



Berlin, 17th October 2006

Blocking limit ends: 6pm. Spoken word takes precedence over written

Speech given by the President of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, Klaus-Dieter Lehmann, to mark the reopening of the Bode-Museum

Ladies and Gentlemen,

the 18th of October 1904, the date of the official opening of the Museum by Kaiser Wilhelm II, was a rainy day and the dank conditions would have been brightened by the array of uniforms, robes and medals worn by those present.

Today we have been blessed with beautiful weather fit for a king, even if our kings are long since a thing of the past. We are honoured not only by the presence of the President of the German Parliament, Norbert Lammert, supreme representative of our parliamentary deputies, and the Minister for Arts and Culture, Bernd Neumann, both of whom will speak on the significance of this occasion, but also by the many ministers, members of parliament, ambassadors and citizens who are also present. This large assembly is ample testimony to the timeless significance of the Bode-Museum and its art collection, and today it is not gaudy uniforms and robes that provide the colour but the sparkling array of unique exhibits on display in the Museum.

I would like to start by extending a very warm welcome to Herr Lammert and Herr Neumann. I am also very pleased to be welcoming the Mayor of Berlin, Klaus Wowereit, Minister Tiefensee, all the members of parliament present, his royal Highness, presidents, artistic directors and director generals, the architects Tesar and Fischer, the ambassadors and other diplomatic representatives of many countries, but most of all you, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues, friends of the Museum Island.

What we are witnessing today ranks as a miracle – the glorious re-birth of the Bode-Museum in its completed form and an assembly of Western art worthy of the expectations of modern-day museum visitors, art extending from Late Antiquity to Classicism and including a wealth of great masterpieces in a collection of sculpture spanning many centuries. The Museum also houses Byzantine art, linking Antiquity with the Middle Ages, as well as an impressive collection of coins numbering more than 500,000 exhibits.

The final, grand exhibition of the Sculpture Collection, before it shut its doors to the public in 1998, was entitled "Riemenschneider on Museum Island". In 1999 the Museum was closed and in 2001 the project of restoration and refurbishment began. Work was officially completed in November 2005. We are now reopening the Museum on time and within budget (€ 152m).

We have not had an easy time refurbishing the building and those of us who bear responsibility for the project have spared no efforts. It has been one of the most intensive experiences of my professional career and the same can doubtless be said for all other people involved. We have all become very emotionally involved with the fortunes of the Museum.

The Museum suffered extensive damage in the War and was patched up in rudimentary fashion during the GDR era. Behind the plaster facades the building's infrastructure was deteriorating drastically, to the point that it was threatening to collapse. All the decisions and steps we took, relating to the building's history, construction methods, preservation of existing structures and aesthetics, were borne out in the end. The Bode-Museum has acquired its own true identity, a bright and cheerful building with an imaginative layout of rooms and an impressive median axis, the epitome of restoration artistry, a truly grand museum down to the last tiniest detail.

That the architectural qualities of this Wilhelminian building have been successfully enhanced, free from any blinkered ideology, is in part due to the times in which we find ourselves today. 15 years ago the Museum might have been refurbished in a way that ran counter to the prevailing character of the complex. It was an age when people were convinced that the Museum Island would only live up to modern expectations if the architects devised a new and garish landmark of meandering metal planes, which would have clashed with the atmosphere of the Island.

It is no secret that the decision on the final exhibition concept was preceded by an intense period of debating and a welter of proposed models and much tossing back and forth of ideas. This was an important part of the intellectual process. A degree of objectivity was maintained and we stayed independent from outside influence as the key elements of the project were formulated. In the process we were able to hold fast to our own position and ensure that Bode's vision was respected but not copied, that the sculptures were given space in which to breathe but not allowed to lose their contextual relation to the era they were illustrating. It is our great pleasure to be able to share and enjoy the result with you all. After 67 years of upheaval, beginning with the War and the years of evacuation, dislocation, destruction and continuing through the long period of German division, we are at last able to spread out all the treasures we have for the delectation of the public. Never before have the

collected masterpieces been given so much space in which to express themselves nor enjoyed the aesthetic potential that they now possess; never before have we had the chance to savour the aura of the sculptures so immediately, so close-at-hand, while simultaneously appreciating the spirit of the respective eras, and never before have exhibition space and sculptures enjoyed such an intimate relation one to the other.

There is an art to contemplating art, and visitors must invest a certain amount of concentration in the process, but they will be amply rewarded. There is no doubt that a modern, contemporary approach to presentation has been taken here, a paradigm shift that opens up new perspectives on all styles and epochs of Western art. Culture lives from knowledge, history and tradition. In restoring the Bode-Museum Berlin has presented the world with a unique and distinctive monument.

The creation of such a panorama of art would not have been possible without Wilhelm von Bode's expertise and his sure eye for quality. In 1872 he began his career in the royal museums. From 1905 to 1920 he held the post of Director General of the museums. It was he who made it possible for the museums to achieve international stature. It is thanks to his enormous will power that this building became what we have restored today, a museum created in a symbiotic process involving the architect Ernst von Ihne and the support of the Kaiser, Wilhelm II. It is fitting that the Museum bears the name "Bode", which it received in 1956. It is with particular pleasure that I welcome members of the Bode family, the great grand children of Wilhelm, to this inauguration: it is very nice to have you here today.

However the Museum still carries an important sub-title: 'formerly Kaiser Friedrich Museum'. Friedrich III, who reigned as German Kaiser and King of Prussia for a mere 99 days – from 12th March 1888 to 18th June 1888 –, may not figure prominently in our awareness, but his name recalls not only the Museum itself but also the great age of Berlin collectors and patrons who, encouraged by Wilhelm von Bode, met and exchanged ideas in 1897 as members of the Kaiser Friedrich Museum Society. They were instrumental in funding many prodigious works of art and culture, thus ensuring the participation of the middle classes in the determination process. One of the key agents here was James Simon, a generous benefactor who dedicated his collections to the State Museums, in particular the Bode-Museum. It is entirely due to collective efforts of this kind by ordinary citizens, largely undertaken by Jewish patrons, that the State Museums were able to expand their magnificent collections in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It is no accident that the coat of arms of the Medicis, the great art patrons, can be seen here in the Basilica. The busts of James Simon and Wilhelm von Bode respectively are also on display in the main staircase area.

The new visitors centre and the foyer will soon bear the name 'James Simon Gallery'.

The Kaiser Friedrich Museum Society is still an active sponsor of the Bode-Museum and the Gemäldegalerie. The Museum Island as a whole has received considerable funding from the *Kuratorium Museumsinsel*, a grouping of approximately 20 German companies. They are not alone, however: ventures run by private individuals such as the Haubs or Herr Würth are continuing the tradition of citizens' commitment to the arts.

The formal opening of the Bode-Museum, seven years after the Museum Island master plan was drawn up, marks the completion of the second museum in the Project, after the Old National Gallery. In two years time the Neues Museum, with its Egyptian Museum and Papyrus Collection and Museum for Pre- and Early History, will be completed, followed by the Altes Museum and finally the Pergamonmuseum.

We are truly thankful to central government for its approach to the master plan and its underwriting of the financing of this, the largest cultural building site in Europe. Until 2002 the *Land of Berlin* was also a co-financer of the project.

If I could wish for one thing today it would be this: the master plan provides for the construction of a visitors centre after the refurbishment of the historic buildings has been completed. Herr Neumann, as Culture Minister you have lent your full support to the successful implementation of the master plan. You would be doing us a great service if you could use your political weight to convince those that hold our purse strings that the visitors centre is urgently needed if we are to provide our international visitors with the information, orientation and hospitality they require, cater properly to the world's tourists and treat the historic premises with the care they deserve. Come 2009, twelve thousand visitors a day will be flocking to the Island and its museums. That is ample indication of the scale of the urgency.

We are also grateful to the Federal Government and the federal state of Berlin for completing the renovation of the historic Monbijou Bridge on time. The bridge links the Scheunenviertel district, encompassing the lively Oranienburgerstrasse and the Hackesche Höfe, with the Schlossplatz and Unter den Linden boulevard, with the Museum Island as the link between the two.

The two gates to the Island – the Bode-Museum in the north and the Old National Gallery in the south – make the Museum Island a major city attraction.

The Museum Island will soon be a gathering place for many individuals, all going about their own activities: art lovers and history buffs, architecture fans, aesthetes of every hue, day trippers taking a break from their cruise along the Spree, tourists from all countries of Europe and the world, courting couples strolling through the gardens of the Museums, shoppers and joggers resting from their exertions on a riverside bench, students from the nearby university... the list goes on. This is an authentic, urban location, not some soulless precinct or a national monument but truly a part of us.