The exhibition tells the story of women, men and children from Asia, Africa, Oceania, the Americas and in some cases from Europe who were displayed in the West and elsewhere at universal and colonial exhibitions and fairs, in circuses, cabarets, and zoos, as well as in traveling “ethnic” villages. For almost five centuries (1490-1960) these people were exhibited as “savages” in Europe, the United States and Japan. The shows were impressive “spectacles”, theatricalizations, with performers, stage sets, improvisations and strolling storytellers. However, colonial and scientific history, the history of race, the history of entertainment, of world fairs and universal exhibitions has been somewhat overlooked… Western promoters actively recruited troupes, families or performers from all over the world, at times coercively, but usually by offering contracts. These large-scale exhibitions of human beings were specific to the West and to colonial powers and served to reaffirm a hierarchy between people according to skin color, the legacy of which can still be felt today.

The concept of the ‘human zoo’, in the broadest sense of the term, serves to describe the transition from an exclusively scientific racism to its more widespread and popular form.

Le Monde diplomatique (2000)
Knowledge about the world changed dramatically around 1492 when Europe discovered the figure of the “savage” in the guise of the Amerindian. Christopher Columbus returned from one of his earliest expeditions and presented six Amerindians to the Spanish royal court, thereby triggering widespread fascination for everything that was considered remote. In 1528, Hernán Cortés exhibited Aztec performers at the court of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. In 1550, a royal procession in Rouen before the French King Henry II featured Tupinamba Indians from Brazil. It was at this time that the Valladolid debate took place concerning the treatment of natives from the New World. Hierarchies based on skin color became commonplace and the transatlantic slave trade would later impact millions of Africans. “Monsters” such as Antonietta Gonsalvus (who suffered from Hypertrichosis, a condition characterized by excessive hair growth) were also exhibited, just like her father Petrus had been when he was offered at age ten to King Henry II. Alongside these humans, exotica displayed in cabinets of curiosities were also coveted by monarchs and aristocrats throughout the sixteenth century. In 1654, three female and one male Eskimo, doubtless Greenlanders, were exhibited in Denmark before they would die five years later and introduced to King Frederick III, thereby creating a newfound “passion for exoticism”. A clash between these two types would emerge during the following century, that of the “noble savage” and the “bloodthirsty savage”, curiosity for human exhibits displayed in taverns and at fairs continued to grow, and by the end of the eighteenth century to capture the attention of learned scientists. By this time, some “human specimens” had achieved celebrity status, such as the Polynesian Aotourouv who was brought to Paris in 1769 to meet King Louis XV. A similar fate awaited the Polynesian Omaï in London 1774. The entertainment and scientific worlds intersected, and the nineteenth century would gradually yield a hierarchized view of these questions. The increasing popularity and prevalence of “ethnic shows” thus played an important role in disseminating these views.

From 1492 to the Enlightenment

**FIRST CONTACTS, FIRST EXHIBITS**

**The Polynesian Omaï (1774-1776)**

In 1774, a young Pacific islander named Omaï arrived in Great Britain for a two year stay. He was outfitted with a velvet overcoat, silk waistcoat and satin breeches, and coached in court etiquette in anticipation of his presentation to King George III. He was embraced by England’s social elite and treated with great respect. His elegance was extensively discussed and confirmed his audience’s belief that he was an emissary from the court of “Otaheite”. He rapidly became a celebrity and his presence was recorded in several works of literature, theatrical performances, and portraits.

**From the Renaissance and the conquest of the Americas on, racism is to be found everywhere. In the colonized regions of the world, it serves to discredit the majority, whereas among the colonizers, it marginalizes minorities.**

Eduardo Galeano (2005)
NEW KINDS OF EXHIBITIONS

During a forty year period that stretched from 1800 to 1840, in both the United States (New York) and in Europe (Paris and London), exhibitions underwent significant transformations, evolving from curiosities reserved for a societal elite toward a popular form of entertainment. “Exotic” exhibitions in Paris and London of Hottentots between 1810 and 1820, of Indians in 1817, Laplanders in 1822 or Eskimos in 1824, point to the scale of the phenomenon. European curiously for the exotic became more varied, and in 1827 spectators were able to gaze admiringly upon Zarafa, the giraffe given to Charles X by the Ottoman Viceroy of Egypt. The same year, four warriors and two female Osage Indians came to Paris and were welcomed by Charles X, only to die shortly thereafter while in Europe. However, it was Saartjie Baartman, the famous Hottentot Venus, that was to have the most lasting impact on this transitional period. After having been exhibited in London and Paris (1810-1815) where she attracted vast audiences eager to observe her “anomalies” (known as steatopygia - enlarged buttocks and thighs, as well as elongated labia), her body became an object of scientific study. London was at the time the European capital of “human zoos”, hosting exhibits of Fuegians in 1829, Guyanese in 1839, and Bushmen in 1847 on the eve of the inaugural Universal Exhibition of 1851. These events coincided with the American painter George Catlin’s attempts at popularizing the figure of the Native American throughout Europe. In the United States, Indian “shows” and “freak” shows (that featured “monsters”) proliferated, before spreading to Europe. This was also the era when the famous showman Phineas Taylor Barnum began his long career with the African-American slave Joice Heth (whom he exhibited), before setting up his American Museum in New York city in which Siamese twins, bearded ladies, “skeleton man”, and other “exotic savages” from around the world were displayed over the years. From what had initially been restricted to a handful of exhibited individuals, one witnessed the emergence in less than a generation of a popular and lucrative industry with its organized troupes, choreographed and staged productions, elaborate costumes, impresarios, contracts, recruitment agents...

The invention of the savage

New kinds of exhibitions

In 1828, the American painter George Catlin began his ambitious project of preserving the traces of Native American culture. He traveled extensively and collected American Indian artifacts, producing some five hundred paintings, of which three hundred were portraits. His Indian Gallery traveled throughout the United States and Europe between 1845 and 1848.

The Hottentot Venus in the Salons of the Duchesse de Berry [Paris, France], watercolor on paper by Sébastien Cœur, 1830.

Louis-Philippe attends a Dance by Iowa Indians in the Salon de la Paix at the Tuileries [France], oil on canvas by Karl Girardet, 1845.

Osage Indians [France], print by Horace Vernet, 1827.

The Hottentot Venus at the Jardin d’Acclimatation [Paris, France], cover of a musical score, 1888.

“Today [thanks to these exhibitions], we no longer need to brave the high seas or contend with the dangers over land in order to learn about...
During the eighteenth century, scientific theories focused predominantly on the cultural and physical characteristics of different populations. But in the nineteenth century, this attention shifted toward the invention of “races”: American Indians, Africans, Asians, Europeans, and so on. The work of the Englishman Edward Tyson (1650-1703), who studied resemblances between men and apes, was a precursor to this new approach. Later, in his *Natural History of Mankind*, Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon (1707-1788) placed Man at the very center of the animal kingdom. The great scientific contribution of the Swede Carl Linnaeus was to establish a hierarchical classification that made it possible to divide mankind into four “varieties” (1758). From these studies, conclusions pertaining to the intellectual and moral aptitude of different populations were reached on the basis of cranial measurements or skin color. In 1775, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach would be the first natural scientist to actually classify the human species according to “race.” That same year, Georges Cuvier (1769-1832) and Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire (1772-1844) would claim that facial structure determined cerebral development. Categorization followed, based on skin color and certain physical traits, yielding a discourse that would furnish the “scientific” justification for slavery and colonialism. At the mid-point of the nineteenth century, Charles Darwin would introduce in his book *On the Origin of Species* (1859) the idea of a “missing link” in the great chain of being between man and ape, whereas anatomy museums (such as Dr. Spitzer’s traveling anatomical museum from 1856 on) served to bring science to the masses at various fairs. Relying on the work of scientists, polemists such as Gobineau (*An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races*, 1853-1855) in France or Houston Stewart Chamberlain (*The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, 1899) in England contributed to bringing racialized thinking to the mainstream at the very moment of colonial expansion. Others, however, such as the Haitian anthropologist Joseph Anténor Firmin, published works such as *On the Equality of Human Races* (1885) in which they critiqued these racial hierarchies.

"I have the right to say to this lying anthropology that it is not a science!"


"Viewing such men [the Fuegians], one can hardly make oneself believe that they are fellow-creatures, and inhabitants of the same world."

Charles Darwin, *Journal* (1845)
From 1840 to 1914

The middle of the nineteenth century saw the birth of new forms of mass entertainment culture in the United States, marked by extravagance, sensational spectacles, and an insatiable appetite for the unusual. In New York, P.T. Barnum’s American Museum, devoted to the exhibition of “freaks”, opened in 1841 and soon became the most popular attraction in the country, seen by some forty million visitors by 1868. In 1871, Barnum created P.T. Barnum’s Grand Traveling Museum, Menagerie, Caravan, and Circus, and started touring the world, with colossal success in Europe. After collaborating with Barnum, Buffalo Bill launched his Wild West Show in 1882, exploiting this mythology through life-size performances that included Red Indians, cow-boys, horses and buffalos. These grandiose shows contributed to the ways in which Europeans perceived of Indians. Among the “star” performers one could find Calamity Jane, Geronimo and Sitting Bull, as well as several Moroccan, African, and Japanese actors, and even a French infantryman...

By 1889, a new level of showmanship had been attained, with the Wild West Show sweeping through Europe. After London, Buffalo Bill made his way to Paris for the Universal Exhibition, accompanied by two hundred and fifty Indians, two hundred horses and twenty bison, before heading triumphantly across Europe. The show was attended by over fifty million spectators in the two thousand towns and cities in which it stopped, across a dozen countries. The figure of the African warrior also proved an important one as a result of the Zulus European Tour in 1853. At the same time, the first universal exhibitions were being held, in London 1851 and 1862, New York in 1853, Paris in 1855, then Metz in 1861, and Paris again in 1867, marking the advent of a new dimension in the exhibition process. Henceforth, human beings would play a key role in all efforts at representing the diversity of human life, and the “savage” would be there to entertain and attract audiences.

The Spectacle of Difference: From the Zulus to Buffalo Bill

From 1840 to 1914

It is not only entertaining because of its novelty, but is paramountly instructive, and no one who has read the history of the Western States for the last past quarter of a century can fail to appreciate the object lessons of the Wild West Show.

The Evening Citizen, Glasgow (1891)
From 1850 to 1914

From the middle of the nineteenth century onward, exhibitions could be found everywhere (theatres, fairs, public gardens, zoos, circuses, cabarets…), and attendance rates were consistently high. By the second third of the nineteenth century, the emphasis shifted towards human exhibits. This phenomenon could be observed throughout Europe (notably in Switzerland, Great Britain, France, Spain, and Germany), and the Jardin Zoologique d’Acclimatation in Paris welcomed more than thirty-five “ethnic shows” between 1877 and 1931. In this context, Carl Hagenbeck opened his new zoo in Hamburg in 1907 in order to provide permanent display space for troupes and exotic animals. Much in the same way zoological gardens were receiving visitors and scientists eager to meet “savages”, theatres and cabarets also provided indispensable outlets for these shows. From this moment on, Australian Aboriginals in London and Berlin rubbed shoulders with Zulus at the Folies-Bergère, Indians in Brussels and Hamburg with Dahomeyans at the Casino de Paris, Japanese acrobats criss-crossed Europe all the way to Saint Petersburg and back alongside snake charmers, belly-dancers, body-builders on the Italian stages or in Dutch circuses. The line between ethnic show and theatrical performance was a tenuous one at best, and several troupes were able to jump seamlessly from one genre to the other, as exemplified in the performances given by the impresario Guillermo Farini. An impressive range of artists were thus able to impose themselves - the African-American actor Ira Aldridge, the Cuban clown Chocolat, the Japanese dancer Hanako, the Three Striped Graces performing at l’Olympia, the Royal Cambodian dancers that so enthralled Auguste Rodin, as well as black face minstrels.

Guillermo Farini

The American William Hunt (1838-1929), alias Guillermo Farini, started his career as a tightrope walker, and only later became a manager of “human beings”. Fascinated as he was with theatrical machines and scientific discoveries, he exploited the burgeoning interest of Westerners for the African continent by exhibiting Bushmen and other “troupes” throughout Europe, earning him the title “King of the Strange”.

Crowds gather at the enclosures as they would before extraordinary animals.

Paul Julliard, Billetto de la Société d’anthropologie de Paris (1881)
From Barnum in 1841 to Krao in 1926

Throughout history, monsters and people with physical abnormalities have been the object of fascination. Much in the same way as “exotic animals”, people who are visually different have captured the public’s imagination in novel ways. Aristotle, Saint-Augustin and Montaigne, had recourse to science or the divine in their attempts to explain physical differences. Luckily, the eighteenth century, colonialist attitudes served as respectable and display cases for “strange” objects from around the world. Later, “monsters” became regular features of itinerant circuses before entering the realm of cabarets, fairs, and being seen on the streets in large cities. From Barnum in 1841 to Krao in 1926, “monsters” were exhibits that were presented to the public in various venues, such as in Barnum’s American Museum in New York, or by the showman, Barnum himself. In 1860, a year after the publication of Darwin’s “On the Origin of Species”, Charles Darwin, the “missing link” in the evolution from ape to man, was exhibited in the United States as the “last Aztec children”. In 1860, Krao, a black-skinned “freak” was exhibited as Darwin’s “missing link” in the evolution from ape to man. Around this time (1886), John Merrick, nicknamed the “Elephant Man” (brought to the big screen in 1980 by David Lynch), was exhibited in Great Britain by Sir Frederick Treves. Finally, from 1887 on, a mother and son with the medical condition congenital hypertrichosis were exhibited in Europe as the “hairy family of Burma” and were a popular attraction. Indeed, if today “freaks” are the subject of history, they nevertheless remain an important component of contemporary popular culture, taking on new forms with each passing era, notably via their omnipresence on the internet that serves to confirm.

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The invention of the savage

Throughout history, monsters and people with physical abnormalities have been the object of fascination. Much in the same way as “exotic animals”, people who are visually different have captured the public’s imagination in novel ways. Aristotle, Saint-Augustin and Montaigne, had recourse to science or the divine in their attempts to explain physical differences. Luckily, the eighteenth century, colonialist attitudes served as respectable and display cases for “strange” objects from around the world. Later, “monsters” became regular features of itinerant circuses before entering the realm of cabarets, fairs, and being seen on the streets in large cities. From Barnum in 1841 to Krao in 1926, “monsters” were exhibits that were presented to the public in various venues, such as in Barnum’s American Museum in New York, or by the showman, Barnum himself. In 1860, a year after the publication of Darwin’s “On the Origin of Species”, Charles Darwin, the “missing link” in the evolution from ape to man, was exhibited in the United States as the “last Aztec children”. In 1860, Krao, a black-skinned “freak” was exhibited as Darwin’s “missing link” in the evolution from ape to man. Around this time (1886), John Merrick, nicknamed the “Elephant Man” (brought to the big screen in 1980 by David Lynch), was exhibited in Great Britain by Sir Frederick Treves. Finally, from 1887 on, a mother and son with the medical condition congenital hypertrichosis were exhibited in Europe as the “hairy family of Burma” and were a popular attraction. Indeed, if today “freaks” are the subject of history, they nevertheless remain an important component of contemporary popular culture, taking on new forms with each passing era, notably via their omnipresence on the internet that serves to confirm.

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I’m not an animal! I am a human being! I am a man!

John Merrick, in the film Elephant Man by David Lynch.
From London in 1851 to San Francisco in 1915

ORGANIZING THE WORLD:
THE ERA OF UNIVERSAL EXHIBITIONS

The very first universal exhibition took place in London in 1851. However, it wasn’t until the Universal Exhibition held in Paris in 1867— and even then, their presence was somewhat discreet—that one could find pavilions in which men and women, wearing traditional clothing, could be found. Having said this, those pavilions enjoyed immediate success and the model was adopted in 1876 at the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, then at the Paris Exhibition of 1878 and the Colonial Exhibition in Amsterdam in 1883, prior to becoming a permanent fixture following the Universal Exhibition in Paris in 1889, itself a symbolic turning point at which one could find a typical street from “Cairo” and six colonial villages.

The 1893 Chicago World’s Columbian Exposition, with its palaces of “Civilization”, George Ferris’s enormous evolving wheel, and ethnological villages that presented various “races” according to their level of “civilization”, were met with the admiration of visitors. Switzerland integrated this approach as early as 1896 with the National Exhibition in Geneva and its “negro village” and “Swiss village”. The Brussels Exhibition in 1897 (following that of Palermo in 1891, Anvers in 1894 and Barcelona in 1896), set up its colonial wing in Tervuren and featured a new development by staging a “Congolese savage.” In Great Britain, the importance of Empire was growing, reaching its apogee at the turn of the century and bolstered by the ambitious stagecrafts of Imre Kiralfy under the aegis of the Greater Britain Exhibition of 1899. A year later, the Paris Exhibition of 1900 introduced a fifty million strong exhibition-going audience to Spahis and Cambodian dancers, whereas the 1904 World’s Fair in St.-Louis, organized entirely around anthropological themes, brought in one thousand two hundred Filipinos and installed them on a vast “Reservation” covering almost fifty acres. Indeed, if the staging of the “savage” lasted all the way up to Great War (1914), in Liège in 1905, Milan in 1906, and Brussels in 1910, Gand in 1913 and lastly San Francisco in 1915, the three decades that ran from 1885 to 1915 were witness to the most significant presence of colonial worlds as essential components of the exhibitions’ decor.

The Anthropology Days at the World’s Fair in St.-Louis (1904)

The Anthropology Days, a four-month event held at the 1904 World’s Fair in St.-Louis, included the three-month-long theme of “peoples of color” prohibited. Inspired anthropologists recruited the indigenous people exhibited in the fair’s ethnic pavilions to participate in their own “Anthropological Games”, offering audiences the opportunity to verify ethnological findings. Thus, the peoples were asked to demonstrate their skills and know-how in an environment that cultivated a climate of curiosity and interest in confirming their “racial inferiority.”

Imre Kiralfy

At the end of the nineteenth century, this talented dancer, choreographer, and impresario from Eastern Europe, teamed up with the famous circus man P. T. Barnum for a series of shows in London. As the person in charge of Britain’s largest international exhibitions between 1899 and 1918, he designed and produced the world’s most elaborate colonial and exotic spectacles, all aimed at promoting the British Empire.
EXHIBITION CONDITIONS: THE FATE OF PARTICIPANTS

Beyond the official statements, distorted images, and untrustworthy interviews, a few accounts given by exhibits have survived. They provide us with insights on the conditions under which they were exhibited, their feelings, and the ways in which they perceived the culture and lifestyle of Europeans. These accounts, as for example those provided by the Indian impresario Maungwudaus, one of the Zulus in the troupe that arrived in London in 1853, the “travel diary” kept by the Eskimo Abraham Ulrikab, or that of the “Hottentot Venus”, or the Filipinos in Spain in 1887, allow us to cast a quite different look on this “spectacle of savagery”. Perspectives varied considerably, such as that of the Eskimo Zacharias who, after completing an American tour in 1893, positioned himself as the “spokesperson” for the exhibited by claiming: “We are happy to have recovered our freedom and to no longer be exhibited as if we were animals.”

The evidence points to harsh and inhuman treatment, such as the presence of enclosures that separated and “protected” visitors (like those found in zoological gardens in Paris and Basel); the use of bodies for scientific studies (such as those conducted in St.-Louis in 1904 or with the Galibi people in 1892 in France); the death of participants (such as the Congolese deaths in Brussels-Tervuren in 1897 or the Filipinos in Spain in 1887); the deplorable living conditions (like those in Chicago in 1893 or those provided to the Eskimos in 1900). Early on, the decision was made to vaccinate participants (a publicity campaign that included postcards announced the vaccination of natives prior to their arrival in new cities), contracts were drawn up, and the colonial authorities increasingly prohibited “savage” recruitment tactics and set up specific organizations charged with overseeing the recruitment of images. Between 1890 and 1900, being a “savage” was professionalized. Participants were henceforth actors who adhered to scripts written by organizers that imposed a standardized view of bodies and of difference in general.

Ota Benga’s story (1904)

Ota Benga, a Pygmy from the former Congo Free State, was taken to the United States in June 1904 at the age of nineteen by the missionary and businessman Samuel Phillips Verner to be exhibited at the 1904 World’s Fair in St.-Louis. In 1906, he was again exhibited in the zoo at the American Museum of Natural History situated in the Bronx, this time in the Monkey House. Later, under the supervision of missionaries, he was forced to take lessons at the local primary school, then worked in a tobacco factory until he committed suicide in 1916.

Ota Benga Height: 4 feet 11 inches. Weight: 105 pounds
Age: 23 years
Exhibited every afternoon during September

The invention of the savage

African Village. Children’s Dances [Anvers, Belgium], postcard, 1930.
The tombs of the seven Congolese who died in Tervuren in 1897 [Belgium], photograph, 1930.
Abyssinian. Prague Exhibition [Austria-Hungary], postcard, 1912.
Zulu Warriors. Princess and Children [United States], photocard, 1888.
A Somali woman and her child in front of visitors at the Jardin d’Acclimatation [Paris, France], photograph by Maurice Bucquet, 1890.

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Photograms series: Young Negroes at Mealtime, from the film Village d’Ashantis by the Lumière Brothers [Lyon, France], 1897; AFRICAN village and Indian Braves, splendid with savage finery, World’s Fair in St.-Louis [United States], 1904; Southern Rhodesia Welcomes the Queen Mother and Princess Margaret. Visit of a native village [today’s Zambia], 1953.
mass production: itinerant ethnic villages

Concurrently with the universal and colonial exhibitions, itinerant “ethnic” and “colonial” villages became increasingly widespread, winning over new audiences in the best part of the Western world, but also in Japan. Carl Hagenbeck, the director of the Hamburg Zoo, developed the prototype in 1874, adapting grand shows to provincial exhibitions and offering new ways of exhibiting “savages”. Hagenbeck recognized very early on the tremendous appeal of these shows and exported his concept and troupes throughout Europe and the United States. Numerous European, American, and Japanese impresarios adopted the model, and their specialized “villages” offered the public the opportunity to “travel” to exotic destinations while observing the “authentic daily lives” of “Sudanese”, “Egyptian”, “Indian”, “Sudanese” or “negro” exhibits. The illusion of a journey coupled with immersion in a strange universe amplified the genuine fascination experienced by the public before the meticulously choreographed spectaculars. Visitors were even able to touch exhibits, and could take home memories of their exchanges in addition to souvenirs (such as postcards produced for the occasion). The Eskimo village presented in Madrid in 1900 soon became the most popular attraction in the capital, while in France, the “negro villages” became uncontrollable stops at provincial exhibitions and the specialty of French impresarios. French and German impresarios emerged as the European leaders of the genre (including Nayo Bruce, who came from what is today Togo, taking on tour to over twenty countries their very own “Dahomeyans”, “Algerian Arabs” and “Egyptian caravans”). These troupes were at times presented as circus tours (by Hagenbeck for example), as part of official exhibitions such as those in Dresden in 1911 or commissioned by colonial powers (as in Lyon in 1894). The sheer number of itinerant villages and the geographic scale of the phenomenon were remarkable, and no matter where they went, in France, Belgium, Italy, Holland, Germany, Switzerland, Great Britain, the Nordic countries, or the United States, they were met with large audiences that numbered in the millions.

Nayo Bruce

Nayo Bruce, of Togo, is an exception in the history of exhibitions. Only a handful of organizers of “human zoos” had been, like him, former exhibits. In 1900, he decided to break his contract with the German impresario Albert Urbach and, with great success, went on to direct the troupe himself in over two hundred and twenty locations (an impressive number at the time) throughout Europe between 1900 and his death in 1919.
COLONIZATION & EXHIBITIONS:
TWO PARALLEL PHENOMENA

The period after 1815 saw the rise of the British Empire (1814-1914), the French conquest of Algeria (1830), the starting point to an analogous history of colonial grandeur (1830-1931), and to a lesser extent the entry of the Belgians, Dutch, Portuguese, Americans (notably in the Philippines), Germans, and later the Japanese into the colonial fray. This newfound expansionist drive came on the heels of the end of Western slavery with the outlawing of the slave trade in Great Britain in 1807 and its definitive abolition in France in 1848, a time when ethnographic exhibitions started to appear. By the time the great colonial empires were delineating territorial boundaries, the phenomenon of “human zoos” had reached its apex. The two were symbiotically linked as the prominence of human exhibits in the most important colonial exhibitions (from 1883 on) or in the colonial pavilions at the universal exhibitions confirmed. These exhibitions provided the colonial powers with the opportunity to showcase the richness of colonized lands while stages in an entertaining manner the fundamental principles of “racial hierarchy”, and simultaneously reinvigorating exhibitions at the service of propaganda and justifying colonialism by highlighting the contrast between the “civilized” visitor and the “savage” exhibit, the native and the colonizer. The British Empire Exhibition in Wembley in 1924-1925 and Glasgow in 1938 and the International Colonial Exhibition in Vincennes in 1931 were the most emblematic of these during the interwar years, emulated by exhibitions in Italy (Naples) and Portugal (Porto) in 1940, and in spite of its having lost its empire after the Great War, in Germany as well with the Deutsche Kolonial in Dresden in 1939. It was in this context that reconstituted colonial villages and exhibitions incorporated into the major international exhibitions participated in colonial domination.

The world’s 200 major exhibitions

“...I repeat that the superior races have a right because they have a duty. They have the duty to civilize the inferior races...”

Jules Ferry (1885)
AN OFFICIAL DRAMATIZATION: THE ERA OF COLONIAL EXHIBITIONS

Colonial pavilions were initially included in universal exhibitions because of their "exotic" quality, but by the end of the nineteenth century specifically colonial exhibitions grew exponentially. In fact, they became a privileged space in which the contrast between the "civilized" and the "savage" could be made evident and the importance of the "civilizing mission" underscored, thereby justifying colonial expansionism. Presages of colonial exhibitions were to be found overseas in the British Empire at the four Intercolonial Exhibitions of Australasia held between 1866 and 1876. The inaugural colonial exhibition in Europe was held in Amsterdam in 1883 (Internationale Koloniale en Uitvoerhandel Tentoonstelling) and included indigenous aliens from South-East Asia and the Caribbean. There would subsequently be three laconic expositions. The first (1883-1889) involved solely Europe with colonial exhibits, but the (London in 1885, Paris in 1888, and then the Colonial Exhibition of 1890 and 1891), but also in Spain in 1897 and Porto in 1898, in addition to the famous industrial exhibition of 1895. Propaganda was pervasive, as in the case of the Berlin exhibition in 1896 on which occasion the "natives" paid homage to the Emperor in certain cases these spectacles were also produced within the empires themselves, such as in Ceylon in 1890 in Paris in 1892-1893. The second wave (1890-1914) was geographically more open and expanded to include national exhibitions such as the Japanese National Industrial Exhibition held in Tokyo in 1906. France, Italy and Great Britain were by now whipping up the number of colonial exhibitions. Madrid in 1896, Paris and London in 1896-1897, Lyon in 1914, London in 1908, 1909 and 1911, Milan in 1909 and the Turin International Exhibition of Industry and Labor in 1911. After the First World War, the third and last major exposition decades 1921-1940 involving the myriad popular exhibitions such as the famous British, Parisian, British, German, Italian and South African.

"Let us not speak of right, of duty... The conquest that you advocate is the pure and simple abuse of power that a scientific civilization imposes on primitive civilizations in order to appropriate man, torture him, extract from him all the strength which is in him for the benefit of the so called civilizer."

Georges Clemenceau’s response to Jules Ferry’s speech before the National Assembly (1885)

From Amsterdam in 1883 to Lyon in 1914

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Publicity poses, exposes, and imposes a new set of values, a lifestyle […].

It goes so far as to suggest how one should live and be…
Bretons and Irish were stigmatized as being more akin to ‘savages’ than to ‘civilized people’. Sandrine Lemaire (2011)
EXHIBITIONS DURING THE INTERWAR YEARS

In the wake of the First World War, the model of the "savage" would evolve towards that of "nation" in the process of being civilized, and the emphasis shifted toward underscoring colonial triumphs, the "benefits" and positive aspects of colonizations, and how the "civilizing mission" was firmly underway. A new model was ushered in, and "ethnographic" exhibitions were once again replaced by the spectacle of modernity and the promise of the future, epitomized by the New York World’s Fair in 1933 that promoted the idea of "building the world of tomorrow". Specifically colonial exhibitions held during the interwar years – such as those in Marseilles (1922), Wembley (1924), Liège and Anvers (1930), Paris (1931) or Chicago (1933), and the "national" Japanese, Italian, and German between 1922 and 1940 – continued to attract sizeable audiences, but the display aesthetic was gradually changing. The "savage" now stepped aside and the "native" took center stage at the service of promoting "colonial humanism" and showcasing the benefits of civilization. The Wembley Exhibition (1924-1925) (twenty seven million visitors) and the International Colonial Exposition in Vincennes (1931) (for which over thirty three million tickets were sold) were clearly the high-points of European imperialism, but the overriding image was of a conquered empire and of pacified populations. In the colonial exhibitions that came later, such as the Universal and International Exhibition in Brussels where the theme was « Peace Through Competition » (1935), the British Empire Exhibition (Glasgow, 1938), the Deutsche Kolonial (Dresden, 1939) or the Mostra d’Oltremare (Naples, 1940), colonized people were presented less contemptuously. In fact, they were relegated to a position of secondary importance when compared to the place granted to artisanal stands, reconstitutions, and demonstrations of the economic might of participating nations. In Dresden, in 1939, the Nazi authorities affirmed the "efficiency of the German model of colonization" and in Naples Mussolini celebrated the "recapture" of a colonial Empire in the tradition of the previous Roman Empire, examples of the increased politicization of the rhetoric. The last "ethnic show" of any significance during the interwar years was the Exhibition of the Portuguese World in 1940. Henceforth, references to the archaic nature of "natives" served to bolster nationalist discourse.

The International Colonial Exposition in Vincennes (1931), Marshal Lyautey, who organized the International Colonial Exposition in Vincennes (1931) barred all displays of "savages" in order to bring attention to the values of "colonial humanism". That same year, following the scandal surrounding the exhibit of "Kanak cannibals" at the Jardin d’Acclimatation in Paris and in Germany, the Minister of the Colonies definitively banned the recruitment of colonial troupes in the French empire. When the Kanak returned to France in September after a tour, the authorities responded quickly to the numerous complaints they received and sent them home. Among these people were several family members of the French soccer player Christian Karembeu.
DENUNCIATIONS OF “HUMAN ZOOS”

During the early years of the nineteenth century, in Europe and the United States, opposition to “human zoos” could be heard and these displays were banned by religious organizations and other groups. For example, the exhibition in 1810 of the “Hottentot Venus” was deemed unacceptable by abolitionists in London, and in 1880 it was by the African Institution (a humanitarian and anti-slavery association) when it called for an end to the “shameful exploitation” and the arrest of its impresario. In 1880, a local Berlin newspaper criticized the exhibition of Eskimos found at the Berlin Zoo. In 1906, Louis-Joseph Barot, the future Mayor of Angers, denounced the ways in which “ethnic shows” served to convey “grotesque caricatures.” In August 1912, in an article in La Grande Revue, Léon Werth evoked the mockery that was being made of these men “disguised as negro clowns.” Participants also complained, and on occasion even rebelled, as was the case when Africans from the “negro village” left the National Exhibition in Geneva in 1896. In 1930, the Martinican intellectual Paulette Nardal was outraged by the exhibition of African women with lip plates at the Jardin d’Acclimatation in Paris. A number of African intellectuals spoke out against this theatricalized presentation of a “falsified Africa” that had become so “dear to onlookers.” In 1931, the French Communist Party joined forces with the Surrealists and staged an “anti-Imperialist exposition” (attended by a mere 5,000 visitors), while others protested the exhibition of Kanaks as “cannibals” at the Jardin d’Acclimatation. In general, objections to these exhibitions were heard throughout Europe, in Japan and the United States, with the notable exception of Switzerland where the model of the “ethnic village” continued to be displayed.

Switzerland, a long tradition

Even though ethnographic shows were gradually disappearing from the European landscape, they carried on in Switzerland for almost three decades. Whether at the Grand Théâtre central in Neuchâtel, the Jardin Zoologique in Basel, or in towns and villages (Lausanne, Geneva, Zurich, La Chaux-de-Fonds…), these shows traveled the country extensively, drawing passionate crowds until the end of the 1960s.
THE DEMISE OF “HUMAN ZOOS”

The gradual disappearance of colonial and ethnic spectacles in Europe, Japan, and the United States occurred throughout the course of the 1930s. Three reasons explain the speed with which this transformation took place. The loss of public interest, despite a greater emphasis on the notion of alterity and the shows’ increasingly spectacular displays; the colonial powers’ desire to present the process of colonization as being firmly underway by excluding the “savage” de facto from representations of colonial triumph; and the development of new media supports such as the cinema which captivated the public’s imagination in novel ways. Other factors might help explain this transformation, such as the increased familiarity people had with outsiders as the result of the presence in Europe of almost one million foreign combatants during the Great War and the influx of non-European migrants. The very last of these manifestations was held at Expo 58: The Brussels World’s Fair in 1958 on the eve of political independence. However, criticism was such that the organizers were compelled to close the Congolese village. The “human zoo” was finally extinct, ushered in almost one hundred and fifty years earlier by the tragic and singular fate of the “Hottentot Venus.”

From 1930 on

The invention of the savage
what are the vestiges today of human exhibitions? In spite of the sheer scale of the phenomenon in terms of attendance rates and the millions of images produced, the subject had not received the critical attention it deserves. The work undertaken by various artists and the restitution of the remains of exhibits have made it possible to redress some of these omissions. Thanks to the initiative of historians, novelists such as Didier Daeninckx’s Cannibales or Rachel Holmes’ The Hottentot Venus. The life and death of Saartjie Baartman, the most recent development was the exhibition of Animal Man. The exhibitions undertaken by the Quai Branly Foundation have marked the first time that such a vast number of people have been engaged in the study of "human zoos". The performances of Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña come to mind, who in 1993, for example, the work of Kara Walker that has explored stereotypes about the black body. Similarly, French artist Orlan drew inspiration from George Catlin’s portraits of Native Americans for a series of photographic portraits she completed in 2005. And finally, a series of "happenings", notably in zoos, have served to denounce the long history of exhibitions and their contemporary incarnations, such as for example with the Bamboula Village in 1994, where the Saint-Michel biscuit company worked with the management of a wildlife park in Port-Saint-Père near the city of Nantes to reconstitute an “authentic African village”, the “African village” at Augsburg Zoo in Germany in 2005, or the Baka Pygmies exhibited in the Rainforest natural park in Yvoir (Belgium) in 2002.

The restitution of the remains of exhibits and appeasing the past
For over a decade now, the bodies or human remains of persons exhibited have been restituted, making it possible to talk about the foundation of shared histories and memories. The quest for these bodies – at various exhibition sites (the Congolese who were exhibited and died in Tervuren in 1897 or in Switzerland from where Fuegians were returned to Chile in 2010), in Western museums (the “Hottentot Venus” returned to South Africa in 2002 or the taxidermied body of the “Negro of Banyoles” returned to Botswana in 2000) – constitute an archeology of memory from which we can begin to trace a longer history without heroes.

From the Elephant Man in 1980 to the return of the Fuegians in 2010

Heritage and Memory

The invention of the savage

In the United States and Europe as well, the police track down stereotypes, victims of racial profiling. Every non-white suspect serves to confirm the rule, inscribed as it is with invisible ink deep in the recesses of collective consciousness: crime is either black, or brown, or at the very least yellow.

Edouard Galatzo (2005)

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In the United States and Europe as well, the police track down stereotypes, victims of racial profiling. Every non-white suspect serves to confirm the rule, inscribed as it is with invisible ink deep in the recesses of collective consciousness: crime is either black, or brown, or at the very least yellow.

Edouard Galatzo (2005)
Our societies must integrate the simple idea that the color of one's skin or the sex of a person does not in any way determine their intelligence, the language they speak, the religion they practice, their physical capacities, or what they love or hate.

Lilian Thuram (2008)