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国立民族学博物館学術情報リポジトリ National Museum of Ethnology

Revisiting “Images of Other Cultures” : Impact of the 1997 Exhibition and Beyond

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Research Resource

Revisiting “Images of Other Cultures”:
Impact of the 1997 Exhibition and Beyond

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「異文化へのまなざし」展再訪
——1997年の展示の衝撃とその後——

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1 Introduction

This article is derived from a 2022 lecture given at “Africa and Beyond: A conference celebrating John Mack’s contribution” (23 and 24 May 2022, University of East Anglia (UEA), Norwich, UK). The present article is much more detailed. The conference was held to celebrate John Mack’s contributions to the study of African Art and Cultures at the time of his retirement from UEA in 2022.¹⁾

I was attached to the Museum of Mankind (Figure 1), i.e. Department of Ethnography of the British Museum, between 1991 and 1992, where I came to know Dr. John Mack, Keeper of the Department at the time. He and I jointly curated an exhibition entitled “Images of Other Cultures” at our Museum, the National Museum of Ethnology (abbreviated in Japanese as Minpaku), Osaka, Japan in 1997 (Figure 2).

Through this exhibition, we strove to trace the “entanglement of gazes” as it has occurred in modern times, by which I mean how the West, Africa, Oceania, and Japan have regarded one another. This article presents a review of the exhibition and an assessment of the exhibition in relation to the history of ethnographic museums and their future in the 21st century.



Figure 1 Former Museum of Mankind. Today’s Royal Academy of Arts, as of now. (Unless otherwise specified, all photographs are by the author.)

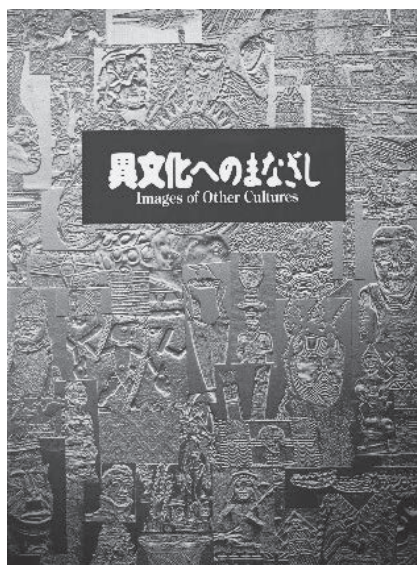


Figure 2 Front cover of the exhibition catalogue *Images of Other Cultures* 1997.

2 1997 “The Images of Other Cultures” Exhibition

In 1997, the National Museum of Ethnology celebrated its 20th anniversary. During the quarter century since the Museum opened, circumstances surrounding the world’s ethnological museums changed a great deal. It is common knowledge that the world’s ethnological museums, including Minpaku, had until then aimed mainly at the research, collection, and exhibition of “other cultures” as seen from within their own cultures. Since the 1980s, however, a burgeoning awareness arose in people around the world of their “own culture” and “own history.” Until then, they had been the subjects of exhibitions. They began protesting against this prevalent one-sided approach to exhibitions of ethnic cultures. Already the function of the ethnological museum as a site for a simulated world tour had been consigned to the past. The gaze which the ethnological museum had cast at “other cultures” through its collection and display had been called into question.

The exhibition “Images of Other Cultures” was held in the Special Exhibition Hall of Minpaku from 25 September 1997 through 27 January 1998 (Figure 3). It then moved to the Setagaya Art Museum in Tokyo, opening there on 12 February and finally closing on 12 April.

The exhibition, which was based on materials and photographs of the collection of the British Museum, was created by combining the collections of many museums in Japan, beginning with those of Minpaku and the Setagaya Art



Figure 3 “Images of Other Cultures” exhibition at the National Museum of Ethnology (Minpaku), 1997.

Museum. Specifically, the objects on display were mainly materials and/or works from Africa, Oceania, the West, and Japan. Through these various materials, we strove to elucidate how the West, Africa, Oceania, and Japan have regarded one another during modern times. Moreover, we tried to trace this exchange of “gazes” over time.

Combining these collections might have provoked a sense of incongruity. Africa and Oceania are two regions usually addressed in terms of contrasting images, particularly as wilderness or paradise. Their respective cultures have been regarded as “alien”: the furthest removed from the cultures of the West. They were even called “primitive.” These regions have most commonly been where ethnologists, anthropologists, and ethnological museums have collected objects and information. In terms of quantity, materials from these two regions are by far the greater part of the ethnographic collections of the British Museum. Furthermore, certainly, regarding Africa, Oceania, and Japan together in this manner had never been attempted before, at least in the mode of display of exhibitions.

On reflection, Japan is unmistakably an “other culture” when regarded from Western eyes. That judgment notwithstanding, the Japanese have come to see themselves as part of the Western world. Moreover, they have adopted a Western perspective toward other cultures, regarding Africa and Oceania as exotic or alien. This special exhibition was an attempt to throw some light precisely on the Japanese view of “other cultures,” to gain awareness of the gaze we direct at others. It raised the question of how the West, Africa, Oceania, and Japan have looked at each other during the modern era.

3 Introduction to the Exhibition: The Time Tunnel

We arranged a long entrance section for the exhibition. For this first attempt to bring together Africa, Oceania, and Japan, we thought it was necessary to allow visitors to become accustomed to this combination and thereby become comfortable with the exhibition's mode of visual display.

This entrance section, known as the Time Tunnel, comprised 30 sets of three photographs, for a total of 90 photographs (Figure 4). The various sets each included one photograph of Africa, one of Oceania, and one of Japan. Each set illustrated a particular theme. The sets as a whole were arranged to trace a temporal regression, from our present into the past. At the entrance were displayed three photographs of rush hours: the Shijō-Kawaramachi crossing in Kyoto, a harbor in Fiji, and a traffic jam in Accra, Ghana. They were followed by other themes: "tourist shows," "markets," and "souvenir photos."

Near the end was a set of "umbrellas." On the day when the 19th turned into the 20th century, people throughout the world, almost as one, began to brandish umbrellas. Photographs taken at that time show people from Japan, Ghana, and Tonga under black umbrellas, standing in the scorching sun. For many people then, perhaps, the umbrella was a sign of approaching civilization.

The 30 sets of photographs demonstrated that, throughout modernity, the people of Africa, Oceania, and Japan have been breathing the same historical air. Furthermore, in fact, this precise point was what we were trying to establish with the exhibition. The entrance through the Time Tunnel hinted at our conclusion, as clarified below.



Figure 4 Time Tunnel, on display at the 1997 exhibition "Images of Other Cultures" at the National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, Japan. (Hereafter IOC 1997)

4 Room I. Western Views of Other Cultures: Africa, Oceania, and Japan in the British Museum

After passing through the Time Tunnel, the visitor stepped into the first room. This section recreated the exhibition halls from the British Museum of a century ago; to be exact, they showed the Oceania, Africa, and Japan rooms, circa 1910, from the British Museum's ethnographical galleries.

A great amount of work was required to recreate these exhibition rooms. Only very recently have we come to realize that the display of ethnographic materials has always reflected an understanding of “other cultures” existing at the time. This circumspective self-consciousness was not common at the beginning of the 20th century, nor was there any conscious effort to leave any record of how objects were displayed. Although we sought photographs of the ethnographical galleries far and wide, only one image remained (Figure 5). Even this photograph, however, does not seem to have been taken to record what the display itself looked like. The focus seems rather have been on the electric lights hanging from the ceiling. In 1890, the British Museum was the first public building in London to have been “electrified.” At the time, the fact that the exhibition halls were furnished with electric light was a source of pride for the museum. Apparently, this photograph was taken to record the fact that the museum had electric lighting.

Perhaps more surprising is that there was very little written documentation. Even in the few remaining guides to the exhibition halls, an entry such as “Case A: A small, carved, wooden figure from Nigeria” does not explain what materials are



Figure 5 The British Museum Ethnographical Gallery, showing South American and Asian materials. Photo: Donald Macbeth, 1907.

being described (Trustees of the British Museum 1910a). In sum, there was nothing to be done except to dig up from the acquisition records those materials relating to Oceania, Africa, and Japan that had been collected by the British Museum before the publication of the various documents and to identify those objects which are most likely to have been those on display at the time.

As might be apparent from the photograph, the exhibition space of the time overflowed with objects that had been sent from all corners of the British Empire. This accumulation of objects, in and of itself, created an impression of the world as the property of the British Empire. If we had tried to recreate these galleries as they were at the time, filled to overflowing with this mass of materials, using only the holdings of the British Museum, the number of loan materials would have been enormous. We therefore decided to borrow the main materials, whether masterpieces or outstanding examples, from the British Museum and to make up the balance of the exhibits with objects in the Minpaku collection, which had either been collected in the 19th century or which could be confirmed to be of a 19th-century style. Actually, recreating the Africa and Oceania galleries alone required about 100 objects from the British Museum collections and about 600 from the Minpaku collections, for a total of some 700 objects.

Let us step into the recreated Ethnographical Galleries (Figure 6). On display in the Oceania gallery was the collection of James Cook, assembled during his third circumnavigation of the world and including a ceremonial wooden crown from Hawaii, in addition to rattles, drums, and ornaments used for the *hula*. What most drew the visitors' attention were a helmet and cloak (Figure 7) made from



Figure 6 Reconstruction of the early 20th century Ethnographical Gallery at the British Museum (Oceania Gallery). IOC 1997.

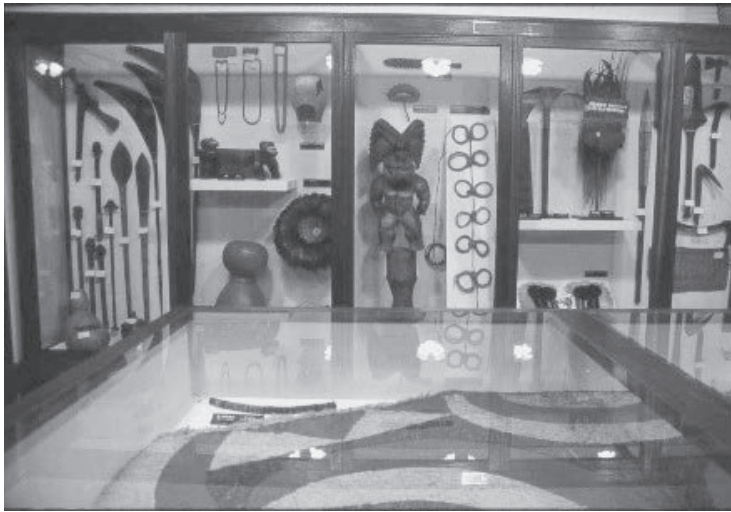


Figure 7 Feather cloak (*'ahu'ula*) and a figure of war god *ku* collected by the London Missionary Society in the 1820s (center of the wall behind). IOC 1997.

magnificent feathers, which a Hawaiian chief wore. Several species of Hawaiian tropical birds were driven to extinction by competition among chieftains in making these objects. Near the wall is an “idol” brought back as a souvenir of their mission by early missionaries to the islands of the South Pacific, one of many bequests by the London Missionary Society to the British Museum.

Many visitors who saw this recreated gallery initially seemed to lose their bearings. There were a litany of complaints: the room was dark; there were too many objects, making it impossible to take one's time and look at them individually; the small captions were difficult to read, and so on. As soon as we added a sign explaining that “The lighting and captions in this room both match those in the exhibition halls of the British Museum 100 years ago,” the complaints stopped, but the visitors continued to look confused. The confusion felt by the visitors can perhaps be regarded as proof that we have become accustomed to the kind of display practiced in art museums today, which spotlights individual pieces. We aimed at recreating a display as it was before history museums and art museums distinguished themselves. We allowed visitors to experience this type of space for themselves.

The so-called “trophy display” can be taken to represent the display as it was before history museums and art museums became differentiated. This display technique had been common in European noble houses since the Middle Ages: The most important booty acquired in battle would be arranged at the center, with weapons taken from the enemy radiating out from it. In the earliest ethnographic displays, this same technique was applied to display weapons of various “races.” In

the recreated Africa gallery (Figure 8), Maasai shields from East Africa were placed at the center, with spears and knives of neighboring tribes arranged as radiating out from them.

What stood out in the Africa gallery (Figure 9) were the bronze carvings of the Benin Kingdom of West Africa and some wooden carvings from the Kuba Kingdom of Central Africa, placed in two freestanding cases in the center of the room.

The Benin bronzes (Figure 10) were brought back to England in 1897 following the conquest of the Benin Kingdom by a British expedition. When their highly naturalistic modeling was first introduced to Europe, Europeans refused to believe that such technical proficiency could exist in Africa; it was loudly asserted that the Portuguese had brought Renaissance carving to Africa. Nowadays, of course, the African origin of the Benin carvings is recognized.

The Hungarian anthropologist, Emil Torday, collected the Kuba wooden carvings in another freestanding case in the 1900s. Among them, a portrait of the Kuba King (Figure 11) drew attention at the time as "the greatest art of black Africa" (Torday 1925: 203).

Thus, numerous pieces widely known today as masterpieces of African art and as the essence of the Oceanic culture had been on display by this time in the Ethnographical Galleries of the British Museum. At the beginning of the century, the British Museum's *Handbook to the Ethnographical Collections*, published in 1910, was widely regarded as the basic text for collectors of "art nègre" (Negro



Figure 8 Reconstruction of the so-called "trophy display." Maasai shields from East Africa were placed at the centre, with spears and knives of neighboring tribes radiating out from it. IOC 1997.



Figure 9 Reconstruction of the early 20th century Ethnographical Gallery at the British Museum (African Gallery). IOC 1997.

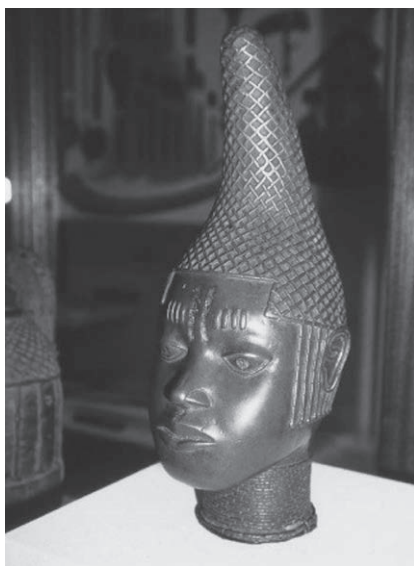


Figure 10 Head of a Queen Mother. Benin, Nigeria. 16th century, Brass. British Museum. Ethno: 1897.10–11.1. IOC 1997.



Figure 11 Figure (*ndop*). Kuba-Bushoong. The Democratic Republic of Congo. Wood, camwood. British Museum, collected by Emil Torday. Ethno: 1909.5–13.1. IOC 1997.

art) not only in England but also in France (Trustees of the British Museum 1910b). One could claim, therefore, that the general images of Africa and Oceania in Europe, as understood through objects, had already been formed in these galleries of the British Museum. What is interesting is how Japan was introduced in these same galleries at the time.

In the Ethnographical Galleries as of 1910, the only Japanese objects on display were swords, spears, bows and arrows, suits of armor and helmets, and matchlock rifles, which were arranged together with arms and armor from China, Persia, India, and others in a corner near the entrance entitled "Arms and Armor of the Orient" (Figure 12). By 1910, which one should remember as the time Japanese culture was being displayed in this manner, the Russo–Japanese War was already over. Japan felt immense national pride in believing that she had gained admission to the ranks of the imperial "powers." This was the Japan that was being represented simply by Japanese swords, armor, and helmets. This fact cannot but make Japanese realize the absurdity of Japan being displayed as an "other culture." If that is the case, however, it might also suggest that there was a similar bias in the impression of African and Oceanic cultures created by the Ethnographical Galleries.

It is noteworthy, however, that exhibits of Japanese objects in the British Museum at that time were not limited to the ethnographical gallery. A great deal was already known about the periods and styles of Japanese painting, and a great



Figure 12 Reconstruction of the Japanese exhibits in the early 20th century Ethnographical Gallery at the British Museum. IOC 1997.

number of paintings were exhibited according to this understanding in the Prints and Drawings Gallery. In the words of the *Handbook to the Ethnographical Collections* of the British Museum, “the work ofChina and Japan is primarily of artistic and archaeological interest,” was shown in a different location separate from the Ethnographical Gallery (Trustees of the British Museum 1910b: 45). Also at this time, the British public was intently watching the military advances being made by Japan in Asia. A popular, bi-weekly magazine called *Japan's Fight for Freedom* was published during the Russo–Japanese War. Therefore, the fact that Japan was represented by swords and armor in the Ethnographical Gallery of the British Museum in 1910 did not mean that the British public or the British Museum were closing their eyes to the changes taking place in Japan. Rather, this treatment was most likely attributable to the nature of ethnographic exhibits themselves, which take foreign or exotic cultures as their object of display. It is important to realize that 20th-century ethnological museums had generally inherited this legacy of a problematic, narrow gaze directed toward the other.

5 Room II. The West as Other Cultures: Europe as Seen by Africa, Oceania, and Japan

The first room, which recreated the Ethnographical Galleries of the British Museum, showed how the West had attempted to look at “other cultures.” In the

second room, by contrast, we showed a side of "other cultures" that the West never even bothered to look at, or, more specifically, a view of how Africa, Oceania, and Japan had actively incorporated Western culture and with it created wholly new cultures of their own. This aspect of "other cultures" had for a long time been eliminated from the exhibitions of ethnological museums because it was regarded as the result of a breakdown of "traditional" culture, and therefore "inauthentic." As a result, non-Western cultures were presented as if they were isolated from the outside world and untouched by change. However, the cultures of the world's peoples have always been undergoing dynamic change. It is this aspect of change, perhaps, which best reflects the fact of these cultures' modernity. What became apparent in this room was an aspect of Africa and Oceania that had not often been introduced in the past in Japan.

For example, in the corner, "The West as seen by Africa" (Figure 13), were Appliqué flags of the Fante people in Ghana, with the Union Jack sewn in appliqué. In Fante society, military companies based in some towns were organized during colonial days. From as early as the 17th century, before their colonization, these companies, called *Asafo*, actively incorporated British military organizations to intimidate neighboring ethnic groups. They adopted a system of gun salutes and parades. They also introduced flags. On these flags were sewn in appliqué the Union Jack of Great Britain, which was considered in the eyes of the Fante peoples to be a sign of great military power. In addition to the Union Jack, other symbols showing the extent of the power of the various companies were also incorporated into the designs. In the example shown in Figure 14, a large dragon was presented on the right, a crouching leopard on the left, and a small bird in front of a human



Figure 13 Room II "The West as seen by Africa." IOC 1997.



Figure 14 Appliqué flag, the emblem of an Asafo company. Fante people, Cape Coast, Ghana. c. 1940. Cotton. National Museum of Ethnology, formerly collection Peter Adler.

hand in the middle. The message being sent to the enemy was “We have a fear-some dragon on our side. We also have tamed the powerful leopard. Why should we fear you creatures like birds?”

A work inspired by European portraits was also there: one example of the altars (*duein fubara*) used to worship dead people among the Kalabari people residing in southern Nigeria (Figure 15). From the 15th century, the Kalabari people of southern Nigeria acted as middlemen in the trade linking Africa and Europe. In this process, large numbers of people from other ethnic groups in Africa were incorporated into Kalabari society. In the 19th century, altars in the form of a screen were devised for worshipping the dead, to comfort the spirits of these newly arrived Kalabari “strangers.” They were modeled on the framed pictures and photographs of family members, which European colonists used to decorate the walls of their homes. One can see in the Kalabari altars a dynamic process whereby people from “other cultures” were incorporated into “our culture” using the products of an “other culture.”

There are also many examples of objects that have heretofore been presented as “traditional crafts,” but which were initially created as a result of contact with Europe. One can cite an example from Oceania. A magnificent pearl shield made out of a nautilus shell, which was produced in the Solomon Islands was displayed in the corner “The West as seen by Oceania.” The shield has always been presented as a “masterpiece of the traditional arts of Oceania” (Figure 16). However, there are only 20 examples of such shields now known to exist throughout the world, all of which were collected around 1850. This was a period during which warfare was



Figure 15 Funeral Screen (*duein fubara*). Kalabari people, Nigeria, 19th century. Wood, raffia, textile, pigment. British Museum, presented by P. A. Talbot. IOC 1997.

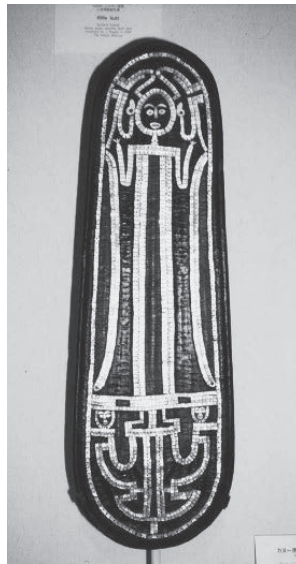


Figure 16 Ceremonial Shield. The Solomon Islands. Wood, cane, vegetable fibre, parinarium nut putty, pigment, nautilus shell. British Museum. IOC 1997.

suddenly breaking out in the region, in disputes over the wealth introduced by the commodity economy which accompanied the advance of the European countries (Thomas 1995: 78). The pearl shield was likely produced as a symbol of wealth and victory during exactly this period. Its magnificent design, too, was first created through contact with Europe.

The fact that new forms and customs are created through outside contact should be self-evident if one considers the formation of Japanese culture. However, little room has existed for this process to be incorporated in earlier ethnological exhibitions, which have regarded only the products of a “closed society” as “authentic ethnological materials.” In this second room, we displayed objects and photographs such as ivory (or whale teeth, in the case of Oceania) carved with European figures, flags, and ceremonial costumes incorporating formal Western styles. By arranging them in their various corners we showed how Africa, Oceania, and Japan looked at the West, thereby making it possible to recognize an aspect of modernism that was developing simultaneously and in parallel throughout the world, transcending regional boundaries.

6 Room III. Japanese Views of Other Cultures: Images of Africa and Oceania in Modern Times

As described up to this point, Africa, Oceania, and Japan made their way into modernity both while being looked at by the West while looking at the West. However, Japan began to compare itself to and consider itself as a member of the West. Furthermore, with this, it also seems to have adopted the image of “other cultures,” particularly the views of Africa and Oceania created in the West. In the third room, we traced historical changes in the Japanese view of Africa and Oceania through various media, including newspaper reports, books, cartoons, film posters, and television productions.

At the halfway point between two exhibition walls, we hung from the ceiling a chain of the front pages of old newspapers in a historical sequence (Figure 17). The first newspaper announced the opening of the first Imperial Diet of Japan in 1890, while the last was a newspaper from the opening day of this exhibition. One by one, the newspapers displayed what the Japanese people had been most concerned about at various historical points. On the walls to each side, we arranged materials and pictures relating to the commonly held images or knowledge of Africa and Oceania at the same points in time.

Generally speaking, there were almost no occasions when articles about Africa or Oceania graced the front page of the newspapers, except for articles relating to the war situation in the South Seas during World War II. With Japan’s advance overseas, there was mounting interest in foreign countries. Two magazines, *Tanken Sekai* (Global Explorations) and *Bôken Sekai* (Global Adventures) were published



Figure 17 Room III: Other Cultures as seen by Japan: the modern view of Africa and Oceania. At the halfway point between two exhibition walls, a chain of the front pages of old newspapers is hung from the ceiling in a historical sequence. IOC 1997.

in the middle of the Meiji period. Regarding Africa, Stanley's *In Darkest Africa*, initially published in 1890, was quickly translated into Japanese and published in 1893. Moreover, "Tarzan," which had already played as a silent movie since 1919, was made into a series of talkies in 1932 with Johnny Weissmuller acting in the lead. It became extraordinarily popular in Japan after the war (Figure 18). A stream of children's comics based on the story, the so-called "Tarzan" pulps, were also published, with names such as *Shōnen Ōja* (The Boy King), *Shōnen Kenia* (The Boy Kenya), and *Barūba no Bōken* (Adventures of Baruba). Tezuka Osamu's *Jungle Taitei* (Jungle Emperor), issued in 1947, is a work that can also be placed in the same lineage. This schema, comparing the "animal kingdom" and the "savage native," continues into the present in recent comics such as Tokuhiro Masaya's *Janguru no Ōja Taachan* (King of the Jungle, Taachan).

In one corner of the section displaying the Japanese view of Oceania, we organized a corner devoted to the works of Hijikata Hisakatsu (Figure 19). Hijikata, a great admirer of Paul Gauguin, felt a strong yearning for the South Seas and arrived in Palau in 1929. Hijikata stayed for 10 years on the islands of Palau and Satawal in Micronesia, which at the time was the Japanese South Sea Islands Mandate. He produced many paintings, wood carvings, and poems, and authored outstanding ethnographies. To this day, Hijikata is known as "Japan's Gauguin." Nevertheless, Hijikata was not Gauguin. What is manifest in comparing Hijikata to Gauguin is the Japanese desire to assimilate Hijikata to Gauguin. By calling



Figure 18 A poster of the movie "Revenge of Tarzan." IOC 1997.



Figure 19 Hijikata Hisakatsu's watercolor paintings. IOC 1997. *The Shade of a Tree* 1970 (right), *Bathing* 1970 (center), *Cocky Island Boy* 1970 (left). Setagaya Art Museum. IOC 1997.

Hijikata "Japan's Gauguin," Japanese compare themselves to the West. The Hijikata corner in the exhibition was constructed precisely to illustrate such borrowed "images of other cultures" that Japanese people possess.

The walls on both sides of the exit from the third room were plastered with travel brochures collected at the time of the exhibition. Tours from Japan to Oceania were numerous, including, as one might expect, Hawaii and Guam, and all advertising blue skies, white, sandy beaches, and magnificent hotels. However, few tours to geographically distant Africa were introduced only in the margins of tours to Europe or Egypt. Almost all of those pamphlets advertised Africa as the "kingdom of the wild." Based on the evidence of the travel brochures, one would have to conclude that Japanese people are still not completely free from the stereotypical images of Oceania and Africa respectively as a "paradise" and "wilderness."

7 Room IV. Border-Crossing Cultures Today

The fourth and last room in the exhibition was titled "Border-crossing Cultures Today" (Figure 20). Amid the advancing number of global exchanges, humankind has come to share many of the same cultural elements. However, this is not to say that the world's cultures have become homogenized. While sharing cultural elements, the world's peoples are also creating their own cultures, rooted in their diverse traditions. This is perhaps the period in which we now live.

In this section, we displayed kiosks (newsstands or roadside shops) from Africa, Oceania, Japan, and Europe to represent the sharing of cultural elements.



Figure 20 Room IV: Border-crossing Cultures Today. IOC 1997.

Also, we presented several hybrid compositions as vivid demonstrations of the simultaneous border-crossing and individualization of culture.

Because they are so familiar, we do not usually notice train station kiosks, but when one inspects the individual articles arranged at a kiosk, various aspects of urban life in Japan become apparent (Figure 21). The large number and variety of throat drops are likely to reflect the bad air quality prevailing in Japanese cities. In the cold, chilled beer, one can see the figure of the middle-aged man taking large gulps during a long commute or office trip. From inconspicuously placed, black-stringed envelopes, with which to express one's condolences, one is reminded of the businessman who, in the middle of making a deal, must drop everything at hearing some sudden bad news. The kiosk, which condenses almost all aspects of life into some 36 square feet, is quite literally the essence of contemporary culture. In the exhibition, in addition to an actual kiosk provided by the West Japan Kiosk company, we presented a kiosk collected by Minpaku in Accra, the capital of Ghana (which its owner, Sherry Engman, called a “supermarket”) (Figure 22), a kiosk collected by the British Museum in the Wahgi region of Papua New Guinea (known there as a “trade store”) (Figure 23), and a life-size photograph of a kiosk from the London Underground, in England (Figure 24). From the various articles arranged in them, it was vividly apparent that numerous and diverse goods and aspects of culture are shared widely worldwide.

We also exhibited examples of hybrid compositions that embody the increasing border-crossing and individuation of cultures. First, there were coffins that are currently very popular in the suburbs of Accra in Ghana (Figure 25). A coffin



Figure 21 A Japanese kiosk. IOC 1997.



Figure 22 A kiosk collected by Minpaku in Accra, Ghana. 1996. The owner of the shop, called it a “supermarket.”



Figure 23 A kiosk (“trade store”) collected by the British Museum in the Wahgi region of Papua New Guinea in 1990. IOC 1997.



Figure 24 Life-size photograph of a kiosk at the Piccadilly Circus station of the London Underground, England. Photo by Makito Minami, 1997. IOC 1997.



Figure 25 Coffins in the form of Mercedes Benz, fishing boat, leopard, and airplane collected by Minpaku in 1996 in Accra, Ghana. IOC 1997.



Figure 26 Shields. Waghi Valley, Western Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea. Wood, metal, paint, textile, plastic. British Museum, collected by M. O'Hanlon, 1990. IOC 1997.

resembling a Mercedes Benz might be used for the funeral of a prominent person who had driven or had wished to drive a Benz vehicle during his life. A fish or boat coffin for someone who was a fisherman and an airplane coffin for an international businessman both represent possessions associated with the occupation or character of the dead person during life.

For Oceania, we presented battle shields (Figure 26) produced during the 1980s in the highlands of Papua New Guinea. Battles between rival groups had already almost disappeared in Papua New Guinea. When battles again began to break out in the 1980s in one region of the central highlands, people began making new shields to prepare for battle. New, previously non-existent designs were applied to the new shields, reflecting changes in people's lives in the highlands of New Guinea. The "SP" on the shield is based on the label of a popular beer in the area. "SIX2SIX," meaning "6 pm to 6 am," is taken from the catchphrase for an all-night dance party. This battle group reread the saying for dancing non-stop as a threat meaning, "We will continue fighting from 6 to 6."

For Japan, we displayed the cut-out picture boards used for souvenir photos, which one used to be able to see at any tourist spot in Japan (Figure 27). They might seem unique to Japan. Still, it turns out that they were as likely as not created by an American artist, Cassius Marcellus Coolidge, who is well known for his series of paintings *Dogs Playing Poker*. The cut-out boards were patented under the name of "comic foregrounds" in his name in 1874. They appeared in the public

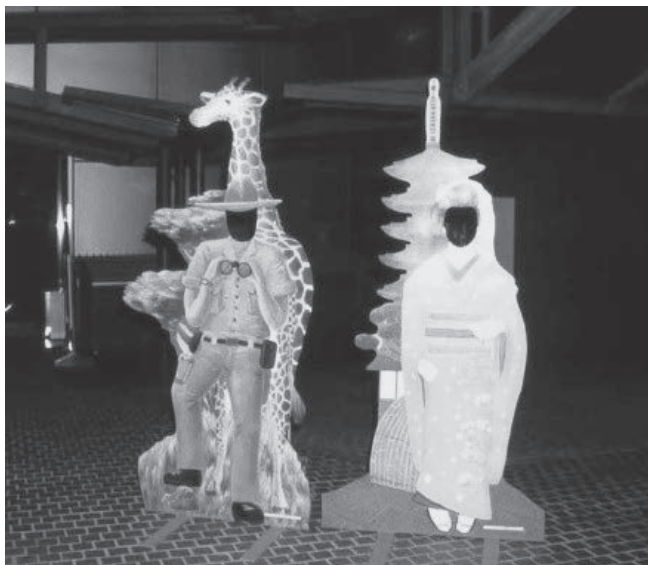


Figure 27 Picture boards with face-exposing hole, on display in front of the entrance of the exhibition. IOC 1997.

space for the first time at the Chicago World's Fair held in 1893. The Chicago World's Fair was the first to be held following the 1888 introduction of the Kodak camera, the first camera which could be operated by anyone. The Fair allowed the photographic culture to reach a mass audience in one fell swoop. At the time of the exhibition in 1997, cut-out boards were disappearing rapidly, perhaps because of the declining old idea of traveling as a mode of “consuming” famous places. However, the characteristic of the cut-out board as an apparatus premised on being looked at through a camera has been inherited by *puri-kura* (print club), which appeared first in Japan and which has quickly spread globally. Today, in the 2020s, the number of cut-out boards is again increasing, perhaps because people can readily take photographs anywhere using a camera phone. The development of cut-out boards chronicles a Japanese mode of adopting the photographic culture which has encompassed the whole world since the mid-19th century.

In the last section of the exhibition, we also displayed works of modern Western art (Figure 28). Since the “discovery of art nègre or African art” by Picasso and Matisse at the beginning of the 20th century, the development of “modern” art, centered in the West, has incorporated non-Western forms, directly and indirectly, as motifs or as sources of inspiration. The work by Rauschenberg displayed in the exhibition, *ROCI Japan*, is an example using a casual Japanese scene as a motif. In works by Max Ernst, *Janus*, and by Joan Miro, *Bird Figure*, there are evident connections to African masks and carvings. However, this tendency to create one's world of expression while incorporating elements of other cultures is seen



Figure 28 Works of modern art on display. Max Ernst *Janus* 1933 (front left), Joan Miro *Bird Figure* 1974 (front right), Robert Rauschenberg *ROCI Japan* 1984 (behind). Setagaya Art Museum. IOC 1997.

not only in modern Western art. The same tendency is apparent in the contemporary designs of the African coffins, the Oceanic shields, and the Japanese cut-out boards presented here. One must ask why we call only one side art and the other ethnographic materials. Why are some in modern art museums and others in ethnological museums?

In the middle of the gallery space of Room IV stand three life-size human figures made of iron, arranged in a funeral procession. The front female figure holds a framed photo of the petroleum industrial complex of Nigeria. The figure is followed by a large dancing male figure representing a town chief. The last female figure cheers the chief by beating two sticks over her head (Figure 29). The set of works was created by Sokari Douglas Camp for this exhibition.

Because the last room is intended to portray the contemporary world in which we all human beings are now living together, I was quite keen to invite at least one artist from either Africa or Oceania to participate in the exhibition project and to create the exhibits of the room. We, the curators from Japan and UK, met Sokari two years before the exhibition opening, discussed the concept of Room IV, and commissioned her work.

The completed work was entitled *My World, Your World*. Sokari Douglas Camp was born in Puguma, a town in the Niger Delta, the southern part of Nigeria, populated mostly by Kalabari people. Obtaining support from an Englishman living in Puguma, she moved to England as a child and later received a Master's degree



Figure 29 Sokari Douglas Camp *My World, Your World* 1997. Setagaya Art Museum. IOC 1997.

at the Royal College of Art (London) in 1986.

From the beginning, she has constantly adopted iron as a material. In Kalabari society, ironwork is produced only by men. Born in Nigeria and active in England, and being a female artist who works on iron that is handled only by men in Kalabari society, we thought Sokari Douglas Camp could well represent the “border crossing cultures” of our decade.

When she came to Osaka to open the exhibition, I asked her why she chose the framed photograph of the petroleum industrial complex of Nigeria for the front figure to hold, she answered, “this is what my homeland is today.” When we think of the Kalabari land in Nigeria, we might easily conjure a picture of tropical rain-forest. According to her, however, almost the entire coastline of Kalabari land is nowadays occupied by the petroleum complex. “Whatever image you have about my homeland, this is what my town is today,” she added. I was very moved by this frank statement, realizing that she had perfectly understood the concept and aim of our exhibition “Images of Other Cultures.”

8 Art and Artefact, Art Museums and Ethnological Museums

There was a particular reason for us to juxtapose Western art and Non-Western artifacts, and to install Sokari Douglas Camp’s work as a symbol of the “border crossing.” The attempt to rethink our gaze toward other cultures must question the conventional division between art museums that mainly contains art as defined by the West and ethnographic museums that contain non-Western “artifacts.” Breaking down the wall erected between ethnographic museums and art museums was an important aim of our exhibition project. For that reason, we held the same exhibition at two venues: the National Museum of Ethnology, in Osaka, and the Setagaya Art Museum in Tokyo.

In the 1997 exhibition catalogue, I noted the following.

It is impossible to speak of modern art without mentioning the name of the artist. When works by individual artists are displayed, they are arranged according to the development of the artist’s style and the date of manufacture.... In the story of modern art, everything is classified, historicized, and individualized in terms of change.

Change is denied, however, to ethnographic specimens or ethnic art. It is relegated to a non-historical time. The identity of the maker is ignored. Modern art, on the other hand, is given its place in history and its historical value according to the change it represents. The maker is elevated to the position of “genius,” close to God. An opposition between the “open” Self and the “closed” Other is posited here. The Self is considered as complex and impervious to generalization, whereas the other is simple enough to be regarded in generalities. The old opposition between “primitive” and “civilized,” which has its roots in Social Evolutionism, is still operating.” (Yoshida and Mack 1997)

Concepts of modern art and the ethnographic specimen were two sides of the same coin arising out of this worldview. Our task was not to reconcile these two concepts, but to reassess the distinction between art and artifacts, or between modern art and ethnographic specimens. It would also involve reassessment of the distinction between art museums and ethnographic museums, art history and anthropology, and art and culture. Japanese people have seen both modern art and ethnographic specimens and we have come to consider the products of our own culture more as art than as ethnographic specimens. Consequently, Japanese people have set themselves on the side of the West, reproducing the image of "other cultures" created by the West. Rethinking the categories of modern art and ethnographic specimens has inevitably led to re-evaluation of the distorted categories of self and others established in our minds.

Once the distinctions between modern art and ethnographic specimen, art and artifacts are eliminated, one can reconsider both the view that art is the expression of a genius separated from society and the view that products tied to social needs are not art. That would enable us to encounter the world afresh, seeing the variety of connections among people living on the Earth and appreciating the diversity of their expressive activities. The many artifacts and artworks introduced by the 1997 exhibition taught the readily apparent fact that we in Japan are contemporaries living in the same era as Africans, Oceanians, and Europeans: all of us having a shared future.

9 Refurbishment of the Permanent Galleries of Minpaku

The "Images of Other Cultures" exhibition reviewed the history of ethnographic exhibitions, and also reviewed permanent exhibition of Minpaku. The permanent exhibition had continued without major change since the opening of the museum in 1977. Soon after the "Images of Other Cultures" exhibition, we began re-examining our Museum's whole permanent exhibition.

The original permanent exhibition of our museum, including the gallery for Africa, was meant to display characteristics that are specific to regional cultures, and so tended to display artifacts used in 'traditional' life (Figure 30). As a result, the exhibits emphasized the individual, separate nature of regional cultures and their unique values, embodying the cultural relativism advocated by cultural anthropology during the 20th century. Minpaku exhibits still faithfully realize this ideal of cultural relativism by not being biased, as are many ethnological museums in the West, toward exhibiting only "other cultures," but by actively placing an exhibition of Japan, as "our own culture," in the whole composition, and further by including Europe as an object of exhibition. Minpaku probably realized the principle of cultural relativism in exhibitions more than any other ethnological museum in the world. However, this realization also means that the Minpaku exhibition was



Figure 30 Display of the African Gallery at the National Museum of Ethnology, 1977–2008.

marked by the characteristics and difficulties that bedevil cultural relativism. One major difficulty for both the exhibition and collection of Minpaku, was emphasis on “tradition.” It portrayed cultures of the world as if they were unchanging, static, complete in themselves, and closed to the outside world. No society in history has ever been entirely complete in itself, isolated from the outside world, and without change. We received comments from audiences stating that, although overwhelming numbers of objects were on display with great impact, the actual life of the people was not apparent from the exhibition. That is not all. Another difficulty of the Minpaku permanent exhibition is that it was regarded as largely one-sided, lacking any channel for the people being exhibited to represent themselves. The refurbishment project had to address these crucially important issues. It became our task to build a space for the practice of mutual understanding between cultures: a cultural “forum” if using the term coined by Duncan Cameron (1971).

In realizing the new exhibition, we clarified the following basic or key concepts:

- While making much of cultural diversity, the exhibition should also demonstrate the connection between each respective region and the other parts of the world, including Japan.
- The exhibition should demonstrate the contemporary situation as a result of historical development rather than being based on the tradition/modernity,

before/after axis.

- The exhibition portrays the contemporary life of people and encourages empathy by showing that we all are living together in the same era.
- The exhibition should be realized through collaboration with those who are represented (the original owners of objects and information on display).

For the Africa Gallery exhibition, of which I was directly in charge, museum professionals from seven African countries were invited to be advisors. During a three year project (2005–2008), we visited African countries together and made on-site surveys of their cultural heritage. Then we met together in Japan every year to plan the exhibition contents. The new exhibition became a platform for an academic network created through the project.

Our new exhibition for Africa (Figure 31) opened in March 2009, it comprises the five main sections of Excavating History, Urban Life, Work, Adornment, and Prayer, with an additional section called Africa Today. With a firm footing in the present, we first look at African people’s efforts to rediscover their history. The people of Africa have built a rich history while always engaging in exchanges with people from other continents. In the “Excavating History” section, we follow the history of the peoples of Africa in five periods: The Birth of Civilizations, Kingdoms and Exchanges, The Slave Trade, Colonial Experience, and The Struggle for Liberation up to the end of apartheid. Then we introduce how people live in Africa today in the following sections.



Figure 31 Entrance of the new African Gallery at the National Museum of Ethnology. Photo from the *Minpaku Virtual Museum*.
<https://www.minpaku.ac.jp/en/exhibition/permanent/panorama> (accessed 16 Aug 2022)



Figure 32 “Work” section at the new African Gallery, National Museum of Ethnology, 2017.

Of the sections described above, I put particular energy into realizing the “Work” section. In the earlier exhibition at Minpaku, Africa was represented according to type of subsistence economy of the societies such as hunter–gatherers, pastoralists, and agrarians. However, in contemporary Africa, even in so-called agrarian societies, most men go to town after the harvest and are engaged in wage labor to secure a cash income. Otherwise, they would be unable to sustain their family’s needs. We cannot simply call the people “agrarians.” In the new exhibition, we emphasized individuals with their names and installed life-size panels which display each individual’s portrait, the tool with which he/she works, and a video or text message telling us what the person thinks about the occupation (Figure 32). These displays demonstrate the life of people who live together with us in the same era. I am inwardly confident that this mode of display can suggest a new direction for ethnographic exhibitions that promote empathy because we all are contemporaries.

The renewal of the African gallery in 2009 marked the start of the renewal of all the permanent galleries of our museum and became a model of the refurbishment project. The key concepts described above for renewal, especially that of collaboration with people who are represented, were realized for every gallery up to the Ainu gallery which opened in March 2016 (Figure 33).

*

Creating a cultural “forum” is not limited to the exhibition. In connection with the “forum” notion, our museum’s unique activity related to Ainu people, an indigenous people in northern Japan, should be introduced here.

Every year at our museum, we receive three or four Ainu craft artists for



Figure 33 “Present and Future” section at the newly completed Ainu Culture Gallery at the National Museum of Ethnology, 2016.

about a month so that they might study the Ainu collection, with actual touching and handling of the objects. Some participants publish books based on their research of the collection. Others make replicas of old pieces made by their predecessors and ancestors.

During their stay, we also hold an Ainu traditional ceremony called a ‘*kamuinomi*’. According to Ainu belief, all beings, including animals, plants, houses, and artifacts, have a spiritual being called ‘*kamui*’. Therefore, at our museum, once a year, we hold a ‘*kamuinomi*’ ceremony to comfort spirits that are related to the objects stored in our museum (Figure 34). For the ceremony, objects usually kept in our storage are actually used. Whenever joining the ceremony, I always feel that it is an occasion on which our museum is infused with real life.

Based on this experience of collaboration with Ainu people, Minpaku is now promoting the “Info-Forum Museum”²⁾ project. This project is now composed of 24 programs covering various regions of the world, with the aim of sharing the information of our collection not only with researchers and public visitors, but also with people of the local communities of origin (source communities). Through the process, newly gained knowledge, understanding, and memories related to each material can be added to the database for subsequent sharing, leading ultimately to new joint research, joint exhibition, and joint community activities.

In some cases, especially those of Taiwan and Korea, real objects were brought back to the source communities, exhibited there (Figure 35). In other cases, source community members are invited to our museum (Figure 36). They study our collection in detail by handling each object. A workshop might be held at



Figure 34 *Kamuinomi* ceremony at the National Museum of Ethnology, 2013.



Figure 35 “The Superimposed South: Tainan as a Collective Memory” exhibition at the National Museum of Taiwan History, Tainan, Taiwan, 2018. The exhibition was based on the UCHIDA Isao archives at the National Museum of Ethnology.



Figure 36 Reviewers from Malaysia, Indonesia and Philippines handle and scrutinize maritime utensils from the region at the National Museum of Ethnology, 2019. Photo provided by Rintaro Ono.



Figure 37 A boy smiles while looking at a photograph of his late grandmother. Kaliza Village, Zambia, 2017.

the source community to view and discuss the objects using images gained from our museum's website. The whole process is filmed. The videos will also be kept in the database.

Some audio-visual materials (old photographs and/or movies) are taken back to the communities after several decades. They are shared with community members in the form of albums and film shows. Usually, people receive them with great joy. Some people shed tears looking at images of their grandparents (Figure 37).

Many source community members say that they participate in the projects to help give their children and grandchildren access to relevant information and memories of their objects. The "Info-Forum Museum" project is now making our museum a sort of "platform of memory" for humanity and for building the future.

10 New Trends in the Exhibition Methodology of Ethnological Museums

Since the 1980s, some new trends have appeared in the field of ethnographic exhibitions.

One trend that was already underway at the time of the 1997 exhibition "Images of Other Cultures" was a dialogical approach that might take the form of a joint exhibition organized by those exhibiting (i.e., museum curators) and those exhibited (i.e., source community members). The movement was, and still is, particularly evident in the Americas.

A typical case is the African gallery entitled "African Voices" at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History. This opened in 1999 after six years of work and energetic community input from Africans and African Americans. Minpaku's new permanent exhibition and the "Info-Forum Museum" project can also be counted as one example of this trend of collaborative museology with source communities.

The repatriation of objects in museum collections to source communities has also been increasing, especially since the 1990s. This movement can be regarded as a very natural extension of collaborative museum activities.

Collaboration between major museums and people of source communities promoted the people's awareness of their own cultures and histories. A vigorous movement is underway worldwide to build ethnographic or community museums to present their own cultures rather than some exotic culture. This might well be considered a movement of de-colonizing the museum.

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Another new trend is reflexive representation, which reviews or problematizes the politics of collection and representation itself. It is exactly in this context that the 1997 exhibition "Images of Other Cultures" should be discussed. Although the "Images of Other Cultures" exhibition was held only in Japan, the impact was not small. On the occasion of the opening of the show, after viewing the exhibits,

Robert G. W. Anderson, the then Director of the British Museum, said “This exhibition should be held in London.” Unfortunately, no “Images of Other Cultures” exhibition at the British Museum was ever realized. Nevertheless, a few years after the exhibition, a great shift in exhibition methodology, especially in ethnographic museums, became apparent.

Many European Museums started particularly addressing the history of their collections and creating reconstructions of the original galleries of the 19th century. Some ethnological museums, especially in German-speaking countries, even changed their name from the “Museum of Ethnology.”

The Museum of Ethnology in Basel, Switzerland, was initially established in 1893 and had been called “Museum für Völkerkunde” since 1918. It was renamed “Museum der Kulturen Basel” in 1996. In accordance with the new name, the museum display emphasizes intercultural dialogue rather than the representation of regions in the world, especially after the refurbishment and expansion of the building in 2008 (Figure 38).

The Museum of Ethnology in Munich, Germany, “Museum für Völkerkunde,” which was founded in 1862 as the first ethnological museum in Germany, changed its name to the “Museum Fünf Kontinente,” that is the “Museum of Five Continents” (Figure 39). While maintaining the organization of galleries based on geographical divisions such as Africa, North America, South America, Oceania, and the Orient, the content of each gallery is reorganized periodically using their collection including works of contemporary artists.

In Berlin, after combining the collections of the Ethnologisches Museum and



Figure 38 Museum der Kulturen, Basel, 2011. Photo by Bala Biott, CC BY SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons.



Figure 39 Museum Fünf Kontinente, Munich, 2017.



Figure 40 The Humboldt Forum building, shortly before completion. September 2021. Photo by Dosseman, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

the Museum für Asiatische Kunst, the Humboldt Forum opened its doors to the public in July 2021 (Figure 40). The museum is located in the reconstructed Berliner Schloss (former Royal Palace that was damaged during World War II and later destroyed) on the Museum Island.

Only the “best” objects were moved to the Forum from the Ethnologisches

Museum in Darlem. The Ethnologisches Museum in Darlem remains as a "Forschungscampus (research campus)," which houses storage, workshops, and libraries.

The Humboldt Forum is said to "focus on intercultural dialogue"³⁾ and "to offer an eclectic view into the past and present cultures of Africa, America, Asia, and Oceania."⁴⁾ There is no place for Europe. The division between those who look at and those who are looked at remains quite clear. Whose "Forum" is it? The question is to be answered henceforth through their exhibition and educational activities.

The Ethnologisches Museum evolved from the collections of the Prussian-Brandenburg cabinet of art at the Berlin palace. It was established as an "independent ethnological and anthropological museum" under the name of Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde (Royal Museum of Ethnology) in 1873. A part of the museum's historical collections are now shown in the Shaumagazin space, open storage or visible storage, at the Humboldt Forum. The official website describes the purpose of the exhibits: "to discover how and why objects were acquired, the perceptions of societies that arose in the process, and how the works have been reinterpreted as cultural objects, art and historical evidence."

In Vienna, Austria, the Museum of Ethnology was renamed the "Weltmuseum Wien," meaning the "World Museum, Vienna" when it re-opened in 2017 (Figure 41). The institution traces its history back to the "Kunst und Wunderkammern" built by Ferdinand II and stored in Ambras Castle in Innsbruck. It was founded as the Imperial and Royal Court Museum of Natural History in 1876.

The overall theme of the new exhibition is "A World Museum for a Global City." In the newly designed exhibition space, regional divisions such as China, Japan, and Africa are maintained (Figure 42), although colonialism (Figure 43) and formation of the museum's collection are emphasized throughout, in combination with contemporary interpretations (Figure 44). Under the roof of the Weltmuseum Wien, the museum's collection has been deeply historicized.

Because so many "Museums of Ethnology" in Europe have changed their names, it seems that our Museum, the National Museum of Ethnology (Minpaku), might become the last and the only Museum of Ethnology in the world in the near future.

In 2015, in conjunction with the Universal Exposition in Milan, Italy, the Museo delle Culture, Milano (Museum of Culture of Milan) MUDEC, opened to the public (Figure 45). It houses ethnographic collections obtained by the City of Milan, including those of Manfredo Settala (Figure 46), an early and well-documented example of the "Cabinet of Curiosity" or the "Wunderkammer" in the 17th century. The overall theme of the permanent exhibition of MUDEC is "Global Milan. The World Seen from Here." It differs from the usual, primarily geographically structured ethnographic exhibitions. Beginning with the introduction of



Figure 41 Weltmuseum Wien, 2017.



Figure 42 “1873– Japan comes to Europe” Weltmuseum Wien. Photo provided by the museum.



Figure 43 “In the Shadow of Colonialism,” Weltmuseum Wien. Photo provided by the museum.



Figure 44 “World in Motion,” Weltmuseum, Wien. Photo provided by the museum.



Figure 45 The “Piazza Coperta” (Covered Central Court) of the Museo delle Culture, Milano (MUDEC). Photo provided by the museum.

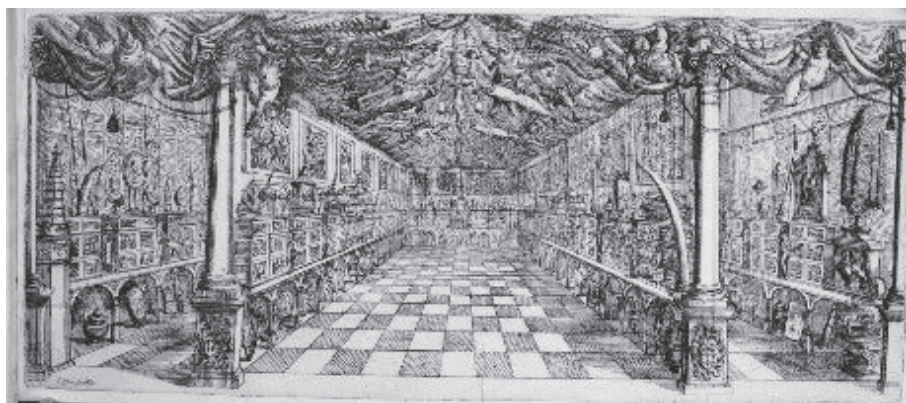


Figure 46 Manfredo Settala’s Cabinet of Art and Curiosities in Milan, Cesare Fiori, ca. 1666.

Settala’s collection (Figure 47), the exhibition reflects the history of the collection as it grew, showing the intentions connected with its formation and tracing the historically changing view of alien worlds. The exhibition is divided into seven sections: ₁Milan in the Spanish world, ₂Travels to Asia, ₃Race to Africa (Figure 48), ₄From Decolonisation to Multiculturalism, ₅Afro-descendants in the Global Milan, ₆From the Sforza Castle to the Diaspora, and ₇Avant Garde Collecting and the Revival of Milan’s Ethnographic Collections. Here, the museum’s collection, which



Figure 47 Section 1: Milan in Spanish World, 16th Century. MUDEC Some objects are from the Manfredo Settala's collection.



Figure 48 Section 3: Race to Africa, 19th Century. MUDEC. Photo provided by the museum.



Figure 49 Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 2015.

covers objects from the 17th century to the present, is given “a new interpretation in an intercultural and contemporary key” (Antonini et al. 2019: 103).

In the Netherlands, the Tropenmuseum (Figure 49), founded in 1864 as the Colonial Museum, and now part of the Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen (National Museum of World Cultures), abandoned the geographical arrangement of the museum to focus on universal themes connecting people worldwide. This change began with the opening of the permanent exhibition “Things That Matter” in 2018. Another permanent exhibition, “What’s the Story,” was added in 2019. In the introductory message, the museum mentions “Nowadays the museum presents the historical collection from different perspectives, inviting reflection and social discussion.” The new exhibition represents an attempt to explain the colonial origins of the Tropenmuseum and the meaning of the collections today. Yet another new permanent exhibition “Our Colonial Heritage,” which specifically examines Dutch colonial history and presence in Indonesia, Suriname, and other countries, opened on 23 June, 2022. It happened to be the very day of the symposium entitled “Africa and Beyond: A conference celebrating John Mack’s contribution” was held. This article was originally presented on the occasion. The decision to completely abandon the geographical arrangement of the museum becomes more understandable if one considers the fact that another museum among the National Museums of World Cultures, the Museum Volkenkunde (Museum of Ethnology) in Leiden, has retained the geographical arrangement of the permanent exhibition quite clearly and consistently.

*

Mapping the dates of the openings of these permanent exhibitions of ethnographic museums chronologically indicates that the inauguration of the British Museum’s *Enlightenment Gallery* in 2003 marked the beginning of this movement. This gallery reconstructed the museum’s old exhibits during the Enlightenment period by reusing the former King George III Library (Figure 50).

When the project was initiated, Kim Sloan was the principal curator of the Enlightenment Gallery, John Mack was Senior Keeper (1997–2003) at the British Museum, and Robert G. W. Anderson was the Museum Director (1992–2002). Although not the curator direct in charge, John Mack was involved in initiating the project.

The British Museum was founded in 1753 when an Act of Parliament established the world’s first public museum, based largely on Sir Hans Sloane’s collection. The Museum opened its doors in 1759. As John Mack described in the catalogue of the 1997 “Images of Other Cultures” exhibition, “the British Museum was in conception a kind of material Encyclopedia” in the age of Enlightenment (Mack 1997: 65). The inauguration of the Enlightenment Gallery at the British Museum in 2003 marked the 250th anniversary of the Museum’s foundation.

The explanation panel set at the Gallery entrance stated the following.

Housed in the oldest room in the present Museum, i.e. the King George III Library, the permanent exhibition shows how British people understood the world during the era of the Enlightenment, through their collections. The displays convey a sense of how



Figure 50 The Gallery “*Enlightenment: Discovering the World in the Eighteenth Century*” at the British Museum, 2022.

from every part of them, thereby prompting reflections on the ways in which the universal museum of the eighteenth century can be re-invented as the museum of the world for the twenty-first.We now have different habits of intellectual address: our social and political concerns are different from those of 1753; but we explore the same subject matter – the unity and diversity of the world that we all live in, which we wish and need to understand. (Sloan 2003)

The message of the last phrase is exactly the same that we aimed to convey through the 1997 “Images of Other Cultures” exhibition.

Judging from the dates of the opening of the new ethnographic museums and galleries which historicize collections, the inauguration of the Enlightenment Gallery at the British Museum can be regarded as a frontrunner of one of the worldwide movements described above.

The seed was certainly in the 1997 “Images of Other Cultures” exhibition. I am very much honored to have worked together with John Mack to initiate such a new and now major trend in the museum world.

Notes

- 1) Professor John Mack retired from University of East Anglia (UEA) in May 2002. He had long been Chairman of UEA’s Sainsbury Institute for Art. He has recently ended his term of office as President of the British Institute in Eastern Africa. Before joining UEA in 2004, he was Keeper of the British Museum’s Department of Ethnography (Museum of Mankind), which he joined in 1976. He was also Senior Keeper of the British Museum as a whole during 1997–2003. Although his responsibilities involved coordinating research and curatorial activities across a wide field, his specialism has been in Africa and the western Indian Ocean. He remains an advisor for the British Museum’s International African Programmes. He has overseen many major exhibitions and gallery installations, including ‘Madagascar, Island of the Ancestors’ (Museum of Mankind, 1986, American Museum of Natural History, 1988 and the Presidential Palace, Antananarivo, 1990), ‘Images of Other Cultures’ (National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, 1997) ‘Museum of the Mind, Art and Memory in World Cultures’ (British Museum, 2003) and The Sainsbury Africa Galleries, which opened at the British Museum in 2001. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 2009.
- 2) In 2022, the project has been renamed “Info-Forum Archives” with more emphasis on research activities.
- 3) Official website of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Humboldt Forum. <https://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/humboldt-forum/about-the-humboldt-forum/profile/> (accessed 17 Aug 2022)
- 4) Official website of Humboldt Forum. <https://www.humboldtforum.org/en/programm/dauerangebot/exhibition/ethnologisches-museum-und-museum-fuer-asiatische-kunst-31568/> (accessed 17 Aug 2022)

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