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**EXPONATEC
PREVIEW**

**THE BRIDE OF
THE DESERT:
YAZD MUSEUMS**



**DIE RAHMEN
DER BRÜCKE-
KÜNSTLER**

**NEW MUSEUM
TECHNOLOGIES**

**MASTER OF
DETAILS:
ZURBARAN**

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Titel page picture: Francisco de Zurbarán: Virgen niña dormida, approx. 1655. Oil on canvas, 103 × 90 cm
© Paris, Galerie Canesso



Anette Rein

The new permanent exhibition in the Brooklyn Art Museum, NY: stimulating Wunderkammer or intellectual chamber of torture?

The Brooklyn Museum, housed in a 560,000 ft² Late-Palladian palace (owned by the City of New York), is one of the oldest and largest art museums in the country. Its world-renowned permanent collections range from ancient Egyptian masterpieces to contemporary art, and represents a wide range of cultures (the museum is well known for its expansive collections of 17th–20th c. paintings, sculpture, and decorative arts throughout a wide range of schools ¹). The Museum is part of a complex of nineteenth-century parks and gardens that also includes Prospect Park, the Brooklyn Botanical Garden and the Prospect Park Zoo. ² Today, the museum is New York City's second largest in physical size and holds an art collection with roughly 1.5 million works. ³

According to the chief curator Kevin L. Stayton ⁴, the museum founded in 1823 and in its current building designed by the architects McKim, Mead and White in 1897, was planned to be the largest art museum in the world. But, after 35 years of constructing, those plans were dropped. The last major architectural change happened in 2004, when a new entrance pavilion was opened and the whole entrance situation had to be changed. ⁵

Since the restructuring of the entrance to the museum in 2004, a much needed revised rebranding strategy ma-

terialized. This rebranding supported the curatorial staff in developing a conceptual introduction into the different galleries of the museum creating a journey through more than 5000 years. Four free-standing walls encircling a space of 2,757 ft² in the Main Hall are surrounded by a row of giant columns serving as a framework for the white cube in the new permanent exhibition. ⁶



The entrance area to "Connecting Cultures" is characterized by a series of columns and the enlarged pictogram of an Egyptian eye together with an introductory text.

Photo: Reiner Zapf



The Brooklyn Museum, NY. Photo: Museum

The concept of the Wunderkammer became the historic primary reference for the curators of the BKM. Leaving behind the organizing principles of material and exotic aspects, the curators concentrated now more on the commonalities between cultures as well as represented universal ideas in the collections. They selected the three categories: "places – people – things" as the basis for international and transcultural comparisons. According to the new concept, they chose objects from the variety of

The chief designer Matthey Yokobosky had a big challenge when developing a unifying design for these main topics. He had one room of about 24 ft in height to exhibit a great variety of artworks that spanned 5 millennium none of which was more than 4 ft tall. He began exploring the idea of using over-sized murals as backgrounds, and asking himself questions like "what is something visual that connects all of these works together?"⁷ The result of Yokobosky's efforts can be seen in the following pictures.

The background display for the section "Connecting Things" became four different murals. Whereas the three topics are presented on three walls, on the fourth one there is the sub-section "Cosmologies" resp. "Time" which became its own background:

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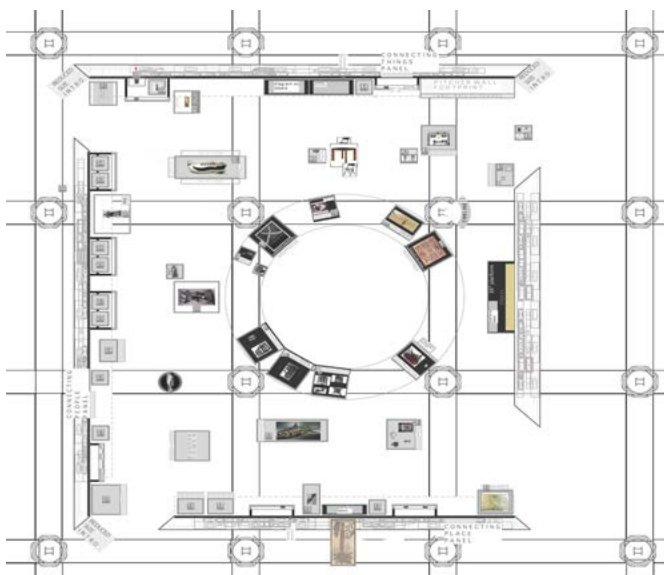


On the wall: Constellation Map, enlarged pl. 20 of the book by Benjamin Bramer *"Bericht zu M. Jobsten Burgi sel. geometrischen Triangular Instruments."*¹⁰ The modern semi-Mayan calendar placed in front of it is the favorite object of the chief curator. Photo: BKM 2015

For this new show, the BKM introduced two technical innovations: a special smart glass which operates like an electrical curtain, in order to be opened for only a short time to protect the sensible materials of textiles or manuscripts. The second innovation was also glass-related, a plexiglass called Optium was used which is more transparent and less reflective than normal plexiglas.¹¹

Connecting Cultures

The exhibition may be entered through one of four openings, one in each corner of the space. Next to each entryway is a text panel mounted on the wall which introduces the concept of the display as presenting a different new approach, which emphasizes connections across cultures and: "allow[s] us to see the ways in which art reflects our shared humanity."¹²



Introductory Gallery, plan view. Photo: BKM 2015

At first glance, the exhibit provokes the impression as being cluttered with the 281 items, arranged on different levels with a lack of space.

Most of the items are exposed as singular art objects with an emphasis on pure form (with or without a showcase). Furthermore, two high glass vitrines filled with dozens of Buddhas or with 95 pitchers, and a wall decorated with mirrors and frames of different size and quality, give the display an overwhelming impression of masses and height. Those installations remind the visitor of an open storage.

According to Lesleyanne Drake, musealization entitles the curator to abstract and formal comparisons: "When works of art [sic!] enter a museum, they take on new meanings and can be understood in new ways. In a gallery setting, we can compare objects from different cultures in ways that were not possible before they were gathered together, leading into new insights into what cultures share and what makes them different. The cases in the central area serve to illustrate this point, bringing together objects of similar form, purpose, or value in the cultures they come from."¹³ The following text requests a closer understanding: "We encourage you to examine these objects and begin to think about the people who produced them. What cultural connections can we draw through an understanding of these objects?"¹⁴

This center is the only place in the display where the curator gives concrete advice for how the visitor might think about the people and their products as an expression of different concepts of cultures and traditions, whereas the other three text panels restrict the visitor to mere formal comparisons: "What connections do you see between these works? With other works in the gallery?"²²

Within this assemblage of material things (supplemented with different media stations²³, slides, and the series of moveable text panels "Pictorial History of the Brooklyn Museum" with a walkthrough of some of the greatest artifacts collected throughout each decade of the museum), the visitor is free to move around without any prescribed way, as usually offered in art galleries.²⁴ There is no narrative in the sense of a story with a beginning, middle, and end (highlight). According to Lesleyanne Drake "there is a universal human story being told".²⁵ But is the story really being told?

In the following, I will give a short description of selected items which can be seen under the conceptual roof of the three topics. Mainly, I concentrate on three questions.

1. Does the exhibition offer to the visitor a better understanding of art for a "shared humanity"? Is the concept of "shared humanity"²⁶ identical with the reduction to mere aesthetical aspects – like the eye-catcher on the website of the museum?
2. Does this project entail participatory aspects? How many voices can be heard in the presentation?

3. What is the difference between a historic presentation in a *Wunderkammer* and the actual display "Connecting Culture"? May items be touched by visitors and moved around for a better understanding?

For a more detailed analysis, I will give a short overview of the two sections "Connecting Places" and "Connecting Things" before I present a selected group of items presented in the third section.

Connecting Places

"Here we present a variety of works from different cultures and times, each exploring the ideas of 'place', as detailed in the text panel. In the presentation there are at least four sub-topics presented: the natural world with its animals, exemplified in the "Century Vase", 1876 designed by Karl L. H. Mueller (American, born in Germany; 1820-1887) ²⁷ which shows inter alia native American animals together with man. The painting "Niagara" 1866 ²⁸ by Louis Rémy Mignot (American, 1831-1870), is dedicated to a natural phenomena which became later a symbol of seemingly limitless natural resources. The oil painting "The Seine and the Railroad Bridge at Argenteuil" ²⁹ from Gustave Caillebotte (French, 1848-1894), illustrates the technical inventions and advancements in modern times and how man has changed his natural environment. The third sub-section shows items which are dedicated to the spiritual world and different cosmologies demonstrated in the Mayan "Tetrapod Vessel with Lid", 350-450 AD, ³⁰ Mexico which shows the three levels

of the universe; the celestial upper world of the spiritual beings and ancestors, the middle world of the human beings, and the deep, watery underworld of the dead. ³¹ The involvement of man with nature is exemplified in Nick Cave's still life sculpture "Soundsuit", allowing a play with identity. ³²

Connecting Things

This overly general part of the display focuses on the intersection of art and design, as well as on the relationship of everyday objects to the Self. This part of the show plays with the sameness (function) and the differences (shape and design). It includes the vast collections of the same kind of items such as the 95 pitchers filled, in a giant open cupboard, with more than a dozen mirrors hanging on the wall.

The chosen examples, all from the permanent collection and each theatrically bluey lit in its own compartment, span three centuries and three continents. ³³ According to Holland Cotter the "Open storage is a great idea, but because it crowds lots of objects together, it doesn't give all the inventory optimal visibility... Many of the ... pitchers are in compartments well above eye level. You know they're there because labels say so, but they have no more physical presence than entries in a mail-order catalogue." ³⁴ Paa Joe's "Coffin in the Form of a Sneaker" from 1990 is another item created to be a bridge between the ordinary and the other reality. "Here the artist combines the Ghanaian tradition of creating coffins that resemble the characteristics or profession of the deceased, with a



In the cases from left (ca. 19th c.): Asante of Ghana ¹⁵, the Atium of New Zealand ¹⁶, the Ngombe of the Congo ¹⁷, French *tabouret* (ca. 1923) ¹⁸. Centre: 17th c. American Wainscot chair ¹⁹. Right case (19th c.): Asante chair (*Akonkromfi*) ²⁰, Luba stool (Congo) ²¹. Photo: Reiner Zapf

reflection on the symbols of status and modernity in the late 20th c." ³⁵

In shown the video loop "The way things go" ³⁶, the two Swiss artists Peter Fischli and David Weiss remove the context from those common place things which surround us in our daily lives and then restructure their relationships to one another. "The artists aim neither to glorify nor to alienate these common objects, but merely to create new references in which they might be considered". ³⁷ With the 18th c. Andean ceremonial *keru* cup ³⁸, the display refers again to Indian historical moments both before and after European colonization.

My analysis of the third section begins where I give a short introduction of concepts about ethnographic objects, art and hierarchies in displays and follows the less descriptive ratatouille of what can be seen in the previous two sections.

From ethnographica to art objects

The difference between an art piece and an ethnographic item was put in a nutshell by the museum professional Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett with her statement that artefacts are created by ethnographers. "Objects become ethnographic by virtue of being defined, segmented, detached, and carried away by ethnographers ... Where does the object begin and where does it end? ... Shall we exhibit the cup with the saucer, the tea, the cream, and sugar, the spoon, napkin and placemat, the table and chair, the rug?" ³⁹ And she suggested referring to the ethnographic segment than to the ethnographic object. The segment becomes an art piece, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett continues: "Though once multiple, in becoming ethnographic many objects become singular, and the more singular they become, the more readily they are reclassified and exhibited as art ... But the ability to stand alone says less about the nature of the object and more about our categories and attitudes, which may account for the minimalist installation style of exhibitions of 'primitive art'." ⁴⁰

How are the (former?) ethnographic items – (now) treated as being part of the art display "Connecting Cultures"? The general concept of the chief curator, successfully presenting all items as equal art pieces and to avoid any hierarchical taxonomies, seems to have transformed into a valid exhibition style. The items from different cultures and time periods are grouped by type or by ideas. According to Lesleyanne Drake, they can thus illustrate "different concepts of the human form" ⁴¹, the underlying approach is: "Art helps us to interpret our world." ⁴²

However, one aspect mediates a difference: namely in the texts of the labels concerning the way of mentioning or hiding the name of the person who created the art object. There are three variations: 1. the name of the artist is mentioned (as in oil paintings, modern and contemporary art, films); 2. the labels without any notice of an author (Japanese, China or Egyptian antique pieces, Buddha sculptures etc.), and 3. those art pieces, where

the name of the artist is unknown and the label looks accordingly: "Unidentified" + name of an ethnic group + "artist" (from Africa, Oceania, and the Americas).

Kavat Mask, late 19th or early 20th century

Unidentified Central Baining (Uramot or Kairak subgroup) artist
Gazelle Peninsula, East New Britain Province, Papua New Guinea
Bark cloth, pigment, cane
Gift of Thomas and Katherine Brush, 1994.142

Worn during spectacular night dances, this helmet mask represents a leaf spirit, one of the many bush spirits depicted by kavat bark-cloth masks.

The mask is formed by stretching bark cloth over a thin cane frame. The pigments that decorate these masks have general symbolic associations: red with masculinity, reminiscent of the flames through which the mask dances at night; black with femininity, the soot of cooking fires, and fertile earth; and white with the spirit world.



Standing Buddha, 7th century or later

Licchavi period style
Nepal
Bronze
Bequest of Dr. Samuel Eilenberg,
TL1998.116.102

Labels from the permanent exhibition of the BKM.
Photos: Reiner Zapf

That makes the difference! Although ethnographic art pieces should be treated in the same way, at the end, through their labels, they still belong to a tribal group (as cultural practices), respectively to an artist who is unknown (if it was an individual creation at all). Those objects are seemingly not representing a "high culture" like the antique Greece statues or the Egyptian portraits, although those artists are unknown also. In vain, one looks for an author who is responsible for the text of the labels. The differences in treating the artists' names could be also a result of different curators of the different museum galleries, writing the text labels for their specific art objects. But, how can a visitor recognize the possibly different authors and their differing theoretical approaches as art historians, together with their political attitudes concerning indigenous rights, when all the texts are written in the authoritative voice of a nameless, faceless curator? Upon request, Stayton conceded: "The labels were written by the curators from whose collections the objects were drawn, so, ultimately, most of the curators wrote some labels, including curators of

American, European, Asian, African and Decorative Arts, as well as our Curator of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art and the Chief Librarian; I also wrote some of the individual chat labels, as well as the longer didactic panels. The drafts were reviewed and consolidated by me, then reviewed by our Interpretive Materials experts and Editorial staff.“⁴³

This can be managed in a different way as demonstrated in the Horniman Museum in London in its "African Worlds" gallery.⁴⁴ "The labels include a short text by one of the makers or users of the object, both personal and 'ethnographic' ... first in the relevant African language and then in English translation. The speaker – the 'translator' of the object for the viewer – is named and is visually present in a photo. Finally, the compiler of the label is named as well. These labels alter the power balance of the museum. The exhibit seems to speak back to its collectors and the interpreting voices are now multiple.“⁴⁵

Besides the predominant historical objects, the display "Connecting Cultures" shows several contemporary art pieces. In vain, one searches for biographies, personal voices/texts by the exhibited artists, or portraits of the authors of the art pieces. Chief curator Stayton commented: "Indeed, we do sometimes include comments from artists about their work as part of our interpretation in the galleries. There is no particular reason why we did not in this case other than the fact that the interpretation and the installation itself was already dense and we did not want to overload it. We certainly may add artists' comments as the installation evolves.“⁴⁶

All personal comments are hidden behind labels with texts, characterized by an art historian neutralizing style. A good example how it could have been different, can be found in the recent exhibition "Making Africa. A continent of contemporary design" shown in the German *Vitra Design Museum* at *Weil am Rhein*. This show by Okwui Enwezor surprised the visitor with different media installations, showing artists involved in discussions, or presenting their topic/project. A media installation with headphones and seating benches allowed the visitors to listen to the personal video interviews with about 60 contemporary African designers.⁴⁷

Those last remarks should introduce the following analysis of the third section in the display.

Connecting People

"For most of history, people perceived the world with themselves at its centre. It is not a surprise, then, that our bodies, our shared physical humanity, play such a large role in imagination and in art ... And it is at the heart of many peoples' concept of the divine. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, for example, God created man in his own image. Conversely, many cultures have conceived of the divine in humankind's own image ... Here we present a variety of works from different cultures and times each

representing 'people' in a different way.“⁴⁸

Following the above information in the text panel about the creation of man after different images, the visitor looks for tangible and intangible heritage in this space which should be compared with each other by shape and content. For me it was quite new information (reminding me of the creationistic approach) that the Judeo-Christian God created mankind in his own image. As far as I know, it is just a story in the bible which proves, vice-versa, that we have invented god according to our cultural patterns.⁴⁹ The contrast, which is constructed in the following sentence between the Judeo-Christian religion and the other religions, remains questionable. As we know, in all cultures, spiritual beings were shaped in a material form according to the human imaginations and experiences of the other dimension of reality.⁵⁰ Spiritual spaces were always related to the natural wilderness, namely to those areas and beings, which were not under the control of the human discipline and will. The difference between the other religious worldviews and the Judeo-Christian ones are the imaginations of spiritual beings. The common connection between all worldviews is the source of their imaginations: the human being / body.

It remains the question, what does the curator mean, when he uses the "us". Who is "us" in this context? Does it mean the curator (?), members of the museum (?), or is it the migrant community in Brooklyn? There is no "us" or "we" in this world, which can be understood without having been specified in advance about the details. And who is meant by the "many cultures" or "some traditions"? The point of view from which a museum (curator) is speaking, should be always transparent. Does an argument originate from a religious perspective or from a scientific one to explain an observed phenomenon in this world? What does it mean in the text: "works from different cultures and times each representing 'people' in a different way"? People as human beings or spiritual beings as imagined by people?

A large display case shows, inter alia, dozens of Buddha statues "from the fourth century in what is now Pakistan; in a terracotta pilgrim's plaque from 12th c. Burma; and in a translucent jade carving from 18th c. China. Here, again [referring to the pitchers⁵¹], objects are lost to view above a certain level, but if you think about it, this makes sense. The Buddha, Mr. Dematerialize, grows less and less visible the higher he rises toward heaven.“⁵²

Furthermore, this section shows modern and contemporary sculptures like Gaston Lachaise's "Standing Woman" from 1932⁵⁴ placed next to the Abelam ancestral sculptures (20th c., Papua New Guinea).⁵⁵ The question arises, if this placing of objects from different cultures may provide any deeper comparison, and if the pairing of three works from such diverse regions elide important artistic and cultural differences?⁵⁶



Walking around, one sees Rodin's Orpheus (1908 ⁶⁰), Nick Cave's contemporary "Soundsuit" (2010 ⁶¹), a "Huastec Life-Death Figure" ⁶²; a Yoruba mask, possibly Areogun of Osi, ca. 1880-1954, or school of Areogun of Osi, ca. 1880-1954 ⁶³, a Yup'ik mask from the Arctic, a Katsina doll (Hopi), and a video about the bodybuilder Eugen Sandow (1894). This section "Connecting People" has a series of portraits, mainly those of women like Picasso's "Woman in Gray" (1942 ⁶⁴), and Daniel Huntington's "The Sketcher: A portrait of Mlle. Rosina, a Jewess" (1858). ⁶⁵

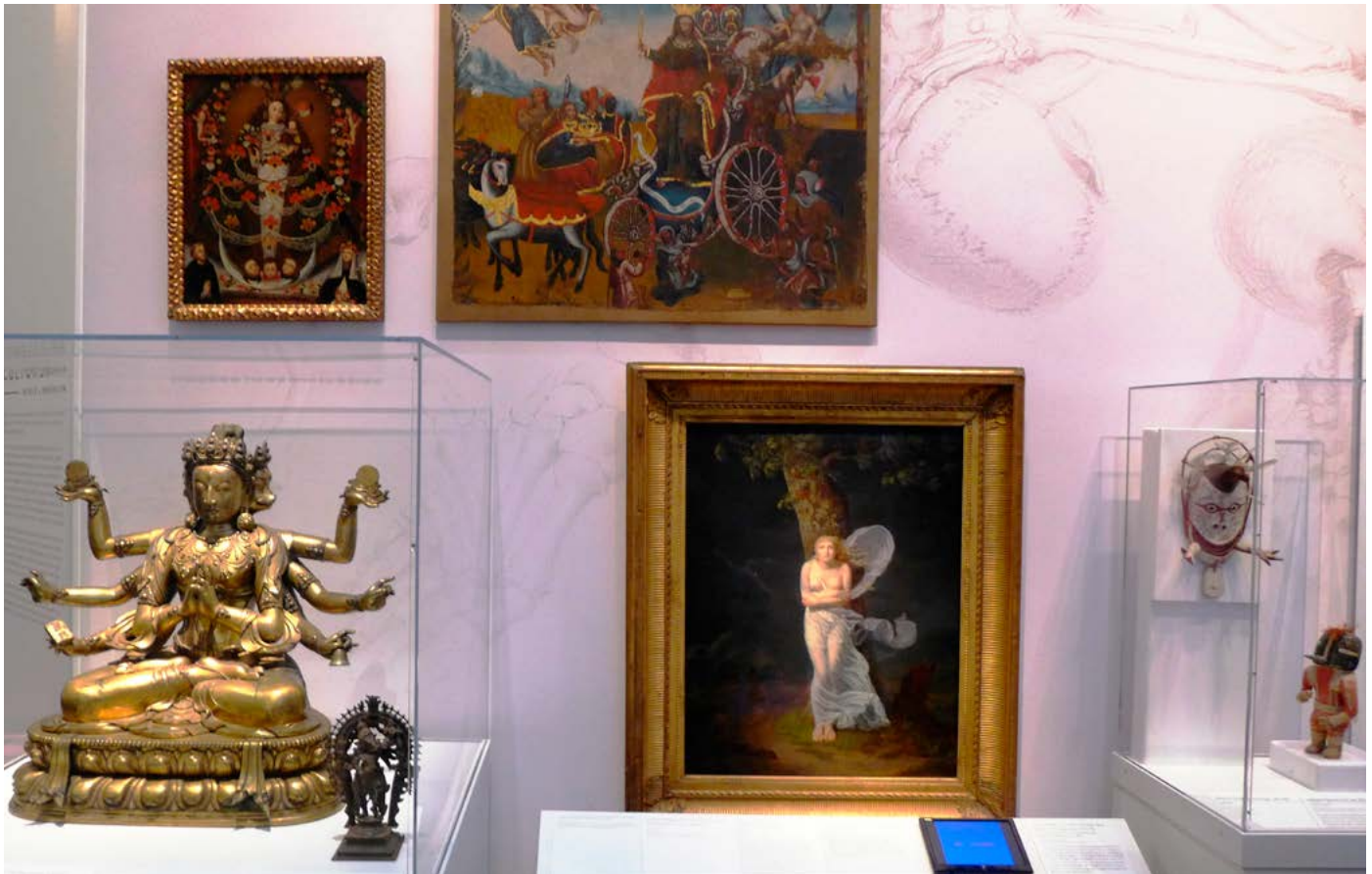
Sabeena Khosla commented on these two oil paintings: "While it is abstract versus naturalistic and appears a to be a bit of a stretch to compare the two due to their obvious stylistic differences, the exhibit implores visitors to look deeper at the subject matter. Picasso used grays and flattened forms in creating woman to represent the bleak situation in Europe during the war, while Huntington used woman to represent the societal need for knowledge and artistry. Both superficially different yet the women in both are seated in a similar fashion and each evokes the use of women in the arts to identify important national circumstances." ⁶⁶

In her reflections (inspired by the object labels), Khosla, a trained art and design historian, concentrated on aspects of the western art and not – like all the other authors as well – on those of non-western people, presented in close neighbourhood. I will analyse some aspects of another combination of art pieces made in different cultures and times, illustrated in the pictures chosen. The seven items are my personal selection. From the

Left: On the backside of the "Buddha-Towercase" with more than 50 Buddhas one can find the different labels and the "Seated Buddha", Asian Art. ⁵³ Photos: Reiner Zapf



From left: "Female Figure Standing with Arms Raised," Dogon artist, Mali, 16th – 19th c. ⁵⁷; "Girl in a Japanese Costume," by William Merritt Chase, c. 1890. ⁵⁸; "Jizo Bosatsu", Japan, late 10th – early 11th c. ⁵⁹
Photo: Lindsey Davis, 2012



Upper row, from left: Virgin of Pomata with S. Nicholas de Tolentino and Sta. Rosa de Lima, 1700 – 1750; "Triumph of Christ the King with the Four Continents", 18th c.
Lower row, left: "Marichi, Buddhist Goddess of Dawn" 18th c. China; Bronze; "Young Woman Overtaken by a Storm", 1795. "Mask of the Valley Ptarmigan", late 19th century; "Hopi Pueblo (Native American). Kachina Doll (Kokopol)", probably late 19th c. Photo: Reiner Zapf. Object details can be found under [https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/...](https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/)

perspective of a social anthropologist, I was looking for ensembles which included western art pieces, as well as so-called indigenous art. The latter ones could be found in any ethnographic museum worldwide.

At first glance, we see seven items (video excluded) from China, the Americas, France, and one bronze without any place of origin. We observe that two single women can be seen in the oil paintings, a carriage in a third one, three sculptures resembling parts of the human anatomy together with bundles of attributes of non-human beings, and one mask without a body. From the texts on the labels ⁶⁷ we learn, that all of them were produced, respectively collected, within the 18th and the 19th resp. beginning of the 20th c.

While trying to see the connectedness of these items, it has to be stated that they differ nearly in most points in their composition: by the differing materials (oil, bronze, feather, wood etc.), by the shape of their bodies, by their attributes (they are accompanied by angels, masks, animal faces etc.), and they belong to different galleries in the Brooklyn Museum. Six of them represent mainly a religious sphere. The only obvious connection between those seven items is the decision of the curator to ar-

range them as an ensemble in this exhibition together with their acknowledged high quality as art pieces.

How many more topics are hidden in these items? Some of them are mentioned in the accompanying text labels – most of them depend on the individual knowledge and interest of each visitor. Just to mention some of the topics, following the items on the picture from left to right: the colonization and Christianization of Latin-America, the appropriation of sacred indigenous places by the Christians. The two statues with their multiple arms represent saviours and guardians of mankind, which can be seen in contrast to the overthrowing and destructive western ideology and power. The dynamism of political power is likewise illustrated in the half-naked women, which seem to be shaken by the French revolution. The five items on the left side are apparently representing antagonistic dynamic interests which means that the human striving for power causes multilayered turbulences.

In contrast to the missing information about the mask on the right side of the glass case, the "Kachina doll Kokopol" of the Hopi is very well documented. According to Stacey Abarbanel, "Katsina" is the proper Hopi word for these dolls and the term "Kachina" is erroneously used by

non-Hopi like Western museum professionals.⁶⁸ As a consequence of this, the question has to be asked about any participation of the Hopi community in the presentation of this Hopi doll.

How then, is a context usually designed in a museum without any participation of external communities? According to Kirshenblatt-Gimblet, in museums "Objects are set in context by means of long labels, charts and diagrams, commentary delivered via earphones, explanatory audio-visual programs, docents conducting tours, booklets and catalogues, educational programs and lectures and performances ... [or] by means of other objects, often in relation to a classification or schematic arrangement of some kind, based on typologies of form or proposed historical relationships ... There are as many contexts for an object as there are interpretive strategies. In-context approaches exert strong cognitive control over the objects, asserting power of classification and arrangement to order large numbers of artefacts from diverse cultural and historical settings and to position them in relation to one another ... the viewer may be encouraged to 'frame for himself a few general principles for which he can seek out specimens.'" ⁶⁹ Her statement describes exactly what happens in the permanent exhibition "Connecting Cultures". The offered frame is the western view on the Other(s) (in history or in present) without any 'authentic' voices of Others. Through this angle, trained by academic art history, the visitors shall compare the art items presented here according to their own gusto following aesthetic criteria, without knowing any background of the people involved. ⁷⁰ Kirshenblatt-Gimblet continues: "Having been saved from oblivion, the ethnographic fragment needs also to be rescued from triviality. One way of doing this is to treat the specimen as a document" ⁷¹ The manner in which the items of non-Western people are being collected and displayed in the West and by the BKM without the authors being translated, runs the risk of exhibiting ethnographic objects merely for visual consumption telling us nothing. ⁷² Museums have to offer more than just jewellery stores with gems and jewels dazzling the visitors in the display cases.

However, taking the Hopi item as an example, the visitors could have been offered not only a deepened insight into Hopi traditions (by the Hopi themselves), furthermore, the BKM could have presented an insight into more general topics, connecting many of the other art objects in this exhibition as well. These may have been: different religious worldviews and different lifestyles; the commodification and the appropriation of cultural traditions by artists, and the trans-cultural flow of cultural ideas; more general questions about dilemmas in a postcolonial world, and about traditions, cultural authenticity, intellectual property rights, religious privacy, commerce, colonization, cultural clichés, concepts of modernity and freedom of expression. Those topics could have been presented here as an introduction into global human connectedness: that means – same topics but differing creative materialisations as expressions of being human while having differ-

ent cultures (like belief systems, values, and lifestyles). ⁷³

Completely ignored by the BKM are, as Drake has put it, "issues of how the object was collected and how it entered the museum setting ... In this way, objects are viewed as dead objects, cut off from the culture that created them and thus, the only life that is imbued with meaning and importance in the museum setting." ⁷⁴

Looking without seeing. The visiting body and the sensual experience of art

During our personal conversation, Kevin L. Stayton reformed that the concept of the *Wunderkammern* was their orientation for the new concept of the display "Connecting Cultures". According to Stephen Bann, ⁷⁵ since the 1990s there has been some kind of fashion to rehabilitate the *Wunderkammern* as a mode of display, and so to provide an instructive contrast to the traditional hanging modes of Fine Arts Museums. The historicist mode of presentation no longer retains unquestioned authority. "Curiosity has the valuable role of signalling to us that the object on display is a nexus of interrelated meanings – which may be quite discordant – rather than a staging post on a well trodden route through history." ⁷⁶ A good example for a reconstruction of the concept of *Wunderkammern*, while following contemporary techniques and the imperatives of conservation, was opened in the Basel Historical Museum (*Barfüsser Church*) in 2011, as part of the new permanent exhibition "Understanding the world". ⁷⁷

Compared with "Connecting Cultures", it is obvious that both forms of displays use quite different categories for the presentation of the various objects: whereas the genuine *Wunderkammer* tried to create a universal taxonomy, the BKM refers to "universal humanity" instead of the show and explanation of the universe. Whereas "earlier *Wunderkammern* and cabinets of curiosities enabled a sense of wonder through a full, active, sensory engagement with objects" ⁷⁸, another difference between the two concepts is already visualized in the entrance space of the BKM exhibit. The visitors are welcomed in New York with a large text panel saying: "Please do not touch the artworks. Oil and salt on your hands can damage metal, marble, and wood. Many of the pieces in this gallery are not behind glass, and even the gentlest touch can be damaging. Security staff will remind visitors not to touch the art." ⁷⁹

The social anthropologist Jennie Morgan comments: "The ubiquitous 'Do not Touch' sign in many museums communicates absence and presence. Tactile engagement with objects and bodily experience is predominantly absent. Present is a sensory hierarchy so taken for granted it is scarcely visible. That instruction is needed at all suggests a deep and inherent desire amongst people to seek out a tactile closeness to things. This closeness is not always satisfied in modern museums where collections are predominantly configured for visual consumption." ⁸⁰ According to Constance Classen and David Howes it might

be argued "that the untouchability of the modern museum is due to a purely 'practical' concern for conservation, rather than to a shift in sensory values. Yet the increased concern over conservation in modernity is not a 'natural' museological development, but is itself the expression of a changing ideology and sensory model according to which preserving artefacts for future view is more important than physically interacting with them in the present."⁸¹ This is not to say that touch is completely abandoned in the museum. It is still permitted for curators (albeit now through a gloved hand), respectively for those people (owners) who have the power to touch collections. Object handling became strictly controlled and reflects boundaries of newly emerging professional values, expertise, skills, and authority.⁸²

Until the mid-19th c. this was not the case. Both private and public collections were often touched and even moved around by visitors, and indeed experienced through a range of sensory channels. "Solely viewing a collection was considered a superficial means of apprehending it. Taking the time to touch artefacts, to turn them over in one's hand, showed a more profound interest ... [for] an access to interior truths of which sight was unaware Touching statues was not just a question of idle curiosity, however, but of aesthetic appreciation."⁸³

According to Classen, the characteristically premodern mingling of spheres of knowledge was accompanied by a multisensory understanding of the cosmos according to which crucial information was transmitted and discernible through all sensory channels. "If the museum was a little cosmos then it too could be regarded as constituting a multisensory tapestry of colours, textures, sounds and smells".⁸⁴

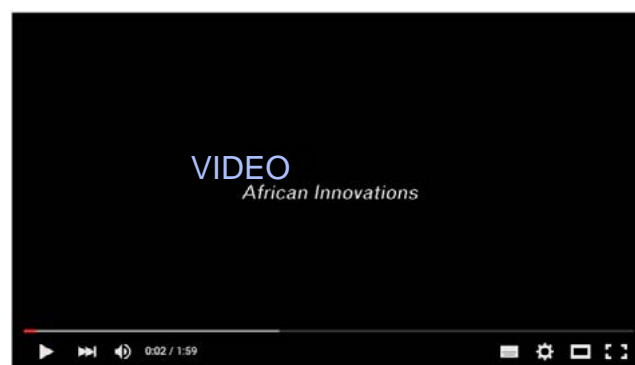
Concerning the objects of the Others, Classen & Howes commented: "Masks, clubs, 'idols', and other characteristic artefacts found in a collection fascinated Europeans with their implications of savagery. Touching and holding such 'barbarous' objects with their own hands enabled Westerners to vicariously participate in, and confront their fear of, the supposed brutal lifestyle of 'primitive' peoples."⁸⁵ The hegemonial contacts with the Others had grave consequences for the valuation of the tactility of the natives in contrast to the Europeans. "Europeans imagined non-Westerners to be more sensuous than themselves. The senses they particularly had in mind were the so-called lower senses of smell, taste, and touch. As 'lower' senses, smell, taste and touch were associated with the body, and with those peoples imagined to live a life of the body, rather a life of the mind."⁸⁶

Classen comments: "Due to technological developments as well as to changes in scientific practice and theory, the nineteenth-century scientist was expected to gather information by means of microscopes and measuring devices and not by sniffing or tasting the material under study."⁸⁷ The smell of perfume is a good example to put the changed valuation of the senses in a nutshell: once

a metaphor for truth now has only cosmetic value while vision reveals truth and is privileged in the museum.⁸⁸

This pyramid of taxonomy had severe consequences in the Western cultural sector until the present. "The more that Europeans emphasized the distinction between the 'noble' sense of sight and the 'base' proximity senses, the less the latter were deemed suitable for the appreciation and understanding of art and artefacts. In contrast to the multisensory modes of previous centuries, in the 1800s sight was increasingly considered to be the only appropriate sense for aesthetic appreciation for 'civilized' adults."⁸⁹

According to Alva Noë, professor for philosophy und cognitive science at the University of California (Berkeley), vision is a process that depends on interactions between the perceiver and the environment and involves contributions from sensory systems other than the eye.⁹⁰



The long-term installation "African innovations" opened August 12, 2011.

While visual perception plays a dominant role in the sensory experiences of visitors of today, the longing of the museum-goers for more intense and multisensory experience besides looking is satisfied by the museums through other activities, which are integrated into the museum visits. Many museums have their own parks, restaurants or cafeterias, museum shops, cinemas, playing grounds, education centres etc., where the visitors are free to move around, to touch, smell, taste, hear, play, feel the surrounding and themselves, and experience the different modes of "being-in-the-world".⁹¹ Ways for a standardised inclusion of all senses in an exhibit, in combination with conversation and other museum's rules, has not yet been resolved. It will be a big challenge for the future.

Collecting Cultures – a critical facit

Though the BKM press release from February, 2012 stating "new ways of looking at art and exploring the Museum by making connections between cultures and objects"⁹² sounds playfully inviting, I question its ethnographic aim. My main objection with this exhibition which clearly follows a Western concept is that only offers one anonymous but official museum voice. None of the voices of the indigenous people and text labelists are mentioned. Stayton says: "We have on-going conversations with our

community about their needs in the building and about programs we are developing (for instance surveys in the galleries, focus groups and less formal interactions), but we did not specifically initiate conversations about this installation in particular. We drew conclusions from more general and on-going conversations.“⁹³ How can the voices of the myriad of important indigenous people standing behind every art piece exhibited be heard? In my social anthropological mind there is an ethnographic disconnect. Those voices are better heard when the goal of an exhibition is specifically focused upon them and not diluted in a pre-fabricated, generalized approach.

“Art“ is a Western concept and has no meaning in most cultures of the Others. In their languages an expression for an exclusive, a single author related cultural production did not exist – although each culture had its own standard of beauty and aesthetic quality. Do we not more successfully uphold “our shared humanity“ when we honour this anthropological origin?

According to Lindsey Davis, “Connecting Cultures” is not the first exhibition to showcase the museum’s collection using this kind of cross-culture display. In 1992, the Brooklyn Museum used the same exact concept, but instead asked artist Joseph Kosuth to choose the items from their collection and juxtapose intentionally to create a political message; an exhibition that played on the idea of the artist as curator.⁹⁴ Contrary to this historical display with its personal perspective, “Connecting Cultures“ misses any personal story or individual perspective, on which the visitors could base an emotional connection with the display.

Art critic Holland Cotter correctly analyzes the background of the museum approach: “The ultimate goal of the Brooklyn installation is to encourage you to play with art, with meanings and values and cultural interconnections, which also means to play with the museum itself, to move its contents around mentally, to make friends where you ordinarily would not think to find them: to be at home in a large world.“⁹⁵ As an appetizer for the rest of the museum, this playground shows excellent items of high quality – so-called masterpieces – and offers the visitor the possibility to develop their own imagination and to ask questions. In the other galleries of the museum the curious visitor may expect to find the answers.

It is very unfortunate that the BKM did not research the good examples by foreign museums when mediating between several perspectives as in the former Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde in Munich⁹⁶ and in the Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum in Cologne.⁹⁷ Does the BKM potentially initiates a new impulse to ethnographical disregard the indigenous origins of exhibited items? Does the global community of museums not have as the main focus to educate the public using primarily a bridge between the different WISSENSWELTEN (worlds of knowledge) created by people? With its reference to Wunderkammern, the Brooklyn Museum of Arts shows a deep misunderstanding of this phenomenon and misuses historical world expla-

nation for deliberate comparisons of cultures and styles without individuals. The new permanent exhibition disappoints the visitor with both its absence of scenography and paternalistic concept based on western cultural hegemony.⁹⁷ Museums have the duty to explain their treasures to enhance and to exchange the mutual knowledge about us all, to share humanity.⁹⁸

Notes

- 1 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brooklyn_Museum (access March 25, 2014)
- 2 <http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/about/> (access March 25, 2014) With this number I refer to published source. Referring to these numbers of objects, Kevin L. Stayton mentioned a very important aspect, which applies to each museum collection: “We are in the process of moving away from using the 1.5 million number as the number of objects in the museum. Such numbers always depend on how the count is made and what is included.“ (eMail of September 17, 2015)
- 3 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brooklyn_Museum (access March 25, 2014)
- 4 Many thanks to Kevin L. Stayton who gave me an inspiring introduction to the exhibition “Connecting Cultures“ on March 24, 2014. It is to be noted here that written contextual content was mainly devised from our interview.
- 5 “For decades the Great Hall was dedicated to American Indian art, with monumental sculptures grouped in its high-ceilinged center and pre-Columbian textiles and pots scattered around the sides. But the space never worked. Its parameters were vague, its sightlines blighted by clunky pillars. All together it made for a damp introduction to the galleries beyond and above.“ Cotter 2012
- 6 Lindsey 2012
- 7 <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/community/blogosphere/2012/05/02/the-big-pictures/> (access August 16, 2015)
- 8 https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/94182/Skeleton_Study (access August 16, 2015)
- 9 Quoted from the label.
- 10 Quoted from the label.
- 11 Stayton wrote in an eMail (August 20, 2015) that the Optium is nearly invisible.
- 12 For a better understanding, Stayton „almost always add[s] something to this quote like “but also the unique expression of every culture“. (eMail of September 17, 2015)
- 13 Drake 2013, p. 8
- 14 Quoted from the last sentences of the text panel “Connecting Cultures. An Illustration“. For notes 15-21 see p. 19
- 15 https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/3286/Stool_Dwa?referring-q=asante (access August 25, 2015)
- 16 <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/101654/Stool?referring-q=atiu+new+zealand> (access August 25, 2015)
- 17 https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/19367/Chiefs_Seat_Ekele?referring-q=22.877 (access August 25, 2015)
- 18 https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/100148/Stool_Tabouret?referring-q=73.142 (access August 25, 2015)
- 19 https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/65330/Wainscot_Chair?referring-q=51.158 (access August 25, 2015)

- 20 https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/112863/Chair_Akonkromfi?referring-q=asante (access August 25, 2015)
- 21 <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/71247/Stool?referring-q=56.6.92> (access August 25, 2015)
- 22 Quoted as the last sentences from the text panels "Connected Places", "Connected People", and "Connecting Things". An opportunity for feedback is offered in the exhibition as well as on the website of the museum.
- 23 Each section shows two videos and in the section "Connecting Places" is one slide show.
- 24 "the website text [on the history of the museum – A.R.] is a reduced version of the information on the labels." Stayton September 2, 2015
- 25 Drake 2013, p. 11
- 26 Quote from the text panel in the entrance area.
- 27 https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/713/Century_Vase?referring-q=43.25 (access August 25, 2015)
- 28 <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/1926/Niagara?referring-q=1993.118> (access August 25, 2015)
- 29 https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/5001/The_Seine_and_the_Railroad_Bridge_at_Argenteuil_La_Seine_et_le_pont_du_chemin_de_fer_dArgenteuil?referring-q=1999.76.1 (access August 15, 2015)
- 30 https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/86005/Tetrapod_Bowl_with_Lid?referring-q=tetrapod+vessel+maya (access August 15, 2015)
- 31 https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/86005/Tetrapod_Bowl_with_Lid?referring-q=tetrapod+vessel+maya (access August 15, 2015)
- 32 <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/186816/Soundsuit?referring-q=Nick+-Cave%27s+still+life+sculpture%2C+Soundsuit> (access August 25, 2015)
- 33 Cotter 2012
- 34 Cotter 2012; although I selected in my article the more critical comments of Cotter's review, I would like to mention that his review was very positive in its final assessment. Thanks to Kevin L. Stayton, who reminded me not to give a wrong impression of Cotter's opinions. (eMail of September 17, 2015)
- 35 Lindsey 2012
- 36 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GXRRC3pfLnE> (access August 26, 2015)
- 37 http://icarufilms.com/cat97/t-z/the_way_.html (access August 26, 2015)
- 38 https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/696/Kero_Cup?referring-q=kero+cup+Andean+ (access August 17, 2015)
- 39 Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991, p. 387f
- 40 Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991, p. 391f
- 41 Drake 2013, p. 12
- 42 *ibid.*
- 43 Stayton per eMail, September 9, 2015
- 44 <http://www.horniman.ac.uk/visit/displays/african-worlds> (access August 14, 2015)
- 45 Sturge 2014, p.1
- 46 Stayton per eMail September 2, 2015
- 47 In the 2015 exhibition only about 60 designers were video interviewed, whereas on the website of the Vitra Design Museum 158 interviews of designers together with comments to different works or projects can be watched under: <http://makingafrica.net/exhibition/> (access September 6, 2015)
- 48 Quoted from the label "Connecting People".
- 49 It is a religious reference, however, with many consequences in the daily life. For example: according to the Christian belief it is forbidden to have tattoos, because the godlike human Christian body should not be changed by the will of man.
- 50 Goodman 1988
- 51 Comment of the author
- 52 Gochfield 2014
- 53 https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/194557/Seated_Buddha?referring-q=seated+buddha+connecting+cultures (access August 17, 2015)
- 54 https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/1149/Standing_Woman (access August 22, 2015)
- 55 https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/108600/Ancstral_Figure_Ngwandu?referring-q=81.164.2 (access August 22, 2015)
- 56 Clarke 2003, p. 175
- 57 https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/169091/Female_Figure_Standing_with_Arms_Raised?referring-q=2011.4.5 (access August 22, 2015)
- 58 https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/1811/Girl_in_a_Japanese_Costume?referring-q=86.197.2 (access August 22, 2015)
- 59 https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/3870/Jizo_Bosatsu_Ksitigarbha_Bodhisattva?referring-q=78.43 (access August 22, 2015) Foto Lindsey 2012
- 60 No further comment on the label, but with a text on the website: https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/111444/Orpheus_Orph%C3%A9?referring-q=84.75.3 (access August 22, 2015)
- 61 <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/186816/Soundsuit?referring-q=Soundsuit> (access August 22, 2015)
- 62 https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/118927/Life-Death_Figure (access August 17, 2015)
- 63 https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/96553/Epa_Mask?referring-q=70.107.13 (access August 22, 2015)
- 64 https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/163792/Woman_in_Gray_Femme_en_gris (access September 14, 2015)
- 65 https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/169/The_Sketcher%3A_A_Portrait_of_Mlle_Rosina_a_Jewess?referring-q=The+Sketcher%3A+A+Portrait+of+Mlle+Rosina%2C+a+Jewess%2C+1858 (access August 22, 2015)
- 66 Khosla 2014
- 67 "not every object has a 'chat' label, that is, a label with a narrative component, usually about 80 words ... As you recall, there are a few sections that we consider 'open storage,' in which we have massed a number of works of similar types ... Of the remaining works in the installation, about 75% have 'chat' labels." Stayton per eMail September 2, 2015
- 68 Abarbanel 2002. See https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/17038/Kachina_Doll_Kokopol (access August 17, 2015)
- 69 Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991, p. 390
- 70 Rein 2015
- 71 Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991, p. 390
- 72 Sturge 2014, p. 1; see also Gochfield 2014
- 73 Antweiler 2007
- 74 Drake 2013, p. 2f; cp. Rein 2010
- 75 Bann 2003, p. 118

- 76 Ibid, p. 120.
- 77 "The Wonderworld of the *Kunstkammer*" was organized according to the four categories used by former collectors to classify their treasures: *Artificialia* (manmade objects), *Naturalia* (natural objects), *Antiquitates* (relics of Antiquity), and *Scientifica* (scientific instruments). "The microcosm of the collection was intended to reflect the macrocosm of the world with all its attendant phenomena. The *Kunstkammer* was a universe in small. ... These cabinets of curiosity reflect not only the collectors' encyclopaedic worldview: art, nature and science together form a unified whole. All things are part of a universal context." (Quoted from the label) On flat-touch-screens at the side of the glass cases, visitors can search for more information about each exhibited object.
- 78 Dudley 2010, p. 17
- 79 A sign, which can be found in most museums, quoted from the BKM text.
- 80 Morgan 2011, p. 65
- 81 Classen; Howes 2002, p. 216
- 82 Morgan 2011, p. 67; Classen; Howes 2002, p. 201
- 83 Classen; Howes 2002, p. 201. "In the world of the museum, just as in the real world, not everyone was considered equal ... There was definite class distinctions of touch in the museum, and gender distinctions as well." (Classen 2007, p. 908)
- 84 Classen 2007, p. 907
- 85 Ibid p. 203
- 86 Ibid p. 206 "The sensuous life of the other, to the European mind, was either one of refinement and pleasure of brutish degradation. The Orient typically served as an imaginary place of exquisite refinements, while Africa was stereotyped as a land of sensory brutality. Both places were, alas, understood to be amoral". „In the early nineteenth century the historian Lorenz Oken invented a sensory hierarchy of human races, with the European 'eye-man' at the top, followed by the Asian 'ear-man', the Native American 'nose-man', the Australian 'tongue-man' and the African 'skin-man'." Ibid, p. 206
- 87 Classen 2007, 907
- 88 Golding 2010, p. 225
- 89 Classen 2007, p. 207. The reduction on the visual approach to objects had also restrictive implications for the treatment of the items of the Others in the collections: "The visual emphasis of the museum contributed to the model of colonization in several ways. Artefacts were required to conform to the sensory order of their new home. This meant being reduced to the visual, or – from a Western perspective – being civilized into the visual. As the artifacts in the museum represented cultures, the people providing them also symbolically had their senses and sensory presences disciplined. Through their representative artefacts they rendered touchless, speechless, and smell-less. ... the multisensory dynamics of indigenous cultures remained obscure – often unimportant – to Westerners. For example, when the creative style of non-Western cultures began to influence Western art in the twentieth century (such as the influence of African masks on Cubism), their varied sensory dimensions were typically ignored, and only semblance of their visual façade retained." (Classen 2007, p. 210f)
- 90 Noë 2004 quoted it Block. During the last years at least two great exhibitions in Europe were dedicated to sensual experiences: "Belle Haleine – The scent of Art (Der Duft der Kunst)" (http://www.tinguely.ch/de/ausstellungen_events/ausstellungen/2015/Belle-Haleine.html (access September 2, 2015); <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5SX-ICHdbA2E> (access September 12, 2015); <http://vernissage.tv/2015/02/16/belle-haleine-the-scent-of-art-exhibition-at-museum-tinguely-basel/> (access September 2, 2015); at the Museum Tinguely in Basel, and "Touch me. Design and Sensation" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5SUJmHd-saR0> (access September 2, 2015); <https://interactionivrea.org/en/news/press/releases/2005/touchme/index.asp> (access September 2, 2015) at 2005 the Victoria & Albert Museum London; and experiments with sounds and objects are present in many displays. Charlie Morrow is one of the great contemporary sound composers for cultural institutions. <http://www.charliemorrow.com/> (access September 13, 2015). „The problem with most museum exhibits is that they do not solve the atmosphere, sound of place problem. Most museum spaces have bad acoustics or media sounds. To make a diverse 2D soundscape work, an immersive envelop of light and sound should be used. Lighting designers know this well since curators are visual and know proper lighting." (Morrow per eMail September 9, 2015) An interesting example is shown in the video of Charles Morrow, who explores sound as object and readout: entrancement, interpretation, clarity, ambiguity. Do you object? https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ue_hZs7oa8 (access May 13, 2015). But, the common display in museum still relies more or less on a visual approach in its presentations.
- 91 Howes 2006, p. 122
- 92 "An innovative installation, featuring some of the most important objects in the Brooklyn Museum collection, has been developed to create new ways of looking at art and exploring the Museum by making connections between cultures as well as objects ... In viewing the juxtaposition and combination of works from different cultures around the world, the visitor will be asked to consider the importance of the idea of place to the definition of culture and the self; the ways in which people represent themselves in the works of art that help define them; and the role of objects, or things, in supporting identity, both personal and cultural."
- 93 Stayton per eMail, September 2, 2015
- 94 Lindsey 2012. "In a way, 'Connecting Cultures' could even be viewed as a self-referential affirmation of an institutional tradition that began two decades before." https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/exhibitions/819/The_Brooklyn_Museum_Collection%3A_The_Play_of_the_Unmentionable_Joseph_Kosuth (access August 19, 2015)
- 95 Cotter 2012
- 96 They divided their displays in two sections. In the main building they showed permanently ethnographic items according to a geographical classification and contexts. In a separate art gallery, they displayed masterpieces as art pieces under the title: „Weiter als der Horizont. Kunst der Welt" also as a permanent exhibition. In the „Kunst-kabinett" (The art gallery together with the *Kunst-kabinett* were opened in July 2008), being part of the art gallery, they changed the displays regularly. The new name of the museum since 2014 is: *Museum fünf Kontinente* [Museum five continents, sic!]
- 97 Atelier Brückner developed special showcases where the visitor can switch between the art pieces with no context shown. While pressing a button, a text appears in the background which explains the context of the item. (Rein 2013, p. 42)
- 98 I am very grateful that Kevin Stayton sent me more additional supportive information and quickly answered all of the following questions per eMail. Many thanks to Patricia

Riesenkampff, who, since years, enriches all my English texts with her excellent proof readings.

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