

**PRESS RELEASE**  
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## **Ethnologisches Museum and Museum für Asiatische Kunst open their rooms in the west wing of the Humboldt Forum**

**Beginning on September 23, treasures of world cultures from Africa, Asia, America and Oceania will be on display on the second and third floors of the Humboldt Forum. – Parzinger: Museumsinsel is getting a wonderful extension – Eissenhauer: Universal scope of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin finally accessible again – Koch: A major aspect of our work will be the critical assessment of the history of the collections**

The Ethnologisches Museum (Ethnological Museum) and the Museum für Asiatische Kunst (Asian Art Museum) of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (National Museums in Berlin) are opening their first exhibition rooms at the Humboldt Forum on September 23. Important objects from these museums that were being presented in Berlin-Dahlem until four years ago will be shown on the second and third floors of the west wing. Some of the objects there will go on display for the first time. Approximately ten thousand exhibits will be shown and examined from a variety of perspectives in more than thirty exhibition modules occupying over eight thousand square meters of floor area. The collections from Africa, Asia, Oceania, and America at the Humboldt Forum and those devoted to the history of art and culture in Europe and the Middle East at Museumsinsel (Museum Island) make the center of Berlin a true locus of world cultures.

Highlights include special objects such as a fifty-square-meter Chinese picture of a sermon by the Buddha, from the 18th century, a throne from the Kingdom of Bamum (Cameroon) from the 19th century, boats from various regions of Oceania, partially reconstructed caves from along the Silk Road, artistic treasures of Hinduism, and Japanese screens, to mention but a few. The exhibitions also integrate contemporary artistic interventions that refer directly to the collections or were inspired by them, such as the expansive Township Wall by Angolan artist Antonio Ole, and a dress created as a work of art by Namibian fashion artist Cynthia Schimming. These works are being shown in exquisitely designed spaces, such as the

elliptical listening room for the ethnomusicological exhibition, and the room designed by Chinese artist Pritzker Prize laureate Wang Shu in the Museum für Asiatische Kunst.

The collections and exhibited objects are being presented and comment-ed upon from a variety of perspectives. From the beginning, the curators were interested in presenting multiple viewpoints. As a result, the cooper-ation with international partners and members of the societies of origin was an integral part of the exhibition concept. In addition to presenting recent, cooperative research into the objects and new ideas for exhibition and outreach, the museums are also addressing the history of how their collections were formed as well as current post-colonial issues. This criti-cal review of provenances and conditions of acquisition and the way in which these are rooted in colonial history are part of the narrative at the Humboldt Forum, and these aspects will continue to inform our work on the collections in the future.

**Hermann Parzinger**, President of the Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz (Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation), comments: “This will be a great day for the Foundation and its Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, and for me as well, because I’ve been involved in the Humboldt Forum project more closely than practically any other major project at the SPK, ever since the architectural competition in 2007. Finally, the objects are getting a chance to speak. Finally, we’re in a position to show visitors how we want to ex-hibit world culture, what we mean by looking at our collections from differ-ent perspectives, and how we’re working with the countries and societies in which these objects originated. The original idea of the Humboldt Fo-rum was to create a place to learn more about the world and at the same time reflect on ourselves in the spirit of Humboldt himself. This is the ac-tual power and message of the objects. We also have to take responsibil-ity for the history behind the collection and how it is rooted in the history of colonialism by revealing the paths that these objects have traveled. But it is crucially important to note the ever-growing cooperation with partners from around the world who work with us here, take on curatorial responsi-bility and from whom we learn as well. The Humboldt Forum must be a continual process of mutual cooperation; only then can it avail itself of this great opportunity to develop a fundamentally new relationship with the global South through the power of culture.”

**Michael Eissenhauer**, Director General of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, adds: “I am very pleased to be able to invite visitors once again to the collections of the Ethnologisches Museum and the Museum für Asiat-ische Kunst at the Humboldt Forum, after a period of several years during which they were off-limits because of the move. The unique cultural net-work of the Staatliche Museen is once more accessible to the public in its all-embracing

diversity and detail. We can now do something that wasn't possible at the former museum site in Dahlem: we have the historic opportunity, in direct proximity to the collections of the Museumsinsel Berlin, to bring art and archeology from a very wide variety of regions and cultures of the world into harmony and to kindle a dialog among them. From an international perspective, this underscores the tremendous importance of the network of institutions in the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. But from now on, it will also be apparent for the general public here in the middle of Berlin in exciting and surprising exhibitions and line-ups.”

The objective of the exhibition at the Humboldt Forum is to ensure that visitors can see and hear a variety of perspectives on the objects and their stories, and to do so in a way that invites as much participation and inclusion as possible. As part of the new presentation of the two museums, a great deal of emphasis is therefore being placed on outreach – with the constant use of graphical elements, digital media, and clearly marked areas for families, children, and young adults, for example.

The intention was to make managing the content of the permanent exhibition, which was designed and arranged by Ralph Appelbaum Associates in collaboration with the curators, as flexible and “mobile” as possible. This has led to an exhibition with a very modular structure. On the one hand, there are spacious, high-ceilinged rooms with large and weighty objects. Next to these, there are “classic,” object-centered exhibition areas with display cases and pedestals (e.g., in the case of “Sacral Art in China and Japan” or the religious art of southeast Asia in “Art of Buddhism in South-east Asia”).

In the open storage areas and study collections of the two museums, with their compact presentations of objects in large display-case structures, items from the collections are arranged for visitors according to different themes in an aesthetically pleasing environment reminiscent of a storage vault. This arrangement underscores the importance of collections as the foundation of any museum, on the basis of which new exhibitions and other projects can be developed time and again. Among other things, the exhibitions consistently address the topic of collecting and the history of how the collections were formed, including the provenance of the exhibits.

**Lars-Christian Koch**, Director of the Ethnologisches Museum and the Museum für Asiatische Kunst: “We're back on the Island! Nowhere else in the world can you tour the history of world cultures the way you can on Museumsinsel. And the links to the present day in these collections play a prominent role for us. The design of the exhibition is spectacular; many of

our objects haven't been shown for a long time, some not at all. We are well aware of the responsibility we have with respect to how our collections were formed historically. And yet – we will and we must live with the contradictions at the Humboldt Forum. We have to turn them into something productive. Education and outreach are a major objective. Our work with children, teenagers, and families will partly determine the success of our exhibitions.”

There are four large family areas intended for families, children, and teenagers. Activity rooms and meeting points are available for various group activities or small events for up to 50 people in each case. The first areas for temporary exhibitions are also being opened. These exhibitions, produced in conjunction with the Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss (Humboldt Forum Foundation), offer a faster and more flexible way to address current trends, issues, developments and challenges in a global context. When the east wing opens in mid-2022, the temporary exhibition areas will total fifteen rooms on the second and third floors. Four of these areas will provide a general introduction to the themes dealt with on their respective floors.

Content of many types has been developed to explain the origin of the objects in the collections of the Ethnologisches Museum and the Museum für Asiatische Kunst as well as the associated issues and possible problems. A companion booklet, for example, introduces visitors to the variety and challenges of provenance research based on selected objects and contexts; it also explains why it is important to investigate the origin of the pieces in cultural contexts and how this is accomplished. In tours, visitors are guided through the building by provenance researchers themselves, which gives them the opportunity to have a face-to-face discussion about cases where the origin of objects may be problematic.

A self-guided tour put together with the Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss allows visitors to “Discover the History of the Site.” Objects at the individual stations of the tour serve to illuminate the history of the Berliner Schloss (Berlin Palace), which is linked to the museums and collections in a variety of ways, not least by their historic nucleus: the Kunstkammer (literally “cabinet of art”). Finally, the permanent exhibition is rounded out by interdisciplinary, scientific “viewing windows” created in collaboration with the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin (Berlin Museum of Natural History) and the Berlin Botanic Garden and Botanical Museum.

One highlight is sure to be the room dedicated to Chinese court art by **Wang Shu**. It illuminates the mutual artistic influences between China and Europe. This work received generous assistance from the Prussian Cultural Heritage Board of Trustees. “It was

important for us to support the work of this leading architect. This is an example of shared heritage in the best sense. Cultural goods possess a unifying property which needs to be activated in order to take full effect. That is precisely what we're interest-ed in," says **Helen Müller**, chairperson of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Board of Trustees.

In a ceremony on September 22, German President **Frank-Walter Steinmeier** and Federal Commissioner for Culture and the Media **Monika Grütters** will open the exhibitions of the Ethnologisches Museum and the Museum für Asiatische Kunst. The author **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie** will deliver a speech to commemorate the occasion.