

The Rachel Carson Center Opening Event



On July 1, 2010, daff beats echoed through the Max-Joseph-Saal in the Residenz München heralding the opening of the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society. Featuring speakers from four continents as well as musical selections from Iran, India and Kurdistan, the Rachel Carson Center Opening Event introduced the Center and its mission of promoting global, interdisciplinary research on environmental studies to the greater Munich community. The evening began with welcome remarks from the Center's Directors, Prof. Christof Mauch and Prof. Helmuth Trischler, as well as from Prof. Reinhard Putz, Vice-President, LMU Munich, Prof. Wolfgang Heckl, Director General, Deutsches Museum, and Dr. Karin Korn-Riedlinger from the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research. In addition, the program featured three keynote speakers: Jane Carruthers, Professor of History and Chair of the RCC Advisory Board from Pretoria, South Africa; Yolanda Kakabadse, President of WWF International from Quito, Ecuador; and Vandana Shiva, World Future Councillor and Alternative Nobel Prize Winner from New Delhi, India. The evening concluded with the guests toasting the future success of the RCC in a reception held in the Theatiner gang of the Residenz.

Following the first musical number of Iranian sufir rhythms, **Christof Mauch** opened the evening by explaining the connections between the Center's namesake, Rachel Carson, and the Center itself. Rachel Carson was an American biologist whose book, *Silent Spring*, detailed the hazards of DDT; she is credited with starting the modern environmental movement in the United States. Carson's work sparked the creation of academic programs in environmental history and environmental studies; the combination of Carson's prose style with scientific fact had a wide-reaching impact across academic disciplines. Mauch indicated that the name Rachel Carson stands for both the Center's origin and the direction it wishes to take in the future. The Rachel Carson Center takes an international approach to research and strives to transcend disciplinary limitations. The diverse research projects at the Center are nonetheless linked by their common recognition of nature as a cultural challenge. Mauch concluded by emphasizing that a final priority of the work at the RCC is to interact with the broader world – "to make sure our work doesn't just stay on our desks."

Following Christof Mauch's address, **Helmuth Trischler** took the stage, describing the role of the Rachel Carson Center as a bridge – a bridge between history and the future, a bridge between dis-

ciplines, and a bridge between Munich's academic institutions, the University and the Deutsches Museum. The Deutsches Museum and the RCC hold many common goals; both want to connect research organizations, and both aim to disseminate knowledge to the public. Trischler then highlighted a range of collaborative programs that are already in place at the Rachel Carson Center: a joint grant with the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, KWI Essen; a wide-reaching digital portal that will include partnerships with the Beinecke Library at Yale University and the Newberry Library in Chicago; a conference with the German Academy of Sciences Leopoldina, the world's oldest natural sciences academy; an ERASMUS graduate school program, which links the RCC with many other European universities; and a joint exhibition with the German Ministry of Research and Education and the Deutsches Museum as part of the "Year of Energy."

Congratulating the Center on behalf of LMU Munich, Reinhard Putz began by extending his thanks to the German Federal Ministry of Research and Education for their funding. He commented that the RCC is an impressive example for the diverse academic resources found in Munich. He then continued to elaborate on the expectations and hopes that LMU Munich has for the Rachel Carson Center. LMU Munich sees the RCC as an important networker – both internally and externally at the university. Citing the recently established, interdisciplinary Ph.D. program brought to life by the Center, Putz emphasized that the Rachel Carson Center has already been – and will continue to be – especially important in fostering dialogue between the natural sciences and the humanities.

Representing the other pillar of the RCC, the Deutsches Museum, **Wolfgang Heckl** focused on the connections between the Deutsches Museum and the Rachel Carson Center. He began by pointing out that research is the intellectual capital of the Deutsches Museum; the museum is not merely a "collector of old items." The RCC will be a valuable reservoir of research and will enrich the knowledge base of the Deutsches Museum. Heckl concluded by listing areas of synergy between the Center and the Deutsches Museum: both are vibrant places of scholarship; both will be focusing heavily on questions of energy, mobility, and the environment in the coming years; and both have a mission to serve society.

Conveying greetings and congratulations from the German Minister of Education and Research, Prof. Annette Schavan, **Karin Korn-Riedlinger** began her talk by quoting a Chinese proverb whose English equivalence is the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The RCC represents the sentiment in this proverb, and Korn-Riedlinger surmised that the Center will serve to counter the isolation that many humanities disciplines often experience. The German Ministry is deeply interested in the integration of knowledge about social and cultural factors into environmental and sustainability discourses. Korn-Riedlinger concluded by reiterating that the Ministry is delighted with

the creation of the Center; there is no other institution in Germany that examines the complex relationships between nature and culture in the same manner.

After a musical interlude which featured two lively numbers played on the balafon, a traditional xylophone, **Jane Carruthers** took the stage to deliver her keynote, “The Rachel Carson Center and World Environmental History.” Carruthers began by contextualizing the role of environmental studies as well as environmental history. She made comparisons to the 1950s and the 1960s when neither environmentalism nor environmental studies existed. World environmental history has since established itself as an essential field for integrating a variety of perspectives on nature and environmental threats. As nature and the environment have no national boundaries, this interdisciplinary networking will be essential when confronting global, environmental challenges. Carruthers then highlighted the unique humanities focus of the RCC as one vital contribution that it will make not only to academia, but also to greater environmental debates. The humanities are crucial to understanding the present and the past of environmental knowledge; this insight should also further our ability to plan for the future. As Carruthers concluded, environmental history has a “moral purpose and practical purchase” – the interdisciplinary and international approach of the RCC will truly shape both the future of environmental studies as well as greater environmental debates and policies.

Following Jane Carruthers, **Yolanda Kakabadse** examined the interaction between the business world and environmental activism in her keynote entitled, “The Business of Nature – or the Nature of Business.” Kakabadse started by relating a personal story of a moment in her life that not only crystallized her thoughts on nature and the environment – but also on business and war. In 1996, she experienced several harrowing weeks in which she thought her son would be drafted to serve in a war between Peru and Ecuador. It was during these weeks, Kakabadse related, that her personal stake and involvement in not only war and business, but also in environmental issues became clear. For Kakabadse, these weeks also served to reveal the interconnections between these various “sectors.” Business is not just about making money, but rather about getting the best out of whatever one does. Kakabadse called for a re-evaluation of the term “business,” by always associating it with a negative, exploitative context, society has furthered segmentation of life and the planet. By separating various clusters – governments, academia, business, media, indigenous people – the discussion has been fractured as has the ability to find potential solutions to wide-reaching problems. As Kakabadse stated, “we only achieve partial solutions.” She then argued for a closer integration between nature and business; environmentalists need to improve their marketing strategy. In order to achieve results, environmentalists should argue for protection of the earth as a good business decision. She listed a variety of examples which exemplify both protection and good busi-

ness practices: butterfly farms which benefit both local communities and scientists; initiatives to plant trees which provide employment and replenish natural resources; and global regulations which protect resources as well as ensuring fair competition. After examining various environmental platforms which WWF International supports and then explaining how these initiatives could benefit from a business strategy, Kakabadse concluded by challenging environmentalists to work on their sales pitch and to “sell” their ideas in order to accomplish lasting environmental protection.

The final keynote speaker of the evening was **Vandana Shiva**, who spoke on “Water, Soil, and Oil: Environmental Knowledge from the Past and for the Future.” Shiva offered congratulations to the Center and stated that the RCC has honored not only the work of Rachel Carson, but also that of environmentalists worldwide. Her talk took as its starting point Rachel Carson's role as a marine biologist. Shiva concluded that were Rachel Carson still alive today, she would most certainly be weighing in on the recent BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, as it combines two of Carson's passions – the ocean, and inappropriate usage of chemicals. She then explained a personal connection between herself and Rachel Carson. One of Carson's main areas of work was against pesticides – a mission that she often undertook alone, facing off against giant agricultural conglomerates. Shiva herself became involved in environmental movements after studying biodiversity and then witnessing the effects that pesticides had had on her own home country of India. These pesticides dramatically reduced the population of the nil tree – a natural pest control agent as well as a ‘local pharmacy’ for villagers because of its many medicinal uses. Shiva then examined the role that pesticides and genetic engineering have had on food growth across the world. These so-called wonder seeds (genetically engineered seeds) have actually increased hunger and created a variety of new environmental problems. Shiva concluded the evening by emphasizing that humans are meant to live in a world of diversity and that this is the beauty of the Rachel Carson Center. The Center, as Shiva said, wants to celebrate the diversity of disciplines; this interdisciplinary approach is how humanity can build on the knowledge of the past to create another future – a future based on the wealth that nature gives us.

The reception in the Theateringang of Munich's Residenz following Vandana Shiva's address was testimony to the many exciting ideas which had been put forth during the course of the evening. The long hall was alive with the buzz of conversations as Munich residents, RCC scholars and international speakers mingled to discuss – in a variety of languages – their reactions to the evening. It is precisely this kind of lively, international debate which the Rachel Carson Center hopes to foster, and which it is hoped will lead to both new questions and new answers to the challenges posed by our environment.

— Arielle Helmick