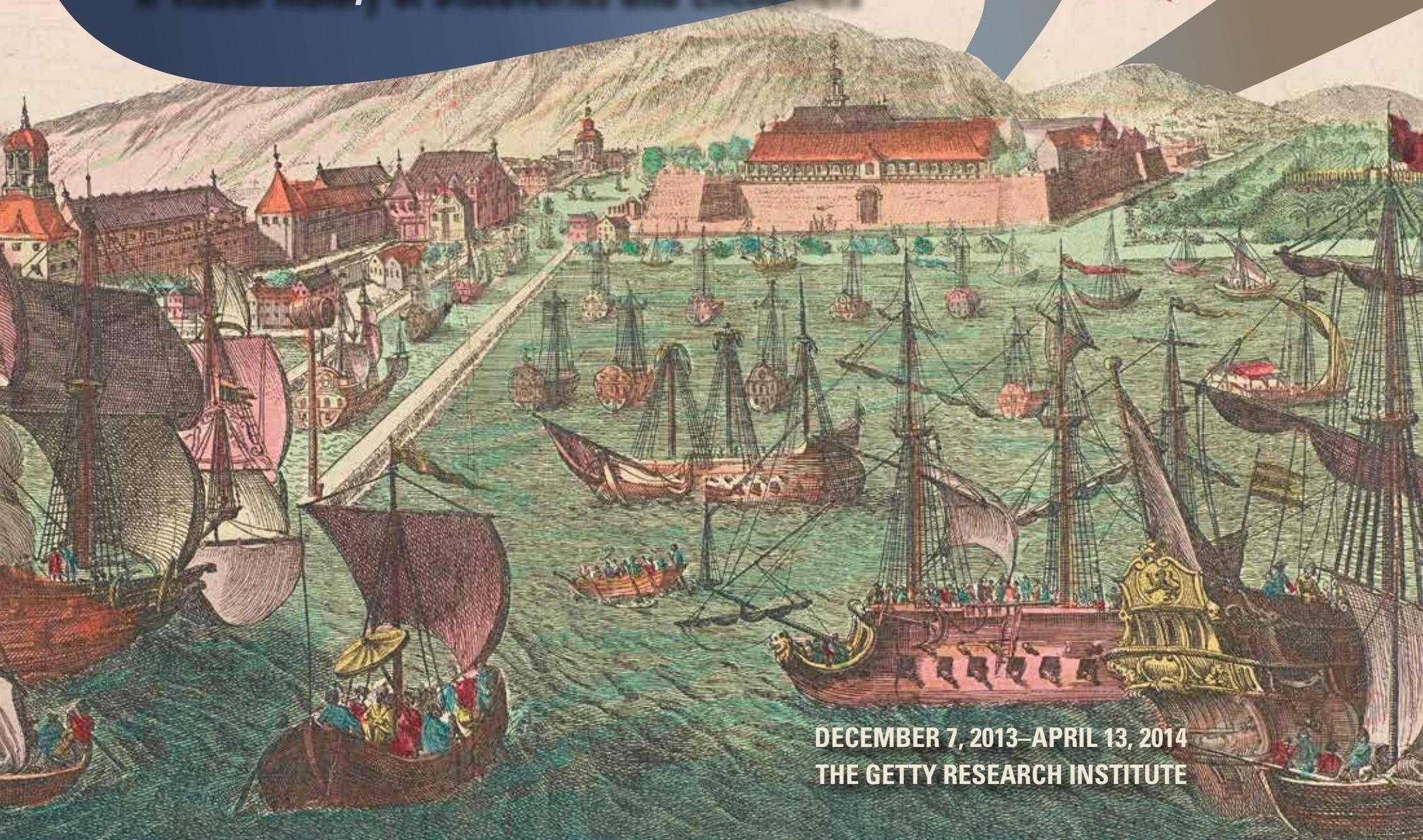


Connecting Seas

A Visual History of Discoveries and Encounters



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THE GETTY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Since antiquity, people have crossed the seas to explore distant shores and discover other cultures. Early travelers' accounts survive in manuscript, and with the introduction of the printing press, an abundance of illustrated reports found wider distribution in Europe and other continents. The Getty Research Institute's rich collection of rare books, prints, photographs, and ephemera makes it possible to present the fascinating but little-known visual history of maritime exploration and exchange.

To study this material is to comprehend—and even to become part of—the process by which our predecessors strove to understand the variety and diversity of our planet's

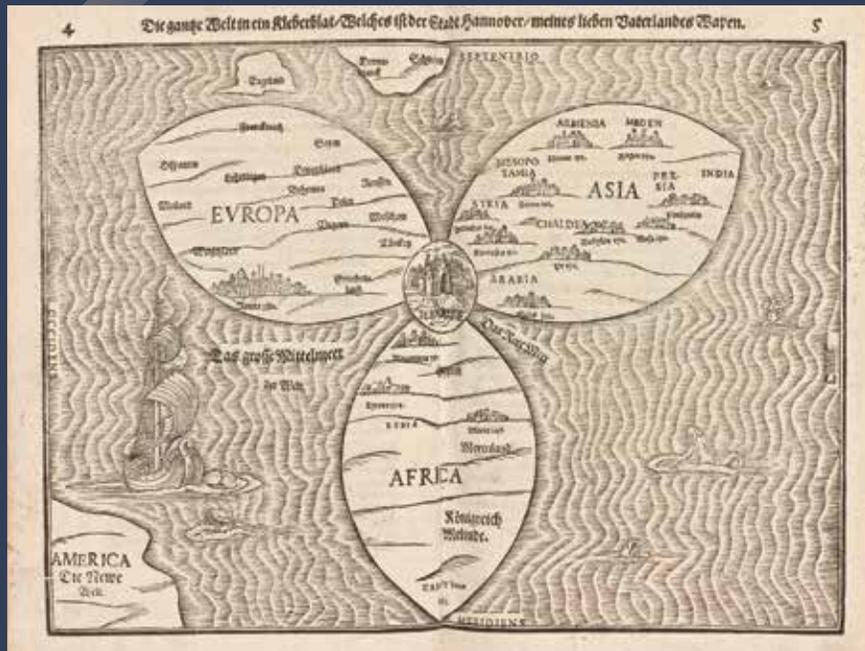


Fig. 1. World as a clover with Jerusalem at the center, woodcut. From Heinrich Bünting, *Itinerarium sacrae scripturae* (Magdeburg, 1597), pp. 4–5. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute (44-2)

nature and inhabitants. Through images of distant lands, *Connecting Seas* explores the beginnings of this engagement with the unknown, the strange, the alien, and the foreign.

Inevitably, the narrative of the exhibition has an ethical dimension as well, inviting the visitor to reflect on a long and complex history of understanding and misunderstanding, a process which continues as we learn to accept, tolerate, enjoy, and protect the multiplicity of human existence and nature's beauty in our global present.

ORIENTING THE WORLD

The exhibition is divided into three sections: “Orienting the World,” “Expeditions and Exploration,” and “Commerce and Colonialism.” The first section displays the techniques and tools early explorers developed in order to navigate the seas. Knowledge of astronomical orientation and the invention of maritime instruments were necessary to face the challenges of ocean voyages. Mapping the world was the premier endeavor to grapple with the unknown. But it is already evident in these early periods how discoverers were seeking to experience the whole world and to describe the planet, which gradually was coming to be understood as the globe we know today. Experience and imagination are combined in these early representations of the earth's continents (fig. 1).

Connecting Seas first introduces the human urge to see the world and to understand, find, and define one's place in it in relation to others. Envisioning and imagining, exploring and mapping, encountering and capturing worlds that are alien and exotic compared to one's own: such creative and tragic

urges were shared by centuries of explorers from Western and non-Western cultures alike.

EXPEDITIONS AND EXPLORATION

The astonished reaction to the reports and objects that travelers brought back from their explorations changed the Western world. Early travelogues were at times fanciful, and hearsay reports generated strange and curious misunderstandings about other lands and cultures (fig 2).

It took centuries to investigate distant continents in a more scholarly manner. This is the story presented in the second section of the exhibition. Exploration and collecting were followed by study and analysis. Enlightenment values motivated rigorous scholarly approaches to distant continents, but they often coincided with imperialist ambitions of European rulers. Napoleon invited geographers, archaeologists, and scientists to accompany him on his military campaigns in Egypt. After their return to France, this team of experts published precise, firsthand observations and groundbreaking research on the entire Egyptian world, from the smallest insects to the largest ancient ruins. Preoccupation with other cultures became the domain of professionals who valued empirical knowledge of distant lands and employed systematic and scientific approaches to their subjects. Among the most remarkable of these was the German naturalist Alexander von Humboldt, who traveled extensively to many parts of Latin America. He returned to Berlin and Paris with significant specimens and copious notes to study and publish the results of his research (fig. 3).



Fig. 2. Giovanni Botero (Italian, 1540–1617). Man from the wilds of Asia, woodcut. From *Le relationi universali . . .* (Venice, 1618), n. p. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute (85-B15519)



Fig. 3. Anonymous, after Eduard Hildebrandt (German, 1818–69). Alexander von Humboldt in his study, 1848, color lithograph. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute (2013.PR.38)

COMMERCE AND COLONIALISM

Paralleling the rise of academic disciplines, this scholarly perspective intensified during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Trade and commerce among the continents, however, became the dominant factor in the relationships of European and non-European countries, as shown in the third section of the exhibition. Exploration, colonization, and exploitation characterized the age of modern imperialism, in which European nations competed for control over territories in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. International exhibitions in European and North American cities displayed not only the products of faraway lands but also things inspired by or copied from them (figs. 4, 5). World's fairs



Fig. 4. Joseph Nash (English, 1809–78). Chinese objects exhibited at the *Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations* (London, 1851), chromolithograph. From *Dickinsons' Comprehensive Pictures of the Great Exhibition of 1851* (London, 1854), vol. 1, pl. 24. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute (90-B9947)

even exhibited actual human beings, brought into the European capitals along with (often inaccurate) reconstructions of their original dwellings. This section demonstrates how racial theories from the late-nineteenth to the early-twentieth centuries were disseminated in prints, journals, photographs, and even children's games (figs. 6, 7).

SCHOLARLY DISPLAY OF THE COLLECTIONS

The rich documentation of the Getty Research Institute's library and special collections offers insight into the history of cultural representation over a period of five hundred years. The exhibition prompts us to see and consider



Fig. 5. Paul Colin (French, 1892–1985). Poster for the *Deuxième salon de la France d'outre-mer* (Paris, 1939), color lithograph. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute (970031.5)

critically the long history of cultural encounters, an endeavor we are still pursuing today.

The visitor may also reflect on the diverse media featured in the exhibition, which have transmitted and transferred depictions of foreign lands for centuries. Various techniques from the Renaissance to the twentieth century—from engravings to photographs and illustrated books to modern posters—are on display and exemplify the history of visual culture.

Most of the rare material in this exhibition is of European origin. This reflects the history of the Getty Research Institute, which was dedicated in the past to collecting and exploring the Western tradition. However, some objects from other parts of the world already signal a recent programmatic change. We hope this new orientation might be more strongly visible in future projects as the collections grow to encompass more fully the global history of cultural encounters.

Exhibitions at the Getty Research Institute aim to open new areas of scholarship. Through deep research in the abundant holdings of the library and its special collections, scholars and curators find relevant material and then interpret these historical images of the past to see how they transferred and represented encounters between cultures. Curiosity, compassion, fascination, and empathy persist, as do misunderstandings, stereotypes, and prejudices. By understanding how such encounters were embraced in the past, we can learn to think critically about our contemporary global experiences and challenges.

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