

# Press release

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## The Palace of the Republic in the Humboldt Forum

The Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss will also focus on the **multifaceted history of the site, which spans around 800 years**. Here the predecessor to the Humboldt Forum, the Palace of the Republic, plays a key role. The Stiftung's collection will be incorporating **major sections of the interior** of the Palace, which have been provided by the Institute for Federal Real Estate (BImA).

Over the last 800 years, the site of today's Humboldt Forum has witnessed more social, urban, political and cultural developments than virtually any other location in Berlin. With construction of the Forum currently nearing completion, the history of the site is crucial to understanding the architecture and concept of the new building.

The Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss has a statutory duty to explore and present this history. In order to let future visitors to the Humboldt Forum find out more about this very special place, the self-contained *History of the Site* unit has developed a range of things for them to see and do. These include a video panorama on the ground floor, a tour around the Palace Basement, the Sculpture Hall, and thirty-six *Traces* displayed all around the building, evoking important functional aspects of the Berlin Palace and the Palace of the Republic as well as historic events that took place there. The Stiftung believes it has a particular responsibility when it comes to honouring the site's previous building, and seeks to do justice to this role in a number of ways. Visitors to the future Humboldt Forum will find the Palace of the Republic represented above all in the *Traces*.

### **Traces of the Palace of the Republic**

Twelve key objects, ensembles and collages illustrate various aspects of how this most prestigious of all East German buildings was used, as well as important events in its history. The glass ballot box, which was used for voting in the first and only freely elected East German people's chamber, symbolizes the transparency of political decisions following the political *Wende* of autumn 1989.

The political significance of the Palace of the Republic was such that the East German Ministry for State Security deemed it worthy of exceptional security precautions. A monitor from the former control centre as well as video recordings bear witness to the virtually comprehensive surveillance of visitors and staff inside and outside the building. The floral wall relief made for the Palace restaurant by the Meißen porcelain factory gives an impression of the opulent and magnificent décor. The commitment to quality is seen too in the design of the backlit guidance system, which lived up to contemporary design standards in every respect.

Works of art with very different contents and styles will provide an opportunity for discussing the significance of commissioned works of art in 1970s East Germany – for instance, a small section of Jo Jastram's *Lob des Kommunismus* (In Praise of Communism), a bronze relief created for the foyer of the *Volkskammer*, will be on display in the Humboldt Forum, along with Wolfgang Mattheuer's painting *Guten Tag* (Good Day) from the Palace gallery. A plate from the Palace restaurant, two ice-cream cups from the milk bar, and a collage of programmes, posters and film excerpts all refer to the fact that the general public viewed the Palace of the Republic above all as a venue for a wide range of culinary delights and an attractive programme of cultural events with stars from East and West. Finally, a photo of the peaceful revolution in autumn 1989 juxtaposed with an image of the March Revolution of 1848 and a photo of the November Revolution of 1918 emphasise that this place has repeatedly offered a hotly disputed setting for political strife.

### **Interior design from the Palace of the Republic**

On 19 September 1990, staff protests concerning asbestos levels led to the Palace of the Republic being closed. Before clean-up work began in May 1998, large parts of the décor were salvaged and carefully documented. Since then, chairs from the *Volkskammersaal* (plenary hall), desks from the political parties' offices, elements from the signage system, the infamous spherical lamps, pieces of carpet, coat stands, marble slabs from the main foyer, furniture from the youth club, and many other interior design items have been held in storage by the Institute for Federal Real Estate (BImA) in the Spandau district of Berlin.

Large parts of these holdings have now been transferred to the collection of the Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss. Instead of spectacular and largely well-known objects such as the pictures from the Palace gallery, which are currently being looked after by the Deutsches Historisches Museum, most of these items are mundane pieces of furniture and décor, which nonetheless exert a powerful effect at a symbolic or emotional level. This now means the Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss has at its disposal a solid foundation of objects which can be used time and again to investigate the all-important history of the Humboldt Forum's predecessor.

Inspired by the eponymous Alexander and Wilhelm von Humboldt and their delight in exploring the world and comprehending it as a system linking nature and culture in myriad ways, the **Humboldt Forum** will establish a new venue for experience, learning and encounter in the heart of Berlin. The participating actors are the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (SPK) with the Ethnologisches Museum and the Museum für Asiatische Kunst of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (SMB), Kulturprojekte Berlin and Stadtmuseum Berlin, the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (HU), and with the Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss at the helm. The Humboldt Forum has already developed a highly visible presence with a broad programme of exhibitions, discussions, performances, workshops, films and artistic interventions.

**Presse contact**

Michael Mathis, press officer  
Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss  
+49 151 1617 97 27, [m.mathis@humboldtforum.com](mailto:m.mathis@humboldtforum.com)

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