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Article sept

Shuffling the Collection: Card Decks as Museum Interventions

Jim Drobnick and Jennifer Fisher

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Jennifer Fisher is a curator and Professor at York University, Toronto. Her research focuses on exhibition practices, affect theory, and the aesthetics of the non-visual senses. Her writings have been featured in anthologies such as *Linda Montano* (2017), *Caught in the Act, Vol. 2* (2016), *are you experienced?* (2015), *The Artist as Curator* (2015), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Paranormal Culture* (2013), and *The Senses in Performance* (2006). She is the editor of *Technologies of Intuition* (2006).

Fisher and Drobnick founded and edit the *Journal of Curatorial Studies*, an international, peer-reviewed publication that explores curating and exhibitions and their relation to institutions, communities, and display culture at large. They also form the curatorial collaborative DisplayCult, a framework for creatively merging disciplines, media and audiences to propose prototypes for display and aesthetic engagement (www.displaycult.com).

[Previous page] ***Fig. 1***
sorryyoufeeluncomfortable, *Lotería: Unhealthy Obsessions* (2016), detail of performance in the Wellcome Collection, London.
Photo: Christa Holka, courtesy of the artists.

A museum building and its facade may serve as the institution's public face, but its essence is the permanent collection. Sabine Haag, director of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, phrases this conviction even more strongly when she expresses that "the collection of any museum is its soul, and its primary responsibility."[1] For many museums, particularly longstanding national museums, that soul is not singular or ethereal, but an entity encompassing thousands of artworks and numerous types of objects, accumulated over decades or centuries, with notable space and conservation requirements. While the collection tends to be an indicator of a museum's depth and quality, most of it remains off-limits to the public and can be experienced only through the mediation of exhibitions and displays. Interaction with the majority of the permanent collection is usually restricted to a small group of staff and professionals.

Artists' interventions have helped to animate museum collections at a time when financial and technological issues exert unusual pressure on institutions. As museum acquisition budgets shrink, and lag behind the purchasing clout of corporate and private collectors, institutions are forced to downsize their expectations of adding to their collections and, instead, focus more on developing encounters with the items they already possess. By facilitating greater access to, and the possibility of interaction with, a large number of works, digital technologies also increase the attention to collections. Yet the intangibility of the online environment can be disappointing and can conversely foster an enhanced desire for material objects and actual experiences with the permanent collection.[2] Given these two trends, collections are at a turning point in which the quest for acquisition yields to an interest in engagement.

Artists are particularly well-poised to enliven permanent collections. As practitioners, they experientially understand the making of objects, and can often empathize with the production of other artists' works, even if separated by time or cultural distance. While artists manipulating a collection may, at times, adopt curatorial functions, such as selecting, juxtaposing, contextualizing, arranging and interpreting artworks, they are free of the burden to represent the institution's official position and so can employ the collection in novel ways. Artists can also be more tactical in their temporary relationship to the collection—they can operate without having to defend a long-term strategic approach or discipline-specific considerations that would normally weigh upon a curator or art historian.[3] Postmodernism has endorsed the quoting, reframing and appropriation of other artists' work, and this sensibility undergirds thinking about the museum's collection as a raw material or medium for creative practice.[4] Interventions have activated museum collections in unconventional ways – such as resurrecting overlooked or non-canonical artworks, staging familiar ones in non-traditional and provocative displays, promoting alternative readings and meanings, or creating atypical interactions with audiences.[5] (fig.1)

1 HAAG Sabine, "Foreword," *Ed Ruscha: The Ancients Stole All Our Great Ideas*, (HAUG, Sabine ed.), Vienna: Kunsthistorisches Museum and Köln: Walther König, 2012, n.p.

2 See PINE, B. Joseph and James H. GILMORE, *The Experience Economy*, Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2011; and KNELL, Simon. "Altered Values: Searching for a New Collecting," *Museums and the Future of Collecting*, (KNELL Simon, Ed.) Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2004, p. 1-46.

3 Artists do not have to dedicate their careers, or gain specialized training and academic credentials, to work with a collection, like most curators or scholars; artists can consider and reconfigure the works obliquely.

4 See KACHUR Lewis, "Re-Mastering MoMA: Kirk Varnedoe's 'Artist's Choice' Series," *The Artist as Curator*, (JEFFERY Celina, Ed.), Bristol: Intellect, 2015, p. 45-57. But the use of other artists' work by an artist-curator can be traced much earlier, see CRISCI-RICHARDSON Roberta, "The Artist as Curator: Edgar Degas' *Maison-Musée*," *Journal of Curatorial Studies*. vol. 1, no. 2, p. 217-231.

5 For instance, see Andy Warhol's *Raid the Icebox 1 (1969)* for displaying underwhelming objects; Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum* (1992-93) or Hans Haacke's *Mixed Messages* (2001) for provocative juxtapositions; and Scott Burton's *Artist's Choice: Burton on Brancusi* (1989) for alternative installations.

Artist interventions involving museums over the past fifty years have tended to concentrate on the objects in the collection—what if the objects were only a pretext for another type of project, such as a deck of cards? The format of playing cards can function synecdochally for the collection, with each card representing a single object and the deck packaging a subset of the larger whole. Cards are small and portable, able to be taken out of the museum, and can constitute a "gallery in a pocket" or an "exhibition in a box." Shuffling of the cards allows numerous juxtapositions (more than 300 million combinations exist for just 5 cards chosen from a standard 52 card bridge deck). Readily understood by the general public, cards encourage games and relational practices, and thus radically alter the agency of visitors from consumers/beholders of artworks to participants/players.

More than simply creating accessibility to a collection, cards by artists translate the original works by shifting iconography from one medium to another through photography, drawing and publication. Such an endeavour conducts upon the collection an operation that Claire Bishop has called "reformatting"—a strategy being used increasingly by contemporary artists.[6] The artists' card decks we will discuss reformat museum collections from auratic objects to printed multiples. Two shifts occur through reconfiguring objects into cards. First there are the conversions from object to image, from image to card, and from collection to deck. Secondly, there is a transition in modality from being on visual display in galleries (or invisible in storage) to appearing on cards and inviting handling and playing. The miniaturized representations offer a sense of tactility and interactivity that can counteract the distance and ocularcentricity of viewing in the museum.[7]

The three projects discussed below were all given a version of carte blanche ("free hand") to engage with a museum's collection. Complete freedom is something of a misnomer, however; working with collections generally involves implicitly sanctioned approval to enter the storerooms and vaults.[8] Yet the artists were permitted to wield objects in the collections in ways that could be difficult for institutional curators. There are, of course, dangers to recontexualizing works. To diverge too far from the hegemonic understanding of the artworks' place in history might be deemed disrespectful, overstepping of the "care-taking" obligation of the curatorial role. These artists, however, were afforded leeway because their efforts were ephemeral and mediated, only using the objects for a short period of time, altering their practice, or revising their intellectual framing. Nevertheless, the museums inviting these interventions granted some significant concessions: they loosened copyright restrictions over the use of the images as well as relaxed the moral valence guarding the integrity of the original artworks. The museum's control was momentarily disrupted, yet that disruption was contained within the terms of the intervention.

Besides connoting freedom, the term "carte blanche" can be translated to mean a white or blank card, and this foundational support is evidenced by the innovative ways these artists deploy the medium of cards for their museum interventions. Despite arising from widely different museal circumstances—a national encyclopedic museum, a private contemporary

6 BISHOP, Claire. "Reformatting: A Curatorial Model of Creativity," *The Artist's Museum*, (BYERS Dan, ed.). Boston: Institute for Contemporary Art, 2016, pp. 48-57. Besides playing cards, another example of reformatting the collection is Christian Marclay's *Shake Rattle and Roll (Fluxmix)* (2004) in which the artist recorded the sounds made by handling Fluxus multiples.

7 By miniaturizing the collection, viewers gain a sense of control over it, much like how Susan STEWART argues about the affect of scale in *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1984.

8 Artists' interventions requiring institutional authorization are what Claire ROBINS calls "legitimized transgressions." *Curious Lessons in the Museum: The Pedagogic Potential of Artists' Interventions*. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013, p. 1.

art museum, and a medical museum—the interventions share a common card format whether in the form of flash cards, tarot cards and loteria cards respectively. Notably, the cards featured in these artist projects differ from the decks of playing cards typically sold as souvenirs in museum giftshops. These genres of cards are similar enough to appear to be a natural offshoot of the museums' public outreach. Yet, we would like to suggest that the artists' cards ask more complex questions: what kinds of knowledge can be produced?; what actions can be performed with artworks?; what forms of social relationships can be developed? The manner of carte blanche that these artistic interventions most rely upon is the conceptual freedom to reconceive the collection as an entity for creative and interrogatory projects.[9] Besides making "playing with the collection" available to the invited artists, these card projects allow many others to similarly play at home or anywhere. We suggest that more than simply entertainment, games can be thought-provoking endeavors that consolidate or disturb worldviews, exercise and redeploy cultural symbols and beliefs, and foster imaginative and resourceful intuitions. Cards by artists increase the dissemination of the collection beyond the institution, while also creating opportunities for engagement that can be simultaneously popular, participatory, critical and self-reflexive. In the three examples we discuss below, flash cards by Ed Ruscha, a tarot deck by the De Paraseit collective, and *lotería* cards by the sorryyoufeeluncomfortable collective, decks of cards intervene into museums to reformat, redeploy and reconsider the significance of their collections.

The Ancients Stole All Our Great Ideas: Flash Cards of Curiosity and Wonder

The Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, began as a consolidation of the imperial collections that generations of the Habsburg family had amassed from the late Middle Ages to the mid-nineteenth century. The highlights of the collection include specializations in Egyptian, Near Eastern, Greek and Roman antiquities; Venetian, Flemish, Netherlandish and German masters from the Renaissance and Baroque; coins, musical instruments, armour, costumes and carriages; and a library with over 250,000 prints and books. Reflecting the tastes of a succession of monarchs and various trends in European aristocratic circles, the collection houses works that are exemplary in the history of art. Of particular note is the museum's Kunstkammer/Wunderkammer, which brings together goldsmithing, jewelry, sculptures in ivory and bronze, automatons and clocks, tapestries, and many natural curiosities and marvels. As a site for an artist's intervention, the Kunsthistorisches Museum thus provides a heterogeneous ambience of Old World abundance and wealth.

Ed Ruscha's intervention into the collection, *The Ancients Stole All Our Great Ideas* (2012), first comprised an exhibition in the museum, and then was published as a catalogue/artist's book consisting of oversized cards. Ruscha selected old master paintings, drawings, metalwork and curios from the Kunsthistorisches Museum's renowned collection, Picture Gallery and Kunstkammer, and juxtaposed them with minerals, crystals, taxidermied animals and other specimens from the Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna's museum of natural history, along with an example of the artist's own work.[10] (figs.2-3) The wording of the title of the exhibition and catalogue, "The Ancients Stole All Our Great Ideas," is drawn from nineteenth-century American satirist Mark Twain,

9 This article does not address why the museums solicited the artists or endorsed the interventions, just the meanings and implications of the card projects.

10 Items were also drawn from the Schloss Ambras, Tyrol, and a private collection in the United States.

Figs. 2-3
Ed Ruscha, *The Ancients Stole All Our Great Ideas* (2012), installation views in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.
Photos: courtesy of KHM-Museumsverband.

and can be read as a mock-lament or facile accusation; the postmodern questioning of originality and anxiety about "everything having been done before" pervades this exercise of artist-curation.[11]

The show occupied a palatial room and juxtaposed about three dozen objects that together form a cabinet of curiosities, a phrase that could also define the entire collection accumulated by the succession of Habsburg emperors.[12] On the one hand, Ruscha's choices subvert the traditional divisions in museums and their departments that create separate silos of paintings, prints, archives, libraries, natural history, and so on. He reportedly chose works that either stirred his fascination, amusement or confusion, taught him something, or just stood out.[13] The apparent randomness of the objects is said to harbor a secret coherence based on the artist's unique and inherently interesting "eye." Differing slightly from an earlier era's glorification of the artist's "hand" (which relied on notions of virtuosity), the privileging of the artist's eye references connoisseurship (enhanced somewhat by the conceptual strategem of Duchampian choice). By "match[ing] our eye to his," as curator Jasper Sharp explains, visitors will "understand the reasoning behind his preferences."[14] Yet the overall significance of the project seems directed towards reaffirming the position of the artist-auteur—if not as a genius, at least as an exemplary visionary subject.[15] In the exhibition, the audience's standpoint and agency, then, becomes oddly constrained: their task rests primarily upon guessing at the artist's intention and seeing the works through his eyes.

On the other hand, despite their close proximity in the same room, Ruscha's choices were still primarily segregated by type: paintings hung on the encircling walls, objects were ensconced in vitrines in the center. While one may view the paintings through the glass of the vitrines to cause a blurry overlay of Old Masters and curiosities, the intermingling effect seems limited. How different, then, is the artist's idiosyncratic selection from the *wunderkammer*-like affect already present throughout the institution? Is the artist's "author-function," as Michel Foucault phrases it, much different from that of the monarch?[16] Ultimately, Ruscha's exhibition still resides within the quirks and boundaries of the collection, despite bridging different museums, categories, and departments. He also replicates the affects of wonder, marvel and curiosity —found at the origins of collecting practices in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and specifically informing the Emperors' collecting priorities—that permeate the Kunsthistorisches and Naturhistorisches Museums' collections.[17] By reaffirming some of those institutions' key foundational ideas and principles, the artist in turn complements their history of collecting.

11 SHARP Jasper, "An Ephemeral Collection." In *Ed Ruscha: The Ancients Stole All Our Great Ideas*, (HAUG Sabine, Ed.), Vienna: Kunsthistorisches Museum and Köln: Walther König, 2012, n.p. See also Rachel SPENCE on the fraught dialogue between the new world vs old world represented in Ruscha's intervention: "Catalogue of Chaos," *Financial Times*. September 21, 2012, < https://www.ft.com/content/5dfc7dfa-0328-11e2-a284-00144feabdc0 > Accessed 15 December 2016.

12 Until 1891, the collection of the Habsburgs intermingled fine art and natural history artifacts until they were separated into the newly-constructed Kunsthistorisches and Naturhistorisches Museums.

13 SHARP Jasper, "Ed Ruscha Exhibition at the Kunsthistorisches Museum," YouTube, October 16, 2012, < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UPtS9gZFA4Q > Accessed 15 December 2016.

14 SHARP, "An Ephemeral Collection," *op. cit.*

15 Cf VLACHOU Nandia Foteini, "I Know Where I'm Going," October 17, 2012, < https://iknowwhereimgoing.wordpress.com/author/nandiaf/> Accessed 15 December 2016.

16 FOUCAULT Michel, "What is an Author?," *Language, Counter-memory, Practice*, (BOUCHARD Donald F., Ed.), Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977, p. 113-138. For the sake of this argument, collecting could be considered to be a form of pre-curating, that is, it provides the material foundation for curating to follow.

17 That said, in today's technocratic world, wonder can induce a liberating affect. See DILLON Brian, WARNER Marina, MALBERT Roger, *Curiosity: Art and the Pleasures of Knowing*, London: Hayward Gallery Publishing, 2013, and *Wonder in Contemporary Artistic Practice*, (MIEVES, Christian, BROWN Irene, Eds.), New York: Routledge, 2017.

Pieter Bruegel d. Ä. | the Elder

Kinderspiele | Children's Games
1560
Eichenholz | Oak, 118 x 161 cm
Kunsthistorisches Museum, Gemäldegalerie, Inv.-Nr. 1017

Der weite, staubige Platz geht in der Bildmitte von einer Dorf- in eine Stadtlandschaft über und bietet die Kulisse für 83 Szenen mit über 230 spielenden Kindern. Pieter Bruegel führt die Spielkultur des 16. Jahrhunderts in Flandern mit lockerer Hand auf. Solch einen enzyklopädischen Zugang – wir sehen ein gemaltes Lexikon – findet man in vielen Bildern des Malers und Zeichners, der nur etwa 10 Jahre seines Lebens mit der Ölmalerei verbrachte und ausschließlich höfisch-städtische Auftraggeber hatte; seine Söhne Jan und Pieter sollten sein Erbe auf unterschiedliche Art und Weise antreten.

Ed Ruscha: „Da ich immer versuche, alte Kunst zur Vorläuferin neuer Kunst zu machen, betrachte ich Bruegels *Kampf zwischen Fasching und Fasten* und seine *Kinderspiele* und halte sie für wahr. Einen Augenblick lang sehe ich keine Botschaft und keine Geschichte, sondern einen verblüffenden Umgang mit Raum und Gegenstand. Bruegel und Jackson Pollock hatten vieles gemeinsam; vor allem luden beide ihre Bilder mit visuellem Lärm und Details auf. Dann beginnen die Geschichten. Gleichermaßen erleuchtete wie verstörte Gesichter zeigen Bruegels Verbindung zu Bosch, und in den Kompositionen stauen sich Fabeln und Narrheiten."

The large, dusty square in the centre of the picture is transformed from a village to an urban landscape, and provides the setting for 83 separate depictions of more than 230 children at play. Pieter Bruegel the Elder portrays the culture of games and play in 16th-century Flanders with a light hand. Such an encyclopaedic approach – this is, essentially, a painted dictionary – can be found in many works by this painter and draughtsman, who spent only about 10 years of his life painting in oil and whose patrons were drawn exclusively from court circles. His sons, Jan and Pieter, inherited and built on his legacy.

Ed Ruscha: "Always attempting to make old art the precursor to new art, I look at Bruegel's paintings *Fight between Carnival and Lent* and *Children's Games* and believe it to be true. For a moment, I see no moral or narrative, but rather an astounding use of space and object. He and Jackson Pollock had many things in common, in the loading of their pictures with visual noise and detail. Then the stories begin. Faces, enlightened and disturbed at the same time, show his connection to Bosch and compositions become traffic jams of fables and follies."

Fig.4
Ed Ruscha, *The Ancients Stole All Our Great Ideas* (2012), front and back of the card from the catalogue featuring Pieter Breugel the Elder's *Kinderspiele/Children's Games* (1560).
Photos: courtesy of KHM-Museumsverband.

Fig.5
Ed Ruscha, *The Ancients Stole All Our Great Ideas* (2012), front and back of the card from the catalogue featuring cooling balls (16th-17th century).
Photos: courtesy of KHM-Museumsverband.

While there is value in imaginatively entering an artist's sensibility, in card form Ruscha's project better accomplishes the potential raised by an artist's intervention. In the catalogue/artist's book, all of the objects in *The Ancients Stole All Our Great Ideas* receive a similar photographic treatment on the same-sized card, and thus better realize the notion of equivalency and the leveling of hierarchies that museums often perpetuate, such as fine art over craft and design, Old Masters over contemporary art, and art over natural history.[18] (fig.4) The cards' dimensions, 24 x 30 cm, make them suitable for individual framing. Yet it is the relationship to flash cards that brings forth a further element not possible with the exhibition itself. Rather than being fixed into position within the Museum, the cards embody many of the customary affordances found in a deck: the ability to be shuffled and rearranged; the rendering of objects as photographic representations; the potential for playing games and creating portable, recombined displays.

The face-side of this portfolio presents medium-scale shots of individual paintings in their frames and close-ups of discrete objects resting on shelves, all beautifully photographed as they hang on the wall or rest upon a gunpowder grey ground. Each object's careful positioning and aestheticized isolation hint at a mysterious value beyond the specifics of origin or provenance. Ruscha, known for laconic photographs and drawings of commonplace objects, vernacular scenes and quotidian words, establishes a continuity of wonder in his manner of selection. Just as the parking lots, gas stations and storefronts of Los Angeles became intriguing through the artist's attentive focus, here the artist's choice endows the objects with another layer of fascination.

Ultimately, the most innovative aspect of *The Ancients Stole All Our Great Ideas* is the rendering of the objects as cards and their ability to be shuffled. Like flash cards, these cards hint at education and learning in a playful context.[19] Yet wonder performs a part too—games of identification typically help young minds seeking to rehearse the categories organizing the world. Ruscha's cards offer a paradigmatic shift in such games of categorization, with objects culled from the pantheon of art history, along with notable curiosities and natural marvels. (fig.5) Rather than confirming supposedly universal knowledge, Ruscha's cards present highly subjective responses to the objects pictured on the front. His thoughts are included on the card's reverse side, like a curator's commentary during a gallery walk-through. Ruscha thus hints at the item's personal significance and clues for his selection. The comments are often cryptic: on Arcimboldo—"An artist can do anything he damn well pleases"; on a cabinet with scientific instruments—"This can only speak for itself."[20] Trying to guess at the artist's motives for picking the works, or to discover an accurate sense of his "vision," then, can be a challenging exercise.

Yet this difficulty can be instructive, and no doubt deliberate on the part of the artist. The cards provide "flashes" of his artistic process: aspects of his aesthetic sensibility, personality, life experiences and philosophical outlook refracted through the choice of art and objects. Rather than coalescing into a consistent or

18 Counteracting this leveling, however, is the priority given to the Old Master paintings (Arcimbaldo, Bosch, Breugel, Rubens, etc.) in the packaging of the catalogue – their cards appear at the top of the stack. Objects from the Natural History Museum and other locations come next. Self-deprecatingly, Ruscha's own work is last.

19 Interestingly, Breughel's *Children's Games* (1560) was one of the artworks chosen by Ruscha and placed on display.

20 *Ed Ruscha: The Ancients Stole All Our Great Ideas.* (HAUG Sabine, Ed.), Vienna: Kunsthistorisches Museum and Köln: Walther König, 2012, n.p. Such commentary refers back to the original wunderkammern in which the display process typically involved the owner telling stories of the objects' collection and significance. See BANN, Stephen, "Shrines, Curiosities and the Rhetoric of Display," *Visual Display: Culture Beyond Appearances*, (COOKE Lynne, WOLLEN Peter, Eds.), Seattle: Bay Press, 1995, p. 14-29.

unitary portrait of the artist, audiences confront an endlessly playful enigma. Shuffling the cards into combinations to seek out particular meanings, for instance, yields near infinite variety: 812 possibilities for two cards, 21,924 for three, 570,024 for four, and increasing exponentially beyond that. To locate Ruscha's "vision" is thus a contrivance with no correct or singular answer. (On the text side of many of the cards, there is a blank column next to the institution's contextualization and the artist's ruminations that seemingly beckons holders to add their own thoughts.) While *The Ancients Stole All Our Great Ideas* does sustain the idea of the artist as auteur, the mnemonic game outlined by the flash cards undermines any chance of definitive resolution. Such indeterminacy leads the audience back to their personal creative potential, and with it an empowered sense of authorship and interpretation.

Het Kunsttarot: Affect and Insight through the Collection

The Museum van Bommel van Dam in the city of Venlo in southeastern Netherlands is a municipal museum where temporary exhibitions are typically based on its permanent collection. The collection stems directly from the activities of its founders, Maarten and Reina van Bommel-van Dam who, in 1969 and 1984, gifted 1,500 works of art from their personal holdings. The donations reflected the taste and preferences of the collectors who amassed a wide range of primarily postwar European modernist works including paintings, sculptures and drawings, but also encompassing Japanese woodcuts and African tribal artifacts. Since the museum opened in 1971, the institution has built upon the founders' focus on Dutch painting and works on paper by expanding their acquisitions to include works representing the Cobra and Zero movements, as well as that of emerging artists, photography, and video.[21]

Invited by the museum to propose a project working with the collection, the De Parasiet ("The Parasite") collective designed *Het Kunsttarot* ("Art Tarot") (2015) to reconfigure the experience of viewing the art.[22] (figs.6-7) Here the museum collection is reformatted into the form of a Tarot deck: as an oracle, a device for self-inquiry, intuition and visionary meditation. The cards feature 55 pieces by artists such as Erwin Olaf, Cornelia Schleime, Rob Scholte and Jan Schoonhoven instead of the expected Tarot iconography of major arcana personages and the suits of cups, coins, staffs and wands. Works in a wide variety of styles (abstract, minimalist, expressionist, pop, postmodern) along with a range of media (collage, assemblage, sculpture, painting, print, drawing, photography), show a more complex aesthetic engagement than a deck designed by a single artist.[23] While most the artists are from the Netherlands and northern Europe, cultural diversity is represented through the inclusion of works from China, Ivory Coast, Mexico and Lebanon. De Parasiet collective member Pavel van Houten relates how this art-based Tarot recast the permanent collection as a means to "predict the future, obtain life lessons, or play a game."[24]

21 Museum van Bommel van Dam. "History." http://www.vanbommelvandam.nl/en/museum/about/. Accessed March 7, 2017.

22 As the collective articulates, De Parasiet "is a wandering organ that attaches itself to successful magazines and events. It benefits from the networks of these hosts and is distributed at their expense." Besides van Houten, the collective includes Richtje Reinsma, Dorien de Wit and Marieke Coppens, and their projects primarily involve publications. See De Paraseit, < http://www.deparasiet.nl > and < http://pavelvanhouten.nl/en/organisatie/de-parasiet/> . Both accessed December 10, 2016.

23 For instance, decks by Salvador Dali or Niki de Saint Phalle express a distinct, overall sensibility through a consistently applied aesthetic style. Filmmaker and tarologist Alejandro Jodorowsky notes that the graphic language specific to each deck carries the subjectivity of its artist/author, the particularity of their worldview, and the manner of their perceptual awareness. JODOROWSKY Alejandro and Marianne COSTA, *The Way of Tarot: The Spiritual Teacher in the Cards*, Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 2009, p. 6, 9.

24 See "Kunsttarot." < http://pavelvanhouten.nl/en/visueel/kunsttarot/> Accessed December 10, 2016.

Figs.6-7
De Parasiet, *Het Kunsttarot* (2015), tarot cards in box and performance of tarot readings at the Museum van Bommel van Dam, Venlo, the Netherlands.
Photos: courtesy of the artists.

The titles and affects of the cards likewise rethink the conventions of the Tarot. Numbers are absent, so there is no strict organization or hierarchy for the cards. In particular, the distinction between major and minor arcana is eliminated, dispensing with a key factor determining the significance of a card in a Tarot reading.[25] Each artwork and card in *Het Kunsttarot* thus maintains its own significance, which is equally important as all the others. The figures represented in the titles, however, reveal the cast of persons that populate contemporary life. Rather than the Tarot's retinue of courtly personages (Empress, Heirophant, Magician), allegorical figures (Strength, Justice, Death) or cosmological symbols (The Star, The Tower, The Wheel of Fortune), *Het Kunsttarot* adapts references emergent from contemporary sensibilities. The cards include persons such as the Alpha Male, the Bureaucrat and the Cheerleader; experiential states such as Transition, Nightmare and Awakening; and emblems of abstractions such as Vortex, Horizon or Brightness. Such significations refocus the Tarot's symbology into those readily identifiable for a twenty-first-century audience. For Van Houten, Dutch people tend to be skeptical and a bit fearful of the iconography of traditional Tarot cards, and *Het Kunsttarot*'s use of the museum's artworks helps to ease discomfort of potential users and render the deck more accessible.

Affect in the cards is variously mobilized. Some artworks on the cards evoke states that are pronounced and consistent with the titles, such as Die Maalstroom ("The Maelstrom"), which conveys anguish, or De Hypnose ("Hypnosis"), which suggests a dreamy languorousness.[26] (fig.8) Other cards pose a contradictory relationship between language and image: De Hokjesgeest ("The Spirit Booth") presents a minimalist wallwork that connotes order and regularity, yet the title refers to opening up paranormal channels, while the bold pink color and confrontational stance of the protagonist in Het Toevluchtsoord ("The Refuge") reflects a sassiness that seems opposed to the notion of retreat. Many of the other cards offer ambivalence, however, and strategically leave interpretation open to the users.

Het Kunsttarot is designed to facilitate the finding of individual answers to "personal questions or problems in the artworks." As van Houten elaborates, he and the collective "believe that art has the specific quality to enable people to gain insight into their own lives as long as [they] dare to ask the right questions."[27] In line with how contemporary museums of all types are expanding their purview beyond the display of objects and the demonstration of disciplinary knowledge, *Het Kunsttarot*'s brochure promises self-determined and self-created meaning: "You can experience yourself as the center of the universe."[28] During a reading, the cards simultaneously display a series of artworks for exploration and turn the gaze of the inquiring subject inward. *Het Kunsttarot* re-frames each artwork as a mirror to reflect the viewer's life, goals and concerns. Artworks are to be examined for their associational logic and lateral connotations. While information is listed in the deck's leaflet, the artist, title of the work, provenance and other details are no longer the primary source of meaning. As this booklet relates, the goal "is not to find the beautiful or ugly [in] the works of art, or [to appreciate] their art historical importance or status, but to use your own gaze, intuition and life experience in dialogue with the works of art." The value of the images relies on their ability to catalyze insight, and inevitably will be different for each person and reading. The random arrangements and unexpected juxtapositions can thus offer stimuli for persons to rethink and reconfigure outmoded and detrimental patterns of thought.

25 Tarot decks conventionally comprise 78 cards, with the major arcana numbering 22 personages, and the minor arcana numbering 56.

26 The texts for *Het Kunsttarot* are in Dutch. The translations presented in this article were done by the authors.

27 VAN HOUTEN, Pavel. Email to the authors, December 2, 2015.

28 See KNELL, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

Fig.8
De Parasiet, *Het Kunsttarot* (2015), detail of four tarot cards.
Photo: courtesy of the artists.

Like most Tarot decks, *Het Kunsttarot* includes a box, a deck of cards, and an accompanying booklet with guidelines and interpretations. The box sports a photograph of the Maarten and Reina van Bommel-van Dam, the collection's originators dressed in dark coats and fur hats, and wearing oversized eyeglasses typical of the 1970s. For their card in the deck, De Oprichters ("The Founders"), they stand arm-in-arm in front of the museum building bearing their name. The interpretation of the card reads: "You will be driven by concerns of failure. If you accept your anxiety, a time of pleasure and abundance will come." (fig.9) Such apprehensions of "failure" attributed to the collectors hint at the psychology of collecting as driven by a desire stemming from a sense of lack out of which meaning is generated. Where this interpretation might stem from the founders' biographies, i.e. their presumable war-time experiences and postwar inclinations to rebuild culture, this card compels pondering the motivation and impermanence of the conditions of possibility for collecting itself.

Interestingly, the De Parasiet collective is also featured on a card. The image on their card presents a white field circumscribed by a black border: a blank screen available for anyone's projection or contemplation. The interpretation in the booklet reads: "Allow yourself to enjoy your apathy, hopelessness and despondency. Be without purpose. Such a state of mind is an invitation to go within and connect with your inner source." The significance of this card diverges from the symbolism and visual form of the permanent collection altogether. Instead, it signals disengagement from external objects to impel a more reflexive awareness about one's inward, self-constructed knowledge.

Unusual for card decks, the image on the reverse side also appears as one of the cards itself, De Finalist ("The Finalist"). Its interpretation could be read as pervading the meaning of the deck as a whole: "You consider your mind as a tool. If your spirit, however, was a work of art, it could be described as lyrically-abstract with an occasional trip. Know you will only be a winner if you find the middle ground." This seems to give cues for the ethos and manner of reading by proposing that "works of art" function as possible ways to access one's "spirit." *Het Kunsttarot* auratically reinvigorates contemporary art with the aesthetic qualities of oracular and visionary power.[29]

The Tarot in general works as a mirror for the self, operating a bit like Freud's *unheimlich*, or uncanny, where the part of the self that is hidden from or suppressed by one's consciousness is displayed by the cards. In this sense, artworks that otherwise appear mysterious may be strangely familiar to the querant. As Tarot psychologist Carl Sargent notes, the "Tarot *reveals* things that the person knows to be true but may have evaded, repressed or not recognized."[30] Reading Tarot cards typically exercises associative logic, intuition, and an understanding of the meanings of the iconography including colours, numbers and the gestures of the figures. The collection of symbols appearing on decks have been likened to a "picture book about ourselves" or a "nomadic cathedral."[31] (fig.10)

While *Het Kunsttarot* employs distinctive images, the operations of the deck are traditional to tarot reading: the handling of the cards, the manner of focusing on a question while handling and shuffling the cards, the sorting through of observations and comments. The brochure proposes the three types

29 On cards' "enchanting" use of religious symbols, see BURGER Maya, "Drawing Cards, Playing Destiny: Karma and Play in New Divinatory Practices," (BORNET Philippe, BURGER Maya, Eds.), *Religions in Play: Games, Rituals and Virtual Worlds.* Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 2012, p. 83-92.

30 SARGENT, Carl. *Personality, Divination, and the Tarot.* Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1988, p. 190.

31 See SARGENT, *ibid.*, p. 190 and JODOROWSKY and COSTA, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

Fig. 9
De Parasiet, *Het Kunsttarot* (2015), detail of four tarot cards.
Photo: courtesy of the artists.

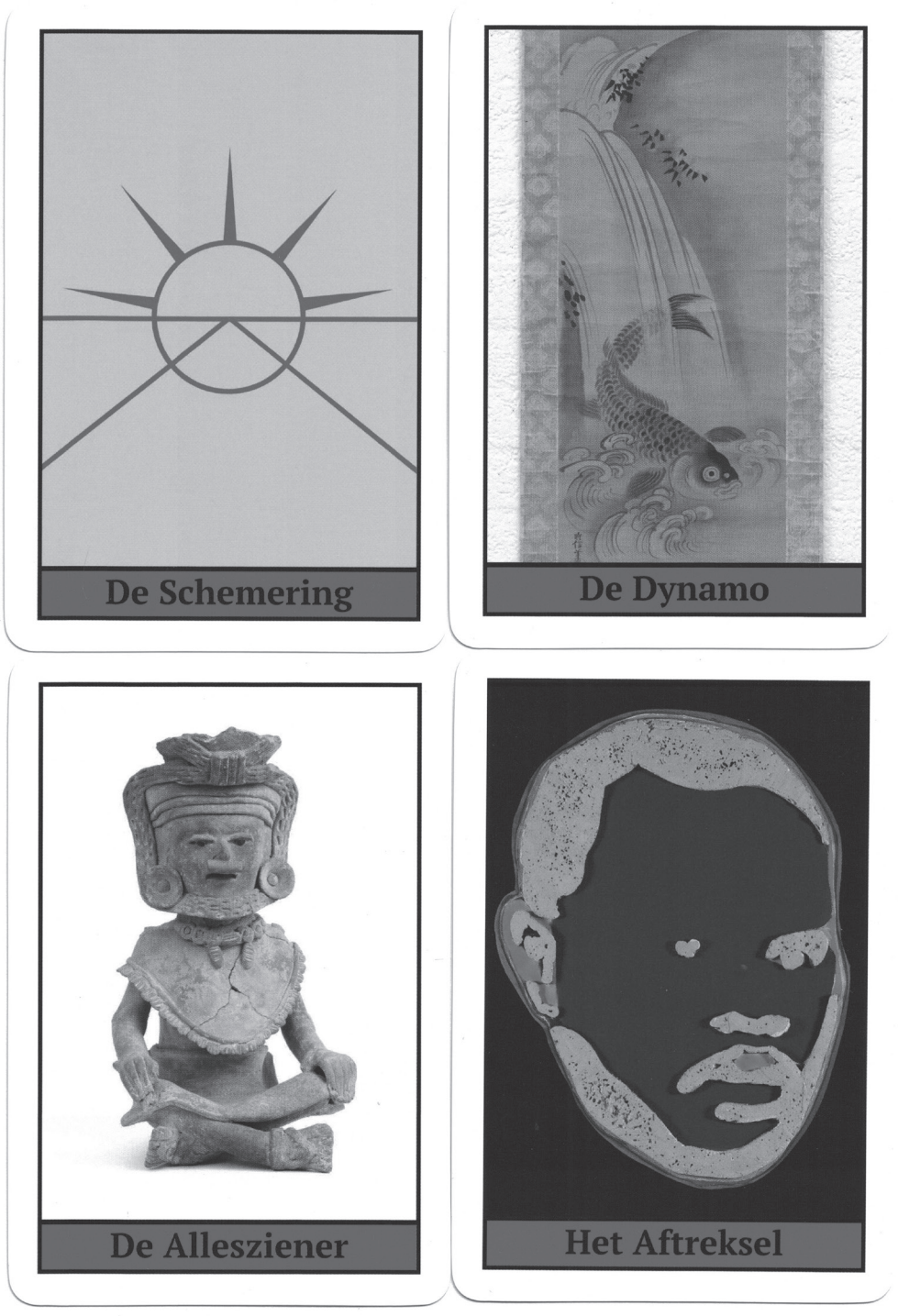

Fig. 10
De Parasiet, *Het Kunsttarot* (2015), detail of four tarot cards.
Photo: courtesy of the artists.

of spreads that are familiar to Tarot practice. For the "three-card layout," the card on the left indicates past, the middle one the present, and right one the future. For the "horseshoe," seven cards are laid in an inverted "V" shape. And the "cross" uses six cards, the card in the middle indicating the position of the questioner. The card positioned on the left side represents obstacles, the card on the right shows the presence of positive influences. The top card signifies the foreseeable future, and the bottom card the role of the subconscious. One card rests outside of the cross, and this indicates the long-term view. Readers choose the layout that best suits their situation and inclination for reflection.

The booklet for *Het Kunsttarot* instructs users to trust their improvisation and intuition, to focus on the associations, memories and perceptions suggested by the cards. Also important are the links between cards in the layout, and how they may make evident new understandings or perspectives. In particular, readers relate the image of the artworks to the querant's situation. Importantly, there are no inherently good or bad cards because each derives its meaning in relation to how the question is framed and to the spread as a whole. Finally, as a disclaimer, the brochure urges users to make responsible choices and decisions when interpreting the cards and applying the insights during their readings.

Het Kunsttarot offers visitors a chance to introspectively engage with the Museum van Bommel van Dam's collection, a manner that markedly differs from what is possible within conventional exhibition arrangements. The handling of the cards reformats the collection to customize the viewing experience as a springboard for personal advice and insight. If the collection comprises the "soul" of the institution, then the *Het Kunsttarot* proposes a means to hold, touch and be-touched-by that soul. As cultural theorist Dick Hebdige has articulated, "soul" can mean the "affective alliances that have the power to bind groups or individuals that may be temporally or spatially segregated."[32] Where Hebdige references social alliances, the relational affect of "soul" can apply equally to the proximities of card-spreads, artworks and beholders. Users can explore the subjective impact of images, and meditate intensely on particular works. The art tarot of De Parasiet fosters intimacy with specific configurations of artworks that can be used to generate visionary insight. If the collection forms the museum's soul, then the *Het Kunsttarot* deck becomes a vehicle for the museum's soul to depart its institutional body and accompany museumgoers on their diverse journeys.

Lotería: Unhealthy Obsessions: Decolonizing the Collection

The Wellcome Collection in London houses more than a million objects that reflect on the significance of medicine, health and the body in societies around the globe. Based on the prodigious accumulating of Sir Henry S. Wellcome (1853-1936), co-founder of the pharmaceutical giant Burroughs Wellcome & Co.,[33] the collection's diversity exemplifies the omnivorous mission to procure artifacts connected to the history, practices and technology of medicine. With immense wealth and manic acquisitiveness, Wellcome collected during the peak of the British colonial empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, utilizing an international network of operatives to "ransack" nations to make a facsimile of the world.[34] A permanent exhibition of objects at the Wellcome, *Medicine Man*, provides a sense

32 HEBDIGE Dick, "What is Soul?," *Video Icons and Values: Case Studies from the Circum-Caribbean*, (OLSEN, Alan M., PARR, Christopher, PARR Debra, Eds.), Albany: SUNY Press, 1991, p. 132.

33 The company has since merged into GlaxoSmithKline, one of the world's largest pharmaceutical corporations.

34 See LARSON Frances, *An Infinity of Things: How Sir Henry Wellcome Collected the World*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Figs.11-12
sorryyoufeeluncomfortable, *Lotería: Unhealthy Obsessions* (2016), installation and performance in the Wellcome Collection, London.
Photos: Christa Holka, courtesy of the artists.

F*ig. 13*
sorryyoufeeluncomfortable, *Lotería: Unhealthy Obsessions* (2016), one of the *tablas* used in the game.
Photo: courtesy of the artists.

of the pan-cultural scope of the collection, along with highlights of its curiosities. Besides anatomical specimens and models, medical and scientific instruments, mummies and masks, it presents items "ranging from diagnostic dolls to Japanese sex aids, and from Napoleon's toothbrush to George III's hair."[35] While the exhibition clearly aims for a populist audience, the overdetermined focus on that which is "fascinating" and "extraordinary"—not to mention the "obsession" with the "universal interest in health and the body"—positions the show within the paradigm of exotic spectacle.

Lotería: Unhealthy Obsessions (2016) intervened into *Medicine Man*'s colonial-era version of a trove of curiosities. (fig.11-12) Using a popular Mexican card game, *lotería*, the sorryyoufeeluncomfortable collective (syfu) staged a performance evening to compete with, be entertained by, and to question the objects on display.[36] *Lotería* is an interesting choice to engage the audience and examine a collection. A type of bingo that uses images in addition to numbers, the game can be played to both gamble and socialize. Participants listen to a *cantor* (caller) offering poems, riddles or humorous aphorisms, try to figure out what pictogram it applies to, and then win a prize when they have assembled four icons in a row, column, diagonal or square on their *tablas* (game boards).[37] The game encapsulates its own history of colonialism: begun as an aristocratic entertainment in eighteenth-century Spain, it was spread throughout the Americas as a form of what sfyu calls "playful propaganda."[38] In Mexico, *lotería* holds special prominence; the 54 pictograms featured on the cards have become emblematic of the nation's culture. Conventionalized in the 1890s by Dom Clemente, the images portray a rural, agricultural life with brightly-colored illustrations of local plants and animals (watermelon, parrot), Christian symbols (heart, the devil), musical instruments and household items (bandolin, ladder), village characters (soldier, drunkard), and signs of nation and authority (the flag, the crown).[39] The archetypes presented are both familiar and nostalgic to many Mexicans, and their folk art style of rendering greatly softens the ideological and political overtones.

What is the relevance of *lotería* to the exhibition *Medicine Man*? Given their foreignness to the British context, a deck of *lotería* cards could have been one of the exotic artifacts collected by Wellcome.[40] Yet this deck of cards by the syfu collective accomplishes more as an intervention into the institution's holdings: through the technique of reformatting, the objects in the exhibition are reframed as cards, and the Wellcome collection itself reconfigured within a Mexican paradigm. Notable objects in *Medicine Man*, such as the leper clapper, buffalo bone amulet, fakir sandals or shrunken

35 Wellcome Collection. "Medicine Man." n.d. < https://wellcomecollection.org/exhibitions/medicine-man > Accessed January 15, 2017. Other items include a phallic amulet, dragon chair and a piece of Jeremy Bentham's skin. Henry Wellcome himself is represented in fancy dress headgear.

36 The sorryyoufeeluncomfortable collective is composed of artists, curators, educators and cultural producers working at the intersection of art, identity, history and politics. *Lotería: Unhealthy Obsessions* was curated by Teresa Cisneros and included contributions from syfu members Barby Asante, Eva Cookney, Deborah Findlater, Ciaran Finlayson, Laurel Hadleigh, Jacob V Joyce, Rabz Lansiquot, Anni Mossyvan, Yussuf Musse, Zviki Mutyambizi, and Salina Popa. See < https://www.facebook.com/pg/syfucollective/about/?ref=-page_internal > Accessed January 15, 2017.

37 Players are traditionally given dried beans or small stones to mark their tablas. For prizes, sfyu gave out items related to the politics of identity, such as sweatshirts, 'zines and lapel pins. CISNEROS, Teresa. Email to the authors, March 16, 2017.

38 sfyu, *Loteria! Unhealthy Obsessions Reprised* < http://cargocollective.com/syfu > Accessed January 15, 2017. See also STAVANS Ilan, "The Ritual of Chance," *Loteria!*, (VILLEGAS Teresa, STAVANS Ilan, Eds.),Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004, p. xi-xx.

39 The figures depicted are not without controversy – El Negrito and El Apache are commonly found in the cards. Such stereotypes, however, lead artists and designers to reimagine and update *lotería* images.

40 In *Medicine Man*, Mexico does not have as prominent a representation as some other countries, but it might be said to be epitomized by the figurine of the Black Madonna in the exhibition, a hybrid of Western and Indigenous spiritual traditions.

head, are re-envisioned through *lotería*'s vernacular aesthetic of stylized images and bold, flat backgrounds. (fig.13) The lighthearted affect brought to bear upon the somewhat grisly illustrations mimics the fun one expects from a game, and just as *lotería* instructs children about the culture they live in, *Lotería: Unhealthy Obsessions* seeks to educate as well. Play and learning flow together, especially when a bit of competition is included, notes syfu member Teresa Cisneros.[41] Yet *Lotería*'s play is strategically designed to embed a political discussion about the items in *Medicine Man* by unmooring them from the context and framing of the Wellcome's institutional history and its early collecting practices. The cards are manipulable for the audience, as the objects are not, and so such interaction negates the quiddity of the curiosities; that is, the translation into cards breaks through the auratic shell of exoticism encasing the objects, a reification that leads to the assumption that their material oddness grants a self-sufficient or self-explanatory power.

The performativity and verbal flourishes of *lotería* unleash a crucial opportunity for alternative exegeses and counter-discourse.[42] Beyond scientific objectivity and museal authority, the cards permit an opening up of the institution's discourse to political interrogations, critical reflexivity, and opinionated interpretations. Not only can the objects be re-evaluated according to polemical analyses, so too can the practices of collecting, exhibition and audience engagement promulgated by *Medicine Man*. The backs of the *lotería* cards feature a mix of information and provenance for the objects depicted, much as one would find on museum labels and didactic panels, but here syfu add pointed commentary on pertinent issues and associations raised by the items. For instance, *Lotería* card No. 35 Amulet Necklace exposes the chronic mislabeling of decontextualized objects from Indigenous cultures, where mistakes in categorization and identification—"fiction presented as fact"—inevitably lead to misunderstanding, if not total erasure, of the object's original purpose and meaning.[43] Other cards impolitely unearth the history of the unsavory collecting practices employed by Wellcome and others generally in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as acquisitions made by stealing from temples, grave-robbing, deceptive purchases, even murder (as in the procurement of the shrunken head). (fig.14) No. 22 Neolithic Infant Cup discusses the labour abuses at Wellcome's archeological digs, some which have been described as "illegal indenture" because he withheld workers' payments. The unlawfulness of the collecting methods is underscored in No. 1 Mask, which represents an object no longer in the Wellcome collection because this Indigenous artifact was repatriated back to the United States. Within the broader scope of colonization, the illegalities of collecting and the opera-tion of the "salvage paradigm" were co-existent with the violence and land confiscation enacted upon communities around the globe.[44] The counter-narrative of the *lotéria* cards presented here redeploys the objects from their status of curiosities within *Medicine Man* to problematic colonial trophies expressing the power of Western nations to subjugate populations and extract resources, cultural and otherwise.[45]

41 Quoted in STENGEL Lucile, "Please Do Play With Your Food… How the Mexican Card Game Lotería Is Teaching Better Eating," *Collectively*, January 1, 2016, < https://collectively.org/article/do-play-with-your-food-how-the-mexican-game-loteria-is-teaching-better-eating/> Accessed December 10, 2016.

42 Given the emphasis on curiosities, both *Medicine Man* and *Lotería: Unhealthy Obsessions* reference the tradition of oral storytelling integral to the display and appreciation of objects in *wunderkammern*. See BANN, *op. cit*.

43 Unattributed quotes in this section are taken from the backs of the *Lotería* cards.

44 See CLIFFORD James, "Of Other Peoples: Beyond the 'Salvage' Paradigm," *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, (FOSTER Hal, Ed.), Seattle: Bay Press, 1987, p. 121–30.

45 Some cards are particularly poignant: No. 41 Buffalo Bone Amulet from the Batak people of Indonesia mentions how the object aimed to protect the wearer from harm, but could not defend against the "civilizing mission" of the Dutch and their attempt to extinguish their culture through the importing of science, capitalism and Christianity.

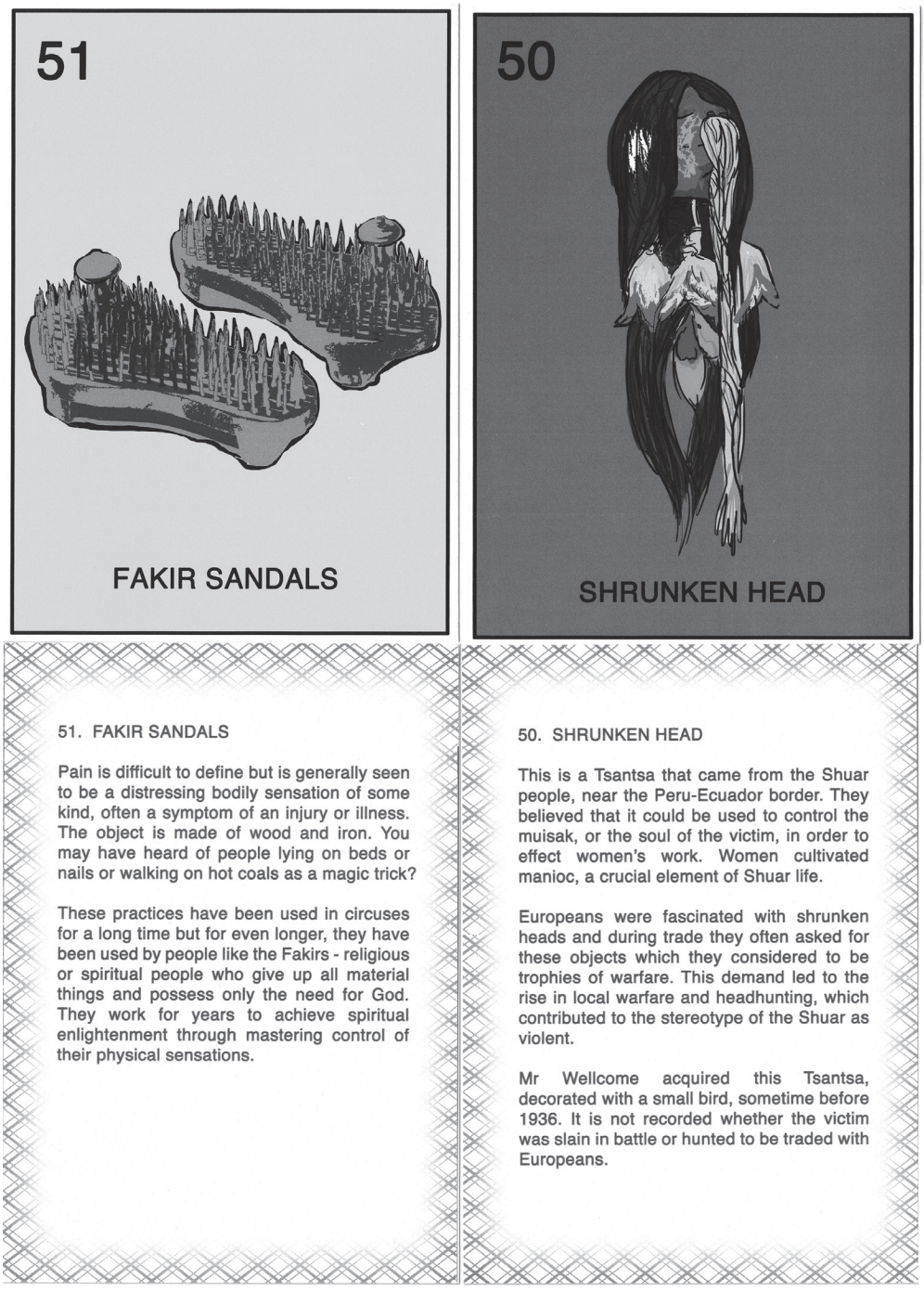

Fig. 14
sorryyoufeeluncomfortable, *Lotería: Unhealthy Obsessions* (2016), detail of two *lotería* cards and their commentary.
Photo: courtesy of the artists.

Other cards reposition the objects according to revisionist history and connect the past to the present. For example, No. 49 Geta Kihai demonstrates how a Chinese surgeon, whose medical theories were typically denigrated as "superstitious" or "barbaric" by western doctors in the nineteenth century, pre-empted Western doctors in utilizing anaesthesia during surgery. Despite the attempts at eradication by colonial authorities, North American Indigenous practices did survive and some objects, such as No. 26 Medicine Man Bag, can instigate a revaluation and regeneration of cultural beliefs. (fig.15) Just because the most egregious acts of colonial violence occurred in the past does not mean that their effects have concluded. No. 43 Execution Mask hints at how the dehumanization and humiliation that continue to mark individuals as "other" and thus legitimize torture and mistreatment. Even commonplace Western items, such as No. 3 Obstetrical Forceps, can contain fraught histories; doctors who first developed the instrument kept it as a secret to help the aristocratic elites, and then later used it to experiment on slaves. What may be the most troubling revelation in the cards is how viewers are implicated in new forms of colonialism. No. 28 Nail Studded Figure outlines how Western consumer lifestyles depend upon the average person's complicity to overlook the persistent forces of corporate exploitation, economic subjugation, and environmental degradation spreading virtually unhindered in the Third World and elsewhere.

Lotería: Unhealthy Obsessions lasted one night and featured three gaming sessions.[46] Continuous with the genre of artists' interventions, the sfyu collective used performance to temporarily commandeer the space of the institution and to create a fun event that was also dialogic, relational, and informative. The ephemerality was tactical, for several important reasons. First, the game reversed the colonial gaze: just as Wellcome intended to gather the world into his collection to create a comprehensive microcosm, the cards enfolded the collection into the world and sensibility of *lotería*. Second, the game assimilated the West's version of the exotic within its own "exotic" paradigm. In other words, the deck estranged the strange by redoubling Wellcome's initial act of othering within the exhibition *Medicine Man* and in its collection as a whole.[47] Yet, there exists an irony in that the iconography in *lotería* and the Wellcome both trade in stereotypes – the former of Mexican identity and social types, the latter in exoticism and otherness. While *Medicine Man* perpetuated stereotypes, *Lotería: Unhealthy Obsessions* destabilized them through the agenda of decolonization.[48] The "unhealthy obsession," then, is the West's own fetishization of otherness through the continued practices of colonialism, primitivism and exoticization. Finally, the element of play relaxed inhibitions about challenging the authority that inherently suffuses the museum and sparked a sense of agency for visitors to develop their own thoughts and interpretations.

46 The performance was a component of the Feeling Emotional, Friday Late Spectacular at the Wellcome, which set out to "explore the art and science of human emotions" through technologies, behaviours and languages. The success of the event led to a restaging four months later. Both events were part of sfyu's open platform events Socially Agitated: Recollecting Collections that took place in the Wellcome's Reading Room and addressed the issue of collections and archiving. See Wellcome Collection, *Feeling Emotional*, < https://wellcomecollection.org/feelingemotional > and syfu collective, *Loteria! Unhealthy Obsessions Reprised*. < http://cargocollective.com/syfu> Both accessed December 10, 2016.

47 The title of the Wellcome's exhibition, *Medicine Man*, bears several problems. On one level, it refers to the man who started the collection and who began his career in the days of herbal tonics and elixirs (he pioneered the use of pills and direct marketing to doctors). It is also an anglicized term for an Indigenous healer, but the exhibition showcases objects from cultures around the world. If the title is intended to refer to "man" in general, then the universalism carries sexist implications. Also, it is not clear how much the Wellcome has consulted with the diverse communities and cultures from whom its artifacts were drawn.

48 *Lotería: Unhealthy Obsessions* deliberately used the "colonizer's tools" as a method to decolonize the museum. CISNEROS Teresa, Email to the authors. March 16, 2017.

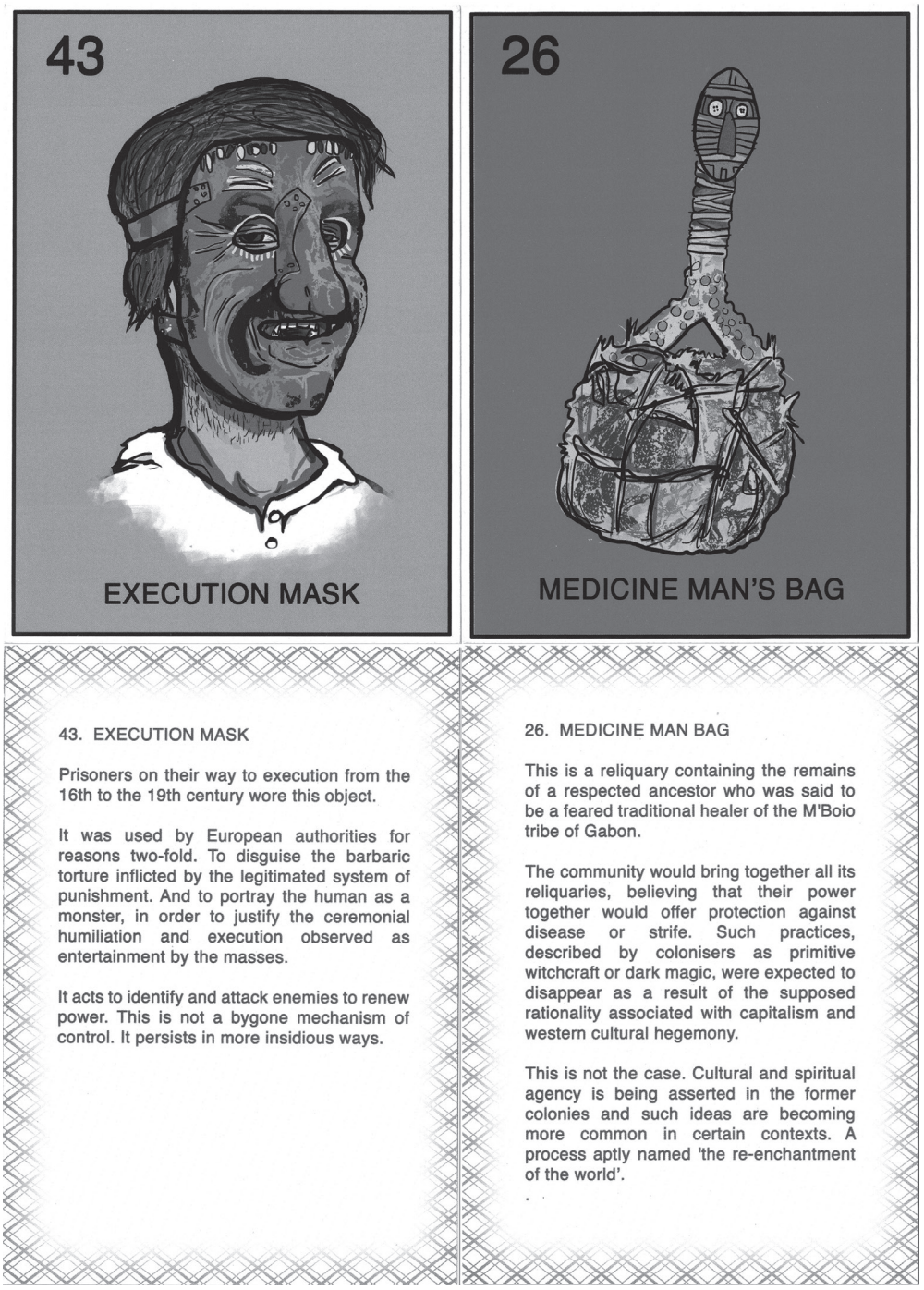

Fig. 15
sorryyoufeeluncomfortable, *Lotería: Unhealthy Obsessions* (2016), detail of two *lotería* cards and their commentary.
Photo: courtesy of the artists.

Yet, decolonization of the museum involves more than just generating alternative viewpoints about objects in a collection or replacing an inappropriate interpretation with an accurate one. As the name of the sorry-youfeeluncomfortable collective suggests, discomfort is relevant to the process of critique.[49] In the realm of museum collections generally and *Medicine Man* in particular, innocence is embodied in the notion of curiosity in which so many of the Wellcome's objects are couched. While the wonder elicited by curious objects can be exhilarating to the imagination, the category of "curiosity" also bears an aspect of containment. Because a number of *Medicine Man*'s artifacts are demonstrably archaic (such as the phrenological skull, an anti-masturbation device, and a scold's bridle), all of the objects are encased in the patina of obsolescence. Viewers remain detached from the objects' aftereffects—they are innocent, then, of being connected to their troubled origins and pardoned of the responsibility to address their continuing problematics. "Curiosity" can thus serve as a means of closure that defers analysis and empathy. sfyu's reformatting of the Wellcome's collection not only plays into the institution's pervasive exoticism, it also cracks the shell of curiosity to shed light on the material conditions of the objects' colonial-era extraction. Such reshuffling thereby forges links between the traumas induced by colonialism and the contemporary lives of museum visitors. The cards are playful, but serious; trenchant, but compassionate; polemical, but factually grounded; critical, but self-reflexive. By constructing a populist card game out of the museum's collection, *Lotería* situates players within an unfolding and complicated decolonizing process.

Cards as Dynamic Multiples: Disidentifying with the Collection

Card decks by artists intervene into museum collections as dynamic multiples that connect art to broader aspects of life and visual culture, empower the agency of spectators, and promote the ongoing critique of institutions. The dynamism revolves around the cards' ability to be shuffled, that is, a performative action that can subject the collection to various kinds of practices. Despite the different types of cards examined here—flash cards, tarot, *lotería*—all play a game of simultaneously reformatting and disidentifying with the collection; that is, they fully acknowledge the collection as the source, but detach themselves from, and renounce to varying degrees, the collections' context and framing within the museum. First, in contrast to the arranging and exhibiting of a collection's physical objects, which require a significant amount of care and planning, the arrangements made possible by the cards enable the collection to be easily configured into new and unexpected pairings and constellations. By *disarticulating* the collection from its location in the museum, the cards transport the objects to anywhere people gather to play.[50] Similarly, anyone can utilize the collection, not just those classes of museum staff, art historical scholars and wealthy donors. The cards also convey a levity of engagement that frees beholders from the weight of custodial decisions that institutions necessarily have to consider about quality, condition, provenance, thematic relevance, etc. Such freedom may seem undisciplined to many art world professionals, but the cards provide an unlimited licence for experimentation and creativity.

49 Similarly, scholar-activists Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang underscore the need to emphasize incommensurability and to embrace that which is unsettling in order to fully implement decolonization. A crucial component of such a practice is to disrupt what they call the "moves to innocence" by those resisting social justice. See TUCK Eve and YANG K. Wayne, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2012, p. 1-40.

50 The terms "articulation," "disarticulation" and "rearticulation" are used by Stuart Hall to describe a provisional juncture or link between a social or cultural formation and ideology. See GROSSBERG Lawrence, "On Postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview with Stuart Hall," In *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, (MORLEY, David, CHEN Kuan-Hsing, Eds.). London and New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 131-150.

Second, the artists' decks invite users into a participatory relationship with the collection that stands in for the handling of its artifacts. In this way the collection is *rearticulated* (with each new conjuncture conferring a different meaning and significance). A deck of cards can be readily understood as a format that invites social activity. The examples in this article certainly epitomize what sociologists Babak Taheri and Aliakbar Jafari outline as the four main reasons museums support play within their programming: to create fun, to stimulate the audience's imagination, to enhance learning, and to nurture social interactions.[51] The artists' card decks we have discussed, however, are more complex: they may accomplish these four outcomes, but they are inflected with multivalent purposes and strategically take advantage of the museums' willingness to be manipulated. Institutional critique fundamentally guides the card projects of Ruscha, De Paraseit and syfu, which all work to start conversations about museums, collections, institutional agendas, and so on. Entertainment is only one part of each artist's practice; in general, these artist card games provide the vehicle for interrogating the value and use of culture.

Lastly, the shuffling offered by card decks presume an ethics. By detaching artifacts from institutional fixity and control, artists' cards open the power-knowledge potency of the collection to free-ranging questions about who a collection serves, how it can support different agendas, and what other ends it can accomplish. The collection, then, is not reduced to an inventory; it is positioned as a politically invested assemblage with a history of use, but one that can be reconfigured at any time. Consider the ease in which the three card decks analyzed above disrupt the authoritative utterances of the didactic panel and invent new understandings for the objects: *The Ancients Stole All Our Great Ideas* by whimsical, autobiographical, off-the-cuff reflections; *Het Kunsttarot* by associative, intuitive, self-analytical meditations; and *Lotería* by polemical counter-discourse. Each sidesteps the conventional reading of the objects in order to mobilize reflexive and interventionist perspectives. In the hands of these artists, collection-based card decks innovatively transform the framing of museum artifacts through operations of relationality, self-inquiry, decolonization and institutional critique.

51 TAHERI Babak, JAFARI Aliakbar, "Museums as Playful Venues in the Leisure Society," (SHARPLEY Richard, STONE Philip, Eds.). *The Contemporary Tourist Experience: Concepts and Consequences*, New York: Routledge, 2012, p. 201-215.

Brasser la collection : les jeux de cartes en tant qu'interventions muséales

Outre l'édifice même du musée, ce que l'on considère comme étant la ressource fondatrice et la principale distinction d'une institution, c'est sa collection. Or, les collections permanentes peuvent sembler à la fois abstraites et mystérieuses (la plupart des objets n'étant pas exposés) et vastes et imposantes (vu le grand nombre d'objets revendiqué par certains musées). Bien que l'on tende à mesurer la qualité et l'envergure d'un musée à l'aune de sa collection, celle-ci reste hors de portée d'un public qui ne peut l'appréhender autrement que par la médiation d'expositions et de présentations, l'accès à la collection permanente et son utilisation étant d'ordinaire réservés aux commissaires et à quelques employés.

Dans ces conditions, les interventions d'artistes dans les musées visent à en animer les collections par des moyens non conventionnels – priorité à des œuvres d'art oubliées, mises en espace non traditionnelles ou nouvelles façons d'interagir avec les publics. Cet article examine un type particulier d'intervention d'artiste dans le musée : la conversion des objets de la collection en jeux de cartes. Plusieurs fonctions sont ainsi assurées – la collection devient portative, elle peut être reconfigurée et, surtout, on peut la manipuler librement. En plus de permettre une meilleure diffusion de la collection auprès des publics, les jeux de cartes d'artistes démocratisent les œuvres d'art et offrent une occasion d'engagement qui peut se révéler à la fois populaire, participative, critique et autoréflexive.

Cet article traite des jeux de cartes d'artistes conçus en tant qu'interventions dans les collections de musées, sous trois formes : cartes éclair, cartes de tarot et cartes de *lotería*. Les collections examinées ici sont consacrées à l'art contemporain, aux œuvres historiques ainsi qu'à l'histoire naturelle et aux sciences. Mobilisées par le jeu, les cartes d'artistes permettent de brasser les questions esthétiques et de propriété liées à la collection et celles de l'enchantement esthétique, des connaissances personnelles et de l'analyse idéologique. Il convient de ne pas confondre de tels jeux de cartes d'artistes et les cartes à jouer vendues par les musées comme souvenirs, exercices d'image de marque ou articles promotionnels. Les cartes d'artistes forment plutôt des multiples dynamiques qui relient l'art à divers aspects plus vastes de la culture visuelle, qui font le pont entre l'élitiste et le populaire, et qui donnent aux spectateurs un pouvoir d'agir tout en s'inscrivant dans la continuité de la critique des institutions.