

Andreas Etges, Viola König, Rainer Hatoum, Tina Brüderlin (eds.)

Northwest Coast Representations

New Perspectives on History, Art, and Encounters

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Andreas Etges

Introduction

This book is the result of numerous journeys, meetings, and exchanges, many of which took place long before any of the contributors were born. It connects the past, the present and the future, talks about tradition and change, and gives not one or two, but many different perspectives on »Northwest Coast Representations.«

For me, in contrast to all the others whose articles are published in this volume, this was a new journey, in a metaphorical, a spiritual, and a physical way. As a scholar of U.S. history I had never focused on the Northwest Coast, on its history or art until 2008. I still do not consider myself an expert, but in many ways I feel enriched by the many encounters with those who are true experts, by training, by heritage, or both, in Berlin and in North America; and by seeing and being touched by the history, the objects and the art of the Northwest Coast.

This volume came out of a joint research project of the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin and the John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies of Freie Universität Berlin. The two institutions are not divided by an ocean. They are literally just across the street from each other in a rather quiet part of Berlin. But there have been times of very little contact. And it was »people« and their »stories« who unknowingly initiated new bonds: Richard West, Jr., founding director of the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C., Stephen Inglis, who had a long and distinguished career at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, and Emmanuel Désveaux one of the founding curators of the Musée du quai Branly in Paris. Each presented and discussed the ideas, architecture and exhibitions of »their« respective institutions in a small and informal series of lectures at the Kennedy Institute. They made us once again aware of our joint interest in the people and the history, the culture and the arts of North America, and also in museums and exhibitions.

In 2007 the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) announced a new program with a focus on increasing the visibility of the humanities. One specific goal of the program was to strengthen the cooperation between museums and universities or research institutes. We decided to join forces and successfully applied for a three-year grant (2009-2012). Our research project titled »One History-Two Perspectives: Culturally specific modes of representation of the »exotic« other at the Pacific Northwest Coast« included funding for two scholars and a research assistant. And it enabled the team of five (Viola König, director of the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin; Peter Bolz,

recently retired curator of the museum's North American Indian collections, Rainer Hatoum, a scholar at the Ethnologisches Museum, Tina Brüderlin, who came to Berlin from New York's American Museum of Natural History, and Andreas Etges, then professor of North American history at the Kennedy Institute) to visit many museums, cultural centers, archives, galleries, etc. not only on the Northwest Coast, but also in Ottawa, on the East Coast, in Paris and in St. Petersburg, Russia. And it provided major funding to invite scholars and artists to Berlin and to finance a two-day conference at Berlin's Ethnologisches Museum and at the Kennedy Institute in the summer of 2011. The conference brought together scholars, museum and gallery curators, representatives of cultural centers as well as artists from both North America and Europe. The articles in this volume are based on contributions from the Berlin conference.

The research project had a special significance in a much larger endeavor the Ethnologisches Museum has been involved in, namely the move downtown into the reconstructed Prussian castle, the future Humboldt-Forum. For curators this move constitutes both a major challenge and a major opportunity in presenting ethnological objects in a new and innovative way. Historically, ethnological museums not just in Germany presented artifacts as relics of »authentic« but exotic cultures which were doomed to disappear. And even though many exhibits have changed over time, this might still be the idea of many visitors, partly because the large majority of objects on display tend to be rather old. The lack of funds to buy newer and modern objects is a major, but not the only explanation for this. The research project enabled key members of the museum staff and others to think more and more deeply about these and other issues of relevance to the whole museum. We did so by focusing on one of its truly outstanding collections, the famous Northwest Coast collection.

For a number of reasons, exhibiting the Northwest Coast in the new Humboldt-Forum will be different from how it is done in the many museums and cultural centers in North America we visited over several years, the smaller and the larger ones. And it will be different from another major new European museum, the Musée du quai Branly in Paris. In some ways each institution is unique, of course, because of its specific history as well as the history of its respective collection. And there are also very different ways of presentation and of curatorial work. The Humboldt-Forum will be in Germany, which has a colonial past, but none in which North America was involved. And not being in North America also means that different laws and traditions apply. While there are plans for many cultural events, this will not and cannot be a cultural center the way the National Museum of the American Indian or some of the other North American institutions define themselves. It will be a museum with many German and many international visitors, a majority of whom will be from Europe – a continent which is not part of the collections of the Ethnologisches Museum. The majority of the curators will not come from the source communities, and the respective exhibitions cannot be curated in close cooperation with all the groups from all over the world whose objects will be on display in the future Humboldt-Forum. In addition, political decisions and economic limitations have had an impact. In many ways, the new museum building will be a replica of the old

Prussian castle, making it far from an ideal space for the collection. So it is not a new museum build around a collection, but a museum that pretty much has to fit into a more or less given architecture and space.

Naturally, there are also a number of advantages. Moving the Ethnologisches Museum to a much more central location in Germany's capital will not only mean many more visitors but also a much broader recognition of its many magnificent objects. They will then be displayed in close vicinity to the five museums of museum island, a UNESCO world heritage site, where people line up to see the bust of Nefertiti, the Ishtar Gate from the city of Babylon, or the Pergamon Altar. And the objects of the Ethnologisches Museum do deserve to be showcased in this central location. How exactly this will be done, is, like the building itself, »in the making.«

The project's task was to »rethink contemporary exhibition practices, and to develop alternatives for new modes of presentation at the Humboldt-Forum with the active involvement of indigenous representatives,« Viola König writes. As director of the Ethnologisches Museum she has been playing a key role in what the Humboldt-Forum will look like on the inside. In her article she not only gives a brief overview over the project idea, and the project's development, but also talks about some preliminary results. The fact that she devotes much space to the words of some of those who made the project special, namely the artists, can be read as an indication to what degree other voices and perspectives shall be heard.

She also touches on a number of issues that many of the other authors also discuss. The distinction between what is traditional and what is modern, or rather the questioning of a clear-cut differentiation along these lines. That is connected to the theme of »change,« which several authors emphasize. The people of the Northwest Coast, their environment, their culture, and their art were never frozen in time, but were always changing. That ties into the idea, again brought up by many of the authors, of how the past, the present, and the future are connected, that they cannot be separated. And, this being an early result of the research project: »two« perspectives will not suffice. Again and again the contributors insist on multiple perspectives. There is a multitude of voices that should be included, but how can alternative readings of museum collections be incorporated into contemporary exhibitions? And how, with limited funds to buy new objects, can it be shown that the people and the cultures of the Northwest Coast are still alive and not only that: that they have been changing?

By looking at the collection in Berlin, by describing experiences from museums and exhibition projects they have been working on, and by looking at the ever changing art market, the contributors do give some answers. These answers are not simple ones, in some ways they even complicate the task at hand for those involved in the future Humboldt-Forum. And that's, I would argue, is how it should be.

In a very dense and rich article Rainer Hatoum first takes another look at the Berlin Northwest Coast Collection before focusing on one of its subcollections, the one compiled by Franz Boas. With regard to issues of cultural translations he stresses the point, that this collection, just like most others, has itself to be regarded as a complex cultural object and as a limited »vocabulary.« The analysis has shown that it contains many a »word« the

meaning of which is quite complex while in other cases they might be ambiguous if not questionable; in any case a vocabulary that does not warrant an easy »reading« or »translation« of »cultural Others.«

Through archival research and extensive trips to the Northwest Coast, Tina Bröderlin uncovered new information on the protagonists involved in the genesis and biography of the Tlingit and Haida Collections at the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin which she presents in her piece. The essence of an object is sometimes not visible to the eye, she argues, and »human-object interrelations« need to be renewed and reclaimed.

Martha Black looks at the process of transferring museum objects to a First Nation through treaty and the profound consequences for the make-up and management of the museums' collections as well as the way they are conceptualized.

Stephen Inglis describes the fascinating history and the challenges of Aanischaaukumikw Cree Cultural Institute. We have chosen to include this one example from outside the Northwest Coast, to give a counterbalance with regard to the importance of material culture from the perspective of one of the most recently opened »native« institutions.

Karen Duffek looks at the place of contemporary art in ethnology museums by discussing two recent exhibition projects, one of which was shown in Satellite Gallery, an experimental project space that the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia has been involved in. She argues that ethnology museums can act as potential border zones where the intersections of different art forms and competing knowledge systems are supported and revealed.

The articles by Aldona Jonaitis, Jennifer Kramer and Gary Wyatt focus on Northwest Coast art, exhibitions, and the art market. Discussing the »canon and beyond,« Jonaitis emphasizes the importance of encounters – historic and current – for change and she concludes: »all contemporary art, in all its different forms, deserves a place in the narrative of Northwest Coast art history.«

Jennifer Kramer recalls a special exhibition she curated which was dedicated to the remarkable Doug Cranmer, whom she considers a truly »indigenous modern artist.«

Gary Wyatt, cofounder of the Spirit Wrestler Gallery in Vancouver, takes a look at the history and development of the Northwest Coast Art Market. He not only touches on the changing art and art market, the use of new materials like glass, bronze and aluminum, but he also describes the growing relationship between Maori artists in New Zealand and artists from the Northwest Coast.

The members of the project team in their articles not only give voice to but also do thank all those people on both sides of the Atlantic (quite a number of the latter actually more correctly on the Pacific Coast) who supported our project in so many different and significant ways. I wholeheartedly agree. And in addition I would like to thank all those at both institutions in Berlin, without whom neither the research project itself nor this volume could have been realized. Our research assistants Pia Herzan, Kathrin Neitz, and Ulrike Stednitz were a great support throughout the 3,5 years of the project. Hans Anders, Jasmin Heermann, and Ulrike Stednitz deserve praise for a fantastic job in helping us

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Viola König

»One History – Two Perspectives«: A Research Project on Culturally Specific Modes of Representation of the ›Exotic Other‹ at the Pacific Northwest Coast

In many ways, the collection of the Ethnologisches Museum mirrors the intercultural phenomena of a world growing together. Our academic work as well as our exhibitions at the museum thus focus on the changing narrative perspectives and on the diversity of the voices within them. The extensive collections of the American Pacific Northwest Coast lend themselves particularly well to researching these complex »histories.« They were brought to Berlin in large parts in the latter half of the nineteenth century in order to create an overview of the peoples supposedly about to become extinct. The collections constitute an ideal basis for developing new forms of presentation in cooperation with artists, artist initiatives and the source communities, who have access to the active local networks. The collections were the focus of the research project »One History – Two Perspectives.« The project was born as part of the reflections on a new concept for presenting the current collections of the Ethnologisches Museum in the future Humboldt-Forum. It was conducted jointly with the John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies at Freie Universität Berlin between 2009 and 2012. When we submitted the proposal for the research project, we emphasized its potential for being used in the future design of the Humboldt-Forum.¹ We envisioned a pilot module, which would incorporate the voices of First Nation cultural experts and artists and provide a new focus on the topic of the transcontinental »cultural gateway« Europe – Northwest Coast – Asia.

The Background of the Collections

The future Humboldt-Forum will unite anthropological collections from Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas that are mostly historical and were brought to Berlin in the last third of the nineteenth century. The objects, which were assembled by German collectors, were viewed as relics of »authentic« cultures doomed to perish. The European cultures were quickly penetrating all continents, and these cultures – which in the eyes of these ethnologists mirrored nothing less than the origin of humanity – were to be preserved



Image 1 Nulis transformation mask, Kwakwaka'wakw, British Columbia, Canada; collection Adrian Jacobsen 1881, Ethnologisches Museum, Berlin, Inv.-No. IV A 1243. Photo: Martin Franken (see also Plate 10)



Image 2 Nulis transformation mask opened Inv.-No. IV A 1243. Photo: Martin Franken

Image 3 Box with lid showing several zoomorphic motives, including raven. Haida Gwaii, British Columbia, Canada. Collection Adrian Jacobsen 1881, Ethnologisches Museum, Berlin, Inv.-No. IV A 800. Photo: Martin Franken



for scientific research. With this purpose in mind, Adolf Bastian, founding director of the *Berliner Museum für Völkerkunde*, the Berlin Museum for Ethnology, sent a number of collecting scientists into the world, where they met competitors with identical or similar purposes from Europe and North America. It was the time of the establishment of the great university and ethnology museums, and the competition for the best pieces had begun.

This process has been particularly well documented for the indigenous cultures at the American Pacific Northwest Coast, that is the Tlingit, Haida Gwaii, Kwakwaka'wakw, Nootka, Bella Coola, and Salish. Adrian Jacobsen (1881-83), the brothers Adrian and Aurel Krause (1881), Paul Schulze (1882), and the famous German »founder of American anthropology« Franz Boas (1887) counted among the most prolific collectors, commissioned by the Berlin Museum for Ethnology. Within a short period of time, these collectors as well as others who did not share their academic background, such as Norwegian Captain Adrian Jacobsen, were able to collect about 2,500 objects at the American Pacific Northwest Coast and brought them to Berlin.²

According to Canadian author Douglas Cole, American museums were worried that their own indigenous cultures would soon be sold out to Europe.³ These collecting expeditions, as well as the early days of tourism, had a direct impact on the production of indigenous material culture on the Northwest Coast as the supply of existing, old pieces was limited. Hence, new objects were produced with the purpose of selling them to the foreigners. Both anonymous and renowned carvers and artists supplied these objects, selling masterpieces as well as the »curios,« early tourist art.

Notwithstanding the predictions of the nineteenth century, the indigenous groups did not become extinct, but actually grew continuously in the second half of the twentieth century. Despite the forced proselytization of the Canadian groups, in particular in the 1920s, Indian traditions have survived and are being lived actively in the communities. The old collections in North American and European museums serve as illustrative examples both for contemporary indigenous artists and for the production of artefacts in

feasts and ceremonies, such as the »potlatch.«⁴ The old collections may be mute witnesses of forceful submission and cultural appropriation, yet indigenous groups recognize that these museums house objects that otherwise might have been destroyed or that would have disappeared. These objects have to be brought to life, ideally in the presence of members of the source communities, curators, and scholars.

In light of future projects at the Humboldt-Forum and based on the collection at the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin, specifically its Northwest Coast collection, our research project had several goals:

- to rethink contemporary exhibition practices, and to develop alternatives for new modes of presentation at the Humboldt-Forum with the active involvement of indigenous representatives
- to search for new ways of translating the »Exotic Other«, and to enrich the conventional forms of museum work
- to research complex »(hi)stories« of a world growing together and
- to cooperate with artists, artist initiatives, and communities in the region, the so-called source communities, to support local networks.⁵

In line with these goals, we set out to analyze the economic, social, cultural, as well as artistic contexts of the contact period of the Northwest Coast since the eighteenth century and to examine the different »contact cultures.« We not only included »indigenous cultures«, but also – and purposefully – other trade cultures which impacted the region in this process, such as the *terms of trade* of Asian trade cultures. Our particular focus was the incorporation of the Northwest Coast into the transpacific and global merchandise trade since the early colonial era. In this context, we were interested in the role of curiosities (»curios«) and the souvenir culture. Since the very beginning, not just American, but also Asian intermediaries and agents had played an important role in the distribution and merchandise of indigenous art and craftwork.

Another point of focus of the research project was to trace the development of museum ethnology since the end of the nineteenth century as well as to map the development of modern »ethnic« art markets in the second half of the twentieth century, that traded both old art and replicas as well as modern art.

The five scholars of the Ethnologisches Museum and the John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies who were involved in the project⁶ furthermore set out to digitize the objects and to thus make them globally accessible, as well as to find complementary sources in American archives. Mostly, though, they sought to expand the relationships with the indigenous communities on the Northwest Coast.



Image 4 Tlingit Artist Nathan Jackson at the Edwin C. DeWitt Carving Center in Saxman, Ketchikan, Alaska. Photo: Viola König (see also Plate 12)

Cooperating with Representatives of the Cultures of Origin in Canada and Alaska

The main focus of our research project was to exchange information with representatives of the cultures of origin (source communities). We sought to identify their perspectives through long-term cooperation with artists, cultural and political activists, local museums and cultural institutions. Considering different – and contrasting – interpretations of the collections in Berlin by the descendants of their producers, as well as their political dimensions, means to accept equality and self-determination, and is thus a presentation of the collections on a level playing field. Our trips to the American Northwest Coast were reciprocated by visits of Indian artists Nathan and Steven Jackson (2010, image 4), Donny Varnell (2010), Nicholas Galanin (2011), Dempsey Bob and Norman Jackson (2012) from British Columbia and Alaska.

It was both necessary and enlightening to cooperate with local, non-Indian colleagues. Peter Macnair, curator emeritus of the *Royal British Columbia Museum* in Victoria, Aldona Jonaitis, director emerita of the *Museum of the North* at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks,

Gary Wyatt, curator at the renowned *Spirit Wrestler Gallery* in Vancouver, and others enriched the examination of the Berlin collections. Drawing on their long familiarity with the material culture of the Northwest Coast, they entered into a deep exchange of ideas with the members of the research project and the Indian guests. Representatives of both groups were invited to participate at an international symposium in Berlin.

The International Symposium »One History – Two Perspectives: Exhibiting the Northwest Coast in the Future Humboldt-Forum«

On June 16 and 17, 2011, thirteen internationally renowned scientists, curators, gallery owners, and indigenous artists from the Canadian and Alaskan Northwest Coast followed the invitation by the Ethnologisches Museum and the John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies at Freie Universität Berlin and came to Berlin-Dahlem (image 5). They discussed the challenges and the opportunities presented by the review of the collections of the American Northwest Coast, as well as their exhibition in the Humboldt-Forum (currently the most important museum project in Germany). This conference was the first of its kind to be dedicated to a regional collection of the Ethnologisches Museum and to its academic review. Together, we entered into the much-postulated dialogue between international museums, academic institutions, indigenous artists and representatives of the societies of origin to re-evaluate the Berlin collections of the Northwest Coast.

A final panel discussion summed up the talks. The project coordinators, Andreas Etges and Viola König, were joined in the discussion by Gerald McMaster, curator at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Gary Wyatt, curator at the Spirit Wrestler Gallery in Vancouver, as well as Martin Roth, former general director of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, which had hosted a »potlatch« in the spring of 2011. The active and lively participants of the symposium discussed the complexity and the particular challenges connected with the presentation of old collections and contemporary art in museums, as well as the merchandise of indigenous art and the demands for emancipation and alternative forms of reappropriating their cultural heritage by indigenous groups.

It turned out that the indigenous representatives placed a much larger emphasis on the accessibility of the collections in European exhibitions, and not so much on their presentation. The German participants were surprised to learn how little intercultural exchange exists beyond the borders between British Columbia and Alaska. The symposium thus provided a forum to establish those contacts.

Preliminary Insights and Results

Having – most importantly, physical – access to the collections thus emerged as the central concern for the representatives of the indigenous groups. This means that it is not

Image 5 Announcement of the international symposium »One History – Two Perspectives: Exhibiting the Northwest Coast in the future Humboldt-Forum« showing the motive of an eagle mask. Nootka, British Columbia, Canada. Collection Adrian Jacobsen 1881, Ethnologisches Museum, Berlin, Inv.-No. IV A 1277



enough for museums to digitize their collections and to guarantee open access online. The future Humboldt-Forum will thus provide more access to the extensive collections of the Ethnological Museum than was hitherto the case at the Dahlem location. However, this is of limited use for indigenous communities in the countries of origin, who seek to revive their cultural traditions and who are searching for their roots. The only way for both sides to cooperate effectively is when the Berlin objects are loaned to the indigenous communities, which in some cases can even include their use. The loan may be reciprocated by sending newer objects from the communities to Berlin – this will be determined on a case-by-case basis. These objects could then be presented in the Humboldt-Forum according to the stipulations of the Indian artists. Of course, special attention will have to be paid to their conservation. Nobody – neither on the Northwest Coast nor in Berlin – would want to see these precious objects put at risk by improper handling. In order to satisfy the different demands, an exchange of objects between Berlin and the Northwest Coast ought to be made possible. We will seek to reinforce the sustainability of this relationship by continuing mutual visits.

The Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden have taken such a step between April and August of 2011, when they hosted two »potlatches« in the U'mista Cultural Centre in Alert Bay, British Columbia, Canada, and in the Kunsthalle in Dresden's Lipiusbau. This was a one-time cooperation, though, and exposed the limits of feasibility.

In anticipation of the development of an exhibition module to be realized in seven or more years at the Humboldt-Forum, the »Nulis Mask,« which was collected by

Adrian Jacobsen in British Columbia in 1881, enjoys a special presentation at the newly opened Humboldt-Box on the grounds of the old Berlin Palace. (images 1, 2) For conservation reasons, the Humboldt-Box exhibits a replica, which represents the Indian perspectives of the Kwakwaka'wakw in its contemporary context. An unexpected visit on March 25, 2012, of a great grandson of its maker, the artist Cary Newman, proved that word has spread on the Northwest Coast of the original's existence in Berlin. Newman explained the meaning and the history of the mask to his daughter: It has a spiritual meaning, and those who wear the masks and who dance in trance at the beat of the drums at the potlatch ceremonies will be strong enough to lift the logs that block the river of wealth. The bear head at the top is part of the family legend. If the front part of the mask is opened, bear claws and an orca's set of teeth appear in its interior. At the dedication ceremony of his house this dance was performed, Newman elaborated, and suddenly a gray whale and an orca appeared together, which normally never happens – »the ceremonies worked.«⁷ Fortunately, this mask is presented as part of the permanent exhibition at the Ethnologisches Museum and is thus permanently accessible. Other objects, on the other hand, are in storage. The Humboldt-Forum will be well-advised to consult with the living descendants of the object's makers on the selection of the objects.



Image 6 »Frog on top of pipe«, Haida Gwaii, British Columbia, Kanada.
Collection Adrian Jacobsen 1881, Ethnologisches Museum, Berlin, Inv.-No. IV A 797.
Photo: Martin Franken



Image 7 »Rooster rattle«, Haida Gwaii, British Columbia, Canada. Collection Adrian Jacobsen 1881, Ethnologisches Museum, Berlin, Inv.-No. IV A 766.
Photo: Martin Franken

Comments by Indian Artists and their Impressions and Impulses

Numerous conversations among the Indian artists both back on the Northwest Coast and following visits of the Berlin collections focused on the deficits of the presentation in its current state. The fact that contemporary artists emphasize the importance of expanding our collections should not surprise us. But how would they, and this was our question, integrate these objects into the Humboldt-Forum? The internationally renowned Tlingit artist Nathan Jackson emphasized in August of 2010:

It was a rare and good opportunity to come to Berlin for which I am grateful. I am delighted to have met the whole staff which works on the project and was happily surprised that interpreters were not needed. It was a good working community and I am pleased with the devotement of everyone.

I found a couple of unusual and interesting pieces in the collection: a rooster rattle (image 7), a thunderbird bowl, a canoe attributed to Capt. Carpenter. I prefer items which were used for a certain purpose. [...] I have never seen an argillite pipe like the one in storage. It has a »little hat«, possibly a ceremonial head, and looked like a bear, a 2D-design. The pipe (image 6) should be shown from underneath as well, as it has nice carving on the bottom. »Frog on top of pipe«: put a mirror underneath it to show art work. – An unusual piece (image 2), a mask with wings spread out; I have never seen before. It does stand out. [...] The bear costume stands out as well.

It reminded me of the one in the Curtis film »In the Land of the Head Hunters.« Bear costumes are rare and powerful in historic ways; mostly there are only masks left.

His son, Steven Jackson, added to his remarks:

In general, it is useful to try to stretch people's preconception. I have already made pieces which resemble some objects of the collection (e.g. the bear costume). I do have respect for the Curtis film and work with fur. However, one has to be careful not to romanticize reality in general and especially in films. I strongly dislike these romanticized descriptions and illustrations. [...] Show the objects you have as art. Display contemporary artists who have a timeless past together. Different objects should be portrayed differently. In general, you should use more contemporary art, more prints if your budget allows it.

And Haida artist Donny Varnell contributed:

Most interesting pieces are a pole, a beaver head dress: carving, an argillite family scene with wife missing her head – a European scene. – To show art: Less is more. I would keep objects in the back, i.e. the collection. The rooster rattle bridges ideas. – After a while objects become repetitive and all start to look the same like horn spoons. Therefore use single examples rather than quantity.

After visiting the Berlin collection in March of 2012 the Canadian Tahltan Tlingit artist Dempsey Bob (image 9) commented:

My approach differs every time. It depends what ideas influence me or if I get inspired by the wood which I am about to use for my carving. I am inspired by the work of my ancestors and the design and technique they have used. I am especially amazed by the accurate carving technique and creativity. I strongly believe that a true artist keeps learning throughout his lifetime, otherwise he would repeat himself.

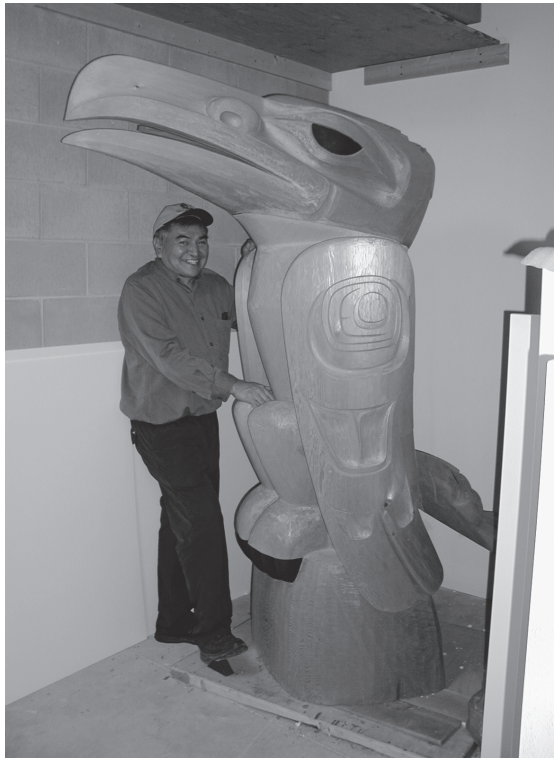
It is more important to be able to see actual objects, rather than just looking at photos published in books. Only by looking at the real object you will be able to understand it fully. I was surprised, for example, at the sizes of some of the objects, as they differed from my perceptions from seeing the photos of the collection.

I have made about 700 pieces so far, it gets harder as I continue. [...] Innovation originates from tradition: Art was built from culture. Art comes from the land. While young artists of my community relate to European art history, European modern artists have stolen ideas from my people. By following western ideas of art, native artists lose the freedom to create what they feel is right, they get pushed into something that is not their own and thereby lose their freedom. Native American culture is rich and creative. But Europeans still do not recognize African, Pacific Island or Native American Art as true art, as they separate art from culture. [...]

Image 8 Mask from a Skagway gallery, Alaska. The style and painting of the supposedly »Tlingit mask« suggests a production on Bali, Indonesia. Photo: Viola König (see also Plate 11)



Image 9 Taltan-Tlingit artist Dempsey Bob and his partly finished Raven sculpture in a hangar of the Vancouver International Airport, 2005. The work was to be presented at the entrance hall. Photo: Viola König (see also Plate 13)



Native American Art in Canada was outlawed until the 1950s. The new wave of Native American Northwest Coast artists like me rebelled against the Canadian government that denied them of their culture. Artists have to learn and push for new ideas. But it is important that you become a master first, before starting to innovate. You have to truly master your skills. Only then can you become a master for the future generations to come and only then have you earned the right to innovate, to follow your intuition. However, it is very important that art has to evolve, otherwise art is going to die. I believe it is a great idea to integrate artists in the process of choosing and exposing the objects in Humboldt-Forum, given that they have a different perspective.

All artists agreed on the value of the old Northwest Coast collection, yet all artists firmly held the opinion that the Humboldt-Forum would have to host contemporary objects as well. Their comments furthermore showed that their selection which objects should be presented did not necessarily match the decisions of the museologists. As artists, they naturally applied aesthetic criteria. It is thus the challenge for the curators and planners of the Humboldt-Forum to translate these criteria, together with the anthropological questions, into a convincing concept.

Many Histories – Multiple Perspectives: Transpacific Contacts Today

Indian artists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries produced for North American and European collectors and tourists. But even then, supply and demand were anything but static. Mass demand, as it happened during the Klondike gold rush in 1897 increased production, with a decline in quality in the same vein. Intermediaries, many of whom came from Asia, and indigenous production sites were changing. To this day, the Asian market produces replicas en masse for the cruise-ship tourists from North and South America, Australia, and Europe, who buy these replicas on their short shore leaves. Differences in quality are enormous. But the commercial »Asia connection« leads not only to China, but to Bali in Indonesia as well. Entire villages devote themselves to the production of world art, including the production of totem poles, masks, and other craftwork in the style of the Pacific Northwest Coast. The Balinese themselves have a long tradition of carving, and they produce both good and poor replicas, and change the style of the masks and the heraldic animals of the Northwest Coast. Especially the eagle and the thunderbird are very similar in their specifics to the Indonesian garuda (image 8).

For over 15 years now, artists on the Northwest Coast have participated in a very fruitful exchange of experiences with their colleagues from New Zealand. For this reason, the Ethnological Museum has submitted a project proposal with the Federal Ministry for Education and Research that would allow to bring Balinese carvers into direct contact with indigenous artists on the Northwest Coast. Both white and Asian intermediaries

continually try to prevent such a meeting. At best, the exchange between Northwest Coast artists and Balinese carvers will be as fruitful as the continuing exchange with the New Zealand artists. A Northwest American artist, Nicolas Galanin, has been focussing on Balinese mask art for a long time and has used it in his works, not as a »reappropriation« of his own, but as an »appropriation« of foreign art. Galanin also provided the Ethnologisches Museum's first art video. The first video in the 2006 installation »Tsu Heidei Shugaxtutaan part 1 and 2« shows a contemporary break-dance performance inspired by a traditional Indian Soundtrack (performance by David Elsewhere). In the second video, an electronic beat sounds at the steps of a traditional dance (performed by David Littlefield). The music and the dances of these antithetic performances provoke the question: What is modern, and what is traditional?

The artists desire that both contemporary art and the movements of global art markets are put into the context of their traditional roots – and not a one-sided, historically romanticizing display of their culture.

Notes

- 1 The research project »One History – Two Perspectives: A research project on culturally specific modes of representation of the 'Exotic Other' at the Pacific Northwest Coast« was a joint research project by the Ethnologisches Museum of the National Museums of Berlin and the John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies at Freie Universität Berlin. It was funded through a grant by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, and was conducted from March 2009 till September 2012.
- 2 Cf. König, Viola (2009). (Ein)Sammeln, (Ab)Kaufen, (Aus)Rauben, (Weg)Tauschen – Zeitgeist und Methode ethnographischer Sammlungstätigkeit in Berlin. In: Bärnreuther, Andrea and Peter-Klaus Schuster (eds.) *Zum Lob der Sammler. Die Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin und ihre Sammler*, Berlin, pp. 286-306; König, Viola (2011). Einführung. In: König, Viola (ed.) *Deutsche im Nordpazifik. Beiträge zur Entdeckung und Erforschung des nordpazifischen Raumes: Aurel Krause. Die Tlinkit-Indianer. [...]*, Hildesheim, VII-XXVII.
- 3 Cf. Cole, Douglas (1985). *Captured Heritage: The Scramble for Northwest Coast Artifacts*, Seattle, p. 37f.
- 4 On the American Northwest Coast, »potlatches« were celebrations in which presents were distributed. They were conducted on special occasions and had to be reciprocated.
- 5 Anthropologists tend to use the unpleasant word »source communities«, which reifies a living community.
- 6 The group of scholars consisted of Viola König, Peter Bolz, and Rainer Hatoum, all from the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin, and Andreas Etges and Tina Brüderlin from the John F. Kennedy Institute.
- 7 Binder, Elisabeth (2012). Das Erbstück seines Stammes. In: *Der Tagesspiegel*, March 26, 2012.