

**PRESS RELEASE****15 September 2022****New collection displays und temporary exhibitions****The Humboldt Forum is now fully open**

**Another milestone has been reached for the Humboldt Forum with the opening to the public of the collection displays and exhibitions in the east wing on 17 September. Some 20,000 exhibits are presented and examined from different angles in over forty exhibition modules on more than 16,000 square metres of exhibition space. They offer a fascinating overview of the arts and cultures of the world across epochs and continents. The presentations of the Ethnologisches Museum and the Museum für Asiatische Kunst of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin as well as the Humboldt Forum Foundation in the Berlin Palace focus on the cultures of Africa, America, Asia, and Oceania in close cooperation with international partners and communities. At the official opening, a 24-hour programme awaits visitors.**

After a digital opening in December 2020 and the gradual opening of the temporary exhibitions and the first part of the collection displays in the west wing in summer and autumn 2021, the Humboldt Forum is now fully open. In addition to major holdings which until five years ago were on display in Berlin-Dahlem, there are also numerous objects which are presented for the first time.

The galleries now opening are those focusing on North, Central and South America as well as the second part of the collection display on Asia and Africa with highlights such as the exhibition segments on the global diversity of Islam and the Kingdom of Benin. The new displays cover a wide range of subjects, from the collecting activities of Norwegian explorer Johan Adrian Jacobsen along the West Coast of Canada to Indigenous perspectives on the objects in Berlin to the lives of things in the Amazon region.

A traditional meeting house (bai) from Palau, a Fijian double-hulled boat (drua), the famous golden cacique of the pre-Columbian Quimbaya, and the monumental Cotzumalhuapa steles from present-day Guatemala are among the stand-out exhibits. Examples of the art of the Khmer include historical casts of the reliefs of the Angkor Wat temple complex with scenes of heaven and hell, which stretch 23 metres across the gallery. The spectacular reconstruction of the Buddhist "Cave of the Ring-Bearing Doves" gives visitors an impression of the religious architecture along the Northern Silk Road.

In the exhibition segments on the global diversity of Islam visitors encounter a rare Iranian Dervish robe from the nineteenth century as well as showcases with displays arranged by mosque communities in Berlin. Two galleries are devoted to art from the historical Kingdom of Benin. On view are historical works which used to be part of the Berlin collections and

remain in Berlin as loans after having been recently returned to Nigeria. The famous “Bronzes” are juxtaposed with contemporary art from Nigeria. This presentation has been conceived together with the Nigerian partners and will be further developed together in the coming years.

At various points the exhibitions include contemporary artistic interventions which directly relate to the collections or are the result of engagement with them. The large-scale installation *Codex Humboldt Fragment 1 / Codex Azoyú Verso* by Mexican artist Mariana Castillo Deball, for example, visualises the contents of two major Mesoamerican illuminated manuscripts from the sixteenth century using 320 ceramic plates.

Close cooperation with international partners and communities has played an important role in preparing many exhibition areas. This also applies to the six temporary exhibitions: developed by the Humboldt Forum Foundation in the Berlin Palace as well as the Ethnologisches Museum and the Museum für Asiatische Kunst together with communities from many parts of the world, they are the result of many years of cooperation. In bringing together different fields of knowledge and experience, they contribute to the forum character of the Humboldt Forum. Exhibits of the North American Omaha and Haida, the Indian Naga, questions about objects from Tanzania, and a presentation of sculptures from Africa, Asia, and Europe provide insights into different societies and their cultural practices.

In addition to presenting current, cooperative research on the objects as well as new exhibition and communication concepts, the museums also address the history of their own collections and current postcolonial issues. Critical reappraisal of the objects’ provenances and acquisition contexts as well as their embeddedness in colonial history are part of the narrative in the Humboldt Forum and will continue to inform future work with the collections. The Humboldt Forum’s varied programming also contributes to this, as it does not just focus on exhibitions but also includes educational and scholarly offerings as well as events focusing on the central theme of colonialism and coloniality.

Numerous components offer visitors opportunities to learn more about to the provenance of the objects in the collections of the Ethnologisches Museum and the Museum für Asiatische Kunst. For example, an accompanying booklet looks at the complexity and challenges of provenance research based on selected collection contexts and objects and explains why it is important to research the origin of the pieces together with representatives of their communities of origin and how to go about this. During guided tours on the subject, visitors can strike up a conversation with the provenance researchers themselves.

### **24-hour opening programme**

The official opening of the new exhibition spaces kicks off midday on 17 September with a 24-hour programme. At noon sharp, the first exhibition talks, performances, drop-ins, workshops, and film talks will start. Through guided tours, discussions, performances, and many other formats, international experts and curators will share personal, in-depth insights into the displays. The party will go on all night in the Schlüterhof with the Sauer Power club night of the Slavs and Tatars artists' collective. The over 100 different events and activities are free of charge and do not require advanced booking.

Detailed programme: [humboldtforum.org/24h](http://humboldtforum.org/24h)

One building, four actors: polyphony is already inherent in the collaboration of the various partners. Entities cooperating in the Humboldt Forum include the Humboldt Forum Foundation in the Berlin Palace, the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation with the collections of the Ethnologisches Museum and the Museum für Asiatische Kunst of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, the Humboldt University of Berlin with its Humboldt Laboratory, and the Stadtmuseum Berlin with its exhibition BERLIN GLOBAL.

## Quotes

**Claudia Roth, Minister of State for Culture and the Media:** “With the completion of the East Wing, the last part of the Humboldt Forum may be opening, but the work continues. The interior of the Humboldt Forum has developed into an open space for international encounter, where the old is scrutinized and the new is created. It shows just how lively museum work can be when it leaves the well-trodden path of Eurocentric perspectives. Open and critical debate is promoted here not only about the colonial past but also, and above all, about how to produce exhibitions in partnership and on equal terms with experts from the communities of origin. The Humboldt Forum remains a work in progress in the most positive way.”

**Hartmut Dorgerloh, General Director of the Humboldt Forum:** “We look forward to the upcoming weekend when the entire Humboldt Forum will become fully open to the public. It has been a pleasure to see Berliners, our local, national, and international partners, as well as the many visitors to the city welcome the Humboldt Forum as a new cultural institution since last year and begin to transform it into a place of democratic, open debate. Now that many cooperation projects are accessible to visitors, we hope that the immense potential of the Humboldt Forum as an international platform for dialogue, in the centre of Berlin, will become even more evident. These projects mark another key milestone in an extensive process, and serve as an important starting point for diverse programming in the years to come.”

**Hermann Parzinger, President of the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz:** “Finally, we can fully open the Humboldt Forum – this place of world cultures – together with our partners from all over the world. It is finished, and yet it is only at its beginning. This forum is a product of dialogue and exchange, and on this basis, it must constantly change and develop. The will to openness and transparency and the recognition of colonial injustice, with resulting restitutions and a variety of new forms of cooperation and co-production, have earned us trust internationally for this project. This will inform our future work as well, for the Humboldt Forum is not a static entity, but an ongoing process. It is vital, therefore, to not only display objects and explore their origins, but also to make indigenous knowledge available, to overcome still dominant Western perspectives, and to better understand how people in different parts of the world live today and what is important to them. The Humboldt Forum can only become impactful if it identifies themes together with our partners from all over the world and provides a forum to also address their various issues of the present. May many visitors come, and may they keep discovering new perspectives on this one world as they stroll between the Museum Island and the Humboldt Forum.”

**Lars-Christian Koch, Director of the Ethnologisches Museum and the Museum für Asiatische Kunst:**

“Last year we opened the museums’ first exhibition areas, and we are very happy about the continuing great public interest. Therefore, I am excited to now be able to present to the public the remaining parts which complete our exhibitions in the Humboldt Forum. And what pleases me in particular is that we can welcome so many of our numerous partners from all over the world to Berlin and celebrate with them – which, unfortunately, had not been possible in 2021 due to COVID-19. If not for the close cooperation with our international partners, many of the exhibition areas could not have been realised in this form, and we could not have fulfilled the responsibility we have towards the history of our collection.”

**Wynema Morris**, Omaha member and private lecturer at Nebraska Indian Community College: “The ‘Francis La Flesche – Omaha Tribe’ exhibition is of great significance to our team of students and Omaha Tribal community members. Seeing the cultural items La Flesche collected over a hundred years ago was overwhelming. Due to forced assimilation, many important aspects of tribal culture were lost. This collection reintroduces them back to the Omaha People. Working with the Berlin curatorial team was a highlight for all of us. It was an opportunity for us to become ‘ambassadors’ for the reintroduction to a past that was almost forgotten.”

**Abba Tijani, general director of the (Nigerian) National Commission for Museums and Monuments:** “We, the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, are happy and excited with the exhibition at the Humboldt Forum which the commission is supporting and is partnering. It is an opportunity for many people to see the recently repatriated objects that remain in Germany as loans and to understand how the National Commission for Museums and Monuments collaborates with the Ethnological Museum to exhibit these bronzes. This represents the future; a future of collaboration among museums, a future of according respect and dignity to the legitimate requests of other nations and traditional institutions.”

**Zubeni Lotha**, photo artist and co-curator of the Temporary Exhibition *Naga Land. Voices from Northeast India*: “My experience of working on the Naga Land project has made me realize the importance of exhibition and how it can contribute to our learning about culture, history, geography etc. We have tried to communicate the learning through the design and the content of the exhibition. The collaborative work has been wonderful and it felt like we were learning from each other at every stage of the process.”

**Seyran Ateş, Lawyer, author as well as initiator and co-founder of the Ibn-Rushd-Goethe-Mosque in Berlin and co-curator of the exhibition Aspects of Islam:**

“It is a great honour and recognition of our work as Ibn Rushd-Goethe Mosque to be included with our own display case in the exhibition “Aspects of Islam” of the Ethnologisches Museum in the Humboldt Forum. We want to use this opportunity to give a broad audience an idea of the diversity and plurality in Islam from our perspective as liberal Muslims. We very much look forward to frank, tolerant and, indeed, also controversial debates at our events. Our motto will always be that we do not proclaim absolute truth but rather seek to create a better common world also and especially with those who think and believe differently.”

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