

## WORLD EXHIBITIONS: A GATEWAY TO NON-EUROPEAN CULTURES?

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The organisation of international exhibitions is a striking phenomenon of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century that lasted until the late 1930s and, in a different form, until today. These exhibitions were the heirs of the national exhibitions of industrial products that appeared in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century in France and Britain, becoming international for the first time in London in 1851 and universal in Paris in 1855, when they expanded their program, beyond the products of agriculture, commerce and industry, as before, to intellectual presentations and particularly the fine arts.

To accommodate these and the thousands of exhibitors and millions of visitors<sup>1</sup>, coming from all countries, it was necessary to develop large, imposing buildings and magnificent palaces, pavilions and galleries<sup>2</sup>. It was necessary also to modernise the host city, for example, by developing new means of transportation such as the Metropolitan in Paris to convey the public to the exhibition. Their impact on cities was great: they helped to change their appearance and to develop them. This was particularly the case in Paris, which hosted five world fairs in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and two more before the Second World War, and whose urban history is closely linked to exhibitions; but many were the cities whose development had something to do with one or several exhibitions (such as Barcelona, for example).

The primary function of exhibitions was to emphasise trade and industry. The abundant photographs of the World Exhibitions show incredible

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1 The World Expo 1867 in Paris drew 11 to 15 million visitors, 1889, 32 million, and 1900, almost 51 million.

2 On the architectural aspect see, among others: MATHIEU, Caroline (2007) *Les Expositions universelles à Paris: architectures réelles ou utopiques*, Paris-Milan, Musée d'Orsay-5 Continents ; CHALET-BAILHACHE, Isabelle (dir.) (2008) *Paris et ses expositions universelles: architectures, 1855-1937*, Paris, Éditions du Patrimoine.

accumulations of goods and entanglements of machines, often presented in motion<sup>3</sup>. Their role in the mediation of technological innovation and transfers was also made clear. The exhibitions “launched” new products; in the prestigious Palace of Industry or Machinery galleries, in a grandiose setting, new products were revealed for all to see. This was also where they could be observed and copied<sup>4</sup>.

But the exhibitions were not only confined to this role. In an era of globalisation, including of the economy, they played an important role in intellectual and especially in cultural and artistic exchanges between countries and even continents. Naturally placed under the sign of cosmopolitanism by the diversity of the participating nations, they opened the distant horizon to the curiosity of visitors. If the obligation to return led to a multiplicity of attractions drawing a large audience -and what could be more attractive than the exotic?-, the exhibitions were beautiful “dream machines” contributing to turn the Western gaze to the worlds beyond Europe<sup>5</sup>.

3 One can get an idea of the goods and machines from the many photographs kept at the National Archives, and especially those of the Paris World Exhibition of 1867, now available on the website of this institution. On the photographic heritage at the National Archives (Paris), see: DEMEULENAERE-DOUYÈRE, Christiane (2007) “Images d’expositions: la photographie et l’innovation technique dans les fonds des expositions des Archives nationales”. In: CORCY, M.-S.; DEMEULENAERE-DOUYÈRE, C.; HILAIRE-PÉREZ, L. (dir.) *Les archives de l’invention. Écrits, objets et images de l’activité inventive*, Toulouse, CNRS-Université de Toulouse Le Mirail, 585-594 ; DEMEULENAERE-DOUYÈRE, Christiane (2009) “Les expositions universelles sous l’objectif. La photographie dans les fonds des expositions aux Archives nationales (Paris)”. In: MATOS, Ana Cardoso de; GOUZÉVITCH, Irina; LOURENÇO, Marta C. (dir.) *Expositions universelles, musées techniques et société industrielle / World Exhibitions, Technical Museums and Industrial Society*, Lisboa, Edições Colibri/CIDEHUS-UE/CIUHCT, 165-178.

4 Particularly about technical mediation, CARRÉ, Anne-Laure; CORCY, Marie-Sophie; DEMEULENAERE-DOUYÈRE, Christiane; PÉREZ, Liliane (dir.) (2012) *Les expositions universelles à Paris au XIXe siècle. Techniques. Publics. Patrimoines*, international conference held in June 2010 in Paris, Paris, CNRS Édition.

5 We will focus our paper on World Exhibitions held in Paris between 1867 and 1900, and the colonial exhibitions of Marseille (1906 and 1922) and Paris (1931). This article is based on the preparatory work for the exhibition presented in National Archives (Paris), March 31 to June 28, 2010, in which I was scientific Commissioner, DEMEULENAERE-DOUYÈRE, Christiane (2010) *Exotiques expositions... Les expositions universelles et les cultures extra-européennes. France, 1855-1937*, livret de notices, Paris, Archives nationales; DEMEULENAERE-DOUYÈRE, Christiane (dir.) (2010) *Exotiques expositions... Les expositions universelles et les cultures extra-européennes. France, 1855-1937*, Paris, Somogy / Archives nationales.

## 1.- To meet the loving public's expectations of the East.

We know of the importance of Orientalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>6</sup>, from the beginning of the century, with Bonaparte's Egyptian expedition (1798) and the Greek insurrection in 1821, and then under the Second Empire, with the Crimean War and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. The East, near or far, was the focus of the news and the subject of the moment.

Travel literature was undergoing a veritable explosion. Many writers (Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Flaubert and Du Camp, Nerval, Gautier, Stendhal, and others...) told of their "journeys" into the "East", an imprecise East, ranging from North Africa to the Middle East, including Moorish Spain, and then expanding to the Far East. A general taste for distant countries was cultivated by many travel books, novels of adventure and exploration, colonial novels, guides, road maps, sketches and travel photographs, etc., while the illustrated papers for consumption by the general public or young people also broadcast images of the exotic elsewhere far and wide.

In Europe, the taste for the East extended to the fine arts. In the artistic "Salons" such as in the World Exhibitions, the public could see works like *Arab Ride*, *Almée*, *Tunisian Fantasia*, *Moorish Woman on the Terrace*, *Eastern Musicians...*, all suggestive of the "Eastern enchantment" dear to Victor Hugo. Architecture was no exception and in the 1830s there arose in Paris and provincial cities many Alhambras, "Moorish casinos", "Chinese baths" and "Algerian villas"<sup>7</sup>.

From 1867, World Exhibitions were part of a logic of economic efficiency, and exploited the public's taste for Orientalism by offering attractions providing a financial success. The World Expo 1867 in Paris<sup>8</sup>, which was innova-

6 PELTRE, Christine (2008) *Dictionnaire culturel de l'Orientalisme*, Paris, Hazan.

7 DUMONT, Marie-Jeanne; HAMMADI, Rodolphe (1988) *Paris-Arabesques, Architectures et décors arabes et orientalisants à Paris*, Paris, E. Koehler-Institut du monde arabe-Caisse nationale des monuments historiques.

8 For a general description of World Expo 1867, KAEMPFEN (rééd. 1983) "Promenade à l'exposition". In: *Paris-Guide par les principaux écrivains et artistes de France*, Paris, La Découverte / Maspero, 221-244, and DUCUING, F. (1867) *L'Exposition universelle de 1867 illustrée*, Paris. For further analysis, we refer to the thesis of VASSEUR, Édouard (2005) *L'Exposition universelle de 1867 à Paris. Aperçu d'un phénomène de mode sous le Second Empire*, Paris, Université de Paris IV-Sorbonne (unpublished), and other papers presented by this author, especially "Pourquoi organiser des Expositions universelles ? Le 'succès' de l'Exposition universelle de 1867", *Histoire, économie et société*, époques moderne et contemporaine, 4, 573-594. On this matter see also the book of BARTH, Volker (2007) *Mensch vs. Welt. Die Pariser Weltausstellung*

tive compared to the Exhibition of 1855 in giving a prominent place to the architecture of foreign nations, thus displayed its openness to the outside world and particularly to the East, inaugurating the tradition of picturesque “national pavilions”, which would have a considerable success in the subsequent exhibitions.

Each country was invited to build examples of its main architectural types in the Park of Nations on the Champ de Mars around the elliptical Palace. Exhibitors from Holland, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Russia, Italy and other countries built reconstructions of houses, palaces and even workshops (such as the “diamond cutting of M. Decoster”, Holland), presented as typical of their national architecture. Sometimes these were at excessive costs, such as the unusual prefabricated Moorish kiosk of Carl von Diebitsch exhibited by Prussia<sup>9</sup> and the reconstruction of part of the Roman catacombs (evoking the “time of the First Christians”) of the Papal States...

Not far away, the “Oriental” representations were particularly noteworthy and much appreciated by the public. In particular, could be found the Ottoman Empire and its vassals, Tunisia and Egypt, which saw a diplomatic opportunity to claim a national identity and a certain *de facto* independence from their overlord.

The Egyptian Park especially attracted visitors with its impressive “Temple of Hathor” and its sumptuous *selamlek* and *caravanseraï*<sup>10</sup>. Under the direction of the Egyptologist Auguste Mariette, it was a lesson in Egyptian archaeology revealed to the public.

The temple, known interchangeably as the Temple of Hathor or Philae or Edfu, borrowed architectural elements from authentic ancient monuments. Its facade, of large dimensions (18 meters wide and 9 meters high), had a cornice and entablature each decorated in the middle with a winged disk flanked by two uraeus cobras female symbolising the eye of the god Ra. The temple was surrounded by twenty-two columns whose capitals were modelled on four different types, and the approach was along a broad avenue lined with sphinxes cast on an original held in the Musée du Louvre in Paris (Fig. 1).

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von 1867, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.

9 After the Exhibition, it was bought by King Ludwig II and reassembled in Linderhof Park (Germany).

10 MARIETTE, Auguste (1867) *Description du Parc égyptien de l'Exposition universelle de 1867*, Paris, Dentu.



Fig. 1. World Exhibition 1867, in Paris. *Album du Parc*, Athor Temple. Photograph by Pierre Petit. (Arch. nat., F/12/11872/2. Cliché Service photographique des Archives nationales).

This temple was also a museum in which Mariette displayed the archaeological treasures from the Bulaq Museum recently founded by the Egyptian Antiquities Service, of which he was director. Among the treasures exhibited to the public were Queen Aahhotep's jewels, discovered in 1859. Of all the Egyptian buildings, the temple was the one that made the deepest impression on the visitors.

In Islamic architectural tradition, the *selamlek* is a pavilion for receiving visitors in the homes of the rich people, usually placed outside the house in the garden. The one in the Egyptian Park was remarkable for the variety of its decoration and its many colours. The luxury and comfort of its indoor facilities reflected the richness of its sponsor, the Egyptian Viceroy, and it served here as his *pied-à-terre* when he came to the Paris Exhibition and received his official guests lavishly.

The caravanserai (or *okel*) was "a corner of the East captured on the spot"<sup>11</sup> whose architecture offered a remarkable blend of wood, stone and brick. It was built with a view to be a real architectural model of the caravanserais of Upper Egypt, complete with inns, bazaars and shops, but it nevertheless borrowed decorative elements from civil and religious buildings in Cairo.

11 "L'Orient à l'exposition universelle", *L'Illustration*, 27 juillet 1867.

Around an open courtyard were arranged shops and stalls, where the public could enter and see at work jewellers, rug-weavers, lace-makers, embroiders, saddlers, manufacturers of pipes for *chibouques*, with their tools all around, and even a very successful barber. The *okel* also housed a public cafe, furnished with divans and mats, where “six Arab servants dark in complexion, dressed in black robes embroidered with gold, with turbans of fine wool damask, shod in slippers”, offered free coffee and hookah<sup>12</sup>. The first floor opened to few visitors a room in which an anthropological collection of nearly five hundred heads of mummies was arranged by dynasty and locality, together with some complete mummies in their sarcophagus.

Tunisia also, with the reconstruction of the Bardo Palace, belonging to the Bey of Tunis, was a sensation, not only because of the great fantasia staged there on the inauguration night<sup>13</sup>.

Other buildings, like the pavilion of the Universal Company of the Suez Canal, offered less archaeological authenticity, but all played on the taste for Orientalism. Even Japan and China were present in the Park of Nations, alongside Romania, which had just escaped from Ottoman rule, and Mexico was represented in the form of an Aztec temple, built as a private initiative!

## 2.- The rise of the colonial world.

The colonies were a strong presence in the first exhibitions, whether the French colonies or those of other European powers. And the Caribbean colonies were represented in the national exhibitions of industrial products from 1839, as was Algeria regularly from 1849. But, from the 1880s, and especially from the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, they occupied a growing space in the exhibitions<sup>14</sup>. This was especially because the period of the

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12 “Six domestiques arabes au teint basané, vêtus de robes noires brodées d’or, coiffés de turbans de fine laine damassée, chaussés de babouches”, *ibid*.

13 WEILAND, Isabelle (2010) “Entre Tunisie fantasmée et Tunisie réelle: la présence tunisienne dans les expositions universelles. Paris, 1855-1900”. In: DEMEULENAERE-DOUYÈRE (dir.), 36-47; BACHA, Myriam (2005) “Le Palais du Bardo”. In: Bacha, Myriam (dir.) *Les Expositions universelles à Paris de 1855 à 1937*, Paris, Action artistique de la Ville de Paris, 87-91.

14 LEPRUN, Sylviane (1986) *Le théâtre des colonies. Scénographie, acteurs et discours de l’imaginaire dans les expositions 1855-1937*, Paris, L’Harmattan; DEMEULENAERE-DOUYÈRE, Christiane (2006) “Avant les expositions coloniales. Les colonies dans les expositions industrielles et universelles du XIXe siècle”. In: ARCHIVES MUNICIPALES DE LA VILLE DE MARSEILLE *Désirs d’ailleurs. Les expositions coloniales de Marseille 1906 et*

major exhibitions coincided with a considerable colonial “surge”: between 1867 and 1914, the French empire increased from 1 million km<sup>2</sup> and 5 million inhabitants to 11 million km<sup>2</sup> and 50 million inhabitants. The area available to the colonies and the number of exhibitors welcomed were constantly growing.

The late 19<sup>th</sup> century would see a multiplication of exhibitions devoted to particular colonies: Amsterdam in 1883, the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London in 1886, Lyon in 1894, Rouen in 1896, Tervuren (Belgium) in 1897, and so on. The exhibitions that were officially entitled “colonial” and took place particularly in Marseille (1906 and 1922), Strasbourg (1924) and Paris (1931) would be the culmination of this movement.

These remote territories were often presented in a flattering way that bore little relation to the local reality. Indeed the exhibition conveyed governmental propaganda for a political settlement with a French people suspicious of distant and expensive business. It allowed them to discover not only the material wealth of the colonies, with their ore, timber, livestock, wool..., but also their inhabitants.

In 1889, for the first time, the colonies had a budget and an independent commissioner in the exhibition. On the Esplanade des Invalides, around the large Palace of the French Colonies, in a variety of stands, stalls and chalets there were private companies: nearly 3.000 colonial exhibitors, twice as many as in 1878. For their pleasure, visitors could choose between the Annamite theatre and the Creole restaurant or the Bambara coffee-house, because the exhibitions were also invitations to other attractions, including exotic gastronomy.

In addition, the World Exhibition of 1889 hosted ethnic fashion shows, popular in Europe since the mid-1870s, presenting for the first time several reconstructions of “indigenous villages”. The Palace of the Colonies was surrounded by small colonial villages, Pahouin, Kanak, Senegalese, Alfourou, Cochin, attractions that were reproduced again in the subsequent exhibitions to the delight of the public (Fig. 2).

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1922, Marseille, Éditions Alors Hors du Temps, 23-31.





Fig. 2. Colonial Exhibition 1931, in Paris. Dr Stephen Chauvet, *Musique et chants des nègres* (Arch. nat., 403/AP/26. Cliché Service photographique des Archives nationales).

These native villages were actually artificial decorations, intended to reproduce the normal living environment of local people. Under the visitors' eyes, in the midst of exotic animals, extras came to Paris to animate these "indigenous villages", portraying their daily life, showing crafts, performing songs and dances, and recreating traditional activities, or so, at least the visitors imagined.

*"We were all three sitting on the edge of a Dahomean river on seats kindly lent by MM. Allez brothers. It was cold. A canoe was afloat on the greenish water, motionless and without reflection... And I tried to recall the bloody mysteries of the bush, the rough paths strewn with thorns where the Amazons run barefoot, [...] the red plains, the pink mud houses, palaces and temples with their flat roofs, paved with human skulls ... But it was difficult"*<sup>15</sup>.

15 "Nous étions tous les trois assis au bord d'une rivière dahoméenne sur des sièges obligeamment prêtés par MM. Allez frères. Il faisait froid. Une pirogue reposait sur l'eau verdâtre, immobile et sans reflets... Et je tâchais d'évoquer les sanglants mystères de la brousse, les rudes chemins semés d'épines où les amazones courent pieds nus, [...] les plaines toute rouges, les maisons de boue rose, les palais et les temples avec leurs toits plats, pavés de crânes humains... Mais c'était difficile", MIRBEAU, Octave (1900) "Espoirs nègres", *Le Journal*, 20 mai.



### 3.- Ethnological dizziness.

Chronologically, the World Exhibitions coincided with the time of the official recognition of anthropology and ethnology as scientific disciplines. They even played an important role in popularising them, by welcoming explorers back from their missions and providing a showcase for the exotic objects and photographs they brought back. Such was the success of these travellers with the public that they were soon joined by collectors and dealers in “curiosities”<sup>16</sup>. The creation of the Ethnographic Museum of the Trocadéro was closely linked to the Exhibition of 1878<sup>17</sup>.

The exhibitions also offered visitors a consumer version of these sciences, a kind of “ethnology of the poor”, such as entertaining attractions, such as the Annamite rickshaw pullers, functional and recurring from 1889 to 1931, or the Cairo Street at the World Exhibition of 1889.

The Cairo Street was an initiative of Baron Delort of Gléon (1843-1899), “representative of the French nation in Cairo”, and collector of Islamic art<sup>18</sup>. It was the reconstruction of an old quarter with its picturesque architecture, shops and especially its popular animation. Rather than a scrupulously accurate reconstruction, it was an evocation performed using architectural elements recovered from destroyed buildings in old Cairo. Its developer wrote: “I am making every effort to invent as little as possible and stay in the interpretation of absolute sincerity”<sup>19</sup>.

Located near the Galerie des Machines and contrasting with its modernity, the Cairo Street, covering 1,000 m<sup>2</sup>, included three gates, two mosques, a Sabil-Kuttab (a school-fountain, kiosk feature of Cairo) which served as police station, shops, houses and cafes, all dominated by a minaret modelled on the Qaytbay mosque.

In Cairo Street, this nightly shows enjoyed great popularity. People flocked

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16 CHARPY, Manuel (2012) “Les ‘techniques archaïques’: produits d’un autre temps et produits artisanaux dans les expositions universelles”. In: CARRÉ; CORCY; DEMEULENAERE-DOUYÈRE; PÉREZ (dir.).

17 DIAS, Nélia (1991) *Le Musée d’ethnographie du Trocadéro (1878-1908). Anthropologie et muséologie en France*, Paris, Éditions du CNRS.

18 His collection, given by his widow to the Musée du Louvre, would form the core of the Islamic arts department.

19 “Je fais tous mes efforts pour inventer le moins possible et rester dans l’interprétation d’une sincérité absolue”, DELORT DE GLÉON, Alphonse (1889) *L’architecture arabe des khalifes d’Égypte à l’Exposition universelle de Paris en 1889: la rue du Caire*, Paris, Plon, Nourrit et Cie.

there to enjoy drinking fig alcohol and listening to guzla and tarbouka music in the Moorish cafe, and contemplating the suggestive rippling movements of the beautiful Tunisian Fathma (Fig. 3). Then the charm became cloying:

*“And here we are on the Cairo street, on which, at night, converges all the libertine curiosity of Paris; in this Cairo street with obscene donkey-drivers, great Africans, with their lascivious attitudes, [...] this population in heat that reminds you of cats pissing on the embers - the Cairo street, a street you might call the Street of the Rut”<sup>20</sup>.*



Fig. 3. World Exhibition 1889, in Paris. Georges Coutan, La rue du Caire, “Concert égyptien, c’est ici la vraie, l’unique danse du ventre!”. [The Cairo Street, “Egyptian concert, this is the true and only belly dancing! “], *L’Exposition pour rire. Revue comique*, [1889] (Coll. part. Cliché de l’auteur).

The spectacle of the Cairo Street extended to the “Negro villages” and other ethnic shows that would therefore multiply through exhibitions and outside<sup>21</sup>. In most cases, the respect for reality was less than for the financial

20 “Et nous voilà dans la rue du Caire, où, le soir, converge toute la curiosité libertine de Paris, dans cette rue du Caire aux âniers obscènes, aux grands Africains, dans des attitudes lascives, [...] à cette population en chaleur qui vous rappelle des chats pissant sur de la braise – la rue du Caire, une rue qu’on pourrait appeler la rue du Rut”, GONCOURT, Edmond; Goncourt Jules de (rééd. 1989) *Journal. Mémoires de la vie littéraire, III 1887-1896*, éd. par Robert Ricatte, Paris, R. Laffont, 12 juillet 1889.

21 In 1874, the German Carl Hagenbeck (1844-1913), retailer of wild animals and circus director, “invented” the “exotic villages” where reconstituted native extras played themselves. The formula met throughout Europe an immediate success and we may estimate 30 000 the

benefits promised by success. Flattering the prejudices and fantasies of visitors looking for thrills, these exhibitions were confined to a doubtful picturesque, of the genre “scenes and types” which would spread in photographic production.

By making available, more often to be curious or entertaining, the most recent archaeological findings, the exhibition also brought within the reach of the general public a knowledge of cultures hitherto reserved for specialist scholars, as was the case with the ancient civilisations of Latin America<sup>22</sup>.

In 1867, pre-Columbian antiquity was present on the *Champ de Mars* with a curious re-creation of an Aztec temple, the Xochicalco Pyramid. This was due to the personal initiative of a member of the Scientific Commission of Mexico, Leon Méhédin, archaeologist and photographer. This reconstruction of the Xochicalco Pyramid was based on his own excavations and casts he made during his stay in Mexico. But, if the project had some archaeological authenticity, it was also realised from a business perspective, as its sponsor received a fee to recoup its costs (Fig. 4).

*“In the vicinity of the temple, we see a monolith of the utmost importance, reproduced in plaster moulds made from the site and this is the great zodiac of Tenotchtitlan [...]. A statue of a Mexican woman, ably rendered by Mr. Soldi, places before the visitor a picture of those distant times. She is lying beside a fountain, dreaming of her child sleeping in an air cradle. Next to the antic woman are men of modern Mexico who guard the museum in their bright national costumes, with sarapes on their shoulder and guilloche pants, open at the bottom”<sup>23</sup>.*

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number of indigenous exhibited between 1874 and 1934. In Paris, the *Jardin d’Acclimatation* had a speciality of these ethnic performances; BLANCHARD, Pascal *et al.* (dir.) (2000, 2011) *Zoos humains et exhibitions coloniales. 150 ans d’invention de l’Autre*, Paris, La Découverte; BLANCHARD, Pascal; BOËTSCH, Gilles ; JACOMIEN SNOEP, Nanette (dir.) (2011) *Exhibitions. L’invention du sauvage*, Paris, musée du quai Branly-Actes Sud.

22 DEMEULENAERE-DOUYÈRE, Christiane (2009) “Le Mexique s’expose à Paris: Xochicalco, Léon Méhédin et l’exposition universelle de 1867”, *HISTOIRE(S) de l’Amérique latine*, 3, 1-16 ([www.hisal.org](http://www.hisal.org)); id. (in press) “Entre archéologie savante et divertissement populaire: la représentation du Mexique dans les expositions universelles (1867-1889)”.

23 “Aux abords du temple, on voit un monolithe de la plus haute importance, reproduit en plâtre d’après les moules faits sur place; c’est le grand zodiaque de Tenotchtitlan [...]. Une statue de femme mexicaine, habilement rendue par M. Soldi, met sous les yeux du visiteur un tableau de ces temps éloignés. Elle est couchée au bord d’une fontaine, rêvant à son enfant endormi dans un berceau aérien. À côté de la femme antique sont les hommes du Mexique moderne qui gardent le musée dans leur brillant costume national, zarapé sur l’épaule et pantalon guilloché, ouvert par le bas”, DUCUING (1867).



Fig. 4. World Exhibition 1867, in Paris. *Album du Parc*, Xochicalco Pyramid. Photograph by Pierre Petit. (Arch. nat., F/12/11872/2. Cliché Service photographique des Archives nationales).

The reconstructed Xochicalco monument, which also hosted an inn served by «Mexicans» in national costume, was decorated not with murals, but with panels of painted canvas, stretched over plaster casts; they did not reproduce authentic murals, but a reconstruction from elements identified by Méhédin in codices and then arranged according to his fancy.

We can be certain in fact that the exhibition did not fit into the architectural or ethnographical absolute authenticity. Not at all... To attract the public, it was located in the spectacular. The exhibition was a place of directing, of illusion, and of the pretence that often serves to meet and even exceed the real or imagined expectations of visitors. Visitors who were passionate about foreign places, found great pleasure in it, which was a key to the success of the exhibition. The attractions offered in 1867 won their public and would be multiplied time and again in the subsequent exhibitions, which sought to offer, each time, ever more unusual and more sensational spectacles.

In the later exhibitions, the public would have new opportunities to explore pre-Columbian architecture. In 1878, they could discover the “Inca” façade commissioned by Peru from the French architect Alfred Vaudoyer (1846-1917) and located in the Rue des Nations. Despite its concern for authenticity, probably influenced by the results of the archaeological mission of Charles Wiener which had just ended, it did not please all the members

of Peruvian society in Paris, who were eager to present a more current and dynamic picture of their country.

At the World Exhibition of 1889, there was a “Mexican Temple”, an imposing palace of 70 meters by 30, which was a replica of a large Aztec *teocalli*, decorated on its front and sides with sculptures personifying Mexican heroes and the main Aztec gods<sup>24</sup>. Designed by a Mexican engineer, Antonio Anza (1847-1925), and a scholar close to the Mexican government, Antonio Peñafiel (1839-1922), this building primarily reflected Mexico’s concern at the time to draw together a unifying national identity from out of its pre-Hispanic past. Despite its monumental and spectacular aspects, the “Mexican Temple” was met with only polite indifference from the public.

#### 4.- Japonisme and Javanese dancers.

Exhibitions can nevertheless be cultural exchanges that will leave their mark on the Western world, and certainly the artistic dialogue then established was extremely rich. They contributed, for example, to the rediscovery of Islamic Art<sup>25</sup> and to the success of Japonisme<sup>26</sup> in the West.

A number of distant countries were opening to the world in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, including Siam (Thailand), China, Japan or Korea, and they went to international exhibitions in order to seek economic partners and promote their products. They also learned about their own cultures. The strangeness of the architecture, the formal beauty of the prints, the porcelain objects and ceramics, the exotic charm of the tea ceremony, the grace of the dancers were all part of an exoticism that generated a real fascination for the Far East which soon permeated the arts and had a lasting influence. Japonisme coming to Europe through the door of World Exhibitions is a striking example.

As well as architectures, like the famous Angkor Temple that was reconstituted with increasing precision at repeated exhibitions until it was the highlight of the Colonial Expo of 1931 (Fig. 5), the traditions and customs of the Eastern populations excited curiosity. For example, the exhibitions gave

24 TENORIO-TRILLO, Mauricio (1996) *Mexico at the World's Fairs. Crafting a modern nation*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London, University of California Press, 64 passim.

25 PELTRE, Christine (2006) *Les arts de l'Islam. Itinéraire d'une redécouverte*, Paris, Gallimard (Coll. Découvertes).

26 *Le Japonisme* (1988), Paris, Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux.

the European public the opportunity to learn about music and exotic dances. By hearing these strange sounds to which Western ears were not still accustomed, they encouraged research in ethnomusicology and stimulated awareness of the interest and value of non-European music.



Fig. 5. Colonial Expo 1931, in Paris. Angkor Temple, in *L'Exposition coloniale de Paris*, Paris, 1931, pl. 9. Photograph by Chevojon. (Coll. part. Cliché Service photographique des Archives nationales).

Particularly the dancers, Javanese in 1889, or Cambodian a few years later, in 1905, at the Colonial Exhibition in Marseille, were highly successful (Fig. 6). Their undulating movements, the grace of their gestures, their aesthetic art seduced a public stirred by the mystery, real or supposed, of their “sacred” dances. We know of Rodin’s fascination with the petite Cambodian dancers, whom he followed to Marseille to make hundreds of sketches of them<sup>27</sup>; we know also of the great success of the “Eastern” dances of Cleo de Mérode or Mata Hari...

27 VILAIN, Jacques; HERPIN, Hugues; DELCLAUX, Marie-Pierre (2006) *Rodin et les danseuses cambodgiennes, sa dernière passion*, Paris, Éditions du musée Rodin.



Fig. 6. Colonial Expo 1922, in Marseille. “Trasos, costume du ‘Roi des Géants’”, August 1922. Photograph by F. Detaille. (ANOM, Aix-en-Provence, FR ANOM 3Fi 2061 et 2047. Cliché Service photographique ANOM).

By decorating the cityscapes with minarets and domes, Algerian palaces and pagodas, “Negro villages” and kampongs<sup>28</sup>, the World Exhibitions allowed their visitors, mostly Western, to become familiar with exotic architectures. By animating these buildings with artisans, dancers, Janissaries and rickshaw pullers, they brought them into contact with different peoples and cultures. As highlighted in a recent exhibition<sup>29</sup>, World’s Fairs and their heirs, amusement parks, created the recipes for one architecture of spectacle and entertainment, which were gradually applied to urban development. They were fully included in the “sensationalism” of the city.

With their openness to the world too, together with the cosmopolitanism of their participants and the variety of “national pavilions” presented, they participated in globalisation already at work and helped pave the visitors’ curiosity to exotic worlds. This opening up, although led by the need for revenue and attracting a large audience, was highlighted in line with public

28 Traditional village of Javanese dancers reconstituted on Esplanade des Invalides at the World Exhibition of 1889.

29 *Dreamlands. Des parcs d’attractions aux cités du futur*, exhibition at Centre Pompidou (Paris), 2010.



expectations. Soon the exhibitions claimed a geographical “universality”<sup>30</sup>, with slogans like the famous “Around the world in one day” in 1931<sup>31</sup>.

But showing architectures and populations, beyond a picturesque and anecdotal discovery that was often reduced to its most playful, was it enough for there to be real opening up? In an era that questioned the “nature” of man and his origins and when some sought to establish the principle of hierarchy of races<sup>32</sup>, rather we see in the world exhibitions two worlds looking at each other face to face, the “wild” and the “civilised”. These worlds did meet, -yet we should like to know better the impressions of the “exhibited” on their Western visitors-, but did they have real opportunities to speak to each other? The exhibitions were certainly a melting pot of cultures, but not the place where cultures were in reality mixed.

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30 We should recall that the universality of the World Exhibition refers to the opening of its program for intellectual productions. His openness to the world is reflected in the term “international exhibition”, which explains that exhibition can be both “universal” and “international”.

31 “Exposition coloniale internationale de Paris, 1931. Le tour du monde en un jour”, illustrated and coloured poster by Victor Jean Desmeures, Paris (Archives nationales d’outre-mer, FR ANOM 9Fi 62).

32 Arthur de Gobineau, Gustave Le Bon and Georges Vacher de Lapouge, for example, established the principle of hierarchy between “primitive races” and “civilized races”.