

# Curatorial Practices of the 'Global': Toward a Decolonial Turn in Museums in Berlin and Hamburg?

Kuratorische Praktiken des ‚Globalen‘: Auf dem Weg zu einer  
dekolonialen Wende in Museen in Berlin und Hamburg?

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## *Abstracts*

Who decides what is included in the contemporary canon of 'global arts'? This empirical mixed-methods study examines how different notions of the 'global' are curated in so-called 'global' visual arts in two German museums. Decolonial aesthetics, postcolonial thought, and the provenance of exhibition objects have challenged the legitimacy of German museums and have triggered a debate on their Eurocentric perspective, their situatedness, the differentiation between artefact and artwork, and the reproduction of colonial thinking and patterns of domination. Although a critical turn in current curatorial practice can be observed, it is not clear whether this change is the result of a genuine effort to decolonize art organizations. In this regard, the potentials, restrictions and applications of academic concepts such as "anti-racist" or "postcolonial curating" are discussed. This study found indications of a decolonial turn in a predominantly White European curatorial practice and emphasizes the need for further changes to this context.

Wer definiert den Kanon zeitgenössischer ‚globaler Künste‘? Diese empirische Mixed-Methods-Studie untersucht, wie verschiedene Konzepte des ‚Globalen‘ in so genannten ‚globalen‘ visuellen Künsten in zwei deutschen Ausstellungshäusern kuratiert werden. Dekoloniale Ästhetiken, postkoloniales Denken und die Provenienz von Museumsobjekten haben Museen in Deutschland in einer Debatte über ihre Eurozentristischen Perspektiven, ihre Situiertheit, die Unterscheidung zwischen Kunst und Objekt und die Reproduktion kolonialen Denkens und Dominanzmustern herausgefordert, ihre Legitimität zu beweisen. Obwohl eine kritische Wende in aktuellen kuratorischen Praktiken sichtbar ist, bleibt unklar, ob dieser Wandel das Ergebnis von Dekolonialisierungsbestrebungen der Kunstorganisationen selbst darstellt. Darauf bezogen werden die Möglichkeiten, Einschränkungen und Anwendungen von akademischen Konzepten wie „anti-rassistische“ oder „postkoloniale Kuration“ diskutiert. Diese Studie belegt sowohl Ansätze einer dekolonialen Wende in der weitgehend Weißen kuratorischen Praxis als auch die Notwendigkeit zu weiteren Wandlungsprozessen in diesem Zusammenhang.

## *Keywords*

Diversität / diversity, Entwicklungsprozesse / development, transformation, Gesellschaftlicher Wandel / social change, Kuratieren / curating, Museum/museum

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## 1. The 'Global' in Visual Arts

Who decides what is included in the contemporary canon of 'global arts'? In the production of knowledge and meaning in society, the fields of visual arts and culture, with museums among their most important institutions, are important actors which represent and negotiate social conditions, assumptions, symbols, and discourses about identity. The museum is a place of knowledge creation and a public space where visitors of many kinds come together and engage with the content exhibited. How visitors first encounter and experience an exhibition contributes critically to the complex decision-making during the curatorial process prior to the opening. Both museums and individual exhibits can therefore be understood as highly sensitive constructs involving more than the vision of artists and those of curators.

Since the 1960s, the function of curators has changed dramatically from the mere caretaking of existing collections to the actual making of exhibitions. The late 1980s revealed that "there is a subtext comprising innumerable diverse, often contradictory strands [...], the subject matter of the new museology" (VERGO 2009: 3). Since then, a curator has become "an independent exhibition maker ('exhibition-auteur') who operate[s] in a broader social and cultural space, organizing large-scale exhibitions of contemporary art, and addressing a general public rather than a particular, clearly socially distinguishable art audience" (BUDEN 2012: 24). Objects in an exhibition become "elements of a narrative, forming a part of a thread of discourse which is itself one element in a more complex web of meanings" (VERGO 2009: 46) (Figure 1).

Now more than ever, works of art are positioned in a defined curatorial setting. Especially in theme-based group exhibitions, they merely represent one of many positions vis-à-vis the overarching theme of the exhibition. These themes and related questions reflect contemporary societal discourses, and many aim, as Paul O'Neill observed in his discussion of the "biennial boom," to bring the 'local' and the 'global' into a continuous dialogue with one another (O'NEILL 2007: 16).

In the second half of the 20th century, we can locate two interrelated changes brought by this curatorial turn: first, the rise of temporary group exhibitions that aim to interrogate a certain 'zeitgeist,' often using a transcultural or global perspective; and, second, the opening of the art museum to a wider public and new audiences. Boris Buden describes the latter shift as follows: "In short, it is through the relation to the general



Fig. 1: *MARKK in Transition, Hanging Vessels & Carrier, Ceiling 1st Floor, MARKK, Hamburg 2020* (Photo by Anna Catharina Mulder 2020).

public that the curator has become an authorial one” (BUDEN 2012: 27). As a result, the relationship between the artist and the curator has become less hierarchical than it used to be.

Since curators have moved in the museum discourse, it is fruitful to question the figure of the curators themselves. According to Mieke Bal’s “expository concept,” culture is created by regarding the tension between the maker, the work, and the viewer as a productive relationship (BAL 1996: 4). The “expository actor” not only refers to individuals, i.e. artists or curators, but also to institutions. For Bal, these expository agents in the “first person” tell the visitor as the “second person” something about a “third person”, namely the exhibition.

The ‘first person’ remains invisible. The ‘second person,’ implicitly, has a potential ‘first-person’ position as a respondent; his or her response to the exposing is the primary and decisive condition for the exposing to happen at all. The ‘third person,’ silenced by the discursive situation, is the most important element, the only one visible. (BAL 1996: 4)

The invisibility of curators, who are largely responsible for the visibility of the artists and artworks, creates the impression of a ‘neutral narrative perspective,’ which, however, cannot be achieved in an exhibition. In view of this, exhibitions, which are similar to other kinds of communicative action, cannot adopt a neutral or impartial standpoint (MUTTENTHALER/WONISCH 2006: 244). For example, beliefs and values



Fig. 2: *Sandals (Pair) & Usambara Violets, Amani, 20th Century, MARKK, Hamburg 2019* (Photo by Paul Schimweg/MARKK 2019).

of curators affect matters of both presentation (who is being addressed and how?) and selection (whose perspective and which narratives are showcased?) (Figure 2). Both of these are closely intertwined, as curators become translators and mediators (BUDEN 2012: 30).

The selection of content and other kinds of decision-making in this context, which are closely linked to issues of representation of power, are often discussed in postcolonial debates. As an institution with long traditions, the museum continues to reflect and reproduce colonial power relations. (KARENTZOS 2012: 249) The so-called ‘crisis of representation’ which developed in anthropology, among other fields, since the 1960s, criticized the discipline’s foundation on colonial premises and posed the question of how it is possible to represent the ‘Other’ in a non-discriminating way. In art history, a similar stream of thought can be detected, which developed in parallel to and was influenced by poststructuralist and postcolonial theory. Not only were colonial iconographies such as ‘Orientalisms’ and ‘Primitivisms’ criticized but also, for example, the genesis of the Eurocentric canon in art museums. In relation to the developments of the above-mentioned new museology, such critics have questioned the established division between art museums (as displaying ‘art’) and ethnological museums (as displaying ‘artifacts’ taken as representatives of an ‘entire culture’) (MUTTENTHALER/WONISCH 2006: 36). Artists of color reject such “burden[s] of representation”

(SCHMITT-LINSENHOFF 2005: 19, 22) as being on display in an ethnically minded way that does not necessarily increase societal participation, let alone change unequal power hierarchies (KASTNER 2012: 75).

Instead, a 'global art' is nowadays favored that focuses on art's trans-cultural entanglements and lays open neo-colonial premises and unequal power hierarchies in the arts and art history (BUURMAN et al. 2018). These developments can be denoted as a decolonial turn in visual culture for the purposes of this paper (MODEST et al. 2019). The decolonial turn in this sense addresses all these critical approaches of post-colonial theory to museums' colonial premises that seek to decolonize the art institution by, among other things, the application of "anti-racist curating" (see below; BAYER/TERKESSIDIS 2017).

To unpack the history of power in the arts and to examine the colonial legacy of 'Western' museums as reflected in, among other aspects, curatorial decision-making, we conducted a mixed-methods study of three exhibitions in two museums in Berlin and Hamburg. By asking what is included or excluded in the exhibitions, which aspects are discussed or disregarded, and which perspectives are privileged or diminished, we focused on what is often referred to as 'non-European art' or, in postcolonial studies, 'global art.' Discussing the potential, limits, and applications of academic concepts such as "anti-racist curating," we consider whether there are any indications of a decolonial turn in this context or not.

To answer this question, we analyzed two sites while taking a look at Bal's three persons: the curator (curating institution), the visitor and the exhibition(s) themselves (BAL 1996: 4). In order to find out whether a decolonial turn can be detected in art museums and ethnological museums, we analyzed museums with regard to both of these categories which have positioned themselves as responding to the afore-mentioned postcolonial critique as well as adhering to the quests of the new museology. The first site is an internationally renowned institution for contemporary art, namely the *Martin Gropius Bau* in Berlin, in which we focus on one of its seemingly postcolonial exhibitions called *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. The second site, in Hamburg, is its former ethnological museum, *MARKK*, its 'postcolonial' reform and repositioning process and its exhibitions *Amani. On the footsteps of a colonial research station* and *Re-Interpreted*.

Even though a critical – and arguably 'decolonial' – turn in current curatorial practices can be observed, the question arises whether this reaction is a genuine effort to decolonize art institutions. Our analyses of

these two sites indicate that it is too early to speak of a proper decolonial turn in the two museums, as can be seen in the ongoing exclusion of underrepresented artists and the reproduction of colonial concepts. Anti-racist curating, however, has led to notable changes in some respects. For example, the *MARKK*'s self-understanding has shifted from a place to convey 'cultures' to a self-reflexive forum. That said, we conclude that, while this study found signs of a decolonial turn in a predominantly White European curatorial practice, the need for further changes to this context and related representations has to be emphasized.

## 2. Power, the 'Other,' and "Anti-Racist Curating"

Firstly, we should take a look at whether and how museums enforce the discourses of the "disciplinary power" (FOUCAULT 1978: 51) of colonial legacies, in order to explain how curatorial practices discipline visitors and others involved. In addition to understanding the curator as a powerful gatekeeper suppressing certain artists by selecting and omitting (GAUPP 2020), we focus on the disciplinary power of what is included (and regarded as 'true') and what is excluded (and regarded as 'false') in the contemporary museum discourse and the self-submission to this discourse of all actors involved (MUTTENTHALER/WONISCH 2006: 20) (Figure 3).

The emergence of various branches of 'Western' science and, above all, the emergence of the 'modern' museum in the nineteenth century in response to colonization led to the division of collected objects into artistic (art museums) and objectified (ethnological museums) categories (SUHRBIER 2015: 101). For these reasons ethnological objects were not perceived as aesthetic and artistic. Instead, they became artifacts of a 'foreign culture.' Seen in this light, 'Western' art history is at its roots a history of power (MICOSSÉ-AIKINS/SHARIFI 2017: 137), which points at the legacy of 'Western' empires that includes both the institution of the museum and the objects contained in them. In short, there seems to be a lack of awareness of the "colonial unconscious" (SCHMITT-LINSENHOFF 2005: 19), i.e. a lack of reflection upon the colonial underpinnings of European art history and curatorial practice.

Although visual culture in Germany today is still deeply invested in neo-colonial power discourses, there have been several calls for decolonizing these practices. In response to decolonial aesthetics, postcolonial thought, and major debates about the provenance of exhibition objects,





Fig. 3: Central Door Relief at MARKK-Foyer with Art Installation on the Theme “Colonial Heritage“, Program “Azimut Decolonial – an Archive Performs”: Three Performer Portraits of “Transnational Ensemble Hajusom”, Photographed by Arne Thaysen, Hamburg 2019 (Photo by Anna Catharina Mulder 2020).

museums in Germany have begun to examine their Eurocentric perspective, their own situatedness, the differentiation between artifact and artwork, and the reproduction of unreflective colonial thought patterns. As such, representations of otherness become increasingly questioned (MUTTENTHALER/WONISCH 2006: 22; see also GAUPP/PELILLO-HESTERMEYER 2020). In recent years, (ethnological) museums have faced questions concerning ownership and representation of (ethnological) objects in their collections (KAZEEM et al. 2009: 7f.). As such, their role in the colonial project is today under greater scrutiny.

Following the discourse-promoting contribution by John Gibling, Imma Ramos and Nikki Grout (2019), we agree that the decolonization of curatorial practices needs to be an “active, radical and potentially all-encompassing” process in which institutional decision-making processes on all levels – from “recruitment to representation, audience engagement to repatriation, acquisitions to architecture, design to labeling” (GIBLIN/RAMOS/GROUT 2019: 472) – need to be taken critically into consideration.

In addition, as our focus is set on the curatorial process of exhibitions specifically, we based our studies on Natalie Bayer and Mark Terkessidis’ discussion of an anti-racist practice of curating (2017) which has also

formed the basis for our research question whether a decolonial turn has become the state of the art in 'global' visual culture. The term 'racism' is to be perceived as a societal uneven ratio, a separation between 'us' and 'them,' which functions as an apparatus or dispositif, in which practices of exclusion and processes of generating knowledge mutually define each other in a binary system (BAYER/TERKESSIDIS 2017: 58). The aim, therefore, is to overcome such societal practices.

In the context of this paper, an anti-racist curatorial practice involves the disclosure, reflection, and unlearning of one's own racisms. In the context of museum exhibitions, the active avoidance of racist longings such as the desire for others and the search for exoticism or voyeurism is fundamental to an anti-racist curatorial practice. The reflection of museological forms of representation should question the construction of the 'Own' and the 'Other,' which implicitly or explicitly conveys specific narratives on 'race' (MUTTENTHALER/WONISCH 2006: 10f.).

Curators need to interrogate all narratives and works of art in an exhibition by asking themselves the following questions: Whose story is being told? Whose perspective has been put in a privileged position? Which artworks are being shown? How have the texts been written? Are the narratives and the artworks intended to empower groups that have been underrepresented or even objectified until now? (BAYER/TERKESSIDIS 2017: 56)

For Bayer and Terkessidis, giving artists the possibility of such self-translation when exhibiting content in museums is the key of anti-racist curating. They argue for the necessity of implementing multi-perspective opinions in the curating process, rather than proceeding with a one-sided point of view of one curator or a unilateral curating team. (BAYER/TERKESSIDIS 2017: 62) A public institution such as the museum is intended to be the right place for this purpose. To examine the two sites considered here, we used the questions above to determine whether and, if so, to what extent museums and curators practice anti-racist curating, thus fulfilling the demands of a decolonial turn in 'global' visual culture in Berlin and Hamburg.

### 3. Analyzing Curatorial Practices

We approached these questions by applying a mixed-methods research design including textual analysis, spatial mapping, online historical and visual ethnography, a qualitative expert interview, participatory obser-



vation, exhibition analysis, and a structured audience survey. With the triangulation of these methodological approaches, it was possible to address all three levels which Bal includes for her “expository actor” without limiting the analysis to just one or two kinds of involved actors.

As noted above, we focused on two museums, each of which was envisioned as a representative for the two established categories of museums: *Martin Gropius Bau* – art museum – (and its exhibition *Garden of Earthly Delights*) and *MARKK* – ethnological museum – (and its exhibitions *Amani. On the Footsteps of a Colonial Research Station* and *Re-Interpreted*). Both museums position themselves in the described discourses on new museology and postcolonial critique. However, rather than comparing the application of postcolonial critique in the two examined museums, i.e. if and how they adhere to the decolonial turn, the study focuses on analyzing the specific characteristics of the curating process in each case. In order to be able to unpack the decolonial argument, we needed to pay attention to the question whether the practices of displaying ‘Western’ art in an art museum and the ‘Other’s’ art in an ethnological museum have been revised, and, if so, how this decolonial turn has impacted the specific museum category. This also made it necessary to apply different methodologies to each museum-case, its specific settings, related recent institutional changes, and exhibitions, all of which will be explained in the following.

Founded as a museum for decorative arts in 1881, the *Gropius Bau Berlin*, “a renowned venue for modern and contemporary art in dialogue with archaeology and cultural history,” (GROPIUS BAU 2020) offers international artists a forum to present their distinct perspectives on contemporary societal concerns (Figure 4). Since February 2018, the *Gropius Bau* has been led by director Stephanie Rosenthal, who aims to open “up the institution as a location for artistic creation and exchange” (GROPIUS BAU 2020) and who curated the exhibition *Garden of Earthly Delights* (July 26–December 1, 2019). This exhibition addressed global “themes as pressing as the anthropocene, seed politics, the legacies of colonialism and historical segregation” (GROPIUS BAU 2019). The exhibit featured artists from across the globe and adopted the curatorial theme of “the garden as a metaphor of the state of the world” (ibid.).

We analyzed this exhibition to evaluate whether curatorial decisions of *Garden of Earthly Delights* reflect a neo-colonial preoccupation with ‘the Other,’ and follow “the canonical model of [...] monographic presentation” (O’NEILL 2007: 14) or whether the decision-making for this exhibit gestures toward anti-racist curating. We also considered who had

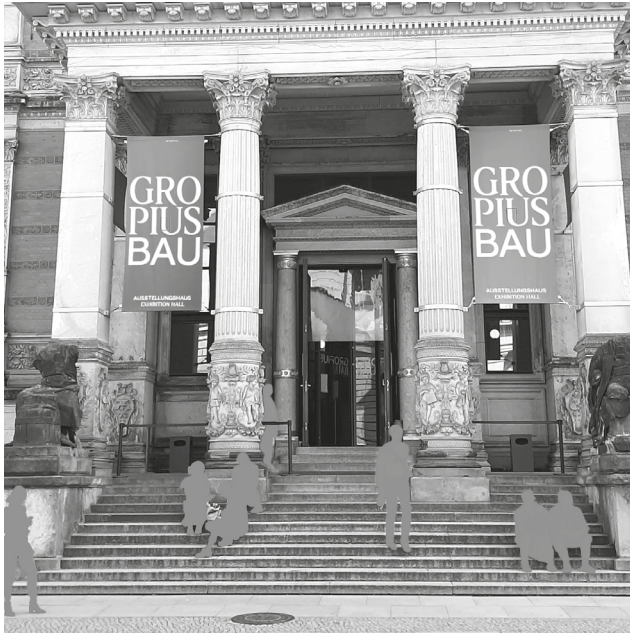


Fig. 4: Main Entrance, Martin Gropius Bau, Berlin 2020 (Photo by Eflin Mulder 2020).

been invited to discuss ‘the state of the world,’ whose perspective had been highlighted, and how contributors have been presented.

In a first step, we analyzed the textual dimension in the texts appearing in the exhibition catalogue, in the introductory texts to each artist in the exhibition, and in texts created specifically for this exhibition from artists’ statements as described in Daniel Jacobi and Marie Poli’s publication on the analysis of textual documents in exhibitions (1995: 51). Our goal was to map interpretational and representational sovereignty and related power relations. In a next step, we analyzed the wording whenever the curated exhibition texts dealt with colonialism (or when they did not address this point) to understand how the *Gropius Bau* dealt with this issue.

In addition to texts, we investigated the museum’s “spatial anthropology” (ROBERTS/COHEN 2015: 170, 181) by applying the methodology of mapping to ascertain whether the exhibition met the criteria for anti-racist curating discussed earlier. Specifically, we looked at the spatial dimension, encompassing the country of origin and residence of artists and the space allotted to them in the exhibition. As *Garden of Earthly*



Fig. 5: “Zwischenraum/A Space Between”, MARKK, Hamburg 2020 (Photo by Anna Catharina Mulder 2020).

*Delights* seeks to bring together perspectives from all over the world, we considered whether the artists chosen truly did so.

The second site we investigated was the former *Museum für Völkerkunde Hamburg* (Ethnological Museum Hamburg), which was founded in 1867 by Thilenius and which was reconceptualized and renamed to *MARKK* (*Museum at the Rothenbaum. World Cultures and Arts*) in 2018 (Figure 5). Its new director, Barbara Plankensteiner, has changed the museum in terms of both structure and content since 2017 (MARKK 2019), possibly with the aim of adhering to the decolonial turn in ethnological museums. Three dimensions of these changes at the *MARKK* were examined: the new concept and vision compared to the old concept, the implementation of this vision as reflected in activities or exhibitions, and the response of visitors to these changes.

To investigate the extent to which the *MARKK* has changed since 2018 compared to its former ethnological orientation, its website was analyzed using an online historical and visual ethnography. With the help of a historical website archive called *Wayback Machine*, it was possible to compare the current website with its three previous versions by applying a qualitative content analysis. To learn more about *MARKK*'s perspective on their concept and the new website, we conducted a qualitative expert interview with a representative of the museum's adminis-

tration. An analysis of several in-house publications by *MARKK* supplemented the data basis.

In addition to tracking the changes at the *MARKK*, we analyzed how the new vision was implemented in an exhibition, *Amani. On the footsteps of a colonial research station* (September 20, 2019–April 26, 2020<sup>1</sup>). *Amani* dealt with the history of the Organic Agricultural Institute Amani in the Usambara Highlands in present-day Tanzania. The institute was founded in 1902 and was a German showcase project where agriculture and forestry, tropical diseases, and the flora and fauna of the rainforest were studied, first by European and later by Tanzanian scientists (PLANKENSTEINER 2019: 9). The curators of the exhibition attempted to portray the ambivalent remains of German colonial discourse and the presence of colonial and post-colonial stories. Next to the exhibition analysis, we analyzed a guided tour with the curator as well as two discussions about nature reserves and famous researchers, which were part of the exhibitions supplementary program. Using participatory observation, we sought to replicate and analyze the visitor experience, including related social interactions such as those between staff members and visitors, to understand the effects of curatorial decision-making. Observations were recorded in field notes and then collected in a spreadsheet.

In addition, we also examined the exhibition's 'objects' on display. Here, we analyzed how the museum deals with the distinction between art and artifact (MUTTENTHALER/WONISCH 2006: 46ff) by comparing the aesthetics of displaying two 'works' by contemporary artists in *Amani* with the exclusive display of ethnological 'objects' in the same as well as in another exhibition called *Re-Interpreted* (October 1–November 6, 2019). The aesthetic analysis in *Amani* was supplemented by an analysis of statements by curators, representatives of the museum, and the artists themselves regarding their artistic practices in the exhibition *Amani*. In turn, the second exhibition, *Re-Interpreted*, developed by a team of curators, did not include any artworks by contemporary artists but only ethnological objects, that were partly framed as aesthetic or artistic. To analyze the 'objects' on display in both exhibitions, we identified the people involved and focused on the exhibition's topic, on what is being seen, how 'objects' are arranged, whether music can be heard, and what is written in the exhibition catalogue as well as on panels in the

1 The museum had to close March 14, 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

exhibition as suggested in Angela Jannelli's and Thomas Hammacher's guide to exhibition analysis (2008: 7).

Last but not least, we analyzed visitors' responses to the exhibition using a reception analysis with an emphasis being paid to the recent changes, especially with regard to the reappraisal of the museum's colonial history and the visitors' willingness to engage with the exhibition's content in the context of anti-racist curation. To this end, we conducted nine face-to-face interviews in the museum. Transcripts were analyzed through qualitative content analysis (MAYRING 2015).

#### **4. Whose Narratives are Curated?**

##### **4.1 Narratives and Spaces at Martin Gropius Bau**

Our analysis of the texts and spatial conditions for Garden of Earthly Delights at Martin Gropius Bau Berlin concerning our research questions of who had been invited, whose perspective had been highlighted and how contributors had been presented showed that several quests of anti-racist curating have been achieved. However, certain gaps between the curatorial narrative and the artists' statements, as well as a strong dominance of invited 'Western'-based artists and some unfortunate curatorial decisions regarding how and where certain pieces of work were placed in the museum and in the exhibition's map, could be detected.

For instance, some works on display dealt very critically with topics of colonialism, such as the site-specific work *Lawn I* (2019) by Lungiswa Gqunta. This work consisted of a grid of broken Coca Cola bottles placed upside down in the middle of one of the exhibition rooms. Filled with ink, water, and petrol, the glass was colored in a bluish green (Figure 6).

To Gqunta, *Lawn I* was a meditation on the garden on two levels. First, it was a reflection of historical circumstances, specifically the colonial occupation as well as the Apartheid regime, which transformed the garden into a status symbol and a marker of segregation. Second, in the interview sequence printed in the exhibition catalogue, Gqunta argued that her work was a metaphor for "the continuation of colonial fuckery" that continued to this day (GQUNTA 2019: 295). However, the room where Gqunta's work was on display was not easily accessible and was therefore placed in a non-privileged position by the curators. 'Her' room was restricted to a maximum of ten visitors at once for security reasons connected to the installation's composition from broken glass fragments.





Fig. 6: Installation view, Lungiswa Gqunta's "Lawn I", Exhibition: Garden of Earthly Delights, Martin Gropius Bau, Berlin 2019 (Photo by Katharina Hilgert 2019).



Fig. 7: Installation view, Libby Harward's "Ngali Ngariba, We talk", Exhibition: Garden of Earthly Delights, Martin Gropius Bau, Berlin 2019 (Photo by Katharina Hilgert 2019).



This led to a constant queue in the preceding room. Many visitors hence chose to skip these two rooms.

The issue of colonialism also featured prominently in other contributions, including those by Australian artist Libby Harward. Harward's mixed-media installation *Ngali Ngariba (We talk)* (2019) examined the aftermaths of colonialism in South-East Queensland with regard to the botanic landscape (HARWARD/HARWARD-NALDER 2019: 286) (Figure 7).

However, it was decided to exclude certain vocabulary from the exhibition text. The curators referred to indigenous cultures as "First Nation cultures," which in English-speaking discourse is one of the applicable terms to use. In the German exhibition text, "Ur-Einwohner\*innen" was used, a term that has historically been associated with colonialization and empire. Similar lexical choices could also be noticed in the exhibition text and catalogue. Here, colonial vocabulary was reproduced when addressing colonizers as "Europäische Entdecker\*innen" ("European discoverers"). However, the critique which this wording entails was said to be "exposed by Harward as being a fiction" in the exhibition panel text itself.

Looking at the questions of who had been invited and how they had been presented, the participants were predominantly composed of artists from North America, Europe, and Asia and a bias could be found toward global cultural hubs such as London or New York City. In terms of geographic location, a review of the nineteen single artists and one art collective showed that artists hailed from six out of seven continents. Yet even though almost all continents apart from Oceania and Antarctic were included, the majority was associated with only three: Europe, North America, and Asia. Six of the nineteen artists were born and grew up in Europe. The number of cities in which the artists had their primary place of residence was very small, and most artists worked in major cultural centers of the 'West,' such as Berlin, London, or New York.

By comparing the actual works that formed the *Garden of Earthly Delights* with their depiction in the exhibition map, it became obvious that some artists are equally prominently presented in both media, meaning that the depiction of the same objects stands out in the map as well in the form of long artistic statements by People of Color Rashid Johnson and Taro Shinoda. However, in the case of Taro Shinoda, only a few steps further into the exhibition a series of photographs by her was positioned. In the exhibition map, by contrast, this part of her work was missing.

#### 4.2 The Postcolonial Reform Process at MARKK

For our second research field concerning the *MARKK* in Hamburg, the analysis of the question whether or not the reform paid tribute to the decolonial turn by revising the colonial past of this formerly ethnological museum showed that this new self-conception, as it is displayed prominently on the website, succeeded in fulfilling the decolonial task to a great extent. The museum decided to create a completely new visual identity which reflected contemporary taste and a consistent image based on the logo, the fonts, the colors, and the overall layout. The new website communicated itself mainly through pictures and headlines. Texts on events and exhibitions were mostly short. The visual element of the colorful markings alluded to the name of the museum *MARKK* and the selection of the pictures was intended to avoid stereotypes and clichéd representations of cultures, as explained in the expert interview with a representative of the museum's administration. The structure of the website invited visitors to browse and find new interesting content, while the most important information remained directly accessible.

Equally significant changes could be found in the information of the website about the self-conception of the *MARKK*, which was most explicit in its mission statement and concerning the history of the museum. Regarding their new self-understanding, the *MARKK* explained that today they want to establish themselves as a reflexive forum, which critically examines the traces of colonial heritage and traditional colonial thought patterns. In the previous versions of the website, it was written that "we offer a forum for the exchange in partnership between people of all cultures" and "as a world cultural archive, we collect, preserve and index testimonies of all cultures in order to make them accessible" (WEB.ARCHIVE.ORG 2020). The explicit naming of the colonial past on the website was avoided before 2018. The function of the museum as an institute of 'racial biology' during the period of National Socialism was not named until 2018 either. Instead, it was emphasized that Franz Termer, the then director of the museum, was known as an opponent of National Socialism.

In contrast, other texts from the *MARKK* concerning its own history we found in a book published by the *MARKK* itself in 2002, that is, long before the transformation period around 2018, did not conceal the problematic background of the museum (KÖPKE/SCHMELZ 2002: 13-41). The problematic distinction between artworks and artifacts ethnological

museums often put forward was also already discussed by the *MARKK* in an exhibition in 2000 (KÖPKE/SCHIFF 2000: 28f.).

Furthermore, an analysis of the guided curator's tour of the exhibition *Amani* and another complementary program at *MARKK* revealed that the critical revision of the museum's own colonial past stood at the forefront. For instance, at the beginning of the tour the curator pointed out the arrangement of a showcase, which was no longer intended to be a showcase for an object to look at, but was instead meant to be accessible to visitors and thus influence their perspective by looking from the inside on the outside, therefore becoming the 'Other.' During the tour the curator often emphasized the museum's own standpoint, for example by making gaps in the museum's own collection history visible. Also worthy of mention was the inclusion of female artists, as highlighted by the curator. Without the tour, this critical view of the themes of the artworks could easily be overlooked.

However, the question of how the museum deals with the distinction between art and artifacts in decolonial terms cannot be answered with equal clarity, even though the exhibition *Amani* presented not only ethnological objects of the research station of the Organic Agricultural Institute Amani but also artworks by four contemporary female artists: Rehema Chachage, Evgenia Arbugaeva, Mariele Neudecker, and Syowia Kymabi. The artistic positions ought to "narrate surprising stories and evoke emotional memories that usually get lost through musealization" (PLANKENSTEINER 2019: 9). These works of art were positioned in central places of the exhibition surrounding a showcase with ethnological objects which was placed in the middle of the room. Between these artworks and the other parts of the exhibition, white partition walls could be found.

We analyzed the works (Z)Amani za Kale: A Former Glory(?) by Rehema Chachage and Amani by Evgenia Arbugaeva. Chachage's installation was composed from a video installation with sound as well as organic material such as red soil and grey stones that were mostly placed on white museum steles, holding glassy slides covered with dark purple liquids. These organic materials stood in contrast to the seemingly objective and modern presentation of the video installation, whereas the slides formed a bridge between this strong contrast between organic and museum display (Figure 8). Chachage described her works as „(her) stories,“ promoting a feminist approach to narrating and preserving life stories and conditions of women (CHACHAGE 2020). In a guided tour, Chachage's work was depicted as a critical confrontation with colonial

rule and ethnological research methods at the Organic Agricultural Institute Amani, memorizing the pain of the local population of the time. This reading was not found in the accompanying text in the exhibition catalogue.

Evgenia Arbugaeva's work consisted of a series of photos depicting a Black man in different locations of the research station. The pictures were highly aesthetic arrangements in dark colors dominated by brownish and yellowish tones, evoking reference to a past time (Figure 9). The high resolution of the photos again stood in strong contrast to the illumination in the pictures, which visitors to the exhibition and a curator described as "atmospheric," "over-aestheticized," "nostalgic," or "thoughtful."<sup>2</sup> In the exhibition catalogue, a longer text about Arbugaeva's work was missing, and the artist was presented as a documentary photographer. Again, the exhibition catalogue left out important information for understanding the work which was provided only in the guided tour. Here, the cooperation with John Mganga, the man pictured in the photos, was emphasized. Mganga, a former assistant at the research station, still lives in the area around the Organic Agricultural Institute Amani (PLANKENSTEINER 2019: 77).

For an analysis of how the *MARKK* presents ethnological objects alone, we took a look at the exhibition *Re-Interpreted*, which was designed as a round tour and consisted of eight ethnological objects on display in two showcases next to each other in the *Zwischenraum* (space in-between), the place that accompanied the changes of the museum. A booklet guided visitors to the numbered objects and provided further information about each of them. A short text in the first room explained that this exhibition sought to ask new questions concerning these objects. In particular, it emphasized the diversity, beauty, and greatness of global art. The last part of the sentence was highlighted in yellow.

The objects were well illuminated and easy to recognize. Every object had its own shield with information about the artist/producer/workshop, location, year, material, and height in centimeters. The texts of three out of the eight objects contained information about external features and the interpretation of aesthetic motives, some of which were highlighted in yellow. One object, *Anhänger in Form eines Mischwesens* (Pendant in the form of a mixed entity), was displayed in the entrance to *Inkagalerie* (Inca Gallery) and called the *Schatzkammer* (Treasury). The Treasury was completely painted in gold, and it took a long time

2 Field notes of participatory observation collected January 19, 2020.



Fig. 8: Installation view, Rehema Chachage's "(Z)Amani za Kale: A Former Glory(?)", Exhibition: Amani. On the Footsteps of a Colonial Research Station, MARKK, Hamburg 2019 (Photo by Viviane Schnitzler 2019).



Fig. 9: Sketch of Eugenia Arbugueva's Photo "Amani, 2019", Exhibition: Amani. On the Footsteps of a Colonial Research Station, MARKK, Hamburg 2019 (Sketch by Anna Catharina Mulder 2020).

to find the pendant (Figure 10). In the *Schatzkammer* it was not clear whether an object was produced by an artist, a manufacturer, or in an anonymous workshop. Furthermore, in the text next to the picture of the *Moghul Fürst* (Mughal Prince), no external aesthetic aspect of the object had been marked, but instead its geographical origin “North India.” Lastly, there was a table showcase on the first floor with an arrangement of the *Löffelsammlung* (collection of spoons). The spoons were closely arranged next to each other, and the shield only contained information about the collector. Artist/producer/workshop, location, and year were marked as unknown.

In order to understand how visitors responded to the recent reform at MARKK and their willingness to engage with the content in the context of anti-racist curation, we assessed various impressions of the visitors, among other places in a joint discussion about selected works of art in the exhibition. While many spoke of a “nostalgic image” or a “historicizing gaze” when looking at photographs of Evgenia Arbugaeva, criticism was voiced that precisely such images fulfill the expectations of the “European view.” Such criticism was also underlined by the curator’s statements.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, the results of our audience research also showed that most of the interviewees clearly discerned the reformation of the museum and were interested in topics that deal with the reappraisal of the museum history in a postcolonial context. For families and children, however, this topic still involved too much reading and was not presented in a sufficiently clear, tangible, and child-oriented manner. Several participants mentioned that the museum had a very heterogeneous target group and should prepare the contents accordingly. This was also pointed out by the few visitors we interviewed, who were not very interested in these topics. According to them, the interest in exhibitions that deal with topics such as racism ought to be present, but the pleasure faded away when it came to long sections of writing. International guests were also interested in more and better legible content in English and other languages. Even some established museum visitors complained about the mediation of some of the contents and wished that they were made to be more vivid. There was also interest in the presentation of the reappraisal of colonialism in a larger historical context, the big picture, in which the museum itself should also be placed. Older museum visitors who had already visited the museum before clearly

3 Field notes of participatory observation collected December 1, 2019.





Fig. 10: “Re-Interpreted”, Outdoor Photo-Exhibition of MARKK, Organized by “Lebendiger Jungfernstieg e. V.” at Jungfernstieg, Hamburg 2019 (Photo by Paul Schirmweg/MARKK 2019).

noticed the change in the museum and showed a great interest in critical exhibitions that focus on German colonial and migration history.<sup>4</sup>

## 5. Toward a Decolonial Turn in the Museum?

### 5.1 Representations at Martin Gropius Bau

As we have seen in our extensive observation of the *Gropius Bau* exhibition, textual as well as spatial curatorial decisions influence the way and the extent to which visitors can comprehend the exhibited artworks. These dimensions inevitably combine xyz with what is perceivable in terms of what is highlighted, altered, or downplayed. When considering the growing autonomy of the curator as a creator of juxtapositions between artworks for a self-chosen, overarching theme, it was the curatorial choices made in the exhibition *Garden of Earthly Delights* that stood at the center of our observations. All in all, both the textual and the spatial dimensions analyzed for the exhibition showed both critical as well as affirmative stances to anti-racist curating. This suggests two major outcomes: firstly, the priority of interpretational/representational

4 Qualitative audience survey conducted December 29, 2019.

choices concerning the curatorial theme, rather than the artists' articulated position(s); and, secondly, discrepancies between translation and paraphrasing when touching on the topic of colonization.

By comparing the exhibition texts, we encountered several points of divergence. Criticisms against colonialism were pointed out as a central topic in the artworks of some artists. Although working very closely with the information given by the artists themselves on their official website, it was decided to exclude certain vocabulary from the exhibition text that would have resulted in a less neutral tone than the way in which it was framed in the end. The curatorial theme of "the garden as a metaphor of the state of the world" was often imposed on the artist's actual intentions. This is problematic since artworks thereby become representative of something which they never claimed to be. In this context, Artists of Color who have gained access to the 'Western' art system, despite institutional obstacles, are often instrumentalized as tokens: as representatives of their national and potentially ethnic origins, they are expected to refer to them in their artistic expression. This curatorial action has also been described by John Pfeffer as the production of the 'Other' in a 'Western' understanding of art, by inscribing a certain essentialism to the art produced by People of Color (PFEFFER 2006: 221f.).

Furthermore, contexts that seemed unfitting to the overarching exhibition theme or that were simply too lengthy have been excluded, such as omitting aspects of queerness in the case of the artist Zheng Bo. What Chandra Frank has defined as the main principle of a decolonial curatorial process, namely "to contribute to the unearthing of hidden histories," (FRANK 2015) cannot be detected for all curatorial decisions taken for this exhibition; on the contrary, some her\*histories stayed hidden. However, if we aim to establish an inclusively curated exhibition space, we cannot stop and focus on only one group, such as People of Color or Indigenous People, who have been subjected to (neo)colonization, with the revolutionary aim to 'diversify' the art institution. We argue that an overall inclusive, decolonial curatorial praxis needs to be sensitive to several forms of oppression, as the main of such a praxis is to open up the predominantly White, hetero-normative institutions to those that have been kept out (KOSOKO 2018: 121).

Moreover, the exhibition decided to adopt an allegedly neutral standpoint when reflecting on colonialism in the explanatory texts, which stood as the sole informational content next to the artwork itself. However, by reproducing certain vocabulary (e.g. "European discoverers"), excluding historical contexts that stem from a racist political order

(e.g. the Apartheid regime in South Africa), and partly diminishing the continuity of systemic racial oppression as well as the reproduction of a Eurocentric hierarchy of knowledge, this alleged 'neutrality' needs to be questioned critically. While Lungiswa Gqunta, for example, posed a very clear and critical standpoint to continuing disparities between the White and Black population in South Africa, which stem from an explicit historic context (namely the Apartheid regime), the curated description of her work left several points open-ended. Her sharp criticism can, therefore, only be properly understood if the visitor reads the interview sequence of the catalogue and brings with them a certain background knowledge about South African Apartheid and its repercussions today.

Referring to Peruvian visual artist Daniela Ortiz, Caceres, Mesquita, and Utikal argue that rather than creating such short-cuts, in order to realize the approach of a decolonial curation, the institution needs to assume a clear standpoint against power inequalities and violent systems of oppression, which are historically grown from colonialism and are still in place today (2017: 206). An anti-racist, decolonial curatorial practice needs, therefore, to intervene with the political status quo.

Furthermore, it has been noted that, when explicitly talking about colonialism, the German exhibition text happened to reproduce vocabulary that emerged during colonialism. It remains unclear and worthy of critique why it was decided to use the outdated term "Ur-Einwohner" in the exhibition text for Libby Harward, who defines herself as indigenous, a term that exists in German ("indigen").

To answer the question of who has been invited to present their perspective on global topics, the geographical residencies of the artists displayed at the exhibition shows a clear connection to an established 'Western' art world, to which the *Gropius Bau* is already linked. This suggests that the curators of *Garden of Earthly Delights* did not try to create a new and direct link with the so-called 'periphery.' Artists still have to (be able to) move their center of living and working to 'center'-cities in order to become part of these artist-networks. Especially in the field of contemporary art, this protection of established art circles amongst themselves in the 'center' can be criticized from a postcolonial perspective (BAYER/TERKESSIDIS 2017: 60). Only since the early 1990s there is a trend towards a "new visibility [...] for the reception of hitherto unknown and/or non-canonized [contemporary non-'Western'] art forms by 'international' (i.e. 'Western') publics." (BHAGWATI 2018: 192) Curators need to change their conventional requirements and aesthetic preferences of the 'center' in their selection process (BHAGWATI

2018: 192f.). If not, two fundamental prerequisites for anti-racist curating are missing: equal access into the museum context, regardless of the artists' origin, and a range of unfiltered perspectives by the symbolic hegemonic selection-filter of the center (BAYER/TERKESSIDIS 2017: 61, 65). It can be concluded that the Berlin curators should have chosen a way of anti-racist curating which not only depends on the established Berlin art world, but also creates new points of connection between the societally constructed zones of 'center' and 'periphery.'

The second spatial dimension which we analyzed with the help of the exhibition map showed a curatorial sovereignty through creating a selective depiction of the exhibited artworks in the visitor's map. This limitation of content may be cited as the reason for avoiding an overloading of the map. As we are asking generally whether the curatorial process of *Garden of Earthly Delights* implies any need for improvement towards a postcolonial maxim, the map, as a highly regulated translation by the curating authority, has to be questioned for doing exactly that. The necessary possibility of self-translation from the side of the artists is not ensured if the map is only created by a one-sided canonical perspective of a curator.

When looking at the spatial representation of the artists in the actual exhibition space, it becomes clear that the curators blocked the visitors' perceptions of some artists' works, due to the already-cited unfortunate spatial arrangements in small rooms, or due to the positioning of artworks or information on the artist in dark corners. Therefore, accessibility as a basic prerequisite for anti-racist curating (BAYER/TERKESSIDIS 2017: 60) was not fully in place.

As it has become clear up to this point, our analysis of the exhibition *Garden of Earthly Delights* shows several failures within the curatorial process – regarding the decisions on presentation or the selection of a textual as well as spatial dimensions – in which we see chances missed for a truly anti-racist curatorial practice. Even though some decisions have been made which point towards a paradigm shift in the predominantly White curatorial practice – e.g. by not stating the origin of the artists, by including theoretical texts about (post)colonialism in the exhibition catalogue, as well as the critical positions articulated by the artists, and by including artists from the 'periphery,' – it does not seem as if the *Gropius Bau* clearly tried to enforce the changes that authors such as Caceres, Mesquita, and Utikal want to see in the art world. What they argue for is a curatorial practice which leaves behind the notion of the "curator as the author" and looks for alternative strategies, such as

QTIBPoC artists (Queer/Trans/Inter/Black/People of Color), which are otherwise excluded from the discourse of contemporary art, in curatorial practice. (CACERES/MESQUITA/UTIKAL 2017: 204)

Despite the negative aspects of this curatorial approach, there were also bright spots that have to be mentioned. Choosing the atrium as a space to display artworks by Artists of Color – Rashid Johnson and Taro Shinoda – was a choice that appeared to be a reasonable curatorial decision in terms of fulfilling decolonial demands. Firstly, the barrier to the artwork is quite low, as it is the first space that visitors enter. They do not even have to pay for this impression of the whole concept of *Garden of Earthly Delights*, as there is free access until the entrances on the side. Secondly, the artworks are presented in the manner of a dialogue, in which each of them has enough space regarding the size of the artworks. This multi-perspective display of two very different interpretations of the exhibition's topic is welcoming and can hence be considered a successful decolonial curatorial approach.

## 5.2 Change in Progress at MARKK

The results from our second research field at *MARKK* clearly showed that the postcolonial discourse and problematic implications of ethnological museums were already discernible in curatorial practice before its fundamental repositioning in 2018 in terms of its historiography on the website and in further detail in books and exhibition catalogues. However, it was striking that before 2018, the explicit mention of the colonial background was omitted on the website, one of the main (communication) media the museum uses to present itself directly to its visitors.

Now, by contrast, the *MARKK* makes self-criticism the central theme of the museum. On the new website, a self-critical outline of the museum's history makes clear that the *MARKK* is aware of its own roots and derives from this the necessity of dealing with the colonial background of the museum exhibits, of researching the contexts of origin, and the possibility of returning the exhibits. This fundamental repositioning is reflected in a new visual design and online presence which adapts the *MARKK*'s corporate identity to contemporary tastes and thus supports the general idea of updating ethnological museums in a decolonial manner as well as adhering to the demands of new museology.

These transformations and the fact that the museum is still undergoing change can be seen in the exhibition *Amani. In the Footsteps of a Colonial Research Station*. With reference to the question of exclusion in the narrative of history (BUURMAN et al. 2018: 21), the participation

of external experts from Amani and surroundings during the curatorial development of the exhibition was neither addressed in the guided tour, nor was it evident in the exhibition's texts or catalogue. Gaps in the mode of representation were thus named during the guided storytelling in the exhibition, but not in the process of developing media that convey knowledge about the exhibitions.

In the exhibition *Amani*, the ethnological "degradation" of artworks as artifacts (LEEB 2013) did not seem to play a major role for the inclusion of contemporary artworks that were presented in an aesthetic way. However, when looked at in the context of the entire museum, such artworks' contemporary and artistic status appears in a different light, especially when being commissioned by the museum. This problem is only solved on the surface without creating a "post-ethnological museum" (LEEB 2013).

Besides important questions about the origin and meaning of ethnographical objects, the exhibition *Re-Interpreted* also tried to focus on these objects' artistic value. However, this artistic value could have been emphasized more clearly. No balance was established between the two points of view artistic and ethnological. The eight objects could have been displayed more clearly, too. They were too close to each other. Instead, it "should become clear that diverse perspectives on (museum) objects exist and that their messages change depending on the respective contextual presentation" (MUTTENTHALER/WONISCH 2006: 22).

Especially in our research on *Amani*, the (active) role of the (speaking) curator as a mediator between the artistic works and the visitors plays an important role for decoding the meaning of art. However, the investigations also demonstrate the possibility of reading the texts of the exhibition against the statements of the curators. For this to happen, however, there must be the possibility of thoroughly examining the individual exhibits and thus of being able to contradict what is said about them, so as to uncover the role of the "expository actor" as an individual who makes decisions based on own experiences and as an institutional representative. The verbal exchange during the tour was decisive for such an exchange.

In contrast to *Amani* the exhibition *Re-Interpreted* is not an aesthetic-artistic but an ethnological form of presentation of the exhibits at *MARRK*. The "expository actors" are far more in the background of the presentation and therefore their function is more difficult to uncover. Opportunities for a decolonial exhibition therefore also lie in exchange,



not only at a global level but also between individuals, in order to achieve a change in narrative and presentation forms.

For this it is important to take into account different “trajectories” (BUURMAN et al. 2018: 19) in order to abandon the great narrative that is only informed by a single perspective (LEEB 2013). The question whether artistic practice can revise *MARKK*’s structural perspective of narration, despite the differentiation between ‘ethnological art’ and ‘contemporary art,’ remains unsolved. Approaches such as anti-racist curating can hardly overcome the institutional separation between art museums and ethnological museums at present, largely due to the two separate perspectives of narration resulting from the separation of artworks. So, whereas contemporary art is continuously set in opposition to and not entangled with ethnological art, interweavings between these two categories cannot be decoded.

This is also what the visitors at *MARKK* underlined. The discussion of racism and postcolonial theory was considered important by all those questioned, but the curatorial practice was nevertheless identified as being in need of improvement. It was mentioned how important it is to include multiple and hitherto underrepresented expert perspectives. Anti-racist curating, therefore, aims at a curatorial practice which is far from the legitimized quasi-objectivity of Eurocentric museums in the Global North, which still allows for only a few privileged perspectives on culture and the arts. This “historiography from below” (BAYER/TERKESSIDIS 2017: 57) aims at a form of knowledge formation that is carefully and comprehensively processed and reflected on, and that extends beyond the racialization and relations of identity/alterity. In committing to such an approach of curation and knowledge formation, the necessity arises to traverse and question all narratives and exhibits of an exhibition in different ways from the outset. By considering the subjectivity of the actors involved and a forward-looking consideration of several perspectives, the aim is thus to strive for a holistic reflection of curatorial practice (BAYER/TERKESSIDIS 2017: 56).

### 5.3 Conclusionary Remarks

In this way, a museum practice of exclusion is to be opposed. Instead, the circle of artists as well as curators should be expanded. This form of collaborative curating through the unconditional inclusion of the hitherto invisible participants can contribute to the de-monopolization of museum practice (BAYER/TERKESSIDIS 2017: 67–69). To this end, it is necessary to rethink established processes in organizations such as

museums. As a practice that is still developing, anti-racist curating is part of an ongoing reflexive differentiation towards situational role shifts and new forms of organization (BAYER/TERKESSIDIS 2017: 69). This has the potential to involve a multitude of participants in organizational processes and to continuously incorporate their individual perspectives.

The classic curator could thus be opposed by a team of curators with different subject areas. Traditionally curated exhibitions could be replaced by new exhibition forms involving the direct participation of artists and audience. (ibid.: 68) Collaborative curating means not to place one's own positions behind or in front of another, but rather next to those involved and to act together. However, it is important not to ignore socio-economic inequalities and persisting power relations between the various actors and to take these into account when designing content for museums (BAYER/TERKESSIDIS 2017: 69).

In addition, a museum should come to terms and confront its own colonial and racist past, present, and future. The examination of the museum's own history regarding the provenance of artworks offers a starting point for the entire social debate on colonialism and racism. By using the museum building itself as a visual example for the approach with the subject matter, visitors can be involved in the process of reflection, and region-specific forms of racist and colonial violence can be illustrated. The museums, for their part, would thus be fulfilling new museology's claim to educational work, by paving the way for museums to act as 'teaching institutions' or instruments of cultural mediation and participation in times of globalization, migration, and cultural plurality (Figure 11).

In conclusion, such a form of pluralization of cultural as well as artistic content can contribute to the development of contemporary and interesting cultural work in the long run and support the ethnological and art museums that have been criticized for their efforts to promote a global perspective on culture and art beyond racialization and beyond colonization. Even though anti-racist curating has succeeded in some respects in both museums studied in this paper, we can conclude that the decolonial turn in the predominantly White curatorial practice at visual art museums has not yet been fully achieved – at least we can say so in respect to what we found at *Gropius Bau*. This can still be seen in the ongoing exclusion of underrepresented artists and the reproduction of colonial concepts in the museums' discourses on "disciplinary power" (FOUCAULT 1978: 51) and their spatial structures.



Fig. 11: *Open Doors at MARKK, Hamburg 2020* (Photo by Anna Catharina Mulder 2020).

Thus, there is still a need to further strengthen a decolonial perspective in curating, to balance strategies of visual representations in museum spaces, as well as to increase audience participation in order to establish a more active role for the public, including in the control of the curatorial function in the sense of new museology.

When museums and exhibitions are understood as places of confrontation, in which historiographies, categories of knowledge and aesthetic practices are discussed every time anew, not only meanings themselves but also curatorial practices are open for re-negotiation. (WUTTENTHALER/WONISCH 2006: 24)

Likewise, all three of the museums' "expository actors" (BAL 1996) need to be analyzed together as entangled and mutually influencing each other in order to overcome the separation between different forms of narration.

The application of these questions also appear pressing from a wider socio-economic perspective "both within and outside the museum context" (VERGO 2009: 41). Thus, we should think of more ways to establish the decolonial turn in museums, as well as to seek to discuss and negotiate a decolonized (visual) culture beyond museums. Curating the 'global' from a decolonial perspective is not only a necessary but also an achievable goal.

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