

Nolde/Huber

The Name of a
Mountain

Valais Art Museum
Au Quatrième

15 Oct 2016 –
16 Apr 2017

Where do mountain names derive from? The Nolde/Huber exhibition addresses this issue by bringing together the complete set of caricatures of mountains by Emil Nolde – recently purchased by the Museum – and the contemporary art installation by Sasha Huber. More than a century apart from each other, the German expressionist painter **Emil Nolde (1867 – 1956)** and the Swiss-Haitian artist **Sasha Huber (*1975)** share similar concerns about the names which human beings have given to alpine peaks: often associated with local legends or famous people, the mountains may adopt now a burlesque, now a problematic face. Thus, while Nolde turns the Jungfrau into a virgin dressed in white, Sasha Huber renames the Agassizhorn ‘Rentyhorn’ so as to pay tribute to the Congolese slave Renty, whose portrait was used by the Swiss geologist Louis Agassiz in order to support his racist theories.

While the Dufourspitze kisses the pretty “Donna Rosa”, the Agassizhorn may one day become the Rentyhorn



Sasha Huber (*1975), Renty in traditional African clothing, 2008, Ink on paper, 40 x 30 cm. Courtesy Kiasma - Museum of Contemporary Art Helsinki and the artist

Emil Nolde

While Emil Nolde was still lecturing in St. Gallen and bore the name of Emil Hansen, he was passionate about the Alps across which he travelled tirelessly. Considering these mountains to be his 'friends', he gave each of them a face and a personality of their own. Accordingly, the Jungfrau becomes a pretty young maid, chastely covered with a white veil. The Schreckhorn is turned into a row of devilish spikes. As for the St Gotthard mountain, it is shown with a halo. Nolde made a series of postcards of these grotesque and extravagant portraits, all of which are shown here. It was a huge success; indeed, these postcards all sold out in about ten days, launching the artist's career.

Bergpostkarten (Mountain Postcards), 1892–1899, chromolithography, Art Museum, Sion, inv. BA 3393 a-ad, purchased in 2015:

1. *The Beautiful Bernina and the Old Morteratsch (Graubünden); the Bold Dufourspitze Mountain Peak and the Adorable Monte Rosa (Valais)*
2. *Cima della Pala, the Vezzana (Italy); The Three Sisters and the Alvier in the Rhine Valley (St. Gallen and Austria); Marmolada, the Princess of the Dolomites, Vernel, her Grand Chancellor and Rodi du Mulon (Italy)*
3. *The Jungfrau, the Mönch and the Eiger (Bern); The Gatekeeper of the Rose Garden (Austria); The Three Mürstchen: the Wicked, the Idle and the Gruff (Glarus)*
4. *The Sweet Zuckerhüterl (sugar loaf) and the Wild Monk (Austria); The Righi and the Pilate (Lucerne); Wildspitz, the Fierce Peak and the Weisskugelchen (The Pretty White Bal), (Schwyz)*
5. *The Three Flowers of St. Maurice (Las Trais Fluors)(Graubünden); The Schreckhörner or the Scary Peaks (Bern); The Sisters, the Sleeping Beauties (Las sours),(Graubünden)*
6. *The Lyskamm, known as the Oger, and the Twins Castor and Pollux (Valais); The Seven Kurfürsten lit up at Sunset (St. Gallen); the Breithorn and its Mates (Valais)*
7. *The respectable Altmann (old man) and the Father Säntis (St. Gallen); The Gigantic Wellhorn and Wetterhorn or the Thunder Peaks (Bern); The Zugspitze and the Two Waxensteine (Germany)*
8. *Mont Blanc, the King of the Alps (France); The Ortler dreaming of bygone days (Italy); The Tödi, the Serious Philosopher of Glarus (Glarus)*
9. *The Matterhorn's Smile (Valais); The Two Mythen (Schwyz); Madatsch the Black and the Little Rhinoceros (Austria)*
10. *The Royal Peak (Italy); Finsteraarhorn the vWicked (Bern); Bei San Martino, Cima di Castrozza, Val di Rota (Tyrol); The Old St Gotthard (Ticino)*

Sasha Huber

Sasha Huber unveils an alternative discourse about mountains. As shown in her video work *Rentyhorn* (2008), the artist lands by helicopter on the Agassizhorn and plants a metal plaque bearing a graphic representation of Renty, thereby seeking to rename the mountain 'Rentyhorn'. Renty is the name of a Congolese-born slave in the 19th century, the portrait of whom Louis Agassiz ordered to be photographed in order to support his racist theories against racial mixing with "scientific evidence". Thus, Sasha Huber's work exhibits the dark side of Louis Agassiz, a geologist well known for his theories on glacial landforms as well as a pioneering thinker of apartheid. This artwork is part of the initiative *De-mounting Louis Agassiz* launched by Hans Fässler and rejected by the Federal Council in 2010. By pursuing her efforts towards a symbolic renaming, Sasha Huber seeks recognition of the suffering experienced by the victims of slavery and racism.

Letters (frames), 2008-2016:

- a.** *Request* from Sasha Huber to Emanuel Schläppi, Mayor of Grindelwald, in September 2008, in which she introduces the initiative "De-mounting Louis Agassiz". A version of this request has also been written in English and addressed to Kofi Annan.
- b.** *Letter* from the municipality of Grindelwald, whose territory covers the Agassizhorn, reproaching the artist for landing by helicopter without permission. The municipality mentions that they do not take a position about renaming the peak, but that they are willing to tackle this issue with the municipalities of Guttannen and Fieschertal.
- c.** *Letter* from the Canton of Valais, whose territory covers the Agassizhorn. It forwards the artist's request to the Swiss Ministry of Economy and Territory.
- d.** *Letter* from the Committee for the Protection of the Jungfrau-Aletsch, UNESCO. It says that the issue has already been studied by the Committee and that a request for further information has already been submitted to the municipality of Grindelwald.
- e.** *Letter* from the municipality of Guttannen, whose territory covers the Agassizhorn. It says that the municipality finds it ludicrous to rename a mountain only because it is a fashionable thing to do.
- f.** *Letter* from the Department of Public Works, Transport and Energy of the Canton of Bern. It says that the Department is not authorised to reply to the request.
- g.** *Letter* from Ruth McCoy in the name of Kofi Annan, in which she confirms that she has received Sasha Huber's letter.
- h.** *Summary*. It summarises the failure of the initiative "De-mounting Louis Agassiz" and denounces the indifference expressed by the involved municipalities as well as the fact that the latter have missed the opportunity to make a difference.
- i.** *Map* of Switzerland. Shows the location of the Rentyhorn (formerly Agassizhorn).

Sasha Huber

Rentyhorn, 2008, video installation, 4 min. 30 sec., property of the artist :

(PART 1)

21. Auguste 2008, Lauterbrunnen, Switzerland

Swiss-haitian artist Sasha Huber airlifts a metal plaque with a picture of the slave Renty to the top of the Agassizhorn (3946 metres above sea level) in the Swiss Alps.

(PART 2)

This act commemorates the role of the swiss-born naturalist and glaciologist Louis Agassiz (1807-1873) as an influential racist and pioneering thinker of Apartheid.

(PART 3)

The Agassizhorn should be renamed the « Rentyhorn » in honour of the Congolese-born slave whom Agassiz ordered to be photographed on a South Carolina plantation around 1850 « to prove the inferiority of the black race », and in honour of the many others who shared Renty's fate.

((END WHEN FADE OUT STARTS))

Will Switzerland seize the opportunity to set an internationally perceived example by renaming the Agassizhorn ? Recent statements by the Bernese authorities have been encouraging. There is cause for hope.

(CLOSING CREDITS)

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((Image of Renty + website))

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