

PRESS RELEASE

16.06.2022

Opening of the exhibition *Songlines* and its supporting events at the Humboldt Forum

17.06.–30.10.2022, tickets available at humboldtforum.org/en/songlines

With the opening of the exhibition *Songlines: Tracking the Seven Sisters*, its accompanying programme of film screenings, discussions, guided tours and workshops will start tomorrow. Indigenous Australian representatives and artists featured in the exhibition are visiting the Humboldt Forum until 20 June 2022 and will provide a personal insight into various aspects of the exhibition and their artistic work. The 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Australia and Germany was honoured at the opening ceremony of the exhibition.

Tomorrow, 17.06.2022, is the opening date of the award-winning exhibition *Songlines: Tracking the Seven Sisters*. With its innovative multimedia exhibition design, contemporary art and performance, it retells one of the central creation stories of the Australian continent. The exhibition was conceived and curated exclusively by a team of representatives from Indigenous Australian communities, headed by Margo Neale, Senior Indigenous Curator of the National Museum of Australia.

Film screenings and discussions with Indigenous artists

Film screenings and discussions with Indigenous artists as well as guided tours and workshops will accompany the experience. Present at the exhibition and staying in Berlin till 20 June 2022 as the Humboldt Forum's guests are the curator Margo Neale, the filmmaker Curtis Taylor from Martu Country, the artist Brenda Douglas, the inma (ceremony) performer Tapaya Edwards from the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands and the artists Anawari Mitchell and Jennifer Mitchell from the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. In artist workshops and guided tours, they will offer a personal insight into the stories and artworks featured in the *Songlines* exhibition.

From 18 to 24 June 2022, the Humboldt Forum will screen five contemporary Australian feature films on the achievements and current concerns of Indigenous Australian communities. By their visual power and their protagonists, these films provide a popular insight into contemporary Australia. The screenings will be accompanied by an address

from the filmmakers and an audience discussion with Maryanne Redpath (Berlinale), Curtis Taylor (film maker), Duane Fraser (Australian Institute Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies) and Margo Neale.

In October, contemporary Indigenous performances and theatre installations from Australia will reflect a variety of artistic positions, translating the exhibition experience into a performative framework at the Humboldt Forum.

Guided tours with objects provided from the National Museum of Australia

Guided tours through the exhibition curated by the National Museum of Australia will give the visitors a chance to follow in the footsteps of the Seven Sisters and visualize Indigenous knowledge and social experiences to an international audience by means of different media, such as painting, performance, film and multimedia installations. For the educational programme, the National Museum of Australia will also provide objects and stories that refer to the daily life and surroundings of the communities represented.

70th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Australia and Germany

In addition, the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Australia and Germany was honoured at the opening ceremony of the exhibition.

Margo Neale, Senior Indigenous Curator, National Museum of Australia: “This grand drama of intrigue, mystery and beauty encompasses the passion and danger of creation, desire, love, flight and survival, and like all such narratives retains its relevance and universality. The lessons imparted continue to have critical contemporary relevance to movements such as the Black Lives Matter, Me-Too and other environment and climate concerns. Australian Aboriginal people managed this continent sustainably for 60,000 plus years. Yet in only 250 years since the arrival of the British, it is in dire straits. How? The answers lie in the *Songlines*.”

Mathew Trinca, director of the National Museum of Australia: “This is a momentous occasion for the National Museum of Australia and our award-winning exhibition, *Songlines: Tracking the Seven Sisters*—one of the first major international shows to be displayed at the Humboldt Forum in Berlin. We are immensely proud to be sharing the foundational Australian stories with German audiences, who I know will be as captivated by this award-winning show as Australian audiences were, when the exhibition showed in Canberra. It is fitting that *Songlines* is on display in Berlin’s newest cultural centre in 2022, as we celebrate 70 years of Australian – German relations.”

Hartmut Dorgerloh, General Director of the Humboldt Forum: “It gives us great pleasure to host *Songlines: Tracking the Seven Sisters* at the Humboldt Forum in the 70th anniversary year of diplomatic relations between Australia and Germany. The exhibition presents an extraordinary encounter with the art and cultures of Indigenous communities at the Humboldt Forum. Hence, this programme is an important contribution to presenting this new site of international polyphony, transdisciplinarity and experiential knowledge to a broad audience.”

Accompanying the exhibition, the Hirmer-Verlag is publishing a comprehensive catalogue in German (372 pages, 300 illustrations, 24.90 €).

Songlines: Tracking the Seven Sisters

An international touring exhibition produced by the National Museum of Australia with the ongoing support of the traditional Aboriginal custodians and knowledge holders of this story.

16 June 2022 — 31 October 2022

Presented by the Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss (SHF) in partnership with the Ethnologisches Museum (EM) – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

The exhibition

The exhibition *Songlines: Tracking the Seven Sisters* tells one of the central creation stories (songlines) of the Australian continent. Songlines are cultural routes that traverse all of Australia. Through story, song and visual culture like ceremonial performance or rock art, songlines map the routes and activities of the Ancestral beings, whose travels created the land. The Seven Sisters songlines tell the saga of seven women who cleverly and cunningly elude a male pursuer with magical powers as they flee across three deserts.

The exhibition shows how the sisters’ travels are imprinted in features of the land and reflected in the night sky, as the transit of Orion and the Pleiades star cluster. The Seven Sisters songlines transmit important protocols of behaviour, map Indigenous Australians’ right to their land as well as the responsibility to care for this land. Songlines carry knowledge that is critical for survival in a volatile and unpredictable desert environment, such as the location of food sources and water holes.

The exhibition is based on a unique, ten-year research and preservation project, initiated and led by representatives of Indigenous communities from the Central and Western Deserts in partnership with the National Museum of Australia and the Australian National University. *Songlines* was collaboratively curated by Margo Neale, Senior Indigenous Curator of the National Museum, and a Board of Trustees, whose members were nominated by their communities.

In over 300 paintings and objects, six large installations, numerous films, photographs and multimedia stations, the story of the Seven Sisters comes alive. Visitors are welcomed by the “Virtual Elders,” life-size videos of members of the Board of Trustees from Martu Country, the Aangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands and the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. One of the exhibition’s highlights is a six-metre-high and wide multimedia dome, inviting the visitors on a cinematic and immersive journey to important Seven Sisters sites. Here, up to 30 travellers, sitting up or lying down, are virtually transported to Walinynga (Cave Hill) and experience a 360-degree vision of this rare Seven Sisters rock art site. Inside the dome, the visitors will also encounter the Seven Sisters as digital animations of the expressive Tjanpi (grass) figures, created for the exhibition by artists of the Tjanpi Desert Weavers.

Press images: humboldtforum.org/en/press

More quotes on the opening and celebrating 70 years of German-Australian diplomatic relations: humboldtforum.org/en/press

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