HUMBOLDT FORUM

HISTORY OF THE SITE

PRESS FILE



THE PERMANENT EXHIBITIONS OF THE STIFTUNG HUMBOLDT FORUM IM BERLINER SCHLOSS FROM 20 JULY 2021

STIFTUNG HUMBOLDT FORUM IM BERLINER SCHLOSS

“You can only understand the Humboldt Forum in its present shape and design if you can imagine the special history of this extraordinary site. In this respect, an examination of the history of the site is a central task with a focus on the Berlin Palace, the Palace of the Republic and the Humboldt Forum itself.”

Hartmut Dorgerloh, General Director of the Humboldt Forum

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City district, Monastery, Palace, Parade Ground, Palace of the Republic, open space: Scarcely any other site in Berlin has experienced such a concentration of social, urban, political and cultural developments over the past 800 years as the site on which today's Humboldt Forum is situated. Numerous princes and politicians have worked and built or remodelled here, making their political claims visible.

The Humboldt Forum is a new building on a special site. Its creation is closely connected with its 800-year history and the symbolic political charge of this place. Numerous debates about its future were conducted; they continue today with different focus points. So what makes a meadow on the Spree a special site? And how can this approximately 7 hectares of land between today's Lustgarten and Breite Straße have such significance that disputes never cease with regard to its design and use?

Questions that occupy the exhibitions on the history of the site. They commemorate important moments in the site's history and offer insights into a wide variety of architectural styles, uses and environments. The exhibits on display are not only witnesses from the past, but also cause for a constant examination of the history of this square - an important stimulus for the programme and profile of the Humboldt Forum.

CORE THEME – HISTORY AND ARCHITECTURE OF THE SITE

The Humboldt Forum, its architecture and function can only be understood against the background of this special site and its history. Therefore, the *History and Architecture* of the site, along with the themes of the *Humboldt Brothers and Colonialism and the Coloniality of Power*, are the three core themes of the Humboldt Forum.

The history of the site is referenced in the Humboldt Forum in exhibitions, events and mediation formats, publications and digital resources, where different perspectives are looked at, researched and discussed.

HISTORY OF THE SITE: ONE AREA, FOUR EXHIBITIONS

Four exhibitions in the Humboldt Forum recount in over 1500 square metres the history of this disputed site – from the city in the Middle Ages, the Dominican Monastery from around 1300 to 1536 through the Hohenzollern Castle that dominated the square for centuries to the Palace of the Republic and the archaeological excavations in the period before the Humboldt Forum was built. From new buildings and conversions, political visions and claims, living and working at this historic focal point.

The exhibitions on the history of the site are decentralised and can be seen all over the building: The video panorama in the Passage presents a concentrated overview spanning eight centuries and serves at the same time as an introduction and table of contents for the other exhibition areas. Using original artefacts, the Palace Cellar gives insight into the life and work of people behind the scenes of the former Berlin Palace. The sculpture in the Schlüterhof presents original façade figures of the baroque palace. Distributed throughout the entire building, from the cellar to the roof, on the staircases and in the restaurants, 35 so-called flashbacks highlight significant events in the site's history and the important uses to which it has been put.

VIDEO PANORAMA: 800 YEARS IN 14 MINUTES



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The video panorama in the Passage conveys a complete overview of the history of the site. At the same time, it serves as an introduction and table of contents for the remaining exhibition areas on the history of the site. A 27 metre wide video installation, which lets images and film sequences on the history of the site pass by in a panorama-like loop, dominates the space. The design of the space shows the raw concrete that reveals the core of the new building. The themes of construction, demolition, reconstruction and the constant transformation of the site find expression in the design of the space.

600 paintings and graphics, historical photographs and films were selected for the panorama: the structural change, the uses and events that are connected with the buildings are clearly visualised in a 14-minute loop. Many of these pictures do not just show rulers, they were also produced by rulers. The recurrent themes are therefore the representation and staging of power, the relationship between ruler and people, the public as well as scientific and cultural uses. The canvas therefore functions as a light table on which the history is curated and presented. The filmic leitmotiv of hands sorting through pictures illustrates the working process of the curators and clarifies the fact that "history is designed".

PALACE CELLAR: GET TO THE BOTTOM OF THE STORY



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The Palace Cellar is the only section of the site of today's Humboldt Forum on which traces from the entire building period of this site have been preserved. For Berlin, the intense historic sequence from the mediaeval monastery of the 14th century to traces of the demolition in 1950 is unique. Between 2008 and 2015, the remains of the walls and artefacts were uncovered during one of the biggest archaeological excavations in the city from Lustgarten to the former State Council building. One part has been preserved in the Palace Cellar and is accessible to the public. The cellar facilities of the baroque palace are in the centre. Its foundations and outside walls have remained unchanged since the 18th century. However, in the interior of the Palace Cellar, new walls were put in, and spaces repurposed and redesigned. The floor level was also raised at the end of the 19th century when water pipes and electrical lines were laid.

The accessible historic cellar area gives us a look behind the scenes of the former Palace and Dominican Monastery, showing the work involved for people in running such a complex building: heating, cooking, guarding and storing. Barrel taps tell us about the drinking customs of the Berlin Dominicans in the Middle Ages, brick walls the room of the Commander of the Palace Guard and deep blast holes of the destruction of the Palace ruins in 1950. A ceramic plate from the 14th century clarifies how innovative the stone chamber air heating was, with which the Dominicans kept warm in the Middle Ages. Installed centuries later for the White Hall under Kaiser Wilhelm II, low-pressure heating with its enormous ventilators, was just as exclusive and ultra modern for its time. The heating system provided not only warmth but also fresh air.

Above the stairs leading down to the Palace Cellar, a construction hanging on the wall made up of foundation piles is a reminder that the Palace stood on swampy ground. To create a solid foundation for the Palace, several thousand piles were driven into the ground down to a depth of up to 10 metres under the direction of master builder Johann Friedrich Eosander at the start of the 18th century. Some of these are still preserved deep in the ground. Today, 40-metre-long concrete piles support the Palace Cellar and the Humboldt Forum above it.

SCULPTURE HALL: ORIGINAL AND RECONSTRUCTION



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The Sculpture Hall, designed by the architect Franco Stella corresponds in its dimensions to the baroque Great Staircase of the Berlin Palace that stood in this spot. Original sculptures and fragments of the Palace over several centuries are presented in five areas – the Main Hall, North Cabinet, South Cabinet, as well as the access rooms of the Foyer (Spree-side) and the Vestibule (Schlüterhof). In the centre stands the baroque sculptural ornamentation and its iconography as a representation of the grand style of the period around 1700.

Many exhibits were part of the baroque façade ornamentation which was created from designs by Andreas Schlüter at the start of the 18th century. These include the giant statues in the Main Hall, presented at great height, as in the historic Schlüterhof. Some of these original statues are themselves copies modelled from ancient examples. Others were 19th-century replacements for damaged statues from the Baroque era. As copies of our time, they can again be seen in the Schlüterhof.

In the South Cabinet, plaster models are displayed from the creation process of today's copies. An impressive film projection shows the artistic processes involved in creating the sculptures, which have been accompanied by the camera for years.
In this way, the Sculpture Hall conveys an impression of the artistic qualities of the historic Palace and its political significance at the time of its creation. At the same time, the process of reconstruction and the methods and processes of the manufacture of sculptures in a baroque style in the 21st century is carried out before your eyes. The tension between the historic Palace and the new Humboldt Forum building thus becomes a theme.

FLASHBACKS: A NEW BUILDING TEEMING WITH HISTORY



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35 decentralised objects, as if distributed randomly throughout the Humboldt Forum, so-called Flashbacks, commemorate important historical events and usage aspects of the Berlin Palace and, in particular, the Palace of the Republic. They do not offer a complete presentation or chronological history of the site, but rather illustrate by example using key objects, small sets of objects or even audiovisual resources "moments" of cultural history as well as the many and diverse dimensions of events connected with this site.

The Flashbacks are sited in public thoroughfares, in catering areas and exhibition areas in partly "foreign" contexts that challenge your attention. They stand out from their particular environments through an individual, simultaneously standardised and recognisable design.

EXAMPLES: SIGNAGE SYSTEM



© Piktogramme Klaus Wittkugel / Akademie der Künste, Berlin / Trägersystem Peter Rockel / SHF / digitale Reproduktion: Jester Blank GbR

Illuminated signage was present throughout the spacious Palace of the Republic to guide visitors to the various event rooms and restaurants. The pictograms for the comprehensive signage system were designed by Klaus Wittkugel, one of the most important graphic designers in East Germany. The artist based his design on modern information and signage systems which had been used all over the world in buildings such as airports since the 1960s.

EXAMPLES: BALLOT BOX



© Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss / Alexander Schippel

The ballot box was created for the legislative chamber (Volkskammersaal) in the Palace of the Republic when the members of East Germany's first freely elected parliament met here in 1990. Until the peaceful revolution of autumn 1989, the East German Volkskammer had been a rubber-stamp parliament whose function was limited to confirming the decisions of the SED government. The glass box symbolized the new transparency of parliamentary decisions, which followed democratic procedures. It was also used in August 1990 when the members of parliament voted on the accession of the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) to the jurisdiction of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany, thus reuniting the country. .

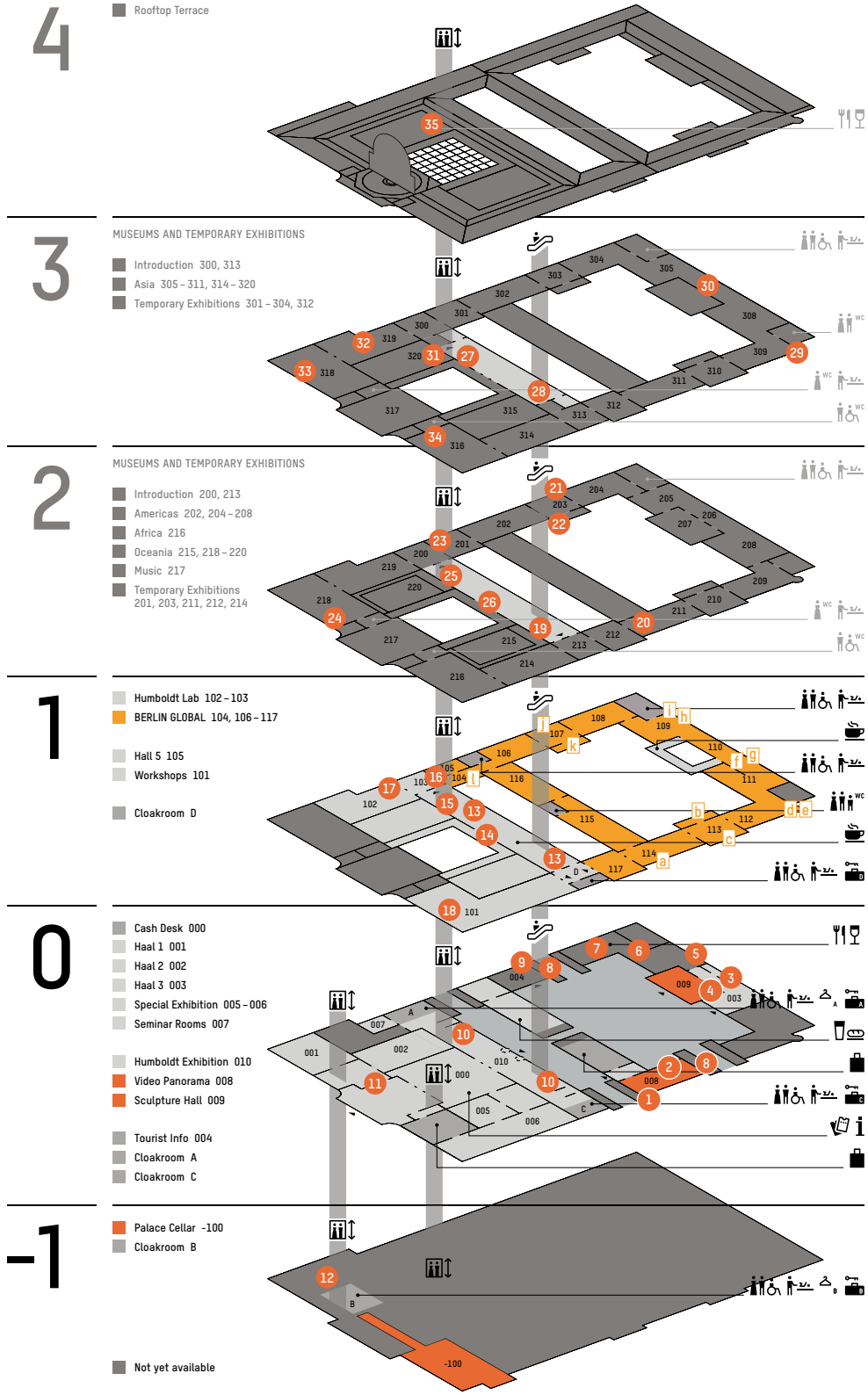
EXAMPLES: SECTION OF TARPAULIN FROM THE PALACE BUILDING WRAP



© SHF / Catherine Feff / SHF / Photo: GIULIANI I VON GIESE

From July 1993 to September 1994, a true-to-scale simulation of the demolition of the Berlin Palace in 1950 showed impressively its early effect in the urban space. The French artist Catherine Feff and her 50-strong team had painted on 10,000 m² of truck tarpaulin a deceptively genuine Palace façade, which was fixed to a 30-metre high scaffolding next to the Palace of the Republic. The work inspired years of debates: Retain the Palace of the Republic or rebuild the Berlin Palace. In 2002, the Deutscher Bundestag decided to build the Humboldt Forum with a partial reconstruction of the Palace façades.

ALL FLASHBACKS AT A GLANCE



FLASHBACKS

1. Memorabilia item: Brigade journal
2. Model ship made of silver belonging to Kaiser Wilhelm II
3. Tarpaulin from the Palace building wrap, 1993
4. Glass ballot box of the Volkskammer
5. Porcelain relief from the Palast-Restaurant
6. Plates from across five centuries
7. Kitchen utensils from the Palace kitchen
8. The revolutions of 1848, 1918 and 1989
9. Parade ground
10. Cobblestones from the Eosanderhof courtyard
11. Events at the Palace of the Republic
12. Imperial-era bathroom
13. Signage system from the Palace of the Republic
14. Sculptural fragment of a genius on Portal 3
15. Interim cultural uses at the Palace of the Republic
16. Fish specimens from the Cabinet of Curiosities
17. Alpine model from the Cabinet of Curiosities
18. Institute of Psychology in the Berlin Palace
19. Bronze relief from the Volkskammer foyer
20. Cabinet from the Secret State Archives of the Berlin Palace
21. Quill belonging to Kaiser Wilhelm II
22. Court apothecary's mortar
23. Proclamation of the Socialist Republic, 1918
24. Exhibitions in the Palace ruins, 1946 - 1948
25. Painting from the Palast-Galerie
26. Surveillance monitor from the Palace of the Republic
27. Art shipments during Wilhelm II's exile
28. Statues of prince electors from the Berlin Palace
29. Headpiece from a horse's jousting armour
30. Sport museum in the Berlin Palace
31. Backcloth from Queen Elisabeth Christine's throne
32. Chinese printing types from the Prince Electors' library
33. Unter den Linden boulevard through the years
34. 'Lalla Rûkh' plate from the Berlin Palace
35. Iced coffee cup from the Milchbar café in the Palace of the Republic

THE PALACE SITE – A BRIEF CHRONOLOGY

Politics have taken place for centuries on this site. The construction history shows this: Since 1443, construction work, demolition and replanning have taken place on this site. Monarchs and tourists, citizens and diplomats, politicians and passers-by used, perceived and changed the square and its buildings as a political stage/for political communication – this is what the historical resources of the site tell us.

1443
The noble Hohenzollern family from Nuremberg are going to rule Brandenburg. So they built a noble seat. The citizens see their freedoms as being curtailed and overrun the building site. But the change can't be stopped: With the growing significance of the Electorate, the Palace also grew.

1701
The Elector wants more: splendour, influence, kingship. The baroque expansion of city and Palace prepares the ground for a bold coup. After gaining Prussia, the Elector crowned himself king in Königsberg. Brandenburg entered the circle of European powers.

1848
Europe in the aftermath of Napoleon: Old systems and new ideas stood in contradiction to each other. As in March 1848, even the Berliners were revolting, the Prussian king briefly showed himself prepared for reforms. But the construction of a new Palace Chapel with a dominant dome signalled: Everything will remain as it is.

1871
In the era of national states and imperial expansion, the German Reich sought its place: The German Länder became an alliance of states – with the Prussian king as Kaiser. The Berlin Palace became the Kaiser's Palace; Berlin the capital city of a modern industrial nation.

1918
The lost World War and the Revolution force the end of the Kaiser Reich. The Palace is the scene of bitter struggles until the young republic is established. Museums and university institutes make their entrance into the Palace but the spirit of the monarchy is not quite expunged.

1945
The German war of conquest, led to the destruction of the Palace by air attacks – no painful loss for the National Socialists: the Palace had primarily served as a backdrop for big events (for the Olympic Games, for example). Adolf Hitler was interested in his new buildings.

1950
After the division of Germany, the Palace wound up in the socialist GDR. Head of State Walter Ulbricht had the example of Moscow before his eyes and demanded a parade ground in the centre of the city – and a break with the past: Despite prominent supporters, the Palace was demolished.

1976
With the Palace of the Republic, Head of State Erich Honecker claimed prosperity, stakeholdership, validation for the citizens of the GDR. The building was the seat of the People's Chamber and a popular event venue.

1989
In the autumn of 1989, the GDR citizens protested for freedom and political reforms. The ceremony marking the 40th anniversary of the GDR in the Palace of the Republic encountered numerous demonstrators. Scarcely one year later, the People's Chamber decided to join the federal area.

2002
After long debates, the Deutscher Bundestag decided to construct a new building with the reconstruction of the façades of the Berlin Palace. Closed by the last administration of the GDR, the Palace of the Republic was supposed to be demolished because it contained asbestos. New German-German fronts arose in dispute about the demolition, reconstruction and ruins.

2021
The Humboldt Forum opened.

HISTORY OF THE SITE
Dates and information

Location	Humboldt Forum: Palace Cellar in the basement of the West Wing, Sculpture Hall on the ground floor of the East Wing, History of the Site – video panorama on the ground floor of the South Wing.
Duration	from 20 July 2021
Opening times	Sun-Mon, Wed-Thur, 10 am–8 pm Fri–Sat, 10 am–10 pm
Entrance	Free. Entry with timed entry tickets can be booked here: humboldtforum.org
Information	Humboldt Forum Schlossplatz 1 Tel: +49 30 99 211 89 89 www.humboldtforum.org
Curators	Team – History of the Site area
Exhibition design	Video panorama and flashbacks: chezweitz, Berlin Palace Cellar and Sculpture Hall: Ralph Appelbaum Associates, Berlin
Publications	Selection, further publications on the history of the site at: humboldtforum.org/publikationen
Mediation and event resources	A multilingual and international mediator team supports the exhibition throughout the entire opening times. Guided tours, lectures, a themed day as well as other events and mediation programmes deepen and expand the theme from different perspectives.
Accessibility	The exhibitions are accessible and offer disability access. Along with a tactile floor guide system, in the exhibition areas there are stations with Braille and a tactile alphabet. The media guide provides audio descriptions in German and English, videos in German sign language and, in future, audios in simplified language Audio descriptions are also provided for selected events. In an audio and tactile guide on the architecture, from autumn 2021 five models of the historic former buildings as well as archaeological artefacts are used to convey the history of the site. Further auditory and tactile tours take place at regular times..
Press Contacts	Michael Mathis, Press Officer +49 30 265 950-525, michael.mathis@humboldtforum.org Andrea Brandis, Press and Communications +49 30 265 950-237, andrea.brandis@humboldtforum.org Mirko Nowak, Head of Communications +49 30 265 950-236, mirko.nowak@humboldtforum.org humboldtforum.org/en/press-room