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Animal Care in Zoos

by Adolf Portmann

With the growth of large modern cities, zoos became, in the 19th Century, important institutions. But, in the beginning, the animal itself does not play a major role, in the sense that the zoo is conceived essentially as a means of popularizing geography and ethnography, the buildings it calls for at that time furnishing a pretext for all sorts of creations in exotic architectural styles (as, e.g., the old elephant house in Basle). In the opening decades of the 20th Century, interest in the animal and its care receive the main emphasis, still, however, attended by a penchant for the exotic. The Hagenbeck Zoo in Hamburg is a remarkable example, and it is thought that the best system is to give the animals as much freedom of movement as possible, in an imitation of their natural surroundings (artificial rocks, etc.) more to satisfy our human notions about animals than the real needs of the animals themselves. The most consistent application of this humanizing-romantic attitude is perhaps the Vincennes Zoo, very fine of its kind, but which still does not take into account the great revolution carried through in this field by the creation of what was called the science of animal behaviour. The latter has taught us, among other things, that the living space of animals in the wild state is often quite restricted and clearly determined by their elementary needs: hunting, trails to sources of water, etc.

This revolution in biology has entailed a no less profound revolution in the conception of zoos. In Switzerland, the two things have developed all the more on an equal footing as it is one of the pioneers of the science of animal behaviour, Prof. H. Hediger, who for a long time directed the Basle Zoo and at the present time directs the Zürich Zoo. Today, exotic décor is no longer sought after, but, while making zoos places where city-dwellers can relax, it is sought to give the animals the kind of care most in keeping with their instincts, including a regard for the social hierarchy proper to many species and the possibility of reproducing as in nature. And far from disguising the necessary buildings, opportunities are sought to make bold, new architectural experiments.

Buildings in Zoos

by Arthur Dürig

The change which has occurred in the conception of the system of care of animals in zoos has utterly transformed our notions about the buildings to be erected there for the use of the animals. Not only is it sought to avoid as much as possible imposing upon them a prison routine, but, besides, every attempt is made to give them the possibility of living in pairs, in families or in packs. Moreover, there are gradually disappearing pretentious buildings of the type of the Basle elephant house, at the same time as the barriers are no longer meant solely to protect the public but also the animals and as efforts are made so that the bars interfere as little as possible with the free view of the animals. Also great care is devoted to the nature of the ground, essential element from the point of view of the normal life and reproduction of the different species of animals. – Not less important, as regards the maintenance of the well-being of animals is the training to which certain species are submitted (cf. the large aquariums in the USA, with their trained porpoises, but over there largely as public entertainment). It is sought also, particularly in the education of children, to create the most direct contact possible between man and animals. Finally, the buildings themselves permit novelty in the midst of functional honesty. – In Basle, the comprehensive modernization of the Zoo has already begun, among other things by the transformation of many pavilions.

New Buildings in the Basle Zoo

The New Elephant House. 1952/53, Arch.: Bräuning, Leu, Dürig, FAS, Basle. Aegerter & Dr. Bosshardt, Engineer SIA, Basle

The structure, planned for 8 adult elephants, was worked out so as to comprise all the necessary utility buildings, in addition to sufficient space for the public and a large open field, with pool. The design of the house meets the desire to establish the most appropriate conditions for the animals, while avoiding spurious romanticism, and at the same time to give the public the best chance to watch the elephants. The building proper is entirely in concrete. Minimum heat: 18°. A 3,500 litre Weco-Cipax boiler furnishes the necessary water to the pool, or 12 cu.m. (filling time 6 hours) at 25°. – Overall cost: about 490,000 Francs.

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The Birds of Prey Aviary. 1953/54, Walter Wurster and Hans-Ulrich Huggel, architects FAS, Basle

Measuring 17 m. x 10 m. x 11 m. high, this aviary intended for birds of prey is distinguished by what takes the place of bars: a network of metal wires at 60–80 kg. tension permitting elimination of metal wires or bars which ordinarily impede the view.

The Carnivore House. 1955/56, Max Rasser and Tibère Vadi, architects FAS, Basle

This building comprises 6 divisible stalls, 9 mating cages, a hall for the public, with glass panes for small animals, 1 open run for the hyenas, 1 monkey cage, 1 kitchen – outdoor enclosures and, in the basement, W.C. and heating and air-conditioning plant. Three structural groups: 1. Hall for the public, with 2 stalls (panthers and pumas), plus 2 glass cases for sloths; 2. Hall for the public and 2 stalls for small carnivores; 3. 2 stalls for the tigers and the lions, and an enclosure for African monkeys; this 3rd section also houses the kitchen, used essentially for warming the meat. The halls reserved for the public are in tiers at several levels, for a better view of the animals, and they are in addition lighted from above by skylights. Each section is air-conditioned.

Students' Sketches at the Zoo

by Karl Schmid

The School of Applied Arts in Zürich has its students make sketches at the Zoo, not simply for practice in copying nature, but with a view to intensifying their powers of observation and inducing them to create, so as to end up with a synthesis of "all that is seen", in accordance with Dürer's principle: the good painter has within himself his world of figures.

Renovation of Mythenquai Beach in Zürich

1951–1956, Hans Hubacher, arch. FAS, Zürich

The buildings of this beach, erected in 1922, were partially destroyed by fire in 1951. There is now under way a complete renovation in several stages (one still to be finished). The installation comprises 4 halls, 108 booths, 4,500 hangers. Care has been taken to assure an unimpeded view over the lake and to create as well a more harmonious beach-park.

Winter Quarters of Knie Swiss National Circus at Rapperswil

by W. Behles

These buildings, intended for use during the off season when there are no performances, with the best natural ventilation and lighting conditions, are situated in a very fine landscape near the lake and near the railway line, with special loading ramp. They are not open to the public, but they can on the other hand be rented during the circus season.

My Animal Sculptures

by Uli Schoop

U.S. became a sculptor of animals out of love for animals. In our age the tendency is only too prevalent to regard this branch of sculpture as secondary, in spite of the masterpieces it has created in Egypt, in Greece and in China. U.S. endeavours to simplify in order to end up with the essential, to re-create nature in terms of abstract form.

Enrico Manzoni, Painter with a Pure Heart

by Piero Bianconi

E.M., one of the naive painters, has just been distinguished by having a brochure devoted to him (La Toppa, Ed., Lugano) and by the prize recently awarded to him by the Lugano exhibition known under the name "Mostra del bianco e nero". Born in 1882, he began as a watch-maker and gives the impression, in painting or sketching, of having retained the magnifying-glass of his first profession, so intensively does he devote himself to details. For a long time, he copied the old masters, including Rembrandt, then proceeded to paint from nature. His rhythm, transcending nature, grows out of his exactitude, meticulous, to be sure, but not slavish. Pure love of beauty and of objects is expressed in him quite spontaneously, according to the technique of the miniaturists and illuminators, and his objectivity, far from being down-to-earth, is all compact of silence and music, and counterpoints the shapes.

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