

J O H A N N

J A K O B S

M U S E U M

The Johann Jacobs Museum's first exhibition consists mainly of research materials mixed with items from the Klaus J. Jacobs collection (18th-century porcelain figurines from Meissen), archive material relating to Maya Deren (from the Martina Kudláček archive in Vienna and New York) and photographs by contemporary artists (Lidwien van de Ven and George Osofi).

A loose correspondence between themes (such as "black gold", which may be either coffee or crude oil), media (such as film, but also the exhibition) and textures (such as porcelain or sequins) provides a rough outline of the cultural hybrid forms that have developed along global trade routes. These intercultural hybrid forms will largely determine the Museum's exhibitions in years to come.

Our plans for the
future

The four photographs by reportage photographer and artist George Osodi (born 1974 in Lagos, Nigeria) are taken from two series of works: Oil Rich Niger Delta (2003–10) and DE MONEY “Ghana Gold” (2010), which can be seen in Zurich in 2014/15.



The Niger Delta has long been linked up to the global economy. From the 16th century onwards, the African west coast was a main centre of the transatlantic slave trade. Since the discovery of crude oil in the 1950s, a trade every bit as lucrative as it is dirty has developed in the Delta: multinational concerns pump the “black gold” out of the earth and transport it through pipelines hundreds of kilometres long to the ocean, where tankers wait under naval protection.

The local population has no share whatsoever of the profits, which account for around 95% of Nigeria’s export income. At the same time, ordinary people suffer at the hands of local gangs, who are equally opposed to the oil companies and to central government, and who lay claim to a territory rich in resources. They systematically tap the pipelines and sell the crude oil thus obtained on the black market. The oil from these tapped pipelines, which often explode, trickles down into the groundwater of one of the world’s largest wetlands.

The golden-yellow wall shows a small gold mine in Obuasi (Ghana). Many of these mines are operated illegally by Chinese, who use enormous machines to turn over the entire region. Thousands of Chinese migrant workers have emigrated to Ghana over the past few decades to try their luck in the gold rush. Once abandoned, the mines are combed by the African population, including children, who search feverishly for the residues missed by the industrial machines.

The anode slurry obtained in this way is mixed with mercury to precipitate the gold.



Supply Chains



Wilhelm Gaensly , born in 1843 in Wellhausen (Thurgau), emigrated to Brazil with his parents in 1848. He first worked as a photographer in Salvador de Bahia but relocated his studio to São Paulo in 1895.



It was here that he became an outstanding chronicler of the Brazilian coffee boom and of the burgeoning metropolis close to the plantations whose population rocketed from 47 000 to 700 000 between 1886 and 1924. The explosion was due to the many European immigrants who were brought into the country to offset the acute shortage of labour in the plantations following the abolition of slavery in 1888.

Apart from the hopeful European immigrants he photographed during the final miles of their crossing or after arrival at the Santos immigration centre, Gaensly's subjects included the coffee plantations and warehouses, or the Avenida Paulista, opened in 1892, which was lined by the villas of coffee barons.

The new arrivals sent these and other images in the form of postcards to their relatives in Europe. They served as propaganda, projecting the image of a modern Brazil to the world outside and attracting investors and industrial engineers. At the same time, they were designed to persuade ordinary working people to make the leap across the Atlantic.

In 2014, the Johann Jacobs Museum will dedicate a retrospective to Guilherme Gaensly.



Gaensly or News from the New World



Today, São Paulo is a megalopolis with a population of around 19 million and the Avenida Paulista one of its main arteries. Here, too, we find the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP), whose collection was assembled in Europe from 1947 onward by an Italian immigrant, Pietro Maria Bardi, on behalf of a Brazilian media tycoon. In view of the country's internationalization, it was important to the ruling elite to demonstrate their European roots and, more generally speaking, to uphold western standards of civilization.

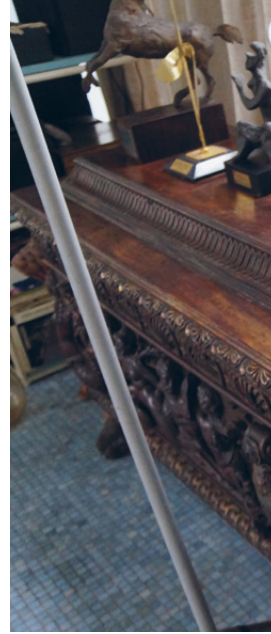
Between 1956 and 1968, Lina Bo Bardi, Bardi's wife, designed and built a freestanding glass structure with no interior walls to house the collection. Apart from this, she developed a revolutionary suspended display system consisting of glass panels weighed down by concrete blocks that presented works frontally, with no additional information (all the details could be found on the back). In stark contrast to other museums, which arrange their collections in terms of national schools of painting, chronology, genre, media or masters, the MASP allows visitors to trace their own personal route through the labyrinth of paintings.

The presentation of the works as isolated pieces also reflects their status as the flotsam and jetsam of history and the course of time. They share a migratory fate. For instance, Auguste Renoir's portrait of two children ("Pink and Blue", Alice et Elisabeth Cahen d'Anvers, 1881), one of the Museum's most popular works, was once part of a collection seized from a Jewish family.

Bo Bardi's ingenious suspension system was destroyed in the 1990s.

Almost a hundred years after Gaensly, photographer Hans Günter Flieg (born 1923) emigrated to Brazil with his parents. Unlike the Gaenslys, their reason for emigrating was not work but persecution of the Jews in Germany. In São Paulo Flieg made a name for himself as one of the best industrial and advertising photographers, but the pictures he took of Bo Bardi's legendary exhibition "Bahia no Ibirapuera" (1959) are of incomparable quality (the series will be shown at the Johann Jacobs Museum in 2013/14).

The photo strip shows a gloomy image of Wilhelmine-era apartment blocks, the view from Flieg's window in Chemnitz, which he captured on film directly before the flight from Germany on 21 November 1939. The picture adjacent to it, his first photograph in Brazil, shows a vase with a bunch of orchids.



MASP or a see-through Display





The Museu de Arte Popular (Museum of Popular Art) in Salvador de Bahia (Brazil) existed for only a brief period, from 1960 until its closure by the military junta in 1964. It was housed in the Solar do Unhão, a cluster of 16th-century buildings with a chequered history, which had served variously as a slave centre, ammunition depot and tobacco factory.

The Museum was founded by architect and designer Lina Bo Bardi, who emigrated from Italy to Brazil in 1947. In Salvador de Bahia, the former capital of the first Portuguese colonialists and centre of the slave trade, Bo Bardi found herself confronted with the interrelationship of western modernity and colonialism.

Her reaction to the experience was to set up a museum that spotlighted the simple handmade products of local artisans. She bought the artefacts, which included ceramic dishes, coffee beakers made from oilcans, oil lamps and baskets, on markets in and around Salvador. For ordinary people and the social establishment, they had no value whatsoever as exhibits. In this respect, the museum differed from conventional ethnological collections.

Bo Bardi's somewhat analytical choice of presentation, which directs the gaze of museum visitors to every single item while underscoring both formal and structural relationships, was an acknowledgement both of the creative drive of the simple population and of the crude materials of which the items were made.

Bo Bardi's collection, however, was not restricted merely to displaying objects that provided an image of society: it understood society as a dynamic and changing phenomenon. This becomes clear when we look at the gigantic open staircase that Bo Bardi installed in the Museum.

Although Bahia was one of the poorest regions of Brazil (and thus of the world) at that time, it was also a fertile source of Afro-Brazilian culture. The Museum staircase was a response to this culture, of which dance and movement were central elements. It was not unlike a Baroque-style open staircase, which served people both as a platform and as a backdrop.

The picture taken by Gaensly, a Swiss emigrant who establishes himself as Brazil's undisputed pioneer of photography, clearly demonstrates the kind of movement Bo Bardi's staircase rejected. In the photograph, we see a long, snaking line of dockworkers lugging heavy sacks of coffee onto a ship. Some carry one sack, others two, but in all cases the workers' backs are bent under their weight.



We build a museum

Would there have been room for the small Meissen figurines on Freud's desktop? Would they have felt at ease with all the "Egyptians, Chinese and Greeks", or vice versa?

Meissen porcelain was produced from 1710 onwards on the Albrechtsburg in Meissen an der Elbe for August the Strong (1670-1733), later known as Friedrich August I, Elector of Saxony, and from 1697 as August II, King of Poland. It came as a response to the monopoly on "white gold" held for centuries mainly by China, but also by Japan.

The history of European porcelain began with its invention by alchemist and pharmacist Johann Friedrich Böttger, who had developed its precursor in the form of a hard red stoneware, known as Böttgersteinzeug, at the Saxon court in 1706. A coffee pot complete with cup and saucer by Böttger are part of the frieze at the Johann Jacobs Museum (in the hallway on the ground floor).

The figurines "Lady with pug dog and blackamoor servant" (around 1740) and "The Indian Lovers" (around 1745) demonstrate the virtuoso use of materials made by Johann Joachim Kändler, the court sculptor of August the Strong. At the same time, these pieces are representative of a genre unique in the decorative arts, with motifs derived primarily from depictions of the court during the age of gallantry. The "blackamoor servant" and the Indian "flowers", which allude to Japanese models, are the only features that hint at the complexity of the world beyond the Saxon court.



White Gold

Filmmaker and anthropologist Maya Deren went to Haiti for the first time in 1947 with a view to studying local dance forms. Once there, she realized that these dance forms were inseparably bound up with the religious rites and rituals of vodou. If she were to acquire a deeper understanding of vodou in all its spiritual and emotional dimensions, she would have become part of the ritual community herself.

Vodou is a syncretic religion. It combines the various African religions of the slaves shipped to Haiti from 1502 onwards, the Catholicism of the Spanish and French colonial masters, and Indian beliefs brought to Haiti by Caribbean tribes who had been forced into slavery by the Spaniards.

The footage produced during Deren's participation in vodou rituals does not strictly follow the rules of scientific anthropology and does not show authentic practices of faith. Her films are more of an amalgam arising out of the confrontation and fusion of western and non-western practices, technologies and modes of depiction. Deren did not edit the stock herself. It was stored, rolled up in coffee tins, for decades at the Anthology Film Archive in New York, where Martina Kudláček eventually restored it with the help of funding from the Johann Jacobs Museum.

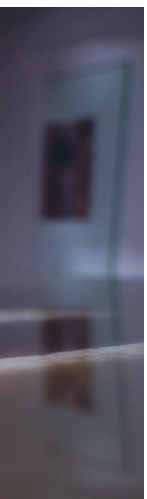
From the 16th century onwards Haiti was a Spanish colony, where African slaves cultivated cane sugar. In the late 17th century, the western part of the island fell under French colonial rule. By the end of the 18th century, this western part (Saint-Domingue) was producing around 60% of the coffee destined for France and England as well as 40% of their sugar imports.

The Haitian slave rebellion (1791-1804), which ended successfully with the defeat of Napoleon's army in 1802 and the establishment of the first "black" republic, had been strongly inspired by the French Revolution, whose lessons were carried from Paris to Haiti by educated mulattoes. The slave uprising was triggered by a vodou religious ceremony, during which a priestess was "possessed" by a spirit – a Loa – who serves the creator deity Bon Dieu. This spirit was Erzulie Dantor, the Loa of women and children and a militant figure whose symbols included the sword and a pierced heart.

The vodou banner, which is clearly in the style of depictions of Madonna, was produced in the mid-20th century at the time when Maya Deren was in Haiti. Apart from the symbols of Erzulie Dantor – a sword and dagger – the female figure also bears features – a heart – of the other central female spirit, Erzulie Freda. Unlike the belligerent Erzulie Dantor, Freda stands for love, dreams and luxury. On the lower edge of the banner we find the ritual drums that were used during religious ceremonies to summon up spirits and incite them to take possession of human beings.

The Johann Jacobs Museum has scheduled an exhibition about Maya Deren's visit to Haiti for 2014.

Deren in Haiti





Guilherme Gaensly (1843-1928) took the group photograph in front of the Hospedaria de Imigrantes (immigration centre) in São Paulo in the early 20th century. Once equipped with a passport and a job, immigrants from Europe would set out from here to start their new lives. The barefooted girl to the left of the foreground grips her clothing tightly, as if it gave her something solid to hold onto, and expresses the general mood: a mixture of abashed curiosity and scepticism. The fatigue of several weeks at sea is apparent, as well as the sense of relief at having finally arrived. New arrivals sent group photographs like these as postcards to their family and relations in the old world.

Like the Brazilian immigrants (or the paintings in Bo Bardi's MASP), the small figurines on Sigmund Freud's desktop (in the photograph by artist Lidwien van de Ven) remain firmly on the threshold. Freud arranged them in such a way that they faced him full on, as if they were interlocutors whose expertise he relied on in the course of his explorations into the civilizing recesses of the subconscious. Or like warders who accompanied him on his risk-fraught journeys into the psyche. The figurines come from a variety of different cultures. Chinese statuettes from the Tang dynasty, Egyptian divinities and pieces from ancient Rome are all clearly identifiable. If Freud's personal museum appears extremely fragile, it was at the same time eminently portable and able to adapt to the history's crueller moments. As Freud himself wrote, the "Egyptians, Chinese and Greeks" had survived his flight from the Nazis to exile in London intact. Today, his desk stands in the Freud Museum in Hampstead.



Little Beings

