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## The lost continent of Mu or the search for paradise

Humanity has long desired for a paradise, the mystical place from which we feel exiled and where we long to return. The mythical or religious paradise are desirable goals for humans in the search for “ideal” places that are believed to be lost, such as Atlantis or the continent Mu. What type of dreams, wishes and hopes are behind these utopias, these ideals and hence these goals of Mankind?

I have a fantasy. This fantasy is constantly shifting, moving from reality to fiction, through texts I read and my own inventions, gathering from films and mythology and reflecting my idea of the “ideal”, manifesting feelings of dystopia and allowing me to imagine a positive “end” of the world.

This place I constantly re-arrange does not have a specific form, but it has a name. I call it my own private Mu, the lost continent. Mu is an island, an archipelago, somewhere at the “end of the world”. Meaning, far away from anywhere occupied by humans, at the end

Marte Kiessling, *Monkey*, 2020, Collage and acrylic paint on paper, 21x29.7 cm

of times, but simultaneously, at the beginning of something new, something better, or at least of something I personally think could be a solution.

Mu starts out simple—it's a paradisiac island in the middle of the ocean, full of lush green forest, white beaches and clear water, where I can live out my days in peace, sometimes alone, sometimes with others, depending on what my current mood tells me. But Mu can be so much more than that. In my mind, I see a community in a distant future, where there is no war, no climate crisis, no discrimination, but a new form of communal living, one that does not harm mankind, nor the world we live in. Mu is the name that I give to this place, this utopian haven, which others might even refer to as paradise. The place we all hope to reach one day. And—depending on our belief—if not in reality, then maybe at least in our imagination.

The term Lost Continent of Mu was first used by Augustus Le Plongeon,<sup>1</sup> a British-American photographer, archaeologist, antiquarian and author who was one of the first to study the Maya ruins of America.<sup>2</sup> He himself got the name from a translation error made by Charles Étienne Brasseur de Bourbourg, who translated the “Troano Codex”,<sup>3</sup> one of three surviving pre-Columbian Maya books. He believed that a word within the said text, which he thought to be read as Mu, referred to a land submerged by a catastrophe.

1 Le Plongeon. “Alice 1841-1937, “Augustus and Alice Dixon Le Plongeon papers, 1763-1937, bulk 1860-1910.”

2 Augustus Le Plongeon's findings were later dismissed by nearly all Mayan scholars and his findings served as a base to many pseudo-scientific theories [editor's note]. See: Desmond. “Of Facts and Hearsay: Bringing Augustus Le Plongeon into Focus.” 139-150.

3 Wauchope. *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, 319-320.

*In our journey westward across the Atlantic we shall pass in sight of that spot where once existed the pride and life of the ocean, the Land of Mu, which, at the epoch that we have been considering, had not yet been visited by the wrath of Human, that lord of volcanic fires to whose fury it afterward fell a victim. The description of that land given to Solon by Sonchis, priest at Sais; its destruction by earthquakes, and submergence, recorded by Plato in his Timaeus, have been told and retold so many times that it is useless to encumber these pages with a repetition of it.*<sup>4</sup>

Hence, Le Plongeon decided that Mu had been a continent peopled by an advanced civilization that in ancient times, sank into the Atlantic Ocean. He later claimed that Queen Moo, a refugee from the sunken continent, was the founder of the ancient Egyptian civilization.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately for adherents to the idea, there is no empirical evidence to support Mu's existence or the theories of its demise. But nevertheless, the idea of Mu as a place was picked up by many in the following decades, may it be in the form of research or fiction. There are even claims for archaeological evidence of the existence of such a place and that its remnants can be found hidden on the ocean bed. Having said that, modern geological knowledge rules out lost continents of any significant size altogether.

In 1926, British occult writer, inventor, engineer, and fisherman James Churchward published a series of books beginning with the title *Lost Continent of Mu, the Motherland of Man*, in which he describes Mu as a lost continent in the Pacific Ocean, previously identified as Lemuria, a hypothetical lost land and the imagined place of origin of the lemurs. Churchward claimed to have had the opportunity to see ancient clay tablets in India, translated especially

4 Le Plongeon. *Queen Múo & The Egyptian Sphinx*, 277.

5 De Camp. *Lost Continents: Atlantis Theme in History, Science and Literature*, 153.

for him by a high-ranking temple priest, which were written in the continent of Mu itself. Allegedly able to learn the language the tablets were written in himself; Churchward said them to originate in the very place where man first appeared, Mu. According to him, the people living on these lost lands were called the Naacal, and numbered as high as 64 million. Their civilization, which flourished 50,000 years ago, was more technologically advanced than the one of Churchward's own time (late 19th to early 20th century), and that the ancient civilizations of India, Babylon, Persia, Egypt and the Mayas were merely the decayed remnants of Naacal colonies.<sup>6</sup> Churchward allegedly found numerous pieces of evidence to support his idea, may it be in the bible or ancient Hindu texts, symbols in different cultures around the world and—as many others—in the megalithic art in Polynesia.<sup>7</sup>

Many followed this idea, among them religious writer John Newbrough, Max Heindel, a Danish-American occultist, Louis Jacolliot, a French attorney and occultist who specialized in the translation of Sanskrit, even Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, founder of the Turkish Republic, who considered Mu as the possible location of the Turks' original homeland.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, one question remains: why do humans have such fascination with these places, may it be Atlantis, Lemuria, Mu or any other lost colony or continent? Might it be the hope that there is, or better was, a truly better place, an advanced society, which is sadly gone, but might hold the key for a better world or life for us? So, might it even be the biblical paradise that we left behind and ever since desperately hope to find our way back to?

6 Churchward. *Lost Continent of Mu, the Motherland of Man*.

7 Churchward. *The Sacred Symbols of Mu*. 165-189.

8 Foss. *Mustafa Kemal Atatürk*, 77-98.

If we take a closer look at these conceptualized lost continents, we can clearly see that the ideas are always intricately connected to the personal ideals of the respective writers. Churchward, who leaning towards the idea of white people's superiority, proposed that the Nacaal society was dominated by a white race superior in many respects to our own. His research supports a quasi-Christian belief system and white supremacy which denounces science and evolution.<sup>9</sup>

Another well known idea follows Thomas More's book *Utopia*, a work of fiction and socio-political satire published in 1516. More wrote the book from his own perspective, using himself as the narrator. Nowadays we all like to use the term Utopia as an imagined community or society that possesses highly desirable or nearly perfect qualities for its inhabitants. More describes Utopia as a socialist state with clear rules and severe punishments, male leadership, no private property and slavery. But at the same time, it has a welfare state, free hospitals, and priests are allowed to marry.<sup>10</sup> Even women get some rights in his society, their role, even though restricted, can be seen as more liberal from a contemporary point of view. Hence, we see not only a reflection of the ideas of his time, but also More's personal beliefs and dreams for an ideal society.

Not all ideas behind lost continents can be related to ideals in the form of imagined societies, some have more of a geological background, at least in their origin. Lemuria, to pick one example, was hypothesized to be a land bridge, now sunken, and its existence would constitute an explanation for certain discontinuities in biogeography. Nowadays we know that the idea of Lemuria's existence has been rendered obsolete by modern theories of plate tectonics,

9 Churchward. *Lost Continent of Mu, the Motherland of Man*.

10 Duncombe. *Open Utopia*, introduction.

but since other sunken continents such as Zealandia, in the Pacific, Mauritia and the Kerguelen Plateau in the Indian Ocean did actually exist, the general thought of Lemuria seems plausible.<sup>11</sup> Zoologist and biogeographer Philip Sclater wrote in his 1864 essay *The Mammals of Madagascar*, published in *The Quarterly Journal of Science*:<sup>12</sup>

*The anomalies of the mammal fauna of Madagascar can best be explained by supposing that [...] a large continent occupied parts of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans [...] that this continent was broken up into islands, of which some have become amalgamated with [...] Africa, some [...] with what is now Asia; and that in Madagascar and the Mascarene Islands we have existing relics of this great continent, for which [...] I should propose the name Lemuria.*<sup>13</sup>

Even though Sclater's idea is based on scientific research, the idea was adopted by occultists and consequently has been incorporated into pop culture.

Is there a pattern to be found here? Even ideas based on the development of life on our planet, the development of species, are morphed by humans for their own benefit, rather than this of other species. A prime example is the specific case of the lemurs, which is not even entirely wrong, since the continents of India and Madagascar once were in fact connected (as Gondwana, the supercontinent, not Lemuria, but almost). Ancient "Lemurians", as described by Helena Blavatsky, the Russian occultist, philosopher, and author, were divided into seven Root Races.<sup>14</sup> She describes the

11 Mortimer et al. "Zealandia: Earth's hidden continent." 27-35.

12 Nield, *Supercontinent: Ten billion years in the life of our planet*, 38-39.

13 Ibid., 38.

14 Lachman. *Madame Blavatsky: The mother of modern spirituality*, 256.

development of these Root Races in vivid detail in the second volume (Anthropogenesis) of her book *The Secret Doctrine*, published in 1888. The first root race according to Blavatsky was the ethereal, the second had somewhat more physical bodies and lived in Hyperborea, the third root race, the first to be truly human, is said to have existed on the lost continent of Lemuria and the fourth root race is said to have developed in Atlantis.<sup>15</sup> She writes:

*The real line of evolution differs from the Darwinian, and the two systems are irreconcilable [...] except when the latter is divorced from the dogma of 'Natural Selection' [...] by 'Man' the divine Monad is meant, and not the thinking Entity, much less his physical body [...] Occultism rejects the idea that Nature developed man from the ape, or even from an ancestor common to both, but traces, on the contrary, some of the most anthropoid species to the Third Race man.*<sup>16</sup>

Later she states, "the 'ancestor' of the present anthropoid animal, the ape, is the direct production of the yet mindless Man, who desecrated his human dignity by putting himself physically on the level of an animal."<sup>17</sup>

In my personal opinion, these ideas can be seen as a form of invented interspecies relations, an idea that I follow in my artistic work, as well as in my imagination and my personal dream of Mu. My own private Mu is inhabited by a differing selection of animals, which in accordance with where my imagination takes me—can talk, live together in harmony—instead of human companions, which rarely exist in my personal Utopia. I am aware that I give these

15 Blavatsky. *The Secret Doctrine Volume II: Anthropogenesis*.

16 Ibid., 86.

17 Ibid., 87.

creatures human behaviours, and therefore “humanise” them according to my needs. But I also imagine something else: interspecies relations developed according to a changed environment, able to adapt to a surrounding that might be non-natural, as it could be the result of human interference. Still, in my dream nature is able to adapt and survive.

Many religions see the thought of a paradise as the goal for earthly righteous behaviour. The basic perceptions of most religions do not differ much. At the end, paradise is an ultimate goal. But did this place already exist? Is it possible to create it here and now? Or does this idea exist only in our minds, in the depth of our dreams and hopes, sets of rules and stories we hear as children? Maybe paradise and Mu are two opposing ideas, since one of them seems to be lost forever and the other could still be reached at the end of times.

In my fantasy, there is no difference between paradise and Mu. In my fantasy, Mu is merely the projection bias for a multitude of ideas. The idea of being stranded on an island and making the best of it, finding peace, tranquillity and a sense of community in accordance with nature. In my dream, humanity does not exist anymore, only on isolated islands, and I imagine that we regroup to find possibilities for a better tomorrow. A metaphor for what I am trying to express could be the end of the first part of the book *The Neverending Story* by Michael Ende, a fantasy novel first published in 1979, where the protagonist receives the ability to re-invent “Fantasia”, the storybook country which was destroyed by lack of human interest.<sup>18</sup> In my dream of Mu, I give myself the same role, the ability to re-invent the world.

18 Ende, *The neverending story*.

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