



Ethnographical Museums today

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Ethnographical Museums were first opened during the colonial era to introduce Europeans to the people living and working in the colonies. These museums served a very practical purpose: they prepared colonial civil servants, travellers and merchants for their encounters with peoples who were, in the eyes of their colonial masters, totally different as well as much more primitive than the "civilized", "advanced" citizens of central Europe. As scientific institutions the museums tried to explain this world order, thus legitimizing the colonial project.

After the end of the Second World War more and more colonies attained their independence, but for ethnographic museums time seemed to stand still. Familiar, seemingly timeless ideas of "them and us" were abandoned only reluctantly, and they were not seriously questioned until the 1980s. This so-called crisis of ethnographic representation started a process of change unlike any seen in other museum genres. The Ethnographic Museum in Vienna had clearly overstayed its welcome as a "how to" for "exotic peoples".

Speaking about others and judging them was replaced by questioning our own models and worldview, and involving the peoples in question in museum work. The new catchphrase was "inclusion", and soon museums tried to establish cooperative partnerships with their collections' countries of origin.

This is the context in which the renamed Weltmuseum Wien began in 2013 to position itself as a meeting place where Vienna (and Austria) and the world could interact - the new installation of the permanent collection focuses on all the connections with the world inherent in the collections. Inclusion here means a diversity of voices. Wherever possible, we have tried to incorporate voices from the countries of origin as well as those of international colleagues and representatives of the relevant diasporas living in Vienna. Controversial views are welcome. Because the Weltmuseum Wien no longer wants to speak as an institution that proclaims a general, apparently objective truth but instead aims to show how knowledge evolves, and who is involved in this process.

The question of how the collections were acquired plays a pivotal role in the new positioning of the Weltmuseum Wien. The discussions about the Humboldtforum in Berlin have clearly shown that scholarship now focuses on subjects like provenance research and colonialism, and that this discourse will be publicised by the media. The Weltmuseum Wien focuses on these questions in the gallery *In the Shadow of Colonialism*; here we look at the colonial history of the collections and document how these questions have changed how museums function and display their artefacts.

But a discussion of colonialism is also highly relevant for today: colonialism has radically changed our world, and its repercussions continue to be felt. Modern globalisation and migration would not be possible without colonialism and its consequences. The gallery *World in Motion* focuses on these subject matters, documenting that migration is an integral part of what it means to be human.



Combining historical collections with contemporary socio-political questions is undoubtedly among the most important tasks of an ethnographic museum, and introducing a diversity of voices is a vital element in the effort to break an institution's prerogative of interpretation.