

SEVEN HILLS. IMAGES AND SIGNS OF THE 21ST CENTURY

AN EXHIBITION OF THE BERLINER FESTSPIELE GMBH FOR THE MILLENNIUM 2000
IN THE MARTIN-GROPIUS-BAU

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The exhibition "Seven Hills. Images and Signs of the 21st Century", the central event in Berlin on the occasion of the millennium, will be shown in the Martin-Gropius-Bau from May 14 to October 29, 2000. General organiser is the Berliner Festspiele GmbH. The exhibit is divided into seven topics: "Nucleus", "Jungle", "Cosmos", "Civilisation", "Faith", "Knowledge" and "Dream". The exhibition will explore the promise of the modern age through a vibrant balance of edification and diversion, of science and art, of a reconsideration of cultural history and visions of the future. A perspective for the future, formulated in the future perfect: What will, what could have come of our time, when this millennium will have merged into the flow of all past cultural history?

Seven designers will give each of the seven categories its own characteristic appearance: Ken Adam, the film architect and Academy Award winner who mounted the design of several James Bond movies and Stanley Kubrick's "Dr. Strangelove", turns his attention to "Nucleus"; stage designer Tina Kitzing tackles the "Jungle"; Charles Wilp, the creator of legendary advertising campaigns in the 1960s ("Africola") and since then occupied as ARTronaut - an artist in the state of weightlessness - recreates the "Cosmos"; the visionary New York architect Lebbeus Woods outlines an ominous scenario for the "Civilisation" of tomorrow; Gerrit Grigoleit and Lars Gräbner deconstruct the pantheon of world religions for the topic of "Faith"; Edouard Bannwart, specialist for "media environments", disentangles the magazines of "Knowledge" and enables communication through the global flow of data; and finally, Kazuko Watanabe, director and stage designer, turns her talent for colourful and playful composition to the creation of "Dream" spaces.

The exhibition is multimedial - but "multimedia" doesn't mean only screens and keyboards. It addresses all of the visitor's senses: the intense interactivity of the media installations is juxtaposed with the abstract observation of medieval manuscripts displayed in protective glass cabinets; modern digital visualisation techniques of natural science with the traditional forms of chart, model and specimen; computer-animated reality on gigantic projection screens with the haptic evidence of history from the past two thousand years; the collective, joint attention paid to the medial exhibits with the silent, individual dialogue with a work of art. The new media in the exhibition serve on the one hand to form networks between objects and installations, pictures and texts in order to provide visitors with an individual approach to the topics. On the other hand, the new media, as essential processors in the modern sciences, are themselves an object of consideration. And they provide new metaphors for natural processes, the abstract visualisation of which can only be generated by the processes themselves: the aesthetic potential that lies in the natural sciences is of no less interest to the exhibition than their artistic transformation through "electronic art". Although it is not possible to depict the exhibition in its entirety here, a few examples should serve to illustrate the strategies of visualisation that it undertakes.

The section called "Nucleus" in the central atrium of the Martin-Gropius-Bau deals with the precipitous development of certain natural sciences since the beginning of the 20th century. The search for "nuclei" and the smallest particles of matter in the most advanced areas of research in physics, brain research, genetics and geology is the prerequisite for an increasing thirst for

knowledge, for the question of the interaction of the particles within the system, and thus the functioning of the system itself. This approach, of course, would be futile if it weren't for the breakneck development of computer technology. Intelligent machines have taken over an essential part of the research work, whereby it is often the case that the smaller the particles are, the greater the technological effort needed to examine them.

It is therefore only natural that the "Nucleus" section utilises the modern media. Major points of reference for visitors will be reproductions of large scientific instruments or theatrical stagings of scientific research projects. An example of this is the "Brain Cinema", which demonstrates neuronal processes in the brain. It is in the form of an oversized concave skullcap, the inner side of which serves as a projection surface - not only for the usual states of neuronal excitation, but also for extreme states such as an epileptic fit or an apoplectic stroke. The quantity of pixels on the skullcap corresponds to the synapses in the human brain so that the processes can be depicted as accurately as possible. Visitors can activate these processes.

In the "Nucleus" section, as in the other areas of the exhibition as well, there will be a mixture of installations, objects and pictures on display. This is in order to illustrate important aspects of present-day research on the one hand, but also to reflect both their origins with respect to the history of science and the artistic positions taken in the respective topics. This combination should draw attention to the correspondence, but also the contradictions between natural science and art, and at the same time achieve "didactic" effects.

In general the new media are used in the following forms: * as digital projections with DPL projectors (Digital Light Processing), * as films in the form of VD projections (Video on Demand), * as video display terminals at "Points of Information" where visitors can call up specific information and images, * as display terminals of the installations that have direct online access to research institutes and receive the latest data from them, * in the form of robots - humanoids, little dogs, industrial robots - that combine media technology and natural movements and illustrate a kind of playful communication between man and machine in a co-ordinated reaction to the outside world.

The "Jungle" section, despite its title which deliberately arouses the usual expectations, is devoted to nature beyond Nature and relies on a concept of nature that does not define itself in opposition to Culture as the true habitat of mankind. The collection, classification and preservation of nature by man is the focal point of the display - from herbarium to gene pool. The title-giving "Jungle" is only present in the form of a synthetic construct of odours, sounds and artificial organisms, in the mechanical animals made by Jim Whiting, or in the sculptures created by Jean Fabre out of beetles. Two media installations allow visitors to confront the topic actively: PICO SCAN by Christa Sommerer and Laurent Mignonneau and "Kali interactive" by the Milan group F.a.b.r.i.c.a.t.o.r.s. In the case of PICO SCAN visitors can scan their own body and thus create virtual organisms that can be seen on five plasma monitors. These artificial beings can communicate with one another. When one visitor touches another, says the artist, "then 'his' organisms immigrate to the monitor of the other visitor and propagate with them: this creates more and more baby organisms that represent a genetic mixture of their parent organisms. In some cases the organisms of different visitors are not compatible, however. Then the two organism populations will attempt to attack each other, whereby each of them can try to protect 'his own' organisms."

"Kali interactive" refers to the Hindu goddess Kali who stands for birth and death in Nature. By means of sensors labelled with icons and secured to the arms of a goddess pictured in the monitor, visitors can navigate through virtual spaces on large screens where they can see vivid pictures of life and death in nature, classified according to the topics "Man Destroys Nature", "Nature Destroys Man", "Man and Nature Co-exist", and "Kali as a Metaphor for the Jungle". If one gets very close to the fearsome goddess Kali, one can follow, with the help of a trackball device, a vision of the future reflected in her eyes, behind which liquid crystal monitors are hidden.

In the "Knowledge" section a plexiglass wall appears to float through the exhibition rooms, thus symbolising Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's famous metaphor for modern communication, the "cosmic membrane". Like the electromagnetic field that surrounds the Earth and, through its technological

availability, "lets every individual be present - actively and passively - on all the seas and continents at the same time," this room-high installation serves as an optical extension of the objects in the exhibition: a projection screen on which a look into the future or into the past can be made virtually. The interaction sought between historical realities and the projection screen is illustrated below by means of two examples.

The theme room "Library of Eternity", which leads us from the storage places of knowledge in antiquity to the future virtual museum of world cultures, is ruled by Athena Parthenos, the goddess of wisdom and understanding, an antique marble statue from the reading room of the library of Pergamum (Berlin, Graeco-Roman Collection, 2nd century BC). The library of Pergamum, an important centre of intellectual life and research, stands in the exhibition for the storage and generation of knowledge in ancient times, not least of all because due to a lack of Egyptian papyrus a method was developed to write on specially treated animal skins - parchment, as it was known - which counted among the most important vehicles of written knowledge until the invention of paper. The medial extension of the authentic and colossal Athena figure represents a virtual stroll through the Acropolis of Pergamum. Starting at the huge altar of Zeus, the so-called "Pergamum Altar", the way leads uphill to the Athena temple and ends there with a visit to the library. Entering the reading room one sees the location where the Athena statue originally stood, together with the reconstructed architecture of the room and its furnishings. The reconstructions will be carried out in co-operation with the staff of the Berlin Graeco-Roman Collection, which will take over and expand the database after the exhibition is finished.

In the theme room "Celestial Strains", which is devoted to the notation and cataloguing of sounds, the oldest sound documents in the world are presented. The phonograph developed by Thomas A. Edison made it possible for the first time to store sounds for repeated reproduction. This "fixing" of sounds provided an opportunity to systematically study non-European music which had not been set down in notes. The exhibition will show such phonographs and sound cylinders from the phonogram archive of the department of music ethnology of the Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin, which contains one of the largest and most important recording archives in the world. Such examples taken from cultures having almost exclusively oral traditions are of inestimable documentary value because the chains of oral tradition have largely been destroyed. In some cases the cylinders that were deformed through transportation or rendered unusable through frequent playing have been restored with the aid of special techniques.

At the same time the multimedial installation on the "cosmic membrane", the "Map of World Music", will allow visitors to select and listen to some 70 to 100 examples of tones from different musical regions. Many of these musical samples will be illustrated by examples of photographs and films from those times. After the exhibition is finished this data will again provide the museum with a base of material which it can further augment.

The last section of the exhibition, "Dream", is dedicated to human subjectivity. The forms of expression that the arts have found for the senses, the passions, dreaming and playful creativity are juxtaposed with related research efforts in the natural sciences, particularly the neurosciences. The room called "Nose-It-All" is just one example of this section. It emphasises the "power of the nose" - subversive in our visual age and dissonant in the concert of the senses. The significance of smell and odours in cultural history, in religious cults and in medicine will be depicted by means of baroque allegories of the senses, incense burners and fragrance vials from antiquity to the present. The centre of attraction, however, is the media installation "Smell and Memory", which is being created in co-operation between the animation filmmaker Heinz Busert, the multimedia producer Professor Eku Wand and the Institute for Neurobiology at the Free University Berlin under the direction of Professor Randolph Menzel. The feat of memory of honey bees in recognising nourishing flowers is to be duplicated in the form of a computer game - not least of all by means of so-called "Glomeruli" pictures, which serve in research to mark neuronal processes by colours. If this relationship is not familiar, such data images from inside the bee can be observed for the pure delight of viewing: as serial works of artistless art, works of unexpected aesthetic fascination.