



STIFTUNG
PREUSSISCHE SCHLÖSSER UND GÄRTEN
BERLIN-BRANDENBURG

25.08.2022

Additional Information Exhibition “Koloniale Kontext” (working title)

Berlin, Charlottenburg Palace, Duration: 4 Months (2023)

INTRODUCTION

The palaces and gardens of Berlin and Brandenburg carry histories of imperialism and colonialism that are still visible and tangible today. For the SPSG, the starting point of this exhibition is a continuous study of this past and its own collections. With the working title “Colonial Contexts”, the exhibition focuses on the involvement of courtly society and the monarchy in colonial structures and practices. Focusing on the objects and relevant biographies, the exhibition will focus on the continuities and changes in practices and power structures at the Prussian court from vantage points that are otherwise left out of dominant narratives. Which alternative histories—those that have been silenced, erased, forgotten, and not yet told—can be unearthed from the research, narratives, and historical framings we currently have?

WHY ARE WE CONCERNED WITH COLONIALISM IN THE PALACES?

Palaces are ideal sites for revealing power structures of a colonial past, as they are “authentic” settings that tangibly show history and culture. The colonial past of Prussia, and by extension of Germany, is told herein through a focus on particular structures and processes: the palace, the court, collecting of objects, and movement within a colonial context. Within contemporary discourses, we look at historical monuments to find an inherent contradiction between the preservation of historical objects and the aim to change the structures that have developed throughout history.

TRANSFORMATION PROCESS OF THE SPSG

It is high time to build on an ongoing internal transformation process. By collaborating with international partners, experts with varying perspectives, and representatives of non-governmental groups, we aim to work towards ‘decolonizing’ the SPSG. A cross-departmental steering group was set-up in November 2020, whose goal is to ensure that objects with colonial contexts are identified, researched, and the results permanently incorporated into the display of the palaces and collections. A provenance researcher, with a particular focus on researching the origins of these objects, assists the steering group in their research. The exhibition project was initiated by the steering group in order to question the established structures of the SPSG and develop the organisation’s approach to the experiences gained through the exhibition’s curatorial process.

This project is seen internally as a practical example of how the SPSG, a sizeable and complex organization, can develop as a cultural institution. This means that the results from this process carry the potential to have a long-term and sustainable effect on the work processes of the SPSG.

CONCEPTION

The conceptualization of this exhibition is realized through a process that is put together by a curatorial team. The exhibition is curated by three people who have all acknowledged their diverse expertise and different social backgrounds. They are thus delegating their responsibilities as per their skillsets: Knowledge of postcolonial theories and their application in museums; knowledge of the SPSG's collections and the art history of relevant objects; and knowledge of the representation of stereotypes and the collecting of “exotic” objects at the Prussian court. This naturally influences their experiences and opinions and they recognize the ensuing privilege that comes with these experiences and opinions. Furthermore, they accept the need to take this consideration into account within the curation of the exhibition.

The curatorial process should also consider different perspectives and approaches of local and international partners. Accordingly, the exhibition will be developed in exchange and with the participation of several “Expert Partners”. On this note, we are in contact with Postcolonial Potsdam, PAWLO e.V., VENROB e.V., BBAG e.V., Stiftung Asienhaus, Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland e.V., Afrika-Haus Berlin, der Korea Verband and korientation to establish a relationship for exchange and collaboration. As these partners are themselves working towards the ongoing attempt at decolonizing German history and heritage, we invited civil society actors to the curatorial process as “Expert Partners” or curatorial advisors. The Expert Partners joined the curatorial team for a series of workshops throughout Spring/Summer 2022 to discuss themes related to historical framing, colonial contexts, and some of the collections’ objects that will be on display in the exhibition in 2023. This exchange is an open-ended process in which we are engaged as an organization. The exhibition offers the possibility to observe the process and encourage visitors to participate in it.

MUSEUM COMMUNICATION

An interactive media station and a multimedia guide enable the digital participation of and low-threshold approach for visitors. The multimedia guide is not only bilingual, but also available in Simplified and Sign language. With a podcast series, publication, and a number of coordinated events, we use different mediation formats to address a wide range of target groups. In order to extend and differentiate access to the central themes of the exhibition, various groups of participants are invited to engage with the exhibition’s objects through these other media formats; for instance, through the podcast series.

COOPERATION WITH LOCAL PROJECTS

The planned program will be coordinated with an exhibition project planned for September 2023 by “Dekoloniale. Erinnerungskultur in der Stadt”, in institutional partnership with the Museum Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf. The exchange and cooperation with both actors is already established through joint meetings. Possible forms of mediation are being discussed that link the exhibition spaces in the Charlottenburg Palace and the Museum Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf, the exterior spaces of the palace, and the public space of Schlossstrasse in order to create an opportunity to engage with colonial structures and the memory of Berlin's colonial history. The intention is to involve other actors and institutions in the neighborhood in the discussion and to jointly realize educational offerings for children and young people.