

Interview with  
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NAISSANCE DE L'ART  
CONTEMPORAIN  
1945-1970 UNE HISTOIRE MONDIALE

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texte tekst

## **What is the book's point of departure?**

This is the third part of an undeclared trilogy. I have worked on artistic internationalization for twenty years now. My aim has been to understand why, in museums across the world, we always see the same things. (This is somewhat caricatural, of course.) I also seek to understand how the global market for so-called modern and avant-garde painting was constituted, beginning in the 19th century. While I learned, like everyone else, that Paris was the center of avant-garde artistic production of the period, an objective approach, aided by maps and statistics, did not reveal this. It was necessary, therefore, to "decenter the gaze," as many historians of art and culture have suggested, particularly in Latin America and Central Europe. I try in this new book to continue along this trajectory for the period after the Second World War, and to show that the idea that the global center of art had been displaced from Paris to New York, was false or could, at any rate, be nuanced by a global history.

## **How did you go about writing the book?**

I applied the same method as in case of my previous works, following the Annales school. I am often told that I am not enough of a historian of art because I focus too much on the social, on quantitative history ... This is, nevertheless, what has allowed me to counterbalance the traditional discourse that made New York the center of artistic life due to the presence of avant-garde painting after 1945, with Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko and others. What I have shown is that there was indeed a diffusion of North American art in the world, but after 1953. And, in fact, particularly in Europe. A mere assertion to the effect that one is a universal monarch does not make people accept it. I therefore delved into the question, and the work became an attempt at reconstituting the genealogy of what is today called contemporary art, which is a true system, quite a fascinating machine, able to absorb the most subversive practices from the beginning of the 1960s, and also able to fabricate careers with great rapidity for personalities that had previously remained in the shadows, little known, even rejected.

## **How is this book relevant today?**

The process of trying to decenter, to globalize the gaze, is truly a hot topic today in the world of art and museums. It is as much a question of casting aside Eurocentrism and North-Atlantic-centrism as it is of fleshing out the social, the economy in art studies, which suffer sometimes from a certain

formalism. It is very interesting to talk of paintings themselves, but that does not explain why a particular painting hangs on a particular wall at a particular moment.