

StrawGold – Cultural Transformations Rendered Visible

As of 25 October 2014 (permanent exhibition)

Jewellery made of straw or PET bottles; a Bavarian dirndl tailored from African Waxprints. The new permanent exhibition *StrawGold* at the Museum der Kulturen picks up on a fascinating topic, namely, the processes of cultural appropriation and transformation that impact on everyday life and culture in many, often unexpected ways. *StrawGold* – a multi-faceted, aesthetic and surprising survey with truly transformative potential.

In ikat dyeing old bicycle tubes are used for tying off cloth; bulky waste is turned into durable goods, and refuse is “reincarnated” in fashionable design items. Across the globe materials, technologies, objects, knowledge as well as artistic, religious and political concepts are often passed on, absorbed and woven into new life contexts, underlining that cultural transformation constitutes a constant in all societies. The exhibition *StrawGold* is grouped into ten galleries, each one addressing a different theme but always involving cultural entanglement and transformation. The show pays homage to human imagination and creativity which becomes manifest in cultural diversity, singularity and versatility.

Straw or Gold?

It is a matter of perspective whether one views something as valuable or valueless, as straw or gold. A single item can be refuse and workable material at the same time. The title *StrawGold* makes reference to this kind of transvaluation. The exhibition shows that across the world everyday culture never became standardized despite the misgivings uttered by many observers. On the contrary, creative processes unfolding in different places in the world and involving diverse actors ensure that foreign cultural goods keep finding their way into the everyday life of cultures around the world. Ultimately, real and virtual interdependences spanning the continents are the guarantors of the heterogeneity, variety and versatility of our human heritage.

The Museum as a Source of Transformation

That dealing with objects from other cultures can be an inspiration is borne out by prominent examples: in the early twentieth century innovative artists such as Pablo Picasso and others discovered in anthropological collections new formal languages, thus providing groundbreaking stimuli to the development of modern art. Periodically *StrawGold – Cultural Transformations Rendered Visible* features works by artists from Basel and other parts of Switzerland which were inspired by ethnographic artefacts held in the museum.

We begin with *Tanz der Demas* (1983) by Lenz Klotz. It was in the winter of 1945 that the young art student Lenz Klotz enrolled in the course “Drawing in the Museum” and thus became acquainted with the Museum of Ethnography, as the Museum der Kulturen was then called. A few years later, after becoming an art teacher, he himself took over the course at the museum, a task he kept up for the next thirty

years with great commitment and enthusiasm. His engagement with the ethnographic world is reflected in the structure, formal language and colour design of many of his works. Along with his own oeuvre, his drawing courses at the museum influenced and inspired generations of young artists.

Besides Lenz Klotz the exhibition also features the project *21 – Memories of Growing Up* by Mats Staub. For this venture the artist spoke with six people from Basel about their memories of the year they turned twenty-one and what growing up meant for them. Three months later he met them again, played them the recordings of their accounts and filmed them in the process. The video installation thus portrays the narrators as listeners of their own memories. Watching people reflect on their own life creates a very intimate moment. They not only share with us their individual experiences but also trace an arc that spans the generations. *21* is a long-term project that has been ever growing since 2012, from venue to venue. Meanwhile the corpus already includes ninety portraits, with the oldest person looking back on the year 1938, the youngest on 2011. The expanding collection of personal portraits provides a remarkable sound and picture archive of the last and current centuries. In keeping with the motto of ongoing change, two exhibition galleries will be rearranged twice a year in collaboration with different partners for the purpose of addressing additional themes or to examine particular aspects of the exhibition in more detail. In special workshops visitors are given the opportunity to create something new from a commonplace item. Thus *StrawGold* not only reflects on the dynamics of on-going change, it also brings out the museum's potential as a source of inspiration and transformation.