

Namban Labyrinth¹

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* Special thanks to Professor Paulo Varela Gomes, who supervised my Seminar’s work which originated this paper

** Drafted in December 2011, revised for publication in the Bulletin of Portuguese and Japanese Studies (CHAM)

Abstract

This paper seeks to reconsider the origins of the term *namban* applied to mobile artistic heritage – so-called art objects –, the theoretical-methodological orientations which are at the basis of this category of (stylistic, historical, cultural, etc.) classification,² and to look at the contrast between Portuguese and non-Portuguese currents of thought about *namban*. Many things about Namban Art³ seem to spin in a confusing labyrinth, from its recognition as Art to the contents it transmits and the values to which it is associated. It is intended here to deconstruct the ideological configuration that has impregnated certain art history studies on this particular subtheme. Objects not usually dealt with in the studies done in Portugal about Namban Art will also be considered, namely phenomena of silence and of non-acceptance: respectively, works that represent the martyrdom of the Christians, and the *fumi-e*. Beyond that, values forged in the international art market and in the globalising discourse of the exhibitions of the 21st century also contribute to make up this revision of Namban Art historiography. This field emerges here, then, as a border territory between Art History, Geography of Art, Cultural Studies about migration of forms, and representation of the “other.” This paper aims to present Namban Art as a subject of study within the scope of the creation of objects which are symptomatic of the impacts generated in the first globalisation and managed in the post-colonial Contemporary period.

1 Article translated by Miguel Abrantes.

2 *Namban* and other Japanese words are written using alphabet and in italic. The alphabetical form of all Japanese words in this text respects common usage in previously published papers and books on this matter (for instance *namban* is typed with “m” and not “n” as it would be if following the romaji system tout court).

3 Namban Art is a descriptor which has been used by Western scholars and art curators in a way which must not be considered an absolute translation of *namban bijutsu*. Also, as a Western based expression, it is not typed in italic although it borrows a Japanese word.

Resumo

Este artigo visa rever as origens do termo namban aplicado ao património artístico móvel – ditos objectos de arte – as orientações teórico-metodológicas que estão na base desta categoria de classificação (estilística, histórica, cultural, etc), e o contraste desta com outras correntes de pensamento sobre o namban (não portuguesas). A arte namban parece rodopiar num labirinto confuso, desde seu reconhecimento como Arte aos conteúdos que veicula e valores a que se associa. Pretende-se aqui desconstruir a configuração ideológica que tem impregnado certos estudos de história da arte neste subtema particular. Serão também tratadas peças que habitualmente não são consideradas nos estudos sobre arte namban feitos em Portugal, designadamente fenómenos de silêncio e de não-aceitação: respectivamente obras que representam o martírio dos cristãos e os fumi-e. Para além disso também valores forjados no mercado da arte internacional e no discurso globalizante das exposições do séc. XXI contribuem para formar esta revisão da historiografia da arte namban. Assim, esta aparece aqui como um território de fronteira entre a História da Arte, Geografia da Arte, Estudos Culturais sobre a migração de formas e representação do “outro”. Este artigo pretende apresentar a arte namban como um tema de estudo no âmbito da criação de objectos sintomáticos dos impactos gerados na primeira globalização e geridos na contemporaneidade pós-colonial.

要旨

本稿では、いわゆる美術品と総称される可動性芸術遺産に適用される用語「南蛮」の起源の再考を試みる。様式的、史的、文化的、等のジャンルの分類の基礎となる理論的・方法論的なアプローチを通じ、ポルトガルとポルトガル以外に存在する「南蛮」についての見解の潮流を比較し、その際だった差異を検証する。南蛮芸術を論じる際、芸術としての認識に始まり、その美術作品が伝える内容、さらに付随する価値に至るまで、複雑な迷路をさまよう感覚に陥る。本稿では既成された観念形態的な設定の解体を試みる。同時に、ポルトガルでの南蛮芸術に関する研究において、通常は考慮されることのない（沈黙が保たれていたり、受け入れられずにいる）品々についても検討する。具体的には、沈黙が保たれている対象がキリシタン殉教を描く作品類であり、受け入れられずにいる対象とは踏み絵を指す。それに加え、国際的美術品市場および21世紀に入り発表され世界の広範囲に広まる論説でなされる偽りの価値も、南蛮美術史に関して本稿で試みるような再評価を構築する要因となっている。その結果、美術史、美術地理学、形状の移行についての文化研究、および「異種」の描写についての文化研究といった複数研究分野の境界的領域に学際的研究分野が現れる。本稿は、人類が初めて経験するグローバル時代に生み出され、植民地独立後の現代性の中で管理されるインパクトの前兆となる作品の創造という観点における研究テーマとしての南蛮美術の紹介を試行する。

Keywords:

Namban Art; Historiography; Heritage.

Arte Namban; Historiografia; Património.

南蛮美術; 歴史的文献; 遺産。

In the transition from the 19th to the 20th century (Meiji Period, 1867-1912), Japan witnessed a pronounced transformation of its society and political structure. The period has been called “road to modernisation,” “Westernisation” or even “Western fever,”⁴ a cultural phenomenon which had in fact made itself felt (albeit with different characteristics) in the 16th and 17th centuries,⁵ and which was transversal to several sectors of Japanese public and private life. Yet, in parallel to that tendency to be open to the West, forced in great part by the economical vector, a certain historicism and eclecticism also flowered in the field of artistic and literary productions.

I do not intend to import concepts of Western historiography, as if they enabled the understanding of Japan’s cultural circumstances in this period, an attitude which would in fact be contrary to the most recent historiographical revisions, which have stressed the necessity of not concocting a history of Asia based on Western theory,⁶ and much less a history of Japan contaminated by neo-imperialistic short-sights.⁷ However, the Meiji Period saw a renewed interest for historical registers and for the works of art that referred to earlier periods of contact with the West, in the manner of a process of re-visitation of History, attempting to sublimate the complex situation (of subordination) of the (then) present. Besides creating *ex-nuovo* pieces which evoked past styles⁸ (*namban* among them), the study of the *namban bijutsu* (literally “namban art”) phenomenon in Japan effectively started to become systematic.

The protagonists of this pre-academic phase of historiography about the *namban* in art performed different cultural activities: they were painters, poets, and writers (Kinoshita Mu-

4 Marius Jansen, *The emergence of Meiji Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), especially 225-227 and 302-305.

5 Marius Jansen, “Rangaku and Westernization,” in *Modern Asian Studies* 18 (October 1984): 541-553.

6 Hui Wang, “The politics of imagining Asia: a genealogical analysis,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 8, no. 1 (2007): 1-33.

7 Naoki Sakai, “Imperial Nationalism and the Comparative Perspective,” *Positions* 17, I (Spring 2009): 159-205.

8 In the first 25 years of the 20th century, the revivalism based on the *namban* pieces has produced a slightly different iconography – see the introduction by Olivier Impey (former curator of the Ashmolean Museum’s Department of Eastern Art) in the catalogue of the Collection “After the Barbarians.” In effect, the characters represented are not exclusively the Portuguese, Spanish and Catholic missionaries who travelled aboard the Iberian boats anymore. Instead, they are predominantly men from Northern European countries, mostly Dutch, who were known to have remained with access to the Japanese market and society until later dates than the Catholics – precisely because they did not connote commercial dealings with the road to conversions to Christianity. In consequence, these pieces have, formally, the features of a *namban* treatment, and respect it as if it were an analeptic eruption, with the significant difference of presenting precisely characters that, historically, are not the *nambanjin*.

kutaro⁹ singling himself out between the 1910's and the 1920's). By the second half of the 20th century, interest among the specialists of taste and of decoration was rekindled, the fundamental works for academic production being finally published: Yoshitomo and Tadao (1970), Mitsuru and Moto'o (1974). These studies, and others of the same caliber, were concerned almost feverishly with identifying typologies, in the manner of families¹⁰ which were defined especially by the kind of scene represented on folding screens or on the surface's decoration of other pieces. It was required, for this absorption into the stream of Namban Art, that the decoration dealt with, or focused on, Western Christian figures (the Portuguese in a broad sense). Views of cities, maps, boats, or artefacts exotic to the Japanese – as for example the famed rifle (which is actually a matchlock musket) – were also assumed. As to the chronology, it remained confined to the 16th century, approximately coincident with the “Christian century.”

The model of *namban bijutsu* formatted by these studies is undoubtedly a chapter of Japanese art, but its specificity resides in it being instilled with an exotic character and in its relation with the opening up of Japan to foreigners and their products. Nevertheless, *namban* art objects were still a vehicle for the Japanese point of view on the cultural encounter and on the mutual curiosity. It also becomes evident, by the analysis either of the texts or of the pieces they refer to, that the *namban* objects – and quite particularly the folding screens and lacquerware for the military elite – were characterised by the sophistication that was typical of products made mostly for the internal market of exotica. Additionally, the focus on the decorative subject matter is part of this initial conception of *namban bijutsu*, since typologically the objects continue to be fundamentally Japanese. To adorn a palace, to decorate the complement of an armour (figure 1), to cover the hyper-polished surface of a writing-box, or to float in the golden of a folding screen (figure 2), the scenes narrated would necessarily have to be an euphemism of the facts – the decorative aspect was then considered the fundamental characteristic of *namban*, in detriment of, for example, the formal influence (of armours and of costumes) (figure 3).

9 For clarification, see the passage of Heiner Frühauf, “Urban Exotism and its Sino-Japanese Scenery” that is most relevant to this topic: “Kinoshita Mokutarō’s interest in exotic themes, for instance, had first been awakened during a journey to Kyushu in July, 1907. His fascination with the *namban* period when Portuguese and Spaniards created a Christian culture around Nagasaki is best illustrated by *Jashūmon* or *The Heretics*, 1909, the famous maiden work of his travel companion Kitahara Hakushū (1885–1942). Regarded as one of the pioneering attempts of Japanese symbolism, Hakushū’s verse avails itself of Christian imagery to express the author’s youthful infatuation with fin de siècle decadence. The church ruins in *The Heretics*, therefore, figure less as religious symbols than as an aesthete’s marker of European civilization itself, temples of worship to a decadent God.”

10 Yoshitomo Okamoto, *The namban art of Japan*, trans. Ronald K. Jones (New York: Weatherhill, 1972).



Fig. 1 – Powder box, decorated with black lacquer and figuration of *nambanjin*.
Momoyama Period.

Image C0012713, kindly provided by Tokyo National Museum
and accessible via <http://webarchives.tnm.jp/>



Fig. 2 – Folding screen from the collection of Kobe’s Municipal Museum.

A detail of this screen attributed to Kano Naizen appears in the illustration number 96 in Okamoto (1972), with the legend “Greeting the arriving Portuguese.”

Image kindly provided by curator Tsukahara Akira.



Fig. 3 – Samurai armour *nambangusoku*.

The helmet and the torso reveal the presence of European models. This typology of torso and helmet became common in the last quarter of the 15th century, and were consecrated especially after Tokugawa Ieyasu had used a similar exemplar in the Battle of Sekigahara, in 1600.

Image C0055615, kindly provided by Tokyo National Museum and accessible via <http://webarchives.tnm.jp/>

Okamoto (1972), in his “study of works of art,” extrapolates the universe of objects throughout the body of the text, speaking therefore of a *namban bunka* (which could be translated as “culture of all things related with the *namban*”). That hybrid culture, in which influences are exchanged, new behaviours appear, and markets become diversified, may already include pieces less indicative of good diplomatic relations between the daimios and the Portuguese missionaries and merchants – unlike the *namban bijutsu* category. As *namban bijutsu* became known in the West under the name of Namban Art, paintings dealing with the martyrdom of the Christians, with persecutions and tortures (figure 4), and any other objects connected with this attitude of anti-Christian fundamentalism (especially the *fumi-e*, figures 5 and 6) were not

regarded as legitimate Namban Art, or at least not as it was dealt with in the international, and especially in the Portuguese, historiography. Consequently, they remained outside its positive aura of “openness to the other” or of “intercrossing of cultures.” This resistance to considering Namban Art as a platform with possible contradictory values, and at the same time symptomatic of a conjuncture more complex than the mere aesthetic crossbreeding, appears even more incongruent when it is observed that pieces of implied religious use (figure 7) or images that refer to the socialisation between Japanese who were either Christianised or for some other reason wore the adornments and the exterior signs of the Christians (such as crucifixes on their chest) (figure 9), often fall under the scope of Namban Art.



Fig. 4 - Martyrdom of Christians in Nagasaki (c. 1622).

Reproduction of a painting belonging to a private collection, on display at the Chiesa del Gesù (Rome). This work was taken into consideration for the first time in *A study of History* (the 12 volumes were published between 1934 and 1961) by Arnold Joseph Toynbee (1889-1975).



Fig. 5 - *Fumi-e* shaped as an oval medallion, with figuration of the Virgin Mary in a mandorla of light, metal set on wood.

This *fumi-e* was made known to Western academics especially after its reproduction had appeared in Okamoto (1972), illustration number 50.

Image C0090335, kindly provided by Tokyo National Museum and accessible via <http://webarchives.tnm.jp/>.



Fig. 6 – Rectangular *fumi-e* with the subject of the Ecce Homo, in bronze.

In this exemplar, the wear and tear is visible.

Image C0098012, kindly provided by Tokyo National Museum
and accessible via <http://webarchives.tnm.jp/>.



Fig. 7 - Wall Oratory. Japan, (late) 16th century, Momoyama period.
 Black lacquered wood (*uruxi*); Painting (oil on copper); gold and silver powder (*maqui-e*); traces of red lacquer; mother of pearl inlays (*raden*);
 Fittings, lock and hinges in engraved and gilded copper.

Dim: H: 51,3 x W: 35,5 cm (closed) H: 51,3 x W: 68,8 cm (open).

Inv. 1186 Museu de Artes Decorativas Portuguesas

- Fundação Ricardo do Espírito Santo Silva.

The analysis of this piece (especially the IHS initials) reveals that both the oratory and the painting were made in the context of a Jesuit commission, although the canvas may have been mounted on the oratory in Macau (where Nagasaki's former painting seminar was then operating with the same Japanese priests and seminarians).



**Fig. 8 - Painting on paper pasted on wood
from the collection of the Museu do Caramulo.**

In this collection, the work has the designation Japanese Young Men, and is described as a votive picture (request for protection or intervention near the gods). In all likelihood, it is a portrait or a representation of a *kabuki* actor. Elements such as the use of crucifixes on their chest and the collar of Iberian lace had become the fashion among the elite or in *kabuki* theatre. There is a representation attesting to that - a scroll entitled *Kabuki Soshi Emaki* (book of painted stories about *Kabuki* theatre), belonging to the collection of Tokugawa Reimei-kai of Nagoya, and shown as illustration number 60 in Okamoto (1972), in which the female character wears a sword on her waist band and a crucifix on her chest. The painting of the Museu do Caramulo has likely belonged to a family from Nagasaki.¹¹ The subject in the painting could indeed represent a Christianised Japanese, but it could also be a theatre character who would generically represent the social group of the Japanese who wore Christian adornments as part of the *namban bunka* of that period (in the sense of it being a fashionable thing to do).

11 The family name of the person depicted on the painting corresponds to a family name inscribed for long in the records of Nagasaki. An alleged living descendant of the sixteenth-century young man wearing the *namban* collar and crucifix presented proof of his ancestry to several media of Japan and Portugal and even visited the Museum of Caramulo.

The surge of a discourse concerning these pieces depends on the development both of private collections and of stocks of consecrated museums. In fact, the trend of getting to know and of showing Japan's Christian past motivated figures such as Nagami Tokutaro (1890-1950), who published the first structured catalogue of folding screens in 1927, and a small 19-page book about the *namban* arts (with plural sense in the original) in 1928. In it, he makes reference also to a broader *namban bunka* (here in the sense of *kultur*), marked by Christianity. Ikenaga Hagime (1891-1955) was another promoter of collecting and of writing, his estate corresponding to the near-totality of the collection of Kobe's City Museum.¹²

All the studies mentioned so far respect pieces which were in Japanese territory, those which were commissioned by the lords and further elite, which represent the taste and the art market of the 16th century; in short, the term was coined for a range of pieces in particular. The idea of pieces made by laymen's commission for the exterior – and which, for that reason, existed in collections, families, and museums of Europe and America – was not (yet) adjoined to the concept of Namban Art.

Another problem of this first Japanese historiography is that of the lack of a clear distinction of the "Portuguese" contribution, which is metonymically mistaken for a generic "Western quality."¹³ In effect, the pieces in themselves could not have been idealised or created without that traffic of people and ideas, that meeting of cultures. They mirror realities which could not be properly observed if one pursued an excessively contemporary point of view, one which broke apart the dynamics of religious/missionary tenor and those of the mercantile trade. Nevertheless, a certain insistence on not clarifying what in fact is transferred,¹⁴ or how or why, gained roots, casting the Namban Art into the dubious existence of a stylistic hybridism. The sheer fact of being considered hybrid paved the path for thinking about them as existing in between something (geographical references, civilisation paradigms, etc), as being the material proof of a natural/inevitable process (the biological hybrid as metaphor for cultural complexity).

12 The Museum of Namban Art was merged with the Municipal Museum of Art, becoming since 1982 one same organism, under the tutelage of Kobe's municipality.

13 "In Japanese art history, the term *namban* refers to works of art produced as a result of intercourse between the Japanese and the southern Europeans – mainly the Portuguese and the Spaniards – who arrived in Japan in the sixteenth century. The word, then, does not signify a particular style or system; rather it is a convenient general term for works in two heterogeneous styles of completely different origin – a Japanese style and a Western style." Okamoto, *The Namban Art of Japan*, 1972, 9.

14 Cultural transferences are concepts more operative for this problem, in the sense of incorporating an openness to phenomena of non-acceptance or of selective acceptance, in detriment of the mere influence of one pole upon the other, and therefore doing away with the assumption of cultural subordination, as well as with the model of centers and peripheries. On these matters, see Elkana Yehuda, Ivan Krastev, Elísio Macamo and Shalini Randeria, eds., *Unravelling Ties – From Social Cohesion to New Practices of Connectedness* (Frankfurt & New York: Campus Verlag, 2002), 284-311; and Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann and Michael North, "Introduction – Artistic and Cultural Exchanges between Europe and Asia, 1400-1900: Rethinking Markets, Workshops and Collections," in *Artistic and Cultural Exchanges between Europe and Asia, 1400-1900: Rethinking Markets, Workshops and Collections* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 1-8.

This could be a validated and justified construction, especially since it has been tacitly accepted as the basis for European and American historiography, were it not that the same author (Okamoto) inaugurated one other problem – still pertinent today. When presenting the contexts (the historic and the social, not the artistic one) for the pieces, he did not touch upon Portugal as colonial metropolis, preferring to focus on the *Carreira da Índia* and therefore on the events and characteristics of the life of the arts and of the markets between Goa and Nagasaki. This question is made even more relevant by the fact that, recently, there has been greater insistence upon shaping the *namban* label into a specification of “commission”¹⁵ (internal and external to Japan), at times extrapolated to scenarios of *namban* culture (understood then as life styles and behaviours associated with the same itinerant destination of these objects).¹⁶ When so-called *namban* objects appear in European collections, and bypassing the fact that very little is known about the authorship and the first ownership¹⁷ of these objects, they are interpreted as art objects¹⁸ connoted with the lot of exotica (in fact, double exoticism, since those pieces were also exotic to the Japanese market of the 16th century). They were indexed in those collections and museums as coming from “Asia” (sometimes China, Korea, and Japanese provenances were misread), with characteristics coming from the circumstances of the commission and reascent of baroque tastes.¹⁹ In recent times, thematic topics as globalisation have also begun to be associated to these artefacts.²⁰

15 Catalogue *Encomendas Namban – Os portugueses no Japão da Idade Moderna* (Lisbon: Fundação Oriente, 2010).

16 Leonor Leiria, “Namban Art. Packing and Transportation,” *Bulletin of Portuguese / Japanese Studies* 5 (December 2002), 49-65.

17 The legitimate ownership is a piece of information essential for auctioning and for the art and antiques market in general. Reference is made to the categories of origin of the piece, who commissioned it and who (or which shop) executed it, something that in the majority of the cases is not guaranteed piece by piece, despite the possibility of making generic attributions to regions or production schools, whose reputation and volume of production are known.

18 The French school of art history designates “object d’art” the piece which in Portugal would be placed under “decorative arts.” Lacking a better native expression, the French expression is adopted here, as it seems more appropriate to the category of the pieces analysed and to a conception of art that overcomes the major arts/ minor arts division.

19 For these matters, see especially the catalogues *Exotica: Os Descobrimentos Portugueses e as Câmaras de Maravilhas do Renascimento* (Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2001) and *Baroque: Performance, Pomp and Power: Style in the Age of Magnificence 1620-1800* (London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 2009).

20 The cultural and artistic interactions that resulted from the maritime voyages of the Portuguese at the dawning of early modernity are commonly considered the inaugural episode of the conceptualisation of globe. In this discourse it is assumed that, through those voyages, the encounter of two mental places (with a geographical reference, but still mainly conceptualised) of medieval culture was made possible: the West and the East. More recent works, such as *Portugal: O pioneiro da Globalização*, which in spite of being non-academic had a great impact on generalised opinion on this subject, brought a refreshing language and method of observation of (historical) phenomena, besides being extremely elucidative of what can be made of novel in geo-referenced texts.

The first in-depth study on Namban Art in Portuguese art historiography is an article of 1960,²¹ actually a review of, and commentary to, Okamoto's book (mentioned above). Two considerations are made clear: the folding screens are works of fine-arts and are historical documents. In this manner, the pieces are raised both in artistic and in historical statutes, and they move from symptomatic objects to monumental objects. Matsuda's first premise was not heard – or was otherwise even deliberately refused – when José Augusto França wrote in 1981²² that those folding screens were “pieces of handcraft,” in an article which shows many other problems.²³ The second premise is based on the illustrative capacity which the scenes narrated in the painted decorations possess, according to the author, surpassing even the information on written documents. It is in this article as well that the (Japanese) paternity of the studies on Namban Art is clarified (ensuing from the reflection upon *namban bijutsu*), even if closely followed by German art historiography: in 1910, Oscar Munsterberg writes “Die darstellung von europaenn in der japanischen kunst,” and in 1922 the Jesuit priest Joseph Dahlmann writes “Japans alteste besiehungen zum westen.” Although Portuguese minister José da Costa Carneiro wrote, in 1929, “Notes on the iconography of the Portuguese in Japan in the 16th and 17th centuries,” this is seen as a descriptive text, and diplomatic rather than historiographical.

Apropos of an exhibition entitled precisely “Namban Art,” organised by the Embassy of Japan in Portugal, the Japan Foundation, Portuguese governmental departments, and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in April-May of 1981, Maria Manuela Mota writes sentences like: “1542 – fortuitous meeting of two civilisations,” “antagonistic poles of the northern hemisphere” and “opposing ends of a way of being in the world.” These words, particularly in an exhibition catalogue, charge the pieces with deliberate meanings, turning them into ambassadors of a political relation between the respective national identities, reinforced in a discourse of harmonious encounter. Also noteworthy is the creation of a geography of extreme-West and of extreme-East, in a model in which Portugal as well as Japan are valued by what they represent (to a third party?), for supposedly carrying the root of their respective cultures in their “ways of being.” Later in the text it is asserted that “the arrival of the Portuguese in Japan represented one of the most remarkable cultural contacts of humankind, as it took place between two civilisations of high level.” The words of the representative of the department of Eastern Arts of the Gulbenkian Foundation disperse the depth of the analysis

21 Küchi Matsuda, “Biombos japoneses com temas portugueses,” *Colóquio – Revista de Artes e Letras* 11 (December 1960), 1-5 and 71-72.

22 José Augusto França, “Arte Namban,” *Colóquio Artes: Revista de Artes Visuais, Música e Bailado* s. 2, no. 49 (June 1981), 60.

23 He claims that it is an art born out of a “phenomenon of acculturation,” interprets the bi-dimensionality and the technique of superimposition of plans as a “theatrical set” (without the analysis of the performance itself), compares the folding screens to the paintings of the Jesuit seminar and classifies them as cases of “primitivism,” considerations all which show how important it is to get acquainted with Japanese art and art history in order to form opinions about these pieces. In spite of the coincidence in dates, França's article in *Colóquio Artes* is not a presentation or commentary to the exhibition of the Gulbenkian Foundation addressed in the following pages.

of the artistic phenomenon and are mixed with political protocols, since the initial premise (of the remarkable encounter) is justified by a historical fallacy, one which, furthermore, is not illustrated by the works of art in question. Neither was Portugal a civilisation, nor did it faithfully represent “its” civilisation. Complementarily, to compare Western Civilisation to Eastern Civilisation is to handle identitarian categories forged after the episode in question and essentially constructed by the ideological paradigms of the modernity.

In the same exhibition catalogue, a text by Yoshio Kitamura (Osaka’s Namban Museum), bearing an unfortunate and incongruent translation of the title into Portuguese,²⁴ presents two lines of study fundamental to the future of the historiography of Namban Art. In the first place, it deals with the issue of the acceptance or non-acceptance of the *nambanjin* (different from the *komojin* – Dutch). The relations with them end with the “cancellation of Japanese hospitality regarding Christianity,” namely with Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s edict. This topic – of the abrupt ending of commercial and social relations between Portugal and Japan in an environment of religious persecution and forced leave – was not followed through in the Portuguese historiography of Namban Art.²⁵ In spite of the presence of a canvas allusive to the martyrdom of missionaries and laymen in Nagasaki²⁶ in the Exhibition “Portugal and the World in the 16th and 17th centuries” (Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, 2009), that object was found in one of the visit’s blind spots.²⁷

The second vector of Kitamura’s text is the stipulation of a bipolar model for the arts related with the *nambanjin*: so-called Namban Art would exclude *kirishtan art*, the former being secular and the latter engaged with Christian religious use. In fact, it was this discrimination that Luís de Moura Sobral²⁸ applied recently, when he wrote “two great categories (...) the sacred are called kirishtan art, the profane or industrial namban art,” though he did not mention where he took it from.

Risking exhausting the analysis of this catalogue, but with the justification of taking it up as a case study of historiography, let us now consider Suzuki Susumo’s article entitled “The meaning of the exhibiting of namban art.” This author presents a critical

24 In Portuguese, the title appears as “namban handcraft,” which is incorrect, since the Japanese expression used should have been translated as “namban arts and crafts,” as, in any case, appears in the body of the text. An English version was consulted, translated from the Japanese original, which was also consulted, for clarification of this point.

25 Another subject that also found no echo in Portuguese art historiography on Namban Art was that of the destruction of several pieces, mostly folding screens, in which Portuguese missionaries were clearly figured, that took place at the time of the politics of isolation imposed by the Tokugawa government. Only those which were not of Christian stamp and which had been reutilised or kept in Buddhist temples were likely to be saved. Tadao Takamizawa even claims that those screens were destroyed by “Japan’s inquisition.”

26 Catalogue: 173 – Martyrdom of Blessed Leonardo Kimura and of his companions in 1619.

27 Marginal area of the exhibitivite trajectory, for reasons of the criteria of distribution of the objects in space, as well as of the “standard guided visit” discourse.

28 Luís de Moura Sobral, “A Expansão e as Artes: Transferências, Contaminações, Inovações,” in *A Expansão marítima portuguesa (1400-1800)*, dir. Francisco Bethencourt and Diogo Ramada Curto, (Lisbon: Edições 70, 2010), 430.

discourse of great interest, since he begins by explaining how Japan received Buddhism, the conditions of, and the causes for, the country's receptivity to cultural and artistic influences, and the artefacts' preservation capability throughout long centuries. By wondering whether Japanese culture could be a sum-up of "overseas civilisations," the author comes to the matter of Namban Art, in which "the Western artistic traditions introduced by the Christian missionaries" were "received and transformed." He concludes that the process was a complex one, and that it had the particularity of fostering the creation of new pieces, adapted to "Japanese taste," thus developing a "style unequivocally of its own." His explanatory topos of the *namban* objects is no longer the particularity of the encounter/impact/relation between *nanbanjin* and locals, but rather the particular style of the pieces: their characterisation as a creative flowering. In effect, that particular style surpassed the individual style of each party. Style is metaphorically presented as an organism which, however possible it might be to identify the fluxes lying behind it, possesses a certain property of spontaneous generation; its birth happens naturally. In fact, this conception of the *namban* art objects as a style not only bore no fruits, it was deliberately relegated to a second plan by Maria Helena Mendes Pinto, the first academic dedicated to the configuration of a body of knowledge about Japan in Portuguese artistic historiography. In her words (for the 1981 exhibition) "the *namban* qualifier was used to denominate the decoration of the pieces where symbols of the Catholic religion appeared or where our navigators were figured." It may be noted that the decoration is taken as the reason for the qualification, but the style is not, thus dismissing the objects to which the qualifier is given precisely on account of form and not of decoration (as is the case of garments,²⁹ with exemplars exhibited on this same occasion). It should be noted as well that, going against Takamizawa, Maria Helena Mendes Pinto points out the importance of the merchants-missionaries group, when in reality we already know that the beginning of the study of *namban bijutsu* in Japan had chiefly considered those folding screens in which missionaries were not figured (being figured, in their stead, merchants, maps, etc.) because those were the ones which survived in greater number – not having been burned at the time of the persecutions.

The following occasion for eventual reflection on the arts of "expansionist" contexts was the XVII Exhibition of Art, Science and Culture in Lisbon, in 1983, where, once more, *namban* art objects were found – in spite of the lack of theoretical or methodological support for the nomenclature (Namban Art) at that time. Luís Miguel Peixoto³⁰ expatiates

29 Kaoru Tanno, *Catalogue Traje Namban* (Lisbon: Instituto Português de Museus, 1994), 15: "The introduction of the *nanban* (*sic*) garments, simultaneous with the period of Portuguese-Japanese dealings, altered the Japanese taste (...), diversified the Japanese costume (...). The innovation in the field of weaving materials and techniques and in the mode of wearing not only had great influence on the everyday, throughout the whole Edo period, as it also became one of the propelling elements towards modern living."

30 Luís Miguel de Andrade Baptista Peixoto, "Maria Helena Mendes Pinto and the Encounter with Japan: an Analysis of the Semantic and Plastic Concepts of her Exhibitions," *Bulletin of Portuguese/Japanese Studies* 12 (June 2006): 83.

on the occasion, but the analysis of the choices implicit in Maria Helena Mendes Pinto's writing (as indicated above) escapes him. The "encounter" corset was indeed suffocating the necessary progress in the understanding of these art objects, of the protocols of affirmation of their contextual weight as cultural symptoms, and even of their pragmatic typological classification.

In spite of everything, the work of M. H. M. P can not be undermined: the break with the exclusiveness of the folding screens, in the exhibitions as well as in the texts, was accomplished by way of this art historian, particularly through her role of commissary of the exhibition *Via Orientalis*³¹ (exhibition at the *Europália* 1991, article of 1993). She stated that "(their) manifestations are multiple and diversified, encompassing not only the pictorial decoration of the folding screens but equally the decoration of objects generally lacquered." It was also she who added to the category the "new pieces purposely created for Christian religion" – referring to *kirishtan* art objects,³² which thus became a chapter of Namban Art (in Portuguese historiography) – and "lacquerware commissioned for Westerners' use, or for Catholic churches of Portugal and of Japan." In her text she is also responsible for introducing what would later be the commonplaces of the description of this iconography: the cartoonish representation of the "Portuguese," with their "wide *bombaxas*" and "large noses," merchants in extravagant procession, with their slaves and assets, on their way to Jesuit lodgings or unloading the *kurofune*. Her formulation of the *namban* object is therefore multifaceted, on the one hand denoting the deliberate creation of specific categories of analysis and the intention of developing an interpretative model for these pieces, and on the other not acknowledging or giving justification for her choices, thus falling into simplifications such as these last cartoonish tirades.

In the same volume of *Artes e Leilões* (which published, in 1993, M. H. M. Pinto's 1991 article) António Sérgio Pessoa³³ took up precisely the inaugurated topic of the "commission" as Namban Art's interpretative key, and dealt with the matter of "Japanese porcelain of exportation," making clear that he considered *namban* every thing that might be "Japanese pieces made for foreign taste or for the foreigner." The contradiction with the first Japanese historiography is evident, and, besides, the position is extreme, since it was already known that the commissions of some pieces, such as the folding screens, had never been meant for the external market.

The problems and the contradictions present in the texts of these researchers, echoing through intra-textual, and especially inter-textual, inconsistencies, and also in the very method of exposition, go back to the same root, which, however, the authors do not name: the greater problem of a "Portuguese colonial art" school and of its unsteady relation with

31 Maria Helena Mendes Pinto, "A arte namban e a exposição *Via Orientalis*," *Artes e Leilões* 21 (August-September 1993): 35-38.

32 Possibly, she chooses to place *kirishtan* art as a sub-theme of *namban* art, but unquestionably included in it, in deliberate reaction to Yoshio Kitamura's words.

33 António Sérgio Pessoa, "Porcelana Namban: Uma sucinta história da porcelana japonesa de exportação," *Artes e Leilões* 21 (August-September 1993): 42-45.

these artefacts. Indeed, they absolutely cannot be considered colonial art, but were nevertheless often imbued of experiences of “expansion” or of “discovery,” in the glorifying and nationalist sense that oozes from those terms. Apparently in response to this underlying problem, a work appeared whose breadth of research and impact upon the Portuguese academia are undeniable. Its purpose seems to be to look into the matter of the Portuguese presence in the world as a motive for the interpretation of an extremely vast and equally varied body of objects and edifications, so as to join art and politico-commercial expansion within the same group. In the volume *O espaço do Índico* of the *História da Arte Portuguesa no Mundo* we may read³⁴ a paragraph that is a significant exception to the usual lack of methodological rigor in texts of art history engaged with the Portuguese presence over the world: “Some foreign authors, even in catalogues of recently held exhibitions, have undermined Portugal’s action in Japan, because of the fact that many of the missionaries were Spanish or Italian. However, it is good to take into account that those foreigners were at the service of the crown of Portugal, fruit of the rights and duties resultant from the Portuguese *Padroado* in the East (...).” There is, then, a discourse of legitimisation of the inclusion of Namban Art in the roll of Portuguese arts in the world, allegedly in response to authors (not indicated) who destitute Portugal from a position of influence upon the Japanese arts. What must be stressed is the nature of the argument employed, which is not artistic, stylistic, or cultural, but rather political; since it is in the tie to the Portuguese *Padroado*, sole arm of the Portuguese Empire in Asia reaching Japan, that this geography is recaptured, and consequently, the pieces appended to it. Thus, Pedro Dias builds a coherent theoretical proposal, regardless of whether one agrees with the argument or not. It is also via his text that the architecture is brought to us, an exercise in crypto-history of art – surmised from texts and reproduction in other objects (painting, for example) – and in urbanism (Nagasaki). These buildings and spaces are not reduced to the interpretations brought by the term *namban*, nor is the expression Namban Art, albeit utilised, operative. More than an aesthetical category, Pedro Dias works with a temporality. It is the “*namban* century” that he configures, encompassing, performance-like, all the movement of people and goods, fixed establishments and audiences, purchase of souvenirs, and changes in the systems of production, within a logics in which “the transformations in the traditional aesthetics of Japan” occur in result of the openness of the country to the exoticism of the “whites from the South.” Note still the underlying tacit acceptance of Maria Helena Mendes Pinto’s line: in spite of being strongly based upon Jesuit descriptions and inventories, because of the corpus of extant letters, Dias’ text does not mention the term *kirishitan*, or the possible existence of sub-themes within Namban Art. Precisely because his interest in the *namban* objects configures a thematic chronology and not an aesthetical or typological category, we may say that his methodological position is consistent.

Pedro Dias’ pages present yet another kind of art works besides those that were commonly shown and written about, objects which in some way illustrate the *namban*

34 Pedro Dias, “Japão,” in *História da Arte Portuguesa no Mundo (1415-1822)*, vol. 1, *O espaço do Índico* (Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores, 1998), 457.

phenomenon (whether thematic, decorative, stylistic, or chronological): statuary of wood and of ivory of small dimensions, candelabra or other ceramics, furniture falling outside of the typology of the arks (see the bed that was recently exhibited at the Fundação Oriente in the Exhibition “Namban Commission”), the *netsuke* and the *fumie*. The pertinence of such inclusion is not quite clarified by the author, but the fact that those same artefacts had never been considered before highlights the following: the selection of objects to illustrate theories about and definitions of Namban Art, and the adjustment of what is taken for *namban* to a reduced group of objects, are two interdependent processes. Such processes were responsible for excluding some objects in favour of others, and usually the excluded objects were the ones Pedro Dias was now trying to bring to the discussion.

The position assumed here is that the artefacts are the only phenomenological bedrock for the aesthetic-stylistic analysis which is art history’s responsibility. And, History notwithstanding, Art History remains the discipline of the art objects and of the discourse on visual culture. To silence some art objects in favour of others (arks, shelf cases, folding screens, etc.) that are interlinked with a discourse of “meeting” and of “expansion”, is to seek to create a “History of Portuguese Colonial Art” instead of seeking to understand the history of the art created by the Portuguese presence in the world. The latter, even if it has a poor capacity to solve the problem of the characterisation of its action (origin? influence?), does not propose to designate certain artefacts as colonial. Firstly, the historiographical implication of this category is not part of the problems specific to the aesthetic-artistic analysis of art itself; secondly those objects were involved with a socio-political relation which was not (historically) uniform throughout the vast spaces in which artistic objects were created and made circulate – whether those networks and points were Portuguese, or mediated by the Portuguese.

In spite of the challenge raised by Pedro Dias to art historians, in studies after 1998 Namban Art appears once again interpreted as a “meeting of civilisations” and an “exchange of cultures,” loaded with terms like “acculturation”³⁵ with no account for their density,³⁶ and with the aspiration of solving the (false) problem of the market which formatted it³⁷ with an artistic category, as it will be exposed below.

35 On “acculturation” as cultural anthropology’s and history’s operative concept, see Michel Grenon, “La notion d’aculturation entre l’antropologie et l’historiographie,” *Lekton* 2, n. 2 (1992): 13-42, and Cécilia Courbot, “De l’aculturation aux processus d’aculturation, de l’anthropologie à l’histoire,” *Hypothèses* 1 (1999): 121-129; on the use of the concept applied to the Portuguese Empire, see Luís Filipe Barreto, “A aculturação portuguesa na expansão e o luso-tropicalismo,” in *Portugal: Percursos de Interculturalidade*, coord. Mário Ferreira Lages and Artur Teodoro de Matos, vol. I, *Raízes e Estruturas* (Lisbon: Alto Comissariado para a Imigração e Diálogo Cultural, 2008), 477-503.

36 The expressions “meeting of civilisations,” “exchange of cultures” and “acculturation” are quotes from Carla Alferes Pinto, “Arte namban: arte para bárbaros?,” *Oceanos* 15 (September 1993): 117-118.

37 The question of the market/commission tends to consider that art objects were made in result either of internal commission (when reflecting the presence of the Portuguese) or of external commission (when compiling the taste of the Portuguese with the Japanese techniques and materials).

In the texts after 1990, the hypothesis of a *namban* culture began to be taken seriously,³⁸ with the result that art objects could no longer be seen as just a category of art, or just commodities, but rather as part of a lifestyle presupposing the existence of conditions for the production of those artefacts, for the market they created and which, at the same time, created them. On this opportune reference to the art market's role in the first modernity, an edition largely ignored by art historians should be mentioned. The publication in question, in Portuguese, and published simultaneously in Lisbon and London by the antiquarian Jorge Welsh (in 2003), includes a text by O. Impey, former curator of the Department of Oriental Art of the Ashmolean Museum, stressing the importance of not being simplistic to the point of imagining that the argument "Namban Art is an art commissioned for the Asian market" can solve everything. In fact, the existence of several parallel markets operating in Asia in the 1500's and 1600's may demand an analysis even greater than the previous line of interpretation. In addition, it is that author also who rises against the longevity of the thesis of *namban bijutsu* as Japanese artistic phenomenon. Contrarily to the wariness which historians of Portuguese art seemed to have, and which paradoxically made them identify Namban Art with echoes of the *Estado da Índia* while at the same time not denying that it was a chapter of Japanese art, Impey suggests that the argument of style is more efficient. Indeed, to see that which is specifically *namban* in these objects as a (artistic) style allows him to prefer to assume that the existence of such items is more conditioned by the tastes that shape the commissions (plural) than by the natural evolution of Japanese aesthetics, or by their possible ability to produce images which synthesise the drama/curiosity of the impact with what is different. He centres mostly on the objects in which the "idea of opulence" and the use of the "exotic material" was more evident, the ones in which the mother of pearl inlays call for mapping out the creative routes (and the routes of the gathering of the raw materials). Subsequently, Impey introduces in the discourse geographic determinations other than Japanese; he mentions imports from Korea and the practice of using materials from the coast of Gujarat (or, perhaps, of finalising the inlays there). This author refuses the earlier discussion about where *kirishitan* art objects belong and quite promptly claims to exist three kinds of Portuguese market: the Jesuit one, the one of European destination (chiefly lacquerware), and the private one (largely unknown) which in any case includes the items not necessarily considered artistic at the time – like the arks and other commodities. He calls attention to the lacquerware, commissioned specifically through the Portuguese *trato*, and not through the Dutch or the English that followed it. In spite of these relevant considerations, Impey's text is in large measure ignored by the historiography of Portuguese language on Namban Art. As far as it was possible to determine, the only echo of these words, as well as of some pending previous lines, was in the thesis by Alexandra Curvelo, presented for obtainment

38 The expression "namban culture" shows up in the works of João Paulo Oliveira e Costa and also often in more technical works, such as "Namban Art. Packing and transportation," having definitely come into the language of Portuguese art historiography after the Conference held at the Fundação Oriente, "Arte e Cultura Namban" on the 11th January 2002.

of the Doctoral degree in the Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas of the U.N.L (2005). Right from her introduction, it becomes explicit that Namban Art cannot be dealt with independently of the reality of the *Carreira da Índia*. Even though the shaky notion of “Portuguese colonial experience” appears, it is softened in the document’s part II, where the author guarantees that “inequality” or “subordination” cannot be spoken of in this Japanese geography. This means that, without hurting the historiographical tradition which attaches the discourse of artistic analysis to the matrix of the Discoveries and of the Expansion, Alexandra Curvelo defines consistently that she is studying a cultural phenomenon and not a historical or political body. We may see the construction of an interpretative panorama of Namban Art that takes into consideration the phenomena occurring in the coastlines of Asia (a construction which is also a program for perceiving Namban as closer to the notion of *bunka*) when she introduces the reading of Kaufmann’s *Geography of Art*: the idea of overcoming the model of centres-peripheries, in favour of one in which peripheries “are considered potential and actual protagonists of a relation of influences much more complex and multi-directional with the centre.” It is from this position that springs her hypothesis that Gujarat may be glimpsed in the mother of pearl of the missal stands, and even that signs of the impact of Japanese lacquerware may be seen in Mexico.

One of the most important vectors of inflexion of Portuguese art historiography introduced by Alexandra Curvelo’s work is the introduction of a reading of Japanese art and culture as the starting point for the interpretation of the art objects, even of the most studied ones, as is the case of the folding screens, not necessarily disregarding what has been said about them by the Japanese specialists. The subject of the *namban-jin*’s physiognomy is a case in point: it had up until then been taken for a caricature, justified as an exacerbation of the strangeness of the barbarians, from the point of view of the Japanese who observed them for the first time. An analysis of the chronology of the screens, as well as a reading of Anna Jackson’s work³⁹ (2004), leads the author to reconfigure the creative potential of visual culture and to reveal in those screens a new dimension, extracting from them the pretension of being veridical portraits or some sort of naïve depictions of the exotic other (a process of undermining the danger posed by the foreign element by showing it as a somewhat silly-faced barbarian).⁴⁰ Her argument set out from the realisation that it had been wrongly assumed that the artists would have had the opportunity to see some of these Europeans first hand, and to produce some sketches from nature. In truth, these painters’ learning process itself did not envisage the act of “lifting from nature” in the manner of European artistic training. What was privileged was the cultural capital acquired through copying, which in the early-Japanese conception is the execution of a work imitating an earlier one, but instilled with a personal note, an interpretation.

39 Anna Jackson, “Visual Responses: Depicting Europeans in East Asia,” in *Encounters: The Meeting of Asia and Europe 1500-1800*, eds. Anna Jackson and Amin Jaffer (London: V&A Publications, 2004), 200-217, paper cited in the thesis analysed here.

40 This interpretative current is reflected in the Exhibition “Encounters.”

Therefore, the argument that the caricatures were a hyperbole of the strangeness glimpsed with the first visual testimonies weakens, so much so, that the first folding screens with *nambanjin* appeared around 60 years after the first disembarkation. In addition to this line of argument, there is the calling of attention to the *gigaku* masks, made for the theatrical dramas of Tadai-ji's opening ceremony (in 752) and which captured physiognomic traces and legendary elements of the Buddhism of the Persian Empire (whose culture contacted indirectly with Japan through the mediation of Tang China). The *bugaku* – masked dances – prolonged the archetype of the barbarian, an archetype in which the facial features bore a resemblance to the ones later used for the *nambanjin*.

And neither was the *nau do trato* (the big cargo ship) an element that could not be decoded by the Japanese observer, since the iconography of the great dark *nau* was already that of the Treasure Ship – which explains the gathering of the curious, and even the long journeys made to see the *kurofune* be unloaded. In this fashion, the object of Namban Art appears as an artistic artefact which, not being hybrid itself, has two tables of interpretation over imposed, without either one annulling the other.

Alexandra Curvelo, undoubtedly taking into account the problem that the term *kirishitan* represented for Portuguese historiography, chooses to dedicate a chapter to it, in which predominance is given to the Society of Jesus. Not clarifying at first whether that term denotes a subtheme, or whether it is merely a designation of the specific use for a body of work, the novelty lies in the identification under that epithet of the lost church of Nossa Senhora da Assunção (which Pedro Dias had avoided doing). By extending *namban* outside the domain of art objects, she crosses the final frontier which this classification still had (brought from the 1800's) and which explained in large measure the lack of theoretical and conceptual depth of the studies concerning these objects and their cultural contents. Alongside religious works or *kirishitan*, Curvelo deals with the “cartographic screens” and the “paintings of genre” as signs of the *namban* culture, making provisions against seeing the syncretisms as mere reflections or extensions of Western influences (which, in a way, is Carla A. Pinto's failure, in her article of 1993). Her model of *namban* culture enables her to see the objects as being historically explained by the Portuguese presence in Japan, stylistically described by the circumstances of the *Carreira da Índia*, and later reinvented in the ambit of the route of the *Galeão de Manila*, in a model in which the traffic of forms and of contents is the motive for a first art of the globalisation: “This journey of the forms, with echoes in Japan and in Macau through the circulation of models, had, in the American continent, a lasting impact which led not only to the spreading of Namban Art, but to its appropriation and consequent reinterpretation as well.”⁴¹

One of the loose threads of Portuguese art historiography about the *namban* phenomenon today is still the issue of the silenced objects, and another (or the same one, seen from a different angle), is that of the objects which negate the discourse of the encounter.

41 Alexandra Curvelo, “Nuvens douradas e paisagens habitadas. A arte namban e a sua circulação entre a Ásia e a América: Japão, China e Nova Espanha (c. 1550-c. 1700)” (PhD dissertation, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2007), 419.

Two examples shall suffice to diagnose this uncomfortable void: the painting by unknown author attributed to Giovanni Niccoló's School of painting (Nagasaki), which represents the martyrdom of the Blessed Leonardo Kimura and of four Christian laymen companions in November of 1619; and the known *fumie*, as, for instance, the one Jorge Welsh showed in his gallery in 2009, or the one in the Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas (Madrid). It is certain that either one has already been seen, as their appearance has been accompanied by index cards describing them, but neither (nor similar ones, nor even the "oblivions" pointed out by Pedro Dias in 89) has been included in the discourse on Namban Art.

The conclusion is evident: they have not, because Namban Art, whether considered as a time interval, a style, a market, or a culture, was configured as a designation of "encounter" (as in "Encounters," the exhibition in Seville, 1992), its spectre conventionalised as being that of the acceptance, it was only granted a positive charge, its configuration is that of the agile panorama of the first modernity, with its exchanges of cargos and of ideas in boats and in dialects – it never is, nor is it encompassed by, the art which negates, which wounds, which testifies to or configures the refusal and the punishment.

Visitors of exhibitions of objects connoted with the Expansion, the Portuguese Discoveries, Portuguese presence in the East, or even with the European cabinets of curiosities, always find themselves facing works of Namban Art, and, therefore, facing the presentation of that nomenclature – as a category. But a visitor who, hypothetically, travelled through all the countries where those exhibitions take place, or who knew their catalogues, would see that, in spite of the repetition of typologies of pieces (or even of specific items, which happens mainly because of the availability of the private collectors who own them), there is no uniformity (or even confluence) of discourse about Namban Art. This fact is due to several contingencies: in the first place, each exhibition or art fair is an event producer of meanings and concepts, whether directly, by means of the textual material produced, or via the disposition of the objects, of the relation that is established between them, or even of the readings visitors extract from them, and which are in turn reproduced in reviews, journalistic notes, etc.; in the second place, proposals of interpretative programs aiming at a definition of Namban Art through a showing of its artefacts have not been many – exception being made to the exhibition "Namban Commissions" at the Fundação Oriente, which will be discussed below; in the third place, there is an almost absolute divorce among the makers of historiographical discourse: academics in a group, exhibitions and museum professionals in another, and art market agents in another. Portuguese art historiography is tendentially produced almost exclusively by the first group, allowing for reflections of the performance of the elements of the second group, but still not conscious of the dynamics and fruitful relation between art history and the art market that exists in hubs such as London (Christie's – department of higher education), New York (Sotheby's), Paris (IESA administers a post-graduation in history of art and of the art market), or others.

In effect, and as already discussed, Portuguese art historiography eschews some of the aspects that Japanese or British authors have highlighted, such as the approach of

namban as a style. Despite the labyrinthine consistency of the *namban* phenomenon in art historiography, it is curious that the iconic potential of its artefacts, particularly of the folding screens, is so high and widespread as to have been used on several occasions for the face of an edition, an exhibition, or an audiovisual production (the most notorious example being the film “The Voyage”, ordered for the Expo 98’s Pavilhão de Portugal, after an idea of Simoneta Luz Afonso and directed by Christian Boustani, figures 9a and 9b). A brief analysis of two graphics in particular may enlighten us on this point: the cover of a 1989 edition of Fernão Mendes Pinto’s *Peregrinação e Cartas* (figure 10), and the cover of the catalogue of the exhibition “Encompassing the Globe,” in the 2009 version of the MNAA (figure 11), which in fact would be better viewed in contrast to the cover of the catalogue of the “same” exhibition in the USA, in 2007 (whose image we do not have the rights to use, but which can easily be viewed on-line).



Figs. 9a and 9b – Screenshots of the animation *The Voyage*.

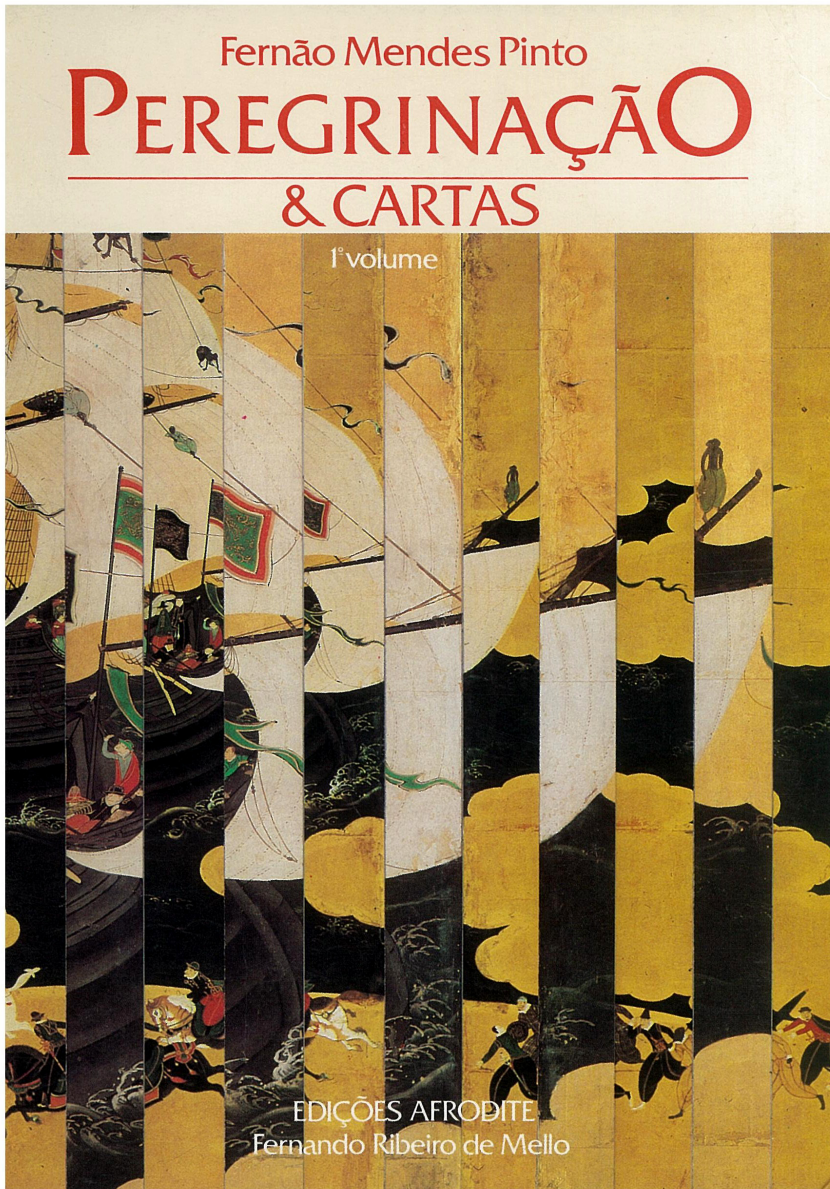


Fig. 10 - 1989 Edition of Fernão Mendes Pinto's *Peregrinação e Cartas*, commemorative of the Portuguese discoveries.

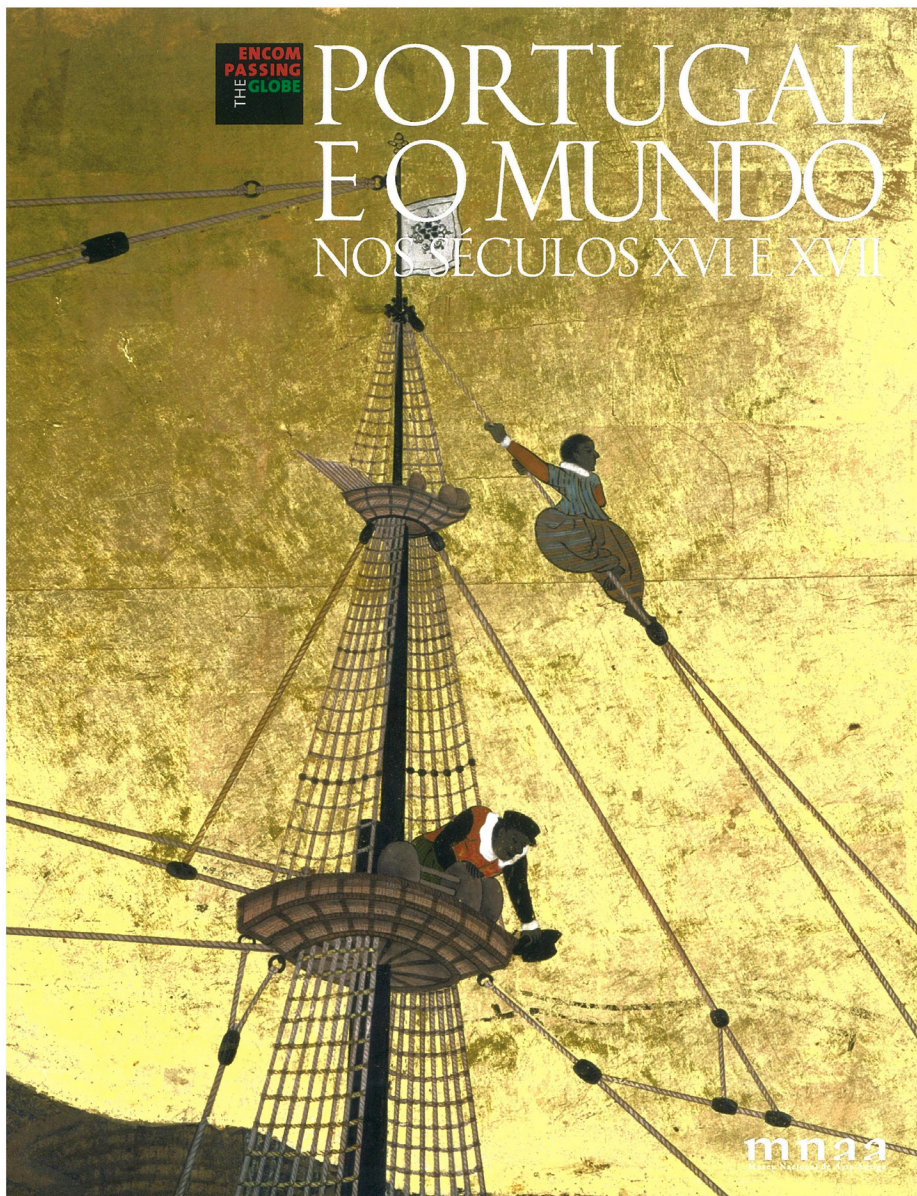


Fig. 11 - Cover of the Catalogue of the Portuguese version of the Exhibition "Encompassing the Globe," 2009

The first situation (figure 10) is a fragmentation of a folding screen in a collage by Eduardo Néry, used with the purpose of reproducing the myriad fragmented histories which are contained in the *Peregrinação*, and the alternative which that book constitutes to Camões' epic – in short, a fragmentation of the image as fragmentation of the experiences in the life-journey. But the use of the *namban* screen is more symptomatic than that, it is the deliberate choice of the artefact representing remoteness, the feat of having arrived to a place which was, up to that point, a mythical extreme-Easterness. Shattering the image erases the presence of the boat and of the merchants in procession, and places even more in evidence the golden atmosphere created by the clouds. The 2009 catalogue chooses this aerial element as well – the golden clouds (also, by the way, the element of the title of Alexandra Curvelo's dissertation). But the catalogue of the "same" exhibition at the Sackler Gallery shows (instead of a mysterious golden ambience of extreme-Easterness) another citation, simultaneously historical and geographical – that of the New World, more exactly of the Land of the Parrots, the name by which Brazil was known during a limited period in the 16th century, and which is evoked by a piece in particular, the feathered crown. It becomes clear that the focus of this exhibition and that of its homonym Portuguese version are not the same. And, if there were any doubts, the title of 2007's emphasises the globalisation of the first modernity (graphics and dimension of the font), while 2009's chromatically nationalises the international title and hyperbolises the Portuguese title, starting with the name of the country. Everything exhibited at the MNAA was under the aegis of this matrix, which includes the Namban Art: arts resultant from the Portuguese presence over the seas and the lands of the globe during the chronology in question. The emphasising of the *namban* objects as surrogate phenomena of a national identity particularly connected to (almost affectively dependant of) the already established corpus of information and of cult of the Discoveries is placed in exhibition once again.

Another aspect to consider of the language used in the exhibition of 2009 concerns the inscriptions for labelling, which are the first information on the index cards for each art work. The designation *namban* is used for folding screens, for a writing-box in which *nambanjin* are figured, as well as for a food-box, stirrups, and powder horn also with that decoration, besides a rifle which does not have any figurative representation. It is not used however for a pair of shoes of European typology, neither for the oratories made in/for the Jesuit Seminar, an ivory Baby Jesus, a holy-water stoup, a missal stand, a box-reliquary, nor for a canvas of the martyrdom of the Blessed Leonardo Kimura mentioned earlier. Taking into consideration the theoretical-methodological orientations already presented in this text, it can be perceived that this labelling privileged a definition of Namban Art limited to the decorative configuration clearly representing the "barbarians from the south," whether they be merchants, or missionaries, or both, thus excluding from the category the stylistic-formal and the chronological approaches, and above all the *namban bijutsu* (in the sense of integration in a geographically vaster, and contextually more diversified, space). The choice of words also rejected the possibility of a relation between *namban* and *kirishitan*, that is, between secular artefacts and religious artefacts (whether of acceptance of the religion or of its refusal and persecution). The conceptual imposition is artificial, since in reality some of the objects, such as the reliquaries, cannot be taken

for objects solely of religious use, nor solely of secular use (the issue of agency would take us even further into the matter). The wider problem of the classification of Namban Art as mobile artistic heritage in a Decree of 2006, more exactly of the selection of some pieces to be classified, and of the exclusion of others, cannot even be broached in this paper, but cannot be ignored by the historiography regarding this thematic.

The exhibition “Namban Commissions” (at the Fundação Oriente, 2011) was a deliberate answer to these inconsistencies, as well as follow-up to some of the hypothesis already presented (Impey, discussed above, had written a proposal for the definition of Namban Art based on the commissions). The proposal for an understanding of Namban Art objects presented there, resultant of the maturation of Curvelo’s research, is more inclined towards overcoming the political connotation, that is, it moves away from the tendency to classify these objects via an attribution of meaning which is alien to their analysis, and which imposes on them the role of diplomatic objects or simulacra of a Portugal-Japan relationship in the first modernity. The approach may be presented as pertaining to culturalism, but does not refuse stylistic or chronological specificities (in the sense which Pedro Dias gives them), as, in any case, may be read in the following excerpts: “The exhibitive project presented intends, then, to introduce a new approach to, or contextualisation of, Namban Art, in an exhibition that is constituted by four differentiated nucleuses (...) 1st nucleus, the art of war (...) 2nd nucleus, *kirishitan* art (...), 3rd nucleus, from Lisbon to Japan (...) counterpoint between the typologies introduced by the *nambanjin* in Japan, of European origin, and the decoration on Japanese lacquer, according to the new taste introduced by the Portuguese, (...) hybridism of the Portuguese-Asian society (...)” It should be noted that, on this occasion (unlike the “Encompassing (...)” exhibition) only one of the nucleuses, the 4th one, entitled “outlooks on the *nambanjin*,” relates Namban Art to a decorative pattern of figuration of the Portuguese (merchants and/or missionaries who travelled with them).

With this exhibition, *Namban Art* ceases to be a phenomenon about “looking at the other” from a Japanese viewpoint, a position, in any case, deceptive, which undervalues the objects in favour of bi-polarised exoticisms. If *namban* kept on being a category only for art works explicitly possessing a figurative decoration with the thematic of the presence of the *nambanjin* in Japan (as if it could not be otherwise, because the word *namban* had been taken from the expression *nambanjin*) it would unavoidably fail to explain other aspects of those very art works – namely, the reason for having been created, the use they had, the motive they were collected for, and other aspects of their “biography” as living agents of historical memory and of its re-writing processes. Besides, that kind of crystallisation of the conception of Namban Art raised the problem of knowing how to explain and name objects related to it (mentioned throughout this text), especially the masks, stirrups, helmets and armours,⁴² which, even if they do not always configure the “barbarians from the south,” are

42 In the art market, not only does Namban Art apply to objects specifically religious and to others clearly military, as these objects reach an ever increasing value of commercial transaction, as well as preponderance within private collections and institutional ones.

always equally made for internal commissions and reflect formal and decorative influences brought by the Portuguese (either by means of the observation of objects, or by mimesis of tastes). However, still regarding the “Namban Commissions” exhibition, an admonition should be made concerning the inconveniency of over-extrapolating the conception of an art of the *namban* in connection to the term that gives the exhibition its title, which essentially is the exhibition’s weak point. By emphasising the commission as cultural process, the Namban Art here presented might come to be mistaken with other categories of artefacts of the whole *Carreira da Índia* and with terms which are problematic, like “Indo-Portuguese” or “Sino-Portuguese”, which does not help to clarify any of the problems of the already complex art historiography connoted with the Portuguese presence in the world.

At this point, an explanatory analepsis must be allowed: in 2005, the exhibition “Namban Art in Viceregal México” was the first great exhibitiv event to relate *namban* objects with a maritime route, namely with the route of the *Galeão de Manila*, which is the complement of the *Carreira da Índia* in a perspective of circumnavigation of the planet, and which in large measure carried products and agents between every point of that circuit, now augmented in function of the union of the Iberian crowns. To show how this exhibition has been an important chapter in the history of Namban Art, two excerpts from the catalogue (p. 160) are presented here, the first on the relevance of the study of Namban Art as a means to understand the art produced in Mexico, and the second, in line with what this text has been dealing with, a definition (of Namban Art) as a category of artistic objects.

When the creation and exportation of namban art to Portugal and the rest of Europe began, several japanese craftsmen came to Mexico on board the China Galleon and settled in Patzcuaro. There they began to develop their own works, obviously influenced by namban art of the momoyama period. The contract published by Guillermo Tovar de Teresa from the archivo de notariás contains the earliest reference known to the González family and this information is fundamental for the subject of lacquer and enconchados.

(...) Namban art reflected the splendor and wealth of the new ruling class, their great palaces and sumptuous golden temples, and the astonishment that the presence of the portuguese in japanese domains caused among the local people. During the momoyama period (1573-1614) and under the influence of the kano school, art flourished with new styles and forms of painting, furniture, architecture, clothing, and medicine. Japan witnessed the resurgence of textiles, fashion, and ceramics with new materials and decorative elements. The arrival of christian missionaries in 1542 meant the first direct, cultural and artistic contact between these regions at opposite ends of the earth. (...) Namban art was commissioned by the portuguese or by the japanese themselves, depending on their taste and sense of style to describe memorable events connected with portuguese activities. These objects were exported to Europe to be used or adapted to local customs and needs.

In conclusion, a debate has recently been configured on whether art historiography can aspire to create a discourse of global- (more than world-) art history, which besides characterising works of art, artists, currents, styles, processes and materials, would focus

also, and not only in supplementary fashion, on the contexts of migration of forms and artistic cultures at the global and plural scales, on the socialisation connected to these objects, and on the material culture of which works of art are part of – since they are also *commodities*. In this sense, Namban Art is a paradigmatic object of study, given its own problematic definition and, more importantly, what that definition stands for when employed in order to charge art works or art objects with certain meanings, include them in groups, choose them for exhibitions, or sell them in lots.

In Portuguese art historiography, Namban Art has gained affirmation particularly within the scope of the study of a specific historical chronology, and within the semantics of the maritime expansion of the 16th and 17th centuries, not yet having encountered the discursive thematic of a global art history. Because it does not attain a clear definition and a consistent methodology, the use of the classification Namban Art remains removed from (or does not recognise) the interpretative lines of the international historiography, of the great exhibitions, or of the art market. Portuguese art historiography shows difficulty in taking up Namban Art as qualifier, as descriptor, and also as a conveyor of values. The existence of implicit (and opaque) judgments, or of unacknowledged ideological orientations, has acted as an impediment to a clear diagnosis of the problems that art objects related to the *namban* culture actually present to the historiography produced in Portugal, namely deterring the creation of a discourse on a global art history, and the study of the production circuits which existed at the dawn of modernity. The successive proposals of definition of Namban Art have usually presented interpretations which, in effect, recreate the objects in themselves (their visible meaning), while remaining vague as to what they are categorising. On the other hand, the fact that the historiography of Namban Art presents such shortcomings is something that may enlighten our conception of the pieces it includes just as much as of those it excludes, as well as of the political (in the broad sense) side of the History of Art.

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