknow, the subject of the museum's special exhibition, *India's Fabled City: The Art of Courtly Lucknow*. Lucknow was an elegant and sophisticated city that was ruled by Muslims of Persian descent. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, European artists, travelers, and political officials were drawn to Lucknow, seduced by the wealth of the court and beauty of the city. The Swiss-born adventurer Colonel Polier, shown in the enclosed painting, arrived in India in 1781. He was employed by an English trading company and lived in Lucknow for several years. A thriving cosmopolitan community of Britons, Europeans, Persians, and South Asians

contributed to the formation of a distinctive regional artistic style at Lucknow.

This style combined elements of European and local traditions. European artists painted portraits of Indian rulers. Local artists were commissioned by Europeans to paint scenes of towns and architecture. Polier often wore Indian clothes and adopted the cultural habits of Indian nobility. He collected traditional Indian courtly paintings and established a painting studio headed by an Indian artist. He hired tutors to help him learn local languages, skills that fueled his collecting passion for Persian and Sanskrit literary, scientific, and religious texts. Most of Polier's texts and paintings are now in libraries and museums in France, Germany, and England.

One enduring outcome of the presence of Europeans abroad are the collections they assembled, which in turn inspired the large public museums founded in the nineteenth century. Collectors like Polier believed what he took from India could help Europeans educate themselves about a culture he had grown to admire.

Merging Cultures

MERGING CULTURES IS THE FINAL MEANS OF CROSS-cultural exchange explored in this resource. What happens to art when one culture encounters another? Such encounters can happen through exploration, colonization, annexation, and conquest. They can be violent or peaceful or some point in between.

For example, Spanish explorers, intent on expanding the Spanish empire, established a system of territories—known as viceroyalties—in North and South America starting in the late fifteenth century. The global influences that converged in colonial Latin America resulted in a confluence of cultures and belief systems. Contemporary artist Enrique Chagoya rethinks the Spanish presence in his native Mexico in *Uprising of the Spirit (Elevación del espíritu)* (1994) to explore how people today understand that historic interaction. See other examples of works that explore merging cultures in the enclosed CD.

Chagoya was born in Mexico in 1953. He grew up knowing the antics of Mickey Mouse and the heroism of Superman, a mark of how deeply American culture had permeated his own. He also saw a rebirth of interest in his native heritage following the accidental discovery by workmen in 1978 of portions of an Aztec temple at Teotihuacan.

As a young man, he began to wonder about the relationship of what seemed like polar opposites, the ancient cultures of Mexico and the pop culture icons of his day. What remains of the past? Have the meanings of symbols and images changed over time? Chagoya responded by creating art that confronts itself, new images facing the old, comic strip characters playing across the pages of what resemble ancient Mesoamerican codices.

Chagoya's art finds its life along the intersections of cultures and time. So do the other examples shown here. They all ask similar questions.

- What results from a new idea built on another?
- Can art from other times awaken enduring values?
- How does art reflect culture?
- Can art help us see through what we thought we knew to find a new way of understanding our world?

CHINA, JIANGXI PROVINCE

Foliated Platter (Pan) with the Eight Buddhist Symbols (Bajixiang), Flowers, and Waves, LATE YUAN DYNASTY, c. 1340–68

WHAT EXPLAINS A PORCELAIN PLATE decorated with Buddhist symbols and Islamic designs? The answer can be found in a single color.

Blue—specifically the cobalt blue seen here—is responsible for one of the most popular and longest-lasting international trends in the history of art. “Blue and white ware” is a term for white ceramic wares decorated in blue. The story has a complex beginning, and involves Persian and Chinese merchants trading specialty products along the Silk Road.

Since ancient times, a primary source of cobalt had been Persia (present-day Iran). This mineral was a valued commodity, because it was scarce and required special processing to create the ideal pigment. The pulverized form could be mixed with a liquid to create paint. Cobalt was highly valued because, when painted on ceramics, it could be fired at a very high temperature. The color remained vivid and the outlines of the forms crisp.

Persian merchants traded cobalt along the Silk Road. They also sold ceramics, metal wares, and textiles decorated in the Islamic style. Elements of that style can be seen here in the intricate patterns of lines, abstract floral motifs, and an overall rhythmic symmetry of forms.

While art from the Islamic countries found its way to the East, a prized Chinese product was heading west: porcelain. This ceramic material had been developed in China after potters discovered a special kind of clay called kaolin, which could be fired at high temperatures. The result was an amazingly hard and translucent product, prized for its pure white color. The material and process of making porcelain remained a well-guarded secret in China for centuries, making products like the *Foliated Platter* highly desirable on the international market in Asia and Europe.

The artistic value of this work depended on the cross-cultural exchange made possible by trade across Asia.

The platter was made at Jingdezhen, an important kiln site in the Jiangxi province of southeastern China, well known for producing high quality porcelain. The center section of the platter includes eight symbols related to Buddhism, the religion brought from India to China as early as the third century. The symbols are the conch shell, eternal knot, wheel of law, lotus, furred umbrella, canopy, water vase, and pairs of fish. Together they suggest auspicious wishes. For example, the lotus flower blossoms above muddy water and is a symbol for enlightenment. The next section of the platter, between the Buddhist symbols and the outer rim, includes six shapes called “cloud collars,” which resemble the elaborate arches of Islamic buildings. Scholars debate how Chinese potters discovered this shape, but many believe it appeared on Persian metalwork or Mongol and Tartar embroideries commonly traded at this time. The cloud collars surround abstract renderings of lotus flowers, melons, grapes, and morning glories.

In time, royal patrons in Asia and Europe bought porcelain to decorate their palaces and present as diplomatic gifts. For European potters, who didn’t learn the “secret” of porcelain until the early eighteenth century, imitations of blue and white porcelain (substituting earthenware for porcelain bodies) became profitable. Like the Chinese potters who created the *Foliated Platter*, later designers mixed and matched decorative forms from a variety of sources, maintaining the ever-popular blue and white color scheme.

- Which countries make products you use? Check labels in your clothes, or stickers on toys and electronics.



China, Jiangxi Province
Foliated Platter (Pan) with the Eight Buddhist Symbols (Bajixiang), Flowers, and Waves
Late Yuan dynasty, c. 1340–68
Molded porcelain with blue painted decoration under clear glaze
Height: 2¼ in.; diameter: 17¾ in.
Los Angeles County Museum of Art,
Gift of the Francis E. Fowler, Jr. Foundation and the Los Angeles County Fund (55.40)
Photo © 2011 Museum Associates/LACMA

POMPEO BATONI (ITALY, 1708–1787)

Portrait of Sir Wyndham Knatchbull-Wyndham, 1758–59

WHY ARE PEOPLE INTERESTED IN CULTURES from the past?

Sir Wyndham Knatchbull-Wyndham graduated Oxford in 1757, and then set out on a tour of Europe. He was 22 at the time, the age when young European men of wealth and social prominence took the Grand Tour through France and Italy to study the monuments of the Classical past. A primary goal of the Grand Tour in the eighteenth century was to acquire, as the contemporary writer Jonathan Richardson advised, "nobler ideas, more moral virtue"—in short, to be "a better man."

In this portrait, Sir Wyndham strikes a pose that ties him to the famed *Apollo Belvedere*, a fourth century B.C. sculpture that caused a sensation when it was excavated near Rome in the fifteenth century. By the eighteenth century, it had become the archetypal representation of an ancient god, striding confidently forward, his arm extended. Moreover, the sculpture was admired as presenting the epitome of masculine beauty. Sir Wyndham assumes this pose, pointing his outstretched arm to the Temple of Sibyl at Tivoli, a must-see ruin on the Grand Tour.

The Italian artist, Pompeo Batoni, was one of the most sought-after portrait painters in Rome, especially by British men making the Grand Tour. He knew how to create a setting evocative of their travel experience. In many of his portraits, like this one, he included a portrait bust of Minerva, the Roman goddess of wisdom (known as Athena by the ancient Greeks). The columns provide another classical note.

But Batoni knew his British clients wanted more from a portrait than a literal document of their visit. They wanted to be presented as heirs of the great traditions of Europe, including those of England. For that reason, he deliberately dressed them in clothes worn by members of England's seventeenth-century elite, as painted by the renowned Flemish court painter Anthony Van Dyck. The costume Sir Wyndham wears is known as a "Van Dyck" costume, characterized by the silk suit with lace collar. The dog may be another reference to Van Dyck portraits, used to draw attention to the man by enthusiastically jumping toward him.

Why would Sir Wyndham want these references to two cultures from the past? They presented him as that "better man" who had through his travels and education acquired "nobler ideas." This portrait was hung at the family's estate in Kent, alongside similar portraits of his ancestors. He was destined to join them as an important member of the English aristocracy. In 1760, on his return to England, he was elected to the House of Commons. Tragically, he died only three years later.

- Make your own Grand Tour by viewing works from LACMA's permanent collection. For ideas, visit lacma.wordpress.com/2010/07/08/a-grand-tour-of-lacma/.
- Plan a new Grand Tour. Choose destinations and monuments you think will inspire "noble ideas."



Pompeo Batoni (Italy, 1708–1787)
Portrait of Sir Wyndham Knatchbull-Wyndham, 1758–59
Oil on canvas, 91¼ x 63½ in.
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Gift of the Ahmanson Foundation, AC1994.128.1
Photo © 2011 Museum Associates/LACMA

Colonel Antoine-Louis Henri Polier Watching a Nautch, after a Painting by Johann Zoffany

INDIA, UTTAR PRADESH, FAIZABAD OR LUCKNOW, C. 1786–88

COLONEL ANTOINE-LOUIS HENRI POLIER LIVED the life you see here. Although he was French by ancestry, Swiss by nationality, and employed by the English East India Company, Polier fashioned himself as an Indian noble.

Dressed in Indian robes, sporting a moustache fashionable among Indian aristocrats, he is shown relaxing at his home in Lucknow, a city in the northern region of India, now called Uttar Pradesh. One of his Indian wives sits to his right. Servants and musicians in the background contribute to the main event, which is the dance, or "nautch," offered by three beautifully dressed women. Polier has a hookah (water pipe), a device used for smoking tobacco, positioned by his divan. Notice the shape of the decorative arches. They are similar to the "cloud collars" of the *Foliated Platter*. There is also an enclosed garden with a fountain.

Polier arrived in India in 1757, working for the English East India Company as a surveyor, architect, and military commander. The company also placed him at the court of Shuja-ud-Daula, the nawab (regional governor) of Oudh in northern India. Polier successfully represented the company's interests as he endeared himself to the nawab. Complicated relationships like this were common in the years between the fall of the Mughal Empire (an Islamic dynasty that ruled northern India from 1526 to 1858) and the beginning of British colonial rule in 1858. On the one hand, the English sought to protect their commercial interests, often using military means.

At the same time, regional leaders of India looked to the Europeans to help them consolidate their local rule and maintain their luxurious lifestyles that were now quickly fading. The two cultures courted each other and, for a time, enjoyed a similar way of life.

Despite the presentation here, Polier did not reject his European identity. In fact, during his stay, he recognized his role as an observer of Lucknow's culture. He collected miniature paintings, often commissioning them from local artists. He also amassed an important group of manuscripts, including a complete collection of the Vedas, the sacred Hindu writings. He intended these as gifts to Europeans who, in his mind, might be "educated" in the Indian culture he knew in Lucknow. In this way, he both lived a cross-cultural experience and offered one to people interested in studying his collection. His Vedas now belong in the collection of the British Museum in London.

Polier returned to Europe in 1787, married, and began a family. He was murdered in a robbery in 1795.

- Polier visited India in the 1700s. What did he see? Use details in the painting to explain your answer.
- If you could move to a foreign country or travel abroad, where would you go and why? What would you bring back home with you to remind you of that culture or to share with others?



Colonel Antoine-Louis Henri Polier Watching a Nautch, after a Painting by Johann Zoffany
India, Uttar Pradesh, Faizabad or Lucknow, c. 1786–88

Opaque watercolor on paper, $9\frac{13}{16} \times 12\frac{5}{8}$ in.

Bequest of Balthasar Reinhart, Museum Rietberg, Zurich

Photo © Rainer Wolfberger, Museum Rietberg, Zurich (2005,83)

ENRIQUE CHAGOYA (MEXICO, BORN 1953)

Uprising of the Spirit (Elevación del espíritu), 1994

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CULTURES MEET? Cultures are dynamic. They blend, they shift, and they merge to form new cultures.

Superman flies in. He fixes his X-ray vision, rendered in brilliant yellow, on a warrior. Nezhualcoyotl approaches, his shield positioned and his club ready for combat. But what is the nature of this battle?

Beneath Superman's flying body is a reproduction of a European print called *America*, published in 1590 by Theodore de Bry. A body hanging from a tree next to a burning building captures the horror of the advancing Spanish troops during the historic conquest of Mexico in the sixteenth century. Whose side is Superman on?

The image of Nezhualcoyotl also comes from a sixteenth-century print, but from a Mesoamerican source. The *Ixtlilxochitl Codex* featured Nezhualcoyotl, a ruler of the Mexican city-state Texcoco and known for his peaceful agenda as well as for his poetry.

Artist Enrique Chagoya created *Uprising of the Spirit (Elevación del espíritu)* in 1994. Chagoya, who was born and raised in Mexico and now lives in the United States, draws on a wide range of symbols in his work. He combines American popular culture elements, like Superman, with historic images from Pre-Columbian mythology to pose questions about the way we understand history. Who records the history we take as fact? Typically, the victor writes the history. But how do we see it today, looking through hundreds of years of events and opinions?

Chagoya uses the medium of collage, selecting images and carefully arranging them to tell a new story, create a new reality. Chagoya mimics the layers of time in the materials of his art. Here, he used *amate* paper (a bark paper used in Pre-Columbian times) as the base of his painting, using a combination of oil and acrylic to present reproductions of historic prints. A collector's stamp (inside the oval by Nezhualcoyotl's shoulder) suggests that a collector, at some later date,

looked at these same images, drawing conclusions unknown to us. Finally, the rectangle in the upper right, shown in red and black on white, may allude to colors used by communists in the early twentieth century, or to the Aztec use of red and black to symbolize the interdependent nature of opposites.

Chagoya intended his compositions, when placed together, to resemble the codices created in pre-colonial Mexico, many of which were burned by the invading Spanish forces. The codices were read from right to left. Does the meaning of the work change if the viewer follows the advancing form of Nezhualcoyotl, as compared with a reading from left to right, moving with Superman?

Chagoya grew up in cosmopolitan Mexico City. He knew Superman and Mickey Mouse as well as any American child of his generation. He also knew the world of student activism of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Chagoya witnessed student protests, some ending in bloodshed and death. When the government issued its official reports after these protests, Chagoya noticed how the police downplayed the events and the number of victims. He realized that history looks different from one person to the next, depending on who records it. And so he began his artwork, including pieces like *Uprising of the Spirit*, to explore how history is told, how sides are drawn, and how a person's view can change looking through the layers of history.


Chagoya calls his art "reverse anthropology," digging through the past and rearranging what he finds. Layers of art become a question with no answer: What do we find when we reconsider the past?

- Take the side of Superman or Nezhualcoyotl. From your point of view, what do you see?
- Do you live in a country that is not your place of birth? What cultural traditions do you keep? Are these traditions unique to your native culture or do they represent a blended culture between your own and the practices of the country you live in now?



Enrique Chagoya (Mexico, born 1953)
Uprising of the Spirit (Elevación del espíritu), 1994
Acrylic and oil on paper, 48 x 72 in.
Los Angeles County Museum of Art
Gift of Ann and Aaron Nisenson in memory of Michael Nisenson, AC1995.183.9
© Enrique Chagoya. Photo © 2011 Museum Associates/LACMA

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