



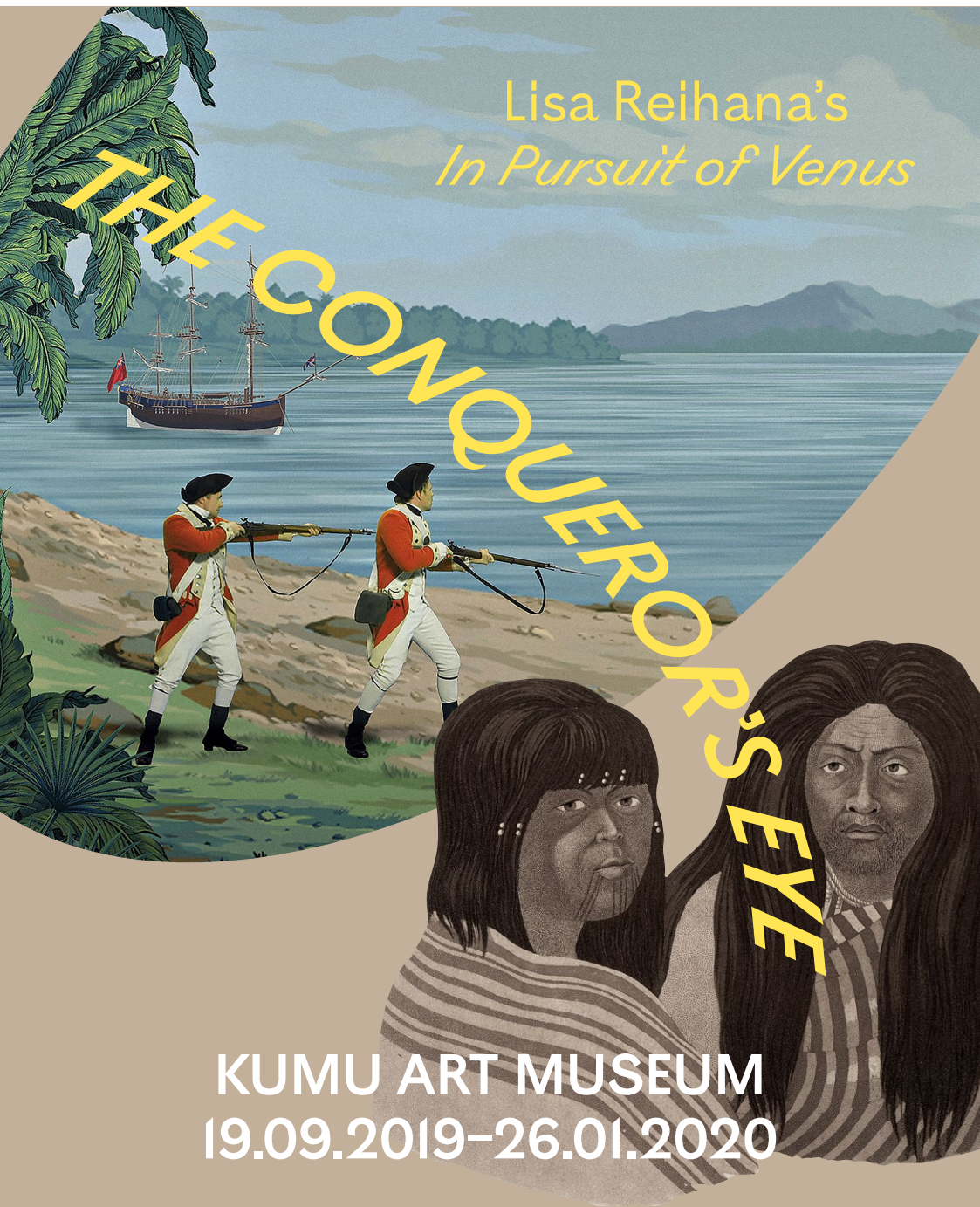
ART MUSEUM OF ESTONIA
ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF ART

KUMU

Lisa Reihana's
In Pursuit of Venus

THE CONQUEROR'S EYE

KUMU ART MUSEUM
19.09.2019–26.01.2020



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We thank: Lisa Reihana, James Pinker, Eidotech, Liina Siib, Estonian History Museum, Estonian National Museum, Pärnu Museum, Tallinn City Museum, Academic Library of Tallinn University, University of Tartu Museum, University of Tartu Library and Valga Museum

Collage on the front cover: Lisa Reihana. In Pursuit of Venus [infected]. Detail. 2015. Courtesy of the artist; illustrations from Otto von Kotzebue's travelogue *Entdeckungs-Reise in die Süd-See*. Detail. 1821

Published by the Art Museum of Estonia – Kumu Art Museum 2019

It is virtually impossible to overestimate the importance of images in the history of colonialism. The start of the colonial conquest of new territories coincided with the invention of the art of printing: Columbus reached America in 1492 and Gutenberg had invented the printing press in the 1440s. The art of printing made the written word accessible to wide audiences, and it also meant an explosion in the spread of images on a global level. The discovery of new continents had turned the understanding of the world as it had hitherto existed upside down. So the public was particularly interested in images depicting unknown lands and their exotic inhabitants. The images not only reflected and described the course of conquests and novel territories and their peoples, but also actively participated in conceptualising these and creating stereotypes of the “Other”, thus contributing to the belief in a radical difference between primitive natives and civilised Europeans. An emphasis on cultural differences helped to justify both the conquests and the domination of Europeans over native populations. Thus, images of the colonial territories tellingly highlight the close ties of visual culture with power. As Edward Said showed in his groundbreaking *Orientalism* (1978), producing and disseminating knowledge about the colonised “Other” is inextricably linked with controlling the “Other” and with expanding the power of colonists.

With colonial imagery, the roles of the spectator and the object of the gaze are fixed: the civilised European's gaze studies and observes, depicts and categorises the exotic natives who have, actually or potentially, been submitted to European power. From the time the colonies started to gain independence the postcolonial turn ever more vigorously called for writing and representing the colonial history from the perspective of colonised peoples. At the centre of the exhibition *The Conqueror's Eye* stands Lisa Reihana's powerful video exhibit *In Pursuit of Venus*, which challenges the stereotypes of representing the Self and the Other as they have been established in the tradition of visual culture. In a playful reproduction of a scenic wallpaper produced in France in the early 19th century, the gigantic video panorama explores and de-familiarises images of meetings between civilised Europeans and the barbaric and exotic inhabitants of Pacific islands. The work represented New Zealand at the Venice Biennale in 2017.

As an extension of Lisa Reihana's work, the exhibition also demonstrates the impact and wide spread of colonialist stereotypes in the Baltic region. It highlights the abundance of colonial visual culture in Estonian museum collections, displays illustrations of the travels of Baltic German explorers who played a prominent role in the exploration voyages organised by the Russian empire, and shows visual representations of the peoples of the Russian empire, including Estonians.

Lisa Reihana's In Pursuit of Venus [infected]

Lisa Reihana's technically ambitious and poetically nuanced work *In Pursuit of Venus* (2015–2017, video, 32 min) draws on historical evidence, fictional narratives, mythology and kinship in order to disrupt time, truth, gender and accepted modes of representation. *In Pursuit of Venus* is a cinematic re-imagining of the neoclassical French wallpaper *Les Sauvages de la mer Pacifique* (1804–1805). The designer of this commercially produced wallpaper referenced illustrations made on voyages to the Pacific by Captain James Cook (1728–1779) and by the French explorers Jean François de La Pérouse (1741–1788) and Louis Antoine de Bougainville (1729–1811). Two centuries later, Reihana harnesses digital technologies to animate, activate and recast the original wallpaper, populating her immersive video panorama with real, invented and speculative narratives of encounters between the peoples of the Pacific and Europe. Challenging historical and contemporary stereotypes, the work returns the glare of imperialism with an investigative twist.

In Pursuit of Venus represented New Zealand at the Venice Biennale in 2017. For this,

the first version of the video work gained significant additions, resulting in the final length of 80 scenes. The work is comprised of over 500 individual digital layers totalling 33 million pixels per frame. At 25 frames a second and 32 minutes in length, that comes to 1,584 trillion pixels. Film was shot at the Campbelltown Art Centre with the Australian Aboriginal community, in London at the Royal Society, and in Auckland. An early decision to commission a Russian illustrator to hand paint the pared-back version of the wallpaper's sky, sea and foreground provided the basis for the habitation of Reihana's orchestration of plants, Pacific peoples, British sailors and naval ships, and more recently indigenous peoples from Australia and Nookta Sound, as well as sea vessels from across the Pacific. The work is a conscious performance of discovery, a becoming witness, a panoramic pantomime, which in its fervour echoes early 19th-century Europe's "panoramania". The emotional arc of the work is powerfully enhanced by its soundscape, created by Reihana's collaborator James Pinker. New inclusions include Aboriginal songs, the recording of the ticking of the Royal Society's hand-wound clock (which

once belonged to Captain James Cook) and recordings of *taonga pūoro* (Māori instruments).

Reihana's work focuses on key themes of colonialism and colonial visual culture: maritime travel and navigation, cultural encounters and conflicts, Enlightenment philosophy and belief in the progress of science, the close relations between mapping and scientific descriptions of the world and the global domination of Europeans, the combining of racism, desire and power in the colonial gaze, longing for a lost paradise, and the ongoing existence of colonial images, ideas and stereotypes in the contemporary world. One of the crucial scenes of the video is the death of James Cook in Hawaii in 1779. While this legendary event is of great importance in European cultural memory, in Reihana's video it is almost hidden in the background. The death of the hero has lost its uniqueness and has become a part of a cyclical, ever-repeating story-world, which is very different from the way Cook's death operated in the narrative of the European colonial conquest and progress of science. In addition, in Reihana's work Captain Cook has acquired an ambivalent gender identity. Highlighting the presence of the past, the video stresses the need to work with colonial legacy and to reclaim it from Māori and Pacific perspectives. Instead of being the objects of the observing gaze, the native people have taken control of the camera.

As a result, we do not see the events unfold from the viewpoint of the explorers landing on the shore; rather, we are watching the action from behind the flora, from the inland perspective. Reihana's approach to the decorative and only seemingly scientifically based 19th-century panorama is not nostalgic or openly militant; she does not call for a condemnation of the crimes of the past, but to study the past creatively and critically, to work with it by using irony, imagination and local communities.

Lisa Reihana (1964) is a globally recognised artist from New Zealand. She experiments across different media, including digital video, film, sound, photography, spatial design, performance, body adornment and sculptural form. Reihana's practice is driven by a deep connection to the communities she works with, which informs her collaborative working method, which she describes as *kanohi ki te kanohi* (face to face).



Jean-Gabriel Charvet (1750–1829)
The Native Peoples of the Pacific Ocean. Detail
1804–1805. Wallpaper
Photo: Wikimedia Commons

The wallpaper *The Native Peoples of the Pacific Ocean* (*Les Sauvages de la mer Pacifique*) was a supreme achievement of the printing technology of the day. It consisted of 20 panels and 1,000 wood cuts and adorned many a fine dining hall and salon both in Europe and in North America. Typical of the Neoclassical era, the characters are wearing costumes reminiscent of classical antiquity that were high fashion in late-18th-century Europe. The vegetation depicted in the wallpaper partly derives from the botanical illustrations published in the accounts of Captain James Cook's travels through the Pacific; partly, however, it is composed of South American plants that Charvet had seen on his recent visit to the continent. The visual heritage of Cook's expeditions is considered the most ambitious in the tradition of geographical discovery: his travels resulted in 600 watercolours, gouaches and paintings, 180 engravings, and 2,000 natural historical drawings and engravings.

The Colonial World in Estonian Collections

A considerable amount of pictorial material concerning geographical discoveries reached Estonia in the Age of Enlightenment, in the late 18th century and in the first half of the 19th century. The Century of Enlightenment brought about a revolution in reading, but also a revolution in images, which meant an explosive spread of graphic art and book illustrations. Printed images became less expensive, and demonstrated new technical possibilities. The dotted or chalk-style printed sheets were not meant to be kept between covers, but were intended to be framed and displayed on walls as “furniture prints”. Several well-known stories and characters of the Sentimentalist period, such as Paul and Virginie from the eponymous novel by the French author Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre (1737–1814), were depicted in daintily coloured series of pictures.

Prints were acquired by the private collections of the Baltic German nobility of Livonia and Estonia (the most important of these was the collection of the Liphart family at Raadi) and by the art collection and library of the University of Tartu, which grew vigorously after 1803. The university preferred works that could be used in teaching and learning, which meant graphic reproductions and illustrations of travel books, in addition to coins and

items of classical antiquity. Thus the pictorial notes on a continuously expanding and more charted world reached Baltic intellectuals: these concerned new geographical discoveries, natural wonders, architectural heritage and ethnic and ethnographic wealth.

The exhibition can only display an insignificant proportion of the pictorial heritage to be found in Estonian collections with the aim of showing the vigorous presence of colonial visual culture even in our part of the world. Referring to Lisa Reihana’s work, classic colonial themes are highlighted: meetings between civilised Europeans and savage natives, scientific study, measuring and classification of the nature and peoples of the conquered territories, and work and coexistence in the colonies under European rule. In these images, exoticism and eroticism, celestial harmony and grotesque violence are intertwined. Colonialism is characterised by major controversies and a very complicated relationship with the peoples conquered and subdued: superiority alternates with fear, attraction with anger and anxiety, the wish to convince the spectator of the radical alterity of the Other with the desire to make the colonised Other similar to the Self, the coloniser.



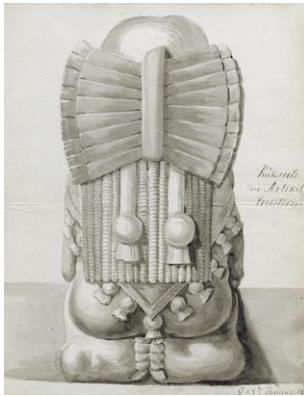
Adolphe Forestier (1801–1885)
After Alphonse Pellion (1796–1868)
Ladies of Hawaii
University of Tartu Museum

Illustration from Louis de Freycinet’s *Voyage around the World* (*Voyage autour du monde: Entrepris par ordre du roi, sous le ministère et conformément aux instructions de S. Exc. M. le vicomte du Bouchage, secrétaire d’état au Département de la marine, exécuté sur les corvettes de S.M. l’Uranie et la Physicienne, pendant les années 1817, 1818, 1819 et 1820. Atlas Historique*). Paris, 1825

Alphonse Pellion was one of several artists who accompanied the French explorer Louis de Freycinet on board his exploration vessel *Uranie*. Starting in 1817 they sailed the Pacific, visiting Australia, the islands of Hawaii and other Pacific islands, South America and other regions. The expedition returned to France with a rich collection of natural history and a great number of drawings. On the basis of these, a 13-volume collected work entitled *Voyage around the World* was published in Paris in 1824–1844, accompanied by four volumes of illustrations and maps.

At the start of the 19th century France experienced a new rise as a colonial power. The country had lost its colonies for a while, but now quickly started to gain huge territories both in Asia and in Africa. By 1900 the combined territories of French colonies reached 12 million square kilometres, which exceeded the area of France by a factor of 22.

Illustrations of Freycinet’s voyage reached the University of Tartu Museum from the Liphart collection at the Raadi manor in Tartu.



Johann Wilhelm Krause (1757–1828)
Bust of an Aztec Priestess; front and back views
1821. Sepia drawings
University of Tartu Library

Copies based on illustrations of Alexander von Humboldt's book *Views of the Cordilleras and Monuments of the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas* (*Vues des Cordillères, et monumens des peuples de l'Amérique*). Vol. I. Paris, 1810

The early collections of the University of Tartu reflect the impact made by the travel images and scientific illustrations of the time. It was the image – both drawings made by hand by the scientists themselves or by the artists accompanying them, as well as graphic prints reproducing those drawings for wide audiences – that worked as a visible document of knowledge gained by first-hand experience. Such belief in the unique role of the image and the ability to draw was shared by Professor Johann Wilhelm Krause (1757–1828). Throughout the years Krause would copy fresh pieces of travel writing acquired by the university collections, drawing the most important monuments in the architectural history of the world, as well as the most original landscapes, and encouraging his students to do the same.

Krause was repeatedly inspired by the works of Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859), the most famous natural scientist of the time; his works are well represented in the collections of the University of Tartu Library. In the years 1799–1804 Humboldt and the French botanist Aimé Bonpland (1773–1858) travelled in South and Central America, studying and describing the vegetation, climate, culture and inhabitants. The following decades saw the publication of a number of lavishly illustrated printed works based on their American travels. Many of the illustrations that became widely known were based on Humboldt's own drawings made on the voyages.

Baltic-German Explorers

Differently from many European nations, Russia did not own large overseas territories, with the exception of Alaska. Instead of far-away lands, the Russian Empire gradually colonised its peripheral regions: gaining territories in Siberia, the Far East and the Caucasus. In the spirit of the era of exploration and colonial conquests, several large-scale discovery expeditions were arranged in the Russian Empire to its peripheries and even further in the 18th and 19th centuries. While European states characteristically focused on tropical regions, Russian scientists and explorers were the first to discover and map many polar regions. Depictions of territories in the north inspired no less vivid colonial fantasies than southern and eastern lands: it was possible to present both climates that were extraordinarily cold and those unusually hot as equally exotic.

The exhibition displays pictorial material deriving from the journeys of two Russian explorers of Baltic German nobility. The Estonian cultural memory often associates Baltic German admirals of the Russian empire with unselfish science and exploration, yet their activities supported the expansion and strengthening of Euro-

pean colonial domination. This was also helped by the pictorial recordings of their exploration voyages. The abundance of stereotypical motifs and themes, and the categorising attitudes that proceed from the assumed superiority of civilised Europeans in these images clearly demonstrate that the process of discovery-conquest-recording definitely was of a colonising nature.

In his youth, Adam Johann von Krusenstern (1770–1846), who had been born at the Hagudi manor, lived and studied in England, in the world's largest colonial empire, and sailed the seas of the world. He returned to Russia with a plan to initiate a journey of circumnavigation. Instead of the empire he was sponsored by Russian industrialists and businessmen, and in 1803–1806 the expedition indeed took place. It was the first journey around the world that started in Russia, and it visited both warmer regions (the Marquesas Islands and Hawaii) and colder locations (Kamchatka, Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands). Its aim was to study the Pacific coast, as well as to advance trade and diplomacy. The expedition mapped the Pacific and conducted studies in natural

history. In addition to nature, indigenous peoples were studied: ethnographic descriptions and dictionaries were compiled, data on culture and customs gathered, and weapons, everyday objects and jewellery were collected. The expedition gave rise to a great tripartite work accompanied by an atlas entitled *Journey around the World (Reise um die Welt in den Jahren 1803, 1804, 1805 und 1806 auf Befehl Seiner Kaiserliche Majestät Alexanders des Ersten auf den Schiffen Nadeschda und Newa*; St.Petersburg, 1810–1812). The book quickly spread internationally: it was re-issued in Berlin, and translations into English, French, Dutch, Danish, Swedish and Italian followed. After the voyage, Krusenstern had a career in the Russian navy, rose to be an admiral, and was active in learned societies.

Yet another famous Baltic seafarer, Otto von Kotzebue (1787–1846), took part in Krusenstern's expedition. Later, Kotzebue himself organised two journeys of circumnavigation with the aim of studying the northern regions of Russia. Popular travel books were published based on the material of his expeditions as well. The first of these was illustrated by Louis Choris (1795–1828) and a selection of these works is also on display at the exhibition.

In addition, the exhibits include objects collected by Baltic travellers that are stored in the collections of the Estonian History Museum, the successor of the Estonian Provincial Museum, which was founded in 1864.



Jegor Osipovich Skotnikov (1780–1843)
After Wilhelm Gottlieb Tilesius von Tilenau (1769–1857)
Ainu People on the Island of Jesso
University of Tartu Museum

Illustrations from the album of engravings *Atlas of Krusenstern's Journey around the World* (Атлас к путешествию вокруг света капитана Крузенштерна). St. Petersburg, 1813

Krusenstern's expedition team included Wilhelm Gottlieb Tilesius von Tilenau (1769–1857), a German naturalist and artist. His works serve as the basis for many graphic prints depicting the circumnavigation, which were published in the popular album *Atlas of Krusenstern's Journey around the World*. It contains detailed drawings of the Polynesian inhabitants of Nuku Hiva, the largest of the Marquesas islands, but even more interest is shown in the Ainu and Kamchadals, northern peoples regionally important to Russia.



Louis Choris (1795–1828)
Inhabitants of Kotzebue Bay
Estonian History Museum

Illustration from Otto von Kotzebue's travelogue *A Voyage of Discovery into the South Sea and Beering's Straits for the Purpose of Exploring a North-East Passage, Undertaken in the Years 1815–1818* (*Entdeckungs-Reise in die Süd-See und nach der Berings-Strasse zur Erforschung einer nordöstlichen Durchfahrt in den Jahren 1815, 1816, 1817 und 1818*). Weimar, 1821

The Tallinn-born Otto von Kotzebue was a Russian explorer of Baltic-German origin. The aim of the circumnavigation on the brig *Rurik*, which he commanded, was to look for the North-West Passage between the Pacific Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean. Of equal importance was providing detailed descriptions of the Atlantic coast and strengthening the position of Russia in the region. All in all more than 500 kilometres of Russia's arctic domain were mapped. On the *Rurik*, Kotzebue was accompanied by the German-Russian artist and explorer Louis Choris, whose task was to record the nature and the people encountered on the journey. After his voyage around the world on the *Rurik*, Choris learned lithography in Paris and copied the watercolours he had made on his journeys using this technology. He also illustrated Kotzebue's travel book with lithographs. Later, he issued a travel book of his own and a portfolio of lithographs about the voyage around the world. His contemporaries valued his work highly and it stood out for its attempted verisimilitude and scientific character: Choris tried to create as exact and detailed representations of people as were characteristic of plants and animals in natural historical drawings. This, however, by no means suggests that he was free from prejudice or eschewed the conqueror's gaze. The exhibited illustrations display the inhabitants of Kotzebue Bay, which was named after Otto von Kotzebue, and life and culture near the Chukchi Sea on the Western coast of Alaska.

Peoples of the Russian Empire

As the peripheries of the Russian Empire became colonised, the empire included different regions and peoples who were described through a combination of the colonial and the imperial gaze. They included the inhabitants of Siberia, the Far East and the Caucasus, as well as people from the territories of the Baltic provinces, Poland and Finland in the European part of the empire.

In the Age of Enlightenment, the first comprehensive study depicting the peoples of the Russian Empire was made and one of its initiators was Catherine the Great. The enlightened monarch wished to refute the stereotypes and writings spreading in Europe that were very critical of life in Russia, particularly as concerned the situation of peasants. In the 1760–70s the Imperial Russian Academy organised a series of expeditions to the territories that had recently been added to the empire, particularly Siberia and the Far East. The expedition reports covered the geography, nature, history, ethnology etc. of the regions. On the basis of these, the first survey describing the peoples of the Russian Empire was compiled. Its author was Johann Gottlieb Georgi (1729–1802), a naturalist, botanist, mineralogist and geographer. The four-volume *Description of All Peoples Living in the Russian Empire*

(*Beschreibung aller Nationen des Russischen Reichs, Ihrer Lebensart, Religion, Gebräuche, Wohnungen, Kleidungen und übrigen Merkwürdigkeiten*) appeared in St. Petersburg in 1776–1780. The work was quickly translated into Russian and French, and was soon reprinted. The illustrations by the German artist Christoph Melchior Roth gained rapid popularity and were published as separate volumes. Pleased with the work, Empress Catherine presented Georgi with a gold snuffbox.

The next, equally impressive comprehensive work concerned with the Russian Empire was published almost a hundred years later. *Ethnographic Description of the Peoples of Russia* (*Description ethnographique des peuples de la Russie. Publiée à l'occasion du jubilé millénaire de l'empire de Russie*), by Théodore de Pauly, appeared in St. Petersburg in 1862, on the occasion of the millennial anniversary of the Russian state. This work was lavishly illustrated with images depicting different peoples of the empire; the Baltic German artist August Pezold (1794–1859) was among the authors. Side by side with the peoples from the colonised territories in the north and the east who were depicted as primitive and exotic in many aspects, the work paid more attention to the peasants living in the European provinces, their

culture and everyday life. This reflects the spread of nationalism in the 19th century, as well as the interest in peasants and folk culture that had been growing as a result of this.

The demonstrations of multi-ethnicity and diversity were intended to emphasise the wealth and variability within the empire and the unity governing it. Particularly in the case of recently colonised or con-

quered territories, visual depiction of the lands and the peoples served the empire as a way of demonstrating its power and provided legitimisation of ownership. At the same time, the spatial boundary between the Self and the Other was erased in the Russian empire, as peoples who were represented as primitive, alien or savage did not live far away, across seas and oceans, but within the limits of the same country.



Christoph Melchior Roth (1720–1798)

Illustrations from Johann Gottlieb Georgi's *Description of All Peoples Living in the Russian Empire* (*Beschreibung aller Nationen des Russischen Reichs, Ihrer Lebensart, Religion, Gebräuche, Wohnungen, Kleidungen und übrigen Merkwürdigkeiten*). St. Petersburg, 1776–1780
Estonian History Museum

The comprehensive work *Description of All Peoples Living in the Russian Empire* describes in words and images the peoples inhabiting the northern region of the European part of the Russian Empire, the lands on the Volga River, Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Urals and Siberia, depicting their dwellings, clothing, customs and beliefs. Different editions of the work contain from 73 to 100 illustrations of representatives of various nationalities that were created by Christoph Melchior Roth (1720–1798), an artist of German origin. The images, which quickly became popular, spread across Europe; they were copied and used as a basis for various works. The graphic prints were based on drawings produced during various expeditions, materials collected at the Kunstkamera in St. Petersburg and models. Images that provided vivid depictions of different cultures and peoples were intended to emphasise the wealth of the Russian Empire, but also helped to create several ethnic stereotypes that still survive.

In Georgi's work, Estonians were represented by three images, all of which depicted women in folk costumes. The texts describe women's clothing in more detail compared with other material that concerns Estonians' everyday life. As was typical of the age, psychophysical characterisations of the people were provided that proceeded from the 18th-century belief that climate influenced a people's character: "They vary in appearance and height. In general, they are similar to Finns. Many of them are melancholic and phlegmatic. The oppression they have to bear, poverty, hard upbringing and the whole state of their souls have toughened them to bear the harsh climate and hard work, want and humiliation. They are indifferent to almost everything in this world except life and love. They are somewhat headstrong, lazy, unkempt and tend towards drink, and yet they are not without abilities. Their women, who experience less oppression, are not devoid of beauty and flirtatiousness."



August Georg Wilhelm Pezold (1794–1859)
Estonians from the Village of Mihkli
Art Museum of Estonia

Illustration from Théodore de Pauly's *Ethnographic Description of the Peoples of Russia* (*Description ethnographique des peuples de la Russie. Publiée à l'occasion du jubilé millénaire de l'empire de Russie*). St. Petersburg, 1862

In 1846, the Baltic German artist August Pezold participated in an expedition of the Russian Geographical Society to study Livonians and Kreevins. The expedition also crossed the Estonian territories in the Pärnumaa and Läänemaa regions. In Mihkli parish, Pezold twice depicted a young mother in the servants' room of the local church manor, and later, in the town of Pärnu, recorded a middle-aged man named Joonuse Ants, who came from the nearby Võrungi rural municipality. More than ten years later, the portraits of people from Mihkli parish served as the basis of the image plate representing Estonians that appeared in the comprehensive work.



China figurines representing peoples of the Russian Empire

Estonians
Gardner Porcelain Factory. 1892–1917
Tallinn City Museum



Samoyed Woman with a Child
Gardner Porcelain Factory. 1860–1870
Art Museum of Estonia



Woman from the Aleutian Islands
Gardner Porcelain Factory. 1860–1890
Art Museum of Estonia

Illustrations from the works depicting the peoples of the Russian Empire also served as a basis for producing china figurines. Porcelain-making had become less costly at the end of the 18th century, i.e. in the era of the Enlightenment, when Johann Gottlieb Georgi's *Description of All Peoples Living in the Russian Empire* (1776–1780) was published. On the order of Catherine the Great, the Imperial Porcelain Factory in St. Petersburg started producing a series based on the work's illustrations that consisted of more than 30 figurines representing different nationalities. Other ethnographic series of porcelain figurines were produced in the 19th century and the early 20th centuries. In the 1870s–80s, one of the producers was the Francis Gardner Porcelain Factory. Their series was based on the illustrations of another major comprehensive work, Théodore de Pauly's *Ethnographic Description of the Peoples of Russia* (1862). Most of the figurines displayed at the exhibition belong to this series. In the 19th century, social class-, nationality- and tribal-themed figurines were the most popular products of the Gardner factory.

This reflects the national ideology that had started to spread in the Russian Empire in the second half of the 19th century, as well as the related interest in folk culture. Porcelain figurines representing subjects of different nationalities served as an opportunity to demonstrate the power and reach of the realm. The decorative festive figurines depicted in their Sunday best, with the details of their folk costumes meticulously painted, showed the empire's ethnographic diversity, large population and wealth. The figurines can be viewed as a small procession of a kind. Starting in the 18th century, there was a custom in the Russian empire and elsewhere of letting people representing different nationalities in their colourful folk attire participate in parades and ceremonies. Figurines in national costumes were ever more frequently used as symbols of provinces, regions and states. The mode of representation lasted longer than the empire: figurines and dolls in national costumes can be found widely to this day.

Visualising Estonians

The earliest images of Estonians derive from the Early Modern period. For a long time, visualising Estonians was the realm of Baltic Germans and foreigners, as the first artists who considered themselves Estonian started working only in the second half of the 19th century. Various traditions and interests were combined in depicting Estonians: Baltic German and Russian Imperial perspectives, colonial stereotypes and motifs, and an increasingly stronger interest in peasants.

The initiatives to record the subjects of the Russian Empire in drawing that had been spreading since the late 18th century had a significant impact on the portrayal of Estonians. The attempts were made in the spirit of the Enlightenment, yet were also triggered by the desire to demonstrate the ethnic diversity and wealth of the empire. The first colour images of Estonians appeared in Johann Gottlieb Georgi's *Description of All Peoples Living in the Russian Empire* (1776–1780). Many Estonian-themed works by Baltic-German artists were created in connection with various initiatives to depict the peoples of Imperial Russia.

At the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, images of Estonian peasants, their customs, clothing and everyday life also found

their way into the works of Baltic German scholars of folk heritage and Enlightenment authors. On their initiative, collecting and studying local folk culture was more actively undertaken. The Baltic Germans were influenced by the growing interest in peasants and folk culture that spread through Europe as a result of nationalism. While earlier visual culture had often depicted peasants as grotesque and ridiculous figures, the modernising world started to represent country folk as an embodiment of national continuity, traditions and values.

In the context of these ideas, the Baltic Germans sadly lacked German peasants in the Baltic provinces. Their relationship with Estonian and Latvian country people was considerably more complicated. For a long time, rifts stemming from ethnicity and social standing reigned in Baltic society. The attitude towards local peasants was made even more complex by the descriptions of the conquest of Estonia and Livonia during the crusades in the 12th and 13th centuries. In the 19th century, the Livonian crusades were represented according to colonial fantasies and associated the peasants of the region with uncivilised barbarians and heathens.

This complicated relationship might explain the fact that Baltic German artists created very few works with Estonians as their subjects. Yet despite their meagre numbers, images created from the Baltic German and Russian Imperial perspectives had a strong influence on Estonian art, which borrowed from them several motifs and topics, modes of depiction and stereotypes related to representing Estonians. What is more, it was not only Estonian artists who adopted the Baltic German interest in folk culture and folk costumes as their own, but also leaders of the movement of national awakening who promoted it more widely among Estonians themselves. When German cultural influence on Estonians is mentioned, it is often bourgeois manners that imitate those of Germans that the speakers have in mind. However, considering Estonian folk culture and costumes as valuable can also be linked with German influence. As a result, the colonised adopted the image created by colonisers as their own, as also happened in other colonies. The best example of this is a woman clad in folk costume, which was widespread across the imagery of colonies and empires, and would later become a prominent national symbol still in use today.



Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald (1803–1882)
Woman in a Costume from Alutaguse
1842. Pencil and watercolour
Estonian National Museum

Baltic Germans were the first to collect and study Estonian folklore, folk costumes and folk culture. In this venture, an important role was played by the Learned Estonian Society, which brought together intellectuals interested in the Estonian language and folk culture. In 1840–42 the Society organised a campaign to collect information on folk costumes. For this purpose, the Baltic German artist Friedrich Ludwig von Maydell (1795–1846) created four outline drawings depicting types of folk costumes of Estonian men and women that were meant to be completed and returned. The lithographs of these made by Georg Friedrich Schlater were ready by January 1841. Eighty sheets were distributed but only a few of these were returned. Thus, the initiative failed, but it served as a vivid illustration of the directing influence of the Baltic German Estophiles on the valuing and shaping of Estonian folk culture. Among those who had responded to the call was Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald (1803–1882), the author of the Estonian national epic *Kalevipoeg* (1853/1862). He sent four drawings of women's folk costumes from Alutaguse to the Society.



Carl Timoleon von Neff (1804–1877)
Surprise
1840s. Oil
Art Museum of Estonia

This work, which has an established place in Estonian national cultural memory and identity, has little to do with the peasants' actual daily life. Still, the painting serves to demonstrate how fashionable the topic of country people was in the art and society of the time. The fashion was both international and transnational. Many artists in Italy were enthusiastic about depicting folk costumes. The Baltic German Carl Timoleon von Neff, who had an illustrious career as an artist in Russia, also repeatedly visited Italy.

Neff created a number of paintings depicting subjects of the Russian Empire in national costumes. The idea originated from Italy, where it was fashionable to represent peasants from various regions dressed in their folk costumes, as well as from the Empress Alexandra Feodorovna's interest in such works. The work, which belongs to the Estonian Museum of Art, is a replica of the painting made for the Empress (now in the collections of the State Russian Museum in St. Petersburg).

Art Walk

Drop-in guided tour in English

Sun 24 November, 3 pm – 3.45 pm

At the exhibition *The Conqueror's Eye*.

Lisa Reihana's In Pursuit of Venus

The Kumu Art Museum offers you a great opportunity to spend your leisure time in a vibrant artistic space. On the last Sunday of every month, we offer a special drop-in guided tour that will introduce one of our latest exhibitions.

Duration: 45 min

Tours are free with museum admission

The meeting point is at the museum ticket office

BOOKING IN ADVANCE

Guided tour of the exhibition

In Estonian, Russian, English, Finnish etc.

We offer the opportunity to order guided tours in different languages to visit exhibitions.

Entertainment tour

“The Conqueror's Eye”

Duration: 2 h

Gather all of your friends, family or colleagues together and discover the exhibition with a professional programme leader!

The exhibition focuses on Lisa Reihana's powerful video work *In Pursuit of Venus*, which represented New Zealand at the Venice Biennale in 2017. The point of departure for *In Pursuit of Venus* is formed by the visual materials of the 19th century and the colonialist view of nature and colonial populations. Similar examples exist in the Baltic-German pictorial legacy.

The tour is followed by a creative part. After the introduction of the exhibition, everyone will have the opportunity to design a personal notebook inspired by the repeat patterns of the wallpaper in the Kumu Graphic Art Studio – the 19th-century fantasy-filled wallpaper patterns also provide the basis for Lisa Reihana's video work.

Price for adults: group of 10 or under, 180 €; up to 20 participants, 18 € per person

Price for children: group of 10 or under, 150 €; up to 15 participants, 15 € per person and, starting with 15 participants, 13 € per person

Programmes are available in Estonian, Russian and English

Max size of the group: 20 participants

Information and booking:

Mon–Fri 9am–5pm

Ph. +372 5343 9230

kumu@ekm.ee

KUMU ART MUSEUM

Weizenbergi 34 / Valge I, Tallinn, Estonia

Open: Tue–Wed, Fri–Sun 10am–6pm; Thu 10am–8pm

Additional information:

kumu.ekm.ee