

125,660 Specimens of Natural History: Navigating Colonial Collections in the Anthropocene

Lunchtime talk by Anna-Sophie Springer, Craig-Kade Visiting Scholar-in-Residence, 2014



In the history of natural history the importance of the Indonesian archipelago as a region for revolutionary scientific discoveries—especially regarding the theory of evolution, studies of biogeography, and the *Homo erectus*—cannot be underestimated. Yet, in the work of traditional science exhibition curatorship this legacy is seldom reflected in its predominantly unidirectional form of colonial knowledge production stocking museums and academies in Europe. In this lunchtime talk, our current Craig-Kade Visiting Scholar in Residence, Anna-Sophie Springer, presents material, which currently forms the conceptual apparatus of a forthcoming art/science exhibition premiering at the contemporary arts center Komunitas Salihara, Jakarta, Indonesia, in August 2015.

By revisiting Alfred Russel Wallace's (1823–1913) eight-year collecting expedition through the Malay archipelago, the project *125,660 Specimens of Natural History* considers the mobility of colonial collections and the environmental transformations they produced against the background of both postcolonial museology and recent "Anthropocene" scholarship. By sharing work-in-progress research, Anna-Sophie discusses how specimen collections and archival references—including such to German colonial scientists such as Franz Wilhelm Junghuhn and Ernst Haeckel—can be reassessed through transcultural collaboration among international artists, scientists, and curators in order to produce relevant work about the history of "colonial environmentalism," the legacy of such colonial practices in the present, and the potential for appropriating these histories for contemporary conservation efforts specifically concerned with the future of Malay rainforest ecologies.



Anna-Sophie Springer is a curator, writer, and co-director, with Charles Stankievich, of the Berlin-based art press K. Verlag. Her practice merges curatorial, editorial, and artistic interests. She is Associate Editor of publications for the 8th Berlin Biennale. She previously worked as Editor for the pioneering German theory publisher Merve Verlag, before launching K. in 2011. Her forthcoming exhibition project is *125,660 Specimens of Natural History*, opening at Komunitas Salihara, Jakarta, Indonesia, in August 2015. Her collection of interviews, *TRAVERSALS: Conversations on Art and Writing*, was released in September 2014. Anna-Sophie is also a member of the SYNAPSE International Curators' Network of the Haus de Kulturen der Welt, where she co-edits *intercalations*, a book-as-exhibition series co-published by K. in the framework of the HKW's "Anthropocene Project." She received her M.A. in Contemporary Art Theory from Goldsmiths College, University of London, and her M.A. in Curatorial Studies from the Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst, Leipzig.

Image above: Map of Southeast Asian archipelago showing Alfred Russel Wallace's route; from his book *The Malay Archipelago: The land of the orang-utan, and the bird of paradise – A narrative of travel, with sketches of man and nature* (1869).