

## Who is behind it?

**The exhibition “Creators” at the Museum der Kulturen Basel takes as its focus the makers of the objects in the museum's collections. Sometimes they are known, but often they aren't – and that is intriguing in itself.**

In November 2024, Dora Kuiru made a feather headdress in her family's distinctive style. She did so based on examples of them in the storerooms of the Museum der Kulturen Basel (MKB). Omar Lemke was allowed to photograph the process. His photos are on display in the first section of the exhibition titled “Creators – People and their works”.

A craftswoman from Colombia, Dora came to Basel with five members of her family. They wanted to study objects that their relatives had made for the anthropologist Jürg Gasché and the MKB between 1969 and 1974. They found it fascinating to see how traditional skills and items of craftwork had changed and evolved in the intervening years. The family was particularly interested in manufacturing techniques, materials, and motifs that are now no longer in use.

More objects made by Kuiru family members – fathers and uncles – are on display in the exhibition's largest space; they include a 12-metre-long dance beam. It is a rare occurrence that museum staff know the identity of the makers of the items in their collections. The exhibition examines this question and reveals how details about the people behind the objects can be discovered today.

### **Authorship conceived differently**

Exhibits in the rear room introduce visitors to indigenous conceptions of authorship. The collective is a form that occurs around the world, be it in India, Iran, the USA, or Tanzania. Researchers can sometimes attribute items to their makers because it is known, for instance, who in a community was allowed to use which motifs, or who was recognized for his or her creativity – as in the case of rugs from Mexico. In the case of the blankets made by the Diné in the American Southwest, however, the makers are unknown. For the Diné, each blanket contains a message: Spider Woman, their most sacred being, taught the community the art of weaving.

In another room, the exhibition considers the question of what these makers were: were they artists or artisans? The smiths of Indonesia's ornate kris daggers, considered to have magical powers, were highly respected. And what about craftswomen in Africa such as the ones who employed their skill to produce spoons and stools for sale in Europe?

Contacts and visits lead to ever more findings, resulting in a win-win situation for both sides. Just last year, researchers discovered the identity of the maker of a canoe from Australia. That finding gave rise to new artwork that can now be shown in the exhibition, and its maker's name is known: Bradley Webb.

The exhibition runs from 11 April 2025 to 25 January 2026. Exhibition images are available on our [website](#).