

**ETHNOLOGISCHES MUSEUM AND MUSEUM FÜR ASIATISCHE KUNST  
OF THE STAATLICHE MUSEEN ZU BERLIN AT THE HUMBOLDT FORUM****MUST SEES****1. DIVINITY IN POLYNESIA**

The 'Divinity in Polynesia' display tells of relationships between objects, people and deities, of the life-giving and life-taking power 'mana' and of the sacred status known as 'tapu': Until the 19th century, Polynesian societies were strictly hierarchical. At the top, the rulers came from the hereditary nobility.

The ruling men and women were regarded as having divine origins: through them, the gods and divine ancestors could make contact with the people. They guaranteed and watched over the health, success and prosperity of the people, and were honoured and appeased with offerings, ceremonies and tributes.

At the centre of these relationships between rulers and gods stood some particularly impressive objects, one of which can now be admired at the Humboldt Forum: a feather cloak from Hawai'i. Feather cloaks ('ahu 'ula) are among the most fascinating items from Hawai'i. The feathers were prepared by the women, and the men then attached thousands of feathers to a kind of fishing net to create these unique garments. The cloaks were a symbol of the rulers' power and divinity, and would usually be worn by high-ranking persons on ceremonial occasions. Together with a headpiece, they protected the most sacred parts of the ruler's body: the head and the spine. The cloaks were extremely rare items, inherited by high-ranking people.

**A Feather Cloak for Friedrich Wilhelm III**

Until the 19th century, feather cloaks were also exchanged in Hawai'i to establish important relationships, or to honour a particular person. Honolulu was a centre for German trade, serving as a stopping point for Prussian merchant ships on their way to East Asia. This cloak, which was said to have been worn by King Kamehameha I (reign 1795–1819) was gifted by his son, King Kamehameha III (reign 1824–1854) in 1828 to King Friedrich Wilhelm III of Prussia. He gave the cloak to Wilhelm Oswald on board the

Prussian merchant ship Princess Louise, to be taken to Berlin to be presented, along with other objects, to Friedrich Wilhelm III. In return, in 1831, the Prussian king sent Kamehameha III gifts including a guard's uniform, a portrait in oils of King Friedrich Wilhelm III, a portrait of General Blücher, saddle, sword and pistols, as well as Prussian industrial goods such as an armchair, hat, dress and jewellery.

## **2. OCEANIA - PEOPLE AND THE SEA**

The view from above of the ship is particularly impressive in this space: it's as if the boat is floating in the Pacific rather than standing on the dark floor. The theme here is about the significance of the sea for the inhabitants of the Pacific Islands – as a means of communication, migration path, supplier of raw materials and also as a threat and identity-giver.

In the centre of the spectacular architecture of the space stand six boats that originate from different regions of the oceans, and from 2022 there will also be a special boat adapted for children, a walk-in boat from Fiji. One wall functions as a map of the ocean: it illustrates impressively the size ratio between the many islands and the expanse of the sea. The radiant genuine coral skeletons, lined up in an 18-metre long glass wall cabinet, referring to the death of coral as a result of climate change, form a strong colour contrast.

### **Outrigger boat of Luf Island**

This outrigger boat originates from Luf Island, which today belongs to Papua New Guinea. In 1881, the trading company Henssler & Co built a trading station on the island. The population resisted. At the instigation of Henssler, in 1882/83 soldiers of the Imperial German Navy attacked the island with a "punishment detachment", destroying a large number of buildings and boats, killing inhabitants and plundering the villages. The building of this big outrigger boat began eight years after this attack. It is said that the men in it wanted to bury their recently deceased leader Labenan at sea. However, this didn't happen because there were too few of them to get the enormous boat onto the water. Through diseases that were introduced and the consequences of the military attack, the population decreased dramatically. For the next few years, it remained in the boathouse, deprived of its purpose. In 1903, it was acquired by Max Thiel von Henssler & Co and sold to the Ethnological Museum in Berlin. The circumstances of the acquisition of the boat on Luf are not documented. The building and acquisition of the boat are the subject of a media station in the "Oceania - people and the sea" room. Interviews of the film maker Martin Maden from Papua New Guinea with Luf inhabitants on the island are also shown here.

### **3. LISTENING ROOM / MUSICAL ETHNOLOGY**

In the musical ethnology exhibition area, the supposedly safe ground of objects is left behind. Here the focus is not directed at special regional cultural features but at the material, sound and aesthetic diversity of cultures in a global sense.

At the centre of the presentation, there is an elliptical listening room in which visitors can fully immerse themselves in the experience of sound. The basis for this is a specially designed sound reproduction system from the Audio Communications Department of TU Berlin, which is able to distribute sounds in all three dimensions of the space. Information on the programme schedule of the various sound installations that run for approx. 15 minutes is available at the entrances. There is a deliberate absence of large expanses of visual content in this listening space. Instead, you are given the opportunity to control six monitors integrated into the walls and to programme the multicoloured light sources embedded in the ceiling. The exhibition showcase in the outer wall of the listening room is devoted to various musical instrument classifications, which enables the subject to be approached from many perspectives. Showcases on the subject of musical instrument making are integrated into the opposite concave wall. Media stations provide information about current research projects and the history of the Berlin phonogram archive.

### **4. ART FROM CLAY**

The dense presentation of ceramics from the East Asian Studies collection enables a wide variety of objects to be brought to light, which otherwise remain hidden in the museum store. In addition, it offers the opportunity to exhibit art-historical comparisons and to display cultural-historical contexts.

The history of ceramics goes back a long way. It was already widespread in various Neolithic cultures of China several thousand years ago. Ceramics were used in daily life, as decorations for living spaces and grave ornaments. However, early on people began to appreciate these pieces for their aesthetic value, which encouraged the development of the materials used, technical sophistication and the variety of styles of the artefacts. Mass-produced since the 14th century in Jingdezhen, the first genuine porcelain worldwide became an important trading good and global conveyor of East Asian culture and artistic brilliance.

Above all, the porcelain flourished with cobalt blue underglaze painting. Its popularity contributed decisively towards the development of European porcelain. The Chinese

blue-and-white porcelain had a big influence on ceramic production in the Netherlands especially, as illustrated, for example, by a 17th century Chinese bowl and an 18th century bowl made in Delft. Both show fields similar to flags on the edges with ornamental and figurative representations. The decoration with an elephant and two monks of the Chinese Kraak bowl was replaced in the Delft piece by a lion in front of a temple.

## **5. DOME SPACE**

The most beautiful hall of the Humboldt Forum emerged beneath the dome of the reconstructed palace architecture: closely associated with the building, a century-old Buddhist cave was reconstructed here. Something like this is impossible to experience in a museum anywhere else in the world.

Originally, the space called the “Cave of the Sixteen Sword-Bearers” was part of a Buddhist temple complex, which was situated near the Chinese oasis Kizil on the northern Silk Road. The caves were dug into the soft stone of the mountain and, embellished with wall paintings, served the monks as accommodation and prayer rooms. Albert Grünwedel, Director of the Indian Department of the Ethnological Museum, discovered them during the Prussian “Turfan Expeditions”. With the consent of the Chinese governor of the time in 1914, the paintings were removed in panels from the walls and taken through Russia, where they were restored, conserved and scientifically researched. Now the “Cave of the Sixteen Sword-Bearers” in the Humboldt Forum has been recreated and houses beautifully its namesakes, the sword-bearers painted around 1500 years earlier.

Another unique feature of the domed hall is the wooden ceiling painted with Buddhist motifs from the eighth and tenth centuries. It served originally as the ceiling of a temple or gate porch and was also discovered by the indologist Albert Grünwedel. It was extensively restored for the Dome Hall and could be installed in a way that it gives the impression it is floating, thanks to a scarcely visible support.

## **6. AFRICA EXHIBITION SHOWCASE – MANGAACA**

Collecting as appropriation and construction of the world, as a form of asserting hegemony as well as the self-presentation of imperial Germany is discussed in the context of the Africa Exhibition Showcase, as is the question of interpretive sovereignty and the power of disposal over the collections.

The exhibits not only show how people in Africa lived, they also reflect the world views of those who collected and acquired them. The presentation is therefore complemented by media with information on the individual objects, the collectors of the acquisition history and the collection contexts.

Mangaaka figures came about in the dispute with the advance of Western-dominated capitalism and the colonialism on the West African coast of the former Kingdom of Kongo. This sculpture, one of only 17 Mangaaka figures in the world, was presumably made in the second half of the 19th century. The enormous porcelain eyes, the size of the palm of a hand, are directed straight at the observer, and there is a hole where the navel should be. Originally, it was the storage space for a wide variety of potent substances, which were supposed to give the figure strength so that it could protect the community from enemy attacks. The iron nails and blades in the body served to seal an oath or a contract and other legal purposes. By hammering a new piece of metal into the figure, the Mangaaka's fearsome power was activated. Anyone who spoke untruths or failed to uphold a contract, surrendered himself to the persecution of this power.

## **7. TOWNSHIP WALL**

"Township Wall", the over 10 meter long installation made up of approx. 100 parts comes from the Angolan artist António Ole. He created it in 2001 for the exhibition "The Short Century" in the Gropiusbau. As a gift from Ole to the Ethnological Museum, it has found a new home in the Humboldt Forum, slightly reworked by the artist.

António Ole has created several "Township Walls" in different cities around the globe. He designed the first wall in 1994 for his work "Margem da zona limite" (Edge of the Border Zone). The title refers to the civil war in Angola (1974–2002), as many people sought refuge in the capital Luanda and the edges of the city at the same time form the borderlines to the area of deadly danger. For his "Walls", the artist always uses materials from everyday life that are no longer used and are regarded as fit for landfill, scrap or rubbish. The "Township Wall" describes experiences that transfer from Oles' home town Luanda in Angola to Chicago in the US and Berlin in Germany. Who does the town belong to? And what shapes it? The firmly cemented inner cities or the continually changing architecture in the niches and on the edges of town? Is it not in the "fringes" that we find creativity, innovation and freedom?

With the installation "Township Wall", the Ethnological Museum integrates for the first time a work of contemporary art from Africa in its permanent exhibition. This

underlines the challenge of the museum to present non-European societies and culture in their historic and contemporary form and in their trans-regional and global relationships, thus prising open the narrow concept of “ethnological”.

Township Wall

António Ole (born 1951)

2001/2018

Mixed media

360 x 1180 x 35 cm

Gift 2018 of António Ole

III C 4560

## **8. WANG SHU ROOM**

The Throne Room, designed by the Chinese architect and Pritzker Prize winner Wang Shu and named after him to represent Chinese court art, is completely different in its structure, materiality and impression from the exhibition rooms adjacent to it.

The space is dominated by the enormous roof construction, which is based on the Chinese pagoda form and seems to float under the ceiling of the hall. It was made from poplar wood and consists of 1300 individual parts, which are joined together with 1500 screw fittings. Each of the 11 bays has a total length of 17 metres and a height of 4 metres. The entire construction weighs around 16 tons and hangs on 176 points with 4 anchors each on the roof.

The floor of black natural stone is surrounded by clay-plastered wall surfaces and a niche set in stainless steel accommodates the large-format mural "The Buddha Sermon" by the court painter Ding Guangpeng (active 1708 - 1771). The work (543 x 1015 cm) is extremely light-sensitive and is presented only a few times a day. The throne in the centre of the room is the only one in European collections that still stands in front of its original screen. In delicate colours, it shows a depiction of the “Paradise of the Daoist Immortals” – so that when the Emperor sat in front of it, he was symbolically accepted into their kingdom. The hugely elaborate inlays of numerous tiny pieces of mother-of-pearl, gold and silver foil make this imperial ensemble a work of special artistic magnificence.

Screen, detail

China, Qing-Dynastie (1644–1911), Kangxi Era (1662–1722)

Black lacquer and gold background on palisander wood with inlays of mother-of-pearl,

gold, silver and tin foil

Throne: 105 x 105,5 x 73 cm,

Screen: 287 x 333 x 64 cm

Purchase of Fritz Löw-Beer, New York

1972-15, 1972-16

## **9. NANDI**

The high point of Hindu temple festivals are the grand processions, even today. The gods leave the sanctuary in the form of bronze images sitting on their wooden mounts and can now also be seen and worshipped by social fringe groups who are normally not allowed to enter the temple.

Nandi, according to legend a white bull of great power and manliness, is Shiva's mount and also his most faithful admirer. In the myths, he romps about with the divine family on the holy mountain Kailash and carries Shiva from place to place. Nandi stands for stability and the upholding of the pious order and is the intermediary between the faithful and their God. Visitors to the temple therefore not only make offerings to Shiva on festival days, but also to him. In front of many Shiva temples in India lays a usually stone Nandi, its gaze directed towards the sanctuary. In the Humboldt Forum as well, Nandi's eyes are fixed firmly on the god Shiva.

Processional bull Nandi – Mount of the God Shiva

South India, 17th C.

wood, coloured painting, metal

134 x 47 x 152 cm

Gift K. Kemper 1987

I 5958

The white bull strides out elegantly. In true bovine fashion, he licks his nostril with his tongue. He is festively decorated: the painting shows magnificent bridles around the head and neck, one bordered riding rug and the straps from which bells hang. This processional figure came in 1987 as a present from a Swiss collector to the, at that time, Museum for Indian Art, and is today a special eye-catcher in the Humboldt Forum.

## **10. JAPANESE TEA HOUSE**

In a way, the tea house represents the self-image of the Humboldt Forum in its entirety: It combines tradition and modernity, brings different people and cultures together, enables common sensual experiences in a place of utter calm, right at the heart of the historic centre of the vibrant capital Berlin.

The tea house, specially designed for the new collection presentation in the Humboldt Forum, continues the tradition of public demonstrations of tea customs already practised by the Museum of Asian Art in Dahlem. Designed by a team of architects led by Jun Ura from Kanazawa, and realised with the participation of artists and craftspeople from Japan, the tea house creates sensitive references between Japanese and German history and culture, while the outside walls and the roof made of rust red Corten steel picks up the octagonal shape of the ruined tower of the Berlin Kaiser-Wilhelm Gedächtniskirche as a peace memorial. Along with traditional materials like handcrafted paper and lacquered wood, modern building materials dominate. The inside walls of the main space are equipped with eight traditional rice straw mats (in Kyoto-size), covered with European clay.

The teahouse consists of a preparation room and the main room in which the tea is served. Here there is a fireplace sunk into the floor and a wall niche in which outstanding artworks are presented. In this place of calm and pleasure, visitors can experience the Japanese “Way of Tea” with all their senses, thereby forgetting their everyday concerns for a short time.

## **INTRODUCTORY ROOMS**

On the second and third floors of the Humboldt Forum are four centrally located introductory rooms leading both to the permanent exhibitions of the Ethnologisches Museum and the Museum für Asiatische Kunst, and to the temporary exhibitions of the Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss, which have been developed and installed in close collaboration with the two museums. Visitors are welcomed into the introductory rooms by a media presentation offering insights into the themes and questions of the adjacent exhibitions, as well as setting the mood for the collected knowledge and objects they present. Film and image sequences address the current challenges of legitimacy and provenance of the collections and contextualise them with contemporary references. An expansive arrangement of six screens in each room emphasizes these interactively changing perspectives. The result is a multi-layered media architecture that plays according to the position of visitors as they make their way



through the room, drawing the space and its surroundings into a grand, illusionary movement.

### **MATTER(S) OF PERSPECTIVE**

In recent years, ethnological collections in European museums have come under strong criticism. The Humboldt Forum is also working to address this issue. A temporary exhibition entitled Matter(s) of Perspective. A Prelude examines some radical perspectives that expose colonialism as a macrosocial occurrence. The installation is specifically dedicated to the traces left by colonisation in the former German colonial territories of Cameroon, Namibia and Oceania and presents interconnections that reach right into the present day.

Photographs and school books, sculptures and interviews form a starting point for reflection on the views of colonisers and formerly colonised societies. These views are typified by the distinction between Us and Them – the Othering of German society with regard to Cameroonian, Namibian and Oceanic societies, and their view of German society.

In order to focus on the points of view themselves, and in the spirit of the current discussion on restitution, the installation works less with museum exhibits, choosing instead to rely on reproductions. Additional artistic works raise awareness of cultural and institutional perspectives: using biographies of Namibians who spent part of their childhood in the GDR from 1979 onwards, a selection of films and images on the theme of intersectionality reflect the effects of colonial cultural contact.

The exhibition is located in Exhibition Area 214, adjacent to the presentation of collections from the Ethnologisches Museum focussing on Namibia, Cameroon and the Pacific area. It is the prelude to a further five temporary exhibitions from the Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss to go on display on the 2nd and 3rd floors, beginning in spring 2022. The presentations bring together different fields of knowledge, people and communities, both in their development and implementation as well as in their communication to the public, creating a strong influence on the character of the Forum. Developed by interdisciplinary teams of curators, they are created in close cooperation with social and community representatives whose history and identity is linked to the objects on display. Further presentations still at the preparation stage include exhibitions on Francis La Flesche and the Omaha Tribe, as well as the Naga people in North East India.