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MUSEUM



PELL

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Wanderer Possibilities

For the first time in the history of Johann Jacobs Museum, the personal library of Klaus J. Jacobs is the subject of an exhibition. This library, which includes botanical expositions, travel journals, culinary compendia and economic analyses dating from the 16th to the 20th centuries, is considered the world's most important collection of written material on the subject of "coffee."



Dr Book , Reveal t

But that alone is only scratching the surface. This particular luxury commodity and stimulant not only reflects the history of globalization with all its depths and dark sides, it also sheds light on the present-day, transcultural mix stemming from trade relations and hegemonies, and the migration of people and things.

Rather than systematically process the library in a way that could only spell tedium for visitors, we decided to match the impulsive character of this transcultural hodgepodge and allow the books to chit-chat between and amongst themselves. This chatter is sparked by the chance motif of the “wave,” which appears in textual or pictorial form in virtually all of the books: in early European accounts of daring voyages and exquisitely-drawn encyclopedias of Japanese fish and mermaids, in romanticized views of Sugarloaf Mountain in Rio and depictions showing a hunt for slaves who have escaped into the swamps of Suriname.

Seen together in this broader picture, knowledge – a blindly trusted authority even today – reveals itself both in its historical instability and its power-technological function. The so-called “truth” is an inexhaustible catchword when it comes to justifying social exclusion, hierarchies and other forms of structural violence. This close link between “power” and “knowledge” is not always as obvious as it is in the racist discourses of the 19th century; it is also inscribed in the educational encyclopedias that purport to grasp, organize and explain the entire world – a claim that, with historical distance, proved a fallacy.

SOME YEARES
TRAVELS
INTO
DIVERS PARTS OF
ASIA and AFRIQUE.

What is it about Me?

But this exhibition does not content itself with a half-shuddering, half-amused fascination with the absurd and past. It traces a line back to the present by embedding the written word into new contexts, which in turn reveal themselves to be just as outlandish.

Thus we re-encounter the fish from Engelbert Kaempfer's Japanese encyclopedia (1729) in Tsukiji (2001), Allan Sekula's film showing harsh, workaday life at the fish market in Tokyo, and Swiss envoy Johann Jakob von Tschudi's journey to visit Swiss emigrants to Brazil (1866) is accompanied by a series of pictures showing the 19th century's incomprehensible arrogance in matters of "race" and "gender" as an unenlightened, present-day issue.



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Courteous and Benevolent
READER.