

# Josef Schulz

Terra incognita

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## Terra incognita

It is impossible to fully understand the enigmatic and often slightly tongue-in-cheek game that Josef Schulz plays with the viewer. Approach. Step back. Approach.

Whether we are speaking of *Brehms Tierleben*, *Illustrated London News*, *L'Universe Illustré*, or *L'Illustration*, the print publications targeted by the artist were aimed at the affluent, upper middle classes who dreamed of seeing the world but stayed at home. Although mass tourism had not yet been invented, there was a great longing for stories and images from afar. The world was yet to be exposed and captured from every single corner. People were eager to discover it, and they wanted to be entertained. In his descriptions of the animal world, Brehm roughly mirrored the scientific standpoint of his time. But he did so through a popular, narrative approach. His illustrators also enjoyed great creative freedom. They had not seen with their own eyes most of the countries they illustrated. No one was ever asked if their work matched the source.

There is nothing fundamentally different about the landscapes and historical scenes published in *Illustrated London News*. Dramatizations and manipulations were effective ways to reproduce the vastness of a view, the height of a mountain, the beauty of a river, or the significance of a historical moment. There was no concern that the domestic public would compare the resulting idealized image to the original. It follows that the period's illustrated magazines and popular encyclopedias documented not so much the actual world as the way in which people in the industrialized nations imagined it to be.

Josef Schulz does not make any contact sheets. He does not stick to a print's original dimensions, but enlarges it instead. In his work, illustrations become at least twenty times larger. The craftsmanship behind them is revealed; tangled lines and hatching techniques appear oversized. Occasionally, like in a double image, the black and white marks shift from intaglio to letterpress. Scratches and burrs become so large that the viewer is reminded of a woodcut.

On closer inspection, however, what happens is exactly what the illustrators tried to avoid: outlines and imagery dissolve. The etching needle's individual strokes become visible and so do their flaws—slight deviations from the parallel and straight lines that are supposed to be there, the trembling of a hand. It also becomes quite clear in which areas the illustrators drew on drawing or painting approaches.

Patrick Metzger

Excerpt from: „Aus der neuen Welt. Die Forschungsreisen des Josef Schulz.“