

# ***Gesamtkunstwerk* World's Fair.**

## **Revisioning International Exhibitions**

### **Introduction to the RIHA Journal Special Issue**

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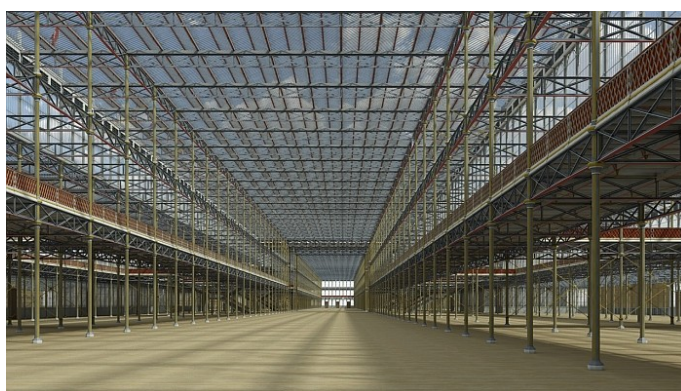
#### **Abstract**

From their beginnings in the mid-nineteenth century, the world's fairs sought to generate a synthesized body of knowledge about the world by gathering an encyclopedic and didactic collection of objects from a wide array of fields: technology, machinery, handicrafts, the visual arts, performance, and ethnography – knowledge made visible and experienced through artifacts sourced from all over the world. This expanded visual experience can also be understood as one that interprets the gaze as a catalyst for a multi-sensory perception and categorization of material culture, of both two- and three-dimensional objects of vision. Thus, these exhibitions not only synthesized 'the world', but they also

synthesized arts, handicrafts, architecture, and technology into an imagined *Gesamtkunstwerk*. The objects and works of art – handcrafted or machine-made – displayed at the world's fairs were conceived as a mass spectacle as they were turned into the signifiers of a narrative – imagined and presented as coherent – of technological progress, colonial expansion, and artistic innovation. The colonized regions were to stand in contrast to this, with ethnographica and handicrafts presented as traditional, 'authentic'. Nevertheless, a complex network of "shared histories" and transnational interconnections became manifest at the world's fairs.

## Viewing and re-viewing world's fairs

[1] The Crystal Palace, built in London's Hyde Park on the occasion of the first ever world's fair in 1851 and later destroyed by fire, can be experienced again virtually since a few years. In preparation for an exhibition in 2011 on the founding history of the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, the progress of the construction and the spatial effect of the Great Exhibition were reconstructed in a 3D film by *Architectura Virtualis*, a cooperation partner of the Technical University of Darmstadt (Fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> Equipped with VR glasses, the viewer still can take a virtual walk through the wide, bright interior space, as if in a gigantic greenhouse, and marvel at the light shining through the glass panes of the facade as these contrast atmospherically with the thin cast-iron struts framing them.<sup>2</sup>



1 Computer generated image of the Crystal Palace in London, built in 1851, destroyed in 1936 (© 2011 Architectura Virtualis GmbH, cooperation partner of the Technical University of Darmstadt, with kind permission of Dr.-Ing. Marc Grellert)

The "spectacular transparent structure" of the architecture made of prefabricated timber, cast iron and glass elements became the model for world exhibition buildings up until the 20th century.<sup>3</sup> The virtual reconstruction, which is part of a larger project generating digital 3D reconstructions of historic, destroyed architecture, demonstrates the potential to create memorial culture using digital technology. In addition, it allows an aesthetic experience of a historical event that is said to have been visually innovative. According to some accounts, it was so overwhelming that it revolutionized ways of seeing in the second half of the 19th century.

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<sup>1</sup> Architectura Virtualis GmbH, Darmstadt, cooperation partner of the Technical University of Darmstadt, created the VR reconstruction of the Crystal Palace for the exhibition "Art and Design for All – The Victoria and Albert Museum: Entstehungsgeschichte des weltweit führenden Museums für Kunst und Design", held in *Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der BRD* in Bonn in 2011; URL: <http://www.architectura-virtualis.de/rekonstruktion/kristallpalast.php?lang=de&img=0&file=0> (accessed May 3, 2024).

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Jürgs, "Wachgeküsste Ruinen. Digitale Gebäudekonstruktion," in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 08.07.2020, URL: <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/rhein-main/tu-darmstadt-geschichte-mit-gebaeuderekonstruktion-erleben-16848702.html> (accessed June 19, 2023).

<sup>3</sup> Marie-Louise von Plessen, "Art and Design for All: The Victoria and Albert Museum", in: Julius Bryant, ed., *Art and Design for All: The Victoria and Albert Museum*, exh. cat., London 2011, 11-19, 11.

Flânerie, in the context of the world's fairs, was an act of both seeing and moving through the exhibition spaces; the 1851 fair's aesthetic can be re-experienced in the form of virtual flânerie. In addition to this VR reconstruction, other 3D models as well as two-dimensional images also serve to highlight the then new visual structure of a world's fair, or in other words, a re-visioning of the world's fairs through a 21st-century lens.<sup>4</sup>

[2] In the 19th century, vision is to be considered a central category of world perception, as the enthused author Hamlin Garland expressed it in a letter to his parents on the occasion of the 1893 world's fair in Chicago: "You must see this Fair!"<sup>5</sup> Since their beginnings in London in 1851, the world's fairs had become a must-see, and it was not by coincidence that numerous tourist *sights* (!), such as the above-mentioned Crystal Palace, the Eiffel Tower (Paris 1889) and the *Trylon* and *Perisphere* (New York 1939/40), came into being there. From atop the Eiffel Tower, for example, which was built as a viewing platform, the entire world's fair could be surveyed in a panoramic view from above. The Tower thus manifests a *mise-en-scène* of the gaze: the world can be taken in at a single viewing, thus rendering it controllable and amenable to visual ownership.<sup>6</sup>

[3] The world's fairs combined the presentation of objects with an early form of globalization. Seeing and showing appear here as fundamental mechanisms closely connected to colonization and globalization. In coining the term "imperial eyes", Mary Louise Pratt drew attention to the connection between regimes of seeing and imperial domination.<sup>7</sup> This kind of authoritative model of vision and knowledge is associated with the gaze from above, which in turn is closely linked to the "cartographic gaze" of modernity: "The cartographic view is therefore inseparable from a new regime of historicity of the masses."<sup>8</sup> In this view, or gaze, there is an interweaving of the aesthetic view of the landscape in the tradition of Joachim Patinir (world landscape) and the geopolitical gaze.<sup>9</sup>

[4] This ocularcentrism – the hegemony of the eye – is taken further at the world's fairs, where numerous technical innovations in optics were introduced.<sup>10</sup> The stereoscope, for example, was

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<sup>4</sup> See Mieke Pfarr-Harfst, "Documentation System for Digital Reconstructions. Reference to the Mausoleum of the Tang-Dynastie [sic] at Zhaoling, in Shaanxi Province, China", (November 2011), URL: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235695086\\_Documentations\\_system\\_for\\_digital\\_reconstructions](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235695086_Documentations_system_for_digital_reconstructions) (accessed May 9, 2022).

<sup>5</sup> Hamlin Garland, *A Son of the Middle Border*, New York 1917.

<sup>6</sup> See Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London 1992, 7; see also Brenda Hollweg, *Ausgestellte Welt: Formationsprozesse kultureller Identität in den Texten Chicago World's Columbian Exposition (1893)*, Heidelberg 2001, 93.

<sup>7</sup> Pratt (1992).

<sup>8</sup> Christine Buci-Glucksmann, "From the Cartographic View to the Virtual", in: *Media Art Net* database, URL: [http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/themes/mapping\\_and\\_text/carthographic-view/scroll/](http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/themes/mapping_and_text/carthographic-view/scroll/) (accessed May 26, 2022)

<sup>9</sup> Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Der kartographische Blick der Kunst*, Berlin 1997, 8 and 11.

<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, Mass. 1990.

presented to a broader public at the London Great Exhibition in 1851 and quickly became one of the most popular visual devices of its time.<sup>11</sup> However, photography, panoramas, and film also played a key role at the world's fairs, serving simultaneously to explore the limitations of art.

[5] The Eiffel Tower, itself becoming an icon of modernity in the realms of both the arts and technology, has been celebrated as a spectacular combination of aesthetic and engineering appeal; it has attracted millions of people through the years to visit it in person.<sup>12</sup> Its image has appeared over and over again in high and low culture and has itself formed part of a new visual culture that runs parallel to the history of international exhibitions while simultaneously being foundational to them (Fig. 2).



2 Advertising label of the company U. Leonhardt & Co., Mülheim an der Ruhr, manufacturer of aniline dyes and chemical products, 1895 (photo: Miriam Oesterreich)

[6] This special issue takes visual practices of presentation and representation as its starting point and subjects them to a literal re-visioning (Latin "re-" = "back" respectively "again", "videre" = "to see").<sup>13</sup> Using the term herself, Adrienne Rich writes that "re-vision is the act of looking back, of

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<sup>11</sup> Linda Hentschel, "Nestflucht und Bildersucht – Die Blickregime des Spektakels", in: *FKW. Zeitschrift für Geschlechterforschung und visuelle Kultur* 35 (2003), 52-61, 57, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.57871/fkw352003891>.

<sup>12</sup> Hubertus Kohle, *Die Apotheose des Eisens und der Eisenkonstruktion: der Eiffelturm in Deutschland*, Heidelberg 2000; William Thompson, "'The Symbol of Paris': Writing the Eiffel Tower", in: *The French Review* 73, no. 6 (2000), 1130-1140; see also Roland Barthes, *La Tour Eiffel*, Paris 1964.

<sup>13</sup> This special issue is a product of the conference "*Gesamtkunstwerk Weltausstellung. Revisioning World's Fairs*", held on April 27–28, 2018 at the Karlsruhe Institute for Technology (KIT), in cooperation with Oliver Jehle.

seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction".<sup>14</sup> A re-vision demands the transformation of habitual ways of thinking and symbolic representations.<sup>15</sup> With regard to the world's fairs and considered from an art history perspective, such a re-vision constitutes a gap that this journal issue seeks to fill.

[7] Starting with the first official world's fair held in London in 1851, the above-mentioned Great Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations hosted in the so-called Crystal Palace, numerous industrial fairs took place within a few years and in quick succession (Dublin 1853, New York 1853, Paris 1855, Manchester 1857, London 1862). Each of these bore witness to the "legacy of the Great Exhibition"<sup>16</sup> in the major capitals of the western world, culminating in the *Exposition universelle de 1900* in Paris under the official motto "Le bilan d'un siècle".<sup>17</sup> Up until the outbreak of World War I, the universal exhibitions also became a realm in which power relations between colonizer and colonized were visualized: the western nations were conceived as being industrially and artistically advanced, thus establishing a competition over which country best represented modernity. The colonial states were imagined to exist in contrast to this modernity, with ethnographic items and handicrafts presented as traditional or 'authentic'.

[8] The world's fairs sought to generate a synthesized body of knowledge about the world by assembling an encyclopedic and didactic collection of objects from a wide array of fields: technology, machinery, handicrafts, the visual arts, performance, and ethnography – knowledge made visible and experienced through artifacts sourced from all over the world. In this novel, because greatly expanded visual experience, the viewer's gaze can be understood as a catalyst for a multi-sensory perception and categorization of material culture, of both two- and three-dimensional objects of vision. Thus, these exhibitions not only synthesized 'the world', but they also synthesized arts, handicrafts, architecture, and technology into an imagined *Gesamtkunstwerk* (a complete and unified work of art). The objects and works of art – handcrafted or machine-made – displayed at the world's fairs were conceived as a mass spectacle<sup>18</sup> as they were turned into the signifiers of a narrative – imagined and presented as coherent – of technological progress, colonial expansion, and artistic innovation. This notion of the world's fair as a mass spectacle is not only linked to considering it as an accumulation of

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<sup>14</sup> Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision", in: id., *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence. Selected Prose 1966–1987*, New York 1979, 33-49: 35.

<sup>15</sup> See also Susan Osborn, "'Revision/Re-Vision': A Feminist Writing Class", in: *Rhetoric Review* 9, no. 2 (Spring 1991), 258-273.

<sup>16</sup> Hermione Hobhouse, "The Legacy of the Great Exhibition", in: *RSA Journal* 143, no. 5459 (1995), 48-52. See also Hermione Hobhouse, *The Crystal Palace and the Great Exhibition: Art, Science and Productive Industry. A History of the Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851*, London 2002.

<sup>17</sup> See "Expo 1900 Paris", on the website of the *Bureau International des Expositions*, URL: <https://www.bie-paris.org/site/fr/1900-paris> (accessed June 6, 2022).

<sup>18</sup> Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather. Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, New York/London 1995.

"animated things"<sup>19</sup>, but also to the way it transports its visitors into a magical enchanted world. Staged presentations of spectacle are thus conceived as 'modern' magic, an experience that ties in with the 19th-century topos of phantasmagoria. Image making traditions and optical devices such as the 'magic lantern', which combined music, lighting and the projection of images to create a "popular [...] form of *Gesamtkunstwerk*"<sup>20</sup> and had the power to evoke astonishment and sentimental emotions, developed in the course of the 19th century into educational media which allowed objects to be conceived in an aesthetically appealing way.<sup>21</sup> With this didactic aim in mind, the idea of the baroque *Wunderkammer* was adapted to the larger framework of the world's fair and transformed into an industrialized cabinet of curiosities.<sup>22</sup> In particular, scientific and technical objects were popularized by being 'performed' in fair displays,<sup>23</sup> thus establishing further parallels between art museums and world's fair exhibitions.<sup>24</sup>

[9] As museums and art collections have emerged in part from universal exhibitions, it is necessary to look more closely at the objects and how they were exhibited in order to identify the hegemonic mechanisms of construction that were deployed. Combining displays of fine art with the above-mentioned popular, scientific, and technical objects and devices, world's fairs formed an integral part of the nineteenth-century "exhibitionary complex"<sup>25</sup> based on a specific visual experience. The question of how something is "given to be seen"<sup>26</sup> at the world's fairs' displays, and therefore how a certain reading is given and prescribed, points to our predominant interest in visual regimes and their aesthetics – an issue that has been largely neglected in previous studies.

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<sup>19</sup> Christoph Asendorf, *Batterien der Lebenskraft. Zur Geschichte der Dinge und ihrer Wahrnehmung im 19. Jahrhundert*, Gießen 1984.

<sup>20</sup> Ludwig Vogl-Bienek, "Helden mit Handicap. Die Soziale Frage in der viktorianischen Projektionskunst", in: Herbert Uerlings, Nina Trauth, Lukas Clemens, eds., *Armut. Perspektiven in Kunst und Gesellschaft*, exh. cat., Darmstadt 2011, 231-239: 233 [unless otherwise stated, all translations are our own].

<sup>21</sup> Sarah Dellmann and Frank Kessler, eds., *A Million Pictures – Magic Lantern Slides in the History of Learning*, New Barnet, UK 2020; Martin Loiperdinger and Ludwig Vogl-Bienek, "eLaterna. Medienhistorische, methodische und medientechnische Grundlagen der Digitalisierung von Werken der historischen Projektionskunst", on the website of *Kompetenzzentrum Trier Center for Digital Humanities* (2016), URL: <https://tcdh.uni-trier.de/de/projekt/elaterna> (accessed May 30, 2022); see also Martin Wörner, *Vergnügung und Belehrung. Volkskultur auf den Weltausstellungen 1851–1900*, Munich/Münster/Berlin u.a. 1999.

<sup>22</sup> See Martina Droth, Jason Edwards and Michael Hatt, "Sculpture Victorious", in: *Sculpture Victorious. Art in an Age of Invention, 1837–1901*, eds. Martina Droth, Jason Edwards and Michael Hatt, exh. cat., New Haven/London 2014, 15-55: 30.

<sup>23</sup> Stefanie Samida, ed., *Inszenierte Wissenschaft. Zur Popularisierung von Wissen im 19. Jahrhundert*, Bielefeld 2011. See also Anja Laukötter, *Von der 'Kultur' zur 'Rasse' – vom Objekt zum Körper? Völkerkundemuseen und ihre Wissenschaften zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Bielefeld 2007.

<sup>24</sup> Today's Science Museum in London has its origins in 1857, in the Museum of Patents.

<sup>25</sup> Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex", in: *new formations*, no. 4: *Cultural Technologies* (Spring 1988), 73-102.

<sup>26</sup> Sigrid Schade and Silke Wenk, "Strategien des 'Zu-Sehen-Gebens': Geschlechterpositionen in Kunst und Kunstgeschichte", in: *Genus. Geschlechterforschung / Gender Studies in den Kultur- und Sozialwissenschaften. Ein Handbuch*, eds. Hadumod Bußmann and Renate Hof, Stuttgart 2005, 144-185.

Visitors were also viewers who were confronted with a variety of often fleeting visual impressions. They absorbed these impressions through a dynamic interplay of active engagement and passive reception, oscillating between attentive contemplation and inattentive consumption.<sup>27</sup> In this context, the way in which art itself was viewed also changed, as paintings were no longer produced and given meaning in an – impossible – aesthetic isolation or in a continuous tradition of painterly codes, but as one of many consumable and ephemeral elements within an ever-expanding array of images, commodities and visual stimuli.<sup>28</sup> Crary speaks in this context of a "confusing bifurcated model of vision in the nineteenth century" based on a co-occurrence of 'modernist' and 'traditional' ways of seeing.<sup>29</sup>

[10] The world's fairs presented just such a co-occurrence of different modes of perception. Walter Benjamin summed up the "visual imperative and its rehearsal in the world's fairs as 'see everything, touch nothing!'"<sup>30</sup> This occurred by inviting visitors to walk through a miniaturized world which, although deprived of haptics and reserved for the visual, nevertheless offered the possibility of immersion. People moved apparently effortlessly along the *trottoir roulant* (moving sidewalk) of the *Rue de l'Avenir* (Future Street) at the 1900 *Exposition universelle* in Paris (Fig. 3).



3 Moving sidewalk at the *Exposition universelle de 1900*, Paris, lantern slide, 3.25 × 4 inches. Brooklyn Museum, New York City, Goodyear Archival Collection (photo: <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/archives/image/55036>)

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<sup>27</sup> Miriam Oesterreich, *Bilder konsumieren. Inszenierungen 'exotischer' Körper in früher Bildreklame, 1880–1914*, Paderborn 2018, 286-289.

<sup>28</sup> Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer. On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, MA/London 1990, 20.

<sup>29</sup> Crary (1990), 4.

<sup>30</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. V.1: *Das Passagen-Werk*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, Frankfurt am Main 1991, 267; see also Katja Weise, *Gezähmte Kleider, gebändigte Körper? Kleidermoden im Museum sehend spüren. Der Einfluss von Präsentationsmitteln auf ästhetische Erfahrungen zwischen Visuellem und Hautsinnlichem*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Potsdam 2017, 66, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25932/publishup-43986>.

This moving sidewalk, consisting of three kilometers of movable platforms mounted on wheels, led visitors through the exhibition on a viaduct seven meters high, past its sights which once again gave them a view from above.<sup>31</sup> People got on and were set in motion in a kind of *perpetuum mobile*. In this way, the circulation of people – which is also manifested in the parallel railway tracks – is associated with the circulation of goods at the world's fair.

## An art history perspective on world's fairs

[11] Given that visibility is a key category, it is all the more surprising that no specific art history consideration of 19th-century world's fairs and their legacy in the 20th and 21st centuries has been undertaken to date. However, as far back as the mid-twentieth century, art historian Nikolaus Pevsner and art dealer Yvonne Ffrench both published respectively a synopsis of the Great Exhibition of 1851 in terms of its artistic objects.<sup>32</sup> And since the late 1970s, there has been a proliferation of studies dealing with the follow-up exhibitions to the Great Exhibition and their significance in the context of the art industry.<sup>33</sup> The focus of these, however, has been more on economic and political issues and the conditions prevalent in both art and industry in national comparison. In general, world's fairs have so far often been analysed from a historical perspective, and more recently through an interdisciplinary lens, in terms of the participating nations' pavilion architecture and inter-national competition, and less in terms of *what* was actually presented and *how* it was presented within the pavilions or in the common exhibition buildings.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> "Die besonderen Verkehrsmittel auf der Pariser Weltausstellung", in: *Dinglers Polytechnisches Journal* 81 (Stuttgart 1900), no. 315, pp. 565-572: "II. Die elektrische Rundbahn der Ausstellung", URL: <https://dingler.bbaw.de/articles/ar315139.html>; pp. 605-610: "III. Die elektrische Stufenbahn"; "IV. Die beweglichen Treppen", URL: <https://dingler.bbaw.de/articles/ar315148.html> (accessed 27 July 2023).

<sup>32</sup> Yvonne Ffrench, *The Great Exhibition, 1851*, London 1950; Nikolaus Pevsner, *High Victorian Design: A Study of the Exhibits of 1851*, London 1951.

<sup>33</sup> John Allwood, *The Great Exhibitions*, London 1977; Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The "Expositions Universelles", Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs, 1851–1939*, Manchester 1988; Jeffrey Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Nation on Display*, New Haven 1999; Franz Bosbach, John R. Davis and Susan Bennett, *Die Weltausstellung von 1851 und ihre Folgen / The Great Exhibition and its Legacy*, Munich 2002; Petra Krutisch, ed., *Aus aller Herren Länder: Weltausstellungen seit 1851*, exh. cat., Nuremberg 2001; Hermione Hobhouse, *The Crystal Palace and the Great Exhibition: Art, Science and Productive Industry. A History of the Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851*, London 2002.

<sup>34</sup> Louise Purbrick, *The Great Exhibition of 1851: New Interdisciplinary Essay*, Manchester 2001; Alexa Färber, *Weltausstellung als Wissensmodus: Ethnographie einer Repräsentationsarbeit*, Münster 2000; Alexander C. T. Geppert, *Fleeting Cities: Imperial Expositions in Fin-de-Siècle Europe*, New York 2010; Alexander C. T. Geppert, *Die normative Kraft des Flüchtlings: Exponierungen des Globalen in der Welt der Weltausstellungen, 1851–1900*, Munich 2010; Alexander C. T. Geppert, "Weltausstellungen" (June 20, 2013), on the website *Europäische Geschichte Online (EGO)*, ed. Leibniz-Institut für Europäische Geschichte (IEG), Mainz, URN: <https://d-nb.info/1043733019/34> (accessed May 6, 2022); Caroline A. Jones, *The Global Work of Art: World's Fairs, Biennials, and the Aesthetics of Experience*, Chicago/London 2016; James Buzard, Joseph W. Childers and Eileen Gillooly, eds., *Victorian Prism: Refractions of the Crystal Palace*, Charlottesville/London 2007; Jeffrey A. Auerbach and Peter H. Hoffenberg, eds., *Britain, the Empire, and the World at the Great Exhibition of 1851*, Aldershot 2008.



[12] Seeking to offer a resolutely art-historical perspective that probes beyond the declared intention to display national grandeur, the present issue addresses the transnational and postcolonial entanglements of the world's fairs and how these are manifested in their spectacles of art, visual display and technological demonstration. Through the shift of notions between fine arts, crafts, industry, science, and technology, we seek to reconsider the concept of art, not least because it leads directly to the concept of design as well as to new ideas regarding what actually constitutes art. The sense of uncertainty prompted by the advent of mass-produced industrial products served to call into question the status of art and to some extent gave rise to reactionary artistic positions such as historicism and the cult of monuments as well as to clear references back to an imagined classicism, visible in the displays and architectural flourishes of the world's fairs. At the same time, industrial innovations gave rise to new art forms informed by modernity, such as the Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain,<sup>35</sup> the Impressionists in France, and the Art Nouveau movements in German-speaking countries and beyond.<sup>36</sup> In view of the simultaneity of multiple historical, 'national' and modern styles on the sites of the world's fairs, debates also arose around a new kind of art criticism, such as in the print media and the extensive catalogue literature. Furthermore, new theoretical approaches were also presented here, including the discourse on realism prompted by Courbet's initiative for his own Pavillon du Réalisme outside the official world's fair in 1855,<sup>37</sup> and debates around functionalism accompanying the Cologne Werkbund presentations in Brussels in 1910 and in Ghent in 1913.<sup>38</sup> New styles and techniques and newly developed materials such as industrially produced colors also led to a modernisation of art production.

[13] This special issue seeks to draw a line from the world's fairs of the past to the world's fairs of the present and to interrogate them with regard to their particular implications for art historiography and to critically examine their constructions and representations. As part of this,

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<sup>35</sup> According to Kate Nichols and Rebecca Wade, recent scholarship "has provided a more nuanced and complex picture [...]". Their volume "guards against a selective and distorting emphasis on Arts and Crafts as only oppositional voices, and highlights period discussions of art and industry that the dominant vision of the Arts and Crafts Movement has overshadowed." Kate Nichols and Rebecca Wade, "Art versus Industry? An Introduction", in: *Art versus Industry? New Perspectives on Visual and Industrial Cultures in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, eds. Kate Nichols, Rebecca Wade and Gabriel Williams, Manchester 2016, 1-18: 3.

<sup>36</sup> See further Philippe Julian, *The Triumph of Art Nouveau: Paris Exhibition 1900*, London 1974; Michael Zimmermann, *Naturalismus unter dem Eiffelturm. Die Kunst auf der Weltausstellung von 1889*, Heidelberg 2002.

<sup>37</sup> See further Lorenz Dittmann "Courbet und die Theorie des Realismus", in: *Beiträge zur Theorie der Künste im 19. Jahrhundert*, eds. Helmut Koopmann and J. Adolf Schmoll gen. Eisenwerth, vol. 1, Frankfurt am Main 1971, 215-239; Klaus Herding and Max Hollein, eds., *Courbet – ein Traum von der Moderne*, exh. cat., Ostfildern 2010.

<sup>38</sup> See Friederike Kitschen, "Ein umstrittenes Modell: Deutsches Kunstgewerbe in französischen Debatten", in: *Deutsche Kunst – Französische Perspektiven: Kommentierter Quellenband zur Rezeption deutscher Kunst in Frankreich 1870–1945*, eds. Friederike Kitschen and Julia Drost, Berlin 2012, 297-310, <https://doi.org/10.1524/9783050061283.297> (accessed June 1, 2022); Christiane Heiser, "Der Deutsche Werkbund auf der Weltbühne" (part 1, 2010; part 2, 2011), on the website *design|geschichte* of the Dutch foundation Designgeschichte Nederland (2011), URL: <https://www.designhistory.nl/2011/der-deutsche-werkbund-auf-der-weltbuhne/> (accessed June 3, 2022).

the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* – that is, the 'exhibitionary complex'<sup>39</sup> in the form of the world's fairs' displays – will be critically reviewed in terms of its inherent universal claims. The arrangement of buildings, artifacts and objects will be examined from a new perspective, particularly in view of their significance for individual and collective practices. Considered against the background of nation-building and global entanglements,<sup>40</sup> such practices can be called into question, while legitimation strategies associated with power relations can be rendered visible. Given an increasingly industrialized system of art production and the growing interpenetration of art and everyday life, the volume also explores the extent to which the world's fairs of the past – as "a true culmination point for key ideas"<sup>41</sup> – contributed to the development and dissemination of new design principles while also prompting modern city dwellers to look at the world in a different way.

[14] In this introduction, we seek to identify four fields – 'Gesamtkunstwerk and the assemblage of things', 'technology and art', 'colonial entanglements and postcoloniality', and 'gender and fashion' – which, despite their importance at the intersection of art, handicraft, architecture, and technology, have been somewhat overlooked in the discourse on world's fairs. Various aspects of these notions are taken up and discussed from different perspectives in the paragraphs that follow.

## *Gesamtkunstwerk* and the assemblage of things

[15] Encountering the eclectic arrangement of buildings, artifacts and objects when visiting the Great Exhibition in 1851, Charlotte Brontë described it as a "unique assemblage of all things".<sup>42</sup> Indeed, it could be said that art, applied arts, artifacts, machines, technological innovations, industrial palaces and national exhibition architecture form an unparalleled symbiosis at the world's fairs. The synthesis achieved by such an encyclopedic, didactic assemblage was reflected in the concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*:<sup>43</sup> It is no coincidence that the idea of a complete and unified work of art and the concept of world's fairs both emerged during the first half of the nineteenth century. In 1850, for example, Richard Wagner described the *Gesamtkunstwerk* as "The Art-Work of the Future":

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<sup>39</sup> Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex", in: *new formations* 4 (Spring 1988), 73-102.

<sup>40</sup> On the concept of „entangled history“ cf. Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria, eds., *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus – Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*, Frankfurt a.M. 2002.

<sup>41</sup> Klaus Lankheit, *Kunstgeschichte unter dem Primat der Technik*, Karlsruhe 1966, 16.

<sup>42</sup> Charlotte Brontë, "Letter to Patrick Brontë 7th June 1851", in: *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Margaret Smith, vol. 2: 1848–1851, Oxford 2000, 630-632: 630 (underlining in original text).

<sup>43</sup> In an essay on urban development, Ulrich Schröder makes a connection to the 'Gesamtkunstwerk Weltausstellung': Ulrich Schröder, "Welt-Stadt. Zum veränderten Verhältnis von Weltausstellung und Stadtentwicklung", in: *Festivalisierung der Stadtpolitik: Stadtentwicklung durch große Projekte*, eds. Hartmut Häußermann and Walter Siebel, Wiesbaden 1993 (= *Leviathan. Berliner Zeitschrift für Sozialwissenschaft*, special issue no. 13 [1993]), 71-88: 72.

*The great United Art-work, which must gather up each branch of art to use it as a mean, and in some sense to undo it for the common aim of all, for the unconditioned, absolute portrayal of perfected human nature, – this great United Art-work he cannot picture as depending on the arbitrary purpose of some human unit, but can only conceive it as the instinctive and associate product of the Manhood of the Future.*<sup>44</sup>

This belief in the art of the future fits well with the future-oriented focus of the world's fairs, an orientation that manifests itself especially in the machines displayed there (Fig. 4).



4 Interior view of the *Galérie des machines*, *Exposition universelle internationale de 1889*, Paris, architects: Ferdinand Dutert and Charles Léon Stephen Sauvestre, engineer: Victor Contamin (photo: Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Prints and Photographs Division, <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2001698576/>)

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<sup>44</sup> Richard Wagner, *The Art-Work of the Future*, trans. William Ashton Ellis 1895, URL: <http://www.public-library.uk/ebooks/107/74.pdf> (accessed June 8, 2023). See for the original German edition: Richard Wagner, *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft*, Leipzig 1850, 32, URL: [https://www.deutschestextarchiv.de/wagner\\_zukunft\\_1850](https://www.deutschestextarchiv.de/wagner_zukunft_1850) (accessed June 8, 2022): "Das große Gesamtkunstwerk, das alle Gattungen der Kunst zu umfassen hat, um jede einzelne dieser Gattungen als Mittel gewissermaßen zu verbrauchen, zu vernichten zu Gunsten der Erreichung des Gesamtzweckes aller, nämlich der unbedingten, unmittelbaren Darstellung der vollendeten menschlichen Natur, – dieses große Gesamtkunstwerk erkennt er nicht als die willkürlich mögliche That des Einzelnen, sondern als das nothwendig denkbare gemeinsame Werk der Menschen der Zukunft."



5 Adolph Menzel, *The Iron Rolling Mill (Modern Cyclopes)*, 1872–1875, oil on canvas, 158 × 254 cm. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Nationalgalerie (photo: SMB – Nationalgalerie / Andres Kilger)

Adolph Menzel's painting of the iron rolling mill, a major work in the Realist tradition that was exhibited twice at world's fairs, once in Paris in 1878 and once in St. Louis in 1904,<sup>45</sup> places the toils of labourers center stage (Fig. 5). The work's title *Modern Cyclopes* serves, however, to elevate the scene into the realm of myth, given that Cyclopes are considered to be the helpmates of Hephaestus, the god of smithing.

[16] The boundaries between art / craftwork / non-art / machines were therefore negotiated anew in the concept of the world's fair. Designer Joseph Maria Olbrich (1867–1908), for instance, presented his interiors at the world's fairs (1900 Paris, 1902 Turin, 1904 St. Louis) as complete ensembles, which contributed greatly to the international influence of the Darmstadt artists' colony, which he had joined in 1900 (Fig. 6).<sup>46</sup> Jörg Scheller points out that "*Gesamtkunstwerk* and *Gesamtkonsum* (total consumption) are two different modes of post-metaphysical socialization (*Vergesellschaftung*) and communitization (*Vergemeinschaftung*): the one communal, the other agonal."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Claude Keisch, "*Eisenwalzwerk (Moderne Cyclopen)*", on the website of *Staatliche Museen zu Berlin*, URL: <https://recherche.smb.museum/detail/958605> (accessed June 4, 2022).

<sup>46</sup> Paul Sigel, "'Most charming examples' – Beiträge der Darmstädter Künstlerkolonie auf internationalen Ausstellungen um 1900", in: *ICOMOS – Hefte des Deutschen Nationalkomitees* 64 (2017), 69-80.

<sup>47</sup> Jörg Scheller, "Gesamtkunstwerk und Gesamtkonsum", in: *Pop-Zeitschrift* (June 4, 2016), URL: <http://www.pop-zeitschrift.de/2016/06/04/gesamtkunstwerk-und-gesamtkonsum-von-joerg-scheller4-6-2016/> (accessed May 22, 2022).



6 Joseph Maria Olbrich, *Darmstädter Zimmer*, presented at the *Exposition universelle de 1900*, Paris (reprod. from: Hessisches Landesmuseum, Institut Mathildenhöhe, and Kunsthalle Darmstadt, eds., *Ein Dokument deutscher Kunst: Darmstadt 1901–1976*, 6 vols., exh. cat., Darmstadt 1977, vol. 5, p. 68)

[17] Olbrich's contributions were also linked to an extensive claim to renewal: "The house becomes a machine", he said: like machines, houses are "without style", defined by economic and functional concerns.<sup>48</sup> This interface between *Gesamtkunstwerk* and world's fair will be critically examined in the following. The very term *Gesamtkunstwerk* is in fact ideologically loaded and utopian and, as an anachronistic desire for the 'unity of multiplicity', it stands in opposition to the differentiation and autonomization of the arts. In this sense the world's fair can also be seen in the context of the strategies developed in order to make modernity visible, strategies which coincided with the emergence of the department store as a new center of urban space, as well as museum strategies. The ephemeral mises-en-scène of world's fairs thus become part of a radically altered visual culture in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: in most cases, the exhibition arrangements were dismantled and moved to arts and crafts museums, which in turn determined the very emergence of those museums in many cases (e.g., today's Victoria & Albert Museum, London; Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro, Paris; today's Kunstgewerbemuseum, Berlin). It is thus necessary to examine and systematically analyse the characteristics of early exhibitions and scenography in their historical breadth, including the development of display cabinets, showcases and dioramas as well as photography, graphic art and poster art.

[18] While the futuristic utopias generally appear in a positive light, as unifying concepts, the close association of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* to totalitarian strategies becomes apparent precisely in the context of the world's fairs.<sup>49</sup> The portrayal of colonies as traditional, idyllic village communities

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<sup>48</sup> Joseph Maria Olbrich, "Vom neuen Ausstellungshaus und dem Hochzeitsturm, III", in: Darmstädter Tagblatt 169, no. 57 (March 8, 1906), supplement 4, URL: <http://tudigit.ulb.tu-darmstadt.de/show/Za-150-1906-1/1157/scroll> (accessed June 15, 2022); see also Ralf Beil, "Das Haus wird zur Maschine! Joseph Maria Olbrich: Dynamik und Pathos der Moderne", in: *Joseph Maria Olbrich 1867–1908: Architekt und Gestalter der frühen Moderne*, eds. Ralf Beil and Regina Stephan, exh. cat., Ostfildern 2010, 21-31.

<sup>49</sup> See Roger Fornoff, *Die Sehnsucht nach dem Gesamtkunstwerk. Studien zu einer ästhetischen Konzeption der Moderne*, Hildesheim/Zürich 2004. See also Alexandra Vinzenz, *Vision 'Gesamtkunstwerk': Performative Interaktion als künstlerische Form*, Bielefeld 2018.

ignores the violence of colonisation. Politics, aesthetics, industry, commerce and ideology are all brought together here. The claim to totality of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* has been critically analysed by Roger Fornoff, who emphasizes the structural analogies of totalitarian regimes and *Gesamtkunstwerk*.<sup>50</sup> He speaks of a repressive harmony in the *Gesamtkunstwerk* which is likewise manifested in the world's fairs.<sup>51</sup>

## Art and technology

[19] From their very beginnings, the world's fairs have foregrounded the relationship between artistic creation and machine production, between art and industry, and between architecture and technology.<sup>52</sup> This is why it is worth scrutinising the multifaceted interconnections of art and technology that are summed up under the term *techné*. The Crystal Palace hosted an array of objects that testified to both artistic and technical virtuosity, with its display serving simultaneously as a spectacle for the audience. Inside the vast hall, art objects and artefacts were presented alongside domestic and industrial products, new technologies and scientific innovations. Moreover, in terms of its aesthetics and function, the exhibition building itself came to represent the essence of modern architectural engineering, and was to profoundly influence subsequent developments in 19th-century European culture and media. With its characteristic glass and iron structure, the oversized greenhouse-like structure designed by engineer and botanist Joseph Paxton not only emphasized the sheer modernity of this type of building (and others built after it),<sup>53</sup> but also had a direct impact on art and modern techniques of reproduction: According to Albert Kümmel, new media such as the 'photo-sculpture' took the glass dome as their point of reference, as a kind of template: a small version of the round glass dome (Fig. 7) was used in the 1860s by François Willème for his invention of an apparatus that reproduced three-dimensional portraits of live models.<sup>54</sup> The model stands illuminated in the centre of the dome room and is simultaneously photographed by 24 small cameras positioned invisibly in the outer wall at an equal distance from one another.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Fornoff (2004), 537.

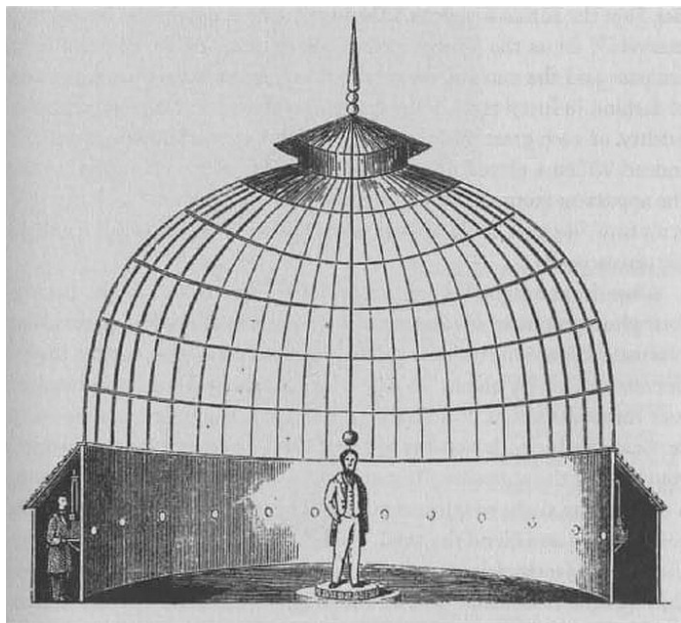
<sup>51</sup> Fornoff (2004), 562.

<sup>52</sup> The title also refers to Pierre Francastel, *Art & Technology in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, New York 2000 (original edition: *Art et technique aux XIXe et XXe siècles*, Paris 1956).

<sup>53</sup> See Marcus Termeer, *Das Treibhaus und die sozialen Konstruktionen von Fremdheit. Metapher und Raum zwischen Herrschaftsansprüchen und Überfremdungsphantasmen*, Münster 2020.

<sup>54</sup> Albert Kümmel, "Körperkopiermaschinen. François Willèmes technomagisches Skulpturentheater (1859–1867)", in: *Skulptur – zwischen Realität und Virtualität*, ed. Gundolf Winter, Munich 2006, 191-212: 193-194.

<sup>55</sup> Winfried Gerling, "Die eingefrorene Zeit oder das bewegte, stillgestellte Filmbild", in: *Freeze Frames. Zum Verhältnis von Fotografie und Film*, eds. Stefanie Diekmann and Winfried Gerling, Bielefeld 2015, 146-171: 153.



7 Studio Willème, schematic drawing (reprod. from: Albert Kümmel, "Körperkopiermaschinen. François Willèmes technomagisches Skulpturentheater (1859–1867)", in: *Skulptur – zwischen Realität und Virtualität*, ed. Gundolf Winter, Munich 2006, 191-212: 194)

[20] Although it differs in some ways from the famous Crystal Palace building—Willème's construction was "raised above a low, brick circular room"<sup>56</sup> – the studio was both functional and aesthetic. Willème's photo-sculpture studio became a theatre, a "mise-en-scène",<sup>57</sup> where the sculptural object was created in several stages: After the pictures were taken by the hidden cameras, behind the scenes the reproduced copy of the model was reworked by the hand of a skillful sculptor. Thus, it was not the actual product, a portrait bust, that counted but rather the magical spectacle of the moment of its making – an effect which is comparable to the widespread perception of early photography as "natural magic". The "simultaneity of the revealing and keeping of a secret"<sup>58</sup> indicates an emphasis on the effective staging of technology as magic. In the context of the Great Exhibition, Jonathon Shears refers to the spectacle as "phantasmagoria" to explain the effect of the manufactured glass on display: a range of new sensations were evoked by the machine-made materials and smooth surfaces which were capable of "enshrining fantastical possibilities".<sup>59</sup> Patricia Di Bello also summarizes the 19th-century phantasmagoria as a "popular form of [...] recreation that used magic lanterns to project images onto glass, cloth or smoke to create highly affecting, ghostly public spectacles".<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Kümmel (2006), 193.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>59</sup> Jonathon Shears, *The Great Exhibition, 1851. A Sourcebook*, Manchester 2017, 61-62.

<sup>60</sup> Patrizia Di Bello, "'Multiplying Statues Machinery': Stereoscopic Photographs of Sculptures at the 1862 International Exhibition", in: *History of Photography* 37, no. 4 (2013), 412-420: 415.

[21] Thus, with regard to the development of modern culture, the concepts of magic and technology became intertwined through their relationship with new media and their presence in commodity culture. The notion of the magical, which in the past had been an integral part of royal cabinets of curiosities (so-called *Wunderkammer*), is also a relevant topic in the transition to modern exhibitions: from 1800 onwards, industrial exhibitions, fairs, or individual demonstrations of 'curious machines' in museums are expressions of a specific aesthetics of display that now becomes available to the general public.<sup>61</sup> This is also akin to an 'industrialized cabinet of curiosities' and is best illustrated by the 1839 painting by Samuel Rayner entitled *Interior of the Mechanics' Institute*, which captures the venue of the first Derby Exhibition of 1839 (Fig. 8).



8 Samuel Rayner, *Interior of the Mechanics' Institute (Derby Exhibition of 1839)*, 1839, hand-colored lithograph. Derby Museum and Art Gallery, Derby (photo: [Wikipedia Commons](#))

The painting shows exhibits of science and technology assembled as cutting-edge innovations and displayed together with paintings and sculptures.<sup>62</sup> Similar exhibition concepts supported "by the Royal Society, the Mechanical Institutes, or the Polytechnics" followed an educational agenda and were "designed to educate working people" while imparting 'good taste' to the masses,<sup>63</sup> an issue that was to become even more prominent in the world's fairs.

[22] Twelve years later, the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London's Hyde Park enabled "the display of sculpture alongside objects of science and industry [...] to reach a pinnacle".<sup>64</sup> This way of

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<sup>61</sup> See Buket Altinoba, "'Curious machines'. Reproducing Sculpture via Machine and its Modus of Display in the Nineteenth Century", in: *The Sculptural in the (Post-)Digital Age*, eds. Mara-Johanna Kölmel and Ursula Ströbele, Berlin 2023, 37-57.

<sup>62</sup> The depicted display shows the status quo of Victorian art: "It became quite common that exhibitions set up by the Royal Society, the Mechanical Institutes, or the Polytechnics displayed achievements in art, science, and technology altogether." Droth, Edwards and Hatt (2014), 30.

<sup>63</sup> The high number of visitors to the Derby Exhibition proves the emerging public interest in the scientific and academic fields as "[i]n the eighteen weeks that the exhibition was open, it was visited by almost 100,000 people". Droth, Edwards and Hatt (2014), 31.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.



displaying technology and art was thus familiar to Victorian scientific society. In 1851, sculptors such as "Benjamin Cheverton exhibited busts and reductions carved on-site using his machine; and photography was declared by the juries to be 'the most remarkable discovery of modern times'".<sup>65</sup> At the International Exhibition of 1865 in Dublin, and again two years later at the Paris world's fair, the above-mentioned François Willème took such elements of fantasy and showmanship to the extreme by concealing his photo-sculpture apparatus from the audience at a demonstration of this new reproduction device.

[23] While the first global exhibition held in London "only admitted those works of art, including sculpture, that were 'connected with mechanical processes'",<sup>66</sup> the following world's fairs in Paris were also exemplary not only for the interplay between art and industrial production but also in terms of their relationship to a multitude of industrially produced objects in the field of the arts. In this context, the possibilities of mechanical reproduction of three-dimensional objects as well as new materials took up a lot of space and set fashionable trends: ornaments and building decorations made of machine-made papier-mâché, portrait miniatures made of bisque porcelain or Parian ware, and showpieces made of copper with a wafer-thin coating of precious metal. The latter technique of electroplating is a sibling of the galvanoplastic technique, which was invented in 1838 for the mass production of artifacts and was celebrated with an allegorical monument of its own at the 1867 world's fair in Paris:

*Perhaps no other monument [than the one by Christofle & Cie.] in the abundant history of the monument has been so indicative of the spirit of the century. The high pedestal is adorned by the door of the sacristy of San Marco in Venice, the two larger-than-life busts are portraits of the composers Halévy and Rossini from the façade of the Opéra, the crowning group is the galvanoplastic cast of Pujet's marble 'Milon of Croton' from the Louvre.<sup>67</sup>*

[24] It was against the backdrop of the world's fairs that Gottfried Semper (1803–1879) attempted to give a coherent theoretical legitimation to the developments in the arts and crafts and the challenges of industrial production in the second half of the 19th century. Semper's theoretical explanations mainly concerned the material of the time, iron, which was used for the first time in a comprehensive form in major building projects towards the end of the 19th century. During the 20th century, architectural historians Louis Mumford and Sigfried Giedion further developed ideas about architecture and materiality as well as mass culture, and such ideas also feature prominently in the writings of media theorist Marshal McLuhan, who became a spokesman for

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<sup>65</sup> Patrizia Di Bello, "Photographs of Sculpture: Greek Slave's 'complex polyphony', 1847–77", in: *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, no. 22: *Victorian Sculpture* (2016), 1-26: 9, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/ntn.775> (accessed May 1, 2021).

<sup>66</sup> Katie Hornstein, "An Unhappy Rivalry: Art and Industry at the 1855 Exposition Universelle in Paris", in: *Meet Me at the Fair: A World's Fair Reader*, eds. Celia Pearce and Laura Hollengreen, Pittsburgh 2014, 169-174, 169.

<sup>67</sup> Klaus Lankheit, "Der Stand der Forschung zur Plastik des 19. Jahrhunderts", in: *Bibliographie zur Kunstgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts. Publikationen der Jahre 1940–1966*, ed. Hilda Lietzmann, Munich 1968, 9-33: 19.

the "new emerging technoculture" and whose "interests in art, architecture, and popular culture" were so closely associated with the *Expo 67* in Montreal that the latter is dubbed by some as "McLuhan's Fair".<sup>68</sup>

[25] In addition to exploring the roles of engineers, architects, artisans, designers and artists in dealing with new materials and their presentation, it is important to consider the objects themselves as agents of innovative potential. This ontological approach to the materiality of machines and objects highlights their significant role in the interplay of art, science, and technology. Moreover, technological innovations were not merely exhibited and appropriated to present the profile of an 'advanced nation', but they were also effectively employed to engage spectators in a participatory manner. For instance, technologies such as lighting or binoculars were used in diorama and panorama presentations to create an immersive experience for the visitors.

[26] As both technology and the belief in technological progress generated a notion of the 'modern' inherent in nationalist competition, a supposed set of 'others' was simultaneously conceived as non-modern. More than any other phenomenon of the era, the world's fairs contributed to the bias of colonialist nations developing the very technology for which the colonies supplied the (human) resources and raw materials. This bias resulted in reciprocal dependencies as will be problematized in the next section.

## Colonial entanglements and postcoloniality

[27] It was not just the range of categories and objects that was expanded in the *Gesamtkunstwerk* of 19th-century world's fairs, but also their geographical boundaries: no less than the entire world was to be included in the exhibitions.<sup>69</sup> The history of the world's fairs is inextricably bound up with colonialist realities, partly due to the exhibition of non-European goods and artifacts in the pavilions of the colonizing nations – designed to establish the latter's identities – and partly through the semantic links with other universal exhibition formats such as the human zoo and the "Gewerbeschau" (trade show). These exhibition formats effectively constituted the economic, political and ideological framework of the world's fairs, which were dedicated to the 19th-century belief in technological progress, and at the same time were always colonial exhibitions as well. The art presented here is thus closely interwoven with these global and imperial interests of the industrial age. The very title given to the world's fair in Chicago in 1893 made clear that it was about the colonial aims and expansion of the participating nations: the "World's Columbian Exhibition" was to be an anniversary celebration (one year on) of the four hundred years since Christopher Columbus 'discovered' America.

[28] The idea of progress was closely linked to Columbus in the United States at the end of the 19th century: the reference to his 'discovery' of America in 1492 made it possible to represent the

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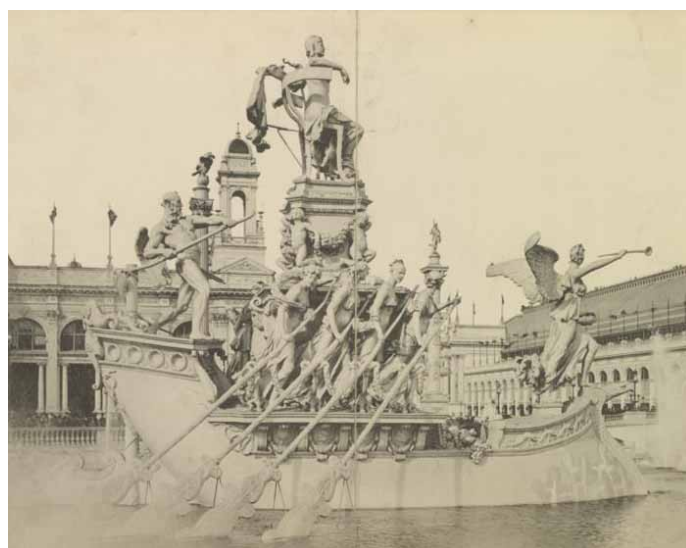
<sup>68</sup> Donald F. Theall, *The Virtual Marshall McLuhan*, Montreal 2001, 126.

<sup>69</sup> See Timothy Mitchell, "The World as Exhibition", in: *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31 (1989), 217-236; Beat Wyss, *Bilder von der Globalisierung. Die Weltausstellung von Paris 1889*, Berlin 2010; Paul Young, *Globalization and the Great Exhibition. The Victorian New World Order*, Basingstoke/New York 2009.

civilizational development of North America – not least in comparison to South America and Europe – as an extraordinary success story,<sup>70</sup> with colonialism providing the initial impetus for economic development and the progress of civilisation. Columbus's three caravels, the Pinta, the Santa María and the Niña had been reconstructed on the exhibition grounds and could be experienced close up. A postcard from that time shows the *Columbian Fountain* (Fig. 9), made by sculptor Frederick MacMonnies, at the centre of events, namely, with the Grand Bassin before it, ready for the taking, as it were.



9 General photographic view of the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893, gelatin silver print, 24 × 33 cm, photographer: Frances Benjamin Johnston. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Prints and Photographs Division (photo: Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/ds.14202>)



10 *Columbian Fountain*, sculpture by Frederick MacMonnies, at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893, photographer: Charles Dudley Arnold, published in: *The American Architect and Building News*, no. 961 (May 26, 1894), p. 140 (photo: Columbia University Libraries – [Digital Library Collections](#))

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<sup>70</sup> Kathleen Lock, *Kolumbus in den USA. Vom Nationalhelden zur ethnischen Identifikationsfigur*, Bielefeld 2014, 119.

The allegorical figure of 'Columbia' (Fig. 10), representing colonial 'discovery', rides high upon the ship of state, surrounded by Music, Architecture, Sculpture and Painting, each visible as a rower on the left-hand side, and by Agriculture, Science, Industry and Trade on the right-hand side. Here, too, technologies and the arts are again shown as complementing each other in the context of (imperial) progress. It was by means of these 'mises-en-scènes', which brought together colonization, nation and progress, that modernity was conceptualized and claimed by the industrial nations as belonging to them.

[29] A similarly overinflated presentation occurred architecturally at the New York World's Fair in 1939/40, bearing the title "Building the World of Tomorrow": the so-called Foreign Nations Building (Fig. 11), a row of identical pavilions rented out to the less wealthy nations, was grouped around the Lagoon of Nations and the Court of Peace (in the year of the outbreak of World War II).

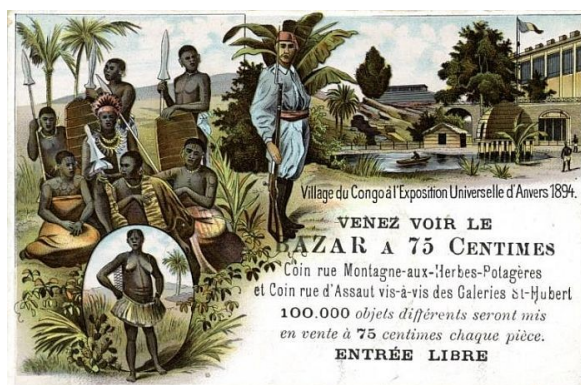


11 Hall of Nations area and Foreign Nations Building with the Mexican flag seen in the center, New York World's Fair, 1939 or 1940, color slide, photographer: Gottscho-Schleisner, Inc. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Prints and Photographs Division (photo: Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/gsc.5a30829>)

The US presented itself as a hegemonic power (Fig. 12): The US Government Building occupied the northern end of the site's great main axis, along which the pavilions of the nations lined up and Constitution Mall led to the Theme Center with the monumental structures of the Trylon and Perisphere encircled by the Helicline. This was joined at the southern end of the axis by the presentation of the City of New York and the triad of the three major US automobile companies General Motors, Ford and Chrysler Motors, flanked on either side by the railroads and aviation buildings. Amidst this gigantic display of economic prosperity (following the years of the Great Depression) and progressive politics in North America, the pavilions housing the "foreign nations" appeared small and marginalized. The 'foreign' exhibited in the various pavilions served as a spectacularized counter-image to the 'modern' identity of the USA.



[31] It was against this backdrop that the project of colonial expansion – itself closely connected to the world of consumption – came to be legitimized as a 'civilizing mission'. The representation of the colonial 'other' allowed for its appropriation through consumption.<sup>72</sup> In the postcard depicting the "Congolese Village" at the 1894 world's fair in Antwerp (Fig. 14), the fully clothed and armed colonizer is portrayed standing upright alongside the colonized subjects, making colonization visually accessible in the world's fair display.



14 Postcard of the Congolese Village exhibited at the *Exposition universelle d'Anvers*, Antwerp, 1894, colour lithograph (photo: [Wikimedia Commons](#))

The iconographic tradition of military conquest by the White Man, which also links hegemonic supremacy with consumption as civilizational progress, can be observed in slightly modified variations. For instance, it appears in advertising motifs such as a contemporary set of advertising cards (Fig. 15).



15 "From the dark part of the world. Traversing a river on an expedition. Seelig's coffee substitutes". From a set of advertising cards of the coffee substitute manufacturer Emil Seelig A.-G., Heilbronn, after 1900 (reprod. from: Joachim Zeller, *Koloniale Bilderwelten. Zwischen Klischee und Faszination – Kolonialgeschichte auf frühen Reklamesammelbildern*, Augsburg 2010, 66)

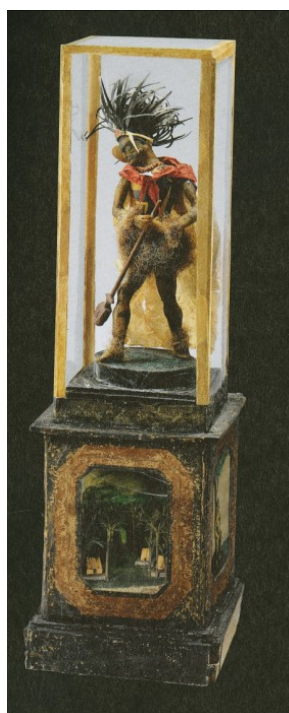
<sup>72</sup> McClintock (1995).

Even Christopher Columbus is used in this way for product promotion (Fig. 16), connecting colonialism with consumerism and exoticism.



16 Advertising label of the company Johnson & Co., Hamburg, for pineapples, 1896 (photo: Miriam Oesterreich)

[32] The world's fairs were literally objectified in the form of mass-produced souvenirs that visitors could take home with them. As early as Paris 1878, alongside all the various catalogues, postcards and brochures available there, a visitor could purchase a carefully crafted souvenir that showed the figurine of an enigmatic and fearsome-looking African "warrior" inside a glass cover. Such trinkets served to establish a part of the world's fair spectacle as a worthy decoration for the bourgeois home (Fig. 17).



17 Warrior figurine inside glass cover, souvenir from the *Exposition universelle de 1878*, Paris, manufacturer unknown. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (reprod. from: Katharina Dohm et al., eds., *Diorama. Erfindung einer Illusion*, exh. cat., Cologne 2017, 229)

In another example, a sign on a souvenir stall at the 1915 Panama-California Exposition in San Diego proclaimed that visiting the fair without taking home a souvenir was not a complete visit (Fig. 18): the actual visit is confirmed by the authenticity and verifiability embodied by a souvenir "that lasts forever".<sup>73</sup>



18 Souvenir shop at the Panama-California Exposition, San Diego, 1915, photographer unknown (reprod. from: Sarah J. Moore, *Empire on Display. San Francisco's Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915*, Norman, OK 2013, 186)

The landmarks of the 1939 New York World's Fair, the Trylon und Perisphere, for example, could be purchased in the form of salt and pepper shakers (Fig. 19).



19 Salt and pepper shaker, 1939, plastic. New York Historical Society, Gift of Bella C. Landauer (photo: <https://www.newyorkalmanack.com/2013/04/great-souvenirs-from-the-1939-worlds-fair/>, accessed Dec. 3, 2021)

<sup>73</sup> Moore (2013), 186.



[33] The objects put on display at the world's fairs were joined by people dressed in costume from different parts of the world, who thus likewise became exhibits, as in the aforementioned "Congolese Village" in Brussels in 1893. Works of art such as the portraits of Maoris painted by the New Zealand artist Gottfried Lindauer, which were displayed in St. Louis in 1904, were not shown in an art gallery but exhibited as ethnographic items, as it were, among other objects of everyday life.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, at the very first world's fair in 1851, the British colony of New Zealand was represented by a "valuable and tolerably extensive collection of native and other products", according to a contemporary visitor.<sup>75</sup> These included a hand-colored lithograph (Fig. 20) based on an oil painting by John Alexander Gilfillan entitled *Interior of a Native Village or 'Pa' in New Zealand*. The display of such genre scenes through the medium of art and their exhibition at a world's fair meant that while they had to appear plausible as ethnographic documents on the one hand, they also effectively called fundamentally into question the boundaries between ethnography/science and art by postulating their own 'authenticity'.



20 Edmund Walker, based on an oil painting by John Alexander Gilfillan, *Interior of a Native Village or "Pa" in New Zealand*, lithograph, 480 × 644 mm, London: Day & Son, 1850. Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, The Ilene and Laurence Dakin Bequest, 1998/32/2 (photo: [Auckland Art Gallery](#))

What becomes clear is that power hierarchies are flexible and are constantly being negotiated anew in each exhibition context. Representations of self and other and the ways they are received are played out in fiercely contested cultural arenas, and the world's fairs were certainly one of these.

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<sup>74</sup> *Catalogue of Exhibits at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition 1904*, ed. New Zealand Government, St. Louis, MO 1904, 10 and 13, accessible online at <https://archive.org/details/catalogueofexhi00loui/page/20/mode/2up>.

<sup>75</sup> *Official Descriptive and Illustrated Catalogue of the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations, 1851*, 5 vols., London 1851, vol. 2, p. 1000, quoted according to: Ewan Johnston, "'A Valuable and Tolerably Extensive Collection of Native and Other Products' – New Zealand at the Crystal Palace", in: *Britain, the Empire, and the World at the Great Exhibition of 1851*, eds. Jeffrey A. Auerbach and Peter H. Hoffenberg, Aldershot a.o. 2008, 77-92: 78.

## Fashion and the gendering of the world's fairs

[34] The partially unclad bodies of women were ubiquitous at the world's fairs during the nineteenth century, not only in the display of nude people in 'exotic' villages, but also in the decoration of the pavilions. The *Galérie des machines* at the 1889 *Exposition universelle* in Paris displayed countless allegorical figures in an idealized white female form,<sup>76</sup> which gave abstract values such as electricity, industry, and steam power an alluring appearance (Figs. 21, 22). The white marble highlights the beauty norms dominant in Europe then as now, and can be readily associated with discourses of whiteness.



21 Louis-Ernest Barrias (1841–1905), *La Électricité*, ca. 1889, sculpture group at the entrance to the *Galérie des machines*, *Exposition universelle de Paris 1889*. Platinotype from a gelatin silver bromide glass negative, 21 × 16,5 cm, photographer: Hippolyte Blancard (1844–1924). Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), Paris, Estampes et Photographie, don de M. et Mme Rousseau en 1944, Eo 508b, 11, boîte folio (photo: [BnE](#), Paris)

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<sup>76</sup> Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form*, London 1985.



22 *L'Industrie*, ca. 1889, colossal statue adorning the entrance to the central pavilion, *Exposition universelle de Paris 1889*. Platinotype from a gelatin silver bromide glass negative, 21 × 16,5 cm, photographer: Hippolyte Blancard (1844–1924). Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), Paris, Estampes et Photographie, don de M. et Mme Rousseau en 1944, Eo 508b, 11, boîte folio (photo: [BnF](#), Paris)

[35] This visualisation of technological achievements through female personifications is all the more astonishing since technological progress and engineering – as well as the objects and materials associated with them, such as steel, iron, steam power and electricity – were generally connoted as male and associated with European male strength, power and virtue. Even the 'fine arts' had a male connotation in the exhibitions of 'national schools of art', and were filled, almost without exception, with works by male artists, while the national pavilions were decorated with images of national allegorical figures in the form of idealized female bodies. Thus, the allegorical representation of the nation took the form of a female figure. Simultaneously, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the nuclear family, with its idealized image of the middle-class housewife and mother, gained in importance as the 'foundation of the nation'. The imagined femininity at this period was primarily associated with handicrafts and domestic activities, in contrast to the 'masculine' domains of engineering and the arts. Consequently, this gave rise to discourses around technology and imperialism that became intertwined with gender roles, leading to the reception of the 'others' – the colonized people, objects, and technologies on display – as 'feminized'. These latter – in parallel to the idealized views of European women – were demonstrably and performatively presented as traditions 'linked to nature' and handicrafts, thus also positioning them as 'keepers of tradition' in times of radical social upheaval. Folklore was thus an aspect of the world's fairs that was dominated by women.

[36] In this context, fashion and textiles also played an important role at the world's fairs. Not only was clothing exhibited to represent nations and homelands (in the form of traditional costumes in geographic and cultural narratives), but it was also presented in the context of modernist discourses as the result of technological progress. At the 1855 *Exposition universelle* in

Paris, for instance, which was seen as a response to the Great Exhibition that took place in London in 1851, the textile and clothing industry was featured prominently with its own large exhibition area at the *Palais de l'Industrie* alongside industrial and chemical products. Not only were the latest power looms showcased, but also the first Singer sewing machines, which represented a link between home work and the industrial mass production of textiles, and between manual work and the automated work of machines. These sewing machines were presented by women to whom domestic textile work had been ascribed throughout the nineteenth century. Correspondingly, textile work in factories was also coded as female (Figs. 23, 24).



23 Presentation of the Singer sewing machine at the 1855 *Exposition universelle* in Paris (photo: <https://www.worldfairs.info/forum/viewtopic.php?f=39&t=531-machine-a-coudre-a-l-exposition-de-paris-1855&start=0>, accessed April 16, 2024)



24 Operators making corsets in the Singer Sewing Machine exhibit in the Palace of Manufactures at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis, Missouri, photographer unknown. Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, Photographs and Prints Collection, [N15849](#) (photo: MHS, St. Louis)

[37] However, women also took on an important role as consumers of fashion, strolling through the world's fairs in fashionable dresses, as can be seen in numerous depictions (Fig. 3). The world's fairs served the global marketing of the textile and clothing industry. Global trade relations are effectively reified in the materiality of the clothes. From the Paris *Exposition universelle* of 1867 onwards, a significant upswing in the cotton industry can be observed. This upswing can be attributed to the availability of improved machinery that allowed for cheaper production. But while the sewing machines in the exhibitions were demonstrated by white women, the work on the cotton plantations, where predominantly black people, often enslaved, worked, remained invisible.<sup>77</sup> Female work is embedded here in the regimes of the colonial gaze and of colonial display.<sup>78</sup>

[38] Moreover, England and France in particular displayed their colonial and industrial hegemony at the world's fairs in the nineteenth century by staging textile production in the colonies as a 'primitive', 'pre-modern' activity carried out on simple devices (Fig. 25).



25 Women of the indigenous Igorot people weaving, photographed in the Philippine Reservation within the Anthropology Section of the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis, Missouri, in: *St. Louis World's Fair Album*, 1904, vol. 9. Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, Photographs and Prints Collection, [N28260](#) (photo: MHS, St. Louis)

[39] In Paris in 1867, a separate section of the exhibition was dedicated to traditional costumes from various regions of Europe. While modernity was represented in this rhetoric by *fashion*,

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<sup>77</sup> See on the complex topic of representation in the context of cotton production: Miki Pfeffer, "'Mr. Chairman and FELLOW AMERICAN CITIZENS': African American Agency at the World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition in New Orleans, 1884–1885", in: *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 51, no. 4 (2010), 442-462, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25800987>.

<sup>78</sup> In his exhibition "The American Negro" at the Paris *Exposition universelle* in 1900, W.E.B. Dubois sought to present a different image of Afro-Americans. He "actively refuted racist images and systematically worked on the transformation of the white gaze and against the scientific legitimization of white supremacy". Elke Gaugele and Monica Tilton, "Fashion and Postcolonial Critique. An Introduction", in: *Fashion and Postcolonial Critique*, eds. Elke Gaugele and Monica Tilton, Berlin 2019, 10-39: 19-23.

traditional costumes served to support a discourse about folkloric harmony. As "living pictures of foreign nations",<sup>79</sup> these displays took on an ethnographic function, meant to document the "seemingly inexorable disappearance of traditional contexts of life".<sup>80</sup> Additionally, they were intended to serve as a symbol of identity for the various nations. The traditional costumes were not only presented by living persons, but also by life-size dolls in a kind of diorama that anticipated the museum presentation.<sup>81</sup>

## After revision – world's fairs to be continued?

[40] While the world's fairs of the past were crowd pullers and attracted attention worldwide, the concept of the 'world as a show' has lost its former significance in the post-industrial 20th and 21st centuries. However, the concept of the world's fair has given rise to a variety of formats for the exhibition of works of art. The Venice Biennale, for example, was launched in 1895 as a decidedly global art exhibition, adopting the nation-based concept of the world's fairs and transferring it to the field of art.<sup>82</sup> From the beginning of the 20th century, national artworks were exhibited in Venice in national – and permanent – pavilions and thus entered into a competition between the art productions of the various nations. At the early biennials, however, the notion of "artwork" was drawn much more narrowly than at the world's fairs and restricted to the recognized genres of artistic practice – painting and sculpture. Likewise, the 'world' was conceptualized as the 'Western world'; over a long period spanning decades only European artists had their work exhibited in Venice. The concept of a specific art exhibition as a biennial was geographically expanded in the years after the Second World War, especially with the 'counter-biennials' and 'peripheral' biennials, most prominently in São Paulo since 1951 or in Havana since 1984 and, since the late 1990s, in numerous smaller formats in, e.g., Dakar and Haiti ("Ghetto Biennial").<sup>83</sup>

[41] As global exhibition formats became geared towards specialized exhibitions of particular sectors, the importance of the world's fair as a concept diminished, as did its worldwide media resonance: for more than twenty years between Osaka 1970 and Seville 1992, no official world's

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<sup>79</sup> Charles Lowe, *Four National Exhibitions in London and Their Organiser*, London 1892, 14.

<sup>80</sup> Martin Wörner, *Vergnügung und Belehrung. Volkskultur auf den Weltausstellungen 1851–1900*, Berlin/München/Münster 1999, 170: "Die Tracht wurde zu einem Symbol des scheinbar unaufhaltsamen Verschwindens traditionaler Lebenszusammenhänge".

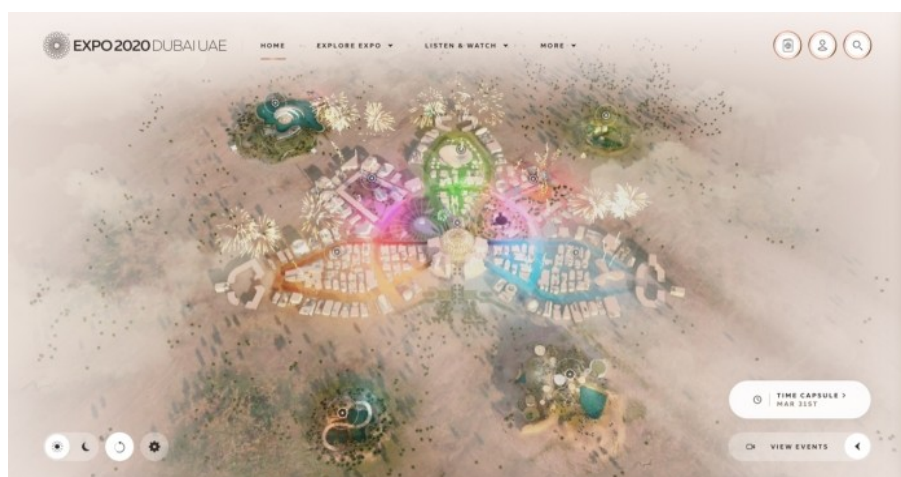
<sup>81</sup> See Julia Petrov, *Fashion, History, Museums. Inventing the Display of Dress*, London/New York/Oxford 2019, 70-72.

<sup>82</sup> See Caroline A. Jones, *The Global Work of Art: World's Fairs, Biennials, and the Aesthetics of Experience*, Chicago/London 2016.

<sup>83</sup> See Anthony Gardner and Charles Green, "Biennials of the South on the Edges of the Global", in: *Third Text* 27 (2013), no. 4: *Global Occupations of Art*, 442-455; and Oliver Marchart, "The Globalization of Art and the 'Biennials of Resistance': A History of the Biennials from the Periphery", in: *On Curating* 46 (June 2020), <https://on-curating.org/issue-46-reader/the-globalization-of-art-and-the-biennials-of-resistance-a-history-of-the-biennials-from-the-periphery.html#.YynrMi-21N0> (accessed September 20, 2022).

fair was held.<sup>84</sup> However, after the revival of the idea of the world's fair in Seville in 1992, which celebrated "The Age of Discoveries" on the occasion of the five hundredth anniversary of Columbus' 'discovery' of the Americas, the context changed for the ideas of (colonial) progress that had accompanied the world's fairs in the past. Since the beginning of the third millennium, the geographical venues of the "Expo", as the former (and Western) world's fairs are now called, have expanded around the globe; they have taken place in China, South Korea, Japan, Kazakhstan and, most recently, in Dubai, where the slogan was "Connecting Minds, Creating the Future" (01/10/2021–31/03/2022).<sup>85</sup> The visitor numbers in Dubai – more than 24 million<sup>86</sup> – show not only that the world's fair as an idea has actually extended its reach, but also that its success or failure no longer depends solely on its reception in the West.

[42] Visuality played a major role in the vision of progress presented in Dubai, the location of the most recent world's fair. "Expo 2020 Dubai provided visitors with a visually striking, emotionally inspiring 182 days, as more than 200 participants [...] created the largest and most diverse World Expo ever", claims the official website of the Bureau International des Expositions.<sup>87</sup> Beneath the invitation to "Visit Virtual Expo Dubai!", visitors to the website can experience a virtual tour of the world's fair in digital form. In a futuristic design of Dubai as a 'smart city', digital media are used to portray it as an ultra-modern and high-tech location (Fig. 26).



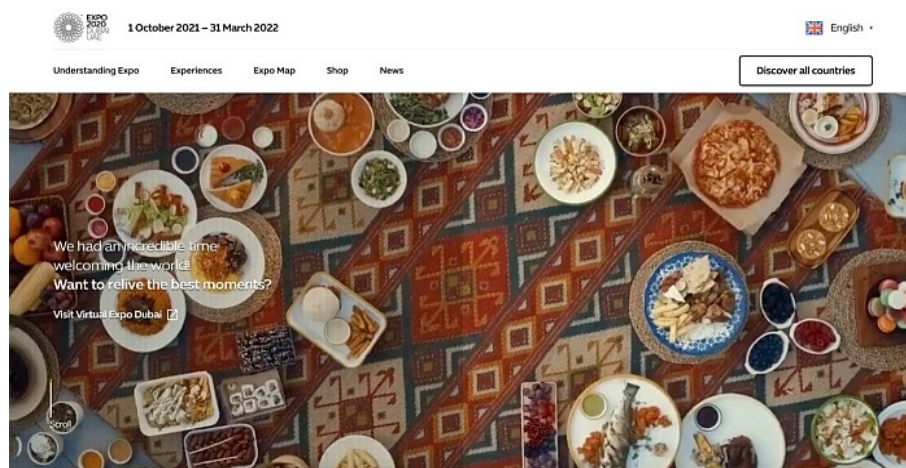
26 Screenshot from the Expo 2020 Dubai virtual visit website, <https://virtualexpodubai.com> (accessed September 23, 2022)

<sup>84</sup> See also Beat Wyss' contribution to this issue, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/riha.2023.3.98046>.

<sup>85</sup> Jones (2016).

<sup>86</sup> See "Expo 2020 Dubai" on the website of the Bureau International des Expositions, Paris, <https://www.bie-paris.org/site/en/2020-dubai> (accessed August 15, 2022).

<sup>87</sup> "Expo 2020 Dubai", on the website of the Bureau International des Expositions, Paris, <https://www.bie-paris.org/site/en/2020-dubai> (accessed August 15, 2022).



27 Screenshot from the Expo 2020 Dubai website, <https://www.expo2020dubai.com/index.html> (accessed September 23, 2022)

This 'smart vision' – which is virtually realized in a rapid sequence of panoramas, – stands in contrast to the simultaneous adoption of 'traditional' patterns manifested in the visual presentation of folkloric performances of 'typical' clothing, costumes, dances and foods, "as a strategic capitalisation of aesthetic Orientalism" (Fig. 27).<sup>88</sup> In this context, different perspectives on the world's fair format can be read as an interweaving of past, present and future vision.

[43] In addition to the new venues for world's fairs and the exhibition of art at specific biennials, another phenomenon is the staging of 'Western' art exhibitions by global players. The lavish presentation of art, e.g., in the Louvre Abu Dhabi further extends the concept of the world's fair as a neoliberal globalization of art,<sup>89</sup> while on the other hand this very concept is disrupted by shifts in meaning, by adaptations and modifications that are specific to the local context. In this way, the institution that epitomizes European art history – the art museum – is brought to a variety of locations, yet it is changed in the process: it is the institution itself that travels, whereas those interested in European art do not of necessity need to travel to see it.

## Perspectives presented in this special issue

[44] The aim of this special issue is to place scholarly and theoretical perspectives on world's fairs in the context of art history and aesthetics. It focuses on the intersections between art and industry and how the fairs were designed to shape the perceptions of a culturally diverse audience. Several articles deal with the colonial realities embedded in the world's fairs and their broader historical contexts. The areas of tension that arise from the colonial contexts and manifest themselves at the world's fairs are explored by the authors in relation to the exhibits and the staged representations of the 'other'.

<sup>88</sup> See Alexa Färber's contribution to this issue, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/riha.2024.2.95414>.

<sup>89</sup> Alexandra Karentzos, "'Was ist schon eine Milliarde Dollar für einen Louvre?'" Institutionskritik und postkoloniale Perspektiven", in: *Kunstforum International* 251 (Dec. 2017–Jan. 2018), 82-89.



[45] Beat Wyss provides a panoramic view of world exhibitions from the 19th century to the present and their colonial and neo-colonial claims. He explores in particular the role of Germany, where no official world's fair had taken place until Expo 2000, and takes a look at recent world exhibitions, focusing on Asia as a new player in today's 'globalized' world's fairs.

[46] The interrelation between strategies of showmanship or dramatic storytelling and print culture, the entertainment industry, and museology are addressed by Karen Burns in her article "'Buried Empires': Showmanship and the Staging of Aesthetic Knowledge at the Sydenham Crystal Palace, 1854–1855". Taking the ephemeral aesthetics of fairs as a starting point, Burns looks at a series of archaeological reconstructions made for the second Crystal Palace construction in Sydenham – the 'Art Courts' – to trace the entanglements of early museum curatorship, popular science and the transmission of 'aesthetic knowledge' or 'taste'.

[47] Regine Prange takes a critical look at the then highly praised steel construction of London's Crystal Palace by designer, botanist and landscape architect Joseph Paxton and contrasts it with the sequence about the Crystal Palace in the 1984 film *The Power of Emotions* by artist Alexander Kluge. Following Kluge's post-Marxist reading, she expands the interpretation of the famous construction through the lens of art history: The iconic Crystal Palace, she argues, functions here as a metaphor in which the fragmentation of the world as well as the looming modern catastrophes are crystallized.

[48] Buket Altinoba takes an in-depth look at industrial culture, engineering art, the applied arts, and technical issues in her essay on "Engineers as Artists. Artists as Engineers. The Reproduction of Art Objects at World's Fairs". In particular, she explores the history of a then newly invented machine for reproducing sculpture which was displayed as a cutting-edge innovation at the very first world's fair in London in 1851. She refers both to the history of early photography and three-dimensional reproduction technologies which were also used for the arts – and whose products, like the machines themselves, served as exhibits.

[49] In her essay "Rationality and Progress versus Natural Creative Talent: Constructions of Masculinity in Engineering and Technology around 1900", Tanja Paulitz provides a sociologically informed insight into the entangled discourses of gender and technology in the context of world's fairs. She explores the ways in which engineers were intervening in artistic and technical discourses as early as the turn of the 20th century. As Moore does for the US context, Paulitz investigates narratives of technological progress and gender ascriptions – or rather ideas of 'technological' masculinity – for modern German nationalist contexts. Paulitz explores how, on the one hand, the figure of the 'artist-engineer' constructed the artist as scientist and technician and, on the other hand, how technological developments came to influence the fine arts and literature discourses.

[50] In her contribution "Gender and World's Fairs at the Turn-of-the-Twentieth Century: A Case Study in Panama and San Francisco", Sarah J. Moore reflects on the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition in Golden Gate Park, which was celebrated on the occasion of the completion of the Panama Canal – a construction project which was massively promoted using contemporary gender stereotypes and ideas of masculinity that were connected with notions

about the US-American nation and its assumed global dominance and actual imperialism. She elaborates on the entanglement of the body, machine technology, and representations of North American masculinity.

[51] Rebecca Houze problematizes early 20th-century attitudes to race and gender and examines how fashion at the St. Louis world's fair (1904) was in tension between notions of the progressive 'new woman' and the mythical 'vanishing Indian'. Using photographs, she shows that such fashion encounters between visitors and participants of the fair played a key role in representing the exhibition's narrative of progress.

[52] Using the example of the "Artware Courts" of the Indian Pavilions at international exhibitions in Calcutta, London and Glasgow in the 1880s, Tapati Guha Thakurta's essay maps a specific network of commissioning, collecting, cataloguing and documenting India's 'art-manufactures'. She locates the category of the designed object – "art manufacture" – in a specifically imperial and institutional field in which the pedagogy and connoisseurship of design came together with the valorisation of craft traditions.

[53] Melanie Ulz situates the phenomenon of the world's fair in the context of a culture of consumption and describes the exhibition of the 'other' as a commodity spectacle, that is featured not only at the fairs themselves but in the press, a variety of printed media, illustrations and popular visual culture as well as in other contemporary exhibition formats such as human zoos. In her analysis of the Brussels International Exposition of 1897 and the Paris Colonial Exposition of 1931, Ulz provides examples of the aesthetic staging and displaying of African art and the perception and appreciation of non-European art within the Art Nouveau and Art Deco movements.

[54] In her chapter "The Art Pavilion at the 1958 Belgian Congo Colonial Exhibition in Brussels. Searching for Perspectives", Bärbel Küster traces the discourses around the exhibition of modern paintings by a group of art students from Lubumbashi in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which were shown (for the first time) together with works of European modern art. At the same fair, 'traditional' Congolese dwellings were also displayed and created a provocative contrast to the explicitly modern paintings. Considering post-World War II modernism discourses, Küster thus discusses questions of 'modern colonial art' in a nationalized colonial framing and the conceptions of metropolis/colony and of art/non-art inherent to these processes and display practices.

[55] National self-representation is also central to Miriam Oesterreich's article. She presents the indigenist exhibition practices of the Republic of Mexico – a politically independent state since 1820 – starting from the 1929 *Exposición Iberoamericana* in Seville, which served as a counter-exposition to the 1929 world's fair in Barcelona. Oesterreich places this specific national presentation in a neo-colonial exhibition format in the context of earlier presentations at 19th-century European fairs. She explores how the Republic of Mexico positioned itself precariously between a self-confident national(ist) stance and a colonialist exhibition value as 'Europe's other'. She discusses the indigenist presentations of the past, which are manifest in the exhibition architectures, as a particular postcolonial claim to modernity.

[56] Alexa Färber deconstructs touristically tinged exhibition strategies taking the example of the Moroccan pavilion for the Expo 2000 in Hanover, Germany. She discusses the thorny issue of national self-representation and self-exoticization in the context of postcolonial world's fairs from a perspective grounded in ethnology and thus brings issues around the exhibition of the 'other' and its modalities into the present.

### Special Issue

Buket Altinoba, Alexandra Karentzos and Miriam Oesterreich, eds., *'Gesamtkunstwerk' World's Fair. Revisioning International Exhibitions*, in: *RIHA Journal* 0300-0312 (31 May 2024), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/riha.2024.2>.

### Guest Editors

Buket Altinoba, Dr. phil., is a researcher at the Institute of Art History at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich working on the project "Machines for the reproduction of sculpture. Competition of reproduction techniques 1770–1880" (funded by the DFG, 2020–2023). Before her visiting professorship at the University of Regensburg, she worked as a research assistant at the Institute for the History of Art and Architecture at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT). She participated in the Mathilde Planck Lectureship Program at the State Academy of Fine Arts Stuttgart and was a PhD fellow at the *Graduiertenkolleg* "Image – Body – Medium. An Anthropological Perspective" at the Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design (HFG). Her dissertation on the founding and development of the Istanbul Academy of Arts (2012) was published in 2016 under the title *Die Istanbuler Kunstakademie von ihrer Gründung bis heute: moderne Kunst, Nationsbildung und Kulturtransfer in der Türkei*.

Alexandra Karentzos, Dr. phil., is Professor of Art History, Fashion and Aesthetics at the Technische Universität Darmstadt in Germany. Previously, she was Junior Professor of Art History at the University of Trier and Assistant Curator at the Alte Nationalgalerie and the Nationalgalerie Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum of Contemporary Art in Berlin. She was a fellow in the research group "No Laughing Matter. Visual Humor in Ideas of Race, Nationality, and Ethnicity" at Dartmouth College, USA, and a guest researcher at the Institute of Art History at the Universidade Federal de São Paulo, Brazil, as well as a fellow at the Alfried Krupp Wissenschaftskolleg Greifswald, Germany. Most recently, she was a visiting scholar at the University of Cincinnati. Together with Viktoria Schmidt-Linsenhoff and Katja Wolf, she founded the Center for Postcolonial and Gender Studies (CePoG) at the University of Trier. She is co-founder and editor of the journal *Querformat. Zeitschrift für Zeitgenössisches, Kunst, Populärkultur*. Together with Miriam Oesterreich, she heads the DFG-funded project "A Critical Art History of International and World Exhibitions – Decentering Fashion and Modernities". She has published extensively on different aspects of art, fashion and visual culture. Another special issue she co-edited for the *RIHA Journal* is: *Gottfried Lindauer – Painting New Zealand*, in: *RIHA Journal* 0189-0197 (20 July 2018), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/riha.2018.2>.

Miriam Oesterreich, Dr. phil., is Professor of Design Theory and Gender Studies at the Universität der Künste (UdK) Berlin. As an art historian (BA from the University of Heidelberg, MA from the Freie Universität Berlin), she is currently researching the transcultural entanglements of Mexican indigenism. She received her PhD from the Freie Universität Berlin with a study of early exoticist advertising images in the German Empire, 1880–1914, which was published as a book in the Fink/Brill series *Schriften zur Kunst*. She has published in journals such as *RIHA*, *Artelogie*, and *Design & Culture*. She has worked as a research associate at the University of Heidelberg and at the Technische Universität Darmstadt, where she deepened her research interests in the fields of Latin American arts, art and migration, and concepts of the body in art. In 2019, she was the Ansel Adams Fellow at the Center for Creative Photography at the University of Arizona. She is an associate researcher of the international project *Worlding Public Cultures – The Arts and Social Innovation* at the University of Heidelberg and the Heidelberg Center for Ibero-American Studies. She is co-editor of the peer-reviewed open-access journal [MIRADAS](#) – *Journal for the Arts and Culture of the Americas and the Iberian Peninsula*.

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### **Editing**

Andrea Lerner and Sophie Reinhardt, Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, Munich

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