

The installation "Manga Bell", which Tina Born is realising in the context of the exhibition *Inspiration Africa / Ein Kontinent im Blick der deutschen Bildhauerei im 20.*

*Jahrhundert* takes an elephant skull, which has been stored in the cellar of the *Berlin Museum für Naturkunde* ( museum for natural science) since 1901 along with countless other specimens, as the starting point for a look back at the dark chapter of German colonialism in Africa.

An inscription on the animal skull, which was integrated into the installation as a replica made of clay, inspired the artist to create a loose sequence of associative objects and history-related reflections that establish references to colonial history. This raises questions about appropriation and demarcation, about traditional habits of perception of the foreign and about contextual shifts of objects and artefacts in the museum environment.

About the exhibition:

In the basement of the *Museum für Naturkunde* in Berlin, some 80 elephant skulls have been stored for more than 100 years, shipped to Berlin together with countless other objects from the then young German colony of Cameroon to stock the museum of natural science opened by Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1898.

One of the skulls bears the identification number 18728, along with a handwritten note: "Mungo near Manga Bell, Cameroon VII 1901 - General Müller - Kreation, G.". The abbreviation "G." names the donors of the specimen, and the inscription provides information about the place where the adult elephant was shot in July 1901. Since there is no known place called Manga Bell on the Mungo River in Cameroon, the inscription seems to refer to the royal house of the Duala people. The best-known scion of this house was Rudolf Duala Manga Bell (1873-1914), King of the Duala, who, after fighting politically and legally for many years against violations of the law by the German colonial power, was executed by the German colonial administration in 1914 on the flimsy charge of high treason in Cameroon's former capital Duala.

In the context of the current exhibition "Inspiration Africa", Tina Born had the animal skull with the identification number 18728 faithfully reconstructed in white clay by the ceramic artist Beatrice Jugert. Presented on a black transport box, it is the starting point for the installation "Manga Bell" from 2019, which the artist is showing in the gallery of the main

hall. The unpretentiously and realistically recreated skull marks a break with the often naïve, exoticising and idealising view of German sculptors from the years between 1892 and 1966, whose works can be seen on the ground floor of the exhibition building. If the skull, which could certainly be understood as an autonomous sculptural work, raises the question of whether and how the reading of a sculpture changes through reference to a real historical background, the large-format raffia object, which hangs over the gallery parapet, subverts traditional habits of perception in a different way. Carefully handcrafted by the artist, this object, a kind of pointed hat with long fringes, is reminiscent of spiritual cult objects in ethnological collections, which still inspire a longing for the foreign in their exotic mysteriousness, but have been robbed of their original meaning and purpose in museum presentation.

While Tina Born's works manifest both a contemporary artistic approach to historical heritage and a critical engagement with different, sometimes contradictory readings of objects, artefacts and works of art, the photographs integrated into the installation refer to the concrete present and future of the African continent. From Winfried Bullinger's series "At the Margins of Power", Tina Born selected the full-body portraits of a woman and a man who come from different regions of Africa. Winfried Bullinger, who has regularly travelled to remote areas in Africa for over 30 years, has been photographing people who belong to nomadic or semi-nomadic ethnic groups or who are refugees with a large-format analogue camera since 2008. His pictures document changing everyday life against the backdrop of climate change, sedentarisation programmes and warlike conflicts.

Tina Born connects the individual objects of the installation "Manga Bell" by means of a modular system of black-painted wooden slats, which follows the strict architecture of the exhibition venue consisting of horizontal and vertical lines. The construction allows different artistic media and approaches to be connected and opens up space for associative links.

Text: Anna Lena Wenzel

Exhibition with the collaboration of Winfried Bullinger and Beatrice Jugert (Sculpture Club)