

A publication of the Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz



**HUMBOLDT  
FORUM**

**A PALACE IN  
BERLIN FOR THE  
WHOLE WORLD**



# TIME TO TALK ABOUT CONTENT

A Q&A session with Hermann Parzinger,

President of the  
Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz

**1. We're standing in the shell of the Stadtschloss, the Berlin Palace. Where exactly are we?**

HERMANN PARZINGER In the foyer, near the main entrance directly under the cupola. The visitors' routes through the building will all lead off from this vast hall.

**2. The Humboldt Forum won't actually open until 2019. So why this magazine now?**

HP Well, we're celebrating the topping-out ceremony! Now the public wants to know: what's going to be inside this building? And what does it have to do with me? Many people imagine it as an ethnological museum with a few extras – but of course it's going to be something altogether different, and we want to publicize that fact. We want to tell people about our fantastic collections of art and culture from Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas, which will be returning from Dahlem to brand-new premises. We're creating a new centre of world culture right here in the heart of the city – an amazing opportunity for Berlin.

**3. The collections of the Ethnologisches Museum (Ethnological Museum) and the Museum für Asiatische Kunst (Asian Art Museum) will be shown on the second and on the third floor. Will the move change how we view these objects?**

HP Yes, radically. Locating the objects in the “new” old Berlin Palace highlights the historical aspect of the collections in particular: viewing objects originating from the colonial era will inevitably make us think about the causes and consequences of the world order dictated by Europe in the 18th and 19th century, whose after-effects the world is still suffering from today. And we will build bridges to the advanced civilizations of the Middle East and Europe on display in the museums on the Museumsinsel (Museum Island). Those are just two of the many new perspectives.

**4. How will the presentation of the objects in the Humboldt Forum differ from the one in Dahlem?**

HP The presentation in Dahlem still follows the narrative of an ethnological museum – very static and offering little scope for change. In the Humboldt Forum we'll be able to be much more flexible and to tell the stories from multiple perspectives, allowing the voices of the indigenous cultures from which the objects came to be heard. And we will try to focus more than in Dahlem on current issues like climate change and migration. In fact, we'll be dealing with all the major issues that concern us today.

**5. Last spring, the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture appointed a trio as founding directors of the Humboldt Forum: yourself, the art historian Horst Bredekamp, and Neil MacGregor, former director of London's British Museum, as team leader. The press enthused wildly about the choice of MacGregor and his acceptance of the post. What makes him the right person?**

HP Neil MacGregor brings a much-needed outsider's perspective to the Humboldt Forum project, but he's also very familiar with how things work in Germany. He has a wealth of experience in culture management and museums and he really knows how to fire people's enthusiasm. The task now is to come up with a programme of events tailored to the Humboldt Forum concept which will really bring it home to the public.

**6. Here you're showing a mask from North America. Can you tell us something about it?**

HP It's a Nulis mask. These masks are still worn at ritual festivities by some Native American groups on the west coast of Canada today. They symbolize the generosity with which gifts are given to guests. We hope people will see the future Humboldt Forum as a gift, too. The Nulis mask also stands for our close cooperation with indigenous partners, the descendants of those who originally created these objects.

**7. The entire site, including its courtyards, is huge. How many cafés and restaurants will it include?**

HP Just in the area around the Schlüter Courtyard there'll be an array of restaurants, museum shops, and bookshops. In summer, people will be able to sit outside on the terraces facing the Lustgarten and the River Spree. You could look at the Humboldt Forum as an extension of Museum Island. One element of Stella's architecture is a public arcade called the Palace Forum, which leads directly from Breite Straße to Museum Island. We want people to see this area as a pleasant place to spend some time. The Humboldt Forum should be a venue where you stroll around! ■

INTERVIEW: ANDREAS SCHÄFER PHOTO: OLIVER MARK

What connects Alaska and Berlin?  
How to build a Buddhist cave in a museum?  
Where were icons invented?

To find out all this and more, come  
and visit the new cultural heart of Berlin



Find out more about the Nulis mask  
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### “WE NEED ROOM TO PLAY”

The Humboldt Forum’s exhibition designer Tim Ventimiglia talks about his experiences in Alaska and the art of giving things a voice

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### IN MY FATHER’S HOUSE

The writer Sherko Fatah on the place his Iraqi ancestors came from

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### SECRET-SACRED OBJECTS

How to exhibit artefacts so secret that the uninitiated aren’t even allowed to see them?

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Viola König and Klaas Ruitenbeek, the directors of the Ethnologisches Museum and the Museum für Asiatische Kunst respectively, answer nine personal questions

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ALTE NATIONALGALERIE

BERLIN CATHEDRAL

NEUES MUSEUM

ALTES MUSEUM

HUMBOLDT FORUM

BODE-MUSEUM

PERGAMONMUSEUM

### HUMBOLDT FORUM – FROM PLATFORM SANDALS TO RING-BEARING DOVES

A first tour of the building

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### “THERE’S ONLY ONE WORLD”

Paola Ivanov and Jonathan Fine, curators at the Ethnologisches Museum, explain how they plan to present Africa

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Statistics with a difference

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### ALL A QUESTION OF HOLES

How to transport the fragile South Pacific ships from Dahlem to the Berlin Palace? A reportage

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### LIVING IN A LANGUAGE THAT’S NOT YOUR OWN

How do we leave colonial structures behind? Not an easy task. An essay by René Aguigah

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# GRASPING

# The Humboldt Forum as an aesthetic

# THE WORLD

and political catalyst

BY MONIKA GRÜTTTERS

**B**ERLIN'S CHEQUERED past has made the German capital one of the key cities in European history and modern global culture. It was from here that tyranny and barbarism spread out to engulf Europe, but it has also become a place for remembering the decades of division between the free world and the unfree world, and for commemorating the healing of this rift twenty-five years ago.

Among the world's nations, Germany alone has the historic opportunity of redefining the central role of the republic in the early twenty-first century. A democratically legitimated building is being constructed on this site now after years of heated debate. When the Humboldt Forum opens its doors in 2019 in the *lieux*



*de mémoire*, the City Palace on Palace Square, it will join together with the Museumsinsel (Museum Island) in providing an unprecedented museum ensemble showcasing the world's cultures from ancient times through to the present day.

The Humboldt Forum is driven by a unique notion. We aim to allow visitors to experience what the Humboldt name stands for: the tradition of the Enlightenment; the idea of self-assured, open-minded encounters between the world's peoples; peaceful dialogue as an ideal. Wilhelm von Humboldt (linguist, educationalist, and the founder of the university that bears his name today) and Alexander von Humboldt (natural scientist, polymath, and author of the influential treatise *Cosmos*) owed their prodigious learning to a virtually insatiable thirst for knowledge about the world and to the desire to grasp it in both senses of the word.

It is this thirst for knowledge about the Other, the unfamiliar, the new, that will be expressed in the Humboldt Forum. Here the non-European arts will find an urban setting where they can be presented to full advantage, juxtaposed with the collections of European art and cultural history housed just a stone's throw away on Museum Island. New kinds of encounters with art and culture will create greater awareness of world cultures that are different in nature but equal in value, while also encouraging discussions about Europe, the world, and the "big" themes of human life that transcend cultural borders. Thus the Humboldt Forum aims to serve as a catalyst in shaping aesthetic and political opinions.

I look forward to the implementation of this vision, the fusion of countless good ideas into an overarching whole, and the inclusion of the public in addition to the various participating actors, all of which will be the responsibility of founding director Neil MacGregor. “I hope we may find a way to make this noble project happen,” he wrote to me back in 2012, while director of the British Museum in London. I am delighted that Mr MacGregor, an expert in international culture and museums with in-depth knowledge of Germany, is dedicating his knowledge and experience to the task of realizing our country’s most ambitious cultural project. ☐

MONIKA GRÜTTERS is a Minister of State to the Federal Chancellor and Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media. She is also chairperson of the Board of Trustees of Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz.

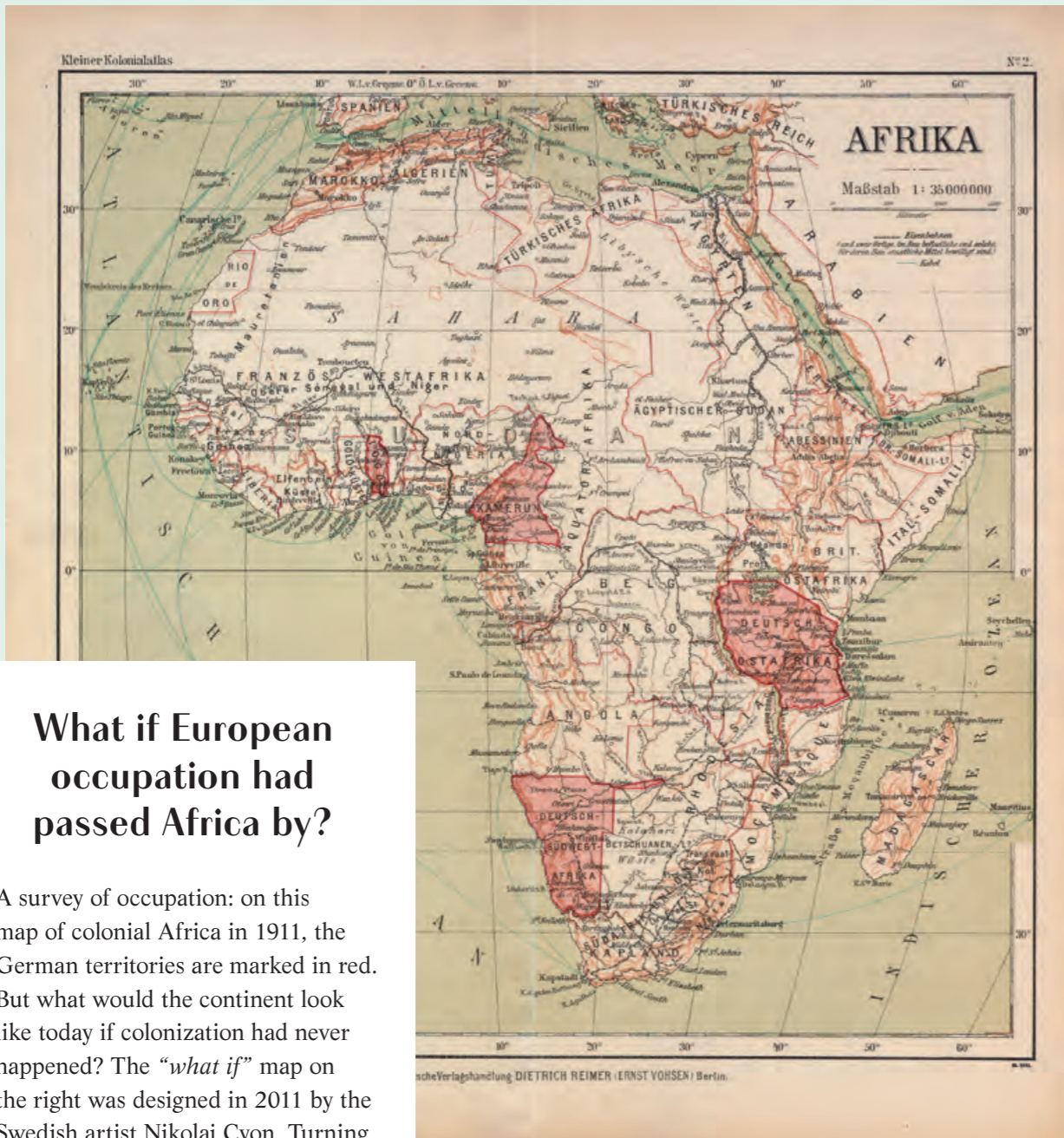
Buffalo's horns Metallurgy Fabric album Leather armour Leather armour for a chieftain Pair of fabric boots Bag with three compartments Student's hat Pair of a shadow puppet Clothing for a shadow puppet Hat for a shadow puppet Cloak for a shadow puppet Shadow play accessories Accessories for a shadow puppet Box for writing paper Diabolo Small wooden medicine box Altar chest Wire for a shark fishing rod Fishing hook for a shadow puppet Buffalo puppet Moon gate Toli cloth Ornamental cloth Retable Altar swing Decorated roof tile Stem of a warship Pair of climbing shoes Pair of a bed frame Toe rings Brass comb Abdominal animal's head Wax casts Weapon parts (mixed lot) Dalang's cart for Wayang figures Windsock Projectile weapon Magical figure Magic house Magical object Bridle (herdsman's kit) Tent band Wooden model of a human figure Ceremonial chair Ceremonial pouch Obsidian ring Wayang lead ornament Cutting weapon Bridal lamp Royal lamp Flint scraper Fragment of an axe Glass neck plate Belt ornament Metal plate Apothecary's scales Ancestor stone Bracelet Container for dry medicines Fruit of the calabash tree Calabash with handle Lacquered bowl Lacquered bowls Baseball Baseball bat Bar used for making tapa (sample) Paint in a box (sample) Men's chest and shoulder belt Chest belt Shoulder belt Canoe stem Lump of burned gypsum and sand Boar tusk jewellery Everyday apron Small breast pocket Bagadú bone Bead Pair of ear flaps Ear jewellery made of pigs' teeth Spatula ornament Necklace with marine mammal tooth Necklace with animal tooth Tip of glass dagger Miniature shrine Cult object Ritual object (Buddhist) Palm-leaf shrine Bone hook Reindeer horn harpoon Obsidian arrowhead Slate arrowhead Slate arrowhead Walrus tooth carving Loincloths Walrus tusk spool for sinew thread Walrus tusk hook or hook for walrus tusk Men's eating bowl Walrus tusk figure Fragment of a walrus tusk blade Walrus tusk tool (for installing bowstrings) Walrus tusk belt ornament Walrus tusk hook and iron pendants for clothing Women's belt clasp Walrus tusk head of a whale harpoon shaft Women's headdress for dancing Phallic figure made of walrus tusk Women's headdress for dancing Walrus tusk club Bowstring stretcher made of walrus tusk Walrus tusk shield made of walrus tusk for a sewing bag Handle made of walrus tusk for a sewing bag Penis bone of a walrus Walrus tusk Bedouin coat made of gazelle skin Doctor's stool Stone stool Harpoon head for seal hunting Bone axe Buffalo horn ring Jade sample Model of a cannon Model of a baby's cradle Model of a flat bowl Model of a bedstead Model of a bed Model of a woman's dress Model of a camel saddle Model of a gun carriage Model of a chair Model of a spear Model of a load-carrying frame Check gauge for musk Fragment of a tombstone Model of a wheelbarrow Model of a farm cart Part of a recurve bow Fragment from edge of clay pot Fragment of a bowl (set) Stone figure of an animal Torso of a clay figure Foot warmer Women's scarf (miniature) Men's shirt (miniature) Belt for women's shirt Calabash for lime (coca consumption) Carnelian bead Bead Hair comb of orange fibres Cotton cap Carnelian beads Cotton shirt Cylindrical stone Tukapu Wooden bead Horn bracelet Beer mug Eye shade for sun protection Women's dancing mask Pendant made of animal teeth A fragment of an animal Soapstone figure of an animal Uruçú pigment Children's sleeping mat Pair of finger masks (dancing ornaments) Pair of women's finger masks (dancing ornaments) Crossbow Children's crossbow Danzantes Mask of the leader of the Danzantes Seed (Usache tree) World disc Ceremonial arrow with eye Sample of Muga silk Spike of a spike bowl lute Calabash drinking bowl Bow for making feather ornaments Side wall of a clay pot Gourd vessel Marble vessel Bottom of a clay pot Type of burdock used for banishing the dead Men's belt buckle Pin of a belt buckle Parts of a belt buckle Clay libation pot Fragment of a mortar incense bowl Part of a catapult Shell jewellery Girls' huipil Children's huipil Collar of a men's shirt Leather apron Drying straw for mate tea Leg bone of a turkey Spools Calendar aids Part of a cap Bronze horsehair cap Small bronze bells Sleeve of a women's shirt Pottery lamp Part of the handpiece of a rubbing stone Stringed instrument Tobacco pipe head for brides Hatchet blade Hemisphere made of gold shell Greenstone Marble Round coin Men's vest Men's shirt Shell bowl Clay head Storage bag made of fish skin Hook of weighing scales Teat (baby's drinking aid) Metal model Model of a cupboard Saw blade Elephant tusk jewellery Feather ornament Fur ornament Wood ornament Horn jewellery Bone jewellery Leather ornament Shell jewellery Pearl jewellery Bark ornament Banded bags Bodyguard's kit bag Basket Rice trader's bag for making prayer beads Hand drill for making prayer beads File for making prayer beads Wooden peg as template and drilling aid (for making prayer beads) In-cab decoration for lorries Lorry indicator lights Lorry reflector Hanging ornament for lorries Mudflap for lorries Hanging decoration for lorries Ornamental mounting for lorries Pair of ear studs Pair of wooden slippers Ladies' slippers Hoop of small bells Blank for a god's chariot Pole weapon Collar of a bridal gown Summer cap Collar of courtly attire Collar for festive occasions Top of coca bottle Spout of a clay vessel Double pipe made of clay Saddle blanket Theatre stage for lizard hunting Arrow for cassowary hunting Arrow for opossum hunting Arrow for pigeon hunting War arrow Dagger made of a cassowary bone Cassowary feathers Neckband of a feather collar Fruit knife for a Model of a double-hulled boat Paddle for outrigger boat Accessories for model boat Replica axe Replica stone hatchet Coix necklace Penis calabash Coloured silk-screen print Tobacco holder Cassowary feather rudder Shaft of a stone axe Roasting basket Sago scraper Carving tools Incense calabash Three-legged clay bowl Model of a tent Ridge pole (for tent) Wooden pegs (for tent) Tent pegs Tent canvas Tent poles Sirih box Men's sirih box Tripodal clay plate Sacred stone Wooden blank for movable type printing Circular net for warriors Artificial beard Fender pile Part of a spindle Lard pot with lid Fender Plant seeds (point of a case) Feather ruff Woodpecker skins Dancer's cuffs Dancer's arm ornaments Double clay bowl Ceramic bowl Lava rock bowl Nabeshima bowl Pyrite sphere Woven rice basket Woven rice and corn basket Storeroom for food basket Copra knife Fruit knife for pandanus Collar made of animal teeth Collar made of animal teeth and jawbones Collar with dog tooth Collar with animal tooth Bone belt Children's belt strap Girl's hip headdress Basket for sago Basket with sago Rice container for harvest Coca basket Grain sieve Coat made of cassowary skin Case with needles Testicles of tree bear Cockatoo feathers Cassowary skin of iguana Gable ornament of a magic house Parts of a magic house Skull mask Part of the floor of a magic house Part of the substructure of a magic house Shell bangle Armlet Dentalium shell money Money ring made of nassa shells Cords with boar teeth (currency) Lead chain (trade item) Iron chain (trade item) Money ring Necklace of shell beads Necklaces of shell pieces Manilla Pierced shell disc (shell money) Money ring of shell money Cords with shell money Wooden doll's head with handle String of shell beads Ornamental chain with dentalium and glass beads Ornamental shells for necklaces String of shell and coconut shell (currency) Rib ingots (currency) Stone money Togo stones Small glass bottle Cowrie shells (currency) Cypraeoidea shells Agate shell discs (currency) String of agate shells Men's vest (forger?) Porcelain bowl Arrow accessories Porcelain cups Daoist figure Plaster cast of a potsherd Plaster cast of a receptacle Plaster cast of a hanging vessel with handle Plaster cast of a long bone Plaster cast of a clay vessel? Bangle of a bottle Boy's lance Ceremonial halberd Deerskin blanket Wooden rods used as weaving shuttles Part of a weaving loom made of wood Cast of a sandstone figure Bracket for plates Figure vessel with stirrup spout Plaster cast of a rock sculpture Plaster cast of a figure Plaster cast of a sacrificial blood bowl Pocket comb Bridal carriage Wooden arm Wooden leg Wooden foot Wooden hand Carrying strap for quiver Ear of a Model of a sewing table Brow ornament for horse Portrait head with stirrup spout Jute doll Clay censer Back plate Caparison with side pieces Women's jewellery for festivals Men's jewellery for festivals Child's door of a house Main door of a house or farmstead Mourning cloth Frond of a coconut palm House wattle barley Dried cheese Grass (food) Grass root Stopper for gunpowder bottle Cream Saddle ornament Paintbrush holder Handle of incense spoon Pair of men's fur boots Pair of men's winter boots Wattle of an "Indian princess" Beaver tooth (to sharpen knives) Breast ornament for horses Drinking straw Double-conical drum Sample box for tea Pearl for animal sacrifice Stone from the Beijing city wall Buddha Lampshade Buddhist sculpture Women's pearl choker Beaded hair ornaments Flat puppet Beads Beaded necklace of shell discs and pieces of snail shell Necklace of shell pieces Necklace of snail shells Fishbone seeds Snail shell jewellery Uruá flute Lidded ceramic bowl Ceramic bottle jug Ceramic pitcher Ceramic Reed mats Necked bowl lute Pair of columns with accessories Bronze vessel with lid Prayer cabinet Fragment of a melon vessel Relief spheres made of gold sheet Model of a corn cob Attachment for a censer Bowl of a fragment of a stucco relief Stone pipe (fragment) Fragment of a clay relief slab Women's game fragments Mica platelets Greenstone platelets Double censer Stone blade of a double-headed axe Wooden door frame Door frame of a yurt Fish spear with trident head Plaster cast of an amulet Pointer Hunting bow Amulet to ward against knee pain Board with animal figures Bag for tobacco Reindeer scapula (votive) Copper nail Bone pendants Hanging bowls with fruit Copper tongs Brass figures Bottom section of a Gold sheet band Gold sheet discs Piece of gold sheet Gold nail Small gold sheet discs Bone nail Fragment of a phone Hanging mallet xylophone Standing xylophone Gong frame Gong stand Brass spheres Orac choker Club for seal hunting Glass bead necklaces Women's necklace Girl's lip plugs Thimble made of copper heads for sea otter hunting Ceramic fragment Bone beads Embroidered chain Finger mask (votive) Copper cooking pot Parts of women's lip jewellery Needle case Embricoider huipil Flat theatre trident tip Horn spade Women's garter Boy's garter Girl's garter Men's garter Pair of women's garter Obsidian disc Bell mounting for horse's harness Clay censer Relief from a clay pot Castanet ring Beaded braid (grave findings) Plaster cast of jewellery Hair braid Antimony box Quiver Quiver with crossbow Wayang Kulit shadow puppet Ancestral temple (portable altar) Officer's attire Pair of writing brush sacrifice Bunch of willow bark for attaching weights to catfish nets Small gold leaf discs Gold mount for a stick for goat skin Brass basin Gold tube Pouring mould for spheres Shell necklace Bone ornament figures Fragment from the foot of a clay vessel Receptacle Clay saucer Mould for making pots Gold fragment of a necklace Boar's tusks Necklace made of sperm whale teeth Neck ornament made of a sperm whale tooth Basket for seeds Jacket Flour bag Stone handle Fragment of an animal figure Shell handles Silver pendant Silver pendant Clay pendant Women's pendant Necklace pendant Bronze pendant Copper Hair cutting ceremony Collar of stone beads Lock of hair (jewellery) Headband Headband made of wattle Tripodal vessel Carinated bowl Clay vessel with foot Clay figure vessel Mummified llama Fragment of a Shell figure Portrait image Handwriting Foot of a stone metate Dried lizard on a wooden stick Shell Obsidian tips Copper bead Silver bead shaped like an animal Nephrite ornaments Fragment of a pyrite



## She's wearing world culture

**Anorak:** An Inuit word meaning “something against the wind”. It successfully migrated halfway around the globe and found its way into Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, German, English, Hungarian, and even Spanish. Having moved from the Arctic Circle to the streets of the world’s metropolises, it became a byword for a geek along the way. Now the garment is a must-have hipster accessory, like the one which takes its name from another Inuit term: “parka”. The anorak on the left was sewn from seal intestines. Today, the thermal effect is created by goose down from Poland or polyester fleece from China.





## What if European occupation had passed Africa by?

A survey of occupation: on this map of colonial Africa in 1911, the German territories are marked in red. But what would the continent look like today if colonization had never happened? The “*what if*” map on the right was designed in 2011 by the Swedish artist Nikolaj Cyon. Turning history on its head, this map imagines how Africa might have developed without European expansionism; in the mid-nineteenth century, it could possibly have been divided into a few large Islamic states and many kingdoms. Pan-African activists use the name Alkebu-Lan as a descriptor for Africa from an indigenous perspective. The term is said to date back to a time before the conquest of northern Africa by the ancient Romans.





## We ♥ icons

The thumbs-up “Like” button on Facebook, smiley emoticons in text messages, and hearts adorning a favourite mug are symbols instantly recognizable to everyone in today’s world. But pictograms and ideographs are not modern inventions. Centuries ago the Mayas, Mixtecs, and Aztecs used ingenious symbols for communication, some of which are reminiscent of modern comics – like speech bubbles for spoken words and flowery bubbles to represent singing. Of these languages, Mayan was the only one with a logographic writing system. The frieze around the upper edge of the vessel shown below contains the symbols for ka-ka-wa, meaning “for cocoa”. See page 21





### Am I a grown-up?

The photograph on the left was taken in 1908 by the Swedish ethnographer Erland Nordenskiöld and shows a Mataco hockey player in Argentina: an adolescent on the cusp of manhood with a self-assured expression. In contrast, the “girl-woman” on the right seems to be gazing into the future with some uncertainty. Her portrait is one of a series titled *Monalisen der Vorstädte* (Mona Lisas of the Suburbs), published in 2010 by Ute and Werner Mahler. The two Berlin photographers sought to capture the moment when a child becomes an adult – the between, a transitional stage fraught with mystery since time immemorial.



# THE HUMBOLDT FORUM – FROM PLATFORM SANDALS TO RING- BEARING DOVES

A dialogue between cultures. One idea, two museums, four partners on four storeys encompassing over 40,000 square metres in total. An introductory tour.

TEXT: ANDREAS SCHÄFER

**L**ET’S PICTURE the scene without the grey wastes of concrete, puddles of water on the floor, and open utility shafts – in short, the construction site is no more. Instead, imagine a pale sandstone façade on the outside and an interior that features cafés, ticket counters, and escalators. Let’s visualize the completed Humboldt Forum in the rebuilt Berlin City Palace. The year is 2019, the inaugural celebrations with all their official speeches – reflecting on twenty years of debate – are over, and now that the initial rush has passed, we are visiting the Humboldt Forum for the first time.

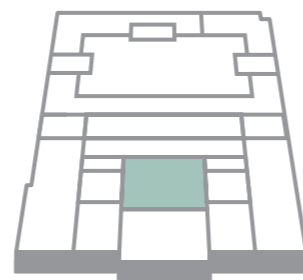
We find ourselves in a high-ceilinged foyer, surrounded by galleries occupying three storeys. Here is the Site Museum, run by the Stiftung Berliner Schloss – Humboldtforum; over there are the doors to the auditorium. The people who were with us at the ticket counter are already on the escalator, perhaps to visit the Cave of the Sixteen Sword-Bearers in the Cupola Room. We linger to admire the niches in the galleries and the large symbols displayed within them. What could they be? Shapes that resemble houses, but aren’t; structures reminiscent of seashells; circles, grid patterns ... the entire foyer is full of strange symbols that look as though they should be intelligible, while actually remaining a mystery. The entrance hall. According to current plans, it might ultimately look like this.



The installation in the foyer echoes themes from the Kunstkammer.

## THE KUNSTKAMMER

GROUND FLOOR



## From Cabinet of Curiosities to Republic of Objects.

**A**PPROACHING ONE of the niches containing a star-shaped crystalline structure, we discover that we are looking at something called a muqarna. This is a highly complex architectural element whose name literally means something solidified or frozen. Muqarnas were first produced in the tenth century by Arabian Sufis in order to study the geometry of light refraction and meditate about creation.

As we stroll around, we realize that each niche tells of a different tradition.

The themes include trade and barter, migration and travel, different ideas about God, and the relationship between the familiar and the foreign. The installation playfully references the cabinets of curiosities in which the tradition of collecting objects and knowledge began during the Renaissance.

Cabinets of curiosities may be the best way of explaining the idea – and the challenge – of the Humboldt Forum. Cabinets of curiosities were places where precious artefacts, rare natural history specimens, objects from foreign lands, and utterly inexplicable items were kept. The aim was to bring together all the elements of the world in a single collection. Berlin had its own cabinet of curiosities: the Kunstkammer, which was installed in the City Palace in the mid-seventeenth century during the reign of Frederick III. The philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz believed that the Kunstkammer had a positively utopian potential. It inspired him to develop the idea of a “theatre of nature and art”, which would be a place for collecting, exhibiting, researching, playing, and learning. The concept was never realized for financial reasons, and the objects in the Kunstkammer were ultimately transferred to university museums during the nineteenth century.

As a location for events, research, and exhibitions, the Humboldt Forum takes up the Kunstkammer’s claim to universality and Leibniz’s idea of a “theatre of knowledge” – but with the crucial difference that the new venue will operate under the democratic conditions of the twenty-first century and in full knowledge of the injustice of past eras. The old cabinets of curiosities were places of wonder. But they were also places where

things were wondered at: people in Central Europe could marvel at objects from foreign cultures, regard them as curiosities, and not infrequently feel superior to their cultures... and, later, feel justified in colonizing and exploiting their countries.

The Humboldt Forum does not perpetuate the paradigm of “us and them”. For how do we define “us” – and who is excluded from that definition? The Humboldt Forum explores how we all live – and how we all lived in times past. What are the similarities and relationships between cultures, and how do they differ? What can we hope to understand – and in what ways do we remain an eternal puzzle to ourselves? The Humboldt Forum narrates this discourse between the cultures from the perspective of today’s networked world and with an underlying feeling of global cohesiveness: the full awareness that we are all *one* world.



All the world in a printer’s tray? Still life of an art cabinet by Georg Haintz, c. 1666.

# HUMBOLDT LAB DAHLEM

Space for questions –  
in a building of  
perennially new answers.

WHEN THE collections of the Ethnologisches Museum and the Museum für Asiatische Kunst are relocated from Dahlem in southwest Berlin to the central district of Mitte, they will change not only their location, but also their character. Their narratives will be different as they address the question of how and when the objects came to the museum – and why other objects did not. How has our view of them changed, and what can they still tell us? Objects have no intrinsic meaning, and the roles they play for people change over time. Once you begin to think about these interrelationships, you get caught up in an endless stream of questions.

One space for airing these queries is the Humboldt Lab Dahlem, which was initiated by the German Federal Cultural Foundation in conjunction with the Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz. From 2012 until the end of 2015, the Humboldt Lab Dahlem accompanied the collections on their long journey to the Humboldt Forum and displayed its findings on what were called “Rehearsal Stages”. Curators, artists, and theatre producers experimented with display options, arranging objects into new contexts, tracing their histories, and addressing the role of visitors in the spirit of the artist Francis Picabia: our heads are round so that our thoughts can change direction.

Let’s play along for a moment. For example, what happens to a perfectly ordinary, functional object when it is displayed in a glass cabinet? (And how would the person respond who had the object in their pocket just a moment ago?) The installation titled “Pre-Show” explored this question. Instead of leaving their coats and jackets in the cloakroom, museum visitors were able to hang them in display cases for all to see, instantly transforming private items of clothing into ostensibly representative objects that were seemingly able to reveal something about their owners and the culture of their time. These items had suddenly become important – and yet simultaneously alien.



“Verzauberung / Beauty Parlour” – a very popular project on the Rehearsal Stage.



Inside the room, an expert explains East African beauty rituals.

The “Reisebericht” project is an unusual travelogue about Johan Adrian Jacobsen, an adventurous and unscrupulous collector who was sent to the northwest coast of America in the late nineteenth century by the then Berlin Museum für Völkerkunde (Museum for Ethnology). He acquired numerous items for the museum’s collection. A computer adventure game has been specially developed by a group of artists called gold extra, allowing visitors to play the role of Jacobsen – and in the process be confronted with his arrogant attitude towards the indigenous people he found there. There is also an augmented reality app in which the objects themselves appear as poetic narrators.

The project “Verzauberung / Beauty Parlour” offered a perspective that was unrelated to museums. In a separate auditorium set up as a hyper-realistic beauty parlour, visitors entered one by one and found themselves in a narrow, fragrant chamber, where they became part of the unfolding story – as the guest of beauty expert Maimuna Difini, who inducted them into the cosmetic practices and wedding rituals of East African coastal towns. Doesn’t a project like this offer a more immediate experience of the context behind African artefacts?

While the Humboldt Forum won’t be replacing its cloakrooms with display cases, space has already been reserved for the beauty parlour in the African modules.

# THE FIRST FLOOR

The Humboldt brothers,  
the City of Berlin, and the  
world (of research) at large.



ALONG WITH a research library for non-European cultures, set up by the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, this level will be devoted to exhibitions staged by the city-state of Berlin and the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. The aim of these exhibitions is to allow visitors to experience something that is difficult to grasp because it usually takes place behind the scenes: research. How can we literally look at research? We could organize science slams or experiments for school pupils. We could showcase research projects on living conditions in



Impetus and vision: the Humboldt brothers, drawn by Adolph von Menzel in 1836.

megacities, for example, or studies about malaria in West Africa. As though on a theatre stage, the Humboldt-Universität will enable visitors to engage with scholarship in everyday life and illustrate the questions that researchers grapple with in various disciplines all over the world, overcoming boundaries and borders in order to cooperate.

Oh, Berlin, you’re so wonderful (which is the title of a famous German song) – and always good for a surprise. Until recently, the city-state of Berlin planned to use its space for an exhibition about the world of languages, with dozens of media stations demonstrating the extent to which language shapes our view of the world. After his election as mayor, however, Michael Müller presented a new concept under the heading “Welt.Stadt.Berlin”. Occupying 4,000 square metres of floor space, this interactive exhibition will show how Berlin influenced the world – and how the world has influenced, changed, and inspired Berlin. “Berlin has always been many things, and it has often been its own antithesis: cosmopolitan and belligerent, democratic and dictatorial, destructive and enriching,” Michael Müller wrote in a newspaper column. The exhibition is still at the planning stage, but it will deal with the themes of “politics, science, culture, architecture, traffic, industry, lifestyle, and migration”. This will be “one metropolis, two centuries, great narratives that eschew melodrama and refrain from abusing facts or chronologies.”

Wilhelm and Alexander Humboldt, from whom the Forum takes its name, will play a key role in the concept: Wilhelm, the founder of the Humboldt-Universität, and Alexander, who travelled the world in order to experience it. Together they embody the quality that turns a city into a metropolis: “The ability to provide impetus and realize one’s vision, and the open-mindedness that adopts and assimilates ideas from the rest of the world,” says Müller.

• WANG SHU •  
Chinese architect and  
Pritzker Prize winner

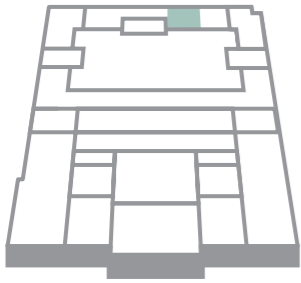


## Game of Thrones: How will you showcase the imperial throne?

The most important thing is the immediate impression that visitors get. How can we give them a feel for the exhibition and help them to overcome the barriers between the old and the new world? I am going to create a large, eight-metre-high exhibition space

in the Humboldt Forum on “Art at the court of the Qianlong Emperor in the eighteenth century”. There will be a magnificent lacquerwork imperial throne and a huge painting of the preaching Buddha which the emperor commissioned from one of his court painters. I will use a wooden framework, an earthy plaster and beautiful traditional Chinese bricks. The very materials are redolent of cultural traditions, and I want to awaken these memories and make them seem fresh and vibrant.

## SECOND FLOOR



## SECTIONS FOR YOUNG VISITORS

### Amazonia: Grasping the world with a cat's cradle in a hammock.

**T**HE SECTIONS for Young Visitors are special areas of the Humboldt Forum designed for children and families which will be embedded in the exhibition modules. They will be less concerned with

the qualities or provenance of the objects, instead allowing young visitors to engage with the exhibition's themes in a more playful, hands-on way. There will be four such areas in total, each devoted to a central question. The South Pacific section, featuring boats that can be clambered over, will ask: "How can I find my way around the world?" Thanks to various hands-on analogue and digital features, children and families will be able to find out more about the craftsmanship, navigational techniques, and artistic and social aspects of boat-building cultures – and wearing VR goggles will give them direct experience of what orientation is all about.

A Section for Young Visitors will also be sited in the Dimensions of Islam module. The question "What do I believe in?" will reference the lifeworlds of children and young people in Berlin and simultaneously address the metaphysical dimensions of faith and spirituality.

In contrast, the Section for Young Visitors on Amazonia will explore the question of "How do I grasp the world?" By, for example, lying in a hammock and listening to stories. Or by communicating with plants, animals, and even the water in a stylized, artistically designed forest.

The section is divided into two parts: the domestic sphere consists of several hammocks arranged in a circle with listening points and space for storing books and games, while the outside world is represented by an interactive installation on the theme of the forest featuring wall and floor elements. Like the other Sections for Young Visitors, the one in the Amazonia section will also feature a "Window on the World": a media station where children and young people from the Amazon region talk about their everyday lives – and demonstrate the coolest cat's cradle tricks.

These areas were designed in cooperation with students and faculty members from an indigenous university, the Universidad Indígena de Venezuela, who visited the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin in late summer of 2014 and again in 2015, as part of the "Wissen teilen" (Sharing Knowledge) project run by the Humboldt-Lab. "Wissen teilen" is developing an online platform for delivering information and knowledge about objects from Amazonia from various viewpoints. This will allow university staff to use the inventory of the Ethnologisches Museum for their teaching activities in Venezuela, while also giving the curators in Berlin a different perspective on their collection. The curators asked their Venezuelan visitors how children in Venezuela grow up, learn, and grasp the world. They were told that indigenous children listen to stories narrated as oral history and play traditional cat's cradle games, thereby learning a great deal about the forest and its creatures. These two elements will characterize the Section for Young Visitors on Amazonia.

Members of the Universidad Indígena de Venezuela in the storage facilities with objects made by their ancestors.

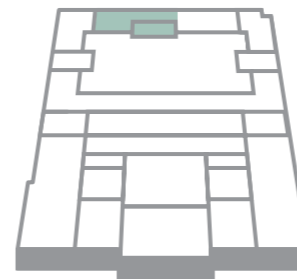


Lienzo Seler II: cotton cloth from the Mixtec and Choco peoples of Mexico, showing the four culture-bringers drilling fire.

## MESOAMERICAN SECTION

### Talking clouds: Icons and pictograms as features of Mixtec culture.

## SECOND FLOOR



**T**HE ETHNOLOGISCHES Museum's module on Graphical Communication Systems in Mesoamerica will be located on the second floor, uniting the interests of the Humboldt brothers after whom the Forum has been named. One of the themes of this section is linguistic variety and communication (a specialism of Wilhelm, the elder brother); the other concerns initial studies of pre-Columbian and early colonial illuminated manuscripts from Mayan, Mixtec, and Aztec cultures, which for millennia inhabited what is today Mexico and Central America (relating to the travels of Alexander, the younger brother). From the first millennium BC through to the Spanish conquest in 1521 and then on into colonial times, these cultures used ingenious graphical systems of communication. The Mayan vase shown on the right was made between AD 550 and 650 and depicts an enema ceremony. In the gaping mouth of the mountain god – in other words, at a cave entrance – a seated figure wearing the mask of the rain god Chaak gesticulates as he turns to face six pairs of figures. In front of them is a vessel with an enema attachment, suggesting that an alcoholic liquid would be administered rectally to the men in order to induce an altered state of consciousness and produce visions. Of particular interest is the hieroglyph frieze encircling the upper rim of the vessel with a consecration formula. Some of the hieroglyphs describe the vessel's purpose as ka-ka-wa – meaning "for cocoa".

The Mayans were the only Mesoamerican people to use a logographic writing system – every symbol corresponded to a syllable or a word. In contrast, the Mixtecs and Aztecs used pictograms – pictorial symbols that could be read even across a language barrier. The underlying code was their shared cultural basis. For example, all the pre-Columbian cultures had a common calendar, and they all built pyramids and played the same ritual ball game. Some of the symbols are reminiscent of modern comics, such as footprints to signify "walking". The folding books of the Mixtecs, which could be opened concertina-style, even contain emblems reproducing the topography of various regions – like our schematic representations of underground railway networks today.



### How many Africa modules will be on view in the Humboldt Forum?

PAOLA IVANOV True to the intentions of our predecessor Peter Junge, who started planning the Forum in 2008 as curator of the African collection, there will be three historical modules: one about the kingdom of Benin in history from the fifteenth century onwards, one about the East African coast and the Indian Ocean ...

JONATHAN FINE ... and one about Cameroon, which will deal with the interrelationships between the various kingdoms of Cameroon, but also with the Germans as a colonial power.

### What story do you want to tell about Africa?

JF The classical narrative of Africa that took shape in Europe about 150 years ago holds that Africa has no history and no development, and that it represents a severed, isolated continent. We want to overturn this perception.

PI It's an idea that can be traced back to figures such as Hegel, for whom history meant the development of the human spirit – something that he believed had taken place exclusively in Europe. We want to show how this notion, which still survives in many people's minds to this day, came about through the emergence of modernity in the West. To define itself as modern, it needed the foil of the not-modern. But we'll be demonstrating that modernity emanated from relationships between all the continents – and Africa was part of that process.

### Can you give an example of these relationships?

JF I just want to say one more thing: although we'll be starting off with the stereotyped images of Africa, that doesn't mean we'll be dealing mainly with European clichés. If we did that, we would be back to using a European perspective as our point of reference, and that would be a mistake.

**So you aren't beginning by exploding the clichés and then telling the real story?**

PI We plan to tell the real story from the outset! Europe is incidental to this. We'll be adopting an African perspective. One example of these interrelationships is the Indian Ocean as an early globalized world that included the African East Coast. The countries bordering on the Indian Ocean had established a network for exchanging ideas, people, and goods as early as 900 or 1000 BC. My perspective here is emphatically southern; it is the Europeans who are the alien interlopers. Trade relations were predominantly peaceful – until the Portuguese came along with their weapons.

### Did you cooperate with other curators on this southern perspective?

PI As far as the Indian Ocean is concerned, research began to take off in the 1980s – and it's never been Eurocentric. For example, I've corresponded intensively with one of its pioneers, Abdul Sheriff, who comes from Zanzibar.

### You will also be displaying the magnificent Pearl Throne of the ruler of Bamum. What can this object tell us about his relationship with the German colonial rulers?

JF The throne was made by the father of King Njoya of Bamum, to demonstrate the wealth and power of the kingdom. When the Germans arrived ...

### ... who occupied Cameroon from 1884 to 1918 ...

JF ... they were perceived as a threat by the people of Bamum. The Germans wanted to have the throne. The king negotiated with them – and then he gave it to the Germans as a gift. But this kind of gift isn't given out of sheer generosity ...

PI ... it actually imposes an obligation on the recipient, according to Marcel Mauss.

JF The throne was that kind of gift. The king wanted to enter into a political alliance with Germany. Perhaps he wanted to join the German Empire, as though it were a League of Princes. But the Germans failed to understand their obligation – or perhaps they were unwilling to understand it. In return, they gave Njoya a fragile musical instrument that

very soon broke, and the king was deeply disappointed.

PI This is an example of European arrogance! Gifts should be exchanged on an equal level. But Kaiser Wilhelm II did not acknowledge the ruler of Bamum as his equal. It was a novel situation – these totally crazy Europeans came along and declared that everything belonged to them: the land, the forests, the natural resources – the lot.

### How will you deal with the theme of colonialism in general? What about the Maji Maji Rebellion, in which a broad coalition rose up in German East Africa against the repressive occupation? And the colonial war between German troops and the Herero and Nama peoples in German Southwest Africa, which ended in a massacre?

PI One of our focal points will be the visible study collection, which illustrates the history of the collection. The museum's African collection comprises approximately 75,000 objects, two-thirds of which were acquired during the colonial era – incidentally, not just from the German colonies. We will show how the collection came into being in the course of the colonial conquests. But we will also present things that were not collected at the time: such as European clothing and fabrics imported from India, which had long been in use in Africa and which

became especially popular in the nineteenth century. Instead of such items, collectors went in search of raffia textiles because these were perceived as more traditional – except that in those days nobody was actually wearing raffia any more. In other words, what was being collected reflected European ideas of what Africa ought to be like rather than the actual reality of the continent. Of course, we will also be focusing on military force and brutal colonial suppression.

JF Colonialism will be an issue in every single one of our modules. We want to avoid hushing up or trivializing anything.

PI Take Benin, for example. All those beautiful and very valuable bronzes reached Europe in the aftermath of the destruction of the Beninese capital by British troops. The story of how they finally ended up in Berlin was told in an exhibition curated by Peter Junge.

### Is the king of Benin demanding the return of these bronze reliefs?

PI There was a major international exhibition on Benin in 2007/08 for which the King of Benin wrote a piece in which he indicated that he would like some of the objects returned. But there was no official demand for their return. Nor has Nigeria ever made a request of this nature.

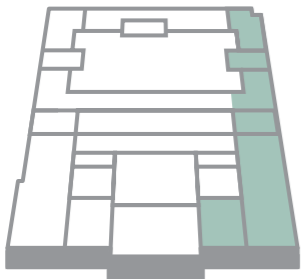
**The legal aspect is one thing; was something rightfully acquired or was it stolen? But there is also a vast moral grey area. Could there possibly be a**

Throne with glass beads and cowrie shells for King Nsangu of Bamum, nineteenth century.

## THE AFRICAN WING

Part of the modern world: Benin, Cameroon, and the East African coast.

SECOND FLOOR



ITALIAN ETHNOLOGIST Paola Ivanov and Jonathan Fine, an American who worked as a lawyer for ten years before studying history and art history, are the joint curators of the Africa modules. An interview about concatenation, colonialism, and criticism of the Humboldt Forum.



Physical and spiritual beauty are one and the same thing in Swahili culture. Wooden sandals with 9 cm-high platform.

**moral obligation to return objects if they were acquired during a period of colonial occupation?**

<sup>JF</sup> We research the circumstances of all these cases, and the perspectives of the people and institutions involved are taken into account when decisions are made.

**I'd like to return once more to criticisms of the Humboldt Forum. Some people think taking what are mostly colonial-era objects that ended up in Berlin and displaying them in a rebuilt palace is essentially a neo-colonial gesture. These critics regard the restoration of the Humboldt Forum as some kind of blatant symbol. Can you relate to this view?**

<sup>JF</sup> I think this assessment is based on a misunderstanding. To be sure, there are museums that present objects from colonial times so uncritically that they end up perpetuating the colonial viewpoint in the present day – but this is exactly the trap we are determined not to fall into. Calling for everything to be dismantled and returned is no solution either, because to do so would be to obliterate history. And this obliteration, I think, would be a dangerous gesture too. Instead, we want to use an opportunity for a critical – and self-critical – engagement with the issues.

<sup>PI</sup> We believe that it is important for the collections to be housed in the city centre, where they will have a wider audience that better reflects their extremely high value. As for their provenance: we are researching the origins of all the objects that will be exhibited in the Humboldt Forum. This can be a very difficult task, but we are not hushing anything up. We want to achieve a change of perspective by moving away from the European viewpoint. And if some people are still associating the palace with the old notion of “the West and the rest”, then we are going to deconstruct that conception. Our hope is that we can negate this image and instead restore the idea of one world. Because that is our primary concern.

# CHINESE MEDICINE

**More than just acupuncture:  
a doctrine of good nutrition and  
harmonious movement.**



**A** **ALONG WITH** a growing interest in spirituality and Far Eastern religions, the West has also developed an enthusiasm for holistic healing methods – and especially for Chinese medicine. A special portal room will be devoted to this topic because of its immediate relevance to our



Left: Apothecary fittings from the 19th century.  
Right: Embroidered pouch for acupuncture needles.

everyday lives. But what does Chinese medicine actually involve? What has changed – or been perhaps even lost – during its transfer to the West? Based on the multifaceted collection of the Ethnologisches Museum, which was amassed between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, this section will illuminate the philosophical background of Chinese medicine and its relationship with religion. Chinese medicine is much more than merely acupuncture: it encompasses every aspect of life and includes not only guidelines for eating well, but also techniques like qigong and t'ai chi that combine movement and meditation. An interactive media table will illustrate how to eat in accordance with the Five Elements, while a hands-on medicine cupboard will feature herbs and spices which are staples in our cuisine while also featuring as ingredients in Chinese medicinal recipes. Also on show will be an entire pharmacy from the nineteenth century, complete with historical vessels, pictures, and signs. Visitors will be able to make themselves comfortable on recliners while locating the “meridians” – the channels of life energy – on their own bodies as well as the individual acupuncture points along their lengths. The art of self-healing by means of finger pressure on some of these points is known as acupressure.



Europeans were fascinated by the Buddhist temples in the Kizil caves.



# THE TURFAN COLLECTION

**Breathtaking cave paintings from the Silk Road.**

**T** **TOWARDS THE** end of the nineteenth century, a veritable wave of Turfan fever spread throughout Europe. Russian merchants had brought back tales of fabulous Buddhist caves, some of them destroyed, from their travels along the eastern Silk Road. A Swedish geographer was the first to go in search of these caves, followed

by a British expedition. Finally, Albert Grünwedel of Berlin's Museum für Völkerkunde set out in 1902 on a quest for traces of lost Buddhist cultures in the Tarim basin in western China. What Grünwedel and his colleagues found in the caves of the Turfan oasis and in nearby towns like Kizil surpassed their wildest expectations. Magnificent wall paintings, sculptures, and thousands of fragments of text – the astounded explorers set to work documenting and collecting what they found, even cutting paintings out of

the cave walls, which would be unthinkable today. It was all packed up in boxes, loaded onto donkeys, and finally shipped to Europe.

Months later, the first forty-six of these treasure chests arrived in Berlin. Kaiser Wilhelm II was so delighted that he immediately funded a second expedition. By 1914, a total of four expeditions had set out for Turfan, and the objects that Grünwedel and his successors brought home still form the backbone of the collection, which remains the most important repos-

itory of Central Asian treasures anywhere in the world. However, the circumstances of their transfer to Berlin were sometimes decidedly inglorious.

In 2010, almost a hundred years after the last of the Turfan expeditions, Michael Eissenhauer, the director of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, and Klaas Ruitenbeek, the director of the Museum für Asiatische Kunst, travelled to Beijing to discuss the collection and its history with the vice president of the Chinese State Administration of Cultural Heritage – and to negotiate a cooperation agreement. Since then, researchers from China and Berlin have been studying the collection together. Li Zhao, for example, the deputy director of the Kucha Research Academy, came to Berlin for eighteen months in March 2012.

The fragments of wall paintings and clay sculptures currently reside in the Museum für Asiatische Kunst in Dahlem, where they are displayed like works in an art gallery. The Humboldt Forum, in contrast, will also tell the collection's story and exhibit historical photographs, letters, and sketches. The reconstruction of the Cave of the Ring-Bearing Doves was completed in 2000 with the intention that it would ultimately be displayed in the centre of Berlin. The cave, which includes original fragments, is the only one of its kind in the world.

However, it will not be the only spectacular cave reconstruction on show in the Palace. The Cave of the Sixteen Sword-Bearers is destined for installation in the large Cupola Room and will have to be attached to the building's skin. This presents a technical challenge, as the structure must comply with exacting conservational standards in order for the original paintings to be installed in it. ■



Reconstruction of the Cave of the Ring-Bearing Doves with original fragments.

## GROUND FLOOR

### SCHLÜTER COURTYARD

Three of the Schlüter Courtyard's Baroque facades will be reconstructed. Facing Alexanderplatz, these connect to the contemporary **Belvedere**.

### THE LARGE FOYER

The main entrance under the dome will lead into the foyer. Soaring up over three storeys, the foyer will contain a major installation envisioning **what a classical cabinet of curiosities** might have looked like. All the routes through the building will lead off from here.

### SITE MUSEUM

The freely accessible Site Museum, devoted to the history of the palace and Palace Square, will be located directly adjacent to the entrance portal. In the basement below, visitors will be able to see historical remains of the building in the **Palace Cellar**.

### CURRENT INTERVENTIONS

The rooms for **temporary exhibitions**, adjoined by a cinema, a hall with a stage, and an auditorium, will also be located directly off the foyer.

## FIRST FLOOR

### BERLIN AND THE WORLD

Most of the **first floor** will be devoted to an exhibition about the city-state of Berlin. Before, a major exhibition entitled "World of Languages" was envisaged for this space. But now the plan is for a multi-media exhibition called "**World. City.Berlin**" to illustrate Berlin's impact on the world and vice-versa. But will that really be the last word?

### THREE PARTNERS ON ONE FLOOR

Here the Kunstbibliothek (Art Library) and the two museums are planning a **library for research into non-European cultures** with a focus on exploration and travel literature and publications on colonial history.

### HUMBOLDT-UNIVERSITÄT ZU BERLIN

What role do research and scholarship play in everyday life? The exhibitions, events, and workshops staged by the Humboldt-Universität in the **Humboldt Laboratory** will provide answers to this question.

### THE LARGE HALL

The famous **South Pacific boats from the Ethnologisches Museum** will hoist their sails on the first floor – but access will be via the second floor, where visitors will be able to view them from a gallery.

## SECOND FLOOR

### AMERICA

The history of America's indigenous peoples and of European expansion will be explored from a number of different angles. The **pre-Columbian Chamber of Gold** will explain the search for "El Dorado" through the eyes of Alexander von Humboldt.

### AFRICA – IN TOUCH WITH THE WORLD

Africa has never been isolated. The modules devoted to Cameroon, Benin, and the East African coastal region on the Indian Ocean will tell of Africa's history and its close connections with America, Europe, and Asia. They will examine the repressions of the colonial era and their continuing after-effects today, throwing light on the **origin of the museum's own collections**.

### THE SOUTH SEAS AND OCEANIA

The exhibition will present paintings on inner bark cloth and shields, providing an **overview of the styles and painting techniques** used in Oceania. The Palau Meeting Point and Colonial encounters will invite visitors to step inside a spirit house and look at an initiation chamber.

### ETHNOLOGISCHES MUSEUM

The collections of the Ethnologisches Museum will be displayed on the second floor of the Humboldt Forum. These will include the **Ethnomusiological Collection** with its 16,000 historical wax phonograph cylinders from the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv (Berlin Phonograph Archive).

## THIRD FLOOR

### ASIAN COLLECTIONS OF THE ETHNOLOGISCHES MUSEUM

Islam, Orient and Occident, **Chinese Medicine**, Asian Theatre, and Buddhism form some of the main themes of these modules.

### CULTURE AND HISTORY OF ASIA

The Museum für Asiatische Kunst will present a series of outstanding **objects from all regions of the continent** in an area covering 5,500 square metres.

### PAST MEETS PRESENT

The Chinese architect Wang Shu is designing the large hall devoted to **art from the Chinese imperial court**.

### CLOSE TO HEAVEN

Two of the largest objects to be displayed in the Humboldt Forum will be the reconstructed Buddhist cave temples of the Silk Road. Alongside the **Cave of the Ring-Bearing Doves**, the spectacular **Cave of the Sixteen Sword-Bearers** with its brilliant wall paintings will be installed directly under the dome.

Published by Nicolai Verlag  
288 pages, 17 x 24 cm, 137 colored illustrations, hardback  
ISBN 978-3-89479-955-7 (German edition: ISBN 978-3-89479-954-0)



# Humboldt Lab Dahlem

Book

"The Laboratory Concept.  
Museum Experiments in the Humboldt Lab Dahlem"

The book comprises short descriptions of the Humboldt Lab projects (2012–2015) and reflects upon the experiment as a whole as an exemplary platform for innovation. The perspective of both internal participants and external observers provides a vivid picture of the challenges faced by a 21<sup>st</sup>-century museum.

Featuring introductions by Hortensia Völckers and Hermann Parzinger, as well as contributions by Irene Albers, Fred von Bose, Larissa Förster, Martin Heller, Stefan Kaegi, Noelle M. K. Y. Kahanu, Harald Katzmaier, Viola König, Sharon Macdonald, Bettina Probst, Klaas Ruitenbeek, Philipp Schorch, Juri Steiner, Tim Ventimiglia, Agnes Wegner, Detlef Weitz, Nina Wiedemeyer and Elena Zanichelli.

Humboldt Lab Dahlem  
[www.humboldt-lab.de](http://www.humboldt-lab.de)



Stiftung  
Preußischer Kulturbesitz



Online Publication

"The Humboldt Lab Dahlem. Museum Experiments  
on the Way to the Humboldt-Forum"

This publication contains essays and images  
documenting the 30 projects undertaken  
by the Humboldt Lab Dahlem, 327 pages.  
Available from [www.humboldt-lab.de](http://www.humboldt-lab.de)

"Culture comes  
to us from others,  
and each of us has  
several cultures."

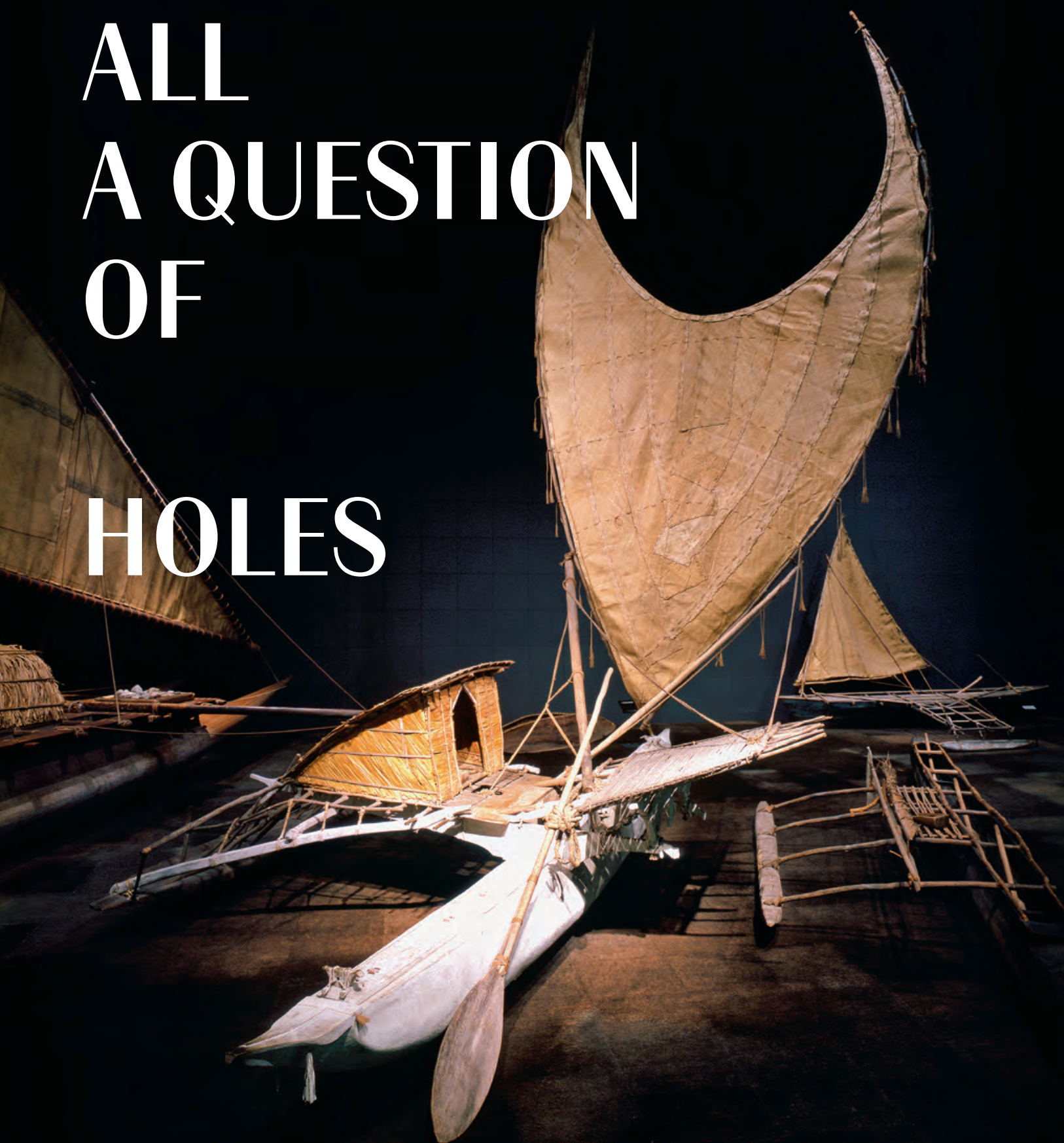
(Tzvetan Todorov)

"Early intuition universally  
precedes later knowledge"  
wrote  
Alexander von Humboldt.

From intuition to knowledge. Over the next few  
pages we'll be taking you on an illustrated tour  
through the various levels of the Berlin City Palace –  
as well as around the world.

ILLUSTRATION: ROBERT SAMUEL HANSON

# ALL A QUESTION OF HOLES





How do you transport all the magnificent but fragile South Pacific boats from Dahlem to the Palace without damaging them? *Rainer Schmidt* dreams of simply setting sail ...

The boats were brought inside through a hole in the wall – then the opening was closed up.

Back in 1970, bringing the South Pacific boats to the Ethnologisches Museum was no easy task either.



**H** **HOLES ARE** bad news for boats. Generally speaking, the bigger they are, the bigger the problem. But at the Ethnologisches Museum in Dahlem, holes have taken on a whole different meaning. For Dahlem is where the treasures of the South Pacific collection are displayed. There they stand in the majestic semi-darkness of a lofty exhibition hall: a dozen boats in a constellation that can be seen nowhere else in the world.

The largest is an extraordinarily elegant, fifteen-metre-long vessel from the island of Luf, now part of Papua New Guinea. This unique sailing boat originally came to Berlin in 1904. Once probably manned by a fifty-strong crew and stabilized by a large outrigger, it was used as a war and trading ship. Like all the others it will soon have to leave the hall – via a door through which you might be able to squeeze a small car but certainly not the pride of the Pacific, not even with

the masts folded down. Taking the boat apart isn't really an option either, given that it's around 125 years old. So what's the solution?

The following: simply break open the door to make it higher and wider, install a roller door, and construct an airlock with cushions of air that can be inflated in order to keep the sensitive climate inside as stable as possible – and that's about it. Günter Krüger of the exhibition design firm Scala describes this major operation in concise and rather matter-of-fact terms. In conjunction with a technician, Krüger has examined the requirements for transporting the boats to central Berlin in early 2018 and come up with a basic concept.

After the boats have passed through the airlock, they will be hoisted by crane in a stiff transport frame onto a flat-bed trailer and ideally covered with a tarpaulin, although it is hoped that the weather

will remain dry. After that, the special night-time transport will roll very slowly through the closed-off streets, preceded by a safety car and with another car bringing up the rear. In some places the roadside trees may have to be pruned to allow the Luf boat to pass through unobstructed and unscathed. Krüger describes it all so vividly that I can already see the trailer rolling and I start to dream ...

It's late, the streets are deserted. The trailer is heading for the Palace, the harbour where the boat will finally dock. The journey begins along a narrow cobble street, then we turn right into the broad asphalted Königin-Luise-Straße. It's twelve kilometres in total from the museum to the large southern hall of the Humboldt Forum, behind the façades of the reconstructed Palace. Suddenly a crazy thought enters my head: what if, instead of turning right, the trailer were to turn left towards the shores of Wannsee:

a lake that is likewise exactly twelve kilometres away. The water beckons.

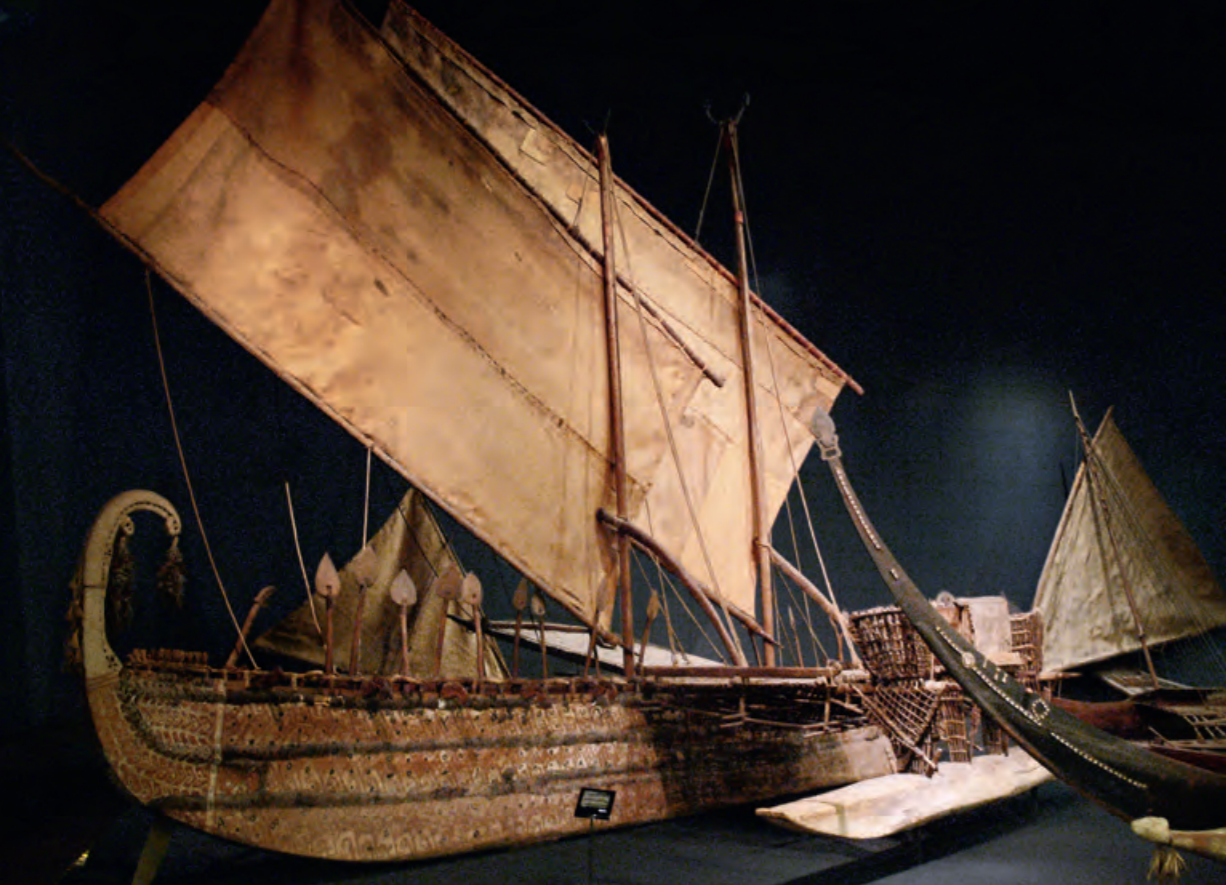
Shortly before the Schwanenwerder peninsula is the venerable Berlin Yacht Club, equipped with crane facilities. I imagine us setting off. We'd launch the Luf boat and sail up to Pichelsee, past the Grunewald Tower. As the sails of the fore-and-aft rig billow in the wind and the boom creaks leeward, I really start to appreciate the elegance and speed of the boat. A glorious dream, but one that could end up with everyone getting soaked, for no one really knows what the material will withstand.

The museum's restorer Leonie Gärtner describes the hull as seriously weakened by an old infestation of insects, by termites and dry rot. Although the pests were eliminated a long time ago, the damage remains, as even an untrained eye can see; in places the hull is crenulated like a fan. But the most serious changes aren't





An artistic rendering of the hall where the boats will be displayed in the Humboldt Forum.



## No metal, no wooden nails, only plant compounds and resins – essentially eco-boats.

even visible, Gärtner explains, because they have taken place at the molecular level – a constant degradation of the material which even regular visual checks and a stable climate of 20 degrees and 50 percent humidity can’t do much to alleviate.

Leonie Gärtner has tremendous respect for the Polynesians’ perfect craftsmanship, an admiration once shared by the British seafarer and explorer James Cook. He thought the design of the Polynesian vessels with their stabilizing outriggers or multiple hulls instead of keels made them in some ways better suited for the ocean than the European equivalents, because it enabled them to sail in shallow waters and to be pulled up onto the beach.

Neither wooden nails nor metal were used to hold the boats together and make them watertight, only plant compounds,

a variety of tropical timbers, and resins; they were the perfect eco-boats, in other words. These materials made the vessels extraordinarily robust. Although research is still being conducted into what the sealants were made of, the boat-builders clearly had an excellent knowledge of the materials they used; the coconut-fibre ropes and palm-leaf sails did their job even under the extreme conditions posed by salt water and crashing waves. Now the restorers in Dahlem are keeping their fingers crossed that the boats won’t incur any damage during transport.

Other unique craft, such as the ocean-going boat with the crab claw sail from the Santa Cruz Islands, will follow the Luf boat to the Humboldt Forum. The boat was built on the island of Taumako. The unusual shape of its sail makes it look confidently individual and modern, while the white hull painted with clay mud from the seabed creates an elegant impression. But it wouldn’t just visually be in a class of its own on the lake at Wannsee; measurements conducted in a wind tunnel have shown that the unusual delta shape produces 1.7 times as much thrust as a conventional sail of the same size.

The Polynesians were considered excellent sailors and navigators who reached thousands of islands while traversing the enormous expanses of water between Hawaii, New Zealand, and Easter Island in their streamlined, ocean-going boats. They navigated with the aid of the waves, clouds, and weather. In Micronesia they also used sticks and shells to produce impressive maritime maps, some of which are on display in the Ethnologisches Museum. Much of this splendid tradition has since been lost, partly because the colonial rulers curtailed shipping, and partly because customs changed or entire cultures simply disappeared.

Not until the 1970s was there a revival of traditional boat-building in the region, says Indra Lopez Velasco, a trainee research assistant at the Ethnologisches Museum – by the Polynesian Voyaging Society, for example. But it took a long time for the society to find someone who could still teach the ancient skills.

Back to the future, to the year 2018. The trailer has turned into Breite Straße, leading to Palace Square, and is moving across the building site, past the façade towards Portal III, the entrance under the

Humboldt Forum

The fifteen-metre-long boat with its large boom. It could carry a crew of up to fifty people.

Humboldt Forum



## All eyes are fixed on a huge hole in the wall. From below it looks tiny.

cupola. Now comes the crucial moment. The transporter edges its way into the courtyard through the wide-open doors of the entrance and the huge vestibule. Until all the boats have been delivered, only temporary doors will be installed – the risk of their being damaged is simply too great. According to Karl-Heinrich Mohr, director of construction at Stiftung Berliner Schloss, they will be “huge construction doors made of solid wood to deter break-ins”.

The days of the Palace as a building site are long gone. The façades in the hall, the galleries in pale architectural concrete, everything is finished. Nothing is allowed to get damaged or dirty. Inside, some two dozen experts are waiting. There is an air of tension. This operation hasn’t been rehearsed; there’s no routine, no second chance. Are all the models, calculations, and drawings going to prove correct? We’ll know in just a few minutes. There’s no margin for error.

All eyes are fixed on a huge hole in the south wall illuminated by spotlights. It is an enormous opening in the solid concrete, nine metres above the ground, almost four metres wide and over six

metres high; in fact, a Berlin double-decker bus could easily float through it.

But seen from below, this opening somehow seems small, tiny in fact. How on earth is the Luf boat going to fit through it? “It may not be a question of millimetres, but we’re going to need every centimetre,” the expert Karl-Heinrich Mohr says, his voice acknowledging the gravity of the situation.

The boat needs to be hoisted into the air, but there’s no question of using an ordinary crane, like the one used to lift it in Dahlem. The Palace courtyard has a glass roof, making access from outside impossible. It’s great from the visitor’s point of view, but makes things more difficult for the transporters.

That’s why the technicians have erected a made-to-measure portal crane facility in the thirty-metre-high entrance hall, which will disappear again once the boats have been brought in. Using a contraption with a trolley hoist – of the kind we know from container units – objects can be moved sideways at the required height. That’s the theory, anyway. Everyone holds

their breath as the Luf boat whizzes upwards and ... it works! The tension subsides, the relieved workers clap.

Over the following nights all the larger boats are propelled through the opening into the thirteen-metre-high hall, one after another; the smaller ones are brought up from the basement on a goods elevator. Visitors will enter the room from the second floor and gaze down into the expanse of a mock seascape, in the middle of which float the majestic sailing boats.

After the last vessel has been brought in, the gap in the parapets will be closed again and the huge opening to the entrance hall walled up. A solemn moment. The large cubic hall has no doors, no windows; no ship will ever leave it again. This is an exhibition for eternity, for now this fleet will dock in its new harbour forever. ☒

RAINER SCHMIDT is a journalist, writer, and sailor. His catamaran is moored at Wannsee.



# LIVING IN A LANGUAGE

## THAT'S NOT YOUR OWN

The discussion about the legacy of colonialism started later in Germany than in other countries. So how do we leave colonial structures behind? Not an easy task. An essay by *René Aguigah*.

X

XAVIER NAIDOO makes his viewpoint crystal clear on many issues. Not only is he an avowed Christian, not only does he claim to know that the United States covered up the true story behind 9/11, but he also makes no bones about his attitudes to skin colour and nationality. “I’m proud to be a German. And as a black person I can say that without any qualms”, he declared years ago. A native of Mannheim and the son of South African immigrants, he has also gone down on record describing himself as a “Neger aus Kurpfalz”, an acid pun using an old German folk tune and exchanging the “Jäger” (hunter) for the German version of the n-word. Xavier Naidoo is today’s Roberto Blanco. While Blanco used to appear as an

entertainer for the conservative Christian Social Union party, Naidoo has flirted with the right-wing reactionary Reichsbürgerbewegung (Reich Citizens’ Movement) that still entertains fantasies of a Germany with its pre-1937 borders. “Ein bisschen Spaß muss sein”, as Blanco sang back in 1973 – nothing wrong with a little fun.

At the other end of the political spectrum, the post-colonial Left are equally unequivocal. There the “n-word” is so taboo that it can’t even be written out full in quotation marks, not even when quoting racist texts for anti-racist purposes. In a recent public discussion I conducted with the Afro-Portuguese psychologist Grada Kilomba on postcolonial issues, she complained

that the term “Neger” was used in the German edition of Achille Mbembe’s most recent book, “Critique de la raison nègre”. But in fact this weighty and breathtakingly impressive book, published in German translation by Suhrkamp under the title “Kritik der schwarzen Vernunft” (A Critique of Black Reason), wouldn’t make any sense without that wicked word. Even Mbembe himself, a political scientist born in Cameroon in 1957, describes the noun “nègre” (which translates as Neger in German and negro in English) as the “anchor” of his book. He borrows it from a centuries-old discourse, which was where the term “nègre” was invented in the first place, and constructs something of his own out of it. Detaching the term from colour or race, he highlights the many forms of humiliation associated with it, ultimately employing it to shape a fundamental critique of capitalism. The book was originally published in French, but that doesn’t change anything; the word “nègre”, used by Mbembe without quotation marks, has just as bloody a history of discrimination as the German “Neger”. If one follows Mbembe’s argument, “raison nègre” still characterizes the exploitative capitalism of today. But anybody who persists in clinging to a blinkered linguistic taboo has no chance of following that line of reasoning.

A further point of dissonance between Grada Kilomba and me emerged at the beginning of our encounter. She spoke English, I spoke German, and she encouraged me to go on doing so, for which I was very grateful. Her encouragement, however, seemed pointed: “Portuguese is a colonial language, but it has been our own language for a long time. To keep questioning whether these are our languages is a colonial way of thinking. Portuguese is my language, full stop. Just as René’s language is German, full stop”, she said.

Does that mean I’m still caught up in colonial ways of thinking if I hesitate before putting a full stop at the end of that sentence? During my childhood in the Ruhr region in the 1970s, my parents shied away from bringing my sister and me up bilingually. My mother is from Franconia, while my father came to Germany in 1960, the year his native country Togo gained independence. My father regarded German as the language of education and work, the language of the family he had established with my mother. If our parents spoke French, it was only when they didn’t want us children to understand. French was the world of his brothers and sisters, of his native country. But it wasn’t his mother tongue. He had learned it at school from French teachers in Lomé in the 1940s and 1950s. Even outside French classes, pupils were threatened with corporal punishment if they spoke Ewe, the African language they used at home. The pu-

pils used to ask whether laughing was only permitted in French as well; sarcasm was a skill people acquired early on in “real existing” colonialism. I visited Togo with my father for the first time in the late 1980s. He hadn’t been back for fifteen years. His Ewe was so rusty that for the first few days he was scarcely able to speak to his mother.

German, for me, is the language in which I exist, the language in which I live and work. And it couldn’t be any other. But the history of how the German language and I found each other is so fragile that nothing about it seems inevitable to me. The Franco-Maghrebian philosopher Jacques Derrida once said: “I have but one language, yet that language is not mine.” Although that sounds paradoxical, it makes perfect sense to me. What’s more, there’s nothing about being German in general that feels inevitable, whether seen from a leftist or a rightist point of view. Afro-German? In purely formal terms you could say this applies to me, but the word sounds technocratic, rather like that piece of officialise, Migrationshintergrund (which literally means having a “migration background”), the designation Neue Deutsche (new Germans – a term used to denote second- or third-generation immigrants), and the Berliner “of colour” (adapting the existing English expression).

The only term for this type of identity I’ve encountered that gels for me is “white but not quite”, coined by the literary scholar Homi Bhabha. Its asymmetry and openness appeal to me, for it expresses a state of being different without saying exactly how or how much. It makes you realize that first it’s up to you to find out where you stand, including acknowledging discontinuities in your own history. That might lead you to be hesitant or constantly struggling to find your viewpoint. But how else do you avoid getting bogged down in attitudes established by colonialism? ■

RENÉ AGUIGAH, born in 1974, heads the Culture and Society department at the radio station Deutschlandradio Kultur, for which he regularly hosts a philosophy programme.

ILLUSTRATION: JULIAN RENTZSCH



# “I AM NULIS. BEHIND ME, THE FIRE BLAZES”

Side-flaps open = generous (as shown on the cover of this magazine), closed = angry with rivals: a mask like this is still worn today by the Kwakiutl people on the west coast of Canada at their rare potlatch festivals. It personifies the ancestors of a First Nations tribe. One object – four stories.

## 1.

At the end of the nineteenth century the Norwegian seafarer and collector Johan Adrian Jacobsen was sent by what was then the Berlin Museum für Völkerkunde (Museum for Ethnology) to North America, where he acquired more than 7,000 artworks and everyday objects from the indigenous peoples alone. At that time all native American tribes were forbidden to hold traditional rituals, such as the gift-giving potlatch festivals – a ban that continued until well into the 1950s. This was what enabled Jacobsen to buy the Nulis mask, which arrived at the Berlin museum in 1883.

## 2.

But the researchers weren't just interested in acquiring objects – they apparently also wanted to influence the indigenous way of life. A chief of the Kwakiutl tribe told the ethnologist Franz Boas: “We will dance when our laws tell us to do so. We will celebrate when our hearts are in the mood for celebrating. Do we tell the white man to do what the Indians do? No, we don't. So why do you tell us to do what the white man does? If you've come here to forbid us to dance, then go away! If you haven't, then you're welcome!”



## 3.

A visit to Berlin by a Canadian artist in 2012 demonstrated how important this special mask still is today. Carey Newman (whose family was called Nulis until they were forced to convert to Christianity) came to the Ethnologisches Museum to see the mask of his great-great-grandfather. Viewing it for the first time from close up, he examined the animal head on the top and the bear's claws painted inside the side sections. He was so impressed that he decided to make a similar mask himself. He wrote: “I should recognize the beauty in what used to be, and bring the old and the new into harmony in the hope that my ancestors will perceive and recognize my efforts.”

## 4.

And what would the mask say if it could speak? In 2014, the Austrian artists group gold extra imagined Nulis doing just that in an augmented reality app for tablets they produced as part of a project for the Humboldt Lab Dahlem: “I am Nulis, and this is the face that my enemies see. I am one of your ancestors ... Behind me, the fire blazes. The whole house is full of smoke. You feel it, even the ground on which you are standing, everything here was once alive. Behind you the animals of our tribe are already coming alive. The dragon blinks. The eagle awakes, and the wolf looks at you. It is said that when animals were alone they would discard their fur and become like people ...”

# WE NEED ROOM

The Humboldt Forum's interior designer Tim Ventimiglia devises the museum's exhibitions. An interview touching on his work in Alaska, the art of giving objects a voice, and his dream of the museum as a living archive.

INTERVIEW: ANDREAS SCHÄFER

# TO PLAY!

PHOTOS: FABIAN SCHUBERT



**T**IM VENTIMIGLIA has been planning and designing for Ralph Appelbaum Associates (RAA), the world's most successful museum design firm, for nearly twenty years now. A qualified architect who hails from the United States, he became the director of RAA's Berlin office back in 2012. Now forty-six, he has created exhibitions all over the world, including a museum of the world's religions in Taiwan, the Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center in Alaska, and a museum of chemistry in Philadelphia. The rooms of RAA's offices in Berlin's central Mitte district are open and bright. Young people are busy at work in front of silver computers. Ventimiglia, who speaks excellent German, meets me in a quiet back room. Spread out over a table are harpoon tips, a shamanic figure of caribou bone, and a beaver-skin hat.

#### What are these exceptional and wonderful objects?

**TIM VENTIMIGLIA** I collected them during my time in Alaska. We were planning an exhibition in Anchorage in conjunction with representatives of the indigenous communities. The people there primarily use objects to tell their own stories. **That's exactly what this magazine wants – to tell stories with objects. I've also found a few other job titles for the same thing: museum designer, museum planner, even museum set designer. Do these describe what you do?**

**TV** Exhibition design, exhibition architecture, scenography – there are a lot of names for it. Even as a child I was already a storyteller, then at some point my parents told me, “You have to learn a profession.” So I studied architecture, but I always came back to storytelling – and today I tell stories using architecture.

**You were born and raised in the United States, and you studied there as well as in Europe. After completing your architectural studies you worked for a short time in Vienna.**

**TV** The architect Elsa Prochazka tasked me with designing commemorative sites at the former residences of famous composers: Mozart, Strauss, Beethoven. Back then I wasn't even aware that the job of museum designer existed. Later I visited the Holocaust Memorial Museum in the United States and thought to myself, “This is just amazing!” The design of the exhibition was heavily influenced by the building's architecture. So who was responsible for it? Ralph Appelbaum. I went to him and said, “I want to work for you.” And I've been working with him now for nearly twenty years.

**You have designed interiors for natural history, technical, and national**

**museums as well as design exhibitions. Recently, however, you have been focusing more on ethnological collections.**

**TV** I am very interested in people and their histories, traditions, and religions. Currently I am working on two of the world's great ethnological museums: the Weltmuseum in Vienna and the Humboldt Forum. I think that ethnological museums right now are trying to find a new role and a new sense of relevance – for their own sakes and for the general public. What is their place today as institutions? Globalization provides an opportunity to view the historical collections in a new light. For example, at the Humboldt Forum we take a very direct approach when it comes to difficult topics such as colonialism and the origins of the collections. These issues are given a high priority, and we're keen to discuss

them. It's not just about displaying objects. We want to design a place where discussions can take place, whether they be between visitors, specialists, or curators. Many people are unaware that all ethnologists conduct field research, not only in the pursuit of collecting objects, but also in order to exchange information between different cultures. These points of intersection are particularly interesting for ethnologists.

**Can you explain that?**

**TV** How has one culture influenced another? I believe globalization began thousands of years ago; it isn't a new development at all. Just look at the Silk Road – there's been mutual influence in play over hundreds of years! It's the reason we find Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and everything else that lies in between in the

**“The highest form of curiosity is our interest in other people.”**



Benin: the bronze reliefs are displayed on the front of the wall, while their stories are told on the back.

region. I planned a museum of world religions in Taipei. There aren't just twelve religions across the globe – there are well over 4,000. And they came about thanks to the exchange that took place between cultures. For example, my five-year-old son has Italian, German, English, Swedish, and Lebanese roots. He's a highly complex individual, and it's important that he has a place where he can develop his own sense of himself. This is what a museum of the world's cultures can do.

**The Humboldt Forum will open in 2019. Where do you stand now, as of the spring of 2015?**

**TV** We're currently involved in submitting the design documentation, and that marks the end of the second phase. On the basis of concepts drawn up by the two museum directors, Viola König and Klaas Ruitenbeeck, as well as the curators, we've finalized a fairly detailed plan and handed it over to the building contractor. **How did you begin? What was the start of the creative process?** **TV** When you're dealing with an exhibition of the world's cultures, naturally you begin with the world itself. The project is named after Alexander and Wilhelm von Humboldt, and so I looked at them first of all. What were they thinking? How could I use them to define our parameters?

**And what did the Humboldt brothers show you?**

**TV** In a nutshell: curiosity. Curiosity for the diversities of the world's cultures. You could say that the highest form of curiosity is our interest in other people. How do they live? What do they eat? Who do they trade with? Who do they pray to? How do they define beauty? When we examine the lives of other people, we begin to think about ourselves. Ideally, a museum is a place where visitors can experience a transformation.

**The museum in Alaska, which you mentioned previously, served as a model for the Humboldt Forum. How?**

**TV** The Alaska project was carried out in close collaboration with Alaska's native communities. Together with the architect

• **TORALF GABSCH** •  
Conservator  
*Museum für Asiatische Kunst*



#### How do you construct two cave temples in a palace?

The Humboldt Forum will contain two reconstructed Buddhist cave temples from the Silk Road: the Cave of the Ring-Bearing Doves, which can be seen in Dahlem, and the Cave of the Sixteen Sword-Bearers, which will be situated directly under the Palace's cupola. First of all, curators, designers, engineers, and conservators have to pay attention to the historical materials, because this reconstruction involves a combination of ancient building methods and Asian painting techniques. In order to better understand this mix, we will be creating scale models in addition to drawings and video animations. Once the first parts of the cave temples have been completed, they will be moved during the 2017 construction phase, because their immense size means that a later installation would be impossible. If all goes as it should, the first wall painting conservators will then move into their new workshops in the Palace on Schlossplatz and continue their work. The preparations for the wall paintings alone will take five years.

**VOICES FROM THE FORUM**

• **ANDREA SCHOLZ** •

Staff member

*Humboldt Lab*

### Why can't you forget the colourful war club?

Together with a delegation of indigenous peoples from Venezuela we visited the storage facilities to have

#### VOICES FROM THE FORUM

a look at their ancestors' artefacts. Two Ye'kwana identified a number of wrongly classified objects. We used copies of the historical index cards while making our corrections. In the future this exchange of knowledge is set to take place via an online platform to be set up by the Humboldt Lab project "Wissen teilen" (Sharing Knowledge). Of course, our storage rooms contain objects that our visitors had never seen before. For example, the Ye'kwana were astonished by the numerous war clubs, including a colourfully painted example from the nineteenth century. They were able to identify the club but were unable to remember its name. And that's why I can't forget this club, because it really made me realise how dependent cultural memory as well as language are upon the use of particular objects.

David Chipperfield, we developed an exhibition and a media concept for the Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center in Anchorage which means that people can keep on selecting, and most importantly, adding new stories for every object. It's like a living archive that is continually growing – and every visitor has access to this knowledge. Of course, the museum is intended to be for tourists too, but more importantly it's a place where indigenous communities are brought together with their old objects. It's the people themselves who talk about their culture.

**The Humboldt Forum is also seeking to create multiple perspectives in a similar fashion. How do you translate this to the Berlin venue?**

TV When you're dealing with 20,000 square metres, not everything can be multi-perspectival, of course. You need recurring elements, otherwise you end up with a carnival. What is important, however, is the outlook. An institution doesn't lose its authority just because it opens its doors and invites other voices to participate! How do we proceed? There are forty-five individual thematic modules, and each of them displays its own exhibition architecture. For example, the architecture of the Amazon module consists of concentric circles which correspond to the form some Amazonian peoples use to represent their world. The innermost circle represents the spiritual, for instance. Then comes the circle representing the home. The next ring describes the garden and the one after that is the forest and hunting grounds. In designing the module we turned to members of an indigenous university in Venezuela and asked them if we were doing it right. We followed the same strategy in Alaska, but

**"I see the diversity every day. The visible storage draws visitors into the full range of the collection."**

it takes a long time for a dialogue to develop and for trust to be established. While working in Alaska, I met with representatives of the indigenous communities on seven occasions, and the first three times I said nothing. They didn't want to hear anything from me. Only slowly did an exchange develop. We talked about fishing and snowmobiles. It took off from there...

**You stress the time it took to develop a dialogue based on trust. Does this mean that the process of building trust at the Humboldt Forum is still at an early stage?**

TV Quite the opposite is the case; a number of curators have been involved in this exchange for decades! This brings us back to the question of how we can put multi-perspectivism into practice. We're responsible for the initial set-up, but my advice to future planners would be not to try and plan each and every square metre. Some areas should remain available for temporary exhibitions, for small interventions, for pocket exhibitions, as we like to call them. Curators, artists, or representatives of a given culture can develop exhibitions in these spaces; they can also react quickly to social events and put together a lovely little exhibition within just a few months. That's of enormous importance for the Humboldt Forum! So alongside the Forum's main function there's also room for playfulness, for spontaneity. We need room to play!

**You spoke of recurrent elements. Are you referring to the visible storage displays?**

TV Yes, to these as well. Visible storage enables us to give visitors a glimpse behind the scenes and show things that they usually would never have an opportunity to see. As an exhibition designer, I find myself in the storage areas a lot. I see the unbelievable range of the inventory, and it's this diversity that we want to integrate into the Humboldt Forum as well. The visible storage cases can be used for presenting large numbers of objects which won't be exhibited more prominently on individual display. The visible storage



Harpoon tips, bone figures, and soapstone animals from Alaska remind Ventimiglia of his work with native communities.

will also be accessible for researchers, for example, featuring separate little niches so that scholars can remove objects and examine them. In the Humboldt Forum we'll be able to display many more objects than is currently possible in Dahlem.

**You said that the Humboldt Forum also addresses critical questions directly. The collections from Africa are particularly controversial. How do you intend to show this?**

TV In the Benin module we'll be exhibiting the famous Benin bronze reliefs ... **... that were pilfered by British troops after they invaded Benin in 1897, burning down the capital and the palace. The reliefs then made their way to Berlin on the art market ...**

TV The plaques will be hung one above the other in a grid pattern, much as they probably were in the palace. You'll also be able to see the queen mother here, an important figure in the history of this empire. On the other side of the wall, however, we'll be presenting a number of voices about the exhibit's history. Curators from Europe and Africa, historians, representatives of the kingdom of Benin, artists – all of them will have their say on the back wall of the room, which in reality is also the outer wall that maintains a relationship to the outside world. Here you can watch films or listen to recordings of various viewpoints concerning

**"From repatriation demands to the conflict surrounding art: everything is addressed, and everyone has their say."**

the collection, and you'll be able to learn more about the kingdom of Benin. The place itself exists to this day, as does its king, whose voice will also be heard. **Will the repatriation requests also be addressed?**

TV The conflict about the artworks? Of course. We'll hear Dr Peter Junge, who curated the module. We'll also hear the King of Benin. We address every issue. **The Berlin Palace was not originally designed to be a museum. How do the contents fit with the exterior?**

TV I don't ask the question of whether or not the palace should be reconstructed. As an architect, I do believe it is important that Berlin should make the most of a prestigious space in the heart of the city. But in what form? That's not a question for me to answer. My challenge was dealing with the great size of the building, the extent of the floor space, and the huge number of windows – that's not easy

when it comes to displaying thousands of sensitive objects. But then I saw the opportunity of using the windows as a way of making a point, with the potential of creating a symbolic reference to Berlin. Berlin, in my opinion, is a diverse city with many communities – over a hundred languages are spoken in the district of Neukölln alone. The Humboldt Forum needs this kind of reference point. We've put a great deal of effort into making it possible for the windows to be left symbolically "open" wherever that makes sense. The interior is actually a highly modern building – and also a very green building, by the way. It was designed to be very advanced.

**Let's imagine a child enters the foyer. How do you guide him or her through the exhibition?**

TV I imagine taking my own child by the hand. Five-year-olds don't read any of the texts, but their interest is sparked when they see representations of people. They like to touch things, and this is something they can do in a number of locations in the Humboldt Forum. We've very deliberately included areas aimed at children and young people, rather than simply hiding them in a side wing, as usually happens. The sections for young people are right in the middle of the action, including activity areas where they can do handicrafts or participate in drama productions. And of course, children can also climb aboard the famous catamaran from the South Pacific. As a father, I'm always looking for a central point, a fulcrum, where I can chat with my son and perhaps even do something together. Beforehand we were talking about discussions; it's my greatest goal to ensure that this dialogue takes place between parents and children, too. ■

# SECRET-SACRED OBJECTS

How do you exhibit objects that are so holy and so secret that the uninitiated aren't even allowed to see them?

The Humboldt Lab Dahlem is experimenting with new forms of presenting ritual objects from Australia.

Humboldt Forum

**T**HE INTERIOR of the glass display case shimmers softly. But there's nothing inside – perhaps only a sign reading: “Object removed for spiritual reasons.” Or might there be other, less radical solutions that can reconcile respect for sacred artefacts with the curiosity of today's museum visitors?

The ethnologists Markus Schindlbeck and Indra Lopez Velasco from the Ethnologisches Museum are collecting ideas that might answer the question of how secret/sacred objects should be exhibited in the Humboldt Forum. Such items include the decorated, flat stones collected by missionaries in Central Australia in the early twentieth century which made their way to European museums, even though they play a very special ceremonial role in Australia's indigenous culture. According to the beliefs of Australian Aboriginal people, these tjurunga – objects with etched or painted ornaments and patterns – preserve the spiritual aspects of their ancestors, myths, and legends.

## VESSELS FOR MYTHS AND LEGENDS

These holy and secret objects can only be viewed by the initiated and have to be protected from the uninitiated. According to the beliefs of some Australian First Peoples, the items can even pose a deadly threat to anyone who views them without authorization. This applied and still applies particularly to women.

This poses a fundamental problem for the ethnologists in Berlin: how can these artefacts be exhibited? The curator of the South Pacific and Australia Collection Markus Schindlbeck – now retired – decided fifteen years ago to remove these sacred Central Australian objects from the exhibition out of respect for their spiritual significance. In light of



Drawings and 3-D prints allow visitors to visualize secret/sacred objects – while respecting propriety.

Left: The sign reads “Object removed for spiritual reasons”. The display case is simulated and did not form part of the exhibition.

the approaching move to the Humboldt Forum, however, these exceptional objects are once again the focus of attention. Who decides whether knowledge remains a secret or whether it can be discussed and thus made public? Are the limits of what is sacrosanct up for negotiation?

In the case of the tjurunga, Indra Lopez Velasco, research assistant for the South Pacific and Australia Collection, won't be looking for answers to these questions all by herself; instead, she'll be engaged in a dialogue with the new curator Dorothea Deterts. There's already a pressing need for fresh scenarios, because a whole raft of decisions will soon have to be made. That's why Lopez Velasco and Schindlbeck used the Humboldt Lab Dahlem's Rehearsal Stage and experimented with different options for exhibiting ritual exhibits in the project series “[Open] Secrets”.

## ARTIFICIAL STONES OR NARRATIVES?

In display cases designed by the team from TheGreenEyl, the actual tjurunga were not presented. Instead they chose to show materials that symbolised them, creating stand-ins such as two adapted 3-D prints of palm-sized stones with spirals and circles. Computer-generated

objects allowed visitors to experience the sacred stones visually while respecting propriety. The exhibit was complemented by a number of beautiful and sensitive drawings of the stones.

Does the use of substitute stones merely represent a cunning way of getting around the prohibition? Might an empty display case and a text describing the stones not be a better alternative? While on an Australian research trip in the autumn of 2014, Lopez Velasco presented her project at the “Where do we go from here?” conference held at the Araluen Arts Centre in Alice Springs. One of the few Aboriginal participants on the podium during the concluding discussion was the politician Alison Anderson. She urged museums to enter into direct dialogue with the people of the regions where objects come from.

Lopez Velasco is currently seeking to exchange information with First Peoples in order to uncover who is responsible for the unique artefacts and how they can be handled with the respect they deserve. The foundations of this cooperative endeavour were laid by the “[Open] Secrets” project. ■

TEXT: CHRISTIANE MEIXNER  
PHOTO: FABIAN SCHUBERT

# THE HUMBOLDT FORUM IN FIGURES

ILLUSTRATION: JULIAN RENTZSCH

16

SCULPTURES  
will stand in the  
Schlüter Courtyard,  
including the Borussia,  
carved from a

14

tonne  
SANDSTONE BLOCK

How do you tie the

1.000

centimetre  
long and

4

centimetre wide  
Guatemalan  
HAIRBAND from  
the 1960s?

Of the

500,000

OBJECTS held by the Ethnologisches Museum,  
more than

10,000

will be  
exhibited in  
the Palace

9,000

cubic metres of  
SANDSTONE will be  
used to produce

2,900

DECORATIVE  
FAÇADE ELEMENTS  
including

100

CAPITALS

90

RAMS' HEADS

45

EAGLES

45

BUCRANIA

10

HERALDIC CARTOUCHES

5,558

is the  
estimated  
weight  
of the

13

-metre-long wooden  
MEN'S CLUBHOUSE  
WITH A LEAF ROOF  
from Palau

kilograms

The museum's most  
often-lent object, the  
BRONZE HEAD OF A  
QUEEN MOTHER from  
Benin, is from the

16th

century

A cloak of red and  
yellow sunbird feathers,  
presented as a gift  
by the Hawaiian King  
Kamehameha I in  
1828, has the highest  
insurance value

THE SUM IS A CLOSELY  
GUARDED SECRET

Of the

34,500

objects held by the  
MUSEUM FÜR  
ASIATISCHE KUNST,

3,000

will be on display in the  
Humboldt Forum

When unfolded,  
the TRAIPHUM  
MANUSCRIPT from  
Thonburi in Thailand  
measures

31.95

metres

“A quarter of a  
folded lotus blossom”

Is this the most poetic  
name for an object?  
Certainly it is the  
smallest throne

The PILGRIM'S  
SCULPTURE from China  
measures only

4.8 × 2.2 × 1.5

centimetres

3.5

million BRICKS are  
needed to construct the

22,500

square-metre  
FAÇADE

513

WINDOWS  
adorn the Palace

# IN MY FATHER’S HOUSE



More people than ever before are now refugees or no longer live in their home countries. Memories of the places they have left behind are constant companions. The author Sherko Fatah on the familiar and the foreign, and the fractures between the cultures.

**T**HE PLACE of my father’s ancestors is a house located near the Iranian border in the city of Sulaymaniyah in northern Iraq – or as the Kurds call it, southern Kurdistan. Like every city in the region, Sulaymaniyah has its own bazaar, and my family’s house is located right in the middle of it, surrounded by shops. It’s not easy to find, even though it’s near the entrance to the covered part of the market; only a small area in front and a narrow metal entrance gate can be seen from outside.

My father and his siblings grew up in this house. The family lived on the upper floor, reached by means of a stairway at the front of the building. On the ground floor there were a few more rooms, some of which were used to store goods. But when I came to the house as a child for the first time in 1969, an old man named Hassan lived in one of these, surrounded by great masses of brass plates, samovars, and metal tableware. He slept – sometimes even during the day – in the midst of these shiny metal household goods, and when the sun shone upon his copper face and hands, you could imagine that he, too, would eventually be transformed into a piece of metal.

This was my impression of him as a little boy, when I entered the bazaar and the courtyard in front of the house and had my first encounter with what we are now somewhat hesitant to describe as the “Orient”, even though in some respects it remains an appropriate term. Long before this moment, however, even before my father had set off on his journey to the “West”, he too had been a little boy living in this house. He romped around the bazaar, climbed up the fig tree in the courtyard, scrambled up to the clay roof, and every spring he watched as a man flattened out the rain-softened clay with a roller.

When I entered the house for the second time in the early 1970s, I was a young citizen of the GDR, only able to travel to such a distant country on account of his father’s background. Everything was so different: the school textbooks had a strange look to them, there was Western clothing, and all sorts of things were for sale. American cars that looked just like the ones in the movies rolled through the streets of Sulaymaniyah. And the presence of armed men spoke of upheaval and war – they walked the streets as if it

were the most normal thing in the world. Despite all this, as a child I hardly felt the strangeness; for me it was all familiar. No one could have told me that I had a split identity, that I existed somehow between different cultures. Things were different back in the GDR; Sulaymaniyah only seemed truly far away to me when I had returned to East Berlin. How was I supposed to tell people about all the wonders and oddities of a place when they themselves were not allowed to travel? Over the years I would visit this place many times, until my family finally gave up the house in the late 1980s.

The last time I was there was in November 2014. Like so many times before, the courtyard and house seemed so much smaller than they were in my memories. My father had died not two weeks earlier, having returned to Sulaymaniyah from Germany some twenty years previously. Not far from the house, in the same old quarter of the city, he lay now in a small freshly-dug grave. Outside in the bazaar, people pressed their way through the shops selling military goods, uniforms, boots, belts, and holsters. His journey had finally come to an end, I thought to myself, and the old house continues to stand. Not all that far away the war continues to rage. What else can I do if not tell a tale about it? ■

SHERKO FATAH, born in East Berlin in 1964, is the son of an Iraqi Kurd and a German mother. He was recently awarded the Berlin Art Prize as well as the Chamisso Prize for his sixth novel *Der letzte Ort* (The Final Place).

ILLUSTRATION: JULIAN RENTZSCH

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Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz  
Von-der-Heydt-Str. 16 – 18, 10785 Berlin

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PUBLISHING COMPANY  
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Ein Unternehmen des ZEIT Verlags  
Askanischer Platz 3, 10963 Berlin

REPRODUCTION  
Twenty4seven

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The Humboldt Forum magazine has been produced with the kind support of the Kuratorium Preussischer Kulturbesitz.

## Service

**Humboldt Box**  
Schlossplatz, 10178 Berlin

EXHIBITION  
Open daily: 10 am to 7 pm

WORKSHOP TALKS  
The workshop talks held every second Thursday of the month provide a glimpse into the planning process at the Humboldt Forum. Additional information at [www.humboldt-forum.de](http://www.humboldt-forum.de)

GUIDED TOURS  
Public tours take place every Friday and Sunday at 3 pm.

SPEAKERS  
On weekends as well as every Thursday and Friday from 2 pm to 6 pm, staff trained in art and cultural education welcome visitors to the exhibition areas and answer questions concerning all aspects of the Humboldt Forum.

**Dahlem Museums**  
(Ethnologisches Museum, Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Humboldt Lab Dahlem)  
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin  
Lansstraße 8, 14195 Berlin

OPENING TIMES  
Tuesday to Friday from 10 am to 5 pm  
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Closed Mondays

**Humboldt Lab Dahlem**  
The online publication “The Humboldt Lab Dahlem. Museum Experiments on the Way to the Humboldt-Forum” is available on the website [www.humboldt-lab.de](http://www.humboldt-lab.de), with 327 pages of texts and images from the online project documentation of the Humboldt Lab Dahlem (2012 – 2015).

T

THE PRE-COLUMBIAN STUDIES specialist Viola König and the Sinologist Klaas Ruitenbeek are currently working closely together on planning the Humboldt Forum. König has been director of the Ethnologisches Museum since 2001, whereas Ruitenbeek, who hails from Holland, has presided over the Museum für Asiatische Kunst since 2010. Their scholarly work is well known, but what is their own personal way of accessing the world, as Pierre Bourdieu might put it? Nine questions about idiosyncrasies.

#### 1. Travel destinations?

<sup>VK</sup> VIOLA KÖNIG Regular travel to Mexico, Alaska, and New Orleans. Unfulfilled dream destinations: Mongolia, Patagonia, Tierra del Fuego, and the Northwest Passage.

<sup>KR</sup> KLAAS RUITENBEEK Northern China's Loess Plateau. The region is bleak, dry, and full of grey towns and villages. It's a landscape depicted by film director Jia Zhangke.

#### 2. Most difficult exhibition project?

<sup>VK</sup> The visitor education programme for the special exhibition "Fest der Farben – Trachten und Textilien aus dem Hochland von Guatemala" (A Celebration of Colours – Traditional Costumes and Textiles from the Guatemalan Highlands) in 1981 in Cologne. At the same time the military government initiated a reign of massacres and genocide among the Mayan population.

<sup>KR</sup> "Gallery of Chinese Architecture", Toronto 2005. For eight weeks I had to supervise craftsmen from China. They needed to prime the surface with 200 litres of fresh pig's blood under the red varnish.

#### 3. Means of transportation?

<sup>VK</sup> Bicycle and ship.

<sup>KR</sup> Train.

#### 4. Favourite object?

<sup>VK</sup> With me things go in and out of fashion. After all, I can choose from among 500,000 objects.

<sup>KR</sup> A semi-cylindrical roof tile from the Han era (2,000 years ago), which was refashioned into an inkstone in the eighteenth century by a literary figure who was fascinated with antiquity.

#### 5. Greatest culinary challenge?

<sup>VK</sup> A banquet held by the Tzotzil in Chiapas, Mexico. They served boiled pork complete with the skin and bristles, and wrapped in corn husks.

<sup>KR</sup> Small whole turtles floating in broth.

#### 6. Wilhelm or Alexander?

<sup>VK</sup> To date, I've had more to do with Alexander.

## SUBTLE DIFFERENCES

Viola König & Klaas Ruitenbeek

<sup>KR</sup> Wilhelm. Language and literature led to my interest in Chinese art.

#### 7. Most admired historical developments?

<sup>VK</sup> The camera, the movie camera, and the audio recorder.

<sup>KR</sup> The invention of printing with "movable type" by Bi Sheng between AD 1041 and 1048 (Song Dynasty).

#### 8. Do you collect anything?

<sup>VK</sup> Only for my job. In the past I collected inspired kitsch, which I threw away every two years.

<sup>KR</sup> For the museum, yes. For myself just a few books.

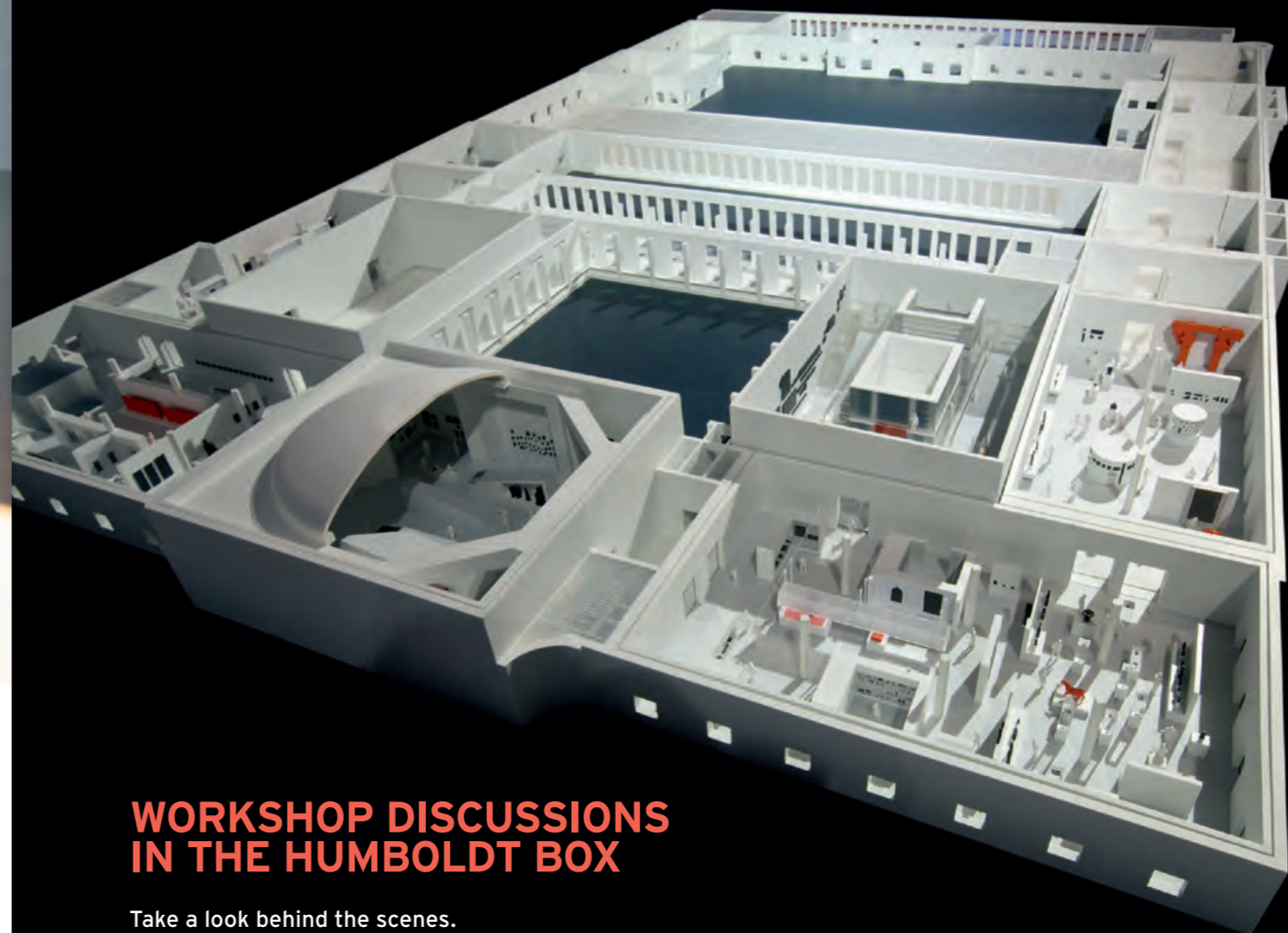
#### 9. Who would accompany you to the Humboldt Forum on the day it opens?

<sup>VK</sup> My dream would be to go with my deceased Berlin grandparents. They often spoke of their visits to the old Ethnological Museum near Potsdamer Platz. What would they have to say about this?

<sup>KR</sup> With my successor. ☹

QUESTIONS: INGOLF KERN PHOTO: FABIAN SCHUBERT

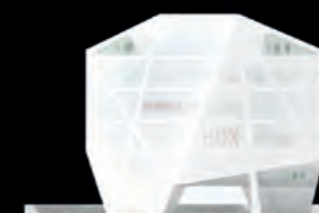
# MUSEUMS IN THE HUMBOLDT FORUM



## WORKSHOP DISCUSSIONS IN THE HUMBOLDT BOX

Take a look behind the scenes.

In our series of Workshop Discussions (every second Thursday in the month) you can learn firsthand from curators, designers and planners what is taking shape next door inside the Humboldt Forum. Talks in German, with broad-ranging exhibitions also for English speakers.



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The Humboldt Forum magazine was made possible by the generous support of

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SIEMENS

