

Press release

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South Seas boat floats into the Humboldt Forum

The reconstruction of the Berlin Palace as the Humboldt Forum has successfully reached a key milestone: right on schedule, on 29 May, the unique Luf boat from Oceania moved into the exhibition hall on the first floor as the first large object from the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

Hans-Dieter Hegner, who is in charge of construction for the Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss, described the huge efforts necessary at the construction site to enable the first large object from the Ethnologisches Museum of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin to be brought to the Humboldt Forum. First, the natural stone flooring in the entrance hall had to be completed so that the hoist could be installed. Most of the construction work in the exhibition hall on the first floor also needed to be finished before the boat could be brought in. The climate in the hall is currently being controlled with a standalone unit, and security technology is also in place. The museum objects will be held in museum-appropriate climate conditions until the permanent exhibition is set up.

Monika Grütters: “The large objects moving into the Humboldt Forum today tell us that the construction phase is drawing to a close. Cultural operations are literally just around the corner! The South Seas boat is the first object from the Dahlem museums to arrive here. Thousands more items are to follow – even if they won’t be accompanied by the same kind of entourage as the large objects. In the entire history of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin there has never been a transfer of exhibition holdings on this scale. All objects, whether great or small, from the Dahlem museums can expect to be seen by crowds of visitors in the heart of Berlin. That’s what I wish for them, at any rate. I am delighted that we will be able to support this aim in our cultural policy by allowing free admission to the permanent exhibition.

And a year and a half before the Humboldt Forum opens, recent staffing decisions about the new management structure and the future general director have got this cultural project off to a good start.”

Hans-Dieter Hegner: “I’m really proud of the way everyone has pulled together to achieve this milestone, both in the museums and on the construction site. Cultural assets like the Luf boat are irreplaceable and globally unique, and it is no small task to ensure that their temporary storage on the construction site is secure. But all the necessary construction measures are in place and we have complied in full with the curators’ legitimate requirements for the exhibits’ safekeeping. At this point I would like to thank all my colleagues and will be looking forward to the successful completion of a further section of the construction.”

Hermann Parzinger: “The collections of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin form the backbone of the Humboldt Forum. Moving the objects from Dahlem to Mitte is a logistical challenge for everyone involved. The arrival of the Luf boat, one of the icons of the Ethnologisches Museum, now heralds the process of filling the Humboldt Forum with content. No longer do we just have to read on paper what this new cultural district in the heart of Berlin is going to be: a place where the world can be better understood. I would like to thank all those involved at the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, the Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss and the Humboldt Forum Kultur GmbH for the success of this delicate operation.”

This is because the future Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss is still a building site. Construction work will only be completed in around a year’s time. However, the sheer size of the boat meant that it had to be installed in its future exhibition space on the first floor before the building is finished. Large openings measuring approximately 4 by 6 metres were left in two walls of the monumental entrance hall specifically for this transport; these will subsequently be bricked up.

The boat was packed for the transfer in a crate measuring an impressive 16 metres long, 2.5 metres high and 1.40 metres wide. The crate was brought to the Palace building site overnight by specialized transport from Dahlem. The boat, still in its packing, was then lifted into its new home with a hoist using specially erected scaffolding. Once in place it will initially remain in its crate until all the work on the construction site is finished next year. Only when the atmosphere is free of dust and the climate control system, fire safety measures, etc. are all up and running can the exhibitions be arranged and mounted. Until that point the boat has to be stored safely on the building site in its packaging.

The boat from the island of Luf has an eventful history. It was built in 1890 on one of the western islands that now belong to Papua New Guinea. In the nineteenth century, the men of Luf used these boats to sail out to sea, conduct trade and go to war. Yet this particular boat never fulfilled those purposes, for the island’s dwindling population meant the remaining men were never able to launch it. It remained in the boathouse until 1903, when Max Thiel spotted it and bought it on behalf of the trading company Hensheim & Co. After a stopover on Matupi in New Britain, it arrived in 1904 at what was then called the Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin.

Fast-forward to 2018: Under the watchful eyes of numerous journalists and those involved with the museum and building site, the minister of state for culture gave the signal to raise the boat just before 9 am. After about twenty minutes, the huge crate stood in the exhibition hall, and the move of the non-European collections from Dahlem into the Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss had been successfully launched. Further transport operations will take place between now and August 2018.

Press material is available at humboldtforum.com/southseaboat.

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