

Exhibition in the Museum of History, 20 May – 25 September 2016

Erasmus MMXVI – The Power of the Word

The project *Erasmus MMXVI – The Power of the Word* marks the 500th anniversary of the publication of Erasmus's edition of the Greek New Testament (*Novum Instrumentum*), printed by Johann Froben in Basel in 1516. The exhibition by the Basel Historical Museum (HMB) in the Museum of History uses augmented and virtual reality to shed light on the life and works of the great Renaissance Humanist Erasmus. Also part of the project is an *Urban Erasmus Trail* through Basel in which an entertaining audio play serves as a vehicle for Erasmus's ideas. Both exhibition and trail are to run until 25 September 2016.

The Exhibition in the Museum of History

Basel played a key role in the life of Erasmus of Rotterdam. The great Humanist spent more than ten years of his life there, and when he died there in 1536 he was laid to rest in Basel Cathedral. The HMB has an unparalleled collection of Erasmus's personal effects, which this exhibition places in a larger context. *ERASMUS MMXVI* in the Museum of History is the first exhibition by the HMB to use virtual and augmented reality. It takes visitors to all the most important places where he lived and worked, acquainting them with his friends, fellow scholars and ideas along the way. Targeted interventions in the permanent exhibition flanked by additional exhibits give rise to what is essentially a tour of the life and works of Erasmus of Rotterdam. Visitors without a smart phone or tablet of their own can borrow one from the museum.

The Urban Erasmus Trail

The *Urban Erasmus Trail* is basically an audio play that pilots visitors to public and semi-public places in the centre of Basel. Equipped with a smart phone, headphones and a street map, they are invited to follow the story of a somewhat overdrawn character in a detective story. The idea is to translate Erasmus's ideas into a present-day context. The individual viewer projects the content onto an outside world that is a product of chance but at the same time steeped in staged realities. The dividing line between subjective experience and real world becomes increasingly blurred, especially when visitors are given stage directions requiring them to become active players in the drama! Staged interventions and surprising twists in the plot, make for a fascinating and thought-provoking experience.

The tour can be undertaken either individually or in groups and lasts just over an hour. The starting point is the entrance to the Museum of History on Barfüsserplatz. All that is required is a smart phone with Bluetooth and the free app *Erasmus MMXVI*. Visitors without a smart phone can borrow the necessary equipment from the Museum of History.

The audio play was created for the HMB by the Austrian conceptual artist Oliver Hangl. The script is the work of the writer Lukas Linder. The trail is a coproduction with Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen.

Basel-Rotterdam Performance

Erasmus of Rotterdam is often viewed as a model European. *ERASMUS MMXVI* therefore sets out to bring Europe together again, at least symbolically. The great Humanist was born in Rotterdam and died in Basel. To visualize his life's journey, the HMB commissioned the Basel artist Florian Graf to create a project that would symbolize the connection between the two cities.

The result is a sculpted pavilion mounted on a raft that will float down the Rhine from Basel to Rotterdam. In Basel, Cologne and Rotterdam this unusual craft will double as a venue for moderated panel discussions exploring the emergence of Humanism and its impact on both the Enlightenment and the post-Enlightenment world of today. These debates between politicians, people from the world of business, artists, intellectuals and social scientists titled "Humanum est..." will be broadcast in a range of media. The topics discussed will draw on Erasmus's *Colloquia Familiarum* (Confidential Colloquies), whose dialogues centre on society and human conduct generally.

The performance will kick off with a panel discussion to be held on the banks of the Rhine in Basel on Wednesday, 15 June 2016. The participants will be Ahmed Aboutaleb, Roger de Weck, Christine Christ-von Wedel and Philipp Ruch. The raft is scheduled to arrive in Rotterdam on 4 September.

The Font

Erasmus cared deeply about the typographic design of his works. Wishing to commission a new typeface specially for the occasion, the HMB initiated a typography competition adjudicated both by an expert jury and the public at large. The winning entry was a font based on Italy's typographic heritage designed by Katharina Wolff, whose capitals recall the *Capitalis Monumentalis* of Ancient Rome, while the lower case letters are modelled on early Italian printed matter. Its italic style, moreover, is based on *Cancellaresca Corsiva* – the "chancery hand" developed by Italian chancery scribes. Erasmus's preference for this style was among the factors contributing to its success as a modern, Humanist typeface. Inspired by 16th-century handwriting, Wolff's cursive font captures the flow and rhythm of Erasmus's own hand.

Starting on 18 May, the new font can be downloaded free of charge from the HMB website (www.hmb.ch/erasmus).

The App

The app developed specially for the exhibition and the *Urban Erasmus Trail* was developed by the HMB in collaboration with HES-SO Valais-Wallis. It can be downloaded onto any smart phone and used for the *Urban Erasmus Trail* outside the museum. Visitors without a smart phone can borrow the necessary equipment from the museum.

The exhibition is supported by:

Ernst Göhner Stiftung, Pro Helvetia, Stiftung für das Historische Museum Basel, Ulrich und Klara Huber-Reber-Stiftung, Lucius und Annemarie Burckhardt Stiftung, CBK Rotterdam, Comité Erasmus Rotterdam, Österreichisches Kulturforum Bern, Port of Switzerland, Mitglieder des Vereins für das HMB.

Exhibition venue: HMB – Museum of History, Barfüsserplatz, CH-4051 Basel

Duration: 20 May – 25 September 2016

Opening hours: Tue – Sun 10 am – 5 pm
Closed: 1 Aug (Swiss National Day)

Admission: CHF 15.-/10.-/5.-. The ticket also covers admission to *WATCH THIS! Genevan Timepieces in Basel*

Press folders: www.hmb.ch/presse.html

Photos can be supplied by e-mail on request.

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