



SUMMON YOUR BUDDHA, THE CLIMATE IS TENSE A CONTEMPLATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE BUDDHA IMAGE IN WESTERN CONTEMPORARY ARTWORKS

Gabriela Martins Pimenta¹

ABSTRACT

This article intends to observe, describe and analyze contemporary Western works of art that depict or have the figure of the Buddha as their theme. The works can be of different styles, as long as they are displaced from temples or sacred places. The idea is to try to understand the Western look at the iconographic and symbolic figure of the Buddha and what their place is for those who contemplate them.

Keywords: Buddha, contemporary art, contemplation.

INTRODUCTON

Man's faith in God, regardless of how it manifests itself, tends to oscillate between concepts such as sin and holiness, times and ages, divergent politics and geopolitics. Until contemporary history, it was practically impossible for man to choose what to believe, since his beliefs and spiritual habits were the result of the society around him, his behaviors and his idiosyncrasies.

With the advent of technologies, today we have access to diverse information about myths, beliefs and practices from different countries around the world. And it is interesting to note that stormy times often generate philosophical and existential questions, an example of which was the increase in research on meditation practices during the COVID-19 pandemic, between 2020 and 2022.

We also verified, at the same time, the emergence of emerging virtual tribes, that is, social aggregations that form through digital media and networks, regardless of geographic location, only with the same purpose and interest in debate or discourse. Based on studies by Simmel (2013), in which

¹ Mestra em Artes pela The New School for Social Research, em Nova Iorque. Possui especialização em Práticas Contemplativas e Mindfulness pela PUC-Rio.



man links to another in order to form a society, we can say that the virtual ecosystem also enables the phenomenon of tribalism. Man lives in society because of his possibility of speech, social exchanges and debate about his anxieties and feelings lived and experienced.

The interest in non-Christian religions occurs in different ways, including with a still colonial anthropological character and perspective, in view of the Eurocentrism of academic and research centers. Buddhism and Hinduism, for example, have been studied and observed several times, but always from a distance, and often with the aim of providing a historical portrait of the exotic.

In popular culture, contact with eastern cultures, practices and faith only intensified between the 60s and 70s of the twentieth century, with the hippie movement. The Vietnam War, the Beatles meditating and their “most zen” member, George Harrison writing “My Sweet Lord” in 1970, after going to live in an ashram in northern India, in addition to the movement known as “counterculture”, were of great importance to importance for us to understand how people came to be interested in oriental culture and even how they understand it.

The Orient, as we know it in the West, is an idea, an imagery story about geography, society and culture. Edward Said reports, in “Orientalism” (2007), that it is a mistake (ours) to conclude that the East is essentially the ideas created through the supposedly opposite gaze, the West. There are cultures and nations located in the East and their histories and customs were not told in a crude way, but studied through the lens of those who write history.

Eastern religions and their practices and rites are constant objects of observation and study for Westerners. Perhaps due to a certain mystical contemplation, Hinduism and Buddhism mainly are seen as a path to self-improvement. According to Weber (1997), practical knowledge and understanding of the meaning of the world is only rationally achieved through mastery over oneself, through regular training of body and mind, something



common in eastern religious and philosophical rites. Still according to Weber, this Hindu-Buddhist magic of finding enlightenment is certainly a habit of a specialized elite, whose purpose is contemplation and who dedicate themselves to it. Even if the majority of the lay population of Asian culture did not necessarily participate in the spiritual foundations of their beliefs, the boundaries between faith, mysticism, philosophy and culture are, in general, uncompromising in distinguishing themselves, after all, the Descarean method is originally western.

This article seeks to portray and analyze contemporary Western works that bring the figure of the Buddha as their theme, even if they are out of context with their religion. The analysis made here seeks to understand how Western eyes see “The Shining”.

Interest in the exotic or in a faith still unknown to us Westerners, of course, also expands to digital and the arts, for example. As Bauman states (2008), the concrete limits of physical space are no longer important and the increasingly frequent use of social networks allows us different forms of connection. Thus, we also emphasize that for the writing of this article, the connections created through social networks were of paramount importance, as it was through them that we had access to the observed works.

According to the philosopher Zizék (2004), religions, nowadays, are ready to serve the postmodern pursuit of pleasure, something consistent with the materialism supported by the consumer industry. Religion is updated, then, abandoning classical characteristics and moving towards the spirit of modernity.

Since the end of the 19th century, a new trend has begun to understand religion in an integrative way, rejecting rigid rules established by institutions (common in Christianity) and expanding the term “religiosity” to philosophy of life, in which it is possible to build a personalized repertoire of beliefs matched to our secular world. These movements are important in the reinvention of



Hinduism and Buddhism, and in the wide dissemination of their practices to achieve well-being and health.

THE DECOLONIAL CONTEMPLATION

Contemplating, confers the action of meditating, looking for a long time or even looking at oneself, according to the Priberam dictionary. Art can take our eyes to different places, including internal contemplation places, in which we question values, ideas and feelings. Making and seeing art has a lot to contemplate. Art, in its distant history, supposedly possessed the ability to make itself felt, only without proposed material utility, art served to be art and to be contemplated.

More recently in history, we see works of art that play with the limits of its aura, bringing political, religious, geographical themes and issues. Engaged art, according to Adorno (1973), disenchant the traditional artistic fetish, disengaged from reality. The engaged work can be dated, as it is located in real time, renouncing its originally contemplative freedom.

Still in the spectrum of Adorno's ideas, what matters about art is not its palpable, material aspect. Meanings are external to the work. However, it is still important to distinguish “engagement”, that is, awareness from trend. Engagement plays with the limits of its neighboring terrain, the explicit and dull clarity of what is obvious to us.

Modern communication and entertainment technologies, as well as the speed with which information circulates, produce socio-cultural environments with a certain saturation of perception processes, due to the increasing amount of stimuli received. Recently, for example, researcher Jonathan Crary has described, in his works, the processes of optimization of attention, directly related to the dynamics of contemporary capitalism.

In this new context, the action of “contemplating” seems to gain relevance, as it opposes the hegemonic capitalist cultural tendency. What was once considered a fundamental and common human experience now takes on



the guise of prayer. Contemplation, emptied of its normality, is now understood as an exercise that can be practiced, associated with routine effort, in a way, like going to the gym.

THE BUDDHA OF THE WEST

The words meditation, mindfulness, buddhism, nirvana, etc, have become popular in the West especially since the 80s. Famous musicians went to meditate in India, a grunge band chose to use the religious term referring to “enlightenment” for their name, Renowned schools and universities in England and the United States have created departments to study Buddhism, its culture and practices.

The popularization of mindfulness practices may be part of a process of secularization of contemporary societies, since it is usually accompanied by scientific discourses. Such a perspective makes the practice attractive in secular environments, but still contributes to the dissemination of knowledge about Buddhism, even though this is a new phenomenon in Western society.

The works demonstrated and analyzed here, in general, pose an interesting question: the relationship between art and the transformation of modes of existence. Since the 1960s, the West has begun to assimilate traditionally Eastern practices such as yoga, for example, and although there are limiting immaturities in the philosophical nature of the proposals, it is still important to note that this knowledge has been absorbed by the globalized and capitalist world, still in a “cute” way, as exemplified by Giselle Beiguelman (2020), but still with a present body. Beiguelman states that in contemporary times there are several types of capitalism, among them, a “cute” version of the same concept, in which we see rounded icons, “a pink and sky-blue world, which is expressed through onomatopoeias, likes and hearts” (p. 31).

The Buddha, as we know it, is commonly depicted sitting in a meditative posture, is slightly overweight, bald, smiling, “fluffy” and wears historical Tibetan clothing. Traditional Buddhist art, however, is more plural in its symbology. Although there is a tradition in India of creating sculptures with



rich iconography, in its early days, Buddhist art did not usually represent the Buddha in human form. During the first centuries B.C. Buddha was represented through symbols, which are supposed to contain anecdotes and stories from his life and philosophy.

The first Buddhist representations of the anthropomorphic Buddha appear as early as the 1st century AD, in northern India, Pakistan and close to ancient Macedonia, perhaps even influenced by the Hellenistic traditions brought by Alexander the Great to the West. The Buddha as we know it has Greek descent, according to the central theory of Foucher (1905). The Buddhist religious visual culture is very rich in variety of different manifestations and symbols, which have adapted over the centuries in different cultures, including Viking works that portray the Buddha, produced approximately in the 800s. Some authors, including Foucher, quoted above, claim that the dissemination and popularization of Buddha images throughout history has to do with a possible attempt at contact and communication with the western world, also from Buddhist empires and countries. The history of trade through the silk route is a good example of what happened, as there was some difficulty in trading in certain regions due to Roman and Persian domination, for example. For a better flow of commerce in the region, it was necessary to find mechanisms of communication, of dialogue, in which the statuary tradition appears, since it served to combine elements of both civilizations.

Today, even Westerners recognize the figure of the Buddha, smiling and meditating. And even more, they use it in works of an artistic nature or even in “pop art”.

Keith Haring¹, an American artist, in the 1980s made the work entitled “Chocolate Buddha”, a series of 5 lithographs, which portray a tribal, ancestral and still pop Buddha, almost straight out of comics. The series can be seen as

¹ See the pictures attached.

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Fonte: www.hisour.com/pt/buddhist-art-36345

¹ See the pictures attached.

² Graffiti placed in Buenos Aires, AR.

Sacred, mythological and religious figures in their representations are usually loaded with symbolism, even in the simplest of their images. God, after all, is himself the center of the world, the source of all creation and energy that traverses eternity and the earthly temporal plane.

Even if they only kept the traditional Tibetan clothes, the poses of the fingers in mudras and the orange and yellow tones of the graffiti, even so, they seem to have been supposedly created to contextualize the real time of the graffiti in the global history of man. One God, enlightened, why, did not engage in such immutable time.



Fonte: <https://oglobo.globo.com/fotogalerias/coronavirus-inspira-arte-urbana-pelo-mundo-24338022>

¹ Graphite in Mumbai, India.



Fonte: www.guyhepner.com

The work of Beatriz Milhazes, on the other hand, seems to bring the subject in question without taking away its artistic aura. The circles may suggest groups, clans, that live there or even something like solar energy, which makes the world turn (Campbell, 2010). Images of medieval saints holds circles around your head. The golden aura is literally represented there. Flowers can be the iconographic lotus of Buddhism, which is reborn from the mud and rebuilds itself after the end.

FINAL REMARKES

The Tibetan Conceptual Buddha has no symbolic imagery form, in its “Enlightened” sense. Images, for Buddhists, just help us to remember something. There is a sense of tolerance in Buddhism that supposedly accepts that symbols, like life, are changeable and impermanent in history. One does not seek, in Buddhist iconography or even in philosophy, to cling to concepts, after all, they are also provisional, they are like passages.

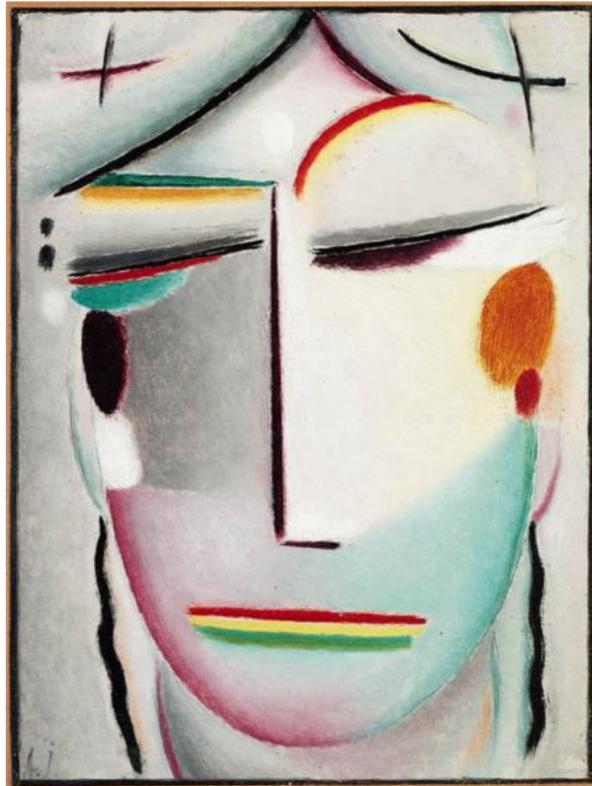
¹ Beatriz Milhazes, “O Buda”.

The engaged work, according to Adorno, disenchant its fetish. Thus, an image of Buddha, displaced from temples, may lose its sensitive sense and historical character, but it is still attractive to us, as it retains the contemplative quality of culture that can leave the academy and museums and take to the streets. Even if the collective dimensions of what Buddhism is lost with each new Western interpretation, as in a simple translation, we can still observe that images and representations of the Buddha in art can also open doors to new knowledge. According to Eagleton (1993), when social life is anthropologized, it becomes culture and thus perhaps the Buddha will emerge for the West, as an icon of a culture.

PICTURES:



Fonte: Keith Haring - moma.org



Fonte: Alexej Jelenski - [pinterest.com](https://www.pinterest.com)



Fonte: Odilon Redon - www.wikiart.org/pt



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