

HUMBOLDT FORUM

PRESS KIT

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HISTORY OF THE HUMBOLDT FORUM SITE

The Humboldt Forum occupies one of Europe's most multi-layered sites, both in its archaeological history and in the momentous events that have affected it over 800 years.

The new Humboldt Forum building sits on an island on the River Spree in the historic heart of Berlin. Opposite to it is the cluster of museums that comprises Museum Island, designated a World Heritage site in 1999. The Humboldt Forum completes the jigsaw of this extraordinarily significant area, close to the Brandenburg Gate.

Cölln (on the Spree, not the Rhine) was once a quiet settlement, with another small town, Berlin, on the other side of the river, it lay on the fringes of the Holy Roman Empire. Cölln began to grow, and in c. 1300 a Dominican monastery was founded there. By the mid-15th century the town, along with Berlin, was developing more rapidly. The House of Hohenzollern, a powerful Franconian family of princes who from 1415 ruled the Electorate of Brandenburg, decided to build a palace next to the monastery. Their palace spread, and the Hohenzollerns deemed that the monastery was in the way. The monastery was dissolved and its church converted into a place of worship for the court, with a royal burial place for the family.

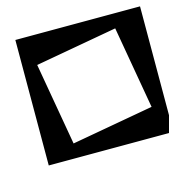
When peace returned after the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), Prince Friedrich Wilhelm, Elector of Brandenburg and Duke of Prussia, refurbished the old palace and laid out a magnificent garden. But the next Prince Elector, Friedrich II, was even more ambitious and in 1698 commissioned the architect Andreas Schlüter to convert the Renaissance building into the great Baroque Berlin Palace, centred on an enclosed courtyard. Extended to double its size a few years later by architects Johan Friedrich Eosander and Martin Heinrich Böhme, the Berlin Palace was hailed as a magnificent destination that foreign travellers must see.

The Berlin Palace became a centre for official duties, and the chapel and cupola were added 1848-1853, reinforcing its royal status. However, from the 1830s onwards, many of the treasures from the palace were removed to new museums on Museum Island, and the Berlin Palace eventually became little more than a residence for the Hohenzollerns.

With the unification of Germany in 1871, when the Prussian king was declared Kaiser, the palace served as a backdrop for great state events. Then, upon the institution of the Weimar Republic in 1918, it was decided the building should house academic, charitable and cultural institutions such as museums.

During the Nazi period, the Lustgarten (the open space in front of the Berlin Palace) became the site of rallies, including their first big rally in 1932, but the palace itself remained largely unchanged until February 1945 when it was almost destroyed by bombs.

After World War II, when Berlin was divided into four zones of occupation, Berlin Palace fell under the Soviet sector, and when the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was established in 1949 the new government decided to demolish it. By 1 May 1951, the site had been flattened and in its place was a huge parade ground, Marx-Engels-Platz, used for state-sponsored demonstrations. In the early 1970s, the East German government constructed its new Palace of the Republic.



As well as being the seat of GDR's parliament, the Palace of the Republic was designated a 'people's palace'. It contained many restaurants, shops, a disco and a bowling alley. But those enticements were more for show than representative of reality, and the Stasi kept all activity there under strict surveillance. After reunification, the Palace of the Republic sat empty and dilapidated. The idea of creating a new building was discussed. Some concerts and art interventions took place within the shell of the Palace of the Republic in 2002-2005, but those were its last years. The German Bundestag decided a new building should be created behind the restored façade of the earlier Baroque building, and that it would be a home for the new Humboldt Forum. The site was finally cleared in 2008.

Marking the layers of history that underlie the site, in the basement of the present building, the Humboldt Forum's home, some parts of the monastery and the cellars of the Berlin Palace have been exposed. Those areas will be accessible to visitors, while a new sculpture hall will be the backdrop for original figures rescued from the palace façade and brought in, to protect them from further weather exposure. An exhibition within the building will track its amazing past.

WILHELM AND ALEXANDER VON HUMBOLDT

The Humboldt Forum is named after the brothers Wilhelm and Alexander von Humboldt.

Prussian philosopher, educationalist, diplomat and linguist Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) introduced the concept of holistic education. The 'Humboldtian model', as it is called, brings the arts and the sciences together with research, with the aim of promoting a greater cultivation of understanding and cultural knowledge. He argued that vocational skills can be acquired more easily if they are based on a true grounding of general education. Today, Wilhelm von Humboldt's visionary ideas remain influential far beyond Germany, in spite of the narrower curricula that so many countries have adopted. He founded the Humboldt University Berlin which, as a research-based university, is ingrained with his principles. Similarly, the educational philosophy of Wilhelm von Humboldt runs like a thread through the work of the Humboldt Forum.

Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859), the younger brother of Wilhelm von Humboldt, was a polymath – a geographer, naturalist and scientific explorer of the Americas, and a proponent of Romantic philosophy and science. In his magnum opus, 'Kosmos', he argued for a holistic discipline, unifying science and culture. This work led him to see the universe as an interacting entity and was the first, as early as 1800, to link human activity with climate change.

With their curiosity and gift for exploring the world from fresh perspectives, the von Humboldt brothers profoundly influenced the development of cultural and scientific thought in the first half of the 19th century. Now, at another pivotal time in global history, their names are synonymous worldwide with education, culture, science and the importance of nature in our thinking about our future.

Taking inspiration from the brothers, the Humboldt Forum brings together the sciences, the arts and education, and promotes dialogue between experts and the public on these subjects and more, recognising that forging links between disciplines leads to the holistic knowledge that is needed to tackle the world's urgent problems.

The Humboldt Forum's displays, exhibitions, events and discussions will all carry the implicit understanding that everything in nature, and all disciplines, are interconnected. This concept, strongly present in art, poetry, philosophy and the sciences in the Romantic era, is today once again at the forefront of advanced thought.

BERLIN GLOBAL

A co-production by Kulturprojekte Berlin (Cultural Projects Berlin) and the Stadtmuseum Berlin (City Museum Berlin), BERLIN GLOBAL is the first big project to open at Humboldt Forum.

It is a state-of-the-art and immersive exhibition on the story of Berlin and its connections with the world. In a space of approximately 4,000 square metres, this exhibition, designed as much for Berliners themselves as for visitors from elsewhere, looks back into the city's history and celebrates Berlin as it is evolving now. With insights into Berlin's network at both local and global levels, it reveals the vibrant and growing interconnectedness of one of today's most exciting world cities.

Through seven thematic rooms – entitled Revolution, Free Space, Boundaries, Entertainment, War, Fashion and Interconnection – the essence of Berlin is revealed. Rich in variety and surprises, each fascinating and atmospheric installation draws on state-of-the-art exhibition technology, inviting visitors deep into Berlin and its underlying diversity.

Visitors can choose to wear chip wristbands with electronic links to the exhibits and are able throughout to engage with numerous media-based links to make their experience fully participatory. BERLIN GLOBAL includes a strong theme of individuals' unique connections to the city, with opportunities for visitors to add their own accounts through discussion. At the end, visitors receive a summary of their very own experience, and can engage in discussion with others about the exhibition's themes and their personal connections with the world.

BERLIN GLOBAL takes us behind the façade of many well-known images of Berlin, by focusing on topics such as revolution and war, and freedom of movement or lack of it. Highlights are displays featuring Berlin's famous street fashion, and its renown as a centre for entertainment, past and present. Exploring issues of migration and Berlin's current global responsibility, it seeks to engage critically with the traces of colonialism that still make themselves felt in the city today.

BERLIN GLOBAL at the Humboldt Forum is a co-production of Kulturprojekte Berlin and the Stadtmuseum Berlin. The exhibition's 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 production, communications and – together with the Stadtmuseum Berlin – displays which are universally accessible and inclusive.

HUMBOLDT LAB

Vibrant, dynamic and specially created by Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (Humboldt University of Berlin), Humboldt Lab is a radical new space for public engagement with the sciences in an increasingly complex world. The Humboldt Lab space, which itself very much resembles a laboratory, gives Berlin's research scientists, across the disciplines, a shared base in which to meet to explore advances in science. Humboldt Lab's aim is to interrupt assumptions and, importantly, it provides a platform for wide-reaching dialogue, taking cutting-edge research into debate between experts and the public. This new permanent forum, in which Berlin's distinguished scientific institutions will come together, will be both a place of education and a venue for networking, discussion and the exchange of ideas.

Welcoming points of view from many angles, Humboldt Lab will not shy away from contentious argument. It will be there to investigate contemporary responses to some of the most pressing questions of our time, such as the global crises in nature and democracy, and will confront these issues from an international, interdisciplinary, scholarly and democratic perspective.

Within the space occupied by Humboldt Lab will be a 750-square-metre interactive exhibition called *After Nature*. Drawing the viewer into the history of science and giving an insight into how scientific knowledge develops, *After Nature* looks unwaveringly at humankind's devastating effects on the global environment, from species loss to the climate emergency.

Climate change, globalisation, consumption, sustainability, loss of biodiversity and inequality are inextricably interwoven in many ways. This exhibition will make the research on these complex interactions visible.

The exhibition will be in place for three years. Objects on display will be drawn from Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin's own extraordinary collection, together with other sources. *After Nature* will also highlight recent research carried out by centres of excellence within Berlin's universities, as well as Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, the city's oldest university.

To keep the displays current and up to date, exhibits will periodically be refreshed throughout the period of the exhibition.

ETHNOLOGICAL MUSEUM AND ASIAN ART MUSEUM

The Ethnologisches Museum (Ethnological Museum) and the Museum für Asiatische Kunst (Asian Art Museum) are among the largest and most significant museums of their kinds in the world, and their opening at Humboldt Forum in 2021 is a major cultural event. With their relocation, they combine forces to offer an encyclopaedic survey of the world's cultures and art, spanning the ages as well as the continents.

There are strong historic links between the Ethnological Museum, founded in 1873, and the Asian Art Museum, which dates back to 1906. The origins of both collections can be traced back to the Brandenburg-Prussian Cabinet of Curiosities in the Berlin Palace – the last precursor but one to Humboldt Forum's building on the site.

Now, while maintaining their old home in Berlin's Dahlem district for scholarship and research, the Ethnological Museum and the Asian Art Museum, both run by Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (Berlin State Museums), are moving together to a new permanent home at Humboldt Forum. There, some 20,000 exhibits from Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas will be on show, over a total of 17,000 square metres. Some objects will be on temporary display, to be replaced by others every now and then.

The new installation provides the space and flexibility to show the two museums' treasures in a radical and spectacular new way, drawing on both collections to tell the story of humanity, and focusing as much on the intangible aspects of cultural legacy as on the artefacts themselves.

Themes running through the displays include ritual, issues around religion, the images that indigenous societies present of themselves, the importance of craftsmanship, and the relationship of tradition to contemporary art.

Alongside the physical objects will be sound recordings from the wonderful Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv. This unique and priceless collection of ethnomusicological recordings dates back to 1900 and is a key resource for curators, together with further supporting materials from the museums' extensive holdings of photographs, films and recordings.

Offering a critical examination of European colonialism, the displays will give voice to colonised people's points of view and relate the artefacts to contemporary social issues. They will focus on the collections' history and highlight new research findings.

As well as the permanent displays, there will be space within the same sequence of galleries for temporary exhibitions. These exhibitions will respond to current, often critical, issues. Drawing on the expertise of curators from a variety of scientific, ethnological, artistic and educational fields, they will be designed in close cooperation with representatives from societies and communities whose histories and identities are interwoven with the exhibited objects. Around these exhibitions will be educational activities and public programmes encouraging further enquiry.

LEADERSHIP BIOGRAPHIES

HARTMUT DORGERLOH

General Director of Stiftung Humboldt Forum (Humboldt Forum Foundation)

The art historian, curator of monuments and cultural manager Prof. Dr. Hartmut Dorgerloh is general director and chief executive officer of the Stiftung Humboldt Forum. After senior roles in the Ministerium für Wissenschaft, Forschung und Kultur in the state of Brandenburg and as the founding director of the Haus der Brandenburgisch-Preußischen Geschichte in Potsdam, he was general director of the Stiftung Preussische Schlösser und Gärten Berlin-Brandenburg from 2002 to 2018. Since 2004 he has lectured as an honorary professor at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.

LARS-CHRISTIAN KOCH

Director for the Collections of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (Berlin State Museums) in the Humboldt Forum

The music ethnologist and ethnologist Prof. Dr. Lars-Christian Koch is in charge of the collections of the Ethnologisches Museum (Ethnological Museum) and the Museum für Asiatische Kunst (Asian Art Museum). From 2003 to 2018 he was head of the department for media and music ethnology, visual anthropology and the phonogramme archive at the Ethnological Museum of the Berlin State Museums. He is also an associate professor of music ethnology at the Universität zu Köln and honorary professor at the Universität der Künste in Berlin.

SABINE KUNST

President of Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (Humboldt University of Berlin)

Prof. Dr.-Ing. Dr. Sabine Kunst has been President of Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin since May 2016. Previously, Kunst was Minister for Science, Research and Culture (MWFK) in Brandenburg, starting in February 2011, and before that she was President of the University of Potsdam. In 2010 – 2011, Sabine Kunst was the first female President of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the largest funding organisation for the worldwide exchange of researchers and students. Her international engagement as a researcher and university teacher has taken her to a number of countries, including Mexico, South Africa, Bolivia and Peru for research visits and development cooperation. In 2010, she was named University Manager of the Year. In 2013, she received an honorary doctorate in Berlin from the American Jewish University Los Angeles.

PAUL SPIES

Chief Curator of the Federal State of Berlin in the Humboldt Forum

Since February 2016, Paul Spies has been Director of the Stadtmuseum Berlin (City Museum Berlin) and Chief Curator of the Federal State of Berlin in the Humboldt Forum. Born in Amsterdam, he co-founded the art history firm D'Arts after graduation, where he remained

for 21 years. He was Director of the Amsterdam Museum and the Museum Willet-Holthuysen from 2009 – 2015. The art historian and archaeologist is one of the leading thinkers in the international discussion about the future of city museums.

MORITZ VAN DÜLMEN

CEO of Kulturprojekte Berlin (Cultural Projects Berlin)

Moritz van Dülmen has been the cultural manager and Managing Director of Kulturprojekte Berlin GmbH since its founding in 2006. He has overseen planning and management of numerous largescale projects, including projects commemorating the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 2009, 2014, and 2019, Long Night of Museums, EMOP Berlin – European Month of Photography, and Berlin Art Week. He is also overseeing BERLIN GLOBAL at the Humboldt Forum, as well as numerous other history and cultural projects. Since 2007, he has been Managing Director of the State Association of Museums in Berlin (LMB), an umbrella organisation for museums in Berlin. In 2005, he initiated the international media conference M100 Sanssouci Colloquium and has served as its managing director since its foundation.