

## Take Your Pick – 125 Objects for 125 Years

14 September 2018 to 6 January 2019

**Like for a birthday party, the Museum der Kulturen Basel's (MKB) is bringing together for its anniversary exhibition guests from all walks of life, all with their own stories to tell. They were chosen by the people of Basel as their favourite objects.**

125 objects are gathered in a semi-circle arena, mounted on pedestals of different sizes and ready to be gazed at from all sides and angles.

At the beginning of the year, 300 objects were selected by a group of visitors on a tour through the museum's storage spaces. These were then put online and the general public called on to pick their favourites by means of a vote. In other words, for its 125th anniversary MKB has fulfilled 125 wishes made by the people of Basel.

The anniversary exhibition, which was conceived as a participatory experiment right from the start, represents an assembly, both in terms of concept and design: like a large birthday party, it brings together people, views, and stories from all walks of life. They may have certain things in common but also differ in significant ways – thus reflecting a policy of MKB in its capacity as an anthropological museum to show what unites cultures, but also what sets them apart.

The film clip *Farafin a ni Toubabou* featured in the exhibition addresses the connections and ongoing exchanges between people, things, and places in an unusual and remarkable way. Together with a few other exhibits, the clip is one of the show's "mavericks". When arranging the show, it became apparent that not every object was ascribable to a specific category.

The display sets out from the motives our visitors to the storage spaces expressed concerning their choice of a specific piece. The exhibition curator Karin Kaufmann then complemented these with explanations from the museum's standpoint, thus offering a view from different perspectives – after all, multivocality is a major concern for MKB in all its exhibitions.

If you think vegetable knives look the same all over the world or that a dice is always thrown by hand, you're wrong. Concepts and practices are by no way universal. The station "What unites us" clearly bears this out.

On their tour through the storage spaces, the visitors came across many an unusual and unknown item which they wanted to know more about. For example, the stacking machine from Germany. This led to the setting up of a station called "Mysterious". It shows that, occasionally, even the museum does not know much about some of the objects it holds.

Some items look "fascinatingly foreign" although they are not from far-off lands, such as, for instance, the decorated skull from Austria. Aesthetics is important to viewers – as it is to the museum. Objects like Sami sleighs, engraved rings, or wooden anchors are "simply great", "ingenious", or "stylish" and therefore deserve to be shown in an exhibition.

Of course, the aspect of personal experience, too, is not missing in "Take Your Pick". Objects often bring back memories from childhood or travels abroad, and trigger emotions. As examples, we have such things as a toy lorry from Bolivia, a headrest from Papua New Guinea, and a zither from Indonesia on display in the station "I was there".

Our visitors to the storage spaces, and consequently also some of the exhibition's stations, raise questions that relate, directly or indirectly, to the role and tasks of a museum today. In the category "Under threat?" we have an ink set from Switzerland next to a Hungarian prayer book. Does preserving them mean that the art of handwriting will not go out of fashion? Or put differently: what part does the museum as a place for preserving material culture actually play?