



DREAMING IN THE MUSEUM

Potted 
Plants as
Indicators
of Trauma
in Museo-
 logical
Settings



to growing plants

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Fig. 1
1787 The Paris Salon,
Louvre Paris, Etching
by Pietro Antonio
Martini

INTRO- DUCTION

Art display is nothing but a way of making order. Of aligning, of sorting, of throwing things away and making sure what you need is easily accessible. It is like housekeeping. And like the best of housekeeping, a certain amount of clutter, a certain amount of stuff is necessary for a place to feel comfortable. Comfort is a requisite for the modern human being. You don't need comfort to survive (Rybczynski, 1987). Comfort, by default, is more than you need for bare survival, it is what comes after the bare minimum is met, the slight surplus that makes life not only liveable, but enjoyable too.

The history of the exhibition space is one that has moved in the opposite direction: from a generous amount of comfort, backwards, to bare survival-mode, only to partially revive its former virtues. The trajectory of this development could be read through any number of museum furniture, chairs, tables and rugs alike, but it is poignantly illustrated by the existence of the potted plant in the museum display. And unlike a chair, a table or a rug, certain other things need to be in place to ensure a plant's survival: social structures and a sense of responsibility to it over time. Plants need to be watered, trimmed, pruned and eventually, when enough time has passed, potted on. For the entire history of the

contemporary art, they were naturally there. Various amounts of domestication, making homely and de-homifying forces worked their way over display settings, but plants remained in place. Until they disappeared.

As early as 1699 the Louvre held its first salons with paintings and sculptures, arguably the forerunners of contemporary art exhibitions (Fig. 1). Back then, the exhibition walls were grey-green and cluttered from floor to ceiling with paintings. The green turned into red by the mid 1850s. The crowdedness of the walls allowed for crowdedness elsewhere in the space: fabrics and rugs, chairs and tables, plants and people, young and old, some running, others sitting, eating and drinking, laughing and joking, looking and sleeping. The museum was a public space, and one that was conveniently dry and warm in wet weather conditions.

To control the masses somewhat, restrictions were implemented on the walls and the former crowdedness made way for an increasingly linear hanging situation. Museum directors in the former German Empire were inspired by home interiors to create an intimate, interiorised viewing experience (Klonk, 2009: 55). The idea wasn't exactly apolitical. The display of art was always to reflect the glory of the powerful, even more so if their glory was under scrutiny. This was the case in 1850s Britain, as it was at the end of that century in the German Empire, in wartime propaganda exhibitions and in America in the 1940s. As the influence of those in power started to crumble, the art display had to convince the public otherwise. In each of these cases, exhibition displays were constructed to project discipline: they aspired to radiate restraint, seriousness, and a certain sense of awe to their visitors.

Reduction became the hallmark of the new display setting. The Bauhaus were some of the first to implement fully white walls in exhibition spaces. The political landscape shifted dramatically with the Nazis gaining power in the 1930s Weimar Republic. The new rulers saw no need to change the increasing whiteness prevailing in the museums, but the white that they promoted was hardly neutral. Every corner of *Haus der Deutschen Kunst* – Hitler's utterly white propaganda museum – screamed subordination and the pursuit of power.

The *Haus der Deutschen Kunst* is not the only origin of what later became to be known as the 'white cube', but it certainly belongs to its history. It is an

example of extremity, of how far exhibition spaces in general, and the white cube in particular, can be used as an instrument of dehumanisation. The white exhibition space loves to shroud itself in supposed neutrality, to be of no place and no time, to be of no world. But no world can be of no world. No place can be of no place, and time is always passing.

More so than any other museum, the Museum of Modern Art (hereafter MoMA) pushed the notion of the exhibition space as a neutral container. When it opened in 1929, its first director had been directly influenced by the trends of pre-war Germany and developed his own riff on the style. Soon thereafter the museum space turned into a container for art, white and ready for its new content. 'For better or worse [the white cube] is the single major convention through which art is passed. What keeps it stable is the lack of alternatives.' (O'Doherty, 1976: 81)

White is white, technically nothing more but a colour. But the white in the white cube has gone far beyond being a colour – it became an attitude of shutting the world out, of creating a vacuum, a vortex in time and space, self-reliant and self-referential, unblemished and eternal. The white didn't get to this point on its own. Furniture was removed, potted plants made unfit for the increasingly precious art. Any mode of comfort, of feeling at ease was replaced by style and stylishness, which penetrated into every behavioural aspect of the museum audience. No written pamphlet informs the audience of how to behave in a museum. The space itself, in the way it is set up and presents itself gives the order: no running, no shouting, laughing only if appropriate and in a measured fashion, constantly watched, if necessary restrained by uniformed invigilators.

The term 'white cube' appeared for the first time as a critique of the exhibition space by Brian O'Doherty in 1976 and quickly entered the museum vernacular. Four years later, in 1980, the American Psychiatric Association recognised PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) as an official condition.

Two phenomena from two totally distinct worlds, and yet they share a strange resemblance. Their descriptions are strangely intertwined. Consider 'a place deprived of location', in a 'limbolike status' with a 'direct line to the timeless' (O'Doherty, 1976: 80), alongside 'time freezes', 'dissociation' and 'lack of orientation' (Kolk, 2014: 60, 70, 71, respectively). The first set of quotes here references the white cube display in contemporary art museums, the second is

a classic medical description of the effects of trauma. Even their symptoms or behavioural effects for that matter, are peculiarly alike: ‘as if we can no longer experience anything’, ‘fragmentation of the self’ and ‘bleaching out the past and at the same time control the future’ (O’Doherty, 1976: 52, 61, 11) on the cube, as opposed to ‘going numb’, ‘overwhelming experience of being split off and fragmented’, ‘losing the sense of time and becoming trapped in the moment, without a sense of past, present and future’ (Kolk, 2014: 71, 66, 69) on trauma. Uncanny to say the least ¹.

How is it to be explained that at virtually the same moment that the negative effects of trauma are recognised, the history of contemporary art display arrived at a space positively promoting and creating the same effects? How is it that veterans returning from numerous wars had almost no institutionalised, psychological support before 1980 whilst the display of art established an environment in which alienation, fragmentation and exclusion were viscerally experienced – a form of display that effectively recreated the symptoms of trauma?

This is a history of how we got to where we are, of understanding why things evolved the way they have. This is a thesis about trying to understand what trends and thoughts, what people and what stories culminated in a moment in the history of a space, in which Brian O’Doherty wrote ‘one has to have died already to be there’ (1976: 7). But it is also a thesis about hope, wonder, joy and essentially growing life.

*The only hope we have is our
Children and the seeds we give them
And the gardens we plant together.*
(Brautigan, 1968)

In a artist talk Tai Shani said: ‘[I might] never live in the house I am building’ (Shani, 2020). It is a provocative thought: perhaps, indeed, we will not eat the fruits of the trees we plant in our lifetime ourselves, but the knowledge of their potential for bearing fruit in the future is reason enough to keep planting, to keep hoping – to build, to help and to work collectively for a better life. As much as this is

a thesis trying to unearth the stories of how a space came to be described with the same words as the effects of trauma, it is also a thesis promoting a third element in counterpoint: the joys of experience, and in particular the joys of experiencing art together.

The history of the exhibition space is in a broad sense one of reduction. After 200 years of continuous exclusion, furniture and plants dwindled in numbers and humans were rendered into disembodied eyes. Likewise, the history of trauma is one tightly linked to society’s expectations of an individual to function in a certain and highly particular manner, namely to be productive, efficient, and to continuously move forwards at any given moment in time. But experiences of time don’t exist in solely linear forms. Indeed, to recognise trauma is to recognise that the past can be viscerally experienced in the present moment.

At the end of World War I, case studies of traumatised war veterans posed a threat to continuing propaganda efforts. The image of the heroic soldier fighting for his motherland needed to be preserved at all costs, and case studies recorded by doctors at the frontlines were not only blocked from publication but trauma as a diagnosis in itself altogether not permitted.

At the start of the century few patient numbers were necessary for doctors to record a new condition (Jacyna, 2014: 5). By the time they were approaching the Second World War increasingly larger numbers were needed – numbers that due to the institutional suppression of trauma cases simply weren’t there, further delaying its official diagnosis.

The numbers eventually rose to irrefutable levels as a result of the Vietnam War. It was simply impossible to reintegrate the returning veterans into the mundaneness of everyday life. The pressure on society of how to deal and effectively help these men was too large to ignore and out of numbers and statistics yet again humans had to grow. The initially rejected case studies, stories of people and their experiences, classified as ‘romantic’ and not scientific enough, were the foundation on which trauma treatment found its first footing in the 1970s (Sacks, 1999: XXXV).

How does a society account for personal experience in a place – a place, which is necessarily of a time and location? Experience needs context. Experience needs connections between individuals, objects, time and space to make an action not an isolated

1
Van der Kolk was concerned with recording his observations throughout his decades’ long career as a practicing psychologist. It is on these grounds that I compare these excerpts. In other words, the comparison of these texts is not as asynchronous as their publication dates would suggest. They are, in fact, near-contemporaries of one another.

thing, but something existing as a reaction to and in relation to others around.

The museum is a space within broader society, representing collective identity. Over the course of the display history, the context of the museum was attempted to be erased in favour of looking at the art on its own. Exhibitions became of an increasingly temporary nature, were asked to be ever-more flexible, efficient and functional, were required not to linger and reminisce but to constantly move onwards. What was expected of the space came to be expected of its visitors, too: the successful model human is to be flexible, effective and functioning. But the loss of context, the increasingly fast pace of life doesn't allow for much settling in place – a condition somewhat necessary for the potted plant. Stumbling over large amounts of archival footage of plants in art museums, I started to wonder what these plants were doing there. The plant life we cultivate in containers is not the one we find in our Northern European gardens. Potted plants are overwhelmingly tropical. Colonialism has uprooted them and confined them to pots far away from their natural habitat. Not only did the plants we keep indoors need to habituate to a new environment, but in the case of the museum, to an environment trying as hard as possible to eradicate context, to make history not only invisible but uprooting its existence altogether. So how did remnants of colonialism end up casually decorating our art museums? Who put them there? What purpose did they serve as part of the display?

Over the course of this thesis I am largely advocating for plants as a solution to the alienation the white cube creates. But given that potted plants are symbols of alienation themselves, how can they serve as its solution? Potted plants are undeniably domesticated, and domestication has as much to do with control and dominion as it does with ensuring flourishing for the domesticated. So how can a creature caught in such a paradox be the solution to a space in despair? And given their complicated history, how could they ever inconspicuously exist in the space?

Potted plants existed within the museum setting for almost two centuries. But then in the 1970s they suddenly vanished, only to re-emerge as part of the art itself. At the precise moment potted plants were deemed too 'dangerous' for the precious art, artists made plants their art material (Sherman, 2013: 2).

Again, it is this moment in the 1970s, the same moment the white cube was critiqued, the same moment trauma was fully diagnosed, that changed the existence of potted plants in the museum irrevocably. Whereas there is lots of writing on the plants' existence in the contemporary art museum after 1970, there are almost no accounts of them before then. In fact, in all my research I came across only three: Gene Pittman's article *Plant as Decorative Element in a Gallery* (2010) Arden Sherman's *Proposal for a Museum* (2013) and *The Plant Collection* (2019) by Inge Meijer. But unequivocal archival materials bear testament to the fact that potted plants have long in fact, since the very beginning of contemporary art display–been living in and among the art.

I want to focus my attention primarily on the plant life inside the museum in the time leading up to the 1970s. In an attempt to answer some of the questions I asked above, I want to introduce what Clifford Geertz has termed 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) as a method to make context tangible. In what follows, with Geertz's help, I attempt to rescue the reduced life inside the museum and understand art display as the complex, complicated social construct it is but also as the fuller, brighter and livelier vessel brimming with stories that need to be told.

This thesis is a triangular history of museum display, the diagnosis of trauma and of potted plants told in three ways. Firstly in form of an academic essay, secondly as archival footage of potted plants in museums and finally in the form of marginalia, indicating to the reader the focus of a text passage.



Every chapter is foreshadowed by a timeline, visually organising the most important dates discussed inside it. I give the first words of every chapter to a plant. Each chosen plant has a particular significance to the chapter that follows and summarises its events from his or her own perspective in form of a poem.

Further, it is important to outline not only the methodological and historical context but the geographical one too. Like potted plants, art galleries have a colonial history. 'Public art galleries are a European

invention that spread first to the United States and then to other parts of the world' (Klonk, 2009: 4). Whereas the educated middle-class in both Europe and America have used the contemporary art museum since the late 1700s as a tool to 'forge a sense of themselves', this simply wasn't the case in places where the art gallery was a remnant of colonial power (Klonk, 2009: 4). Plants will undoubtedly be found in museums in Asia, Africa and South America, in fact the Chinese were the very first people who cultivated plants in pots already in 1000 BC (*Houseplants: A Potted History*, 2020). However, I am going to focus my research on vegetal life in museums across Europe and America. Specifically, I will focus on museums in four major cities to which I have particularly personal connections: London, Berlin, New York and Amsterdam.

The focus of my writing is very much on people, plants and experience that are of particular times and locations. This is the reason that the trauma history I will be discussing is mostly an event-based one, one inflicted by a traumatic experience, that fractures the understanding of one's own life story.

As much as this is the triangular history of potted plants, museum displays and trauma diagnosis, this thesis is a collection of stories across time in different places, gathered almost like a bouquet of flowers – the stories of peoples' lives, the stories of potted plants and the way we account for the fragmenting effects traumatic experiences can have. Writing my thesis I became very aware that the people, the curators, artists, doctors and botanists whose stories I tell aren't people in general, but specifically mostly men. And I wondered where are my women?

I found my women where I found my plants. I realised the only people who wrote about potted plants, about potted plants in art history and the history of potted plants itself, are women: Arden Sherman, Inge Meijer, Marlene Stephanie Wenger, Gene Pittman, and Jacq Barber are just a few whose work I draw on in what follows. Talking about healing trauma, the psychologist van der Kolk said: 'Telling the story is important; without stories, memory becomes frozen; and without memory you cannot imagine how things can be different' (Kolk, 2014: 221). So let's gather stories in bouquets of flowers.

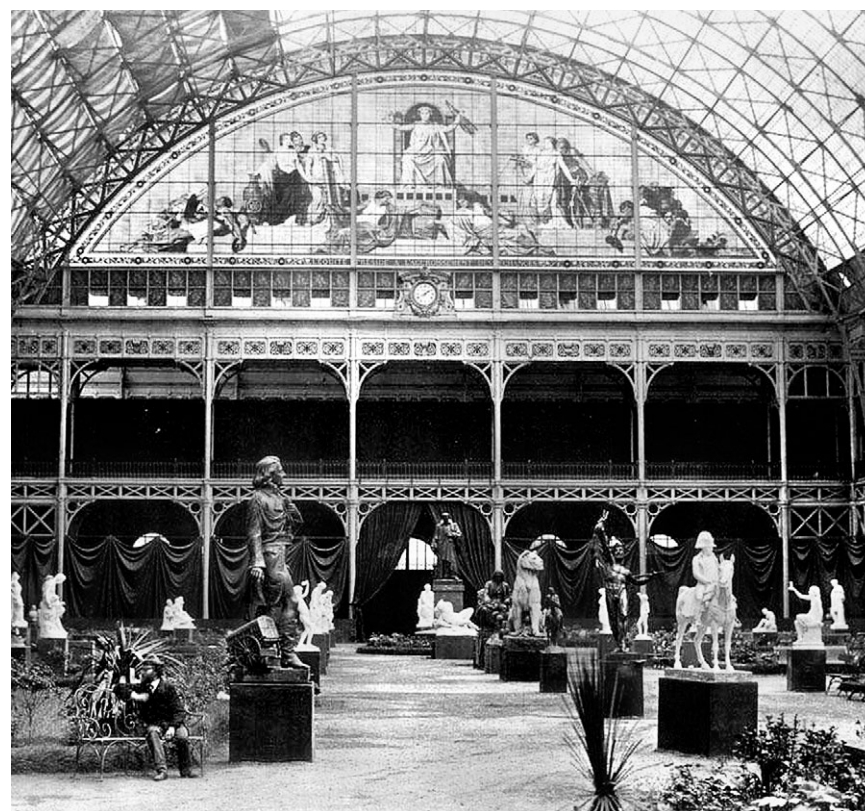


Fig. 2
1864 Installation view
of 1864 Salon des
Refusés at Palais des
Beaux-Arts, Paris

Fig. 3
1878 Exposition
Universelle at Palais
d'Industrie, Paris

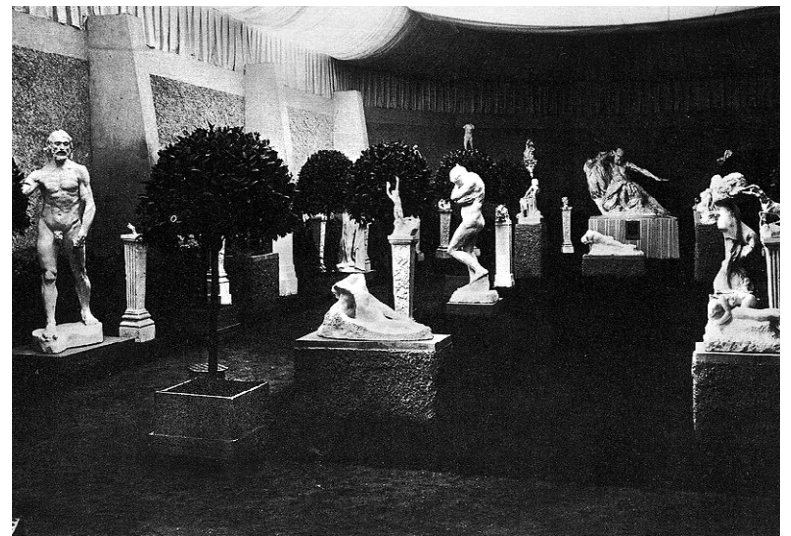


Fig. 5
1899 Giacomo
Favoretto Exhibition,
Venice Biennale,
Venice

Fig. 6
1901 The International
Exhibition, Glasgow
Art Gallery and
Museum, Glasgow

Fig. 7
1902 Rodin's
exhibition, Prague



Fig. 8
1903 Venice Biennale,
Venice

Fig. 9
1908, Frank Lloyd
Wright's Japanese
Prints exhibition,
Art Institute of
Chicago, Chicago

Fig. 10
1910 Early Oriental
Rugs, Metro-
politan Museum of
Art, New York



Fig. 11
1928 Gala in Music
Foyer, Carnegie
Museum of Art, Pitts-
burgh



Fig. 14
1937 Pablo Picasso,
Guernica, San Francisco
Museum of Art,
San Francisco



Fig. 15
1940 Twenty Centu-
ries of Mexican Art,
MoMA, New York



Fig. 16
1942 Duncan, Draw-
ings, Photographs,
Memorabilia, MoMA,
New York



Fig. 18
1942 The Sculpture
of John B. Flannagan,
MoMA, New York



Fig. 19
1943 Birds in Color,
Photographs by
Eliot Porter, MoMA,
New York



Fig. 20
1946 The Museum
Collection of Painting
and Sculpture,
MoMA, New York

Fig. 21
1946 The Museum
Collection of Painting
and Sculpture,
MoMA, New York



Fig. 23
1946 Piet Mondrian,
Retrospective,
Stedelijk Museum,
Amsterdam

Fig. 24
1949 Twentieth
Century Italian Art,
June 28, MoMA,
New York



Fig. 25
1951 Modigliani,
MoMA, New York

Fig. 26
1952 Molyneux
Collection,
MoMA, New York

Fig. 27
1956 Pablo Picasso
Guernica, Stedelijk
Museum, Amsterdam

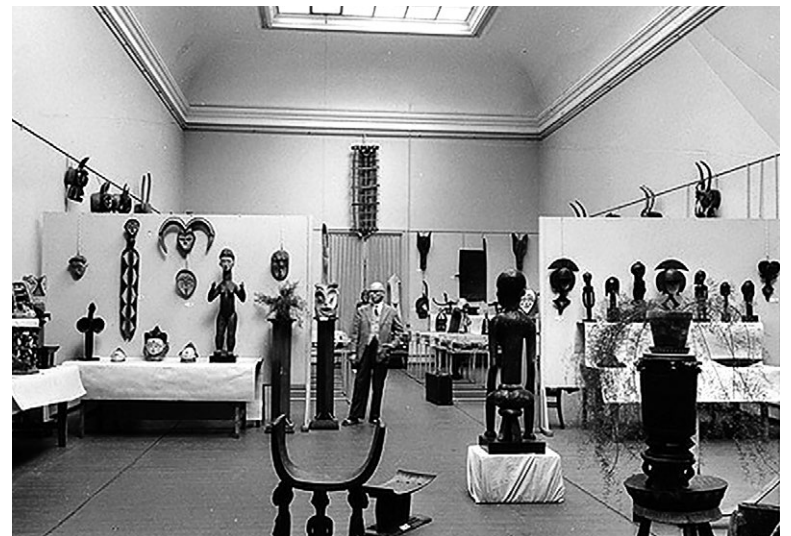


Fig. 28
1957 Josef Mueller's
collection, Solothurn,
Switzerland

Fig. 29
1957 Léger, Stedelijk
Museum, Amsterdam



Fig. 30
1958 Sculptures
and Drawings from
Seven Sculptors,
Guggenheim Muse-
um, New York

Fig. 31
1959 Totems Not
Taboo, Museum of
Fine Arts, Houston

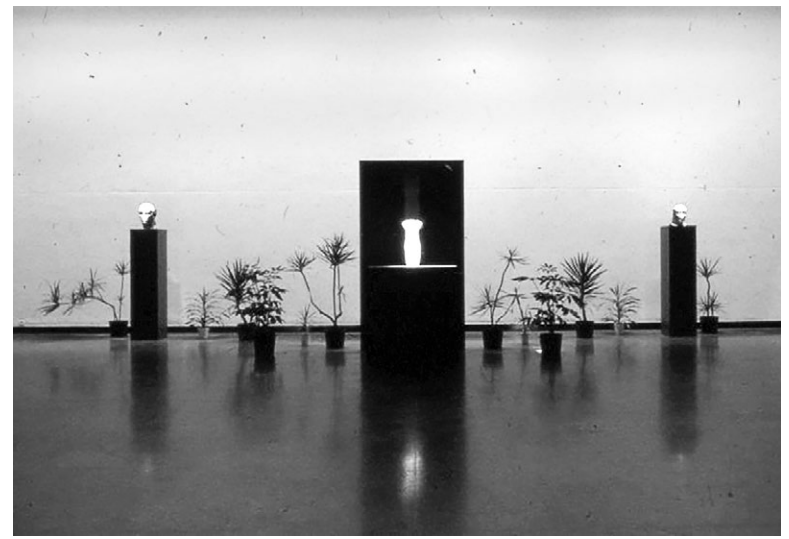


Fig. 32
1960 Egyptian
Sculpture of the Late
Period, Brooklyn
Museum, New York

Fig. 33
1960 Ancient Art
of the Americas,
Brooklyn Museum,
New York





Fig. 34
1960 Derkovits,
Stedelijk Museum,
Amsterdam



Fig. 35
1961 Verzameling Ella
Winter, Stedelijk
Museum, Amsterdam



Fig. 37
1962 Hans Verhuist,
Stedelijk Museum,
Amsterdam



Fig. 38
1962 Collection
Rolf E. Stenersen,
Stedelijk Museum,
Amsterdam



Fig. 39
1962 Laurens,
Stedelijk Museum,
Amsterdam

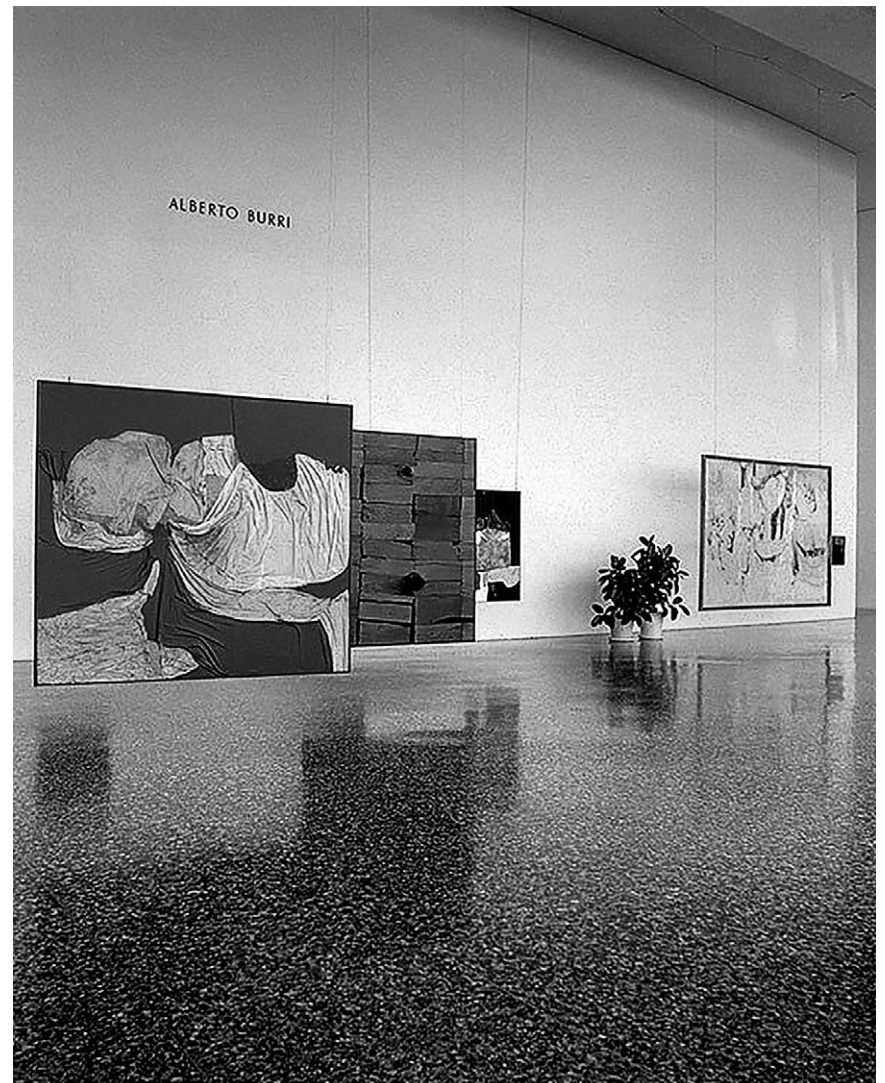


Fig. 40
1963 Alberto Burri,
Museum of Fine
Arts, Houston



Fig. 41
1963 International
Watercolor Exhibition,
Brooklyn Museum,
New York



Fig. 42
1964 Jaap Nanninga,
Stedelijk Museum,
Amsterdam



Fig. 43
1965 Alexander
Calder Retrospec-
tive, Guggenheim
Museum Museum,
New York



Fig. 44
1965 Recent Acqui-
sitions, Painting
and Sculpture,
MoMA, New York

Fig. 46
1965 Not Seen and/
or Less Seen of/
by Marcel Duchamp/
Rose Sélavy, Mu-
seum of Fine Arts,
Houston



Fig. 47
1966 Mughal carpets,
Cleveland Museum
of Art, Cleveland

Fig. 48
1966 Sculpture and
Drawings by Henry
Moore, Brooklyn
Museum, New York



Fig. 50
1967 Oriental Carpets
from the Kevorkian
Foundation, Brooklyn
Museum, New York

Fig. 51
1967 Niki de Saint
Phalle, Stedelijk
Museum, Amsterdam

CHAPTER I

Alone Among Many or Displaying Indivi- duality

1699
first series of salons
at the Louvre, Paris

1760–1840
Industrial Revolution

1790
Napoleon acquires
Great Palm for
Empress Josephine

1800
Jean-Baptiste
Lamarck experiments
with Mimosa Pudica,
Paris

1814
Relocation of Great
Palm to London

1836
National Gallery's
Select Committee
Report: 'improvement
of taste'

1838
National Gallery
at Trafalgar Square
opens

1848
Men's suffrage
movement UK

1850
National Gallery's
Select Committee
Report: 'improvement
in the character of
visitor'

1854
Great Palm transport-
ed through London
with 20 horses

1860
Redecoration Nation-
al Gallery, crimson red

1889
Pierre Janet wrote
the first-ever book on
trauma

1900
Introduction of arti-
ficial light in museum

1908
Francis Darwin an-
nounces at the British
Association for the
Advancement of
Science: 'Plants are
intelligent beings.'

*By the time I am carried
through London •
I am used to the tremble
of time • My stem
is thick • And my shoulders
are burdened •
With the weight of more
than one Empire •
I see children running
• In excitement of the
place to go • But soon the
crowd evaporates •
Leaving only me • Standing
here alone.*



PALM TREE

The origins of art displays, trauma diagnosis and some of the earliest research into plant intelligence can, more or less, be traced back to one place: Paris. Whereas the French capital was in many ways the birth ground of these trajectories, I am going to follow their developments in a back and forth between French and British soil. We begin, however, in France. The installation of contemporary art in the French Salons of the 18th century followed the principle of home interior arrangements itself, in a fashion easily summed up as ‘the-more-the-merrier’, or what the art critic Germano Celant named the ‘quantitative exhibition method’ (Celant 1996: 374). Quantity not only applied to furniture, paintings and sculptures, but to plant life, too; at times giving the impression that the art was being exhibited inside a tropical garden. (Fig. 4.) An example of such a residence is Malmaison, the voluptuously decorated home of Empress Josephine on the outskirts of Paris. Not only did fabric drapes, intricately carved wooden chairs and tables, thick rugs and paintings in golden frames fight for attention but she was an avid plant lover and collector too (Ellis-Rees, 2019). Her husband, none other than Napoleon Bonaparte, knew of his wife’s love for everything vegetal and often returned with a green surprise from one of his many trips to the colonies. Whilst the French population started to flock into the newly opened Louvre, Napoleon invaded the East African Island La Réunion and brought back a palm tree as a gift for his wife.

Josephine cared for the palm for more than a decade but after her death in 1814, a Thomas Evans of the East India Company, something of a plant collector himself, bought the palm tree and took it with him to London. Indeed, as William Ellies-Rees has quipped, to possess a plant formally owned by the French Empress was most likely seen as a symbolic victory over the French (Ellies-Rees, 2019). Thomas Evans’ enjoyment of the tree didn’t last long though, as he too died, not long after the palm’s acquisition. The once-again ownerless palm was adopted by Loddiges Nursery in London’s Hackney borough, at the time the world’s largest greenhouse and home to numerous tropical plants that had been, like the palm, uprooted by the new currents and cycles of colonialism. Over the next forty years, the palm shot skywards, until the Loddiges Nursery closed its doors and the palm—now some three stories in height!—was taken





Fig. 4
1890 Figaro-Salon,
Paris Drawing by
Jean-André Rixens

across the city to its final resting place in The Crystal Palace.

Not only did the so-called Great Palm make its way across the water from France to England, but so did the idea for a national museum. During the forty years that the palm flourished at Loddiges Nursery in Hackney, Britain opened its equivalent of the Louvre, the National Gallery on Trafalgar Square.

While the purpose of a national art museum had everything to do with prestige, its purpose was rather straightforward indeed: to display and store the nation's art. And in this most British of museums, we encounter a sheer quantity familiar to us now from France. On display was the collection; that is, not a selection of it, but the collection in its entirety. The position of each painting on the wall was determined by a simple spatial hierarchy: the more important the piece, the more central a position it was given on the wall. The sheer abundance of work thus arranged made for dynamic viewing indeed: at times moving up close, then swirling around to step back, now bending down and often craning the neck.

The abundance at play on the walls was reflected by the constant commotion taking place on the museum's floorspace too. Paintings, sculptures, chairs, tables, rugs, potted plants and flower pots, people walking and talking, children running and laughing—even eating and drinking—while others took a quick afternoon nap in the dry warm of the museum. One exasperated museum invigilator described the scene with the following words:

'I have observed a great many things, which show that many persons who come, do not come really to see the pictures... On (one occasion), I saw some people, who seemed to be country people, who had a basket of provision, and who drew their chairs round and sat down, and seemed to make themselves comfortable, they had meat and drink.'

(cited in Klonk, 2009, 44)

London's National Gallery has always been free of charge to the public, so soon after it opened its doors it became an excellent poor weather alternative to the park for public gathering. People came to the museum to spend time together, so having a picnic inside the museum seemed only a logical consequence. No doubt the museum's park-like appearance was further enhanced by the number of

potted plants in the space. As trade with the colonies bloomed, indoor greenery was more popular than it ever had been. And unlike today, the furniture at the National Gallery was not fixed firmly and immovably to the ground; the benches and chairs could in fact be moved about at will; a liberty visitors full-heartedly embraced as they made themselves at home.

Right from its opening hours a political agenda permeated the exhibition space. The National Gallery's Select Committee stated the 'improvement of taste' as their general aim for the institution, which became an aspiration to see the 'improvement in the character of visitors' only a decade later (Klonk, 2009: 46). The museum proudly called itself the 'National' gallery, except the visitors to the museum were anything but representative of the nation as a whole. Before the introduction of artificial light in the gallery space (this was around the turn of the 20th century) museum opening hours were strictly dependant on the hours of sunlight in a day (Klonk, 2009: 6–7). As such, since middle-class women traditionally didn't work during the day, (and since working-class women were significantly more likely to work during the day), museum visits were almost exclusively open to and for middle class women. This fact was attended by a curious tension. In 1850s Britain, only legal citizens – that is, propertied men – could make decisions about how the art at the gallery was hung. But these 'legal citizens' had barely any time to visit the place as they were working during the day. And thus it was middle-class women, who had no way to make their voices heard in arranging displays, who were overwhelmingly those effected by the changing climate in the museum.

Men's suffrage movements were rising up and down the country and whilst the government worried about its control over the nation, the Select Committee of the National Gallery worried about its control within the walls of the museum. Museum behaviour was clearly not going in the desired direction, as yet another invigilator noted:

'... when I suggested to them the impropriety of such proceeding in such a place, they were very good-humoured and a lady offered me a glass of gin, and wished me to partake of what they had provided; I represented to them that those things could not be tolerated.'

(cited in Klonk 2009: 44)

Discipline needed to be enforced, control needed to be gained, order needed to be made; restraining the display was believed to have an equivalently moderating effect on its viewers. For years Charles Eastlake, National Gallery's director, had advocated for a change in display and felt like now, his time had finally come.

Colour theories had started to circulate in the 1850s and were particularly influential on museum directors. Eastlake was no exception and took it into his own hands to translate Johan Wolfgang Goethe's studies on colour from German into English (Klonk, 2009: 29). Until the point of Eastlake's tenure, the walls of the museum had been painted a neutral shade of olive green. But Eastlake became increasingly convinced of a shade better suited to the task of displaying art. In a letter to the Select Committee he made his arguments with the following words:

'it may be observed that a picture will be seen to advantage on a ground brighter than its darks, and darker than its lights, and of so subdued a tint as may contrast well with its brighter colours. The choice of that tint should, I conceive, be regulated by the condition of its harmonising with the colour gold, with which it is more immediately in contact.'

(Eastlake as cited in Klonk, 2009: 31)

Situated optimally between light and darkness, Eastlake believed red to coexist not only in harmony with gold but all colours at either end of the spectrum. Harmony, for better word to neutrality, was the sought-after effect between paintings, their frame and the wall; an effect that was described by David Hay, a critic of the time, as allowing the individual to 'glide' from one art piece to the next (cited in Klonk, 2009: 32).

No matter the colour, not much gliding was going to take place, with the sheer number of paintings hung on the wall. It wasn't only the colour of the wall that needed to change, but the arrangement of its hangings, too. Since the National Gallery's opening, Eastlake had advocated for more empty space and a one-tiered display, one that would bring the work closer to the audience and 'emphasise the moral value of individuality' (Klonk, 2009: 36). Art's central function was understood as to promote, or providing a vehicle for, 'individual expression', one that was surely best harnessed in the form of solitary, individual contemplation (Klonk, 2009: 36). To such a position, it is clear that



picnicking, children’s laughter, toddlers’ attempts at taking their first steps and the like were only a hindrance to the individual’s betterment through the appreciation of art. Eastlake’s goal was to kill two birds with one stone: to get his redecorating plans approved while simultaneously creating a lay-out demanding greater decorum from visitors. He achieved mixed results: the walls were indeed eventually repainted in a dark crimson, but the lack of space ensured the multi-tiered hanging would prevail for some time (Klonk, 2009:34).

Eastlake’s position towards his audience remained confusing. He advocated in favour of entrance fees on certain weekdays, to give upper-class women the opportunity to look at art without the hazardous interaction of lower classes, whilst outspokenly upholding ‘a classless vision of society’ (Klonk, 2009: 47). In the 1870s he in fact made a statement, he could no longer distinguish different classes inside the National Gallery. Whether that was because societal classes were effectively harmonised, or because part of society was made efficiently uncomfortable in the space to stop frequenting it, remains unanswered. It seems however obvious, that something drastically changed in the museum space. Functioning actively as an extension of the public space in the mid-19th century, tales of joyful gatherings and children playing dwindle in numbers towards the end of the century. The National Gallery was once a place where people felt so at home that they drew chairs together to sit in small circles surrounded by potted plants, to chat and laugh, share food and drink, all in the company of art. By 1900, it no longer was.

Up to this point only a small fraction of the population had a voice in society: propertied men. Over the course of the 19th century the display of individuality had been made into a public spectacle. In its most generous form it became a remarkable display of uniqueness, at its worst it was a display of disturbing otherness. In both cases, however, the act of putting the individual on a pedestal resulted in them being further isolated; an act in which humans and plants alike were caught.

The *Mimosa Pudica* was the first plant seen to show a reaction to trembling. It is a peculiar little plant brought in from South America, which has the astonishing ability to move rapidly: it closes its leaves at the lightest of touches. In an experiment in the early 19th century, the scientist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck instructed



his pupil to push a cart full of *Mimosa Pudicas* around the bumpy, cobbled streets of Paris. After initially retracting their leaves, the plants soon habituated to their newly turbulent environment and remained unfazed to its continuous exposure (Man-cuso, 2018:111). Lamarque had become the first person in recorded history to demonstrate a plant’s capacity to learn and remember.

How much Josephine’s Great Palm remembered of the many journeys it had made across its lifetime, we can’t know. But by the time it was exposed to London’s streets it had grown three storeys high and needed no fewer than twenty horses to be set in motion. On a warm summer’s evening in July 1854 Londoners were pulled out into the streets by the sight of the Great Palm waving its branches into their homes. The event was remembered in *The Illustrated London News* the next day, its chronicler writing ‘the progress of this stupendous plant through the metropolis, and the effect of the broad foliage – sometimes sweeping the three-storey windows of the houses- will not be easily forgotten’ (Ellies-Rees, 2019: 11). The Great Palm from La Réunion found a new home between a coffee tree from Yemen and a fig tree from India. Three trees approximately equally far away from their respective homes, keeping each other company in their individual uprootedness.



Whilst *Mimosa Pudicas* were observed to adjust to external shudders, the internal trembling of patients suffering from traumatic experiences was put on public display at the Salpêtrier hospital in Paris. The place served as a shelter and treatment centre mostly for women who had survived sexual assaults and whose trauma was treated with talking therapies and hypnosis². In 1889 one of the practicing doctors at Salpêtrier, Pierre Janet, wrote the first-ever book on trauma and its effects on individuals³. Through close observation and hours spent in conversation with patients, he was the first to point out the ‘difference between ‘narrative memory’ – the story people tell about a traumatic experience – and traumatic memory itself’ (Kolk, 2014: 181). An ordinary, narrative memory is

2	3		
Hypnosis in particular	This book had only	environs. The psy-	almost 100 year old
lent itself well to public	a limited reach and its	chologist Bessel van	trauma description,
displays in front of	publication was by	der Kolk was aware	was present in the
large, live audiences	no means equivalent	of this book but at the	clinic’s library (Kolk,
(Brandell & Ringel,	to widespread ac-	time he started his	2014).
2019, p. 1). Importantly	knowledge of	position at the Boston	
however, it was the	trauma in common	Veteran Administra-	
treating psychologist	medical practice be-	tion Clinic in 1978, not	
that stood at the	yond the Salpêtrier	a single book on tra-	
centre, not the patient.	and its immediate	uma, not even Janet’s	

flexible, social and can adapt to new circumstances. Traumatic memory on the other hand is anything but social; it is a ‘split-off element’, which is impossible to integrate into the past as an event that has happened but crucially is over (Kolk, 2014: 182). Because traumatic events are experienced as frozen in time, they have repercussions in the present and hinder a person in making new experiences.

The relationship of trauma and mental illnesses was investigated early on, but described mostly in gendered terms of hysteria or neurosis with many of the symptoms believed to stem from the uterus. Trauma was conceptualised by Jean Martin Charcot, Pierre Janet and Sigmund Freud and his cohort towards the end of the 19th century, but their practices were available only to a fraction of the population (Brandell & Ringel, 2019: 1–2) in elite circles of major northern European metropolises. The adoption of diagnoses of traumatic disorders would enter mainstream medical practices only a hundred years later.

In sum: over the course of the 19th century, individuality recurs as a central theme in the contexts of botany, trauma and art display. Outstanding plant individuals, such as the Great Palm, captured the imagination of the public, but that a simple houseplant could be seen as an individual with an experience of the world was a wholly new concept, one that led Francis Darwin to announce plants as intelligent beings at the British Association for the Advancement of Science a few years later in 1908 (Mancus, 2018: 43). Case studies of patients, often women, highlighted the difference between traumatic memories and regular, narrative ones. And the exhibition mode gradually changed from a quantitative to a linear approach (by the 1910s Eastlake’s preferred lines of paintings were finally hanging, though he was long gone as the Gallery’s director).

Another tangle of perplexing coincidences: plants turn out to be sensitive, patients appear to have trauma, and overwhelming quantity is reduced to a linear hanging system in the museum. Rather than connecting individuals, recognising them as sentient and as essentially part of a larger whole, the assignation of uniqueness seems to have had the opposite effect; to have separated and isolated individuals from the group. In the name of harmony, separation had become a political tool to control the behaviour of people in the museum space.

CHAPTER II

Making a Home or Im- posing Intimacy

1890 Wilhelm von Bode initiates home inspired museum display at Nationagalerie	1905 Gottlieb Haberlandt: Light-Sensing-Organ of Green Leaves	1917 Reports on shell shock denied publication	1933 Nazis rose to power in
1893 Wilhelm Wundt: Principles of Physiological Psychology	1911 German Expressionist exhibition on dark blue walls, Munich	1918 abdication last German Kaiser	1937 Haus der Deutschen Kunst, Munich
1900 Introduction of artificial light in museum	1914–1918 First World War	1918 Howard Kemp Prossor colour rooms as treatments for nervous disease	1937 Entarte Kunst Exhibition, Munich

*My skin is coated in millions
of eyes • I blink at the
world in the hope to be seen •
But only one man sees
the world reflected in me
• Colours do come and
eventually go, • Burst from red
into many a hue • Start
to feel blue until it fades
through • A blanket of snow •
halts the world in its
tracks • If only I knew that
winter fades too*



QUEEN ANTHURIUM

While red dominated the gallery on the British Isles, the Germans unleashed numerous, contrasting shades towards the end of the 19th century. Like their British counterparts, those in present-day Germany were concerned with the individual's viewing experience albeit with a more psychological effect in mind. At the forefront was interiority and personal expression and, as a result, museums of the late German Empire sought to create a more intimate and private exhibition experience (Klonk, 2009: 55). Colour theories and their effects on the human condition circulated in society, and were particularly influential on museum directors. Especially the work of the German Wilhelm Wundt, whose work focused on emotional sensations produced by colours, had an impact on decisions made inside the museum.

Wundt put forward the idea of fatigue as a better word for emotional saturation or indifference, caused by an over-exposure to the same stimulus. In his opinion, contrasting sensations would have a positive effect of heightening the experience and described them in terms of someone recovering from an illness:

'...hence the so much fresher feeling of pleasure which the convalescent receives in his normal everyday sensations, in comparison to the continuously healthy person who only becomes aware of the pleasure of life through a series of small events of pain'.

(Wundt cited in Klonk, 2009: 75)

In this regard museum directors had two options: either to inflict 'small events of pain' or, maybe much easier, to recreate the rejuvenated experience of someone on the mend. The second option was the one opted for with a visually diverse display. To prevent the state of sleepiness described by Wundt, Wilhelm von Bode, the director of the *Nationalgalerie* in Berlin, turned for inspiration towards a place in which stimulation took on an intimate feel – the home.

Influenced by the domestic, he initiated a new kind of stimulating, sumptuous museum display celebrating home atmosphere: rooms in different shapes and sizes created various vistas and openings inside the space, patterned wallpapers in yellow, pink and green gave the space a vibrant feeling, while lavishly decorated furniture and the occasional potted plant brought the domestic atmosphere in the museum home. But the chosen benches, chairs

and tables were crucially different to those found in the home: they were markedly heavier and often bolted to the ground, making it impossible to re-arrange them. The audience was to feel as if they were looking at art in a homely environment, without eliciting the behaviour commonly associated with the space. Arguably the most genuinely homely item—the one appearing in the museum just as it did in the home—was the potted plant.

Gottlieb Haberlandt, working within walking distance from the *Nationalgalerie*, dedicated his life's work to plants' ability to see. Plants were well known to 'see', or rather perceive, sunlight. After all, they not only grew in the direction of the sun, but also were known to be capable of tilting individual leaves towards it. Haberlandt's ambition went far beyond plants' mere perception of light, though, and focused on their ability to recognise shapes and forms. He spent years studying the epidermis cells (which make up the outer layer of a leaf), where he claimed to have found the necessary preconditions for visual perception.



Despite the years spent on the subject, Haberlandt never found any conclusive evidence as to what advantage the ability to sense visually would confer on a plant. His theory, so beautifully titled *Light-Sensing-Organs of Green Leaves* (1905), was never proven nor fully refuted but captured the imagination of a number of botanists in the years to come⁴. Francis Darwin endorsed his ideas and Harold Wager in fact used the epidermal cells of several plants as lenses. Further, the contemporary Italian botanist Stefano Mancuso writes that his theory might explain plants' 'mimetic behaviour' (Leermejer, n.d.). Haberlandt's research reflects in botanical terms concerns that were circulating also in museological settings: the question of interiority and exteriority. Experience is the story the body tells of the exchange between inside and outside. A body in any set of circumstances is exposed to external stimuli, which are digested on the inside to then be made manifest as reactions on the outside. The museum display used intimacy as a way of imposing a certain kind

of behaviour—of disciplining its audience—thereby reducing visitors' experience to that of awe and restraint. In this way, viewings became increasingly solitary. The world was allowed to leave its mark on the inside, but the inside was permitted only in controlled, measured ways. Intimacy ensured experience would become more and more private.

With the shift towards the outside world full of newly affordable, enticing commodities, the search for ever- more stylised exhibition interiors continued as one of the guiding principles for museum installations. At the turn of the century, conflicting views about the availability and role of art split opinion on the matter of its display. Some argued art should be accessible to everybody and advocated for art education for children, favouring also the voluptuous, festive display of the kind developed by Bode.

Contrastingly, there were those who shunned sumptuous decoration, advocating instead for de-cluttering the museum and paring back the exhibition display (Klonk, 2009:78). Abundance and opulence is easily liked and enjoyed.

Some museum directors feared the mass appeal of opulent decor precisely because of its potential to create a collective experience, a unity evoking an unwanted democracy. The German Empire under the rule of Kaiser Wilhelm II was already crumbling at its edges and the museum space needed to work as a stabilizing force for society at large. To avoid such mass appeal and instead champion the rich few (who, it should be noted, were as this time in the process of personally buying up the museum's treasures) the voluptuous interiors reminiscent of the home were made less homely.

As the absence of the home as a tangible tool by which to make sense of an arrangement became more common, a void opened up in ways of seeing and arranging art displays. This void was filled with more abstract ideas for colours themselves. The use of coloured walls initially surged in popularity under German Expressionism, even though they didn't choose the lavishly patterned wallpaper of the previous museum generation (Klonk, 2009: 91). Many of the Expressionists' exhibitions were held against a dark blue backdrop; a colour choice that not only provided the optimal contrast for their brightly coloured paintings but restored a sense of depth and tranquillity to the exhibition space; a sense of calmness which many painters felt had been missing in a world increasingly driven by a capitalist market.

4 Haberlandt spent years studying the epidermis cells; the cells constituting the very outer layer of a leaf. It is in those, he believed, to find the necessary preconditions for visual recognition. The epidermis cells hold large amounts of plasma, which could serve the same function as a converging lens for a human eye. He has gone so far, as to be able to capture the reflection of a microscope on the inner cell membrane of a Queen Anthurium and calculated the plant's range of vision at 44–66 degrees (in comparison, the human range of vision encompasses 160 degrees). The distance of an object to the plant has to range between 80–100 cm in order for the image to be in focus. (Haberlandt, 1905: 84).

The ability of the colour blue to provide refuge for the restless took on a whole new urgency in the context of the emerging First World War. Museums closed, exhibitions were brought to a temporary halt and many of the German Expressionist painters were recruited to fight at the front. The devastating war had yet unseen effects on the men caught in active combat, effects that were carefully documented by the doctors providing them with first aid in field hospitals. But against all common sense these documents were denied publication in 1917⁵. In this environment veterans returned to a society that had almost no effective support for their grievances. The only shelter they were offered was the calmness provided by one colour.

Whereas the Expressionist painters chose a deep shade of dark blue reminiscent of the night, the blue that would alleviate pressure for war veterans recovering in hospital had a brighter, fresh-morning-like quality. Both shades were reminiscent of the sky but at different times of day. One recreated the sensual depth of a starry night, the other the possibilities of new life growing, rooting the veterans in the immediacy of the moment and promise of the future.

This morning blue was chosen by colour theorist Howard Kemp Prossor, a specialist in the therapeutic value of colours on patients suffering from nervous diseases who developed, in fact, a whole colour scheme for hospitals. The colours' job was to renew the patients' hope in the continuity of life and suggest springtime. Yellow to suggest light and the sun, blue for the sky and their implied combination, green, suggesting plants (Cesaro, 2008:2). It was this metaphorical plant, represented by the implied combination of blue and yellow (the green was never actually painted) that would provide the only trauma treatment at the time.



The potted plant had become rather metaphorical in the home too. The formerly voluptuous home interiors of the 19th century with their rugs, mouldings, fabric ruffles, lavishly decorated furniture and fondness for potted plants, appeared increasingly

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In fact, to prevent any claims for monetary compensation and threats to future war efforts, the British Government went as far as to file a report forbidding the diag-

nosis of what was then termed 'shell shock' (Kolk, 2014: 187).

out-dated and fussy in the aftermath of the First World War. An era had ended. The German Kaiser, whose reckless foreign policies had pushed the nation and the world into war, had to abdicate and the pared-backness of the museum display that had announced itself before the war as a form of elitism returned now in the new dress of the coming modernism.

The home had a renewed importance in post-war museum displays, less so as a specific source of inspiration and more because functional design had become the main concern of the influential Bauhaus school. The school's approach to craftsmanship with all its attention for materials, textures and forms spoke a language of simplicity and practicality that jarred with the consumerism of the time. Objects were well-designed and well-made. Each form had purpose and function, and was beautiful in its integrity and timelessness. The home interiors created as a result of the Bauhaus were freed of clutter; even potted plants were less present and,

if they did happen to feature, their appearances were mostly in the shape of prickly cacti. The Bauhaus had a utopian approach to egalitarian openness, towards learning and learning from each other, teachers from students alike, made for exhibition displays that reflected those ideals.



These Bauhaus exhibitions worked like thinking machines, taking the visitor on a journey through asymmetrical wall hangings that had the feeling of 'the logical twist of the course of thought' (Klonk, 2009: 108). With its large, windowed gallery fronts, these exhibitions actively invited the outside world into the space, whose open plan layout and temporary room dividers allowed for welcoming views through the gallery. For the first time in history, these exhibitions took place in white.

By 1930, about a decade after the Bauhaus School began, most German galleries had adopted a white interior. But under the pressure of the growing support for right wing political forces, the Bauhaus had to close and the exhibition white lost its open and discursive nature.

By 1930, about a decade after the Bauhaus School began, most German galleries had adopted a white interior. But under the pressure of the growing support for right wing political forces, the Bauhaus had to close and the exhibition white lost its open and discursive nature.

When the Nazis rose to power in 1933, Hitler saw little necessity to change the prevalent whiteness; to the contrary, the white functionality rather suited the technocratic mentality of the regime (Klonk, 2009:125). The newly built *Haus der Deutschen Kunst*, Hitler's propaganda museum that celebrated all aspects of German superiority, opened its doors



Fig. 13
1937 Haus der
Deutschen Kunst,
München

in 1937 and was held in clean, stark, unblemished white. Everything about the museum was made to propagate deference and subordination. There were few seating options, all of which were hard and uncomfortable, a couple of plants only in the entrance hall (Fig.13). While vast sculptures towered over the visitors, enormous paintings were hung above eye-level forcing visitors to look up, and the layout of the space channelled the audience efficiently from exhibition entrance to exit.

The skilful manipulation of art exhibitions is a speciality of totalitarian systems. Exhibitions are tools that can be used to promote certain political visions over others. For example, the day after the *Haus der Deutschen Kunst* opened its doors to the public a very different, but just as politically potent exhibition was inaugurated: the *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art) exhibition. The exhibition was created to ridicule anything not Nazi-approved and to state unequivocally what was acceptable and what was not in the new climate. The German Expressionist art, now classified degenerate, once presented on a dark-blue ground, was now exhibited on white walls. But instead of demonstrating properness as it did in the *Haus der Deutschen Kunst*, the white was used to the opposite effect. Smear marks, writing and stains on the white walls from which the works were hung sought to viscerally illustrate the kind of foul minds came to make this kind of art. The pieces themselves were hung in a crowded manner and low to the ground, making the audience literally look down on the work and the humans who had made them. Since nobody wanted to be seen spending too much time with such disgusting art, conveniently no exhibition furniture let alone potted plants were needed in the space.

The Degenerate Art show was a spectacle of the most horrific kind. Almost two million Germans came to see it, more than three times the numbers that came to the *Haus der Deutschen Kunst* (Klonk, 2009: 130). Some arguments for the high turnout speak of an underlying, covert appreciation for Expressionist art, but perhaps there is something to be said also about it being simply a lot more enjoyable to look down at something or someone than it is to be made to feel small yourself.

The Nazi regime fell, and with it the white of the exhibition space was increasingly freed of its oppressive associations. Furniture and plants found their way slowly back into the exhibition space, but

the abundance with which they had existed in the home and museum before was now firmly a thing of the past. The popularity of the white exhibition space continuously increased, providing the ground-work for what was to become the white cube. But the history of the white cube is one of many colours and many shades of what is right or wrong, accepted or not, to be looked at in awe or fiercely rejected. It is a history tainted by what art should do, what its function should be and its purpose as a vehicle for political ideals.

CHAPTER III

Cool Style and Luxury Plants to Hold the World at Bay

1913 Edward Steichen wins gold medal of the French Horticultural Society	1928 Edward Steichen buys farm in Connecticut	1932 MoMA moves to 53 rd Street building	1940 first photography exhibition at the MoMA
1914 – 1918 First World War	1929 – 1939 Great Depression	1936 'Steichen's Blue Delphiniums' at the MoMA	1942 <i>Road to Victory</i> at MoMA, curated by Edward Steichen
1915 Edward Steichen returns to France as part of the American Army	1929 MoMA opens in Heckscher Building	1939 Roosevelt calls the museum 'the citadel of civilisation'	1945 Edward Steichen wins Best Academy Award for Best Documentary with <i>The Fighting Lady</i>
		1939-1945 Second World War	

*I swam through the oceans •
And crossed the seas • I
hold my head high • Resting
assured • Even gods
approve of me • I step into the
white • Demanding to be
seen • But like any a creature
• Time withers me •
Narrowing the window •
I wish to be seen*



BLUE DELPHINIUM

A curious press release made the rounds in the New York newspapers on Monday June 22 1936: 'WEATHER PERMITTED: Because of the recent cold, rainy weather the dates given below might have to be postponed a day or two...' (MoMA, 1936: 1). However, the weather permitted the exhibition to open in time and the following Wednesday at 10am, the first and only ever flower show opened at the Museum of Modern Art. The exhibition was so spectacularly unusual that the press release had to make doubly sure the audience understood what was awaiting them.

'To avoid confusion, it should be noted that the actual delphiniums will be shown in the Museum — not paintings or photographs of them. It will be a ,personal appearance' of the flowers themselves.'

(MoMA, 1936: 1)

'Edward Steichen's Delphiniums' was a one-off, one-man, one-week show of deep blue delphinium flowers bred and cultivated by Steichen. Few knew the famous photographer was also an ambitious horticulturalist. In the 1930s, photography was as unusual an art medium as flowers and the delphiniums in fact predated the inaugural photography exhibition at the MoMA by four years (MoMA, 1940). Steichen, who later curated a number of photography shows at the MoMA, made his entrance into the museum on a floral note.

His love for the blue flower sprouted early on and stayed with him throughout his life. Born in France, Steichen spent his early childhood in America, married in the US before moving with his wife and two daughters back to France. Seeking the perfect deep blue colour, Steichen soon began to cross French and English delphinium varieties. As his efforts progressed, his ambition and knowledge grew steadily and gradually transformed a plot of land rented by the family in the countryside just outside Paris

into an ocean of blue. His delphiniums didn't go unnoticed and in 1913 they won him the gold medal of the French Horticultural Society.



A year later however, the climate for growing flowers changed abruptly and the family narrowly escaped World War I by jumping on the last cattle transport leaving to Marseille and boarding a ship to New York (Stippl, 2014: 5). The seven acres of carefully cultivated delphiniums were less lucky, and when Steichen returned to France as an American soldier during World War

I, he could only rescue a couple of seeds from his neighbours' gardens.

The Museum of Modern Art was founded in 1929, at the very beginning of the Great Depression, at a time when more than a third of all manufacturing firms in New York City had gone out of business and an estimated three-quarters of a million of the city's inhabitants were unemployed (Klonk, 2009: 136). At the youthful age of twenty-seven Alfred Barr was one of the lucky few with a job as MoMA's first director. Having spent formative years at the Bauhaus and in Berlin's *Nationalgalerie* in Germany he returned to the US at the same time that Steichen was first propagating his rescued seeds on American soil.

Nationalgalerie's influence was clearly reflected in MoMA's inaugural exhibition. Barr too was of the conviction that art only made sense embedded in the fashion of the day and given the increasingly temporary nature of contemporary art exhibitions, a functional, practical display was key. The MoMA set in stone what was to become the most prominent mode of exhibiting work for the rest of the century: the white cube.

At this moment in time, the MoMA was not yet located at its 53rd Street building in midtown New York, but a couple of blocks south on the 12th floor of a much less flashy office building. Barr did all he could to disguise the previous function of the space. He boarded up windows and doorways but the entrance into the museum through an old elevator reminded the visitors unequivocally of where they were: in an office. His wife described his choice of a single-row hanging against walls clad in off-white painted hessian as novel for the time (Klonk, 2009: 138). Given, however, how few remarks the press made of this particular display setting, suggests the trend had already sufficiently made its way over the ocean and was firmly docked on American shores.

The move in 1932 to the new building gave Barr the unique chance to fit the rooms of the yet-to-be museum to its content, the art. Inspired by Bode's attempts in the *Nationalgalerie* in Berlin, Barr too valued an intimate viewing experience for art. The museum was set up in a series of alcoves and small rooms with low ceilings, interspersed with a couple of sitting opportunities and what appears to be Barr's potted plant of choice, the palm (Fig. 17). The palm trees brought an exotic feeling of luxury to the oth-



Fig. 17
1942 New Acquisitions
and Extended Loans,
Cubist and Abstract
Art, MoMA, New York



erwise cool material choices including marble, terrazzo stone and extensive amounts of glass. Added to the temporary exhibition displays as flexible placeholders, they permanently decorated the entrance, the lobby, staircases and the exclusive member's room on the top floor of the museum (Klonk, 2009: 149). The palm tree is to this day a popular house-, and for that matter, museum-plant. Undemanding and easy to care for, the palm adapts easily to poor light conditions and even prefers indirect sunlight over full exposure – almost a given in any art museum.

However, despite all the plants' efforts and clear aspirations to domesticity, a homely feeling wouldn't quite set in. Henry McBride, a prominent New York art critic of the time, described his experience of the museum as follows:

'Apparently, in the new museum, we shall be expected to stand up, look quickly and pass on. There are some chairs and settees, but the machine-like neatness of the rooms does not invite repose.'

(McBride as cited in Klonk, 2009: 147).

The image painted of this new museum is markedly different to the one described 80 years prior at the National Gallery in London. The leisurely ease with which Londoners in Victorian England whiled away their time surrounded by the nation's treasures and potted plants is virtually unimaginable in Barr's MoMA. Long gone are the luncheons and children playing, and with them the idea of the museum as an extension of public space. The new public was a wholly different kind. The 'machine-like neatness' of the museum interior expected a machine-like neatness from its audience too. Rather than rearranging furniture to fit the audience's needs, visitors arranged themselves decoratively onto the fashionable museum furniture. Barr's entire display setting had an underlying didactical purpose, set up to cultivate the museumgoers' aesthetic sensibilities and encourage them to recognize themselves as 'informed members of the consumer society' (Klonk, 2009: 149). The display still set out to improve the visitor's character as it did in the 1850s in London. But whereas the improvement in previous times had had an internal, long-lasting effect in mind, the one prevalent in New York upended individuality as coats people dressed themselves with: coats that needed to be continuously updated. Fashion magazines like *Harper's Bazaar* or *Vogue*



dedicated entire spreads to fashion shoots conducted inside the museum. Under headlines such as 'in harmony with the Art in Our Time', models posed in evening gowns with exhibition catalogues in front of paintings and surrounded by neatly arranged sculptures (Klonk, 2009: 171).

Some of the earliest fashion photography originated in front of Edward Steichen's lens, the same man whose love for delphiniums enabled the first and only ever flower show at the MoMA. The only photographic evidence of the exhibition shows a woman in a long, buttoned-up dress and small matching hat, sitting in and amongst a sea of blue delphiniums (Fig. 12). The vast bouquets are placed in differently shaped vases, some reminiscent of Greek urns, others in more cylindrical, modernist glass vessels, placed on top of a white display staircase. The woman, delicately perched on the same step as the flowers, is clearly a model and not a regular member of the public; surely such intimate proximity to the flowers wasn't a privilege granted to the broad masses.

Abundance had gone painfully missing in the museum display over the last decade and the delphiniums' opulence stood in stark contrast to the otherwise austere space. The deep blue flowers clearly left their impression on New York's public and the flower exhibition was described in the *New York Herald Tribune* with markedly more enthusiasm than the space had been reviewed earlier:

'In our short lives, we have already seen delphiniums that one can describe as very good-looking, and there has to be a reasonable boundary for what one may expect from a plant. This exhibition raised the level of our knowledge by at least 50 percent, to be conservative. It is the most striking exhibition of delphiniums by a single breeder and all breeders together that we have ever seen in our country. With it, one man has proven once more that with nature, virtually anything is possible.'

(as cited in Stippl, 2014: 8)



Flowers and blue delphiniums in particular were important as part of cultural activities dating as far back as Ancient Greece. They received their name due to their flower buds' resemblance to dolphins, the animal into which the god Apollo himself transformed on occasion. The Delphinia, one of the earliest recorded ancient Greek festivals, involved a procession of girls delivering branches of



Fig. 12
1936 Edward
Steichen's Delphin-
iums, MoMA, New
York

the delphiniums to a temple in Delphi dedicated to Apollo, the god of music and art (MoMA, 1936: 2). The delphiniums Steichen bred were clearly of an exceptional kind, but despite all the praise he got in the press and the godly approval for the flower, flower breeding was not to be recognised as a new art form. Steichen's delphiniums entered the market only in the form of a little seed package, titled 'Connecticut Yankee', that can be purchased to this day at any regular garden centre for two dollars. Conspicuously absent from their packaging is any mention of the artist, curator, and breeder.

Two years after the one-week, one-man flower show, Steichen retired as a professional photographer and dedicated his time solely to the breeding of his blue flowers. Just as World War I interrupted his horticultural activities, so too did World War II. After the bombing at Pearl Harbor, Steichen made his choice to enlist in the army. He could only preserve his most important breeds and upon his return from the war, the vast majority of his flowers were once again ploughed down, marking the end of his large-scale plant-breeding project (Stippl, 2014: 9).

With the publication of shell shock diagnoses being denied in the aftermath of World War I, governments and medicine effectively turned their backs on returning soldiers, but their experiences were commemorated in art and literature (Kolk, 214: 187). At the age of sixty, Steichen was too old for active combat, but his extensive photography experience put him in a prime position to direct the Naval Aviation Photography Unit. The war was still in full swing, but morale needed a boost at home. The historical moments Steichen and his team captured over the war years were compiled into a photography show at the MoMA, titled *Road to Victory* (MoMA, 1942). After the war, Steichen commemorated the efforts of the Navy's photography unit in the film *The Fighting Lady* for which he was honoured with the Academy Award for Best Documentary.

As much as the public enjoyed Steichen's delphinium display, it is his photographic legacy that brought fame to his name. The exhibition *Road to Victory* toured the world in the following years as fine art, but the flowers never ceased to be ornaments and decoration.

The MoMA created an increasingly self-contained museum space. It shut the doors to the world and

allowed life on the inside only in very measured ways: as cut flowers, as potted plants or then as neatly dressed visitors. Roosevelt proclaimed the importance of free-spirited art as a pillar of democracy, calling the museum ‘the citadel of civilisation’ in his radio speech in 1939 (as cited in Klonk, 2009: 155). But the free spirit of art appears reigned in and constrained by the display setting Barr initiated more prominently than any museum director before him: the white cube. As a result, potted plants became sidekicks to the art; luxury companions in the increasingly deserted, un-homely museum ruled, above all, by style.

CHAPTER IV

Potted Plants as Catalysts for Experience in a White Home

1937 refurbishment of Stedelijk Museum	1943 Bombing of Public Record Office in Amsterdam, Sand- berg into hiding	1946 Mondrian's retro- spective at Stedelijk with Monstera, first plant back in the museum	1962 over a hundred potted plants at the Stedelijk
1939 – 1945 Second World War	1945 Sandberg family reunited	1961 Mark Rothko's retrospective at the Stedelijk Museum	1962 retirement Sandberg, fivefold increase of visitor numbers
1940 – 1945 Stedelijk under Ger- man occupation	1945 Sandberg appointed as director of Stedelijk Museum		

*A hole or two doesn't bother
me • Like everybody
else • I learnt to accompany •
The emptiness inside of
me • It is the bustling of life
• That makes me feel
awkward • But I awaited this
moment • To stand here
and stand by • To accompany
• Not only vacancy •
But victory*



MONSTERA DELICIOSA

The whiteness that now occupied the MoMA increasingly took hold of European museums. It was in 1937, a year after Steichen's flower show at the MoMA and the same year Hitler opened the *Haus der Deutschen Kunst*, that the former yellow, red and green Renaissance rooms at the Stedelijk were covered in a blanket of white. The transformation took place under the watchful eye of the museum's newly appointed curator Willem Sandberg.

He had no interest in making the museum into an 'elite temple for art' instead it was his ambition to build art a 'home' (Meijer, 2019:2), 'a place where people dare to talk, laugh and be themselves' (Sandberg, 1997: 21). Hence he was shocked when it transpired his own barber, despite living for thirty years in close vicinity to the museum, had never been inside it. 'The windows are too high to see what is going on in there and I don't know how to behave in a museum' the barber responded in his defence (cited in Sandberg, 1997: 33). Swiftly, Sandberg arranged a large scaffolding to be placed around one museum wing. When it was ready, early one morning, he saw his barber climb up to have a look through the newly accessible windows. What had started as a conversation soon became the inspiration for a very physical extension: a two storey-high glass front facing the street, so that everybody from the outside saw what was happening on the inside (Sandberg, 1997: 33).

The museum formerly dedicated to displaying Dutch art of the past took on a more contemporary, international position in these years. Despite the growing pressure from The Netherlands' eastern neighbour, Sandberg proceeded to show artists and artworks deemed 'degenerate' by the Nazis (Stedelijk, 2015: 3). He wasn't naïve to the threat that was looming across the border and while he celebrated the avant-garde in the museum, he went about building an art bunker, just in case the museum walls ceased to be sufficient protection for the work. The bunker proved to be very needed soon thereafter and became a shelter not only for pieces from the Stedelijk but a number of the Rijksmuseum's Rembrandts, a series of Van Goghs and art collections belonging to Jewish families (Stedelijk, 2015: 4). The Stedelijk itself remained open during World War II but fell under German occupation and became the venue for a series of fascist propaganda exhibitions.

Willem Sandberg had long since left the Stedelijk and continued his defiance of the occupation as an

active member of the Dutch Resistance Movement. Part of the group's prerogative was to forge identity documents to prevent the deportation of Dutch Jews. Sandberg, who had had a sheltered upbringing as the son of aristocratic landowners, was a typographer by trade – a skill with a particular importance to the Resistance. To pre-empt any attempts to expose the forged documents the movement bombed the Amsterdam Public Record's Office in 1943. The operation was partly successful, but the group was betrayed, and all its members but one captured and executed. It was by mere chance that Sandberg happened to be out of the house when the Gestapo turned up on his doorstep. But his wife and son ended up in incarceration. With a bounty on his head, Sandberg was forced into hiding in a small town near the German border. For almost two years he lived alone under the pseudonym Henri Willem van der Bosch.

wife in german prison

son in concentration camp

myself with a death sentence in my pocket

it taught me that every minute of life is a gift

(Sandberg, 1997: 30)

In the aftermath of the Second World War the American military tribunal opened in Nuremberg trialing German physicians for medical experiments on concentration camp prisoners. The tribunal resulted in the Nuremberg Code, the first document in history stating the voluntary consent of patients is absolutely necessary to any medical procedure. It became a landmark document in medical ethics.

With the end of the Second World War the Sandberg family was reunited and finally returned home in April 1945. Only a single potted plant had survived their absence: a particularly hardy *Monstera Deliciosa* that had lost all but one leaf (Sandberg cited in Meijer, 2019: 103). Friends and family donated cuttings of their own plants to the freshly reunited family and soon not only the *Monstera* grew a number of new leaves, but their whole home was bursting at the seams with plant life.

Once again Sandberg was offered a position at the Stedelijk Museum, this time not as a curator but as its director. With the guiding principle 'propaganda begins at home' Sandberg reawakened and extended his pre-war museum policies (Sandberg, 1997:32). He initiated a restaurant and

a library on the museum grounds, set up film events and a programme for local school classes. The museum staff he organised into an inclusive club, from the invigilators and curators to the cleaners alike, taking them on trips, exhibition tours and evenings out. To celebrate the new era at the museum he started his tenure as director with an exhibition

of Piet Mondrian's Victory Boogie-Woogie.

At this point Sandberg's own home was starting to overflow with newly grown plants. In need of more space, the newly appointed Stedelijk director relocated some of the plants from his own home to his work place, the museum. The first plant to make the move was a *Monstera Deliciosa* (Meijer, 2019:103). Out of all the locations Sandberg could have chosen he placed his delicious monster in the midst of Mondrian's posthumous retrospective, right underneath the Boogie-Woogies (Fig. 23). In retrospect, this choice seems somewhat peculiar, given that Mondrian famously avoided not only all plant life, but also the colour green altogether. His dislike for green was so well known that Dan Flavin later dedicated one of his light pieces to him, calling it *green crossing green* (to Mondrian who lacked green).

Sandberg grew up in the same provincial town as Mondrian, Amersfoort, and was a lifelong admirer of Mondrian's work. Sandberg new well that Mondrian had grown to dislike flowers and plants:

Till '21 – lived on painting flowers

then he stopped and

could not stant flowers

(Sandberg, 1997: 58)

Nonetheless, there it was, the *Monstera Deliciosa* in the midst of all the Mondrians. While we can't know exactly the role of the potted plant in the success of the show, it remains that Mondrian, who had not enjoyed commercial success during his lifetime, became internationally recognised through this retrospective at the Stedelijk. Looking at the Victory Boogie-Woogie and the *Monstera Deliciosa* Sandberg wrote:

I look at them

as his apotheosis

an outcry of joy

the world opens wide

the bars start to flourish

to blossom

now he could die.

(Sandberg, 1997: 59)

The *Monstera Deliciosa* was soon followed by numerous other plants in subsequent exhibitions. Their entrance into museum life came about quietly and went almost unnoticed; contemporary media recording their increasing prevalence are practically impossible to find, as Inge Meijer has reported (2019: 4). But despite this archival quiet, we know that plant life at the Stedelijk flourished. The silence might be partially explained by the potted plants' surge in popularity after the Second World War and their sight was an ever more common one; in this sense, their presence may simply not have been as noticeable as in other places at other times.

In the pursuit of work, an increasing number of people moved from the rural to urban environments. Apartment blocks and high-rise buildings sprouted out of the ground and suburbs sprawled out further and further. This relocation brought not only smaller living quarters but, more often than not, an absence of gardens. Since the countryside had to make way for the concrete jungle, gardens had to be brought inside the home (Barber, 2020: 20)



What was suitable for the home certainly was appropriate in the museum too and a surging number of plants re-greened the newly whitened museum. But curatorial statements about the presence of plant life in museum settings are elusive. Inge Meijer's *The Plant Collection* (2019) shows potted plants standing in an empty corner or against an empty stretch of wall.

In most cases, they seem to be placed more as an afterthought rather than a considered choice. They were simply there, as were the chairs, benches, tables and other exhibition furniture. There are, however, a number of cases that evince the more deliberate placement of plants within the museum. One such case is an exhibition of Mark Rothko paintings from 1961 (Fig. 36).

The photograph shows a room hung on all sides with the large-scale colour field paintings and right in front of them some ferns (Meijer, 2019: 31). The ferns are planted in what appears to be a custom-made, rectangular planter mirroring the rectangular shapes in the paintings. It seems implausible to brush off this visual correlation as a mere coincidence; the planter matches the paintings it accompanied too neatly for that to be the case. In the light of this example it is even more striking to find no written account as to how, why and by what criteria flora was settled amongst the changing art displays. Given the otherwise pared-back interior of the



Fig. 23
1946 Piet Mondrian, *Retrospective*,
Stedelijk Museum,
Amsterdam

Fig. 36
1961 Marc Rothko,
Stedelijk Museum,
Amsterdam



Fig. 45
1965 Mr. van der Ham,
Stedelijk Museum,
Amsterdam

museum, with only a couple of seating opportunities for tired legs, the plants' presence is even more prominent. Why were they there?

Inviting the world into the museum went to the heart of Sandberg's principles and potted plants build a bridge between inside and outside. Further Sandberg saw an 'intrinsic similarity between nature and art' (Sandberg cited in Meijer, 2019:2). Other than these statements relating to plants there are only a few snippets found in museum internal letters, that give a notion of what may have occurred behind closed doors. The number of plants at the Stedelijk Museum grew steadily between 1946 and 1962, reaching, at their peak, over a hundred specimens (Meijer, 2019: 103). So many plants require a significant amount of time to maintain. The plants' first guardian during this time was a certain Mona Winter, who was charged initially with watering and trimming the plants. But soon the number of plants outgrew the window of time she had available for the task; looking after the plants had evidently become a full-time job. Sandberg describes his solution to the apparent problem in a farewell letter upon his retirement:

'The man for the job was there without our having to look for him, a small man with white hair and a pink face but a green thumb. He took care of the nature indoors for 16 years, and all of us at the museum, but especially the plants themselves, say to him: 'Thank you kindly, Father Van der Ham.'

(Sandberg as cited in Meijer, 2019: 103).

On Sandberg's recommendation Van der Ham followed a two-year course at the Royal Botanical and Horticultural Society, which he completed with excellence. More than just looking after the numerous potted plants, Van der Ham was in charge of independently hiring plants for 'special' exhibitions (Meijer, 2019, p.110) (Fig.45). Certain plants pop up regularly in several exhibitions, the Monstera and the Ficus Tree among them. Others, like the Strelitzia or the previously mentioned fern planter, seem to belong to the second group of plants, those hired for special occasions. The mere act of hiring in plants, in addition to displaying those owned by the gallery highlights the considerable care that went into choosing the appropriate plant for particular exhibitions. While a fern may have been fitting for Rothko, it simply wouldn't do for Chagall.

While we do not have access to a specific statement outlining Sandberg’s curatorial choices to include plants as part of exhibition displays, it is clear at this point that their inclusion was at the heart of his museum policy. It was Sandberg’s goal to create a space in which art and audience could meet with ease and pleasure, to make a home for the art and people, not just an elite group consisting of members of the educated middle class (Sandberg, 1997: 20). Numerous examples demonstrate how seriously he acted on his conviction: He built an extension to the museum inspired by his barber, he brought potted plants back into the museum as a way of making it more homely, set up a restaurant, a library, numerous events and children’s educational programmes. His efforts clearly yielded positive results reflected in the fivefold increase of visitor numbers by the time he retired (Rawsthorn, 2016).

Sandberg did not create a temple for art; he built art a home. But more poignant than his actions were the ways he talked of the people he surrounded himself with. The gardener he hired, the barber he frequented, the artists whose work he showed. In the nearly twenty years he served the Stedelijk as its director, Sandberg set an example for an inclusive museum, a museum where life can happen; where life in fact blossoms.

CHAPTER V

Necessary Roman-ticism and Masters of Alien-ation


1947 – 1991 Cold War	1969 Hélio Oiticia's <i>Tropicália</i> at Whitechapel Gallery in London	1973 start of pharmaceutical revolution	1982 Third edition of <i>Awakenings</i> by Oliver Sacks published, now acceptable
1955 – 1975 Vietnam War	1973 Cliffort Geertz: <i>Thick Description</i>	1976 Brian O'Doherty: <i>Inside the White Cube</i> , coining of the term 'White Cube'	1985 no more plants as part of the exhibition display
1966 Cleve Backster's research into the emotional capability of plants	1973 Peter Tompkins: <i>The Secret Life of Plants</i>	1980 PTSD recognized as official diagnosis by American Psychological Association	
1966 Hélio Oiticia's <i>Tropicália</i> exhibited in Rio de Janeiro	1973 Oliver Sacks: <i>Awakenings</i>		

*I saw it for a long time coming
• And finally it arrived •
Goodbyes and farewells • But
filling my mouth • Is a
hollow cavity • A vacuum of
no colour • Frozen in time
I don't dare to stare • So I close
my eyes • Just in time
to catch a glimpse of a
shudder • Of light sparkling
with white*



RUBBER TREE

The museum display is in one way or another always a reflection of 'collective identity' (Klonk, 2009: 4). More so than the actual art on display, the display itself shapes the way we look at what is in front of us. It informs what we deem to be important, what we see, or, for that matter, what we don't see.

Sandberg's green museum and the policies he implemented are a utopian example of what is possible in the exhibition space. The ethos of the Stedelijk of the '60s, despite technically being a 'white cube', is a far cry from the notion of 'aesthetics ... turned into a kind of social elitism' (O'Doherty, 1976: 76). On the contrary: by reintroducing potted plants into the museum display Sandberg made a home for art and people. White walls do not by default equal white cube; nor is every white space necessarily a white cube in the way Brian O'Doherty describes it. The number of plants, or rather the lack thereof, serves as a useful indicator as to how far a white space is pushed into being a white cube. The fewer plants there are, the more white-cubesque the white cube is. Plants added to the white cube, transform it into a place where shared experience is of essence. 

But the trend very clearly went in the direction O'Doherty suggested, and the Stedelijk was no exception. With plant numbers steadily increasing at the Stedelijk in the '50s until they reached their summit in the '60s, their numbers slowly dwindled until they vanished from its exhibition spaces by 1980 (Meijer, 2019: 105). In her *Proposal for a Museum*, Arden Sherman (2013) pinpoints the mid '80s as the moment in which plants had vanished from art displays in general. The monetary boom of the art market made art preservation suddenly the major concern of art handlers. Atmospheric controllers, dehumidifiers and hygiene measurements were rigorously implemented and as a consequence plants were deemed too great a danger to the increasingly precious art. The art conservator Elisabeth Bracht notes, however, that plants pose relatively little danger. Indeed, she writes, 'if you want to preserve the art, you've got to keep out the people' (cited in Meijer, 2019: 105). Humans are wandering ovens and shoe soles bring in bacteria from the streets outside. A plant has bacteria growing in its pot too but, by comparison, a plant is rather stationary and its limited movement is easily reined in with a couple of trimmings every few months.

In 1976, the same moment plants were almost gone

as casual exhibition companions, Brian O'Doherty wrote his text bemoaning the dehumanised, sterile white cube. The supposed purpose of the white cube is for 'art to be free to take on its own life' (O'Doherty, 1976: 15). But what is art being freed from? Context? Life? What is a 'life on its own'? And what is art without context?

The question of isolation and fragmentation, of attempting to see things on their own, is picked up on in a different way by the need for 'thick descriptions'. In 1973, ethnographer Clifford Geertz noticed in an essay on anthropological methods something akin to what O'Doherty would observe in the art world just a few years later, namely a lack of versatile tools to understand things in a larger, complex contexts. Thick description in an ethnographical sense can be explained with the example of a simple contraction of the eyelid, a twitch. A 'thin' description would be just the same, a twitching of the eye. The thick description however, would look into the how and why the twitching exists, the 'meaning structures in terms of which twitches, winks, fake-winks, parodies, rehearsal of parodies are produced, perceived, and interpreted' (Geertz, 1973, p. 312). So rather than looking at the twitch of the faceless, the twitch is a small part of a social construct. Rather than being black or white, thick descriptions come in a variety of grey shades. Both descriptions, thick and thin, are necessary; one isn't a substitute for the other. Life is a messy affair – but excluding the mess is excluding life itself.



Art display, we could say, starved itself of thick descriptions, but life doesn't grow on thinness alone. So artists embraced what was rejected by the museum: the potted plant. The art pieces that emerged as a result of this process were largely installations. Rather than being clearly delineated from the gallery and easily displayed in a frame or on a plinth, this new kind of art incorporated all six walls of the room. They created environments in which the audience wasn't an outsider anymore but instead a part of a larger whole (Bishop, 2005: 105). From one moment to the other, plants occupied a radically different position in the contemporary art museum. Marcel Broodthaers' *Un Jardin d'Hiver*, 1974, includes in the material list alongside 16 painted chairs and 16mm film projected on screen, 30 potted plants (Fig. 59). The potted plants-too-dangerous-for-art and the potted plants-as-art were largely the same specimens: Broodthaers clearly favouring palms, whereas some of his contemporaries



Fig. 59
1974 Marcel
Broodthaers, *Un
Jardin d'Hiver*,
Palais de Beaux-
Artes, Brussels



Fig. 49
1967 Hélio Oiticica's,
Tropicália, Museo
Centro de Arte Reina
Sofía, Madrid

preferred Dracaneas in the case of Nam June Paik, or Rubber Trees for Hélio Oiticica. Much like the plant life dominating home interiors, the museum flora referenced a world radically different to the one that European and Northern American museumgoers called their own. They promised a world essentially 'other' than the one outside the front door; a utopian world full of bright colours, soaring temperatures and sunshine, experienced by those museumgoers foremost as a vacation destination. This is precisely the effect *Tropicália*, arguably the first art piece using a potted plant, had on its British audience (Fig. 49).

Hélio Oiticica's *Tropicália*, 1966, was an affront to the white cube in every possible respect: impossible to keep clean and tidy, impossible to experience from a safe distance and impossible to preserve for the future in any conventional manner. The piece was a makeshift micro village: the gallery floor covered with a layer of sand, huts made up of colourful, printed fabrics stretched over frames, plants everywhere and live parrots flying around. Oiticica himself described the piece as a 'kind of map. It's a map of Rio and it's a map of my imagination. It is a map you go into' (Tate, 2020). The 'going into' was meant very literally. The audience was asked to take off their shoes, to wander in the enormous sandpit, and was invited to touch the work and sit down and relax. What had commonplace in the National Gallery a hundred years earlier was once again experienced by a new generation of Londoners as a complete novelty: the museum as an extension of public space. Women came down to the Whitechapel Gallery with prams, and toddlers played in the sand. School children read books in the installation's maze and businessmen from nearby Liverpool Street turned up to eat their sandwiches to the sound of tropical birdsong.

For its British audience, the piece played into a Brazilian stereotype of a tropical paradise, perfectly illustrated by the lush, tropical plants flourishing in it. To its Brazilian audience it was a paradise of a different kind, one in which freedom of expression and liberty was the utopian currency. The piece's aesthetic was modelled on Rio's favelas – the homes of the city's poorest. As a response to Brazil's brutal military dictatorship at that time, Oiticica promoted the political potential of coming together and 'simply hanging out' (Tate, 2020: 13).

The social construct created by Hélio Oiticica existed in a much more complicated way than a painting hung at a specific height on white wall. Installations

uprooted the notion of what art is or could be. Ready-mades and collages were the forerunners of installations, and ushered in an increasing blurring of the line between art and life. With Josephs Beuys' cry 'every man is an artist' (Beuys cited in Tate, 2021); every single thing had the potential of being art too: even a humble plant in a pot. In this process plants simply 'couldn't exist as decoration in the exhibition setting any longer' (Wenger, 2020). As everything could be art, it became necessary to remove from the exhibition space anything that wasn't. This is yet another reason as to why potted plants were taken from the museum: arguably art asked for an ever more radical white cube.

Installations are bound to time and place in a way a painting or a sculpture isn't. In most cases paintings and sculptures are clearly contained within a frame or on a plinth. Hence their placement in a space or another isn't that important to the work itself. But installations occupy a room in a different manner: since they exist as a thing you can walk into, the environment crucially determines its experience. Given that the room is constantly changing, according to the time of day or the amount of visitors, the installation is constantly changing too. It is therefore impossible to experience the same installation twice in completely the same way.

With installations, art took on a new nature and the line between art and life became one defined foremost by words. This is, this is not. With it objects, spaces and audiences alike became participants in art. Living and being alive was certainly encouraged in the exhibition space, if perhaps in a more reflexive manner than it occurred during the National Gallery's heyday. The taking-part-in or being-part-of art was a novelty. As such art became self-referential, acknowledging its own thick description, its existence within a larger context of meaning making, differentiating and influencing. As such thick description is a method to make context tangible, it accounts for the myriad different ways in which something can be read, seen, interpreted and experienced – a process in which, despite being anything but a newbie, potted plants' presence in the museum was properly noted for the first time in history.

This taking note of plant life occurred in a wider context of seeing plants across culture. The former lie-detector specialist Cleve Backster dedicated his later life's work to understanding plants' emotional

response to their surroundings. Though the scientific validity of Backster's research is now not less questionable than it was when it was made, his ideas took the public of the 1970s by storm and struck a particular cord with New Age thinking. Horticultural societies sprouted, houseplants were played music to and even given language lessons as a result (Green, 1979).



The idea of measuring and visualising the emotional response of humans using a galvanometer attached to a polygraph was already around at the beginning of the 20th century but became increasingly widespread in the 1950s. Decades before the first MRI brain scan was made in 1990 (Kolk, 2014: 39) this method promised an early window into the unseen workings of the brain. Simplified, the galvanometer attached to a human being conducts changes in electrical charge, which in turn are translated into a more or less wavy line by the polygraph (Tompkins, 1973: 29). The line was believed to be a reflection of the subject's emotional state, with sudden fluctuations marking arousal. On a whim, Backster, who was America's foremost specialist in the use of the galvanometer as a lie detector, wired up his humble office plant and was astounded by the results he measured. But what those results really were was a slightly muddled affair.

Backster read in the polygraph's wavy line the emotional responses of his office plants to their environment. Carefully monitoring the plants in his office, he started to take note of his own daily activities in relation to those gained from the plants, and found an uncanny correlation between the two. On a trip out of town, he believed he saw a definite change in the polygraph reading of his loyal Dragon Tree in the precise moment he decided to return home to New York (Tompkins, 1973:39). It seemed like his ability to read the plant's mind was matched with the plant's to read his, no matter their distance.

Convinced that plants are not only capable of experiencing stress but further capable of reading the stress level of the human they are primed to, he started to make his research public. It proved, however, difficult to replicate his findings and the polygraph came under scrutiny as a tool to record the emotional states of plants. While the scientific community remained firm on their position towards his research, his findings gained mainstream interest with the publication of Peter Tompkins' book *The Secret Life of Plants* in 1973 (Castro, 2019, p.11).

It seems like Backster's real breakthrough was not in proving or disproving that plants have emotional responses similar to those of humans, but to lay the groundwork in the population to consider a being without a central nervous system as a being at all. The word individual most literally means 'not to be divided'. A plant however can be divided numerous times and each cutting can grow into its own, respective individual. Personality and individuality essentially connected to the brain lie at the core of what we humans consider a being. And an idea that had been part of native cultures of America and Australia for millennias reverberated for the first time in contemporary Western society: the idea that plants feel, react and experience not unlike ourselves.

The understanding of what constituted an individual was thus broadening to include plants. Given the essential quietness of plants, not much seemed at stake; the plant, after all, wouldn't talk back. The same year Backster's research on plants' emotional capacities encouraged people to talk to their green flatmates, romanticism met a wholly different critique if applied to people. When Oliver Sacks' published his patient-oriented writing on a peculiar form of Parkinsonism in 1973, there was no outcry or protest, it was simply met with silence.



In *Awakenings* (1973) he documented the almost plant-like existence many of his patients lived in after they fell ill with the neurological disease. Each and every individual had a different manifestation of the illness, but almost all described a form of being halted in their tracks, unable to move for hours. Not unlike that of a plant, the patients' apparent immobility was revealed with time-lapse photography – the scratching of the nose being an affair stretched over several hours (Sacks cited in Krulwich, Abumrad 2007).

Case studies have been the major form of gaining insight into patients, particularly patients with mentally or neurologically based diseases. They had however increasingly fallen out of fashion by the middle of the 19th century (Sacks, 1999). Statistics, facts, numbers and data replaced case studies, and with them, the patients, the people, their stories, and their lives vanished from medical discourse. Undoubtedly numerical information is important, however the humans behind them are of this world and numbers can only tell so much of their experience.

*'There is nothing alive which is not individual:
our health is ours; our diseases are ours;
our reactions are ours – no less than our minds or
our faces. Our health, diseases, and reactions
cannot be understood in vitro, in themselves; they
can only be understood with reference to us,
as expressions of our nature, our living, our being-
here (da-sein) in the world.'*

(Sacks, 1999: 228)

In contrast to much of the research conducted at the time, Sacks decided to let his patients speak for themselves, writing their stories in the form of case studies, rooting the patients' medical history in their personal experiences. Sacks himself explained the strange muteness of the professional world towards his research with a similar argument Clifford Geertz made for thick description. The romantic style (a popular criticism of Sacks' work made by his contemporaries) – the attempt to present a disease in all its facets and every day manifestations in relation to the individual patient – had fallen out of favour. It was only a decade later, that this kind of case history was not only acceptable but met with renewed interest.

Awakenings hit society as the pharmaceutical revolution kicked off; a moment in which newfound medications promised solutions where no hope for one had existed before. The excitement for the newly developed drugs, and the hope that they carried for both patients and practicing doctors is carefully documented in Sacks' book. In it however, he also documents the various different forms in which patients reacted to the new treatment, how it improved their lives, but also how unknown side effects dampened their initial excitement, all in the case of one neurological disease treated with one drug.

The documentation of patients' reality, one considerably more nuanced than that presented by cold, hard statistics, was yet another reason for the silence with which *Awakenings*' first publication was met. But in order to try to understand, in order to care, we don't need numbers, we need stories, and we need people to tell them:

*It is the imagination of other people's
worlds – worlds almost inconceivably strange, yet
inhabited by people just like ourselves,
people, indeed, who might be ourselves – that forms
the centre of Awakenings. Other worlds,
other lives, even though so different from our own,*

have the power of arousing the sympathetic imagination, of awakening an intense and often creative resonance in others.

(Sacks, 1999: XXXVIII)

By the time the third edition of *Awakenings* was published in 1982, the book was not only widely accepted but became somewhat of a classic. By this time Helio Oiticia's *Tropicália* was joined by a series of other plant-based art pieces. Potted plants, however, were from now on scarcely seen as part of the museum setting.

Because all aspects of life taking place, growing and blossoming were increasingly swallowed up by the neatness of the exhibition display, life was embraced in a new form in the museum: as installations. But over the preceding decades, discipline had been ingrained in museumgoers making the sudden invitation to participate confusing. Formal signposts were required to invite the public to 'Please touch', 'Please lie down' or to announce that 'You may interact with this artwork'. And if still in doubt, invigilators were on hand to further reassure visitors that they were overstepping boundaries by engaging physically: 'Yes indeed you may pick up this object, or walk into this space, or sit down on the work if you wish.' The life encouraged by such installations was still somewhat constrained, however: somehow artificial, stilted, and rarely did visitors' experiences really overrule the spatial requisites: after all, still inside a museum, still behaving according to the space's instructions.

The potted plants seemed to offer a solution to the white cube's 'thin description': a reminder that life doesn't grow neatly, but in numerous directions simultaneously. This solution appears to be some what surprising if not paradoxical, given the colonial history of the plants in pots. It might be a hard ask to find an even more alienated specimen than a potted plant in a white cube: uprooted and isolated in a small pot, far away from its natural habitat, in a space actively avoiding context. But history has shown potted plants to be sensitive, intelligent and capable of habituating to turbulent environments in ways that are inexplicably other to our own, and yet so strangely alike. Potted plants have mastered alienation and have become masters of alienation and if we let them, we can learn from their experiences.

CON- CLUSION

Vegetal life has always been central to art-making. Floral figurations have particular significance in Islam and date back almost two millennia. Its plant forms flow into each other in endless transfiguration, have spread across the world and have crucially informed Western contemporary art making (Marks, 2011). Not only abstracted flowers but potted plants too, in their entire physicality of growing green, pots and soil, have existed alongside art for as long as there have been art exhibitions. Pietro Antonio Martini's etching from 1787 shows the Paris Salon at the Louvre, arguably one of the very first contemporary art venues (Fig.1). It shows a room with an extravagantly high ceiling, walls stacked with paintings, a joyous mass of people in their finest gowns and, in the middle of it all, a potted plant. The history of potted plants is a colonial one, and like any other colonial history, it is one marked by exploitation. Alongside people, animals and physical objects, plants undertook the months-long journeys from the colonies to Europe. Transporting plants across oceans is no easy task and if the rough seas or the abrupt change in climate didn't end them, then rats did. Even seeds weren't safe from the furry creatures and often fell victim to them before they reached the mainland.

A coincidence led to a major breakthrough in plant transportation; the invention of the Wardian Case (Lichtman, 2020). In 1829, the doctor and amateur horticulturalist Nathaniel Bagshaw Ward placed a moth chrysalis for safekeeping in a jar. Upon closer inspection of the jar's occupant, he noticed a little fern had joined the moth without his doing. Against all his expectations, the fern thrived in its glass confinement and with it the idea for a 'rat-blocking, self-watering plant suitcase' (Lichtman, 2020).

The Wardian Case, the first ever table top terrarium, was the invention that allowed tropical plants to be uprooted, potted and replanted in a new environment, thousands of miles away from their home. The legacy of the Loddiges Nursery, the very same London Nursery in which Empress Josephine's Great Palm resided, was built on the Wardian Case. 'Whereas I used formerly to lose nineteen out of the twenty of the plants I imported during the voyage, nineteen out of the twenty is now the average of those that survive', its owner, George Loddiges claimed of the case (as cited in "Nathaniel Bagshaw Ward," 2019). But the Wardian Case was not only something of a lifesaver in transit; it remained so upon arrival.

Harsh winter climates, poorly lit Victorian homes and extensive air pollution caused by coal fires and gas lanterns made a hostile environment for delicate, tropical plants (*Houseplants: A Potted History*, 2020). The appropriately named Cast-Iron-Plant became the most popular houseplant at the beginning of the 19th century due to its talent for sheer survival. The Wardian Case was the home inside the home for the less hardy species. The increasingly delicately fashioned plant containers fitted right into the interior décor of the time and their popularity surged alongside those of tropical plants. Better air conditions, larger windows, higher ceilings and central heating eventually not only improved the living conditions of people but allowed them to share their living quarters with a wider array of tropical potted plants now relieved of their glass shelters (*Houseplants: A Potted History*, 2020).

Colonial trade turned collecting into a craze that didn't stop at Wardian Cases and their like. Other moments of particular obsession included the Tulip Fever in 17th century Netherlands, followed by Britain's Fern Frenzy in 1850s and shortly followed by a worldwide Orchid Mania in the second half of

the 19th century (Barber, 2020). Notably, those collecting plants were those of monetary means; they were the same folk acquiring art. The respective collection of art and of plants were thus from the beginning pursuits that went hand-in-hand. When the Salons of the 18th century turned into museums, it was only natural that potted plants joined the art, chairs, tables and rugs in the move to their new home.

For a hundred years of art display, the domestic space was a direct source of inspiration for the museum's layout and décor. But increasingly the museum furniture followed a trajectory that deviated from the one at home. The seating options became heavier and were in places bolted to the ground, resulting in a museum interior in which visitors were increasingly deprived of the agency to make the space their own. Being rooted in place is somewhat a given for potted plants, making them arguably the only things existing in the museum as they did at home: in a pot. Even when the home started to move out of the museum in the early 20th century, potted plants remained in place, alluding to former home comforts.

As reductionism gained the upper hand, walls started to turn white, space became more awkward and plants appeared increasingly lost in exhibitions. The nooks and crannies of the room formerly filled with the clutter of life were now vacant and the only placeholder still available was the potted plant. So they stayed. Archival material shows potted plants in corners, guarding the door, plonked in the middle of the room, always slightly awkward, always slightly out of place as if they themselves didn't quite understand their situational circumstances of being left behind.

This is the transitional phase of museums: between two world wars, between wall colours from red to white, and between different display strategies: the move from showcasing their entire collection at all times to putting on temporary selected exhibitions. This move to temporary exhibits required new strategies of display to accommodate their frequent changing. The luxurious home interiors of previous times were not only out of fashion but simply too expensive to be continuously replaced to match the art. Something more flexible, functional and practical needed to be at hand and the white cube was the logical answer to that question. In its transition from the white space of the '30s to the white cube of the '70s, the white cube not only devoured

the plant's space in the museum but turned the art museum into an 'emblem of estrangement' (O'Doherty, 1976: 80).

So how is it possible that it came to a situation in which I can ask: How is it to be explained that at virtually the same moment that the negative effects of trauma are recognised, the history of contemporary art display arrived at a space positively promoting and creating the same effects? The answer to this question lies in history. It is a conglomeration of myriad smaller and larger decisions taken by individuals and groups, of trends and political incentives over the course of two centuries in the case of the exhibition space, and of one century in the case of the diagnosis of trauma. Both are, however, the broader result of dehumanisation and an outcry for individual experience to return. It is an outcry manifested in the art display in artists taking curation into their own hands in the form of installations, and in ethnographical discussions as a need to find versatile methods to account for the complexities of social situations as highlighted by Clifford Geertz's *Thick Description* (1973).

There are a lot of things one does not do in the white cube of the 70s: 'one does not speak in a normal voice; one does not laugh, eat, drink, lie down, or sleep; one does not get ill, go mad, sing, dance, or make love' (O'Doherty, 1976:10). The only thing viscerally experienced in the white cube is the out-of-placeness of the physical body: 'The wooden floor is polished so that you click along clinically, or carpeted so that you pad soundlessly, resting the feet while the eyes shave at the wall' (O'Doherty, 1976:15).

Potted plants in pre-'70s museums can today be useful indicators to determine the attitude of a museum to its white cube. Simply put, the more plants there were, the more life, experience – essentially *story* – was encouraged in the space. The fewer potted plants there were, the more the space effectively recreated the effects of trauma. It turned the visitor into a disembodied eye, 'shaving at the wall', perfectly illustrated by the documentation of art showing almost always no audience. The visitors were allowed to look at the work with their eyes, but not to be part of it with their body.

The Stedelijk increased its visitor numbers fivefold in the time plant numbers were growing (Rawsthorn, 2016). There was a restaurant, a café, children's edu-

cation programmes and a series of events organised too, but with them naturally came plants.

Rather than simply being incidental parts of generic museum displays, we might profitably think of potted plants as historical beacons that suggest and point towards important issues of their day. In the 1850s they alluded to the home, creating an intimate viewing experience. In hospitals in the early 1920s the metaphorical plant implied by the combination of blue and yellow wall colours, suggested spring and life's cycling capacity for renewal. At the MoMA in the 1930s potted plants promoted luxury. In the 1950s at the Stedelijk they once again were given a more gentle purpose of alluding to home comforts. And in the 1970s they returned as part of the art itself, bringing back the life that the white cube attempted to extinguish.

Bessel van der Kolk (2014) writes about two areas in the brain that go blank in the event of a traumatic experience: 'the area that provides a sense of time and perspective, which makes it possible to know that 'that was then, but I am safe now,' and another area that 'integrates the images, sounds, and sensations of trauma into a coherent story' (Kolk, 2014: 221). A traumatic event is not experienced as a story, something with a beginning, middle and an end, but as a collection of disjointed fragments, that can return viscerally at any moment in time. Precisely because they lack rooting within a history, they are caught in a limbo-like state.

Sleep has an important role to play in how memories can change and adapt over time (Kolk, 2014:262). In a state of sleep, the brain recalibrates information, replays and recombines fragments time and time again, brings emotionally relevant information to the forefront and allows less relevant material to fade away. The sleeping brain is even capable of processing information it cannot during the day. At night the brain can integrate information into the larger memory system, into our life story. To find a beginning, middle and an end, we need to sleep.

Plants sleep too. They assume a night-time position, not unlike animals. While spinach flattens its leaves to the front of the stem, the bean flops its leaves in the direction of the ground and the Birdsfoot Trefoil closes its leaves around the flower. These varying nocturnal positions have one common trait: the leaves of each plant return to the position they had during germination. Some roll,

some close, some drop and some fold their leaves, but sleeping plants' positions are in most cases reminiscent of their first growing stages. The similarity to humans doesn't stop there. The younger the plant, the more sleep it needs; the older the plant the shorter the period it remains in its sleeping position daily (Mancuso, 2018: 232). The trigger for the change in position, like for ourselves, is light. With the fading of light, the plant too, falls into a deep slumber.

Some of the earliest documents of written language are dreams; dreams of kings and spiritual leaders were some of the earliest stories we told. Ancient Greek dream analysis were some of the earliest forms of medicine. Priest-physicians asked their patients to sleep at the foot of the temple of Asclepius, the healing temple near the city of Nafplio on the Peloponnese. The dreams reported the next day formed the foundation for their administered cure. Today, those dreams—those stories—are etched into clay tablets and litter the Asclepius Temple, thus making stories some of the earliest forms of medicine (Pagel as cited in Mallick, 2011: 3).

Potted plants take up a similar amount of space as a human does. As such, they are the perfect leafy stand-ins for humans. Maybe what we are unable to do, plants do for us: eating and drinking, living and sleeping, dreaming inside the museum. The dream is a tool to settle experiences into stories, stories that help us make sense of the world in a way that we couldn't when we are awake. Maybe that was the role of the potted plant in museums all along: they kept dreams alive. They dreamed inside the white cube so that the white cube could dream by proxy. They dreamed inside the white cube so that we could dream inside the museum too. They dreamed inside the white cube to tell the museum's story with a beginning, middle and an open end.

*I pray that in thirty-two years
passing that flowers and vegetables
will water the Twenty-First-
Century with their voices telling that
they were once a book turned by loving
hands into life.*

(Brautigan, 1968)

In the moment potted plants left the museum, Richard Brautigan wrote this poem titled Shasta Daisy. Shasta Daisies are white flowers with yellow cores.

They are a cross breed of a number of daisies; the kind of unspectacular flower that grows in the backyard of every childhood home. They are not the kind of flower we seed; they are the kind of flowers that grow, not in a pot, but in the garden.

In the years since this poem was written, at times rather unspectacular plants became art: grass (in Hans Haacke, 1969, Green Grass) and even regular pond algae (in Julia Crabtree and William Evans, 2018, Clenched). First and foremost tropical plants still dominate art, but occasionally there is a glimpse of native flora inside the museum these days.



The plants I have excavated from history are not real plants any longer. With time they have become stories, stories whose voices re-green the history they have been physically part of, but vocally excluded from. An anthology is a published collection of poems, or stories. Anthology, the word, is made up the Greek word 'anthos' meaning 'flower' and 'logia' meaning 'to gather' or 'collection'. Plants need to flower to reproduce. Reproduction brings new life, life that has almost been stagnated in the museum. This thesis is an attempt to show the life that has been growing in the museum over the course of two hundred years of display history. It is in every sense of the word an anthology – a collection of gathered flowers.



Fig. 52
1970 Constantin
Brancusi, The Art
Institute of Chicago,
Chicago

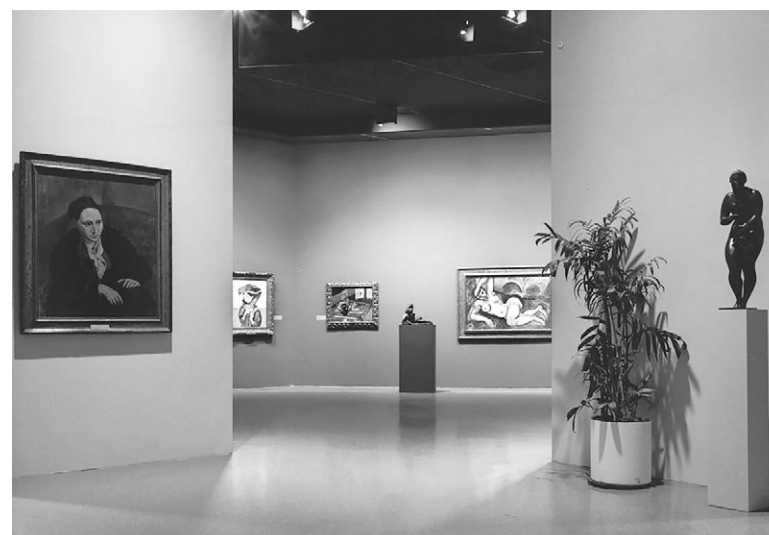


Fig. 53
1970 Four Americans
in Pairs, The Col-
lection of Gertrude
Stein and her Family,
MoMA, New York



Fig. 54
1970 Jasper Johns,
Lithographs,
MoMA, New York

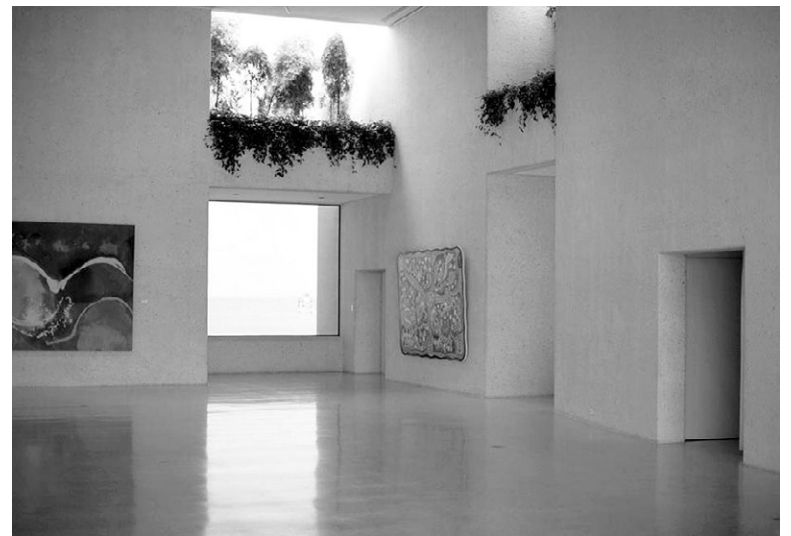


Fig. 56
1970 Berkeley Art
Museum and Pacific
Film Archive, Berkeley



Fig. 55
1970 Interior of
Guggenheim
Museum, New York



Fig. 57
1973 Christo, Valley
Curtain, Stedelijk
Museum, Amsterdam



Fig. 58
1973 Exhibition
c. 7,500, curated
by Lucy Lippard,
Walker Art Center,
Minneapolis



Fig. 60
1974 The Rockwell
Museum, New York

Fig. 61
1975 National Gallery
of Victoria, Victoria

Fig. 62
1975 Navaj rugs,
Stedelijk Museum,
Amsterdam





Fig. 63
1977 Dan Flavin
"Untitled (for
Gretchen)", Berkeley
Art Museum and
Pacific Film Archive,
Berkeley

Fig. 64
1979 The James
Thrall Soby Bequest,
MoMA, New York



Fig. 65
1982 Frederic, Lord
Leighton, and others,
Manchester City Art
Galleries, Manchester

Fig. 66
1989 Goddesses,
Saidye Bronfman
Centre, Montreal



Fig. 67
1996 Joan Jonas,
Spring Well,
Christenrose
Gallery, New York

Fig. 68
2003 Living Inside
the Grid, Urban Shelter
Units, New Museum
of Contemporary Art,
New York



Fig. 69
2005 Frank Lloyd
Wright and the Japa-
nese Print, Hammer
Museum, Grunwald
Center for the Graph-
ic Arts, Los Angeles

Fig. 70
2006 Around all
together, one
amongst many,
Galeria Pro-
jecte SD, Barcelona



Fig. 71
2009 Mandla Reuter,
Slowly And Majesti-
cally The Sun Steals
Gradually Over The
Hilltops, Galerie
Mezzanin, Vienna



Fig. 73
2010 Rodney Mc-
Millian Installation
view of Succulent,
Vielmetter Projects,
Los Angeles



Fig. 72
2009 David Maljkovic,
Scene, Hold, Ballast,
Sculpture Center,
New York



Fig. 74
2010 In The Glass
Coffin Of The Virgin
Forest, Matthew
Welch, The Wood-
mill Project Space,
London

Fig. 75
2010 Natasha Wheat,
Self Contained, Nata-
sha Wheat, Museum
of Contemporary Art,
Chicago



Fig. 76
2011 Liu Ding's Store,
2011, ZKM, Karlsruhe

Fig. 77
2011 Objets textués,
Maison des Arts de
Laval, Laval





Fig. 78
2012 Tim Phillips and
Adam Dix, Sumarria
Lunn Gallery, London



Fig. 79
2012 Margeret Lee,
New Pictures of
Common Objects,
MoMA PS1, New York



Fig. 80
2012 Paul Wacker,
Wait and Watch
Awhile Go By, Alice
Gallery, Brussels



Fig. 81
2012 Huang Yong
Ping, Ressort, 7th
Asia Pacific Triennial
of Contemporary
Art, Gallery of Modern
Art Queensland

Fig. 82
2012 Dormitorio
Pubblico, Campoli
Presti, Paris

Fig. 83
2012 André Piguet,
Guppy Jungle,
Ryan Renshaw Gal-
lery, Queensland



Fig. 84
2012 Heidi Norton,
Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago,
Chicago

Fig. 86
2013 Air de Pied-
à-terre, Lisa Cooley
Gallery, New York

Fig. 85
2013 Young Museum's annual Bouquets
to Art boutique, San
Francisco



Fig. 87
2013 CCS Graduate
Thesis exhibition, less
like an object more
like the weather, Bard
College Hessel
Museum of Art, New York

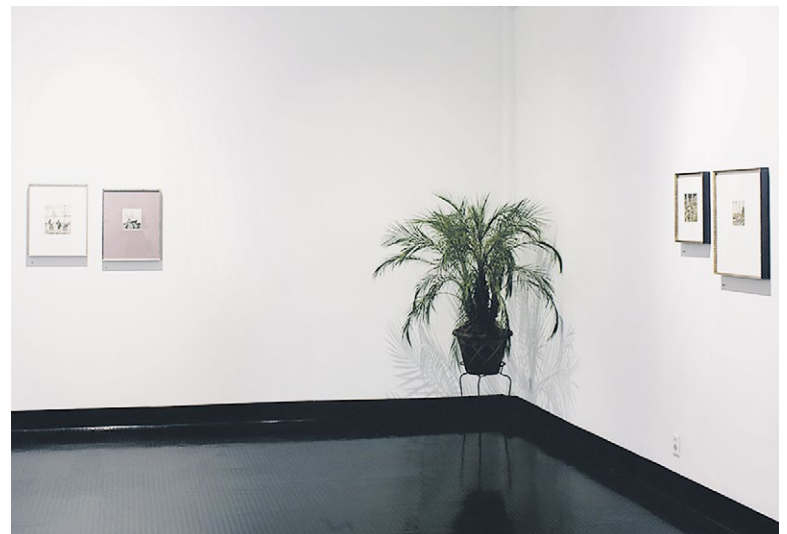


Fig. 88
2013 Around the
World in Forty
Pictures, California
Museum of Photogra-
phy, UC Riverside

Fig. 89
2013 The Fresh
Air Collection, Space
Studios, London

Fig. 90
Metropolitan Museum
of Art, New York



Fig. 91
2018 Leonie Brandner,
Marbellous Living,
Auswahl 18, Aargauer
Kunsthau, Aarau

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- Fig. 2
Installation view of 1864 Salon des Refusés at Palais des Beaux-Arts, Paris, France. (1864). [Photograph]. <https://miseengreen.com> (Courtesy of Arden Sherman, mise en green blog.)
- Fig. 3
Believed to be installation view of exhibition, Paris Exposition Universelle at Palais d'Industrie, Paris, 1878 (1878). [Photograph]. <https://miseengreen.com> (Courtesy of Arden Sherman, mise en green blog.)
- Fig. 4
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- Fig. 5
Venice Biennale, 1899, Giacomo Favoretto Exhibition, Source: Grupaok. (1899). [Photograph]. <https://miseengreen.com> (Courtesy of Arden Sherman, mise en green blog.)
- Fig. 6
Installation view of the International Exhibition of 1901, Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow, Scotland, Source: theglasgowstory.com (1901). [Photograph]. <https://miseengreen.com> (Courtesy of Arden Sherman, mise en green blog.)
- Fig. 7
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This is the triangular history of potted plants, museum displays and trauma diagnosis. It is a collection of stories across time in different places, gathered almost like a bouquet of flowers – stories of peoples' lives, stories of potted plants and stories about the way we account for the fragmenting effects traumatic experiences can have. But more than anything else it is a story about hope, wonder, and joy – the joys of experience, and in particular the joys of experiencing art together.