



PRESS RELEASE

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Nov. 23, 2022 – Jan. 8, 2023: Exhibition, Dance, Video Installation

Vinyago – Dance and Exhibition beyond Colonial Biographies

***Vinyago* combines exhibition, dance, music, and video art to create a gallery-filling installation. At its center are East African masks from the Ethnologisches Museum - objects that were originally used in a spiritual, performative context and are now kept and exhibited in the museum.**

The largest collection in the African Department of the Ethnologisches Museum of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin is from present-day Tanzania. The masks on display were originally used for spiritual, performative purposes, whereas in museums they tend to serve as art objects or exhibits. *Vinyago* takes this contradiction as a starting point to reflect on the role of ethnological museums and their colonial past.

In cooperation with the Humboldt Forum Foundation, nineteen Tanzanian artists critically reflect on this shift in meaning and the contexts of the collection and museum presentation. *Vinyago – Swahili for masks – Dance beyond Colonial Biographies* combines exhibition, dance, music, and video into an immersive installation.

Performance

December 2–4, 7–11, 14–18, 2022, at 7 p.m. Duration 90 min. Tickets: 16 / 8 Euro

Every Friday and Saturday following the live performance, there will be an audience discussion with the artists.

In the 90-minute performance, eight dancers and five musicians interact with the historical masks from the Ethnologisches Museum as well as with contemporary masks from Tanzania: some behind glass, others as a vital part of the action. They engage with these objects that were never intended for a museum. In the performance, the masks are, rather, to become one with the dancers and the community of origin. Based on the masks, as well as on a critical look at the exterior the Humboldt Forum and its exhibitions, the artists from Tanzania present an intense, musical and dance-like reflection on issues such as identity and restitution, theft, loss, and dealing with transience. Rather than seeking to recreate traditional dance, *Vinyago* establishes a connection and puts the emphasis on a contemporary perspective. Inspiration for the choreography comes from Tanzania, but it also absorbs influences from West Africa, a region of great importance for dance.

Exhibition: Nov. 23, 22 – Jan. 8, 2023

Featuring live interventions by musicians and dancers: December 2–4, 7–11, 14–18, 2022, at 7 p.m. Admission free

A fur dance mask with two ostrich feathers; a face mask with white, pink, and blue beads—the collection presentation shows these and three other historical masks, static, shielded in a display case, while 86 other masks from Tanzania are kept in storage. The latter are present only through historical catalog entries on one wall. The exhibition questions the modes of presentation, prerogatives of interpretation and the accessibility of objects in German museums. The protagonists' reflections become an artistic act: through interviews with activists in Tanzania and Germany, they share their working methods, their doubts, and their drive to realize this project in the Humboldt Forum. Featuring live interventions by musicians and dancers. Preparations are under way for performances at various locations in Tanzania.

About the project

Vinyago is based on an initiative by Isack Abenekeo (choreographer and artistic director of the Tanzanian cultural organization ASEDEVA), Gita Herrmann (historian and cultural manager from Germany), and Nicholas Calvin (photographer and filmmaker from Dar es Salaam). In their work, the team explores issues such as identity and restitution, loss, and dealing with impermanence. For the project, the artists held numerous discussions with mask makers and people from communities of origin such as the Makonde, Mwera, Yao and Makua in southern Tanzania. Inspirations for the choreography come from both Tanzania and West Africa.

Additional information: humboldtforum.org/vinyago

Press images: humboldtforum.org/presse