

PRESS RELEASE**29 September 2021**

***Terrible Beauty.* Elephant – Human – Ivory: Film and Discussion Series Launch**

At the centre of the *Terrible Beauty. Elephant – Human – Ivory* special exhibition you will find around 200 exhibits which tell the story of ivory carving, while at the same time illustrating its fatal combination of beauty and cruelty. Starting on 3 October, the discussion and film series will once again scrutinise the relationship between humans, animals and nature in all its destructive aspects.

To launch the film series, on Sunday 3 October at 4pm, and on 6 October at 7pm, we will be screening the film *Sisters of the Wilderness* (South Africa, 2018, 90 min, English and Zulu with English subtitles) by the young South African director Karin Slater. The director and two of the protagonists will also take part in a post-show discussion with the audience.

The *Terrible Beauty* programme presents the Elephant – Human – Ivory relationship from a wide range of perspectives. An exhibition, discussion and film series, themed days, educational events and a publication link the cultural significance of ivory with the social and ecological consequences of its use: from processing the raw material to the colonial connotations of the image of the tusk, from the use of ivory in medicine and its connection with ideals of beauty to its role as a symbol of sophistication, from the elephant as symbol of power, hunter's prey and protected animal species, from its perception as an important link in the cycle of nature and as a bearer of meaning in religion, myth and artistic reflection.

After the successful launch of the first special exhibition at the Humboldt Forum Foundation in the Berlin Palace, with more than 200 exhibits, media stations and the *Voices of Ivory* installation, the discussion and film programme will begin on 3 October 2021. Starting with the relationship between humans, elephants and ivory in all its destructive aspects, the two series cast a searching light on the tense relationship we have with nature and the environment.

***Terrible Beauty* discussion series**

The four-part [*Terrible Beauty*](#) discussion series spotlights the theme of the relationship between elephant, human and ivory from a variety of perspectives, using it as a template for the complex relationship between nature, human and environment. A number of national and international experts, chiefly from the field of the exhibition's collaboration partners, will be involved in this series.

Over the four events, concrete examples will be presented of human-animal conflict, the exploitation of animals and humans, animal rights and conservation, and the connection

between the ivory trade and the slave trade. What opportunities exist for the human species to see itself as a part of nature? What could conservation look like today? Popular, activist and scientific discourses will be set together in context. International perspectives from the regions where the animals live will also be included. Each event will begin with a short introductory presentation. There will then follow a moderated discussion which will include questions from audience members. These events will be conducted in German and English.

To launch the discussion series, on 11 October 2021 at 7pm in Hall 2 at the Humboldt Forum, the question of conservation as a neo-colonial practice will be scrutinised under the title [*Protected Areas. Poaching/exploitation in post-colonial contexts*](#). Is the western world not only contributing to the destruction of the animal world, but also failing in its conservation efforts? – these are the questions that will be addressed by Ilka Herbinger, programme director for Central and West Africa at WWF Germany, and Dr Paula Kahumbu, CEO of the Kenyan NGO WildlifeDirect. Beginning with the symbolic power of the elephant, these two experts will attempt to outline the role of humans in the destruction of ‘protected areas’. The subsequent evenings will feature concrete examples of human-animal conflict, animal exploitation, and the connection between the ivory trade and the slave trade. The series will conclude with the idea of political rights for animals, and the abolition of the binary Nature-Culture / Nature-Human mindset as opportunities for a different mode of coexistence.

Two grand themed days centred around *Terrible Beauty* will take place on 8 and 9 January 2022; they will be suitable for all the family, and anyone interested in engaging with the theme through participation in artistic and discursive events. From the Foyer to the Halls to the exhibitions, there will be tours, discussions, workshops, theatre, performance and music.

The discussion series and themed days are curated by Julia Schreiner and Ibou Coulibaly Diop from the Programme and Events team.

A complete programme of dates for the discussion series can be found [here](#). Tickets can also be booked via this page. Please note that after 13 November, regular ticket prices will apply to the *Terrible Beauty* exhibition. Timed entry tickets can be booked [here](#). For press tickets, please contact presse@humboldtforum.org

***Terrible Beauty* film series**

Beginning on 3 October, the film series will be screening around 20 feature, documentary and animated films, including classics, historical finds and new releases, from Africa, Asia, Europe and the USA. All films will be screened in Hall 2 at the Humboldt Forum. Each day's programme will be geared to a particular audience, for example, adults, children or young people. The focus will be on elephants as a symbol and icon for humans. As kings of the animal kingdom, these grey giants occupy a special position that corresponds to their special role in the film world – and yet functions in quite a different fashion. The elephant is a genuine ‘character actor’ who embodies a variety of roles in the human-animal relationship. There is probably no other animal that has been presented in cinema in such a variety of ways.

There will be a 5- to 10-minute recorded Eye-to-Eye introduction to each film. Curator Dorothee Werner has invited filmmakers, academics, educators and children to offer a wide

range of perspectives on their relationships with each particular film. For example, a South African ranger will introduce the film which was shot in 'his' national reserve, and a Tamil salesperson from Berlin, having watched 'Chandani and Her Elephant', will offer reflections on biographical parallels between herself and the film's protagonist. The Eye-to-Eye introductions complement and contextualise the film programme by providing multiple perspectives.

The opening film *Sisters of the Wilderness* (South Africa, 2018, 90 min, 3 and 6 October), by young South African director Karin Slater, accompanies five young women on a hike through South Africa's oldest national park. Although they grew up in close proximity to the park, they had until that point only been familiar with its awesome natural history from the TV. For the women, the hiking trip opens up astonishing new perspectives – on themselves, their heritage, and the world in which they live. The director and two of the protagonists will be attending the film series opening event on 3 and 6 October, and will be available for the post-screening discussion.

Die Leuchte Asiens / Prem Sanyas / The Light of Africa (India/Germany, 1925, 98 min, 10 November) – a German-Indian co-production from 1925 made by Franz Osten and Himansu Rai – is regarded as a forerunner to Bollywood cinema. For the making of this epic film, which tells the life story of Gautama Buddha, the Maharaja of Jaipur allowed the joint Indian/German film crew access to his palace and his magnificent palace elephants. This combination of oriental fable and religious passion film, wrapped up as a travelogue, was a huge hit in its time – both in India and in Germany. The film will be shown in a restored form with a new soundtrack.

BAL GANESH (India, 2007, 105 min, 17 October), an Indian animated film especially for children, tells stories of the tricks played on adults by the popular elephant god as a young boy.

The film series will be complemented by three presentations on the cross-connections between cinema, TV, animal behaviour research and the internet, all with elephants as the central focus. On 3 November 2021, Berlin author Helmut Höge will present *The Elephant in the Room. Record, Share, Like*, a 'best-of' show of photos and excerpts from the amateur videos shared every day on social media by elephant handlers, tourists on safari, rangers, circus professionals, elephant researchers, activists and zoo visitors.

The film series begins on 3 October and will continue through into the new year. Films screened at 4pm on Sundays are suitable for a family audience, films shown on Wednesdays are recommended for viewers aged 16-18 or over. They will be shown in their original version with subtitles and/or live translation.

The complete programme can be found [here](#). Tickets can also be booked via this page (5 € / concessions 2.50 €). Please note that after 13 November, regular ticket prices will apply to the *Terrible Beauty* exhibition. Timed entry tickets can be booked [here](#). For press tickets, please contact presse@humboldtforum.org.

The film programme is curated by Dorothee Werner, who is a freelance filmmaker, author and curator. Her clients include the Berlin International Film Festival, and she is a member of the African Movie Academy Awards, Lagos, Nigeria. She is the designer of the www.cinemaspacesnetwork.net at the Humboldt Forum.

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