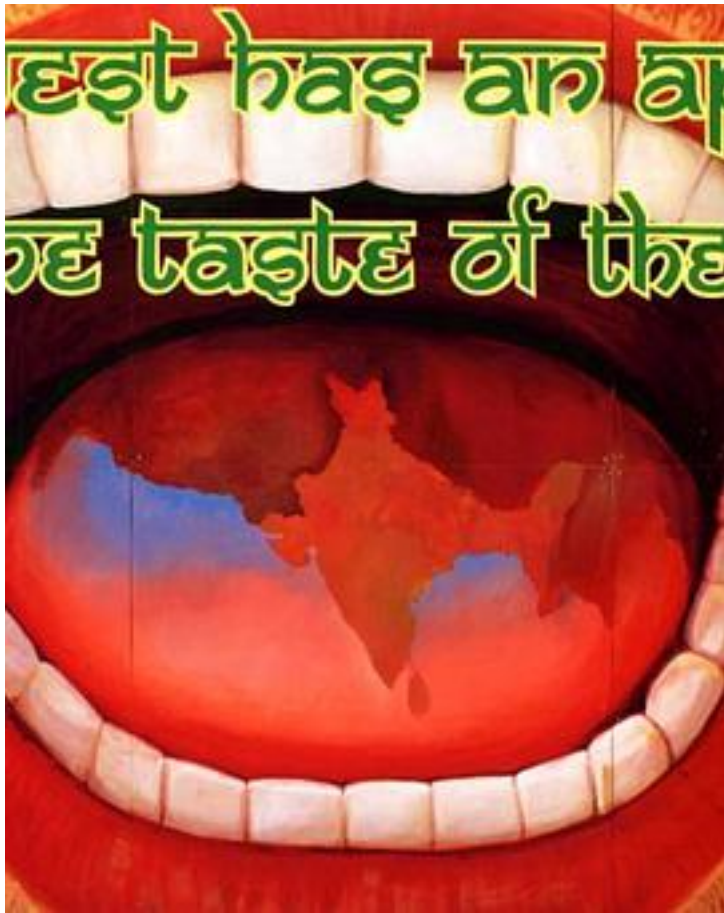


What Is a Trade?



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著者: Bell, Greg/ Fels, Donald/ Parker, Samuel K.

出版者:

出版时间: 2009-2

装帧:

isbn: 9780924335266

For nearly two decades, artist Donald Fels has been creating complex bodies of work around the link between trade and culture. The conceptual starting point for his most recent project is Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama's 1498 voyage to Malabar, India, (now Kerala) in search of a direct route for the spice trade. In 2005, Fels traveled to

Kerala, where he worked with commercial signboard painters on a series of large-scale enamel-on-metal paintings that examine Vasco da Gama's legacy in India. Fels and his collaborators created paintings in the style of hand-painted billboards and Bollywood advertising. The artists' bright color palette and strong graphic narratives make visually arresting statements about the historical and contemporary effects of trade and globalization. The collaborative and improvisational nature of the project challenges traditional understandings of artistic production and provides a forum for cultural exchange. Essays examine the changing definition of global trade and its impact on all nations and cultures. Greg Bell is curator and collection coordinator at 4Culture in Seattle. Artist Donald Fels lives in Fall City, Washington. Samuel K. Parker is associate professor of interdisciplinary arts and sciences, University of Washington, Tacoma.

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