

# Ceremony (Burial of an Undead World)

Introduction  
in Simplified Language



In English

The exhibition opens on October 23rd  
and will end on December 30th 2022

## **Imprint**

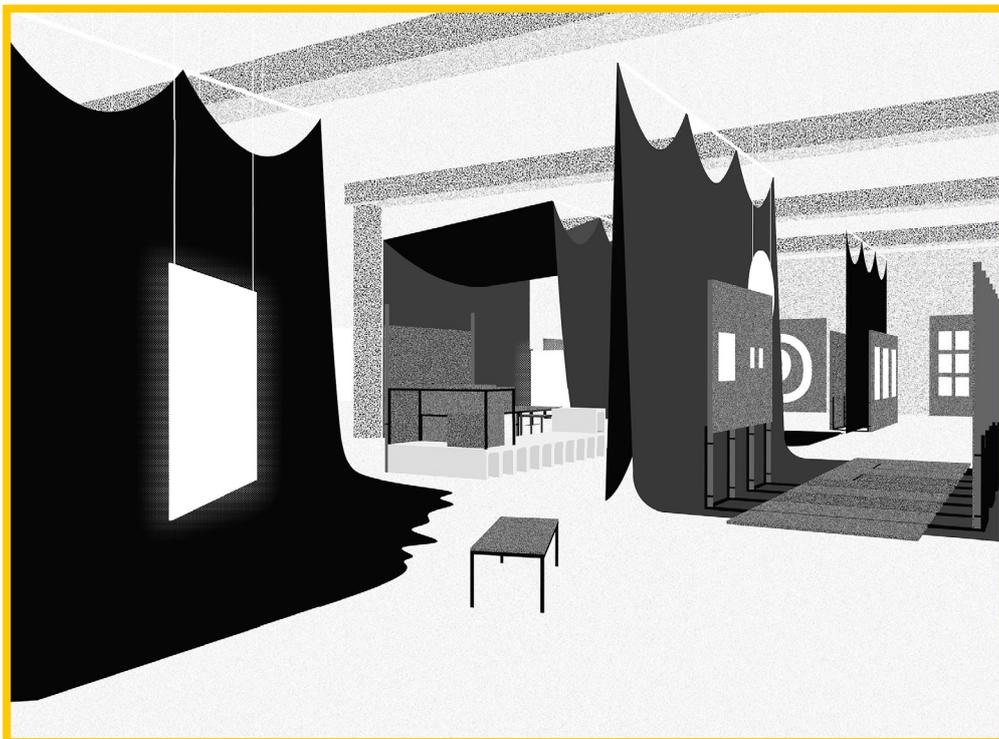
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We are delighted to welcome you to the exhibition **Ceremony (Burial of an Undead World)**. We have picked six works from the many artworks displayed to introduce you to the main ideas in the exhibition.

## Storytelling

The first thing we notice when we come into the exhibition hall is the black fabric all over the room. Various areas in the exhibition space are brightly lit. Others remain dark. The fabrics are shaped to form tents and curtains. Images, installations, and films are displayed on the walls and inside the fabric tents. Sometimes music or a voice can be heard in the space. Sometimes everything remains silent. All this makes us think of a theater. There are several theater stages that we can enter.



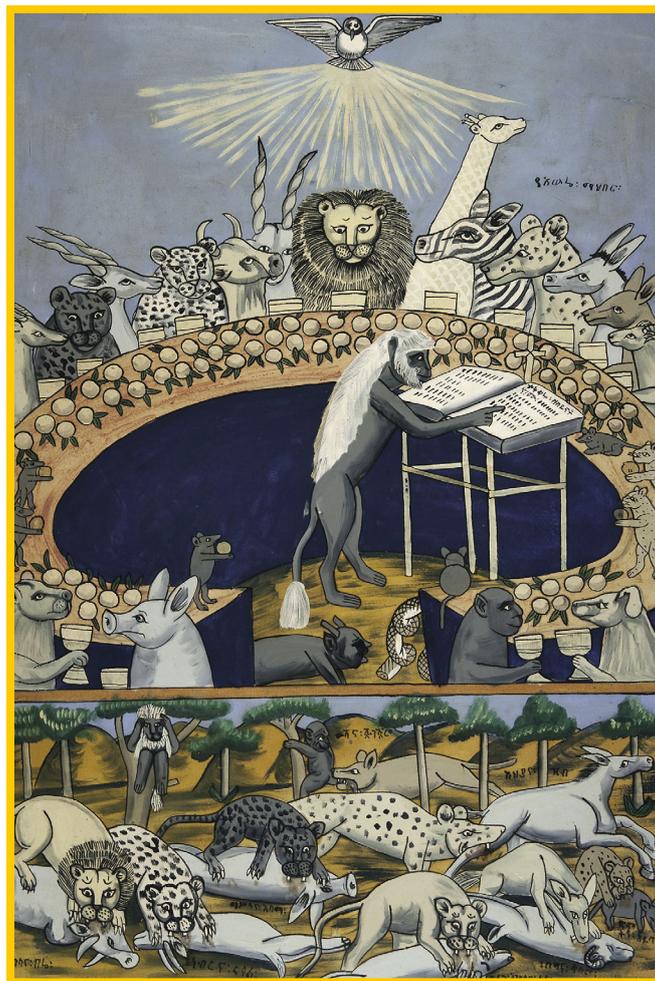
**Visualization Ceremony**, 2022, courtesy  
Studio Martha Schwindling with Marlene Oeken  
(3-D representation of exhibition architecture)

In a theater, people come together to experience stories. The tent is a place where people gather too: for shelter or to celebrate. A celebration can also be called a ceremony (as in the title of the exhibition). Ceremonies can be happy or sad. For example, we celebrate weddings or funerals. Ceremonies can be celebrated with family and friends – or with a large group of people we don't know, such as at carnival.

Ceremonies may be related to religious belief or to a secular event. They may also be held when a politician or the president of a country officially takes on their position. Those kinds of ceremony are about displaying importance and power. All ceremonies have one thing in common: they are based on narratives. They can be personal stories of individuals or be about entire groups. They can be told by religious communities or political parties. People invent stories for very different reasons.

**Sylvia Wynter** is a writer and philosopher. She was born in Jamaica in 1928. Wynter says that storytelling is what makes us human. The storytelling urge is what connects us to each other and makes us different from other living beings. Stories about our origins are especially important to humans. Through them, we explain where we come from, who we are, and where we are going. For Wynter, stories are the foundation for community-in-practice in our lives. Wynter's ideas are very important to the team that created the exhibition. The title Ceremony also comes from her work. Wynter's English texts are available to read in the exhibition.

In the exhibition, many stories are told side by side. They come from a number of different times and places in the world. Many of them are about how the world came into being and how we humans live in it. What is important is who tells these stories. And who has not had a chance to tell their own story yet. Because stories influence how we see the world and our lives. Which stories have survived? And which still need to be told?



**Assembly of the Animals** by Anonymous,  
around 1965 to 1975, courtesy of the  
Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam (painting)

## Assembly of the Animals

Several painted images can be seen on the right, looking from the staircase. The story told in this exhibition begins with them. The pictures show a group of animals at a table. The animals are sitting peacefully in a circle, although they could be hunting each other. The lion sits in the middle. Everything in this gathering of animals revolves around the lion. Only one figure is standing: a monkey reading from a book. What role does it play in the story?

These images come from Ethiopia, a country in the east of Africa that used to be called Abyssinia. They are about a ceremony: the last emperor of Abyssinia is being crowned. He is depicted here as a lion. The emperor was called Haile Selassie. He lived from 1892 to 1975 and was known by

the title “Lion of Judah.” Judah is a kingdom in the Bible. The Bible is the holy book of all Christians. Rays of light and a dove can be seen above the lion in the pictures. That reference also comes from the Bible. There, the dove stands for the connection between heaven and Earth, humans and God. This suggests that the lion in the image receives its power directly from God. The monkey leads the peaceful ceremony. Like a priest, he reads from the Bible. In other stories from Ethiopia, however, the role of the monkey is less clear. He can also be a cunning trickster or a captivating storyteller.

## Images of Power

Power and faith are depicted together in the images showing the assembly of animals. Rulers in Europe in particular have used the Christian faith to increase their own power. Kings and politicians exploited people’s faith to portray the history of their rule as if God had given them their power. The Italian dictator Benito Mussolini (1883–1945) was one example. He was an ally of the dictator Adolf Hitler (1889–1945). A dictator rules alone, often violently. The population is oppressed and has no freedom. This form of government is the opposite of democracy. In a democracy, the people determine in free elections who will be in the government. Dictators like Hitler and Mussolini, on the other hand, keep trying to extend their own powers. They invade other countries and overpower the people who live there. That is also the background to Mussolini’s occupation of the Empire of Abyssinia in 1935. Haile Selassie had to flee and led the resistance against the Italian occupation from London. He became a role model for many resistance movements against the violence that originated in Europe.

European governments conquered entire continents with great cruelty and founded what are known as colonies. This word comes from Latin and originally meant cultivated land. Today, the term is mainly used to refer to territories that were occupied by other countries. In Africa, Australia, America, and Asia, force was used over centuries to bring people there under control. Their ways of life and beliefs were suppressed. The Christian religion was forced upon them. People from Europe exploited the fertile land and the labor of the indigenous population – in other words, the first inhabitants of these countries.

**Sylvia Wynter** also grew up under foreign European rule. Jamaica was a British colony until 1962. In other words, the King of England appointed himself as ruler after British soldiers had stolen the land on his behalf. Wynter's texts are also about European colonialism and Western ideas about human beings. Colonial violence can still be felt in many places today. That is why her texts are so important.



Mussolini in a car with his lion, Italia, 1924  
(photo: D and S Photography Archives / Alamy Stock Photo)

We turn to the panels of images by **Aby Warburg** that are shown next to the stairs. They include photographs of Mussolini. In one of the photos he is driving through Rome in a convertible car with his pet lioness in his arms. This lioness was even called Italia. Another picture shows him visiting his adult pet at the zoo. The lion has been a symbol of dominance for thousands of years. The idea was that the animal's power would be transmitted to Mussolini. These images, which appeared in newspapers around the world, are meant to show him as Italy's powerful and fearless leader. This reveals how Mussolini used images as an effective way to portray his power.

The other two panels of images are about agreements known as the Lateran Pacts of 1929. That was when Mussolini signed a treaty with the Catholic Church. This treaty ended decades of conflict between the Catholic Church and the Italian state. In the photos we see Mussolini next to powerful men from the Church. Visible proximity to the Pope helped Mussolini to win support from believers, for the Pope is the head of the Catholic Church. With his support, Mussolini wanted to exercise his tyranny without resistance.

## The Power of Images – Present and Past

Art historian **Aby Warburg** (1866–1929) believed that he could tell the story of cultures with images and without any words. Because pictures speak to us more directly than words. The stories they tell are seductive and make us believe that what we see is true – whether in a church mural or a newspaper photograph.

In his **Mnemosyne Picture Atlas**, Warburg brought together around a thousand pictures on black panels. Like Warburg, the exhibition organizers also explore images. They aim to show how works of art are used to change how people picture the world in their minds. That process,



Excavation of a Roman ship at Lake Nemi in Italy, around 1930 (Photo: Archivio GBB / Alamy Stock Photo)

however, often benefits the handful of powerful people who rule the world. They mostly come from the worlds of politics and business and are influential in Europe and the USA. However, their images only show one point of view. The views of other people are thus made invisible.

There is also no narrator's voice commenting on the historical film images in **Diana's Looking Glass** (1996) by **Angela Lucchi** and **Yervant Gianikian**. The film consists of shots of Lake Nemi in Italy. Mussolini had this lake drained in around 1930. The goal was to salvage two ships built 2000 years ago by the Roman Emperor Caligula. On one of the ships there was a shrine to Diana, the Roman goddess of hunting, the Moon, women, and childbirth. In Caligula's day, the most important temple to Diana was located at Lake Nemi. The Roman ships sank without a trace. Mussolini had these pieces of Roman heritage raised again. That created a link between the Roman emperors' boundless power and himself. The film images of the ships being found are followed by shots of the Italian army making violent conquests in Africa. Just as the rulers in ancient Rome kept expanding the area where they ruled, Mussolini wanted to build an empire. Combined with the somber film music and footage of war scenes and dead animals, a picture of doom and death emerges.

## The Power of Storytelling – Order and Chaos

We return to the beginning of our story, to the images showing the assembly of animals. There is another half of the image alongside the depiction of the peaceful group of animals: in it, we see wild animals tearing each other apart. Order exists alongside chaos.

We are familiar with such divisions between order and chaos or between good and evil from the oldest stories of humankind, which are called origin narratives. The Bible, for example, begins with God first creating light and darkness. Christians believe that people go to either heaven or hell when they die.



**The Last Judgement** by Michelangelo, painted between 1537 and 1541, Sistine Chapel, Rome (Photo of the fresco: Dennis Hallinan / Alamy Stock Photo)

Thinking of the world as being divided into simple opposites, such as black and white, good and evil, light and dark, helps people to find their way in life. These simple images create a sense of community and give meaning to life. Origin stories always have a purpose as well: they explain and order our lives on a small scale and at the same time also create broader connections across society. In the process, however, they always exclude people, for example, because of their gender, skin color, or origin.

Stories about differences can shape entire countries. In Italy, there is a clear division between the north and south of the country. The rich and powerful cities are in the north. The south is viewed as the “other” Italy, backward and poor – that is how many people in the north think about the south.

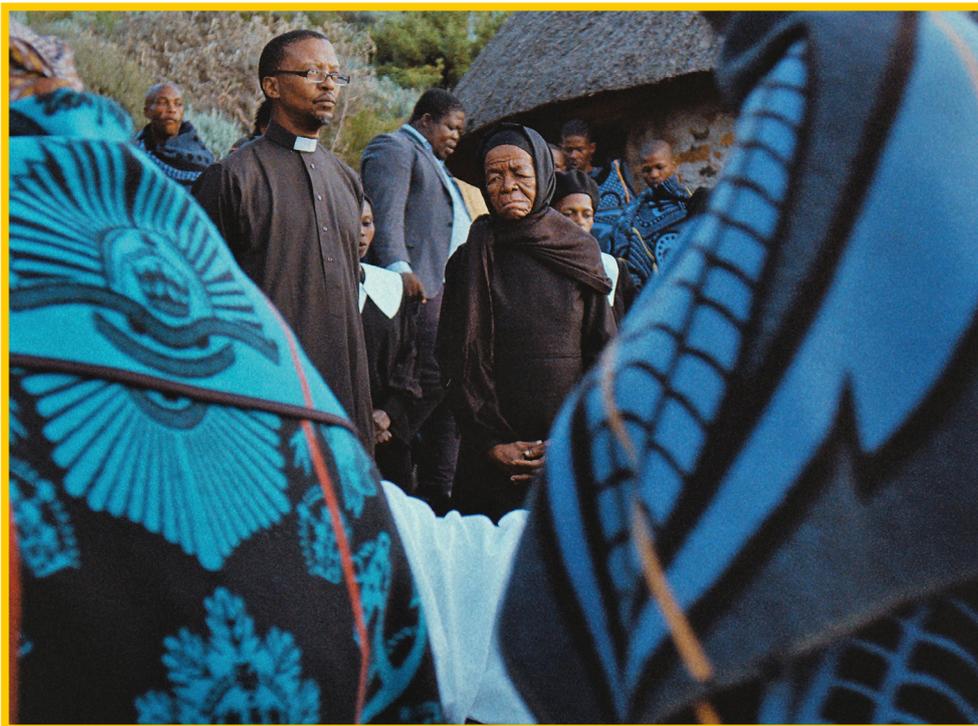
The film **Magia Lucana** (1958) by **Luigi Di Gianni**, shown to the left of the staircase, is about a region in southern Italy. A narrator's voice accompanies the black-and-white shots of peasant life in the Basilicata region. For centuries, faith has helped the farmers find strength for their work in the parched landscape. Christians believe that God will reward them after their death for their suffering. The film shows us Christian and non-Christian customs with no clear dividing line between them. That includes images of saints as well as a belief in the supernatural or in spirits. Those two kinds of storytelling coexist here and are seen as equally valuable. The people in the film do not need to make a distinction between past and present, religion and magic. Darkness, chaos, and grief are part of life. Even the sun, which makes life possible, can also destroy life with its heat. The dead and ghosts have a permanent place in these people's lives. This attitude does not fit in with ideas about modern life: for example, belief in progress and moving towards a better future. The actors in the film by



**Magia Lucana** by Luigi Di Gianni, 1958, courtesy of Lucio Di Gianni, digitalized and made available by Fondazione Cineteca di Bologna (film still)

**Lemohang Jeremiah Mosese** are promised that kind of better future, in which people even control the forces of nature. **This Is Not a Burial, It's a Resurrection** (2020) is set in a village in Lesotho, a country in southern Africa. A narrator-musician also guides us through this film. He plays the music of his ancestors on an instrument called the lesiba.

In the story, a fertile valley provides food for the farmers and their animals. However, the village is going to be replaced by a reservoir. The people who live there and the graves of their dead are to be relocated. They are forced to change their lives dramatically in the name of progress. Only one old woman, the widow Mantoa, resists. She has no desire to leave her home, her family's graves, and the place where she wants to die. In the film, she opposes destructive progress with her grief. The village community, on the other hand, sets out for an uncertain future, leaving behind their old life with its stories.



**This Is Not a Burial, It's a Resurrection** by Lemohang Jeremiah Mosese, 2020, courtesy of the artist and Memento Film International (video still)

The films by **Di Gianni** and **Mosese** are full of striking contrasts, accompanied by atmospheric sounds and the chants of mourning women. The women maintain connections between the living and the dead. Just as the goddess Diana protects life that is coming into being, the widow Mantoa tries to protect the dead. In both films, death takes a central place in the life of the community. These communities are threatened.

## The End of the World

We live in a world that is determined by capitalism. Capitalism is a way of organizing society that is based on owning property. Capitalism aims to ensure that the capitalist economy is successful – in other words, it tries to make more money and greater profits. It is not interested in people's lives. The people are exploited, alienated, and robbed.

Inequality and injustice define many people's daily lives. Their origins, skin color, gender, or religion determine who has power and who is excluded. Such forms of exclusion are described as discrimination. To be more precise, in many cases, racism involves discrimination against people because of their physical characteristics. Wealth and freedom only exist for a small handful of people – mostly white men. Colonialism in particular is built on such ideas. The consequences of colonial exploitation can be felt everywhere: in the destruction of the environment, the climate catastrophe, and in the resulting movements of millions of people fleeing their homes.

The exhibition makers believe that this way of organizing society has had its day. The modern colonial world system is broken and lies in ruins. However, although it has been dead for a long time, the system is struggling violently to survive. The title of the exhibition talks about an "undead world."

## Ceremony (Burial of an Undead World)

As the exhibition title also indicates, there should be a burial of this undead world. What the exhibition organizers mean is that the images and ideas that represent this world should be buried. Those images and ideas are shown in the exhibition and are thus part of the ceremony used for the burial. For there can be no new future without this kind of burial.

The work **Burial of this Order** (2022) by **Jane Jin Kaisen** is also about a funeral ceremony. In the video we see a group of people dressed in white carrying a coffin. This kind of solemn procession usually walks through a cemetery. Here the procession moves through an abandoned building site – a modern ruin? The ceremony ends in an image of destruction. Objects from the video are on display in the exhibition space.



**Burial of this Order** by Jane Jin Kaisen, 2022,  
courtesy of the artist (video still)

## A New We

A new community can only emerge as a result of the ceremony and the burial of the broken world. For **Sylvia Wynter**, the ceremony is a transition that produces fundamental change. This kind of change may be peaceful or violent. It will only become possible to tell new stories when capitalism and colonialism have been overcome. Old divisions no longer have any place in these narratives. Sylvia Wynter talks about a comprehensive community with a sense of “we.”

We return one last time to the image of the assembly of animals. They are peacefully united at the table, although they are so different. Could this community of animals perhaps offer us an image of an all-embracing “we”? Which previously untold stories could then be told?

→ [hkw.de/en/Ceremony](https://www.hkw.de/en/Ceremony)

**More information on accessibility:  
hkw.de/accessible or 030 – 397 87 175**

Part of **The New Alphabet** (2019–2022), supported by the Minister of State for Culture and the Media due to a ruling of the German Bundestag.

Haus der Kulturen der Welt is a division of Kulturveranstaltungen des Bundes in Berlin GmbH.

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