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Four Journeys by Daniel Maier-Reimer as presented by Mark Dion

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The mandate to safeguard knowledge, the responsibility to gatekeep systems of knowing, is a precarious task. It is a messy institution. Inquiring into the production processes of facts and fictions entails patience and the resilience to face cognitive and cultural products of dominant ideologies.

Leaning on working models out of the world of science has been prominent in the practice of Daniel Maier-Reimer and Mark Dion alike for many years now. Archaeology, field work, excavation, picking up the shovel and reassembling the past are often implemented in both artists' approach. Daniel Maier-Reimer works intensely with the site, or better sites, of his works and the role that photography plays, when called upon. The artist takes a trip, often somewhere quite far away from home. Throughout his travels, which he conducts alone, he takes a photo. This is not necessarily a staged one, if of course there is such thing as staged and un-staged photography the minute representation occurs. But this single photograph, a picture, is the only thing he brings back with him home. It is then handed over to someone else who is tasked to introduce it to the matrix of art under their own care and supervision. In the past he has walked along the limit of the city of Florence, the Great Wall of China, Tbilisi, Kaliningrad, and Mount Etna to name a few. Not all journeys produced a photograph, not all resulted to a public showing, and some included a small cluster of pictures instead of a singular document.

History as a discipline and a field of enquiry has undergone major changes whilst confronted with a crisis of criticality and self-reflection. Equally important, formative even, to the source material collected is its display, the moment it gets a form and becomes part of a taxonomy.

In this exhibition Daniel Maier-Reimer tasked Mark Dion to orchestrate an environment to host a selection of four past travels: the most recent one to Mount Etna (2022), from the Tyrrhenian Sea to Adria (2013), to the Kaliningrad Peninsula (2001) and to Lapland (1990). The exhibition space takes the form of a 1970s travel agency. Almost obsolete in today's world of internet accessibility, a travel agency was an important infrastructure from the 1960s all the way to the early 1990s, instrumental in establishing a global obsession with leisure, free time, and escapism. Filled with posters, info brochures, travel books, miniature airplane models, globes, and various knick-knacks, the travel agency rapidly became a kind of imaginative historical archive. Daniel's journeys are sorted into this system.

Mark Dion's work investigates the limits and confines of discourse; the systemic approach that allows one to claim ownership over things and their meanings. Collecting, ordering, and showcasing the artist examines the multifarious means with which power is embedded in knowledge. The exclusionary assortments of a 17th century "Curiosity Cabinet", the uniformity of a neatly organized book collection, or the

tactful malice of a precise taxonomical table; all are situations that envelope into a cognitive condition. By shifting the focus of the work, often introducing it into institutions such as a zoo, a museum of natural history, a research facility, or an aquarium, he renders visible the political underbelly of history-writing that often escapes the art museum.

A single picture is an overpowering role to fulfil. However, the more time one spends with the photographs inside this travel agency, the more apparent it becomes that they don't behave like documents, or representations. Besides the obvious indexical aspect of their imagery i.e., a tree is recognizable as a tree usually ought to be, they merely depict rather unceremonious moments. They don't reflect a fragment of a bigger whole either. The moment Daniel decides to let them go; they find their spots in a system that someone else created. Rather than a documentation of history, an artifice culturally inscribed in the photographic apparatus, these works are more an inquiry into the way memory operates; not about history but an interrogation of the building blocks of historiography.

The travel agency behaves thus in a manner similar to art and its institutions: it digs and safekeeps, it breathes and moves in circles, it builds on the power of nostalgia and is bound to the premise of looking back.

Benjamin once spoke of a man who seeks to approach his past. He must do so with a shovel on his hand.

Weather patiently waiting his turn in a forgotten travel agency, walking up and down the banks of a loud river or silently whispering inside a dusty museum, "he must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter; to scatter it as one scatters earth, to turn it over as one turns over soil. For the 'matter itself' is no more than the strata which yield their long-sought secrets only to the most meticulous investigation. That is to say, they yield those images that, severed from all earlier associations, reside as treasures in the sober rooms of our later insights."¹

Haris Giannouras

¹ Walter Benjamin, "Excavation and Memory," in *Selected Writings*, Volume 2, Part 2, 1931-1934, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, trans. Rodney Livingstone et al. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 576.