

Robert Folger Introduction

Dossier: Imagining the End of Times

On December 14th 2024 the special pop-up exhibition *Imagining the End of Times: Stories of Annihilation, Apocalypse, and Extinction* [*Imaginar el fin de los tiempos: historias de aniquilación, apocalipsis y extinción*] opened in the National Museum of Anthropology [Museo Nacional de Antropología, MNA] in Mexico City, one of the most important museums of its kind in the world.

The exhibition was a joint project of the Mexican National Institute of Anthropology and History [Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, INAH], the MNA, the National Institute for the Fine Arts and Literature [Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura, INBAL], and the Käthe Hamburger Centre for Apocalyptic and Postapocalyptic Studies (CAPAS) at Heidelberg University, Germany. Curated and conceived of by Adolfo F. Mantilla Osornio, ex-fellow of CAPAS and associated researcher, the exhibition juxtaposed and brought into dialogue archaeological artifacts and works of art from Mexico that reflect on the key concepts of annihilation, apocalypse, and extinction; spanning a range from 12,000 BCE to the present day. The exhibition was accompanied by a monograph by Mantilla, a collection of essays of researchers of the INAH also edited by Mantilla, and an academic programme including multiple events from December 2023 to April 2024, which took place in a discussion space situated at the centre of the exhibition.

The first of these events was a series of lectures on the day after the inauguration organised by CAPAS and performed by curator Adolfo Mantilla (Academia de Artes, INAH), CAPAS director Robert Folger, and CAPAS ex-fellows Patricia Murrieta-Flores (University of Lancaster, UK),

Alejandra Bottinelli Wolleter (Universidad de Chile), Emily Ray (Sonoma State University, USA), and Robert Kirsch (Arizona State University, USA). The starting point was Mantilla's monograph with the selfsame title as the exhibition which provided the organising principle and theoretical framework for the exhibition. From the perspective of their individual disciplines and distinct research interests, each participant presented their thoughts on the exhibition and their own 'stories' of the end of times. Although the programme followed the lines of chronology, from the late Pleistocene or early Holocene to our present, the particular temporality of end times, the entanglement of past, present, and future, was one of the guiding principles.

The focus on apocalyptic mass extinctions and the possibility or fantasy of total destruction of not only human but of all life on earth necessarily addresses a problem of global or planetary dimension that requires a transdisciplinary approach which is at the heart of CAPAS' research agenda. Transdisciplinarity goes beyond the collaboration between often siloed academic disciplines by seeking a dialogue between academia and the public. Dialogue implies the recognition of the validity and importance of non-scientific epistemologies as their underpinnings, for instance in activism, in indigenous cosmologies, and in the arts, while also reflecting the positionally and ideological framing of knowledge production. The comprehensive project "Imagining the End of Times" exemplified and performed this notion of transdisciplinarity. Although backed and informed by scholarly programmes and publications, the exhibition acknowledges the power of artistic expression in opening horizons and possibilities to establish the kind of temporality required for thinking and overcoming the end of times. The exhibition was open to a broader public, free of charge, and it generated a considerable interest from various media outlets on issues usually confined to academia. Made possible by a collaboration of institutions and researchers from the so-called Global South and Global North, the exhibition took place in Mexico which perfectly illustrates, due to its often apocalyptically framed colonial past and postcolonial aftermath but also the vitality and creativity of its culture, that the end of times is something to be feared and, at the same time, the precondition of the emergence of a new world.

In this dossier of *Apocalyptic*, we highlight the contributions of the lecture series on the topic *Imagining the End of Times: Stories of Annihilation, Apocalypse, and Extinction*, providing an abbreviated compendium of the presentations held on December 15th 2023 at the MNA.

Robert Folger is Director of the Käte Hamburger Centre for Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Studies (CAPAS) and Professor in Romance Literature at the Department of Romance Studies, Heidelberg University. His research interests include apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic studies, medieval Spanish literature (historiography, literature, and science), Spanish Golden Age literature and culture (the picaresque novel), Latin American literatures and cultures (of Mexico and the Southern Cone), the history and theory of subjectivity, and cultural theory.

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