

The theme of the exhibition programme in 2011 is *IMAGINE* – towards an *ecoaesthetic*. *IMAGINE* suggests that art is a critical but at the same time positive, fruitful option that makes allowances for the surroundings and the environment. With this focus *IMAGINE* wants to put discussions of representation and negation issues on a back burner in favour of a more 'healing' aspect.



The point of departure for this year's theme is the manifesto *Ecoaesthetics* by the artist, writer and curator Rasheed Araeen, which was published in the art and culture periodical *Third Text* in the autumn of 2009. In this text Araeen mounted a frontal assault on the modern ego and the recuperation of the avant-garde. He advocated a collective artistic imagination that would function as the way forward towards "lakes and rivers with clean water, collective farming and the planting of trees all over the world".

The manifesto rejects – albeit in a slightly one-track masculine way – previous artistic attempts to step down from the pedestal of the bourgeoisie in favour of a collective commitment to the surroundings and the environment. While Araeen can be criticized for his slightly narrow aim of denigrating artistically committed experiments, this does not detract from the relevance of a debate that goes behind the current 'acuteness' one experiences today in relation to ecological and environmental issues in art.

With *IMAGINE* the Aarhus Art Building wants to take a closer look at alliances between art and sustainable development. The themes emphasize the origin of the concept of sustainability and the linkages between environmental and social problems which have been characteristic of thinking about and the development of this particular concept since the beginning of the 1970s. Through important movements that have consistently had sustainability as their primary starting point the concept has furthermore been linked conspicuously with an ethical imperative and a determined ambition to overcome inequality – understood as the concrete and symbolic construction of power relations.

The exhibitions on the programme in 2011 try to embrace this complexity in the concept of sustainability and its history from two different angles. One approach to the theme focuses on artistic views of alternative energy. The other focuses on oppressive mechanisms that affect various minorities, women and the environment on the existing premises of inequality and power relations.

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Nynne Haugaard

IMAGINING PICTURES

2nd July - 17th August 2011



Video still from *Imagining Pictures*, 2011

Nynne Haugaard's (b. 1976) exhibition *Imagining Pictures* is based on a particularly unpleasant chapter in Danish history around 1900, in which people imported from distant and exotic lands were exhibited in Copenhagen Zoo. The artist has obtained access to previously prohibited archive material containing information about the exhibitions, the importing of people, visitors' reactions and extensive photographic records. The

video installation juxtaposes selected archival stories with contemporary imagery in an exploration of the mechanisms that create our perceptions of other cultures. The exhibition *Imagining Pictures* focuses on the construction of our cultural self-understanding and opens up new perspectives on the encounters between different cultures.

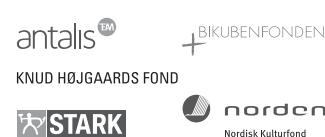
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VIDEO INSTALLATION

The large six-channel video installation that decorates the walls of *Imagining Pictures* takes the audience on a journey of imagery, diary entries and personal stories. The archival documentation from the public exhibitions at the zoo is combined with contemporary perspectives, and personal stories that weave in and out between past and present using text and sound. The audience does not know the subject's name, it is only revealed to be a "she". The installation explores the middle ground between images of "the other" and the socially constructed notions that accompany them. For example, the installation tells the story of the Chinese, who decided to go on strike in a refusal to allow the public, and scientists, to see their feet. There is also the story about the Indians, who disappointed audiences because their smell had disappeared, and the story of a Kyrgyz, who challenged the stigma of the exhibition by breaking out of the zoo every night to play skittles at Alléenbergh i Pile Allé.¹

Imagining Pictures encourages new perspectives on the encounters between different cultures. For example, the installation asks if we need "intermediate categories of information to orientate ourselves within a transcultural landscape." The installation's aim is to see and hear the world in a quest for an alternative understanding of "them and us".

WHO LOOKS AT WHOM?

Imagining Pictures starts in the 18th and 19th centuries' international human exhibitions in Europe and concludes with modern-day mass tourism. The rotunda greets the audience with seven large photographs of Japanese tourists taking pictures- of you? *Imagining Pictures* explores the idea of staging the audience in much the same way as the Japanese themselves were exhibited 100 years ago in Denmark. The photographs bring the human exhibitions into a contemporary landscape, in which mass tourism and cultural branding is now the mechanism for international cultural navigation in a globalised world. The audience are staged as observers

but are simultaneously being watched themselves. Japan is not a theme in itself; just an opportunity to challenge the classical Western world's notions of ethnocentrism and power relations in general.

BACKGROUND OF THE HUMAN EXHIBITIONS

In the period between 1878-1909, there were at least 33 human exhibitions in Denmark, with Copenhagen Zoo organising several of them. Copenhagen Zoo was also responsible for arranging many of the imported people in Denmark's human exhibitions. It was common for the exhibitions to depict the subjects as savages and uncivilised. They were the only opportunity ordinary Danes had to see different people from other parts of the world.²

SELF-UNDERSTANDING AND EUROPEAN IDENTITY

The human exhibitions were not only for public amusement. Scientists, especially anthropologists and ethnographers, were very interested in the exhibitions, which closely echoed the scientific trends. According to the dominant scientific view at the time, human history was conceived as a civilisation in which the white European man was placed at the top of the racial hierarchy. The exhibitions consisted of the people representing the lower echelons of this racial ordering, functioning as an illustrative contrast to the European audience. The human exhibitions therefore functioned as a device to construct a European identity.³

The exhibition has been made possible because the artist, through researchers Rikke Andreassen and Anne Folke Henningsen, obtained access to the Zoo's historical archives. Since 2009 these two scientists have worked in the field of postcolonial theory and the analysis of archival material as performances of race, gender, sexuality and national identity. This autumn their findings will be published in the book *Vilde seværdigheder* (Wild Sights).



Photo from *Imagining Pictures*, 2011

SUSTAINABILITY

The exhibition *Imagining Pictures* is designed to focus on the social aspects in the current debate on sustainability. Haugaard's case contributes to the discussion by framing sustainable development as a chance to break down repressive mechanisms that affect different minorities, cultures and races. Based on archival material and research, Haugaard presents a reflection of human nature, cultural inequality and national identity from an inclusive perspective.

ABOUT NYNNE HAUGAARD

Haugaard was educated at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts (2001-2006), Freie Klasse Hdk in Berlin (2000-2001), and the Royal Academy (Det Jyske Kunstakademi) (1998-2000). Her focus often centres on gender, race and social issues. Post millennium she has worked on several projects concerning minority groups and other cultures including a project in Gellerup in collaboration with artist Nikolaj Kilsmark. The two artists lived for a period in Gellerup and set out to rejuvenate its media image and tell stories other than the ones presented in the media. Haugaard has also worked internationally, for example in Khatmandu, and her most recent published book is *Wish You Were Here* in collaboration with Nikolaj Kilsmark. *Wish You Were Here* is about art in a transnational context. Haugaard currently lives and works in Copenhagen.

1. Østergaard, Cecilie Høgsbro: *Trusselsbilleder? – Nynne Haugaard's Imagining Pictures*, 2011.
2. Andreassen, Rikke: *Udstillinger af 'eksotiske' mennesker*. (Exhibitions of Exotic Peoples) Description of research project. www.rikkeandreasen.dk.
3. Andreassen, Rikke: *Udstillinger af 'eksotiske' mennesker*. (Exhibitions of Exotic Peoples) Description of research project. www.rikkeandreasen.dk.