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TAJ MAHAL

NANETTE SNOEP:
BACKGROUND
AND VISIONS

NEW MUSEUMS
IN YINCHUAN
AND
SINGAPOORE

LITTLE FAKES

THE LENBACH
TREASURES II

66 pages
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Anette Rein

Little stories with big impact. An interview with Nanette Jacomijn Snoep

Nanette Jacomijn Snoep is the new director of the three Saxonian ethnographic museums: Museum für Völkerkunde Dresden¹, Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig², Völkerkundemuseum Herrnhut³, and the executive vice-president of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden (SKD)⁴.

After our first meeting during the opening ceremony of the ethnographic museum in Genève⁵ in October last year, we discussed intensively the necessity for changing the perspective. We agreed, not to look for the category "ethnographic museum", but instead, to look for different concepts and questions while working with ethnographic objects. I would like to quote an interview from 2014 where you said: "The collection gives us the ability to cross traditional boundaries and to pursue new concepts for exhibitions".⁶ Which challenges do you see in the work with ethnographic collections in the near future?

NJS: The first point I would like to speak about is the question: why do we still need these traditional classifications of objects like the geographical or the ethnical formations of the Other. Why do we still create borderlines between us – what means between the West and the Rest (of the world)? We need a complete mix so that you do not know on the first spot from which point of view am I looking at something resp. someone. Or, from which point of view are we talking at the moment. The classical system of Western orientation which creates only one view on the world, we have to abolish it. I would like to quote Bhikhu Parekh⁷ who writes: «We» cannot integrate «them» as long as «we» remain «we»; «we» must be loosened up to create a new common in which "they" can be accommodated and become part of a newly constituted "we". This is exactly what I would like to materialize in the future SES Museums.

Let me give an example for this approach. When I taught African Art History at the *École du Louvre* in Paris, I always started my first lecture with a 19th century Japanese map of the world – which represents the world in a different order: Europe isn't more in the center of the map and Africa looks like suddenly totally different. We have to blur the continental boundaries. We have to start thinking from another perspective. Up until now, the exploration of the world is mainly reported from a Western point of view. But, how would history have been told if we would

look at Chinese enterprises to the East African Coast long before the Portuguese arrived there? We really have to turn the globe and to see it from another perspective. When we put the Indian Ocean in the center, you get a total new vision of the world. Suddenly you can connect the East African coast with India, East Asia, Madagascar with Indonesia and so on.

We have many more examples of these possible changing perspectives from which would follow different concepts of world explanations. There are many traps of thinking we fall into time and time again. We, these so-called Ethnological Museums, are still interpreting the world in terms of European values and experiences. These traps are also characterized through the fixed classifications of our ethnographic collections which consist mainly of objects collected in colonial times when artificial borders have been created in order to classify and to govern the world.

Internationally sharing is one of the top headings which should characterize our work in future. We are sitting on world heritage of people from outside of Europe, often collected in contexts of domination. In so far we have to collaborate and share the knowledge of our collections with Non-European people from Africa, Asia, America, the Pacific, intellectuals, artists, spirituals from over the world. We want to collaborate with interesting non-European thinkers and creators who do not need an official diploma to be accepted as equal in our museums.

These debates of international collaboration and partnership, already started in the 90's, but in 2015 we should finally put them into practice in a systematical and fundamental way.

The dichotomy ethnology and art is over. To me it seems superficial because it limits our thinking. We can have an anthropological approach towards art and vice versa but we should not think exclusively. We must mix different disciplines of humanities.

We have to show in our museum the historical process of globalization, the history of encounters from different perspectives. We will have to highlight different worldviews and connexions, collisions of worldviews, multiple confrontations of different kind of local histories. A museum that builds bridges and questions on how other visions and knowledge have been adapted, adopted, rejected, integrated or ignored throughout the centuries. That is my wish.

It is also important to tell the biography of these collected objects. Their own story, from their fabrication till today, not just give them an “ethnographical” signification. Notions of authenticity have to be reconsidered: What means authenticity, when First Nation People started to produce pincushions for the foreigners that became a kind of proto-touristic production? Or the famous “*minkisi*”, those nailed power sculptures from the Congo that have been adapted to the European taste already in the 1880's? How can we explain the origin of ideas when in Afghanistan the people copied the flowers from the German fashion journals BRIGITTE or BURDA MODEN and started to produce bags with these flower embroideries on top. Travellers were convinced to buy typical Afghan motives, when they found the bags offered in the traditional market places in the 70's.

Saxony was already global before globalization! We are dealing with “exotic objects” since centuries. You find

it back in the Grünes Gewölbe⁸ as well as in the oldest African collections of the Museum für Völkerkunde in Dresden. We have to study the history of the items in our collections in every detail.

Where do you see the missing links in the ethnographic collections?

NJS: I miss contemporary objects in most of our collections; with contemporary objects I do not necessary mean contemporary art works but contemporary expressions: modern ritual masks and costumes, reinvented traditions. For example, I collected for my exhibition on West-African voodoo⁹ contemporary costumes and masks, made of African wax produced in the Netherlands and Chinese fabrics. I find this mixture of new and traditional material and concepts exciting – but in most collections you would never find this global mix neither collected nor documented, because it is considered as unauthentic, “impure”.



Nanette Jacomijn Snoep (r) during the interview with Anette Rein in Leipzig. Fotos: Ute Uhlemann, SES

Coming back to the aspect: blurring the perspective. What does this mean to you in the last consequences?

NJS: First we have to give up the boundaries of our classification, we have to mix all approaches, and of course, we must always include the European perspectives as equal ones to the rest of the world. A museum has to be a place where an intercultural dialogue must be understood as a bi-directional process. This must happen in all our analyses of items, concepts and world views.

As a Museum we have to avoid the so-called “Ethnographic Present”¹⁰. When we show objects, we have to replace them in time and space. For that reason we have to mention on every label the time when the object has been created or used and if we don’t have this information, at least the time when it has been collected or when it has entered the museum. The same for the author: if we do not know an author – which is almost always the case in ethnological collections – one should mention this on the label as: „unidentified author“.

The mention of an “anonymous author” is already an information and avoids that “ethnographic anonymity”. In this way, several traps originating in colonial times and some traps of our contemporary ethnocentricity could be avoided.

A new systematization of information should be applied: 1. Author/ownership, 2. the time and place of production, 3. explanations about the former use of an item, 4. The time and context of collection and last but not least 5. Additional information on the biography of the object through: stories of the first owner, stories of the context of collecting, stories about its itinerary till its showcase, stories of its collector and so on.

As I could observe in an exhibition on ordinary and shapeless African charms¹¹, some of the visitors were seriously emotionally touched by the personal items together with the stories which we presented. I found two different reactions: either the visitors started to laugh and were amused by some funny anecdotes about collecting those objects and cultural misunderstandings, or they started to cry when they were confronted with the personal explanations of some objects. For example, the *Ibeji* sculptures (twin sculptures from Nigeria) are created when a mother has lost one of her twins. These sculptures which represent her dead child have a strong therapeutic value, as they also simply help the mother mourning about the child’s death. When you give in this case a personal individual story of the object and not just a so-called objective and neutral ethnographical explanation, the visitor is able to understand the meaning of an object. Something that seems so far and exotic comes suddenly nearer to you. I would like to collect the personal story of such a mother and to present her story to the visitors in an exhibition. I want to invite the visitors to think about their own feelings in comparable situations. They could find out that mourning if someone dies, is a common human experience.

And then, an exotic voodoo object that often provokes fear in exhibitions, becomes suddenly understandable.

We could ask the following question in any exhibition: Are different cultures really different or how could I develop a closer understanding coming from my own cultural background? However, the aim of any museum’s exhibition work should be to mediate comparable common experiences and emotions of human life. It is necessary to construct bridges between people from Saxony and for example with people in Nigeria, so that they can develop empathy for each other. I want to offer subjective personal stories to touch the visitors on an emotional level.

What do you remember as the most important situations in your childhood and during your education which let to your interest in anthropology and in other cultures different than your own? Which were the most important steps in your life?

NJS: I am a child of two art historians. My mother worked as an art critic, my father was the director of the Frans Hals Museum in Haarlem. During my childhood (*1971), I sat for hours in the Frans Hals restoration workshop – that was in the 1980’s – observing the conservators restoring these huge and impressing paintings. I loved to see how they worked with great accuracy and concentration. When I was a child, I was able to visit museum-stores, artists studios... I’ve had drawings of Rembrandt in my child hands... I’ve visited with my parents hundreds of museums, castles, churches, biennales and so on. I was immersed in the art world.

The second important point of my family background could be my father’s Jewish roots and my Mother’s first years of her childhood in a Japanese internment camp in Indonesia during the Second World War. These experiences from the war, shared by my parents, were perhaps the basis of my extraordinary childhood compared to other children in the Netherlands. This was the reason why we never ate Dutch food at home: I was brought up with Yiddish and Indonesian cuisine and by second world-war traumatized parents.

These two family backgrounds that has maybe something to do with a kind of feeling to be a minority, could explain why I was very early, when I was a teenager, very interested – or almost obsessed – in slavery history and the black diaspora, genocides and colonial history.

After finishing school, I worked as an au pair in Paris; there I was introduced to the Togolese community (they taught me to cook Togolese). These experiences deepened my interest in Africa. After some detours I started to study cultural anthropology in Paris. In 1995, I got my first job at the Musée de l’Homme.

For me it is very interesting to come to Germany and to work in Saxony, and to talk with you, I become more and more aware, that one underestimates one’s own cultural background – although, I always concentrated my inter-

est on the little stories of other people with a minority identity.

In January 2015 the whole family, you together with your three sons and your husband, moved from Paris to Dresden, where you have started your new job as the director of the three ethnographic museums. I admire how you are able to combine the different roles to be a mother to three children and to be a director in three institutions in three cities with over 200 staff members. How do you can manage it all? Where does your motivation and energy come from?

NJS: My family have always been energetic people and worked hard through their lives. Personally, I like to work at night and need only four to five hours sleep. I can also concentrate in all places and situations and I am disturbed by nobody. I don't know where this energy comes from but I am grateful for it.

My motivation and energy for this new position has to be seen in the context of telling many personal stories of different people which were forgotten until now. I want to work with the collections and ask many questions to find the biography of the things and the different individual stories which are connected with these objects. To give back their voices.

Do you have any special message for our readers of the magazine ExpoTime!?

NJS: Yes, thank you very much for giving me the place to ask the readers to do a favor for the three museums. I would like to ask them for their active participation: Please, help me and send me your suggestions for a new name for our three Saxonian ethnographic museums, the so-called SES. Together, they have some of the world's best ethnographic collections and are located in three different cities. They are together under one big roof, the *Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden*, SKD¹², that means 14 museums together with collections from all over the world.

Since I began my work as the director of these museums, I have been thinking about the right words for creating a new name. During the last 15 years some of the ethnographic museums have changed their names like: "*Weltmuseum*"¹³ in Vienna, "*Museum der Weltkulturen*"¹⁴ in Frankfurt/M., "*Museum fünf Kontinente*"¹⁵ in Munich or "*Museum der Kulturen*"¹⁶ in Basel. But what do they mean with "*Welt*" [World] or with "*Weltkulturen*" [world cultures]?¹⁷ What does it exactly mean "world culture" if Europe is excluded?¹⁸ So I'm curious to know what you, dear readers, think of this. I invite you to help finding a new name for our future museums of multiple knowledge and visions. The winner will receive a nice surprise.

Please, send your suggestions to: voelkerkunde.dresden@skd.museum I am looking forward to hearing from you very soon.

Thank you very much for this inspiring conversation con-



cerning your ideas and your family background as the source for your energy and motivation to continue in your approach to looking for little individual personal stories to lighten our lives. I wish all the best for you and the three museums in Saxonia.¹⁹

Notes

- 1 <http://www.voelkerkunde-dresden.de/> (accessed July 9, 2015)
- 2 <http://www.mvl-grassimuseum.de/> (accessed July 9, 2015)
- 3 <http://www.voelkerkunde-herrnhut.de/> (accessed July 9, 2015)
- 4 <http://www.skd.museum/> (accessed July 9, 2015)
- 5 <http://www.ville-ge.ch/meg/index.php> (accessed July 9, 2015)
- 6 http://artdaily.com/news/76088/Nanette-Jacomijn-Snoep-appointed-new-Director-of-the-State-Ethnographic-Collections-of-Saxony#.VZ_L_vntmko (accessed July 10, 2015)
- 7 Parekh 2000



Nanette Jacomijn Snoep explains a nail fetish in a Tangaro-video, hosted by dailymotion (French). Sorry for the rather antique video technique.

- 8 <http://www.skd.museum/?id=73> (accessed May 14, 2015)
- 9 Snoep 2014
- 10 Fabian 1983
- 11 Snoep 2009
- 12 <http://www.skd.museum/> (accessed May 14, 2015)
- 13 <http://www.weltmuseumwien.at/> (accessed May 14, 2015)
- 14 <http://www.weltkulturenmuseum.de/> (accessed May 31, 2015)
- 15 <http://www.museum-fuenf-kontinente.de/> (accessed May 14, 2015)
- 16 <http://www.mkb.ch/de/programm.html> (accessed May 14, 2015)
- 17 Mueller-Straten 2014
- 18 Not many German ethnographic museums have an European department.
- 19 Thanks to Paul Williams for the proof reading.

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- Snoep, Nanette: *Maîtres du Désordre*, RMN. Paris 2012
- Snoep, Nanette: *Human Zoos. The Invention of the Savage*. Paris 2011
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- Snoep, Nanette: *Recettes des Dieux. L'esthétique du fétiche*. Paris 2009

Exhibitions

- Voodoo, The Art of Seeing Differently. Strasbourg 2014
- Recipes of the Gods. The Aesthetics of the Fetish. Paris 2009

Was sind museologisch durchdachte Ausstellungen?



Martin Schärer
Die Ausstellung - Theorie und Exempel

Schärer's Buch beinhaltet einen theoretischen und einen analytisch-praktischen Teil, in dem die theoretischen Aussagen anhand einer Ausstellung überprüft werden. Der theoretische Teil ist semiotisch-museologisch orientiert und verarbeitet auch französischsprachige Positionen, die im deutschen Sprachraum nicht immer bekannt sind.

9783932704758 EUR 30,-

Verlag Dr. C. Müller-Straten
<http://www.museum-aktuell.de/shop/>
Fax: 0049-(0)89 839 690 44

- published 27 April 2005 <http://www.pukeariki.com/Research/Taranaki-Research-Centre/Taranaki-Stories/Taranaki-Story/id/108/title/the-little-fakes>
- 4 R. J. Watt: James Edward Little's Forged Marquesan Stilt Steps. In: Records of the National Museum of New Zealand 2, no. 7/982, p. 49-63
 - 5 Kevin Dixen: Torquay's Master Maori Art Forger. In Torquay Herald Express, 21.8.2013. <http://www.torquayheraldexpress.co.uk/KEVIN-DIXON-Torquay-s-Master-Maori-Art-Forger/story-19688112-detail/story.html#Mz70AaX16kXVZY48.99>
 - 6 cp. note 3
 - 7 http://www.freemanart.ca/greatest_art_forgers_fakers.htm
 - 8 Watt according to Hoskin: "Dr Watt says the most distinctive thing about Little's carving style was his method of rendering grooves. This method varied little from fake to fake and formed the basis of the Maori motifs which he used. His most distinctive grooving was the 'S' shaped simple double spiral. He often carved it in mirror-image and sometimes he simplified it further into a pakura-like motif. This 'S' form is found on nearly all of his fakes in both wood and bone."

At a glance 2

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Special thanks to Isa Päßgen of Lenbachhaus Munich and her press dept. and to the teams of Yinchuan Museum and National Gallery Singapore as well.

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