

Portuguese art history: a view from North America

Edward J. Sullivan

Introduction

Anglophone scholars and students of the arts of the Iberian Peninsula had a well-recognized manual of information available to them during the 1960s, 70s and 80s. The survey book entitled *Art and Architecture in Spain and Portugal and Their American Dominions, 1500 to 1800* by George Kubler and Martin Soria appeared in 1959 as part of the wide-ranging Pelican History of Art series.¹ Although there were other texts in English that dealt with Spanish art of the Renaissance and Early Modern eras, there was no other book that also covered Portugal (as well as the colonial Lusophone and Hispanophone Americas). The Pelican History series was (and still is) a principal tool for wide dissemination of information, although the Kubler/Soria volume is long out of print and, at least in so far as Spanish painting is concerned, it was surpassed in 1998 by Jonathan Brown's volume on that subject.² Within the context of the subject at hand, however, and examining the 1959 book for the relative attention it gives to the different geographical areas it proposes to cover, there is a great disparity to the information on the arts of the two nations that occupy the Iberian Peninsula. The book is 416 pages long and is divided into three sections. Kubler is the author of Part 1 that deals with architecture. Martin Soria wrote Parts 2 and 3 (Sculpture and Painting respectively). Portugal and Brazil follow the discussions of Spanish art and in sum they occupy only fifty-one out of the total page count. This leads us to surmise that within the over-all study of Iberian art history in the U.S. and elsewhere the Pelican History volume was used, Portugal ran a distant second place in interest. This, in fact, is not surprising given the paucity (if not complete lack) of university courses available (then and now) and the small number of scholars in the United States who have devoted their attention to Portugal.

The aim of this essay, principally occasioned by recent exhibitions in the U.S. in which Portuguese art was placed in a broad, global context, is to examine the few outstanding exceptions to this rule and to attempt to chart several waves of interest in Luso-cultural arts on the part of historians of Renaissance and Early Modern art in

¹ George Kubler and Martin Soria, *Art and Architecture in Spain and Portugal and Their American Dominions, 1500 to 1800*, Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books,, 1959.

² Jonathan Brown, *Painting in Spain, 1500-1700*, London and New Haven: Yale University Press, Yale Pelican History of Art, 1998.

North America. The present text is, in fact, a four-part series of remarks. The first section deals with scholarship in North America on the arts of Portugal during the 1940s through the 1970 when a post World War II generation of scholars demonstrated interest in previously under-researched phenomena in art history. Part two assesses more recent activity in this field in the form of the exhibitions that emphasized the global connections of the maritime empire. Part three looks at the definitions of the term 'Baroque' as it is applied to Portuguese art and notes several recent contributions to the study of seventeenth century painting by the Canadian-based Portuguese scholar Luís de Moura Sobral and Part four looks at the historiography of the art of one of Portugal's most outstanding painters of the middle years of the seventeenth century, Josefa de Ayala (1630-1684), also known as Josefa de Óbidos (for the town in the western part of the country where she spent most of her life), whose work will be examined to provide something of a 'control' for the arguments contained herein. The last section of this essay presents additional comments on the art of Josefa de Óbidos, in light of recent scholarship (especially as it focuses on global trade conducted by the Portuguese in virtually all parts of the world in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries). It also takes into account the 2015 book and exhibition of the art of Josefa (as she is often called) at the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon. While in previous decades Josefa's art was often considered naive or provincial, she is now looked at as a key link in the definition of the Portuguese Baroque, thus attesting to the reach of feminist art history as well as a rise in the status of decorative arts and textiles, elements that so often make appearances in her paintings. In fact, this reassessment of the art of Josefa de Óbidos might serve as an adumbration of new and broader approaches to the study of Portuguese art history and an indication of the importance of re-inscribing it within a reconfigured hierarchy of art historical values.

Part 1: U.S. scholarship on the arts of Portugal 1950s–1970s

George Kubler (1912–1996), mentioned above, was one of the most renowned art historians in the middle and later years of the twentieth century. His work was well known in his native U.S. (he was born in Los Angeles) and abroad. Kubler was a product of the tutelage of French scholar Henri Focillon, his professor at Yale where Kubler received his PhD in 1940. Kubler departed from the then-accepted canon of proper themes for a dissertation, writing on the obscure (for the time) topic of sixteenth century Spanish churches of New Mexico.³ Much of his work throughout his long and productive life as a scholar and teacher (at Yale) concentrated on Latin American (principally Hispanic) colonial art. He ultimately became a great expert on pre-Columbian art as well as writing a still often-consulted theoretical treatise called *The*

³ The book based on his dissertation was published as *Religious Architecture of New Mexico in the Colonial Period and Since the American Occupation*, Albuquerque, N.M.: University of New Mexico Press, 1940.

Shape of Time, a wide-ranging rumination on the history of objects within a larger spectrum of changing taste throughout the ages.⁴

Kubler is accorded a lengthy citation in the on-line *Dictionary of Art Historians* in which his accomplishments and publications are noted.⁵ Conspicuously absent, however, is one of Kubler's main contributions to our knowledge of Portuguese sixteenth to eighteenth century architecture. *Portuguese Plain Architecture* is a major study of a mode of unadorned building form that dominated much of the country for almost two hundred years.⁶ As Kubler states in his introduction: 'The period studied here begins with a major change of Portuguese taste in the 1520s resulting in the abandonment of Manueline decoration. It closes with the resumption of surcharged ornament in the decades around 1700'. The book is a thorough, city-by-city, town-by-town study of all of the major (and some very small) monuments that the author thinks best represents the 'plain style'. This mode of architectural expression is, the author emphatically points out, not to be confused with the Spanish 'unornamented style' whose principal manifestation was the palace-monastery complex built for King Philip II known as El Escorial.⁷

Art historians still often quote Kubler's writings and his views on the relative merits of assessing the art object through the lens of temporality are still debated. Robert C. Smith (1912–1975) on the other hand is a name remembered in North American art historical circles only by those few whose professional careers have been dedicated to the arts of Portugal and colonial-era Brazil. The art historian Hellmut Wohl placed Smith within the 'third generation of American art historians' in his assessment of the rise of the discipline in the U.S. in the late nineteenth century. He situates him alongside such central figures as Erwin Panofsky, Richard Krautheimer, Julius Held, Walter Friedlaender, Karl Lehmann and others.⁸ However, unlike these illustrious individuals whose efforts were concentrated in a wide variety of areas of art history and art theory, those of Smith was relatively circumscribed. Portugal from the Middle Ages to the

⁴ Kubler published the Pelican History of Art volume on pre-Columbian art in 1962. *Art and Architecture in Ancient America*, Baltimore, Md., Pelican Books. *The Shape of Time* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962 is still in print

⁵ <https://dictionaryofarthistorians.org/kublerg.htm>. Accessed June 29, 2016. See also Thomas F. Reese (ed.), *Studies in Ancient American and European Art: the Collected Essays of George Kubler*, London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985. This anthology has only one essay in which Kubler discusses Portuguese architecture.

⁶ Kubler, *Portuguese Plain Architecture. Between Spice and Diamonds 1521–1706*, Middletown, Ct.: Wesleyan University Press, 1972, 3.

⁷ Kubler, *Portuguese Plain Architecture*, 3

⁸ Hellmut Wohl, 'Robert Chester Smith and the History of Art in the United States', in *Robert C. Smith. Research in History of Art*, Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2000, 33. It should be noted that Wohl is revered in Portugal as an expert on the art of that country. His principal contribution in English is his essay on 'Portuguese Baroque Architecture in Jay A. Levenson (ed.) *The Art of the Baroque in Portugal* Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art and New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993

nineteenth century and Brazil in the colonial period were his main areas of expertise and publishing, even though he wrote essays on other topics that range from studies of Renaissance and Baroque furniture in England, France and the Netherlands, to the art and architecture of colonial Philadelphia.⁹ Many of Smith's contributions to the literature of art history were in reviews and journals (in English, Portuguese and Spanish) that, in many cases, had limited distribution. One of his major books (on Portuguese wood sculpture or *talha*) was published in Portugal (in Portuguese) and had little diffusion outside the Portuguese-speaking world.¹⁰ His interest in what many would call 'decorative' or 'minor' arts, such as furniture, woodcarving and jewelry have tended to limit his scholarship to a niche that has not received widespread notoriety. Nonetheless, for the history of the arts of Portugal and Brazil, his scholarship is central to our knowledge.

Smith was often principally concerned with topologies and attributions and many of his essays take these elements as their principal focal points. Perhaps this approach, so different from that of, say, Kubler (who expressed indifference to such empiricism and formalism), and inimical to today's art history with its emphasis on both social origins and theoretical implications of individual works and trends, accounts in part for the eclipse of Smith's contribution. Yet it is also the fact that there has been very low demand for information on and university courses about the art of Portugal.¹¹ While Brazilian Early Modern art has elicited some interest on the part of U.S. museum-goers, viewers, collectors and students, that of Portugal has provoked very little. Smith taught between 1947 and 1975 at the University of Pennsylvania but his students did not follow his lead into the field of Portuguese art historical studies.¹² Nonetheless, the fruits of Smith's labors as a tireless photographer of Baroque monuments and all forms of art in both Portugal and Brazil led to the creation of a major archive of slides which is still at the University (now digitized). After his death these photographs inspired a beginning graduate student, David Underwood, who went on to write a PhD dissertation at the

⁹ 'Bibliography of Robert C. Smith,' in *Robert C. Smith Research*, 437-451

¹⁰ Robert C. Smith *A talha em Portugal*, Lisbon: Livros Horizonte, 1963.

¹¹ While Portuguese art history has not developed as a significant field in the United States, it has flourished in Canada, at least at the Université de Montréal, where French-trained Portuguese art historian Luís de Moura Sobral has taught since 1976. His writings on artists of the Portuguese Baroque have appeared principally in Portuguese and French-language publications. Several Portuguese institutions have attempted to promote the study of Portuguese art history in the U.S. but this effort has, in the end, been directed more toward social history and other forms of the humanities as practiced in the country. The Hélio and Amélia Pedroso/Luso-American Foundation Endowed Chair at the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth and the FLAD/Michael Teague Visiting Professorship at Brown University are two examples.

¹² Malcolm Campbell, Smith's colleague at the University of Pennsylvania, cites his closest student, Nancy Halverson Schless as the person who knew Smith best at the University. She went on to become a historian of colonial-era architecture in the Northeast of what became the United States. See Malcolm Campbell, 'Robert Chester Smith and the University of Pennsylvania', in *Robert C. Smith, Research*, 140-141.

University on the reconstruction of Lisbon after the 1755 earthquake in comparison with parallel architectural phenomena in Rio de Janeiro, the capital of Portuguese Brazil.¹³ Underwood later developed his talents as a distinguished historian of modern Brazil and is the author of several well-respected books on the architect Oscar Niemeyer.¹⁴ The fact that the few students of Smith or his latter-day disciples (such as Underwood) went into different fields begs the question of why they strayed from their original engagement with Portugal. The dictatorship of Salazar and the general distaste for working in a repressive atmosphere certainly had something to do with this phenomenon, as did the more obvious and practical fact of the paucity of university professorships in this area.

Smith's entire archive of original photographs, notes for his books, articles and lectures, together with personal photographs and other forms of documentation was donated to the Fundação Gulbenkian in Lisbon. The exhibition dedicated to Smith's life and career and its accompanying book presented by the Foundation in 2000 is fundamental for our knowledge of this scholar.¹⁵ Anyone interested in the historiography of Portuguese art must consult this rich resource *in situ*.

Smith's principal contribution to the history of Portuguese art for English-speaking audiences is his 1968 survey book *The Art of Portugal*.¹⁶ Containing eight chapters the text is divided by artistic media, beginning with Architecture and then proceeding to The Gilt Wood Church Interior, Sculpture, Painting, Ceramics, Silver, Furniture and Textiles. Each division is presented chronologically (from 1500 to 1800) and geographically. Smith does not include discussions of colonial Brazil, except to clarify his thoughts on the prototypes in Portugal for certain key monuments in the history of Brazilian art and architecture.¹⁷ Smith's straightforward prose and interest in categorizing within genres and sub-genres characterizes this volume. Its significance as

¹³ David Underwood, email message to the author, 29 June 2016. See 'The Pombaline Style and International Neoclassicism in Lisbon and Rio de Janeiro', PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, Ann Arbor, ProQuest, 1988. See also Underwood, critical essay on the Palace of Queluz in *International Dictionary of Architecture and Architects*, Chicago: St. James Press, 1993, vol. 2, 753–754 and essays on architects Mateus Vicente de Oliveira and João Frederico Ludovice in vol. 1.

¹⁴ David Underwood, *Oscar Niemeyer and the Architecture of Brazil*, New York: Rizzoli, 1995 and *Oscar Niemeyer and Brazilian Free-Form Modernism*, New York: Braziller, 1994.

¹⁵ Robert C. Smith. *Research* contains fifteen essays by Portuguese and American art historians, each commenting on his life and the importance of his work. In addition, there are many photographs of Smith and many of the thousands of images he collected. The book contains a complete bibliography.

¹⁶ Robert C. Smith *The Art of Portugal*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson Ltd, and New York: Meredith Press, 1968.

¹⁷ For example, on p. 193 Smith analyses the architecture and sculptures at the church of Bom Jesus do Monte in Braga as precedents for the work of Brazilian sculptor and architect Antônio Francisco Lisboa, called 'O Aleijadinho' (The Little Cripple) at the church of Bom Jesus de Matosinhos at Congonhas do Campo (Minas Gerais).

a manual is undeniable and one wishes he might have done a similar volume for Brazilian colonial art that could be used as the basis for further, more nuanced studies by later scholars. As it stands, Smith's study of Portuguese art from the late Middle Ages to the era of Neoclassicism represents a one-off encyclopedic collection of facts and an extremely important compendium of photographs.

Part 2: new scholarship on Portuguese art in the U.S.: 1990s to the present

The 1990s and into the early 2000s marked a period of renewed interest in the U.S. on the subject of Portuguese art. This was due, in part, to the commemoration of Iberian voyages of exploration through exhibitions and books that accompanied them. 1991–92 was a starting point for a re-evaluation of the role of the Portuguese in contacts between the Iberian Peninsula and territories in Africa, Asia and the Americas. The National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. mounted an immense exhibition entitled *Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration*, curated by Jay A. Levenson, accompanied by an equally ambitious catalogue (also edited by Levenson).¹⁸ Levenson has been, in effect, the catalyst for the ongoing reassessment of the key role of Portuguese art and visual culture within a European and worldwide context. One of the lead essays concerned the historical aspects of Portuguese journeys that had, at their heart, commercial 'discovery' and exploration of the possibilities of future exploitation.¹⁹ Throughout the catalogue major examples of Portuguese art of the fifteenth and sixteenth century were incorporated, with their accompanying scholarly texts and, as mentioned in footnote 19, Luis de Albuquerque contributed an entire section of the catalogue devoted to the Portuguese interventions in this process of world expansion. The most outstanding works from Portugal included *The Temptation of St. Jerome* by Hieronymus Bosch (Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga), the 'Panel of the Infante' from Nuno Gonçalves's magisterial series of paintings *The Panels of St. Vincent* also in the Museu de Arte Antiga, and the *Adoration of the Magi* attributed to Grão Vasco from the eponymous museum in Viseu. Of equal interest in the context of this book's focus were objects from the lands abroad colonized by the Portuguese in the early phases of imperial expansion, including fifteenth and sixteenth century Sapi-Portuguese ivory objects (made for international trade and consumption in Portugal, in what is today called Sierra Leone) and one of the most famous of several surviving feather capes created for the Tupinambá noblemen of Brazil.²⁰ Indeed, the larger view of Portugal as a world power and a consideration of its

¹⁸ Jay A. Levenson, ed., *Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration*, Washington; National Gallery of Art, 1991.

¹⁹ Luis de Albuquerque, 'Portuguese Navigation: Its Historical Development', in *Circa 1492*, 35–39.

²⁰ See Amy Buono 'Their Treasures are the Feathers of Birds': Tupinambá Featherwork and the Image of America', in *Images take Flight: Feather Art in Mexico and Europe (1400-1700)*, eds. Alessandra Russo, Gerhard Wolf, and Diana Fane, München: Hirmer Verlag, 2015, 179–189 and 'Crafts of Color: Tupi Tapirage in Early Colonial Brazil', in *The Materiality of Color: The Production,*

enormously varied material cultures has sparked the interest of many scholars in the Anglophone world (and elsewhere) and it may be fair to say that this 'transnational' aspect of the Portuguese presence in most of the world's continents well into the twentieth century represents a special chapter in scholarship on Portuguese art history as it has been written by foreign scholars.

The organizer of the National Gallery's project, Jay A. Levenson, a distinguished historian of transnational Renaissance art, has been for a number of years the Director of the International Program at New York's Museum of Modern Art. In 1993-94 the exhibition entitled *The Age of the Baroque in Portugal* that Levenson coordinated at the National Gallery of Art in Washington and the San Diego (California) Museum of Art offered an American public an extensive view of the sumptuous arts produced in the country during the reigns of Dom João V (1706-1750) and Dom José I (1750-1777) and his minister, the Marquis of Pombal who was principally responsible for the reconstruction of the capital after the devastating earthquake of 1775. The exhibition and its catalogue, of which Levenson was the editor, concentrated on the eighteenth century and defined 'the Baroque' as pertaining to those years (questioning such a definition will figure in the next part of this essay). The exhibition itself concentrated on the arts that most directly reflected the luxury of court life (tapestries, silver, furniture, jewelry, silver, ceramics and a spectacular royal coach). The catalogue was much wider reaching, with essays by Portuguese and Anglo-American social and art historians.²¹ It offers a series of studies of the wealth and splendour of the nation as it benefitted from the riches of its overseas colonies, especially Brazil. These texts, especially the historical overviews by A.J.R. Russell-Wood ('Portugal and the World in the Age of Dom João V') and Kenneth Maxwell ('Eighteenth-Century Portugal. Faith and Reason, Tradition and Innovation during a Golden Age') are among the most satisfying essays in their analysis of a wide variety of aspects of the country's centrality to the European cultural picture of the eighteenth century and an insightful inquiry into Portugal's unique position as a country on the physical margin of the continent. Angela Delaforce's article ('Lisbon, "This New Rome". Dom João V of Portugal and Relations between Rome and Lisbon') makes a

Circulation, and Application of Dyes and Pigments 1400-1800, eds. Andrea Feeser, Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes, Aldershot: Ashgate Press, 2012, 18-40.

²¹ Levenson (ed.), *The Art of the Baroque in Portugal*, Among the American and British authors are A.J.R. Russell-Wood, Angela Delaforce, Kenneth R. Maxwell and, as discussed above, Hellmut Wohl. The inspiration for this exhibition was the series of 1991 shows dedicated to Portuguese art in Brussels that constituted the Europalia festival. Levenson (in an email correspondence to the author, 26 March, 2017) indicated that the Portuguese Ministry of Culture contacted The National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. and suggested that these could be the basis of an exhibition in the U.S., resulting in *The Art of the Baroque in Portugal*. I am grateful to Dr. Levenson for his clarification of this and for his careful and generous reading of the manuscript of this essay.

convincing case for the time period she considers as being one of Portugal's most internationally oriented eras in terms of cultural exchange.²²

In the late 1990s there were several significant exhibitions of Portuguese art in the United States. They each had useful catalogues that represented collaborative efforts between Portuguese and American scholars and they were presented under the auspices of the Portuguese Ministry of Culture and the Gabinete de Relações Internacionais. *The Sacred and the Profane. Josefa de Óbidos of Portugal* will be addressed in Part 3 of this essay. The other two shows and catalogues of note were *Crowning Glory. Images of the Virgin in the Arts of Portugal* (Newark Museum, 1997) and *At the Edge: A Portuguese Futurist, Amadeo de Souza Cardoso* seen at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington and the Arts Club of Chicago in 1999. These exhibitions were favourably reviewed but their catalogues, printed in Portugal and only sold at the venues of the exhibitions, have not received the distribution they might have had, if they had been promoted by either a commercial or a university press in the U.S. Nonetheless, their texts are especially useful. Jerrilyn D. Dodds, the principal curator of *Crowning Glory*, wrote a wide-ranging essay on the permutations of the image of the Virgin in Portuguese art from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century. Luís de Moura Sobral presented an overview of Portuguese painting; Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt discussed the Virgin within the context of Portuguese colonial visual cultures and the author of the present article (who also served as co-curator of the exhibition) wrote on Josefa de Óbidos and Portuguese spirituality. Several prominent North American scholars contributed to the Souza Cardoso book, among them Kenneth Silver and Rosemary O'Neill who treated the artist within the wider context of European modernism.

A major scholarly effort in the field of Portuguese art and the arts of the Portuguese colonies took place in 2007, again coordinated by Levenson who was largely responsible for the *Art of the Baroque in Portugal* exhibition and book. *Encompassing the Globe. Portugal and the World in the 16th and 17th Centuries* was an ambitious exhibition that gathered literally hundreds of objects, from sumptuary arts to those of everyday life. It was first seen at the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. It was subsequently re-organized in 2007-08 at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels and, in 2009, at the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga in Lisbon. While the exhibition itself was a compelling and satisfying event, the publications it occasioned are of lasting significance. There are three volumes in the English-language edition and Levenson edited all of them.²³ Together they form one of the best illustrated and

²² Delaforce's book *Art and Patronage in Eighteenth Century Portugal*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, is a valuable volume that continues her arguments made in the 1993 essay onto a wider format. The book is not discussed in the present context as it concentrates on the work of scholars based in North America.

²³ The three books all bear the same title: *Encompassing the Globe: Portugal and the World in the 16th and 17th Centuries*, Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2007. There is a large hard cover catalogue and two soft cover volumes, one subtitled *Reference Catalogue* and the other *Essays*. There are also French and Portuguese editions of the principal catalogue: *Autour du Globe: Le*

intellectually sound assessments of what we might call the 'Portuguese imperial experience' in the Renaissance and Early Modern periods. The hard cover and weighty catalogue contains dozens of photographs and brief essays that pay equal attention to the arts of Portugal and all of the areas of the world where Portuguese cultural, economic and military influence was felt. The paperback volumes, 'Reference Catalogue' and 'Essays', form the second and third fascicules of this tripartite publication that presents the reader with hundreds of images of cartography, objects related to travel, depictions of the inhabitants of the Asian, American and African nations under Portuguese political sway as well as the sumptuary arts produced under Portuguese influence (Kongo ivories, Japanese Namban screens, Chinese export porcelain etc.). This vast project in which Portuguese, other European and North American scholars took part, represents the quintessence of a globalized effort to explicate the arts and cultures that resulted from the immense influence of the Portuguese in the post-Navigators phase of its development as a colonial power. The books and exhibition set a standard for understanding the arts of a European nation in its widest possible context.

Happily this 'holistic' approach to examining the arts of the Portuguese world epitomised by the *Encompassing the Globe* enterprise has continued to bear fruit within the realm of U.S. scholarship. In recent times several key exhibitions and their catalogues have elucidated the links between Portugal and the non-western world in particularly compelling ways. In 2013 the Metropolitan Museum in New York organized a foundational exhibition of textile arts entitled *Interwoven Globe: The Worldwide Textile Trade, 1500-1800*. Many examples of Portuguese textiles as well as textile imports into the country were examined.²⁴

The 2015 exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York called *Sultans of Deccan India, 1500-1700* was an innovative episode in the study of a multiplicity of facets of Indian art of this two-hundred year period.²⁵ The show and book were made all the stronger for the emphasis on the participation of foreign powers in the political and cultural milieu of this region of Central South India. Centers of Portuguese India such as Daman (Damão), Diu and, especially, the thriving city of Goa (which was formally ceded to Indian governmental control only after the 1974 revolution in Portugal) were fundamental to the trading efforts of the country in the Early Modern Era. The commerce in spices and textiles was especially lively and reflections of Indian

Portugal dans le Monde aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles, Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 2007 and *Portugal e o mundo nos séculos XVI e XVII*, Lisbon, Instituto dos Museus e da Conservação, 2009.

²⁴ Amelia Peck, (ed.), *Interwoven Globe: The Worldwide Textile Trade, 1500-1800*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013. See especially the following essays: Maria João Pacheco Ferreira, 'Chinese Textiles for Portuguese Tastes', 46-55 and John Guy, 'One Thing Leads to Another: Indian Textiles and the Early Globalization of Style', 12-27.

²⁵ Navina Hajat Haidar and Marika Sardar (eds.), *Sultans of Deccan India, 1500-1700: Opulence and Fantasy*, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2015. See especially the essay by Sanjay Subrahmanyam 'Europeans in the Deccan'.

decorative patterns in the painting of Portugal in the Baroque era served as evidence of this relationship, as the third part of this essay will briefly examine.

An even more recent exhibition and book, *Kongo. Power and Majesty* (2016) edited and written to a great extent by the Metropolitan Museum curator of African art, Alisa LaGamma, deals with the complex histories of this region of Central Africa through examinations of religious ritual, hybrid material cultures and interactions with western powers. LaGamma's introductory essay which bears the same title as the exhibition and book, presents many elements of the cultural identity of the region over 400 years and underscores the relationships to Portuguese cultural and material presence in the region.²⁶

In closing this section of the essay it is important to signal that not all recent scholarship on the part of North American scholars on Portuguese art or the Portuguese presence in the colonial extension of its empire is connected with exhibitions. A 2014 publication in *Ellipsis. Journal of the American Portuguese Studies Association* by Mia M. Mochizuki demonstrates this scholar's interest in observing the interactions of western and non-western cultures by discussing the contacts between objects of Portuguese origin in a worldwide context throughout the Early Modern era. Her essay on the 'Luso-Baroque Republic of Things' points the way toward new ways of conceptualising the analysis of object-transmission and, by extension, new theories of understanding the role of Portugal in the global networks of contacts involving people, places and things.²⁷

Part 3: The Portuguese Baroque

The third part of this essay concentrates, first, on a question of nomenclature – that of the meanings inherent in the term 'Portuguese Baroque'. After a consideration of this inherently chronological problem, we will turn our attention to the historiographical considerations of Josefa de Óbidos, who has been called, by some, one of the maximum representatives of the Baroque style in Portugal. An initial word must be said about the term itself. While the meanings and definitions of 'Baroque' in art and literature have been long debated throughout the western world, and a consensus has led to the adoption of the term 'Early Modern' as a substitution for 'Baroque' in most quarters, Portuguese scholarship has tended to continue to utilize this term to define not one but several distinct periods in the advance of its art history.

In 1959 Martin Soria, co-author with Kubler of the Pelican History of Art volume dedicated to Spain and Portugal (discussed above), makes several points about the definition of the Portuguese Baroque and the time period it encompasses. He points to the year 1640, the beginning of the restoration of Portuguese independence after sixty

²⁶ Alisa LaGamma (ed.), *Kongo. Power and Majesty*, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016.

²⁷ Mia M. Mochizuki, 'The Luso-Baroque Republic of Things and the Contingency of Contact', *Ellipsis. Journal of the American Portuguese Studies Association*, 12, 2014, 143–171.

years of annexation to Spain, as the beginning of the Baroque era.²⁸ He then turns to the last several decades of the century, deeming them representative of the 'Late Baroque' and signaling that they 'are best represented by two artists indebted to Spain', Josefa de Óbidos and Bento Coelho (1620–1708).²⁹ His assessment of Portuguese painting in the second half of the seventeenth century is brief and the implications of his description leave the reader with the distinct impression that the artists of the Lusitanian portion of the Peninsula are inferior to those of Spain. Soria notes that the 'fathers of [Diego] Velázquez, [Juan de] Valdés Leal and Claudio Coello were Portuguese' but only minor Spanish painters worked in Portugal at this time.³⁰ Portuguese art historians have differed with these assessments and have, in more recent times, offered a more in-depth and balanced view of the accomplishments of Lusitanian painters of the seventeenth century. Luís de Moura Sobral has been especially active in the field of research and publishing on the artists of seventeenth-century Portugal. His exhaustive catalogue and documentation section of the ambitious exhibition catalogue on the work of Bento Coelho (Lisbon 1998) was the culmination of many previous essays on this artist. The contribution of Moura Sobral and the other scholars who took part in this project (including Vítor Serrão, Rafael Moreira, Nuno Saldanha, Paulo Varela Gomes, Fernando Castelo Branco, João Francisco Marques, Ana Hatherly and Manuel Carlos de Brito) situates Coelho within the overall picture of religious painting in Portugal and beyond, making a substantial case for his consideration as a leading figure in the discourse of the later phases of Early Modern painting in Europe.³¹

Six years after the publication of the Bento Coelho study, Moura Sobral published another significant contribution to the history of seventeenth century painting in Portugal, in this case also connected with an exhibition (at the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon). It is noteworthy that the word 'Baroque' is not used here, and we should remember the title of the catalogue edited by Levenson discussed above which situates the 'Baroque' squarely within an eighteenth-century context. The debate is still ongoing, especially as, we shall see below, Portuguese scholars have used the term 'Baroque' recently to denominate the later seventeenth century.

Moura Sobral's book is aptly named. Its title, *Pintura portuguesa do século XVII. Histórias lendas narrativas*, suggests not only the contents examined within but also some of the ambiguities of painting in Portugal during the seventeenth century.³² The book's preface by José Luis Porfirio lays out some of the problems of 'visibility' for this time period, the first half of which was dominated by the Spanish presence. He also notes the traditional preponderance of scholarly emphasis placed on the history of earlier phases

²⁸ Martin Soria, *Art and Architecture in Spain and Portugal*, 342.

²⁹ Soria, 342

³⁰ Soria, 342.

³¹ *Bento Coelho (1620–1708) e a Cultura do seu tempo*, Lisbon: Ministério da Cultura and Instituto Português do Património Arquitectónico, 1998.

³² Luís de Moura Sobral, *Pintura Portuguesa do século XVII. Histórias lendas narrativas*, Lisbon: Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, 2004.

of Portuguese painting, such as the interest in the so-called 'Portuguese Primitives' to the detriment of representatives of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.³³ *Pintura portuguesa* is an exhaustive volume, with dense essays on various genres of painting (religious, history, portrait and still life painting) and the re-assessment of artists both well known and obscure. Its individual catalogue entries offer valuable insights into the iconography, provenance and other questions regarding the many works discussed.

Part 4: Portuguese art historiography. The case of Josefa de Óbidos

While significant figures of Portuguese seventeenth-century painting such as Bento Coelho, António André (1580–c.1664) or Marcos da Cruz (c.1610–1683) are virtually unknown names in North America, that of Josefa de Óbidos may be somewhat more familiar, at least to a small margin of art historians. The author of this essay has written several articles on the work of this painter since 1978.³⁴ In 1997 a small but representative selection of her works was included in the above-discussed exhibition and book *Crowning Glory. Images of the Virgin in the Arts of Portugal*. Also in 1997 the National Museum of Women in the Arts (Washington D.C.) presented the exhibition *The Sacred and the Profane. Josefa de Óbidos of Portugal*. Its catalogue was the first major publication about Josefa's art in English and contained essays by Vitor Serrão, Ana Hatherly, Luís de Moura Sobral and Barbara von Barghahn.³⁵ These essays, observing the painter's art with an appreciated degree of objectivity, represented a welcome corrective to the remarks of earlier American art historians such as Soria, who, writing in a period when feminist consciousness was virtually non-existent in art historical discourse, underscored her 'frank, naïve and tender sentimentality' akin, as he stated, to the sentiments of folk art. In the meantime, Smith pointed out her 'artificial lighting, the dainty, fussily clad figures and obsessive piety that were the artist's stock in trade'.³⁶

Josefa de Óbidos was the daughter of the artist Baltazar Gomes Figueira who worked in Seville for part of his career and it was there that Josefa was born.³⁷ She

³³ José Luis Porfirio, 'Da invisibilidade da pintura (portuguesa do séc. XVII)', in Moura Sobral, *Pintura portuguesa*, 9–11.

³⁴ Edward J. Sullivan, 'Josefa de Ayala. A Woman Painter of the Portuguese Baroque', *Journal of the Walters Art Gallery*, 37, 1978, 22–35; 'Obras de Josefa de Ayala, pintora ibérica', *Archivo Español de Arte*, 54: 213, 1981, 87–92; 'Herod and Salomé with the Head of John the Baptist by Josefa de Ayala', *Source. Notes on the History of Art*, 2: 1, 1982, 26–29; 'Josefa de Óbidos and Portuguese Spirituality in the Age of the Baroque', in *Crowning Glory*, 63–73.

³⁵ See also Casey Gardonio-Foat, 'Professional Women Artists of Golden Age Iberia', doctoral dissertation, New York University, 2012 with a chapter on Josefa de Óbidos.

³⁶ Soria, *The Art and Architecture of Spain and Portugal*, 343; Smith, *The Art of Portugal*, 203.

³⁷ Vitor Serrão who has done much of the most respected archival work on Josefa's career has also painstakingly documented that of Baltazar Gomes Figueira and other artists of what he terms the 'Óbidos school'. See Serrão's exhibition and catalogue *Baltazar Gomes Figueira (1604–1674). Pintor de Óbidos 'que nos paizes foi celebrado'*, Óbidos: Câmara Municipal, 2005.

inherited much of his signature style that emerged from Gomes Figueira's engagement with Tenebrist realism as practiced by Spanish painter Francisco de Zurbarán. 'Josefa', as she often signed her works, developed most of her career in the small city of Óbidos, north of Lisbon, but nonetheless maintained close contact with court circles. Renowned as an independent spirit who, chroniclers emphasize, never married, she became known for her religious compositions (that often feature female saints such as Theresa of Avila for an altarpiece in Cascais and Catherine of Alexandria in the still-*in situ* retable for Santa Maria, Óbidos), still lifes and allegorical landscapes. Many of her paintings often rely on pattern and decorative motifs derived, in part, from her familiarity with textiles and other luxury goods imported from Portugal's overseas territories, including Goa.

Some of the earlier twentieth-century studies and exhibitions of Josefa's work, starting with João Couto's writings in the late 1940s, began to clarify the problems surrounding her career and her importance within the panorama of the Portuguese 'Baroque'.³⁸ More recent books and exhibitions, such as the one cited above in Washington D.C. (the only instance of a Portuguese artist of this period to have a monographic show in the United States) have revealed a much more nuanced picture of this painter. In 1993 Vitor Serrão coordinated a large exhibition and book project called *Josefa de Óbidos e o tempo Barroco* that marked a high point in Josefa de Óbidos studies.³⁹ In 2015, the information from the 1993 volume was enhanced and, in some cases re-evaluated, in the exhibition catalogue *Josefa de Óbidos e a Invenção do Barroco Português*, a compendium of essays that expanded the role of Josefa within the development of Early Modern art in the country, ascribing to her a leading position within the 'invention of the Portuguese Baroque' as the title suggests.⁴⁰ This project marked a departure from the consideration of the artist within a purely national context. The catalogue and exhibition included valuable information on the arts of Spain (including the work of Zurbarán and his followers and the importance of still life throughout Iberia in the 1600s) and, most importantly, presented Josefa within the framework of three-dimensional arts through an examination of the parallels of her highly realistic painting with a view to understanding the similar spirit of verity in Portuguese (and Spanish) polychrome sculpture. A small section of the exhibition as well as a brief but important essay by

³⁸ João Couto *Catálogo das pinturas de Josefa de Óbidos*, Lisbon: Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, 1949.

³⁹ Vitor Serrão (curator and editor), *Josefa de Óbidos e o tempo barroco*, Lisbon: Galeria de Pintura do Rei Luís I, 1993. See 103 for a list of all exhibitions of the work of this artist up to the publication date.

⁴⁰ *Josefa de Óbidos e a invenção do Barroco Português*, Lisbon: Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, 2015. My review of this catalogue was published in *The Burlington Magazine*, 158, September 2016, 746–747. See also Carla Alferes Pinto, *Josefa de Óbidos*, Lisbon: Quidnovi, 2010. Although the latter is a book for the general reader (forming part of the series *Pintores Portugueses*), it provides a good overview of the art and some of the problems evoked by the figure of Josefa within the context of Portuguese painting of the time.

Anísio Franco placed Josefa within the context of Portuguese trade with Asia.⁴¹ Given the comments above (Part 2) regarding the recent efforts of scholars to widen our understanding of the Portuguese contribution to global art history, this effort is an important one in the reassessment of such a key figure in Portuguese Early Modern painting as Ayala.

In the spirit of such a revision of the place of Josefa's art within a larger context of art history in Europe and beyond, it is appropriate to consider several concrete examples of this artist's work. The painting *The Pascal Lamb* in the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore (fig. 1) is one of several versions of the famous composition by Josefa and the only work by Josefa de Óbidos in a North American collection (with the exception of a painting in the Portuguese embassy, Washington). If we consider this picture as well as another version of the Sacrificial Lamb theme in the Museu de Évora, we observe a sensibility that characterizes a transnational language of pattern, decoration and adornment. In this example the lamb rests within a cartouche surrounded by a profusion of fruits and flowers. It has long been understood, through the writings of Serrão, Moura Sobral and others, that the artist's use of florid architectural decorative details not only links her to the work of some of her Iberian contemporaries such as Bartolomé Pérez, but even more so with many northern artists (Flemish, Dutch and French) who employed the same technique.

In a conventional or even clichéd sense, the artist's insistence upon decoration as a prime element in her painting has been linked to the so-called 'intimacy' of Portuguese spirituality. Without denying that there is a particularly intense sense of quietude, privacy and contemplative religiosity in this and related images by Josefa de Óbidos, it is important to insist upon the strength of the decorative quality, not as a parochial or provincial element, but rather one that the artist uses very consciously to reinforce the intensity of the experience of confronting the central image as a focal point of religious contemplation, and even quasi-ecstatic identification of this manifestation of this Christological iconography.

This 'aesthetic of abundance' may best be seen in a series of late still life paintings such as the 1676 example in the Biblioteca Braancamp Freire, Santarém as well as in its companion piece also in the same museum. Both of these works possess a strong decorative power. Decoration serves as a principal guiding element in the conceptualization of these images of elaborate depictions of fruits, sweets and highly decorated vessels. Yet there is more to observe in these and related works. Josefa's evident fascination with *horror vacui*, or the filling in of virtually every empty space, is accompanied by her dedication to depictions of luxury and objects of rarity value.

At the monastery of the Venerável Ordem Terceira, Coimbra, there is an image of *Jesus as Savior of the World* painted in 1680 showing the infant standing on a richly decorated plinth (with a sacrificial lamb embossed on its base) surrounded by luxurious

⁴¹ Anísio Franco, 'A Circulação de Modelos na Criação do Barroco Português', in *Josefa de Óbidos e a invenção*, 113–115.

drapery, lending to it a particularly theatrical caste – not unlike the artist's other versions of these themes. It is inevitable to detect the relationship between such images as those of Josefa to ivory carvings of the Christ Child made in Goa, other South Asian centers, as well as the Philippines.⁴² The importance of this point should be underscored not simply as a case of parallel phenomena, but as something that links the art of Josefa de Óbidos directly with the immense popularity of luxury objects from the overseas territories. The affinity for such exotica had, of course, been in effect since the early years of the fifteenth century after the voyages of exploration of Vasco da Gama and others. Such objects as ivory sculptures and all manner of other objects of desire were collected in secular curiosity cabinets as well as ecclesiastical institutions. Josefa's obvious knowledge of this type of object is not a coincidence. This offers another indication of the presence of the personality of Josefa de Óbidos within the global discourse of artistic circulation, collection and the mutual nourishment that went on between Western Europe and South and East Asia. The theme of this exchange and aesthetic interaction was, as we have seen above in Part 2, the subject of the exhibition *Encompassing the Globe* held in Washington D.C., Brussels and Lisbon in 2007-09. Although in its extensive two volume publication with essays by Portuguese, American and European scholars, the name of Josefa de Óbidos was not mentioned once, there is nonetheless a great deal of information regarding the artistic and aesthetic ambience within which her art developed and through the efforts of the many scholars who participated in that effort we can deduce considerable information regarding the interactive and transnational character of her artistic expression.

Textiles play as significant a role in these compositions as the statue-like image of the Christ Child himself. His drapery, the rug on the floor below him as well as the theatrical curtains that part to reveal his presence are all of a richly embroidered and highly colourful nature. These textiles are signifiers of another sort of commodity that entered into the international discourse of trade and collecting. As in many contemporaneous Dutch paintings of interiors or even still lifes, tapestries and wall hangings of obvious Asian derivation appear as signifiers of the sophisticated and worldly nature of their artists and the collectors of their works. It may be argued that the same thing happens within the development of much of the work of Josefa de Óbidos.

If we observe any of the hundreds of examples of East and South Asian textiles in Portuguese, European and American collections from the period that witnessed the development of Josefa's career we observe the lively patterns of floral and other motifs that cover the surfaces of such things as bed covers, linings of the interior of tents and other creations in cloth that were exported from such centers as Diu and Goa into Portugal throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as seen in the *Sultans of the Deccan* exhibition and book discussed above. While this is an immense subject it is incumbent upon any researcher into the art of Josefa de Óbidos to insert it within any research project regarding the broad geographic ramifications of her art as another

⁴² See essay by Franco, 114.

element of the taste for foreign goods and commodities and the impact that it had on her and her contemporaries.

We may close this inquiry with mention of another work by Josefa de Óbidos in the Museu de Arte Antiga, Lisbon. The 1647 *Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine of Alexandria* is a diminutive painting on copper in which we observe a domestic tableau, set within a humble house furnished with rough seventeenth-century furniture. Yet contrary to the humility of the environment we are struck by the magnificence of the robes of the participants in this supernatural drama, including the intricately embroidered cape of the bride of the baby Jesus, the curtains that part to reveal the scene and the splendid carpet on the floor.

We are inevitably reminded here once again of the textiles that had traveled with the retinue of Portuguese travelers to the Far East and to South Asia, arriving in Lisbon for distribution throughout the country. This scene in this exquisite painting on copper reveals the mystical union of St. Catherine of Alexandria (to whom Josefa would dedicate the panels of the 1661 altarpiece in the church of Santa María in Óbidos), a saint who originated in the Eastern Mediterranean (specifically Egypt) and thus her association and identification with the sumptuousness of Eastern design patterns on textiles and other luxury arts is easy to understand. Indeed dating back to the fourteenth century, many artists, particularly the sixteenth-century Venetians such as Gentile and Giovanni Bellini, dressed their saints of oriental origins in highly decorated silks and, for the males, turbans.

Regarding these parallels and aesthetic intersections, we might now suggest reserving a place of honor for Josefa de Óbidos within the pantheon of international artists – Portuguese, Spanish, Italian or French – who responded to the worldwide geography of artistic creation whose boundaries and perimeters must now be reconfigured in our era of globalized art historical inquiry.

Edward J. Sullivan is Professor of Art History at New York University. He has published extensively on Iberian art of the Early Modern and Modern periods. Portugal and Brazil have figured prominently in his writing. He has written several monographic essays on Josefa de Óbidos and on Brazilian artists of the 18th century. His forthcoming book, *Making the Americas Modern. Hemispheric Art, 1910-1960*, will appear in 2018.

Edward.sullivan@nyu.edu



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)