TRANSLATIONS* OF GUEST BOOK ENTRIES
AND
COMMENTS ON COMMENTS

2009 CHICAGO

* an informal, collaborative effort among artists, students, their families, teachers, and neighbors.
I visited the Quai Branly Museum because I had read about the controversies around it. Examining the museum for myself, I was soon overwhelmed by claustrophobia, getting lost in the dark, labyrinthian interior of long ramps, narrow corridors and miniscule side rooms, all determined by paper maché walls reminiscent of MacDonalds playground architecture. Then, on the top floor, I came across the guest book. Surprised by the preponderance of positive comments, I photographed its pages, for further study at home.

Adelheid

On the previous day, I was thrilled by the brazen way in which the Gare d’Orsay had been transformed into a museum.

My husband I had a great time visiting this museum, particularly we are also to notice sample we particularly appreciate the sculptures and some artifacts from the Philippines which I’m in the original.
Palimpsest

A manuscript, typically of papyrus or parchment, that has been written on more than once, with the earlier writing incompletely erased and often legible.


The variation and mixtures of cultures offers something new.
Co-existence and acceptance of others is something beautiful (here meaning ‘admirable’).
No matter how varied religions or cultures may be, we can all live together in peace. (name illegible)

Finding beauty in the mix of cultures can be easy to see aesthetically but sometimes can be difficult to understand and/or accept. It sometimes takes time and research to understand it fully. By the museum putting on this exhibition, the audience is presented with items and ideas that they may have already known/seen, but did not have full knowledge about. The exhibition takes a little bit of the “fear of the unknown” and puts it on the table for everyone to see and question. This act of learning is beautiful in and of itself. Once the audience has grasped a better knowledge of the mix, I believe acceptance is almost inevitable.

Acceptance through learning and understanding can lead to the audience seeing the mix of cultures as beautiful and it can also lead to the idea of peace between cultures. If these cultures presented in the exhibition can mix to create something new, peace seems more achievable than before. The mix of cultures can lead to a creation of something completely new or something that just has aspects of two or more religions/cultures. In either situation, the syncretic nature of this mix does create a sense of peace.

My comment on the comment:
I am particularly interested in the comment because it brings up a few things that I believe were part of the meaning behind the exhibition from what I understood. This comment touches on two topics: beauty in the mix of cultures, and peace between religions and cultures.

I really appreciated and admired this comment because it shows that this person really believes in the mix of cultures and leaves us with a sense of hope. It also shows that the exhibition only strengthened this belief, it must have been great.

Thanks,
Ana Clara

I was a Libyan when I was walking on the desert. And a Turk with my head covered in the Blue Mosque delighted from the incredible ceramic tiles.
I am an American now.
And can’t wait to see who I will be.
Irene

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Thanks,
Ana Clara
I kept thinking of the drawing on page 4:

PSALMS
I like your challenge to Freud,
Your Medusa all smiles and stone-true songs.
Years after the appropriation of your ancestors and mine - his, too -
My automatic writing responds to your joy,
The warm confrontation of your observation/
Her command.

Rachel
Of all the comments in the Quai Branly guest book, I was most interested in the actual script of the handwriting. With the different languages, genders, and age groups displayed, the ways in which people choose to visually demonstrate their thoughts and words is not only telling of their character, but of the way their words are meant to be interpreted. In some pages the script is large and spaced out, whereas in others it is small and precise. There are also doodles, drawings, and graffiti tagging which continue to share even more information and reactions of the guests to the exhibition.

Katlyn

5 October 2009
For Maria, who I madly love!!

I love you Adelaide, I am crazy for you.

“If you wish to forget anything on the spot, make a note that this thing is to be remembered.” Edgar Allan Poe

“I did not experience the exhibition, only the texts and drawings of some exhibition guests. Do the guest book texts/drawings relate to the exhibition? Possibly some do. Most likely not all directly relate to the exhibition. Some guest’s texts/drawings may be daydreams like students in class or riders in transit whose thoughts wander off to boobs, monkeys, patterns. Some practice their calligraphy and sketching.”

Jessica

“I love you Adelaide, I am crazy for you. Kisses Kisses

Lori
A ‘New’ Chirac Bounces Back In French Race
By Joseph Fitchett
Published: Monday, March 6, 1995

The room for maneuver in changing France’s economy will broaden the moment a new president is elected, Mr. Chirac acknowledges. But he basks in his own rising credibility and popularity.

French media are talking about “the new Chirac,” “the liberated Chirac,” even “the Zen Chirac.” On television, he has overcome a white-knuckle delivery that frightened viewers. Instead, he projects the personality - long vaunted by his friends - of a man whose natural authority is tempered by eagerness to please.

The quality of the change can be summed up by a Chirac campaign symbol, an apple, that has taken on a life of its own. Adopted casually for a brochure, the apple was featured as a derisive prop on a satiric television program that has thrived on Mr. Chirac’s foibles.

But this time he turned the tables, bantering about the jibes and light-heartedly reminding crowds that apples are good for you. The homy touch fit Mr. Chirac’s image as a man with the common touch so plainly foreign to Mr. Balladur.

THE other day Stéphane Martin, president of the new Musée du Quai Branly, was in his wedge-shape office with the picture window overlooking the Seine. Dapper, charming, with the weary politeness of a busy executive who has better things to do, he fetched the latest salvo against his institution, a book by Bernard Dupaigne, and casually tossed it across the table.

The most ambitious museum to open in Paris in 20 years, dedicated to non-European cultures, Quai Branly provoked a ruckus from the instant President Jacques Chirac came up with the idea for it more than a decade ago. It was his monument to French multiculturalism and, perhaps, to himself.

Two beloved Paris institutions had to be dismantled, the Musée des Arts Africains et Oceaniens and the ethnographic department of the Musée de l’Homme, France’s sublime natural history museum. Anthropologists, not to mention more than a few people who loved going to those museums, were furious. The familiar aesthetics-versus-ethnology question came up: Will religions, ceremonial and practical objects, never intended as art in the modern, Western sense, be showcased like baubles, with no context?

Given the current political climate, Quai Branly’s eventual opening, after years of delay, seemed almost as if it had been scientifically calculated to ignite the maximum debate.

I couldn’t tell whether Mr. Martin was being helpful or if he actually enjoyed the fuss. What did he think of his museum? I asked. He thought it was a “neutral environment” with “no aesthetic or philosophical line.” I thought he was kidding.

He wasn’t. If the Marx Brothers designed a museum for dark people, they might have come up with the permanent-collection galleries: devised as a spooky jungle, red and black and murky, the objects in it chosen and arranged with hardly any discernible logic, the place is briefly thrilling, as spectacle, but bow-slapppingly wrongheaded. Colonialism of a bygone era is replaced by a whole new French brand of condescension.

The dismay was obvious when I met museum directors, curators, anthropologists and art historians at a conference in Quai Branly, just before the museum’s opening. For about an hour everyone on a panel talked about the need for better, more flexible museums, which seemed to me an obvious euphemism for the problems here, which nobody mentioned — until a scholar, Christian Feest, smiled, raised his eyebrows and tilted his head slightly.

He couldn’t help, he said, pointing out the elephant in the room: How would Quai Branly overcome the obstacle of its own design? That shifted the atmosphere, as if tension had been released, and during the break I intercepted several African and American curators and a French art historian who all shook their heads and confided, as if revealing a private embarrassment, that Quai Branly was a missed opportunity and an inexplicable enterprise. An Australian architecture critic then sidled over and nodded toward Jean Nouvel, the museum’s architect, confiding the day before at the press opening. Now he was standing alone. Everyone was passing him by on the way to hors d’oeuvres.

The place simply makes no sense. Old, new, good, bad are all jumbled together without much reason or explanation, save for visual theatrics. Quai Branly’s curator of Asian collections, Christine Hemmet, who was furious about the dismantling of the Musée de l’Homme, took me to find a Vietnamese scarecrow, circa 1970’s, on the back of which was painted an American B-52 dropping bombs. She said she had wanted to install a mirror in the display case, behind the work, so the scarecrow’s back would be visible. But she was told it would spoil the mise-en-scène.

Think of the museum as a kind of ghetto for the “other,” a word Mr. Chirac has taken to using: an enormous, rambling, crepuscular cavern that tries to evoke a journey into the jungle, downriver, where suddenly scary masks or totem poles loom out of the darkness and everything is meant to be foreign and exotic. The Crayola-colored facade and its garden set the stage for this passage from civilization.

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Culture, in this specializing and improving sense, existed not just as a set of ideas: in the mC19 development of public libraries, museums, concert halls, and art galleries, it also informed the practices of a new set of cultural institutions which aimed to combat the shortcomings of civilization by diffusing the higher standards of culture throughout society. While these shortcomings included the values of industrialism, they also, and more particularly, included the ways of life of the urban working classes and the need to enfold these classes within the improving force of culture if the threat of anarchy were to be averted.

Such conceptions continued to be influential in the C20, informing the development of public broadcast systems and with an ongoing, albeit diminished, impact on cultural policies. The period from the mC19 to the eC21 has, however, witnessed serious challenges to the singular normative view of culture which underlies the culture-civilization opposition. This reflects the challenges that have come from the varied social movements - old and new - which have refused to accept the negative evaluation of their own cultural pursuits that the Arnoldian usage entailed. The socialist and labor movements, feminism, the struggles of indigenous peoples and of minority ethnic cultures, and the identification of the African-American contributions to the cultures of modernism have all taken issue with the classed, gendered, racial, and Eurocentric biases that undermined the universalism of culture’s claim to be the best that has been known and said.

from: New keywords: a revised vocabulary of culture and society / edited by Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg, Meaghan Morris.
There are no continents, there is one world

Yes Yes the family

C'est pas mal

J'ai bien aimé

I love you

il y a un monde.

PDF 9

Wasn't bad, I liked it

Il y a une famille

C'est pas mal

J'ai bien aimé

Sé l'aime

I love you
May God preserve your hands (meant as 'good job' or 'well done').

Your museum is rich, large and unique.

Very well done, greetings from Libya.

May peace and God’s mercy and blessings be upon you.
Peace be upon you.

I am pleased to attend this beautiful exhibition that contains fascinating and beautiful exhibits of African and Asian cultures. However, the exhibition is bit lacking in artefacts, particularly valuable African items. Thank you [for your consideration]. Thank you very much and wish you continued success and excellence.

Thanks,
Charlotte
As if by chance, I chose to visit this museum to celebrate my 30th birthday with my sweetheart. Beautiful exhibition. There are a lot of objects from African countries missing. There are many objects in other places right now, but we had a wonderful time anyway. Keep up the good work.
The museum is often required to present, nay, package events that cannot be so. A subject of it’s own aesthetic and frequently financial limitations, the institution is challenged in presenting controversial realities. Acting as the venue for a former President’s legacy exacerbates these restrictions.

Yet, upholding the purportedly educative role of the public museum forum, the Quai Branly provides a guest book for discussion. As is astutely recognized in this guest’s entry, readers are prompted to ask themselves: and exactly how were these objects acquired? Do they not reflect the very pillaging colonialism we are told they eradicate? Could there not be more interests at play than the objects on display, flatterly indicate? What has the museum disguised here? This visitor writes with exasperation: “On peut se le demander!!!” (“One can ask!!!”)

Indeed, however quietly, one can ask; one can ask the questions that perhaps the museum cannot. Whilst we understand that the guest book offers a space for discussion of only a certain nature, we note it may be unlikely that if answers are given, they may never be delivered to the person who posed them – it may be duly noted that in this case, with public access to the question, the utter simplicity of the question may be enough.

Katie

May 09

Yes, we have to ask ourselves.
I read something lately, that says that Museums are based on liberal academic tradition which privileges the notion of unrestricted access to information. And that this is directly in tension with the cultural protocol of many indigenous groups around information sharing. So I wonder… Is this concept also applicable to the artworks?
I guess if the person who wrote this comment wonders where the works come from, maybe they don’t come from museums. Reading this little comment, it occurred to me the big debate about returning the artworks to their country of origin. I am not sure it is right all the time, but if something worth to think about.

Irene

The point of balance of my being
I situated it there in my heart
And it so happens at the meeting of the "other"...
Of all the humanity
Thank you.
The note on the top of the photo no.14 is written in Chinese. It says:

“Fusion is an irresistible general trend. I wish for the interchange between different cultures from all over the world. The world has no boundary and unifies as one.”
The concept of mestizaje expresses the tensions, contradictions, and ambiguities of its birth in the New World. More important, it is a concept that continues to have spiritual and aesthetic dimensions. Mestizaje refers to racial and/or cultural mixing of Amerindians with Europeans, but the literal connotation of the word does not illuminate its theoretical applications and its more recent transformations. Since its inception in the New World and during those moments when race was a significant factor in social standing, mestizaje has been invoked to remedy social inequality and the misfiring of democracy.
In the name of Allah the most gracious and merciful.

I found this exhibition and museum to be wonderful and worthy of thanks and appreciation to the government of France and all staff in charge as it embodies all human civilizations together. May peace and security dominate the world and all its cultures throughout time.

Salaam (literally 'In peace' meant as 'Sincerely')

My wife and I

(signature without name)

11.06.09


March 15th 2008 – July 19th 2009
Crossing of cultures, colonisation, globalisation, “shock of civilisations”...

The idea of métagage takes account of the contact between peoples and traditions, of the coexistence of mixed identities, and reflects ways of bridging the gaps between different cultures. The Planète métagex exhibition aims to stimulate the visitor's imagination by juxtaposing objects along the way, from the 15th century to the present day. It analyses the repercussions of European, mainly Iberian, expansion on the other civilisations and the exchange of influences between East and West in the wake of the great expansions, notably the Chinese and Muslim. This exhibition of cross cultural objects and arts highlights the richness of artistic productions stemming from the blending of ways of doing and believing, of creating and designing.

http://modules.quaibranly.fr/metis/metis_en.html

http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Paris+Primitive:+Jacques+Chirac%27s+Museum+on+the+Quai+Branly.-a0206055425

Paris Primitive: Jacques Chirac’s Museum on the Quai Branly
by Sally Price
Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007; 224 pages, 10 half-tones, 1 map; $47.50 cloth, $19.00 paper

For those following the historic debates on museum representation, colonial collecting, and cultural patrimony surrounding the opening of the Musee du Quai Branly, the narrative in Sally Price’s new ethnography Paris Primitive: Jacques Chirac’s Museum on the Quai Branly comes less as a surprise than as a sobering confirmation of the machinations involved in the museum’s birth and the opportunities missed with its eventual form.

The upheavals within the French museum world caused by the bureaucratic and political maneuvers that accompanied Jacques Chirac’s legacy project received frequent commentary within the Parisian press. To be sure the very public airing of grievances around the project, the political and personal repercussions it had, and the arcane, nepotistic practices of the French state that its creation highlighted have attracted the attention of a number of other scholars. Yet most accounts have seemed unable to pursue arguments beyond the much-cited public records of discord, either because the researchers have had limited access to the internal workings of these institutions or because they have given little value and time to more informal or unconventional sources.

The two best-known books in French on the subject come from Bernard DuPaigne and Benoit de l’Estoile. In his Le Scan-dale des arts premiers: la veritable histoire du musee du quai Branly (2006), DuPaigne, the former director of the Musee de l’Homme Laboratoire d’ethnologie, writes, in a wounded but dry tone, of the reshuffling and shifting of collections and resources from his museum and that of the Musee des arts d’Afrique et d’Oceanie at the Porte Doree, documenting perceived and real injustices and injuries. In Le gout des autres: de l’exposition coloniale aux arts premiers (2007) de l’Estoile covers many of the same topics as Price, but he is more interested in addressing a broader history of the imbroglio of French universalist principles, primitivism, and exhibition practices, taking the 1931 Colonial Exposition and the creation of the Musee du quai Branly as the bookends of his study. A recent special issue of Le Debat (2007) gives ready access to the array of opinions amongst French and international scholars concerning the institution and its cultural and political placement within contemporary France. Finally, broader studies of the institutionalization of power and culture and the contours of the national art world can be found in the work of scholars such as Sarah Deleporte (who organized the conference “La France, Ses Musees, son Identite / French Museums and Identity” at the University of Chicago Center in Paris, June 1-2, 2006), Nelia Dias (2001), and Daniel Sherman (2008).

While Price’s book engages in similar discussions, with its focus upon the complicated and compromised genesis of this museum project and the heated debates that accompanied the reconfiguration of the museum world in Paris, it is unique amongst all of them as an engaging ethnographic study.
“[…] it is imperative to consider the production of knowledge as a social activity. To develop ‘knowledge’ we need raw materials and tools on which and with which we can work.’ These are linguistic, conceptual and cultural as well as material.”

Andrew Sayer, Knowledge in Context, in “Method in Social Science”, New York, 1992