

## **PRESS SERVICE**

21 July 2021

## **HIGHLIGHTS OF THE BERLIN GLOBAL EXHIBITION**

### **A Tour**

#### **Legacy of colonialism: The "Thinking the World" mural**

How is Berlin connected with the world? The BERLIN GLOBAL exhibition, which explores this question with seven main topics, starts by looking back into time and out across the continents. Upon entering the first room, visitors find themselves in the middle of a panoramic depiction of the world covering all four walls from floor to ceiling. This mural is by How and Nosm, two brothers known for their large-scale works sprayed and painted on walls and buildings around the world. Here at the Humboldt Forum they created global landscapes from historical events, individuals and universal symbols such as broken chains and clasped hands. Historical books, maps, cartoons and drawings provided the inspiration for these pop-coloured pictorial narratives.

The first voyages of discovery by the Portuguese and Spanish in the 15th century led to the oppression of native peoples, as shown on the entry wall. The Electorate of Prussia established its first colony in the 17th century in what is now Ghana and had people shipped to America like goods. The long wall to the left of the entry shows the Humboldt brothers: the great naturalist and world traveller Alexander and the linguist Wilhelm. For them all cultures were of equal value, and what mattered was the richness of the human mind. Alexander von Humboldt, now considered an early environmentalist, saw the world as an interconnected whole and was constantly discovering new interdependencies among natural processes.

However, curiosity and a spirit of inquiry about non-European cultures were seldom pursued apart from hegemonic thought and claims of ownership, as the opposite wall shows. Around the year 1900, scientists in Berlin exploited unequal power relations by soliciting artefacts and craniums from the colonies, most of which are still in the city's collections today.

They used these objects in attempts to prove the superiority of their own culture. At that time Europeans were dividing up entire continents among themselves like cakes. Nor did they hesitate to employ extreme forms of violence, including the first genocide of the 20th century which was perpetrated by German colonial troops on the Herero and Nama in what is today Namibia.

Only on the fourth wall are faint signs of hope visible for a global community whose peoples come together on equal terms.

### **Interactive revolutions: The wheel of history**

The exhibition's general principle is to make history understandable in new and sometimes surprising ways that immerse visitors in worlds of sights and sounds. Some parts of the tour even become a shared experience, as is the case with the "wheel of history" in the "**Revolution**" room. Revolutions are started here by communal effort –

the installation in the middle of the room is easier to activate when multiple visitors pull together. They can decide which historical upheaval they wish to experience: the March Revolution of 1848, the November Revolution of 1918, the Peaceful Revolution of 1989, the revolt of 17 June 1953 in East Berlin, or the student protests in West Berlin in 1967-68. Turning the wheel to the corresponding year activates a series of projections onto the surrounding elliptical walls. Striking large-scale images show streams of protesters and barricades under construction while narrators provide concise accounts of the revolution in question. The projections use materials from the respective time, beginning with pictorial broadsheets and engravings, then photographs and films and finally television coverage. The visuals are accompanied by recordings of revolutionary songs, chants and shouts. A map of the city projected onto the table highlights locations at which specific events took place. Visitors looking up will see the borders of Berlin at the time. Literally and metaphorically, the city is turned upside down.

### **Vanishing free spaces: Moving walls**

Berlin has always offered space to people who could not live as they wanted elsewhere or who found provincial life too restrictive. They included religious refugees in the 17th and 18th centuries, young people attracted to Kreuzberg and Schöneberg in the 1970s and 1980s, and many artists and musicians in the 1990s. The "**Free Space**" room tells of projects and utopias that thrived in niche areas of the metropolis. One example is Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute of Sexual Science which in the 1920s was the first in the world to study gender diversity and to network and counsel homosexuals and transsexuals.

Another example is the self-managed Drugstore and Potse youth centres in Schöneberg that began organising punk and rock concerts and films and discussions in the 1970s.

Each topic occupies its own section of the room, surrounded by partitions on which videos and photos are projected. Of note here is that the partitions move. They slowly recede and advance, depending on the content of the visuals. They move back when projections show vibrant scenes from the Schöneberg youth centres or the liberating effects of sexual science for people whose gender does not meet conventional criteria. The space enclosed thereby expands. But when the youth centre is closed or the institute is looted by the Nazis, the walls converge upon visitors.

Free spaces that expand or contract become memorable physical experiences. The same principle applies to the thoroughfare in the centre of the room showing changes to Potsdamer Platz. The partitions recede with photos showing how the open space was used after the fall of the Wall, and then advance again when the area is covered with buildings in the 1990s.

### **Threshold to another world: The steel door of the Tresor techno club**

A vibrant and varied club culture arose in the spaces that opened after the fall of the Wall. The history of the Tresor techno club is a typical example. Searching for party venues, Dimitri Hegemann and two friends discovered an underground metal chamber in 1991 below Leipziger Platz, above which the Wall had stood for thirty years. It was the vault of the legendary Wertheim department store, the ruins of which had been removed in the 1950s. Hegemann and his friends turned it into Berlin's most famous club, which attracted young people from around the world for 15 years. When Leipziger Platz was developed the club had to move. The impossibly heavy rusty steel door, which is the largest original object in the BERLIN GLOBAL exhibition, used to mark the threshold to another world where people from east and west danced to hard techno music and where there no longer seemed to be any borders. But not everyone who approached the door was allowed in.

The threshold to the Tresor club therefore exemplifies three of the exhibition's main topics: free space, boundaries and entertainment.

It tells yet another story. In 1937 the Nazis seized the assets of the Jewish owners of the Wertheim department store. Some fled abroad and three were murdered. Safe deposit boxes in this door to the bank in the store's basement once held customers' valuables.

**Decisions behind closed doors: The colonial map**

Another dramatic original object is displayed just a few steps away in the "**Boundaries**" room, namely a map from the archive of the German Foreign Office. Printed in 1906, it shows part of western central Africa which the Europeans had divided up among themselves. A large contiguous area east and south of the border of the German colony of Cameroon is outlined with a blue pen.

In 1911 French ambassador Jules Cambon marked this area to show how much land France would transfer to Germany if Germany would return the favour by recognising the French protectorate of Morocco. The treaty signed shortly thereafter ended the Second Moroccan Crisis.

The map is a vivid illustration of how colonial powers bartered territories behind closed doors – far from the actual location and without any consideration of the people who lived there, their rights or their interests. With a few strokes of a pen, they created new circumstances and drew or shifted borders whose arbitrary qualities continue to burden the African continent. But colonial power was not exhaustive. *White* Europeans repeatedly faced resistance by African populations, and the German colonial regime in Cameroon was no exception.

The colonial map is one of four objects in this room that focus on boundaries and borders in the history of Berlin. The room also has media stations shaped like surveying instruments that invite visitors to explore boundaries – often invisible – that run through the city today.

**From New York to Berlin to Istanbul: Hip-hop**

A stack of flight cases backed by flashy graffiti and fronted by a turntable forms a module in the "**Entertainment**" room featuring hip-hop in Berlin in the 1980s and 1990s. Some of the black and silver cubes show videos and others hold objects that tell special stories: a painted ghetto blaster, a jacket with the "Cartel" band label, a contract for a performance at the Palace of the Republic, and homemade DJ equipment from the GDR.

Hip-hop is an example of a global musical culture that changed as it moved from one continent to the next. Young Black and Hispanic people invented it in the New York borough of the Bronx. The first songs were heard in Berlin in the early 1980s via means such as the US military radio programme for soldiers in West Berlin. Young people in both West and East Berlin began to rap, mix and scratch, and to breakdance on Breitscheidplatz and Alexanderplatz. The western side of the Wall became a huge canvas for graffiti.

Hip-hop offered German-Turkish youngsters a self-assured mode of expression and a way to take a stand, including during the period after German reunification when racist incidents were on the rise.

Groups like "Islamic Force" began combining hip-hop rhythms with melodies from the east, leading to a genre called oriental hip-hop which then became popular in Turkey.

### **Faraway lands close up: The kaiserpanorama**

A kaiserpanorama is a precursor to the television. Stereoscopic photos are rotated once a minute inside a large wooden cylinder. Twenty-four visitors can sit around the periphery of the cylinder in the "**Entertainment**" room and gaze through eyepieces at images that appear in three dimensions.

The small, generally hand-coloured glass photograms brought the world home to many people around 1900. They showed ceremonial occasions with the royal family, sporting events, natural disasters, faraway cities and landscapes considered exotic. These included views of Germany's colonies seen through the eyes of *white* Europeans.

Adolf Fuhrmann installed his first kaiserpanorama in 1883 in a passage between Friedrichstrasse and Unter den Linden called the Kaisergalerie. His Berlin company soon began delivering new series of images to kaiserpanoramas in Europe and overseas. The functional kaiserpanorama in the BERLIN GLOBAL exhibition is a faithful replica of the original in the Märkisches Museum.

### **Hosting the world in East Berlin: Lamps from the Palace of the Republic**

The glass globes and metal rods on the ceiling of the "**Entertainment**" room will seem familiar to some visitors. These round lamps hung in the foyer of the Palace of the Republic and were the source of the nickname "Erich's lamp shop". Like all the furnishings in the Palace of the Republic, they represent the latest design trends of the 1970s. The GDR presented itself here as a trailblazer in the arts, with an inviting, cosmopolitan and open atmosphere. It offered corresponding entertainment programmes in its grand hall – not just music and dance groups from other socialist or non-aligned countries but also international stars like Carlos Santana, Harry Belafonte and Udo Lindenberg. Many people who frequented its cafés, restaurants and bowling alley associate the Palace of the Republic more with memorable evening events than the seat of the East German parliament. The globe lamps, replicas of seating areas and Lothar Zitzmann's *World Youth Song* painting, all familiar from the foyer of the Palace of the Republic, recall the building that preceded the Humboldt Forum. Many other places in the exhibition and the building at large also make reference to the history of the site.

**Plans for world domination: The large globe from 1936**

A floor-to-ceiling rust-coloured sculpture that appears to have fallen into or exploded in the middle of the "War" room creates a dramatic and unsettling atmosphere. Visitors also quickly notice a large globe in a wooden frame. Large-format globes of this type were made for ministerial and other public buildings under the Nazis, and a similar one stood in Hitler's Reich chancellery. The one in the exhibition is probably from the headquarters of the skilled trades confederation. It shows global interconnections in the 1930s, including railroads, maritime and flight routes, telegraph connections and caravan routes. For the Nazis many of the countries represented territory to be conquered or regained. Former colonies in Africa and the South Pacific, which were lost in 1919, are highlighted and shown with German names. Globes such as these inspired dreams of conquering the world and anticipated future wars. Schoolroom maps like the one of "Germany's colonies" falsified history and taught pupils the ideology of a master race and a "people without living space".

**The dark side of fashion: A garment worker's protest sign**

Nearly every piece of clothing sold in Berlin today has been produced in other parts of the world, often under appalling conditions and in ways that harm the environment. For a long time hardly any German consumers were aware of garment workers' living conditions in countries from Turkey to China.

It took the disastrous collapse in April 2013 of the dilapidated Rana Plaza production hall in Savar to raise global awareness of the hazardous, exhausting and poorly paid work in garment factories in Bangladesh. More than a thousand people, primarily women, lost their lives. Well-known international clothing companies had products made there.

In August 2013 workers demonstrated at the ruins on a Global Day of Action and demanded that transnational clothing corporations commit to meet fire protection and building safety standards. A protest sign with the handwritten message "We sew your clothes. Make our factories safe" was used in the demonstration. That sign can be seen in the "Fashion" room. It is part of a large-scale infographic on global interconnections in the textile industry since the 18th century and labour conditions for garment workers – the majority of whom are women.

**At home in the world: *Interconnected Lives* from Tape That**

Berlin draws residents from far and wide – half of its inhabitants were not born in the city but instead come from other cities, towns and villages in Germany or elsewhere.

The "**Interconnection**" room features Berliners with a second or third homeland: individuals who found a job here, who had to leave other countries for political reasons, or who can work anywhere in the world. Many of them maintain contact with their families and friends by phone or online, by letters, packages and actual visits if possible. Their experiences are captured in audio portraits.

Members of the Berlin artists' collective Tape That were inspired by their stories to create an installation. They made unique works with coloured tape on thin aluminium panels for each of the 15 audio portraits. They then cut these rectangular works into strips and suspended them at different levels from the ceiling. Fifteen fragmented bands run through the long room and cross paths like lives themselves – exemplifying individual interconnections across the globe.

Each of these bands has a specific colour that also appears on audio station dials and display cases at the front of the room. The cases contain objects on loan from the individuals in the audio portraits. The five artists in the Tape That collective have different styles. One works with cipher-like geometrical shapes that appear three dimensional, another prefers splintered strips with wave-like and mesh patterns, and yet another takes a representational approach. Listeners to the audio stories will spot connections. The orange strips referring to Yang, a former functionary who now runs a snack stand, have symbols such as the communist star of North Vietnam. The fragmented pink contrabass with occasional abbreviated reference to major Berlin sites like the Brandenburg Gate, Television Tower and Kotbusser Tor is associated with Inge Kappahn, a singer and musician who performed in socialist countries in the 1950s and 1960s. Connections radiate out from Berlin to the world – to Nuremberg and Hanoi, Leipzig and Accra, Izmir and Osaka.

### **Space for networking: The "Berliane"**

At the end of the tour the **Lounge** invites visitors to engage in conversation. One point of entry can be each visitor's "ticket to connect" with the summary of their votes at interactive stations and their choices in the various dilemma questions.

The tickets' results and profiles are based on four values that figure prominently in all the world's cultures and influence social and political life: tradition, freedom, security and equality.

The Lounge's "architecture of encounter" was designed by the Stammpunkt atelier. Three curved sculptures 50 metres in length wind freely through the elongated room, climbing to the ceiling, wrapping around columns and returning to the floor where they form circular or semi-circular seating areas. This is the "Berliane", a portmanteau of "Berlin" and "liana" or woody vine. The sculptures consist of padded metal tubes lined with robust fabric.

Evoking enormous jungle vines, the green "Berliane" is yet another symbol of worldwide interconnections. This interior design creates spaces for both exploration and relaxation, offering a conducive atmosphere for coming together and sharing ideas and views.

## **BERLIN GLOBAL – A coproduction of Kulturprojekte Berlin and the Stadtmuseum Berlin**

*The BERLIN GLOBAL exhibition opened on July 20 on the first floor above ground of the Humboldt Forum. On around 4,000 square metres of space, it explores the complex web of relations between Berlin and the world. Immersive installations and atmospheric presentations lead visitors into theme-based rooms that reflect the many sides of the city.*

*The BERLIN GLOBAL exhibition at the Humboldt Forum is a coproduction of Kulturprojekte Berlin and the Stadtmuseum Berlin. Its design and contents were developed by a team led by Paul Spies, Chief Curator for the State of Berlin at the Humboldt Forum and Director of the Stadtmuseum Berlin. Kulturprojekte Berlin is responsible for the overall production, communications and – together with the Stadtmuseum Berlin – displays which are universally accessible and inclusive.*

*Major actors at the Humboldt Forum include the Ethnological Museum and the Museum of Asian Art (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz), Kulturprojekte Berlin, the Stadtmuseum Berlin and the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, under the direction of the Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss.*

### **More information**

[www.berlin-global-ausstellung.de](http://www.berlin-global-ausstellung.de)

[www.humboldtforum.org](http://www.humboldtforum.org)

[www.kulturprojekte.berlin](http://www.kulturprojekte.berlin)

[www.stadtmuseum.de](http://www.stadtmuseum.de)

[Facebook](#) [Instagram](#) [#berlinglobal](#)

### **Press contact**

Franziska Schönberner

+49 (0) 30 24749-750

[f.schoenberner@kulturprojekte.berlin](mailto:f.schoenberner@kulturprojekte.berlin)