

The Savage hits back revisited.
Art and Global Contemporaneity in the Colonial Encounter

Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum – Kulturen der Welt
Köln, February 12-13, 2016

In recent years the European bias in art history has increasingly been challenged. Deeply rooted in the high-times of modernism and colonialism, the belated establishment of art history as a global endeavour has driven the academic discipline into crisis.

The fierce controversies about methods and theories for a globalised art history, however, often overlook early attempts to come to terms with Non-Western art on its own terms. To be sure, most artists and curators, art historians and merchants treated art from outside the European canon as primitive survivals and established a discourse on auratic authenticity that has remained powerful until today.

Few, however, approached the art of the colonized other as products of a “global contemporaneity”. This workshop suggests to re-visit the colonial encounter with foreign art worlds in the work of Julius Lips. At once marginalized and influential until today, his seminal work “The savage hits back” (1937) opens up a kaleidoscopic view on depictions of Europeans worldwide. Inverting the colonial gaze on the other, the critical stance towards the European prevented a major exhibition in Nazi-Germany and Lips was driven into exile.

Lips broad universalist scope reaches from Benin bronze-reliefs of Portuguese merchants to Victorian age aboriginal drawings and from Northwest-coast carving to African tourist art sculptures of colonial officials. The objects express mutual experiences of alterity and document the history of cultural contact-zones along formal and iconographic features. Art forms travelled through different locales and sparked new aesthetics into being - confusing prevailing regimes of primitivist aesthetic and pseudo-scientific presuppositions about the other: When „salvage anthropology“ asked for „pure“ objects, seemingly untouched by external influences, Lips showed non-western art as contemporary art for the first time. When primitivists were interested in formal abstraction or the magic of „fetishes“ Lips pointed out the explicit realism that is generated in the depictions of the Westerner and his material culture.

What do we know today, nearly 80 years after Lips' work, about the contexts, and the effect, of art works depicting the Westerner from a non-western perspective? What were the purposes of these images and to what extent were they meant to travel in time and space or to remain on site? Is it possible to unravel the “biography” of such objects today and can we reconstruct the networks that shaped their production, circulation and reception *in situ*? Why and in which respect do these enigmatic objects receive attention over time and how are they valued and represented in exhibitions and publications today?

This workshop takes place at the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum, which hosts the collection of “Europeans” that Julius Lips acquired as director of the museum. It invites to reconsider the work of Lips in order to prepare a scholarly volume celebrating the 80th birthday of “The Savage hits back”.

Program

Friday, February 12, Venue: VHS-Saal

12.00-12.30 Welcome and Introduction

Anna Brus/Erhard Schüttpelz (Locating Media/ Medienwissenschaft, Universität Siegen)

12.30-13.30 'Object-Lessons': Ratzel, Frobenius, Lips

Christopher Pinney (Anthropology and Visual Culture, University College London)

13.30 – 14.30 Lunch

14.30 – 15.30 Between Mimicry and Mockery: African Representations of the European Other as Spirit
Matthias Krings (Ethnologie und populäre Kultur Afrikas, Johannes Gutenberg Universität Mainz)

15.30 – 16.30 Entangled humour. Art and Alterity in the Colonial Encounter

Anna Brus (Locating Media, Universität Siegen)

16.30 – 17.00 Coffee

Organisation: Anna Brus – Joseph Imorde – Erhard Schüttpelz (Universität Siegen)



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Friday, February 12, cont.

17.00 – 18.00 “Zwischen Lehrstuhl und Indianerzelt”: Eva and Julius Lips as Americanists and Ethnographers of Eastern Woodland Cultures
Cora Bender (Medienethnologie, Universität Siegen)

18:00 Refreshment

18.30 – 19.30 Keynote lecture:

Humor and Violence: Viewing Colonial and Contemporary African Art through the Lens of Julius Lips
Zoe S. Strother (African Art, Columbia University, New York)

20.00 Conference-Dinner

Saturday, 13. Februar, Venue: Bibliothek

9.30-10.30 *Indian Views of England: Subaltern Accounts from the Late 19th Century*
Michael Harbsmeier (Culture and Identity, Roskilde University)

10.30-11.30 n.n.

11.30 Coffee

12.00 – 13.00 *Different Strokes, Different Perspectives: Mapping Memories of 150 Years of Interactions with Europeans in Ewe Visual Culture*
Nii O. Quarcoopome (Curator, Detroit Institute of Arts)

13.00-14.00 Lunch Break

14.00 – 15.00 *Boundary Work. Towards a Global Dimension of Art History (Around and After 1900)*
Joseph Imorde (Kunstgeschichte, Universität Siegen)

15.00 Coffee

15.30 – 16.30 *Taking the Outside In: the Mimetic Faculty in the European Identification with African ‘Primitivism’*
Michael Rowlands (Anthropology, University College London)

16.30 – 17.30 *Not Afraid to Look the White Man in the Face*
Gerald McMaster (Indigenous Visual Culture, OCAD University Toronto)

17.30-18.30 *On Looking through Native Eyes: Lips in Oceania*
Ann Stephen (Senior Curator, Sidney University Museum)

18.30 Refreshment

19.00 – 20.00 Keynote lecture

Rethinking Picasso's Demoiselles and the Era of Global Colonial Encounter
Suzanne Preston Blier (Fine Arts, African and American Studies, Harvard University)

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