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Fabian Lehmann: Postkoloniale Gegenbilder

In this fascinating study, Fabian Lehmann investigates the opportunities offered by visual art as a means of coming to terms with the colonial past. He thus connects two fields that have rarely been studied together: scholarship on art's ability to embody and shape collective memory, and scholarship on the memory of colonialism.

Lehmann analyses artworks grappling with the German imperial past in Namibia, the former German Southwest Africa, Germany's main settler colony between 1884 and 1915. He considers visual art in a fairly broad sense, including paintings, sketches, prints, films, video art, installations, and to a lesser extent performative-based art. Most of the case studies were produced between 2005 and 2018. The author thus illustrates the wide spectrum of artistic responses to the colonial past, tracing recurring motifs and, ultimately, connecting these to collective memory (7). He asks in what specifically artistic ways these works reflect collective memory - and forgetting - of the German colonial past (8). Importantly, he understands these case studies as works that do not reflect the historical past as such, but rather as engagements with the memory and forgetting of this past from a contemporary, postcolonial perspective (9).

The strongest point of the analysis is the tracing of colonial motifs and their contemporary reinterpretations in the first part of the book. For example, Lehmann connects a still from Christoph Schlingensiefel's film *The African Twin Towers* where white actors seated behind a desk hand out candy to black children in Namibia, to a photograph of German officials recruiting indigenous men for the Togolese police force in 1914. Arguably, the connection to this specific photograph is somewhat overstated, for there were many more like it in German and other European contexts. However, identifying this visual trope helps us understand the extent to which it has been remade and remixed by the artist.

This methodology again comes to the fore in Lehmann's third chapter, in which he traces the image(s) of the Nama leader and resistance fighter Hendrik Witbooi in works by Namibian artists Inatu Indongo, Hentie van der Merwe, Moholi Ndikung, Andrew van Wyk and Petrus Amuthenu. Lehmann closely follows the artists' decisions in terms of framing, colour and expression in the remaking of two iconic photographs of Witbooi and interprets their contemporary meanings. He pays particular attention to material, and we learn about the significance of cardboard prints as a technique that is widely used in the Namibian art world since the 1980s. Importantly, the author also considers more popular renditions, including Witbooi's image on Namibian dollars before 2012, and how this commercialisation has affected contemporary artistic renderings of the anticolonial hero. In this chapter, it becomes clear how Witbooi, and by extension the German colonial past, have been integrated into the national collective memory of Namibia.

The second part of the study focuses on Namibian monuments as *lieux de mémoire* to the colonial past. It centres on the much-discussed *Reiterdenkmal* in Windhoek, which was erected in 1912 and removed from its prominent, elevated position in the city centre to a new location in front of the Alte Feste in 2009 and eventually into its courtyard in 2013, where it has become part of the museum complex. Lehmann explains how the monument serves as a point of shared collective memory between Germany and Namibia (249). Drawing on previous studies, Lehmann tells a story that may be familiar to many scholars working in this area. He does, however, take the analysis a step further by showing how artists, including Lok Kandjengo, Imke Rust, Tim Hübschle, Klaus Klinger and Natasha Beukes have understood this monument and its deconstruction in relation to the surrounding urban landscape.

In the third part of the book, Lehmann emphasizes the poignant role of landscape in the memory of German colonialism. He points out how specific landscapes have become representative of Namibia, thanks in large part to their reproduction in landscape painting in the German community and images used by the tourist

industry. But Lehmann also goes behind these images to uncover 'forgotten' landscapes of trauma, including the site of concentration camps used during the Herero genocide both in central Windhoek and on Shark Island off the coast of Lüderitz. Drawing on theoretical insights by Maurice Halbwachs, Pierre Nora, Jan Assman and cultural landscape studies, Lehmann first departs somewhat from his remit and analyses these memory spaces in and of themselves, leaving aside their impact on art. He thus interprets Shark Island as a site of forgetting that is antithetical to the memorial landscape around the *Reiterdenkmal* in Windhoek (341). Taking up the artistic thread again, he continues with an analysis of the video installations of Philip Koyo Metz and Nicola Brandt and their relation to postcolonial landscapes. Although offering some important insights, this section is not quite as thematically and methodologically unified as the preceding two parts.

A relatively short ten-page conclusion sums up the main points, but still leaves several questions unanswered. For example, if the artistic works under scrutiny are representative, perhaps even constitutive, of a 'collective memory', as Lehmann claims, then what sort of 'collective' are we talking about? Given the diversity of examples that the author offers, can we really speak of a 'collective' memory at all, rather than simply a collection of individual reflections on the colonial past, mediated by ethnicity, age, nationality and/or politics? The identification of techniques and processes showing *how* artists have tackled motifs from the German colonial past is clear and easy to follow, but there is relatively less discussion of the much more complex question of *why* these choices are made and what that might mean. The concept of *Gegenbilder* (counter-images) touched upon in the conclusion and in the title goes some way towards uncovering this, but could well be explored further.

This book will appeal to a range of scholars exploring the intersections between visual culture, memory and empire. Art historians will appreciate the close reading of individual works, as well as the attention to not just the visual, but also the material qualities of the art objects under discussion. Historians will be intrigued by the varied creative ways in which the past remains present in contemporary Namibian art. They may, however, also wonder how these more recent works fit in a longer trajectory of visual art addressing the German colonial past in Namibia.

One drawback of a study focusing to such an extent on a relatively contemporary phenomenon is that it is soon outdated. Political responses to the colonial past are an area of rapid development, and the artistic landscape is similarly dynamic. Just after this text was published, the German government formally issued an apology for the colonial past. Will this affect the art world, and in what ways? One can only hope that Lehmann will keep us up to date in future publications.

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