

On the occasion of 'Expedition #1: The Library a Jungle' we asked Barbara Haenen to join us and share her reflections.

The Popol Vuh, a Mayan holy book, says that the world came into being when two gods engaged in a dialogue and their words became reality. Human beings, they said, were allowed to exist in order to appreciate their work of art, nature. Animals, on the other hand, did not possess the faculty of speech. First, the gods tried making people out of mud and wood, but these both ignored the natural world. They were washed away in floods and torn to pieces by the two divine jaguars, Crunching Jaguar and Tearing Jaguar.

On Thursday the 31st of March, Glubbubdrib went on its first expedition, 'The Library a Jungle', in the Artis Library. On this occasion, the entire collection was explored. During the first fifteen minutes artist Martin La Roche browsed – swiftly and foremost in silence – the library's reading room, opening archival boxes, displaying projected images, and asking the audience to read out loud from the chapter headings. The new explorers embarked on a journey across Bashee and Meia-Co-Shimah Islands - Singing sands - Laborious modes of

dressings the hair - Sensitive plants - Arrival at Patching-san - A grand terrain for picking up odds and ends - The Lake of Crescent Moon - A family of Qazaqs - False alarm - Sturdy desert grass - Departure from the island of Sooloo. The books were the only ones moving around the space (being carried from shelf to person), the only ones that made a sound (when being read from or flipped through) and the only ones that had comfortable cushions to sit on (for their protection).

One of the objectives of Natura Artis Magistra, the natural history society that founded Artis in the nineteenth century, was to bring the natural life to the city. There it could be studied without extensive travel. Artis created a book of nature which you can leaf through by walking around in it. Its paths were designed to run in both straight and curvy lines, to encourage an active mind. Artis' members believed that walking in straight lines would produce rational thoughts, and that meandering allowed the mind to become more creative.

Would the Mayan gods have approved of this way of representing nature, by turning it into a book and reading it? When we entered the Zoo through Natura Artis Magistra's 'Members Only' entrance,

the first thing we saw was an empty Jaguar enclosure. Empty, because it was not yet enclosed. We also walked past a sleeping turtle, kangaroos, an artificial waterfall (which had been turned off), and a pack of hyena's that stood there staring at us (perhaps they were surprised to find a group of people in the Zoo after closing hours, perhaps because of something else, I don't know, they didn't say). Erik de Jong, the Artis professor, read a poem to the giraffes, and our group briefly split up when one half got so distracted by the elephants that they forgot to follow the leader.

The walk ended in the Zen Garden, where we stood in front of a tall green Buddha statue. There the speakers showed us a completely different storytelling device, an Indian Kavad. Used by storytellers to entertain crowds before the invention of television, it is a wooden box construction that unfolds to reveal a series of images, telling the stories of the Hindu gods. It was also in the Zen Garden that Erik de Jong read to us another origin story, this time translated from Inuit. It told of animals and people, who in 'the very earliest time' were the same, as they spoke the same language. A person could become an animal at will and vice versa. Their words had the same power as

the Mayan gods were said to have at the beginning of the world. Because they could turn anything they wanted into reality, just by saying it. And 'nobody could explain this: that's the way it was'.

'The Library a Jungle' is part of the program 'This Teeming World' – initiated by Foundation Glubbudbrib. It presents seven library expeditions departing from the natural history collection of the Artis Bibliotheek of the University of Amsterdam.

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