

# Museum der Kulturen Basel

## In Full View

**"In Full View" is a series of events in which museum staff will be working on their projects while members of the public look on. Workstations are to be moved into an exhibition space where staff will be available to answer questions from the public at any time. 7 May is the starting date.**

"Dambana, Sri Lanka" opens the series. In November 2022, the Museum der Kulturen Basel (MKB) received two requests for the return of 47 objects that originated in the Vedda community at Dambana. These requests prompted an investigation into the items' provenance and a research trip to Sri Lanka.

The 47 objects – containers, bows, arrows, axes, digging sticks, flintstones, mats, bark cloths and many other items – were collected by Paul and Fritz Sarasin, researchers from Basel. Starting in 1883, these two natives of the city made repeated trips to British-controlled Ceylon to study its people and natural environment. With the help of colonial administrators, they gained access to Vedda groups who led very secluded lives.

In discussions during a research trip last year, representatives of the Sri Lankan government, of the Vedda people, and of two universities indicated that the items still hold great significance for Vedda communities to this day. Moreover, they stressed that new views and anecdotes surrounding their return would further add to their significance.

The MKB itself cannot take the decision to return these items. The Museum Commission and the University of Basel have consented to the move. The Governing Council of the canton of Basel-Stadt has agreed yesterday.

### Seeking dialogue

The MKB now wants to make the public aware of the purpose of the exercise, show what has been achieved so far, what is currently in progress, and what preparations for a return of the items might possibly look like. To that end, curators, conservators, designers and collection managers will be moving their workstations into a gallery within the museum.

Between 7 and 31 May, staff will be working in full view of museum visitors. Any time while the museum is open, staff can – and should – be interrupted in their work! They are there to chat to the public, to give information, to answer questions and explain what they do.

The 47 items that are the focus of "Dambana, Sri Lanka" will be on display, too, of course. Visitors can also inspect several types of document, including letters, index cards, photographs, contracts, applications, and publications.

Downloadable images are available on our website.

The next project - "Hiva Oa, French Polynesia" - opens on 27 June and runs until 21 July. In 1932, Lucas Staehelin and Theo Meier travelled from Basel to Hiva Oa, an island in the Marquesas group, to assemble a collection. Using objects from their collection, and in collaboration with MKB, an exhibition on Hiva Oa is now being planned.