

PAIRINGS

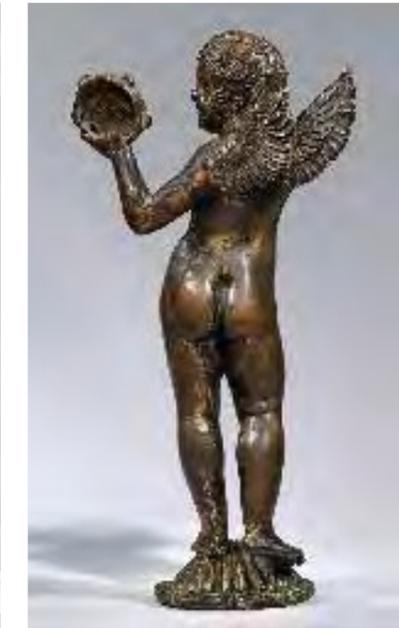
The first pairing of the exhibition *Beyond Compare* is located at the entrance to the Bode Museum's famed Basilica. In a vitrine, two bronze nude figures—one male, one female—greet visitors (fig. 1). The figure of the woman, a princess or goddess, was created in the kingdom of Benin, in present-day Nigeria, around 1600 and probably stood on an altar in the royal palace. The boy with wings, or putto, was made in 1428–29 by the Renaissance sculptor Donatello for the baptismal font of Siena Cathedral. The female faces the viewer; both her rooted stance and her rectangular base give the statuette a clear front and back. By contrast, the boy, slightly smaller, does not face any single direction. Twisting as if around an axis, his body invites us to walk around the vitrine. Every step we take is rewarded by the discovery of an entirely resolved composition. Having arrived at the rear of the case, we can take in the two figures' backs. From that angle, too, the Benin princess appears solid and statuesque, while the putto's contorted back is as graceful as is his front (fig. 2).

Something draws our attention and hampers our effort at unhindered comparison of formal similarities and differences. While the boy's back shows a polished surface speckled with traces of gilding, we cannot help but notice two inscriptions in white numerals and letters on the woman's back: one runs vertically along her spine, the other horizontally across her shoulders (fig. 3). No such inscription is visible on the back of the male figure.

These inscriptions are inventory numbers, the classification codes assigned by a museum to a work, usually at the time of its acquisition. Such a number is the work's DNA in the museum's cataloging system. Each single object has its own specific number; it is referenced in all inventories, loan agreements, and catalogue entries. The number III C 10864 painted vertically is also listed in the present exhibition catalogue, in the entry devoted to this juxtaposition (cat. no. 7.2). The second number, 9794, across the woman's upper back is an earlier reference number, a witness to a previous classification campaign, probably by the dealer who sold the statuette to the Berlin Museums. The male figure has just one number, 2653, applied on the underside of the shell on which it stands. The bronze figure can be unscrewed from the marble block to which it is attached and the number accessed.

While we cannot divine the intention of the technician, curator, or restorer who, many decades ago, inscribed inventory numbers on the back of the Benin princess, there is no question that their presence competes with an aesthetic appreciation of the work. Whoever painted the numbers—and whoever supervised this person—did not think that this was a problem. Ensuring that the object's place in the museum's classification system be instantly accessible seems to have been the primary concern. In the case of the male figure, every effort was made to prevent the inventory number from interfering with our aesthetic enjoyment of the statuette—there should be no barrier between the object and the appreciation of viewing it.

The Berlin Museums purchased the two bronze figures at the beginning of the twentieth century, in London, within two years of each other but for two separate institutions. The Benin princess was destined for the Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde, the present-day Ethnolo-



gisches Museum, and the Donatello putto for the Renaissance bronze collection of the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum, the present-day Bode Museum, which opened in 1904, two years after the work's acquisition. An important theme of this exhibition is what happens to objects when they are assigned to an ethnological museum or to an art museum. Historically, ethnologists principally studied the cultural contexts and human interactions that objects make manifest. Objects often served as illustrations of something greater than themselves. Traditionally, an art museum attempts to illustrate the evolution of a visual art form, such as sculpture, by assembling a representative ensemble of key works in this development. Wilhelm Bode (1845–1929), who acquired the male figure and recognized it as a work by the Florentine sculptor Donatello, considered the Italian Renaissance the apex of Western civilization and Donatello one of its fathers. It was therefore his duty to acquire as many works by this artist as possible and to display them in such a way as to create the necessary conditions for them to be appreciated aesthetically (fig. 4).<sup>1</sup>

These loosely sketched definitions should not hide some commonalities between the two approaches. Although best remembered as a connoisseur, as someone who recognized quality in works of art and incessantly strove to secure the best examples for the Berlin Museums, Bode thought of himself as a cultural historian, a disciple of Jacob Burckhardt (1818–1897). He saw it as his role to convey a sense of the context in which the works of art were created. He did this in different ways, by juxtaposing painting and sculpture in his installations, by emphasizing the role of art in Renaissance society in his writings (such as the museum's guidebook<sup>2</sup>), and by designing galleries as evocations of historic architecture—the most evident example of which is the Basilica in the museum that bears his name, designed to conjure up the volumes and elevation of a Florentine church of the High Renaissance.

Similarly, when Bode's museum opened, the Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde also sought to convey a sense of context. By displaying as much of the material culture from African societies as possible in individual, large, metal-framed vitrines—termed “Berlin cases”—the museum hoped to show, not evoke, information about the objects' contexts (fig. 5). It fell primarily to later generations of curators, mainly at other museums, to pioneer the atmospheric invocation of context through the use of dioramas. Although individual sculptures and works were

1 Presentation of the Benin princess and Donatello's putto (cat. nos. 7.2 a–b) in the Basilica of the Bode Museum.

2 Rear view of cat. no. 7.2B.

3 Rear view of cat. no. 7.2A.



4 Presentation of Italian bronzes in the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum, gallery 36, 1917, SMB, Zentralarchiv, 2.4./00701.

5 Display of African collections in the Museum für Völkerkunde, prior to 1926.

recognized as important—both culturally and aesthetically—little or no emphasis was placed on individual artists as bearers of African art history. As the art historian Roy Sieber emphasized, many artists were known by name in Africa; the traders and colonial officials who took objects to Europe were not interested in recording these names, and this is why we most often do not know them.<sup>3</sup> In the West, African objects are now integrated in the collections of many museums traditionally known to collect art, such as the Louvre in Paris or the Metropolitan Museum in New York. In 2003, in Brazil, the Berlin Ethnologisches Museum mounted an exhibition from its African collection, which was also shown in a slightly modified form in Berlin between 2005 and 2016, under the title *Art from Africa*,<sup>4</sup> a phrase integrated into the title of the present exhibition.

#### COMPARISONS

The closing of the Ethnologisches Museum in Dahlem in preparation for the move of the displays to the Humboldt Forum presents an ideal opportunity for an in-depth comparison of two major sculpture collections, one from Africa in the Ethnologisches Museum and one from Europe in the Bode Museum. What until now had been possible only in a book—by illustrating works from different traditions, as André Malraux (1901–1976) had done in *Le musée imaginaire*<sup>5</sup>—can now be done on a large scale with original works of art of the highest quality.

Inviting people to compare objects on display is what museums do (fig. 6). They ask their visitors to think about what connects the things on the walls or in the showcases, what makes them similar or different, and what those distinctions mean. But seldom is the act of comparison itself the subject of inquiry.

Comparing uses analogy and metaphor to make sense of things as similar or as different. As such, comparing is double edged. On the one hand it enables us to engage our curiosity, to try to understand things as diverse as the shape of the universe or the nature of thought itself.

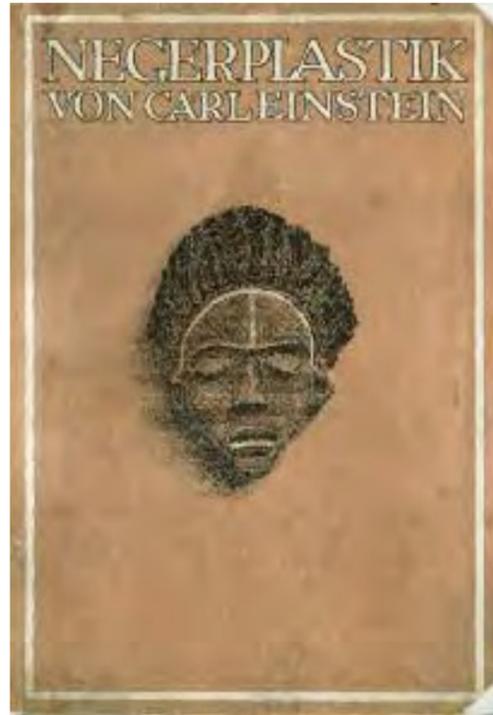


The ability to compare opens new horizons or perspectives and releases us from the narrow parochialism of what is familiar. Comparing things that we understand with things we do not can help us build bridges into the unknown.

But comparing also has a darker side. The literary critic Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan (1949–\*) has argued: “[C]omparisons are never neutral: they are inevitably tendentious, didactic, competitive, and prescriptive. Behind the seeming generosity of comparison, there always lurks the aggression of the thesis.”<sup>6</sup> His view sums up a present impulse in the humanities and social sciences to ask what hides behind the seemingly harmless act of thinking about the ways things or ideas are similar and different. Because comparing involves weighing which things are better or worse, comparisons necessarily depend on hierarchies of value. Comparing is to judge, to hold up, and to cast down.

Such judgments inevitably raise the question of the subjective character of many kinds of comparisons. Who decides? By what criteria? When framed this way, it becomes apparent that comparisons may not only be subjective, but that they are also shaped by preconceptions and prejudices. The prior experiences and values—indeed the “life world or way of being”<sup>7</sup>—of the people comparing things affect their comparisons as well as the conclusions they draw. What counts as similar and as different is not only a matter of perspective, but also of epistemology (theory of knowledge) and power. Such was the case for social theorists in the nineteenth century who transformed Charles Darwin’s (1809–1882) evolutionary theories—which grew out of morphological comparisons of birds and other animals—into justifications for the supposed superiority of “white” Europeans and the inferiority of Africans, Asians, Pacific peoples, and Native Americans. Their ideas rested on the notion that comparing human features, such as skin color, hair, and physiognomy, revealed a person’s “race” and that “races” existed in social and biological hierarchies. Of course, evolutionary theory and racism were not identical, but could be made to fit with each other. Racist Europeans and North Americans deemed Africans

6 Wooden vessels from the Bamum kingdom in the exhibition *Bamum. Tradition and Innovation in the Cameroon Grassland* in the Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 2009.



and Pacific peoples to be “primitive,” atavistic vestiges of earlier stages of human evolution, while Europeans themselves were considered the apex of human development, the most evolved.

When artists, theorists, and art historians from Europe and North America turned to African sculptures in the early twentieth century, they largely adopted the notion that African societies, and the works of African artists, were also “primitive” (fig. 7). Implicit in their judgment was a comparison with European sculpture and European art. The concept of “primitivism” was, paradoxically, simultaneously derogatory and celebratory. Of course “primitive” people were deemed less evolved, less sophisticated, and often less intelligent. But many social critics argued that “civilization” at the end of the nineteenth century—with its megacities, mass poverty, and social hypocrisy—had alienated human beings from their true selves. It followed therefore that “primitive” peoples (and their art) represented

human beings as we were supposed to be. In such a worldview, African art could serve as a parallel to and an inspiration for the development of a new, modern European art, unencumbered by civilization and its stifling aesthetic canons.

The religious art of the European Middle Ages was also often deemed to be inferior to that of the “secularized” modern era. As Hans Blumenberg has noted, modernity was invented, in part, by demoting the medieval. The Middle Ages in Europe were “lowered to the rank of a provisional phase of human self-realization, one that was bound to be left behind, and were finally disqualified as a mere interruption between antiquity and modern times, as a ‘dark age.’”<sup>8</sup> And yet, just as twentieth-century modernists held ambivalent views about what they deemed “primitive” African art and societies, many of their earlier peers in the late nineteenth century had similarly complex stances toward medieval “primitives.” The completion of Cologne Cathedral in 1880 suggested that the modern industrial era was able to supersede—but also to complete and perfect—the earlier achievements of the Middle Ages. Many Europeans also sought to escape the anxieties of industrialized society through idealized notions of the medieval past. The art of Gothic cathedrals and courtly culture spoke to Victorian art critics such as John Ruskin, who understood it to embody a balance between man and nature and to hearken back to a simpler time of artisanal workshops and craft guilds. In Cologne, “*colligite fragmenta ne pereant*” or “collect the fragments lest they perish,”<sup>9</sup> was the motto of the famed theologian, medieval art collector, and founder of the Schnütgen Museum, Alexander Schnütgen. His approach resonated with ethnologists’ rationale for collecting art and objects of material culture from contemporary groups they believed to be on the verge of extinction.

In no way are primitivism and its comparative framework starting points of this exhibition. By asking what animates comparisons and what hierarchies of value shape them now, we are also seeking to peer behind the worldviews that inform our comparisons, to understand what motivates them, and to lay bare the presuppositions on which they are based.

This exhibition asks how these questions have influenced the way we, now, in Berlin at the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century, see works of art from Europe and Africa. It addresses what we can learn by comparing African and European sculptures. How do the

works speak to us formally and historically? How have they been used and what have they meant to the people who made, owned, collected, and viewed them before us? In addition, the exhibition delves into how the meanings of these objects have also been filtered through the Berlin Museums, which placed some of them in a museum devoted to European art from the division of the Roman Empire to 1800, and the others in a museum devoted to the material culture of the “others” against which European culture has defined itself since approximately 1500. Institutional arrangements, and the categories institutions devise, reflect and reinforce worldviews and ontologies (theories of being). Dividing sculptures and other works of art by their geographical provenance and the dates of their creation is not the only way to organize or display them, of course.

The comparisons we have chosen, the questions we pose, and the answers we suggest are clearly affected and limited by our own “life worlds.” We have emphasized some issues and not others. How our perspectives have molded our views is something at which we can only guess. Although each of us comes to the study of the works in this exhibition by a different path, marked by different interests and passions, our perspectives are primarily those of people who have lived for most of our lives in the “global north”—mainly Europe and North America. Our recent professional lives have been shaped by the present moment in Germany, and especially in Berlin, not only with the city’s increasingly cosmopolitan character, but also with Germany’s growing openness to question its role as an agent in the history of European colonialism. It is because of European and German colonialism in Africa that many of the works in this exhibition left the African continent and entered Berlin’s museums.

The issues at the core of this exhibition stem from its curators’ life worlds, but also from our personal and intellectual interests. The themes we have chosen mainly concern: how Europeans and Africans have seen and portrayed each other over the centuries; how different aesthetic values but similar artistic practices influenced the development of art in Europe and Africa before the twentieth century; how Africa and Europe have long been part of the same globalized world, linked by trade, religions, and intellectual exchange for centuries, even if their relations have long been characterized by decisive inequalities; how analogies and ways of thinking about art from Europe must be used carefully and self-consciously when speaking about art from Africa, and vice versa; how many themes taken up by African and European artists appear to reflect common (if not universal) human experiences. Had other curators—whether from Europe, Africa, North America, or from South America—conceived and prepared this exhibition, it might have looked quite different, comparing different objects and asking different questions. This is not a matter of legitimacy, but of perspective.

#### ENTANGLEMENTS

Under the slogan “provincializing Europe,” in 2000 the historian Dipesh Chakrabarty called for decentering the writing of history.<sup>10</sup> The idea of Europe and North America as the protagonists of history and the pioneers of modernity is a myth from the colonial era that endures to this day. In the age of imperialism, Europeans and North Americans saw “non-European peoples” not as equal agents in a shared history, but as vestiges from the past. Europe’s historical development alone was recognized, and Europe’s hegemony was supposed to spread this “modern civilization” throughout the world. Similarly, the art of colonized peoples was considered to be “static” and “traditional,” and was projected onto the past. There was only one art history: that of European art.

Historical research has since established that the developments that led to the emergence of modernity and to the present world did not originate from a European-North American “center,” but resulted from complex entanglements involving all continents. Historical enquiry now focuses on concurrent developments and connections in a world with many centers.<sup>11</sup> A global art history that does not put Europe at its center, however, is still at its beginnings.<sup>12</sup> How can the simultaneity and plurality of global developments be integrated into art history?

7 The cover of Carl Einstein’s publication *Negerplastik*, published in Leipzig in 1915 (Verlag der Wessen Bücher).

Ethnological museums were important instruments for the colonial (re-)invention of the idea of a “primitive” or “barbaric” Africa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: a continent isolated from the rest of the world in time and space and thus a continent outside of history. The anthropologist Johannes Fabian called this the “denial of coevalness,” or the rejection by exclusively European and North American ethnologists and anthropologists of the fact that “non-Europeans” belonged to the same period of history as they themselves did.<sup>13</sup> The entire historical development of the African continent was ignored, including its centuries-old interconnections with Europe, the Americas, and also with Asia.

Instead, an immutable, homogenous “traditional” culture of “tribes” or “ethnic groups” was conjured up, whose testimonies had to be “saved” before the European “civilization” “destroyed” them through colonization. The fact that one can only collect testimonies from a particular moment in time was ignored, as was the fact that Africans culturally appropriated many objects originating from Europe, Asia, and the Americas. European ethnologists either did not collect such hybrid objects or denied their hybrid nature.<sup>14</sup>

The colonial image of Africa was only one in a sequence of constructs of the continent. In its march toward modernity, Europe defined itself over centuries by projecting notions about what it conceived as “not European” and “not modern” onto the African “other.”<sup>15</sup> That such projection could occur at all shows that, in reality, both continents had long been intertwined. European-African contact zones, such as the kingdoms of Kongo and Benin, in particular, were not only centers of exchange, but also places where Europeans negotiated their own identity, their “selves,” in terms of the “other” or the “others.”

The real and multiple correspondences and interconnections between Africa and Europe that contributed to the development of historical modernity are particularly evident in the history and art of the kingdom of Kongo, a powerful African polity south of the mouth of the Congo river (fig. 8). Shortly after the first encounter with the Portuguese at the end of the fifteenth century, the kingdom’s elite became Christian. In dialogue with European missionaries, the Kongoese faithful developed their own version of Christianity, which became the state religion and which resonated all the way to the Americas, for instance, in the Haitian revolution at the end of the eighteenth century (fig. 9).<sup>16</sup>

At the same time, existing religious beliefs and practices persisted in Kongo. For instance, the Christian concept of holiness was translated with the Kongoese *ukisi*, a term referring generally to forces from the “other world” that could also be present in objects. Characteristic products of this transcultural contact zone are the power figures known as *minkisi* (sing. *nkisi*), which Europeans in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries collected in the region. The addition of efficacious substances (“medicines”) endowed *minkisi* with nonhuman powers; they could mediate between the world of the living and the world of the dead, and also perform protective, healing, and judicial functions. *Minkisi* are hybrid objects that incorporate not only imported European goods (such as textiles, mirrors, and nails) as components of their power, but also elements from the hybrid Christian visual repertoire, such as pronounced realism and glass windows in their chests, as was common for reliquary busts, which had been used in European Catholicism since the Middle Ages (see cat. no. 7.6B; Cat. 4: “Protection and Guidance”).

Through the joint presentation of *minkisi* and reliquaries, this exhibition shows, on the one hand, the formal correspondences between the two types of objects and thus presumed historical connections. On the other hand, the juxtaposition also illustrates parallels concerning the presence of the sacred or the powerful in objects. The art historian Hartmut Böhme emphasizes that, as with *minkisi*, a nonhuman power inhabited reliquaries according to Christian piety in the Middle Ages. The saints were present not only in the relics themselves, but also in their figurative receptacles: they truly resided there.<sup>17</sup>

In essence, relics and reliquaries, like *minkisi*, collapse the separation of nonhuman power (“subject”) and “object,” which had been a primary concern of religions in Europe and the Near East since antiquity and which finally triumphed in modern European philosophy. The on-



tological division between subjects and objects gave rise to confusion, which Europeans applied to the contact zones on the West African coast by inventing the idea of African “fetishism”—the notion that Africans worshiped objects and “self-made” gods—thus projecting their own concerns onto the “others.”<sup>18</sup> The Portuguese were the first to use the concept of fetishism to condemn alleged practices of “idolatry” or “devil worship” and witchcraft in Africa—practices that were feared and persecuted in Europe at the time.

The question of divine presence in objects fueled virulent controversies in Europe. Some Catholic images, such as the *Vierge ouvrante* (cat. no. 3.1) and the *Palmesel* (cat. no. 5.10), purported to make this presence particularly manifest. Protestants condemned *Palmesel* as “idols” in the sixteenth century and used African “fetishism” as an argument a century later against what they saw as the quasi-fetishist veneration of saints and relics in Catholic practice. In the philosophy of the Enlightenment, African “fetishism” illustrated the irrationality of any form of religion.

The discourse of fetishism finally established itself in Europe in the nineteenth century, a time of exploding desire for all manner of things as a result of the Industrial Revolution.<sup>19</sup> On the one hand, numerous religious objects, including *minkisi*, were collected in Africa and declared to be “fetishes,” that is, as evidence of a “low” evolutionary stage of humankind—which also justified the “civilizing mission” of colonialism. On the other hand, Karl Marx’s (1818–1883) notion of commodity fetishism and the psychoanalytic conception of fetishism as sexual perversion served to foster European introspection into its own culture. Fetishism thus became a concept that served “to enlighten ... and above all to abolish the frightening *other in oneself* ....”<sup>20</sup> This self-reference is also evident in the subsequent “discovery” of “fetishism” by modern art, in particular by the Surrealists, as a means to define oneself in relation to the material and immaterial world, in ways that were “not rational” (in a positive sense), “originary,” and “untamed by civilization.”<sup>21</sup>

The projection of the supposedly “nonmodern” onto the “others” served as a mechanism of repression or “purification”<sup>22</sup> through which the structures of thought in Western modernity could be maintained or even defined—determined by René Descartes’s (1596–1650) separation of *res cogitans* (thinking substance: mind, subject, culture, etc.) and *res extensa* (extended sub-

8 Jaspas Beckx, *Don Miguel de Castro, Ambassador of Congo*, ca. 1643–50, oil on wood, 75 × 62 cm, Copenhagen, Statens Museum for Kunst, inv. KMS 7.

9 Crucifix, Kingdom of Kongo, 16th–18th century, brass, 31.2 × 15.5 × 2.6 cm, SMB, Ethnologisches Museum, acquired in 1987 from Charles J. Massar, III C 44815.

stance: body, object, nature, etc.). This ontology is, in Chakrabarty's words, only a "provincial" one—one (and perhaps not the best?) of many other possible ontologies.<sup>23</sup>

In all historical contexts, the entanglement of practices and discourses in "Africa" and "Europe" is evident. Africa and Europe are both part of the formation of the modern world. The art of both continents reflects worlds at once different and intertwined; the epistemologies and ontologies from Africa discussed in the catalogue are as much a part of modernity and art history as the ones from Europe. That is why the art of Africa must not be subjected to models developed in dealing with European art, as, for example, the autonomous aesthetics established by Kant in the eighteenth century, which were primarily based on the privileged position of visibility, the distance between the viewer and the work of art, and the discourse of masterpieces.<sup>24</sup>

Several African artistic principles that the exhibition addresses still need to be examined more intensively: the importance of materiality and materials as well as of their "accumulation";<sup>25</sup> the participatory and immersive aesthetics of performance (Cat. 5: "Performance"); the blurring of the distinction between that which is represented and that which represents—an important aspect for masks and masquerades; or, as in the case of power figures such as the (*nkisi nkondi*) *mangaaka* (cat. no. 7.5A), concepts of authenticity that do not presuppose a singular masterpiece, but see in the multiple iterations of specific figures a confirmation of their power, and thus of their artistic composition.<sup>26</sup>

This exhibition reveals similarities in difference and differences in similarity, historical connections and historical plurality, mediations and correspondences: first insights into a relational (art) history, which, we hope, will question preconceptions and make us think further.

#### EXHIBITION AND CATALOGUE

The exhibition and this catalogue are divided into two main parts. In the special exhibition galleries of the Bode Museum below the Basilica are six large groupings in which African and European objects are discussed with regard to specific themes. These form the first six chapters of this book.

Titled "The 'Others,'" the first section considers how Africans and Europeans have in turn been each other's "others" and what prejudices are at play here. Historically, Europeans tended to portray Africans as potential slaves and as irrational, while Africans often depicted Europeans as violent or threatening. The second section on "Aesthetics" illustrates the range of different aesthetic approaches in African sculpture, from highly naturalistic renderings—so convincing that early European critics thought them too perfect to have been made by Africans—to fiercely expressive sculptures that challenge understandings of mimesis. Groups of carvings from southern Germany and the Democratic Republic of the Congo each reveal ranges of style within the same period and the same region. The social construction of the person and gendered categories is the subject of the third section, "Gender." Sculptures from Africa and Europe illustrate how gender can be portrayed fluidly in works of art and can call into question the notion of the unequivocally male or female "autonomous individual." The fourth section, "Protection and Guidance," explores how images articulate the universal need to feel safe and to make sense of the world. Medieval reliquary busts and *miniksi* are shown together; a European image of the Virgin and Child and an *ibeji* twin figure from Nigeria have both been caressed so often as to erase the details of their carving. The fifth section, "Performance," examines how foreign a museum display is for European liturgical objects and for African masks and other works of art, which were intended to be seen in motion or as part of an action. A revelation disclosed in the sixth section, "Taking Leave," is how in several African societies the departed remain active in the world of the living, while, in Europe, a person's death is followed by mourning and—sometimes—remembrance.

The second half of the exhibition consists of twenty-two juxtapositions of single African with single European sculptures installed throughout the permanent collection of the Bode Museum. Each juxtaposition is the subject of a separate catalogue entry and focuses on a com-

monality or difference between the two works. Some repeat themes discussed in the first six sections. A juxtaposition of the *Seated Virgin and Child* by the Ulm sculptor Michel Erhart with a *pfemba* maternity figure from Kongo, for example, could have been part of the "Gender" section (cat. no. 7.12). Likewise, both the *mangaaka* from the Central African Yombe region and the *Virgin of Mercy* by the same Michel Erhart originally promised safety and sustenance in different ways to their respective communities (cat. no. 7.5); they would have been a logical choice to include in Cat. 4: "Protection and Guidance." Other juxtapositions address issues beyond the first six sections. The discussion of two statuettes consisting each of two figures standing back to back (cat. no. 7.21) makes clear that the opposition of good and evil familiar from European medieval art has little currency in many African societies, where, instead, the concept of complementarity is much stronger. Like Hans Leinberger's *Christ in Distress*, the Chokwe mythical hero *Chibinda Ilunga* has achieved more than any ordinary human could (cat. no. 7.7); comparison with this Herculean figure seemingly unaffected by his labors brings into relief the importance of Jesus's suffering in Christian faith. Occasionally, what appears at first to be a mere formal similarity, as in the case of a *byeri* reliquary figure from Gabon and the *Sedes Sapientiae* by Martinus Presbyter (cat. no. 7.9), turns out to reveal substantive and conceptual correspondences, in which visual strategies, viewership, and contents are imbricated. Although the juxtapositions are given a sequence in the catalogue, there is no preordained way of seeing them in the museum: helped by an app and a floor plan, visitors will be guided from one to another or can come across them at random while walking through the galleries.

#### CATALOGUE HEADINGS

Catalogue headings, like object labels in an exhibition, enjoy an aura of authority. They seem to convey "objective" information about the works on display. But the truth is seldom so straightforward. All museum classifications are constructs. They are necessarily provisional and open to reassessment. As curators and as authors, we see the information in the catalogue headings (and in the headings of the object labels in the exhibition) as helping readers and viewers to identify the objects. The information is a starting point for learning more about the works on display. We have done our best to see that it is accurate, based on what we know. But the information is not a definitive statement about what the objects are or a complete statement of everything that is known about them. We encourage the readers of this catalogue and the visitors to the exhibition to use them as starting points for their own inquiries.

Nonetheless it is important to be aware that what we have included in the catalogue and label headings reflects our choices as curators. There is no single standard about what must be in such headings and how it must be conveyed. For instance, all the works in this exhibition were made by human beings—not by "cultures," "tribes," "ethnic groups," or "peoples." If we are fairly certain of a work's attribution, we have chosen to include the artist's or workshop's name. If we have been unable to identify who made a work, we have decided not to inscribe a generalized term, such as "unidentified artist," but to leave a gap—metaphorically—in the heading instead by not inserting a fictional or generalized attribution. This is because other than drawing attention to the gap itself (which is important), such general attributions can risk conveying inaccurate impressions. For instance, in many cases we do not know who made an object, nor the conditions under which the people who made it worked or thought of themselves, as artists, craftspeople, or as ritual specialists, and so on. Future research may—or may not—reveal this information.

A different issue arises with respect to where the objects in the exhibition come from. The geographical designations in the headers include in parentheses the present-day nation-state where we believe the object came from. For the most part, such states did not exist when the objects were made or when they were acquired by the Berlin Museums. The Federal Republic of Germany did not exist in the sixteenth century, and neither did Nigeria.<sup>27</sup> The terms that precede the parentheses are a mixture of names of "ethnic groups," geographical regions, and

place names. For the most part, they are drawn from the museums' inventory records and object files, and they represent a historical accretion of information, inferences, and ascriptions that museums have used over the decades and centuries to categorize and classify the objects in question. Some of them are more "factual" than others. We strongly encourage readers and visitors to consider them with some skepticism. For instance, it is important to bear in mind that "southern Germany" never existed as the identity of the people who now live in the Federal States of Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg, and many "ethnic groups" in Africa may be little more than inventions of colonial officials.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, an object's association with a town, region, or ethnic category is not always a "fact" but often a matter of interpretation and inference.<sup>29</sup>

It is also crucial to discuss how we have chosen to address provenance. This exhibition is not centrally about provenance. But questions of provenance and what it means run through many of the issues the exhibition addresses. In preparing the objects for display, it has become clearer to us how much intensive research remains concerning who made these sculptures (especially those from Africa), how they changed hands over the decades or centuries of their existence—including often violent or forced circumstances of dispossession in Africa—and how they entered Berlin's museum collections. This will require a continued commitment of funds, personnel, and time. Provenance is much more than a chain of ownership, and the stories that are relevant to understanding it cannot be conveyed adequately by merely listing a few names and dates. An adequate way of addressing provenance in short museum labels has yet to be developed. For the moment, we have decided to state who conveyed each object to the museum and when the museum acquired it—with the awareness that this does not solve the problem. These data are, as discussed above, a starting point for our readers and visitors. Where aspects of an object's provenance are particularly relevant to the exhibition, they are also discussed in the entries, where they can be better explained.<sup>30</sup>

In sum, one should read catalogue headings and exhibition labels with care and with a healthy critical awareness, bearing in mind that they cannot convey the complexity of the objects' histories in their entirety. The information they contain and the interpretations they suggest, like the results of research generally, are open to question and reinterpretation.

- 1 See Neville Rowley's online catalogue of Donatello's works in Berlin: [www.smb-digital.de/eMuseumPlus](http://www.smb-digital.de/eMuseumPlus).
- 2 Cat. Berlin 1911.
- 3 Sieber/Walker 1987, pp. 20–21 (introduction).
- 4 Junge/Ivanov (eds.) 2005; beginning in the late 1980s, Hans-Joachim Koloss (1938–2013) mounted several art exhibitions drawn from the African collection of the Ethnologisches Museum (e.g., exh. cat. New York 1990, Koloss [ed.] 1999).
- 5 Malraux 1952–54.
- 6 Radhakrishnan 2009, p. 454.
- 7 Ibid., p. 453.
- 8 Blumenberg 1983, p. 77. See Nichols 1991, p. 8. For a contrasting view, see Cole/Smith 2010, pp. 22–24.
- 9 See Westermann-Angerhausen (ed.) 1993.
- 10 Chakrabarty 2000.
- 11 See Bayly 2004; Conrad 2013; Conrad/Randeria 2002.
- 12 See, with regard to Africa, the critical article by Peffer 2005.
- 13 Fabian 1983.
- 14 On the history of the collections from Africa in the former Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde, compare Ivanov 2005, 2007, and Stelzig 2004; concerning the Berlin museum and other ethnological museums in imperial Germany, see generally Penny 2002, Zimmerman 2001.
- 15 See Cat. 1: "The 'Others.'"
- 16 Heywood/Thornton 2007; Thornton 1983.
- 17 Böhme 2006, pp. 170–78.
- 18 Concerning the following discussion, see, e.g., Pietz 1985, 1987, 1988; Böhme 2006; Kohl 2003.
- 19 Böhme 2006, pp. 17–20.
- 20 Ibid., p. 20 (emphasis in original).
- 21 Shelton (ed.) 1995; Tythacott 2003; Malt 2004; Genge 2009.
- 22 Latour 1995, p. 11 passim.
- 23 See Descola 2011.
- 24 Kant 1995 [1790]. It is also debatable to what extent the art of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance in Europe can be assimilated to the Kantian aesthetics.
- 25 Concerning accumulation, see Rubin 1993.
- 26 Concerning this last point, see MacGaffey 2014/15.
- 27 For two works from the fifteenth century carved in what was then the Holy Roman Empire, Nikolaus Gerhaert's *Dangolsheim Madonna* from Strasbourg (cat. no. 7.14B) and the *Holy Kinship* from Silesia (cat. no. 7.15B), the countries of origin are listed as France and Poland, as these are the modern political entities now encompassing the regions where these works were made.
- 28 See, for instance, the discussion of hybrid aesthetics in Cat. 2: "Aesthetics." See also Kasfir 1984, p. 163; Ivanov 2005, pp. 43–44.
- 29 The art historian Christof Metzger, for instance, has argued that the *Dangolsheim Madonna* (cat. no. 7.14B), despite its name, was originally placed in Strasbourg Cathedral. See Metzger 2012.
- 30 See, for example, cat. nos. 3.5, 7.2, 7.3.