



PRESS RELEASE

28 September 2023

Live music, dance, theatre, ofrenda, market

1-5 November 2023, free admission

As part of the exhibition *in_finite. Living with Death*

Celebrating Life and Death

The Día de Muertos Festival: An Invitation to Confront Our Mortality in a Special Way

At the beginning of November, on All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day, people in our climes remember the dead. But they do so elsewhere, too: Ever since the James Bond film *Spectre*, which opens with a Mexican Day of the Dead parade, the world has been familiar with the Mexican festival when the dead return for a day from the afterlife to the realm of the living and all celebrate lavishly, with candles, incense, an altar, flowers, cut paper decorations, and sugar skulls being indispensable elements. Calaca e. V. has been organising the Mexican Feast of the Dead at different venues since 1995. This year marks the first time it will take place at the Humboldt Forum.

The Feast of the Dead is the largest and most important festival in Mexico. According to ancient Mexican beliefs, on All Souls' Day the dead come to visit from the afterlife and celebrate a contemplative and joyful reunion with the living, involving music, dance, and good food. Nowadays, this colourful, lively festival is celebrated all over the world, including in Berlin. At the Mexican Festival of the Dead in the Humboldt Forum, visitors can expect a market, craftwork, workshops, and activities for children, as well as a varied evening programme addressing the themes of death, memory, colonialism and featuring an ofrenda, theatre, dance, performance, and live music. For the celebrations combine colonial and pre-Hispanic cultural traditions, with the pre-Hispanic belief system subversively asserting itself against the Catholic faith.

BRIEF GLOSSARY

Ofrenda: Elaborate altar, richly decorated with gifts for the dead such as flowers, candles, craftwork, fruit, cakes, sweets, lemonades, liquor, cigarettes

Calavera: colourfully decorated sugar skull for the altar of the dead (ofrenda)

La Catrina: Central figure of the Mexican Feast of the Dead: an elegant skeleton lady wearing a large hat and feather boa

Mictlán: Place of peace reached by the dead after a long and arduous journey

PROGRAMME

1 November: 3–6:30 p.m.

2–3 November: 4 p.m.–24 a.m.

4 November: 1:30–12 a.m.

5 November: 1:30–6:30 p.m.

MARKET

Mercado Calaca e.V.

Mexican food and crafts

Tacos, tamales, tostadas, tequila – sample original Mexican specialities at the market in the foyer of the HF! Craftwork and sweet baked goods made specially for the Feast of the Dead make ideal gifts and souvenirs. You are invited to stroll, look, feast, and marvel.

SHOWCASE

Papel picado. Showcase of Mexican cut paper decorations

Colourful paper banners and miniatures: a must at Mexican festivals, these decorative elements will also adorn the Humboldt Forum during the Feast of the Dead. Armando Martínez specialises in making this particular Mexican folk art and invites visitors to watch and actively participate.

PERFORMANCE

Ofrenda ceremonies

The ofrenda, an altar about 40 square metres in size and exuberantly decorated, is central to the Mexican festival of the dead. After the ceremonial opening, it is decorated with flowers, candles, craftwork, fruit, cakes, sweets, lemonades, liquor, cigarettes – gifts for the deceased. All visitors are also invited to bring gifts for their deceased, such as photos and candles. In this way, the altar grows over the course of the festival, as it fills up with mementos. The opening and closing ceremonies are performed each day of the festival using traditional rhythm instruments such as rattles and bells and shells to invite the deceased.

MUSIC

Son Mex – Mexican guitar concert

Three Mexican musicians have come together in Berlin to show the richness of their musical culture. Each of them focuses on performing music from different regions of Mexico. With guitars and guitarrón (bass guitar), they interpret different genres such as waltzes from Oaxaca, chilenas from Guerrero, and sones from Michoacán and Veracruz.

PERFORMANCE

Journey to Mictlán

According to pre-Hispanic beliefs, human beings undertake an arduous journey after death, which ultimately takes them to Mictlán, a place of peace. On this journey, a person is accompanied by a dog that supports them and helps them pass through nine challenging levels. Tanja Watoro interprets this journey in her performance using music, sounds, prehistoric objects, and body language.

PERFORMANCE AND MUSIC

La Catrina

The figure of La Catrina embodies the Mexican Festival of the Dead, and every child in Mexico is familiar with her: an elegant skeleton lady with a large hat and feather boa, created by the Mexican lithographer José Guadalupe Posada. La Catrina appears, walks through the room, visits the ofrenda, and asks selected individuals to dance. Live music accompanies her on her way.

MUSIC

Mariachi Internacional *El Dorado*

Mariachi Internacional *El Dorado* is a group that plays the music of love, longing, joy, and passion with rousing enthusiasm. In doing so, they bring a piece of Mexican tradition to Europe. The musicians play romantic boleros, rancheras, corridos, sones, and jarabes. *Bésame mucho*, *Cielito lindo*, *La cucaracha*, to name just a few well-known songs. The singing is accompanied by trumpets, violins, and the typical sounds of the guitarrón and the vihuela.

LECTURE

Colonialism and Resistance. The Mexican Feast of the Dead and the Concept of the 'Baroque': towards Understanding Latin America

The cultural forms that Latin America has produced have their source in the asymmetrical confrontation between and response to two principles of civilisation: capitalist modernity from Europe and the various types of original, pre-Columbian civilisations. In this lecture, philosopher Iván Carrasco Andrés describes the mestizo process that Latin America had to take on to recreate a lifeworld that was almost annihilated by Europe.

MUSIC

Ensemble Sesiones del Sur

The Ensemble Sesiones del Sur features musicians from Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, Panama, and Germany. Founded in 2018 in Leipzig under the direction of Venezuelan multi-instrumentalist Mauricio Vivas, the group has always included numerous Leipzig-based jazz musicians as well as international guest musicians, especially from West Africa. The ensemble has since focused on combining musical traditions from Latin America, notably Peru, Brazil, Venezuela, and their African diaspora.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAMME

4 + 5 November 2023, from 2 p.m.

PERFORMATIVE PRESENTATION

'What is put on the ofrenda?' Opening of the ofrenda for children

The 'elements of the ofrenda' (water, fire, salt, flowers, bread of the dead, etc.) and their meaning (in Spanish with translation) are presented in front of the altar. The presentation gives rise to a game where the children can identify the elements of the Ofrenda on a preprinted piece of paper with illustrations.

WORKSHOP

Face painting for children

Face painting is also a must at the Mexican festival of the dead. The children can choose from designs such as skeleton, flower, and many numerous others.

WORKSHOP

Fun skeletons

Sequined skeletons with glittering skulls? Children can make these and much more in three themed workshops. They can place the artworks on the ofrenda as gifts for the deceased or display them on a pinboard. The workshops' requirements are tailored to different age groups.

INTERACTIVE THEATRE

Interview with death

What does death really think of his job? Does it make him sad sometimes that many people don't like him? And why can't all people live forever? Death comes on stage here and is interviewed by a journalist and the children in the audience. In the process, the children learn why the deceased never disappear completely when we think of them.

STORYTELLING

Macário. A musical narration for children

A woodcutter from a humble background meets death and is given the gift of healing people. Macário becomes rich and famous, but his abilities also sow mistrust and he is accused of witchcraft. The story is accompanied by music and impressively staged for children with theatrical elements.

All events are free of charge

Information: humboldtforum.org/fiesta-de-dia-de-muertos

Press kit and images for the press: humboldtforum.org/presse

One building, four partners: This diversity is founded on the collaboration of our partner institutions. The Humboldt Forum is a collaboration between the Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss; the Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz for collections from the Ethnologisches Museum and the Museum für Asiatische Kunst of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin; the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin for the Humboldt Lab; and the Stadtmuseum Berlin for the BERLIN GLOBAL exhibition.

PRESS CONTACTS

Michael Mathis, Spokesperson

+49 30 265 950-525, michael.mathis@humboldtforum.org

Kathrin Luz, Kathrin Luz Communication

+49 171 3102472, kl@luz-communication.de

Andrea Brandis, Press Officer

+49 30 265 950-237, andrea.brandis@humboldtforum.org

humboldtforum.org/en/press