

# Collection Concept for the Museum Europäischer Kulturen – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

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# 1. Introduction

The Museum Europäischer Kulturen (MEK) belongs to the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, along with 14 other museums and four institutes. Founded in 1889 as the Museum for German Traditional Costumes and Domestic Products, it has undergone a number of changes in its profile over the course of the last 130 years; these have been accompanied by corresponding changes in its collecting policy and the museum's name. The most recent and most important change to its profile took place in 1999, when the "European" department of the Museum für Völkerkunde (today the Ethnologisches Museum) merged with the Museum für Volkskunde to form the Museum Europäischer Kulturen with a new orientation.

The MEK collects and preserves material and immaterial culture from across Europe and conserves it for the future. These forms of cultural expression reflect past strategies for managing everyday life from the 18th century onwards as well as fundamental historical changes in everyday life in Europe. The most recent acquisitions document significant social debates on, and the processes of, shaping life today. The collection also includes objects that are regarded as an expression of European culture(s) outside Europe or that have a European influence as a result of different forms of cultural contacts.

For the past 20 years, the MEK's work has accompanied contemporary social and cultural processes, and this is reflected in its collection and exhibition policy. This concept provides answers to the question of how the MEK handles its extensive historical and class-specific collection today and how the collection can be developed strategically for the future or adapted to new social and cultural conditions. This process-oriented approach characterises the MEK and how it approaches the concept of culture.

The collection concept serves as a guideline for the further development of the collection in coming years. It is in line with the museum's mission statement, which sets out the MEK's orientation and goals. The MEK follows the *Code of Ethics* (2004) of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in all its activities, including acquisitions and the handling of its collections. It also maintains close relationships with ICOM's International Committee for Collecting, which is a platform for museological exchanges on collecting. The MEK places special emphasis on ensuring a participatory orientation in line with the sixth principle in ICOM's Code: "Museums work in close collaboration with the communities from which their collections originate as well as those they serve." This applies in particular to the collection's development.

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Elisabeth Tietmeyer, Berlin, May 2019

## 2. The History of the MEK Collections

The MEK is one of the few institutions worldwide that is devoted to the everyday culture of human lifeworlds and cultural contacts in Europe. It is neither a timeless presentation of a compendium of the “peoples” of Europe nor a representation of all spheres of life for specific social groups, as the founders and researchers intended the institutions that preceded the museum to be. Over the course of more than 100 years, they collected around 250,000 objects from the lifeworlds of the lower and middle classes in the 18th and 19th centuries and from several European ethnic minorities (see below). The forerunners of the Museum Europäischer Kulturen include the Museum für (Deutsche) Volkskunde and the “European” department of the Museum für Völkerkunde of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

The collecting of objects from the lifeworlds of different “peoples” or groups in the 19th century was motivated by the “idea of salvaging cultures” that drove the museum’s initiators, Adolf Bastian (1826-1905) and Rudolf Virchow (1821-1902). The former, a physician and one of the founders of ethnology as an academic discipline, believed that the culture of peoples “without writing” and supposedly without histories was disappearing as a result of the cultural change caused by colonialism. He wanted to preserve their cultural heritage for posterity in Europe. This plan was institutionalised in 1873 with the founding of the Museum für Völkerkunde, based on the ethnographical collection of the Royal Prussian Cabinets of Art. Among other objects, this collection included 16 objects from various European countries that had been presented in a display case bearing the inscription “Europe” in the Neues Museum, which opened in 1859 on the Museumsinsel. This case is considered to be the “germ cell” of the Museum Europäischer Kulturen.

In the years up until the opening of the Museum für Völkerkunde in 1886, Bastian and his staff undertook numerous collecting voyages and expeditions, in particular overseas, from which they returned with many objects that appeared strange and exotic from a European perspective. As Bastian restricted collecting exclusively to objects from peoples “without writing”, European cultures did not fit into his collection concept. An exception to this was made for the Sami in northern Europe, who are primarily characterised by reindeer herding and were considered a people without writing and history. However, Rudolf Virchow, a physician, anthropologist and politician with an interest in social issues who initially supported Bastian’s project, criticised the exclusion of “civilised” European societies, above all Germany’s own societies. This led him to found a Museum for German Traditional Costumes and Domestic Products as a private institution in 1889. This museum was integrated into the Royal Prussian Museums as the Royal Collection of German Folklore in 1904 as a subsection of the Prehistoric department of the Museum für Völkerkunde. The Collection of German Folklore finally became an independent institution in 1935 as the Museum für Deutsche Volkskunde as part of the association henceforth known as the Staatliche Museen. It is no accident that this took place under National Socialism: folklore was used as a means to legitimise National Socialist ideology.

Like Bastian, Virchow was originally motivated by the idea of salvaging disappearing cultures. By collecting objects, he wanted to preserve the memory of lifeworlds, in particular those of the rural population in the 19th century, whose culture he saw disappearing as industrialisation advanced in Europe. Virchow found many supporters who backed his project of creating a systematic collection of German and, for comparison purposes, European cultural assets for the new museum. Virchow’s approach was also followed by the staff in the “Eurasian” department – also founded in 1935 – of the Museum für Völkerkunde. They mainly collected objects from the rural population in eastern

and south-east Europe, such as household, craft and trade implements, and costumes. Both the forerunners of the Museum Europäischer Kulturen therefore followed a similar collecting policy. Both institutions also offered their services to the National Socialists' "völkisch" (racial) ideology. Many of the objects added to the collections in the period up until 1945 do not have comprehensive provenance documentation; doubtful provenance is to be assumed in some cases. Some of these objects have been returned in recent decades.

After the Second World War and the construction of the Berlin Wall, the Museum für Deutsche Volkskunde was divided into an Eastern and a Western institution, just like the other Staatliche Museen (with the exception of the Museum für Völkerkunde). Both institutions – the Museum für Volkskunde in the East and the Museum für Deutsche Volkskunde in the West – followed the 19th-century collection lines. Above all, their staff attempted to supplement the collections through object acquisitions since 80% of the holdings had been decimated by the war. The Museum für Deutsche Volkskunde, located in isolated West Berlin, was dependent on the antiques trade, flea markets and private collectors for its acquisitions.

In the 1980s, both sides finally overcame their restriction to pre-industrial rural/artisanal culture by turning their attentions to the cultural change in the industrial age and including the lives of the urban population, as is demonstrated by the special exhibitions *Großstadtproletariat* (Urban Proletariat, 1983-1989), *Dienstbare Geister* (Willing Hands, 1981) and *Das ABC des Luxuspapiers* (The ABC of Luxury Paper, 1983). But here, too, they focused on the 19th and early 20th centuries. The aim of collecting up until the present day was one that both institutions only met in isolated cases, such as in the fields of trading cards, children's books and the school system.

The "Europe" department of the Museum für Völkerkunde, as the department was known from 1950, remained true to its cultural region approach and its traditional collecting policy by focusing on bringing together costumes, ceramics, household and economic implements from the rural population, from this point onwards the rural population of south-east and central eastern Europe. As before, these objects were collected on collecting expeditions but also through external commissions and donations. Both the folklore museums also made acquisitions via donations.

With the reunification of the two folklore museums as the Museum für Volkskunde in 1992, the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin developed a plan to break away from the museum's self-restriction to Germany by merging it with the "European" department of the Museum für Völkerkunde and restructuring it. This reorganisation led to a paradigm shift. The MEK's founding in 1999 was preceded by many discussions among folklorists. The planned European orientation of its collecting policy was controversial. However, the "European element" was something never absent from the Museum für Volkskunde and its forerunners. The clear restriction of the museum's work to Germany and German-speaking regions took place under National Socialism. This was reinforced by the founding of the "Eurasian" department in the Museum für Völkerkunde. At this point, its German objects were transferred to the Museum für Deutsche Volkskunde, which, in turn, gave all its non-German objects to the "Eurasian" department. Until the two institutions started to collaborate on a practical level with a view to a merger, this division was largely maintained.

Before its merger with the folklore collections, the "European" department included around 30,000 objects. The combined collections of the two folklore museums contained approximately 220,000 objects in 1992. Since then around 35,000 objects have been added to the collection. Overall the MEK collections – as is the case with most other museums – are characterised by a high level of

subjectivity: which objects were added to the collections depended to a large extent on the interests and passions of individual directors and collectors.

The museum's new orientation as the Museum Europäischer Kulturen in 1999 was accompanied by a re-evaluation of its previous collection practice. Whereas the founders of the MEK's forerunners had been inspired by the idea of preserving a world that was (supposedly or actually) disappearing, this retrospective view was now supplemented with a perspective specifically focused on the present. Since then, greater numbers of objects relating to three socially relevant themes today – cultural contacts, migration, and sexual and gender diversity – have been included in the collection. Existing objects are being re-examined in the light of these issues (see Chapter 8). Whereas its collection strategy was in the past primarily based on collecting expeditions by private collectors, the MEK has emphasised a participatory approach and multiperspectivity in its collecting in recent decades.

The explicit focus on European lifeworlds that has characterised the MEK's work since 1999 is not linked to a strictly defined concept of Europe. The fact that different definitions of Europe exist alongside each other – geographical, historical, political and emotional – is acknowledged by not taking any single one of these definitions as the sole basis for the MEK's work. Just as people and objects do not stop at borders, an analytical perspective on cultures and cultural contacts in Europe must remain open and mobile.

### 3. Collection profile

With its approximately 285,000 objects relating to cultural history, the MEK holds one of the largest collections of everyday life and popular culture in Europe. It is formed of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, predominantly from Germany. For historical reasons, a further area of focus is eastern and south-east Europe. Its unique elements include its largely historical holdings from several European ethnic minorities, such as the Sami and the Crimean Tatars. Particularly noteworthy are the inventories of textiles, popular imagery and photographs as well as the thematically categorised collection areas relating to naive art, childhood and youth culture, rituals and forms of religious expression.

This last and extensive holding encompasses the three monotheistic world religions. It was compiled under the Berlin collector Gertrud Weinhold (1899-1992) with a culturally comparative perspective that extends beyond Europe's borders. The MEK's unique holdings also include the largest collection of costumes in Europe.

The MEK collection situates the museum at the point of intersection between museums of everyday life, ethnological museums and European museums, such as the House of European History in Brussels. The MEK differs from other ethnological museums and museums of everyday life due to its European perspective and its thematic focus on diverse cultural identities and cultural contacts. In contrast to the House of European History, the MEK has an extensive collection that has been collected over time. In terms of its orientation, it is comparable with the Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée (Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations, Mucem) in Marseille; however, this museum focuses on the Mediterranean cultural region. Similarities also exist between the MEK's orientation and that of the Volkskundemuseum (Austrian Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art) in Vienna, which has similar holdings, but its overall focus is not explicitly devoted to Europe.

The MEK has different points of intersection with the 14 other Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Some of the MEK's holdings have counterparts in the Kunstgewerbemuseum, Kunstbibliothek or Kupferstichkabinett. The MEK collections are linked with the Ethnologisches Museum not only by their shared history but also by their social and cultural anthropological profile. Whereas the Kunstgewerbemuseum, Kunstbibliothek and Kupferstichkabinett focus on artistic aspects, the Ethnologisches Museum collects non-European ethnographica. Together they represent the broad spectrum of material culture that has shaped and shapes everyday life.

In coming years, the MEK will focus its collecting strategy even more intensely on examining, collecting and documenting contemporary everyday practices here in Germany and in other European countries.

## 4. Collection goal and functions

The **goal** of the MEK collection is to preserve contemporary and historic manifestations of cultural identities in Europe, to allow comparisons to be formed between them and to highlight differences and similarities. The objects in the collection reflect the diversity of cultural identities in Europe, reveal cultural contacts and represent the formation of groups, hybridities and boundaries. The collection highlights the reciprocal processes of globalisation and Europeanisation as well as the specific local, regional, national and transnational cultural locales. The collection serves both as a source of self-affirmation and as a prompt for questioning.

The MEK collection fulfils **four functions**. The collection as a whole forms a memory in which the diversity of European cultures and ways of life in the past and the present can be preserved for posterity. This not only takes the form of tangible objects; it also encompasses the documentation of intangible cultural heritage, such as rituals, craft and trade techniques, the required knowledge and the associated skills. Secondly, the collection provides a foundation for research on material and immaterial cultures in Europe. The collected objects have the potential to answer current and future questions on cultural identity(ies) in Europe, thereby promoting and enriching academic research. Thirdly, the collected objects make Europe's cultural diversity and unity accessible in exhibitions and provide a means to experience it. Fourthly, the MEK sees its collection as an engine of social processes: via its objects, it forms networks and connections between people and thereby fosters dialogues between them. The participatory approach to collecting that the MEK follows enables very different groups and individuals to participate in the development of the museal memory and its museal representation. In this way, the museum contributes to recognising social diversity and to fostering inclusive processes and mutual respect. Moreover, necessary social debates can be initiated and held via the collection.

The collection's goals and functions have changed repeatedly over the course of the MEK's institutional (pre)history. The current collection strategy acknowledges these changes and ruptures. Regular re-examinations and re-evaluations form the basis for continually reviewing whether the collection meets the goal of collecting with contemporary and historical relevance and for realigning collection practice accordingly.



## 5. The collection's inventory system

The MEK's eventful history is reflected in the collection's architecture, among other aspects. The MEK collection is formed of three parts that were merged in the 1990s: the collection of the East Berlin Museum für Volkskunde, the collection of the West Berlin Museum für Deutsche Volkskunde, and the "Europe" department of the Museum für Völkerkunde.

Analogous to the cultural geographical orientation of the Museum für Völkerkunde, the folklore collection was organised into "cultural landscapes" since its founding in 1889 and catalogued accordingly. These classification parameters only played a minor role from 1935 onwards, when the collection was established as an independent state museum. However, they were retained in the ethnological collections. The Museum für Deutsche Volkskunde's new inventory system classified based on materials and typologies (so-called subject groups) in the first instance and therefore followed a culturally comparative approach. It recorded the sequential number within a subject group and the inventory number for each object. Since then objects have been assigned to subject groups that primarily reflect their context of use. The catalogue currently includes 74 subject groups with numerous subgroups and can be expanded if required.

As a result of the division of Germany and the folklore museums that existed in parallel in the East and the West, two different cataloguing systems emerged: The Museum für Volkskunde on the Museumsinsel in the East, where the index cards for the pre-1945 holdings remained, continued to catalogue based on subject groups, but without sequential numbers. The Museum für Deutsche Volkskunde in Dahlem in the West used sequential numbers for its inventory and worked on the basis of the existing objects in the absence of the old index cards. When the collections were merged in 1992, each accession number was given a prefix indicating its former location to enable clear identification – I for (Museums)Insel, D for Dahlem and A for old holdings (pre-1945).

For instance, object A (8 E 265) 77/1937 is a small jug with a lid. It was the 77th accession to the collection in 1937 and assigned to subject group 8 E, jugs. It was the 265th object within this subject group.

By contrast, object I (35 F) 125/1958 is a toy horse. It was the 125th accession to the Museum für Volkskunde on the Museumsinsel (I) in 1958 and was assigned to subject group 35 F, toy animals. As sequential numbers were no longer assigned within subject groups in this institution, only the subject group 35 F is indicated.

Object D (38 F 1) 381/1970 is a mould for wax votive offerings. It was the 381st accession to the museum's collection in Dahlem in 1970 and assigned to subject group 38 F, votive moulds. The sequential number 1 indicates that this was the first votive mould within this subject group located in Dahlem. The existing votive moulds in the collection before the division of the Museum für Deutsche Volkskunde and the associated documentation remained in the museum in East Berlin; hence the numbering in the West Berlin museum began at 1.

The "European" department – at the time known as the "Eurasian" department – of the Museum für Völkerkunde organised its holdings since its founding in 1935 into so-called cultural landscapes. The department was identified by the Roman numeral II. In contrast to the folklore museums, the Museum für Völkerkunde retained this inventory system. The holdings are still organised into four "cultural landscapes" today. Within these holdings, the objects are assigned to ethnic and national groups.

Object II A 50, for instance, is a cheese mould from Cabras/Sardinia. The prefix II is used to classify all the objects in the European department. The letter A indicates that the object was assigned to northern/western Europe. The cheese mould was the 50th object within this group.

Accession numbers II B, II C and II D relate to eastern and south-east Europe; the original classifications were “Slavs, Balkan peoples, Balts and Hungarians” (II B), “Turkic peoples and European Finns” (II C) and “Caucasus” (II D). A separate inventory group (II E) comprises the paintings and models of the painter and ethnographer Wilhelm Kiesewetter (1811-1865). Added to this are the photographic holdings of the “European” department, which are inventoried under VIII. When the folklore collections merged in 1999, the “European” department retained its inventory system, but it is not used for accessions of new objects.

New accessions to the collection, initially to the reunited folklore museums and later to the MEK, have been identified by the letter N since 1992. The cataloguing continues to be based on subject groups. For instance, object N (31 O) 177/1999 is a snow globe from subject group 31 O, knick-knacks/travel souvenirs. It was the 177th accession to the museum in 1999. The objects are stored at different locations in Berlin chiefly depending on their material composition (textiles, ceramics, glass, paper, wood, etc.).

## 6. Collection description and outlook

As a result of the museum's eventful history, there are different inventory systems that could be used as a basis for organising the holdings of the different parts of its collections. In some cases, these systems have a practical application – for instance, structuring the entries in the database. In other cases, they are the result of the MEK's history but no longer in use. On a general level, four organisational systems that can form the basis for structuring the parts of the holdings can be distinguished: by theme, material, "cultural landscape" or ethnicity, and by collectors. All the organisational systems are relevant to a description of the collection. While most objects can be assigned to several categories, the unique characteristics of individual convolutes only emerge clearly when they are examined from one of the four perspectives. In the section below, descriptions of the individual collection areas are followed by a brief outlook examining their prospects for further development.

### Organisation based on themes

The subject group catalogue sets out the guidelines used for inventorying new accessions. It currently lists 74 groups. They are largely of a **thematic nature** and relate to an object's context of use. Some examples include "children's clothing", "toys", "trade implements", "trade and transport", "death and burial", etc. The important large groups of holdings are set out below:

#### a) Work and trade

Crafts, trades and "domestic products" were among the primary collection areas of the MEK's forerunners. While the first objects included in the collection were mostly objects decorated in the "folk art" style, the museum soon began to collect the relics of old guilds, such as guild certificates and deeds, craft and trade shops, and chalices. With the acquisition of the Rudolf Wissell Collection (see below) in 1966, the museum secured a significant collection of sources on historical craft and trade research. In the 1970s, the museum proceeded to include whole workshops or selected ensembles in the collection. For instance, the museum holds a blueprint workshop, a shoemaking workshop, a violin-making workshop, shop furnishings for a grocery store, and a glove-maker's tools.

*Outlook:* In special cases, individual material objects can supplement the historical collection. This area is being actively further developed primarily in the context of mediating cultural techniques as intangible cultural heritage.

#### Polish Christmas star, Rabka-Zdrój/Poland, 2018

To mark its acquisition, the making of a Polish Christmas star was filmed in 2018 to document its production.

#### b) Home and home life

This area encompasses furniture, household implements, ceramics and tableware. The holdings include whole interiors along with their furnishings as well as items of furniture such as beds, tables, chairs, cots and similar items from rural areas of Germany and other European countries dating from the 18th to the early 20th century. The holdings were expanded with furniture and furnishings from

different social classes in urban environments.

The ceramic holdings in the collection focus on Westerwald pottery, Siegburg stoneware, Marburg and Bolesławiec pottery, and on ceramic products of all kinds from Spain and Portugal. The spectrum of collecting was later expanded to include porcelain and other tableware (including enamel, tin and plastic items). Since the beginning of collecting activities, both the ceramic holdings and the

**Plastic cup, Berlin, 2018**

On 24 October 2018, the European Parliament voted to ban single-use plastic items, such as drinking straws and throwaway food and drink containers. Including a plastic coffee-to-go cup in the MEK collection was therefore a logical step.

household implements have come from various European countries, including Germany, Hungary, Romania, Spain and the Netherlands.

*Outlook:* Collecting everyday tableware will be continued and is actively pursued primarily in the context of the themes “sustainability” and “Europe within a global context”, which are set out in the next chapter. In addition, gaps in the holdings for recent decades are being filled. Items of furniture are only added to the collection in special cases.

### c) Religion, belief and ritual

The holdings in the area of religion, belief and ritual include a large collection of Christian votive offerings from different European regions and sculptures on themes of Christian iconography. Ritual objects and both religious and secular objects marking the course of an individual’s life (baptismal certificates, bridal crowns, confirmation certificates, etc.) and the passing of a year (advent calendars, Easter eggs, Christmas decorations, etc.) also fall within this area. The objects in the Gertrud Weinhold Ecumenical and Comparative Collection (see below) and the Marie Andree-Eysn Collection (see below) make up a significant section of this area: a large part of the approximately 1,500 nativity scenes and nativity figures in the MEK holdings comes from the Weinhold Collection. Objects from other religions, such as Judaism and Islam, are also included in the collection, albeit in smaller numbers.

*Outlook:* New objects are added to this area where they represent extensions, hybridisations of traditional motifs or new developments from across Europe and beyond Europe’s borders.

**Electronic prayer beads (tasbih), China, early 21st century**

In contrast to traditional prayer beads, this electronic collection of prayer beads has a display and a compass for determining the direction of prayer. A variety of functions, including the call to prayer, can be selected with the seven buttons.

### d) Toys

The MEK’s toy collection is primarily formed of objects from the 19th and 20th centuries. It contains card games, board games, dolls including their accessories, doll’s houses and toy shops, wooden and tin toy figures, crafting toys and building blocks, vehicles, rocking horses as well as optical, mechanical and electronic toys primarily from German-speaking regions and Poland. Part of this area

is also formed of the Gertrud Weinhold Ecumenical and Comparative Collection (see below).

*Outlook:* This holding is being supplemented through the addition of individual objects documenting contemporary developments. It is scarcely possible to completely capture all current developments, and the MEK does not aspire to do so.

**Magic collectible card game, Berlin, 2005**

Magic was the first collectible card game in which players could both collect and trade playing cards. First launched in the USA, it spread in the 1990s and now has several million fans and players worldwide.

### **e) Clothing and jewellery**

The MEK's textile and jewellery collection forms one of the core holdings in the collection. The objects predominantly date from the 19th and 20th centuries. They reflect the clothing behaviour of village-based regional cultures from German-speaking and European regions as well as the diversity of clothing in urban classes, primarily the middle and lower classes, up until the 1970s. The primary collecting principle is "everyday clothing". This has resulted in one of Europe's largest collections of costumes encompassing many different European regions. The jewellery collection with its well-preserved pre-war holdings provides a representative overview of rural clothing accessories, thereby supplementing the textile collection.

*Outlook:* Gaps in the holdings in this area, chiefly from the 1970s onwards, are being actively and systematically filled. One of the challenges facing the collection in coming years will be representing globalisation and its countermovements, such as slow fashion and sustainable fashion (see Chapter 7).

### **f) Photography**

The MEK's photographic holdings are primarily formed of ethnographic images often taken by unknown photographers depicting people's daily lives. Depending on the medium's technological development, they are studio photographs, images taken by travelling photographers or amateur photos. Unique works such as daguerreotypes and tintypes also feature among these holdings.

Particularly noteworthy are the extensive photographic holdings from south-east Europe, the convolutes documenting the lives of the Sami and the Crimean Tatars, as well as part of the image archive of the Berlin Society for Anthropology, Ethnology and Prehistory. Also highly significant is the collection of photographs taken by Otto Stiehl during the First World War in two special camps outside Berlin that housed Muslim prisoners of war. The large collection of ethnographic photographs is supplemented by cinéfilm home movies as well as cinéfilm recordings of a scientific nature. The main additions to the collection in recent decades have been personal photo albums and convolutes created by amateur photographers as well as photo-ethnographic projects by author-photographers.

*Outlook:* One of the challenges for the collection's development is the integration of everyday digital photography. Documenting and digitising the existing holdings of analogue photographs and films will be one of the priorities in coming years in this area as well.

## g) Everyday print products

### **Cookbook, Stuttgart, 2008**

In recent years, food and diet has evolved into a highly popular field in which identity issues and lifestyles are negotiated. For this reason, a cookbook titled *Pink! Gay Cooking* was added to the collection in 2019.

The books and print products in the MEK's holdings are predominantly print products for everyday use, such as cookbooks, schoolbooks, sample catalogues, maps and travel guidebooks. This area also includes a well-researched holding of so-called luxury paper (trading cards, folding maps, paper dolls, etc.). Around 30,000 postcards and approximately 1,000 posters from different contexts also form part of the collection. It also includes religious books and children's books. The

documents within the holding include family certificates and letters, written materials from family estates, official correspondence, identity cards, medals and decorations as well as invoices, receipts and savings books.

*Outlook:* Individual objects documenting new developments will be added to the collection.

## h) Popular visual worlds

A further area of focus within the collection is the popular visual worlds of all sections of the population. From framed chromolithographs from the parlour to cut-out picture books for children, the collection encompasses all areas of popular prints and painting. Particularly noteworthy is the extensive collection of approximately 10,000 picture books (predominantly lithographs, mostly colour, large print runs) from all the major European publishers and covering all genres. The outstanding holdings in this area also include so-called *Bänkelbilder* (large-format images that were displayed at funfairs and told stories to accompany them). Alongside the graphic collection, the MEK collection contains products of traditional craft and trade techniques and popular culture from the fields of sculpture and painting. This includes Polish naive art, which is represented by the Orth Collection (see below), among others.

### **Graffiti, Amsterdam/Netherlands, 2014**

Drawing on the walls is as old as the history of humanity. In the 20th century, images and writing in public spaces took on a new meaning as graffiti. The MEK acquired a graffiti by the Dutch street artist Laser 3.14 in 2016.

*Outlook:* New developments are documented in exemplary form. It is scarcely possible to completely capture contemporary visual worlds, and the MEK does not aspire to do so.

## Organisation based on material

Objects are stored at the different locations primarily based on material for conservation reasons. The major groups are wood, ceramics, glass, paper, metal, wax, textiles and plastics. So-called mixed materials represent the largest group. The mere material is not significant for collecting practice.

## **Organisation based on special collections**

The MEK collection includes a number of **special collections**. Most of these can be traced back to the collecting activities of individual collectors. It also encompasses collections that were not explicitly created as such but can be traced back to a particular individual or company, such as estates. The convolutes created by individuals are self-contained, and no further objects are being added to them.

### **a) Weinhold Collection**

The private collection “The Gospel in the Peoples’ Homes. Gertrud Weinhold Ecumenical and Comparative Collection” primarily contains objects from the 20th century. Gertrud Weinhold (1899-1992) collected them in Germany and many other European countries, with Poland forming a significant focus of her collecting. She also collected Christian objects in Latin America and Africa. A large toy collection also forms part of the Weinhold Collection, which contains approximately 15,000 objects in total.

### **b) Andree-Eysn Collection**

The Andree-Eysn Collection was created in the early 20th century by the Austrian folklorist Marie Andree-Eysn (1847-1929). It contains objects with religious connotations, primarily votive offerings and cult objects from German-speaking regions. By far the largest part of the MEK’s votive holdings can be traced to Marie Andree-Eysn.

### **c) Orth Collection, Schauß Collection**

The Hans-Joachim and Christina Orth Collection bears witness to Polish naive art. It was created between 1960 and 1980 by Hans-Joachim Orth (1922-2012), a journalist who worked in Poland, as well as in other countries, and his wife, Christina (born 1937). Consisting of more than 1,000 artworks from all regions of Poland, it is one of the largest existing collections of Polish naive art. The graphic artist, book designer and collector Hans-Joachim Schauß (1933-2013) also bequeathed more than 250 sculptures and figures of Polish naive art to the MEK in 2013.

### **d) Wissell Collection**

Rudolf Wissell (1869-1962) was an active trade unionist and a Social Democrat. Among other positions, he served as Reich Minister of Economic Affairs and Reich Minister for Labour during the Weimar Republic. He also made a name for himself as a craft and trade researcher. To document and preserve craft and trade customs, he published on the history of the crafts and trades, and created a collection of material evidence. The majority of his collection was destroyed during the Second World War. The approximately 570 items of equipment, tools and certificates – including guild chests, chalices and walking canes – that Wissell collected after the war became part of the Museum für Deutsche Volkskunde in 1966.

### **e) Christa Pieske Collection**

Christa Pieske (1919-2010) was a German folklorist and art historian. She collected wall prints and luxury paper. The Museum für Deutsche Volkskunde collaborated with her on the exhibitions *Bilder für jedermann* (Images for Everyman, 29/05/1988-28/05/1989) and *Das ABC des Luxuspapiers* (The ABC of Luxury Paper, 24/07/1983-27/03/1984) as well as on the catalogues bearing the same names. A large number of the works shown at these exhibitions entered the museum's collection.

### **f) Wilhelm Kieseewetter Estate**

The painter and ethnographer Wilhelm Kieseewetter (1811-1865) travelled across Scandinavia and parts of the Russian Empire in the mid-19th century. He produced paintings and models of settlements and houses on his travels. The largest section of this work – 162 paintings and twelve models – forms part of the MEK collection.

### **g) Company estates: e.g. Planet Verlag**

The MEK holds several company estates. One of them is from the Planet Verlag, which was the largest publisher of print products in the GDR. It published colouring books, scraps (also known as cut-outs), maps, magazines and many other print products. The company estate of this publisher now forms part of the MEK collection.

## **Organisation based on “cultural landscapes” or ethnic/national groups**

Both of the MEK's early forerunners – the Museum für Völkerkunde and the Museum für Deutsche Volkskunde – originally organised their holdings into so-called cultural landscapes or ethnic groups (see Chapter 5, The collection's inventory system). This type of inventory system is no longer followed today; however, important individual convolutes still exist. Particularly noteworthy are the largely historic holdings from several European ethnic minorities, such as the northern European Sami and the eastern European Crimean Tatars.

A number of the ethnographic holdings, primarily collected in southern, eastern and northern Europe, can be traced back to individual collectors. Men such as Johan Adrian Jacobsen or Wilhelm Planert and Wilhelm Crahmer and the married couple Nata and Hans Findeisen were commissioned by the Museum für Völkerkunde, or obtained its agreement, to travel through different European and non-European regions. They returned with traditional objects or objects regarded as such. This attribution of holdings to particular collecting travellers is relevant to provenance research, but it is not relevant to future collecting activities.



### **a) Sami Collection**

The indigenous Sami population, now numbering approximately 70,000 people, live in northern Scandinavia and the Russian Kola Peninsula in a region known as Sápmi. As early as the 18th century, two Sami shamanic drums entered the Royal Prussian Cabinets of Art and later the Museum für Völkerkunde. They marked the start of the Sami Collection, which was commissioned by the museum and largely formed between 1880 and 1929. The collection was supplemented with exhibits from research expeditions in the 1960s and 1970s. Today the Sami Collection comprises around 1,000 objects, making it the most important Sami collection of clothing and everyday and religious objects outside Scandinavia. Added to this are more than 600 photographs documenting daily life in Sápmi.

*Outlook:* The Sami Collection has been intensively researched for a long time, and this work will continue in coming years. Provenance research is conducted on the collection within the framework of cooperation projects. The collection will be continued within the framework of current research and exhibition activities.

### **b) Crimean Tatar Collection**

The Crimean Tatars are a Muslim minority living on the Crimean peninsula among a Christian Orthodox majority. The MEK collection of Crimean Tatar history and culture is formed of approximately 600 objects relating to everyday life and feast day culture from the late 19th century to the late 20th century, around 500 photographs dating from the 1920s to the present day, approximately 50 drawings, lithographs and oil paintings produced in the 19th century, and three 19th-century settlement and house models. The majority of the objects were collected in 1925 by Nata and Hans Findeisen, who had been commissioned by the Museum für Völkerkunde. In recent decades, the collection has adopted a new focus on cultural identity and been expanded with new objects.

*Outlook:* The Crimean Tatar Collection has also served as the basis for intensive research activities for many years and will continue to do so. Individual objects are added to the collection in special cases.

## **Looking ahead**

New objects are always assessed based on thematic criteria prior to their inclusion in the collection. Objects are not added to the collection **solely** based on criteria such as material, collector or ethnicity.

## 7. Thematic further development of the collection

The MEK collection is not only being developed based on existing collection areas. In addition to these, three focus areas will form the basis for its thematic development in coming years. These three focus areas respond to important current social issues. They link to existing holdings in the collection, but they also give rise to new priorities.

### Processes of identity formation

#### **Rainbow Sami flag, Kiruna/Sweden, 2019**

Some people identify as both Sami and queer. This is expressed in the Sápmi Pride flag – a flag that combines the rainbow flag and the Sami flag in graphic form. The flag becomes a political message in public spaces.

The central question in cultural anthropology has always been how groups express belonging in material and immaterial culture. Societies in Europe have become differentiated and hybridised through processes such as globalisation, liberalisation, individualisation and conflicts, among others. Whereas region, social group and religion provided the main basis for identity formation for a long period in the past, today these possibilities have multiplied. Many people today are consciously engaging with the question of their identity. The MEK's aim in coming years is to

intensify its collecting of tangible and intangible cultural assets that reflect the multiple identities in Europe and the superdiversity of European societies. On the one hand, objects that express self-chosen identities will be added to the collection, but new additions will also include objects representing external ascriptions (in the sense of stereotypes that can lead to stigmatisation and exclusion). In this context, the MEK is naturally also engaging with the resurgence of nationalisms in Europe, national and regional independence movements, contemporary xenophobic and racist tendencies in society as well as the countermovements that have arisen in response.

### Europe within a global context/Glocal Europe

Europe is not a never-changing, culturally homogeneous continent that is separated from other cultures. Interconnectedness and globalisation processes have always played a large role in people's daily lives. The MEK explores the question of which elements of Europe's tangible and intangible cultural heritage are viewed as "European culture" in other parts of the world. This can include objects, stylistic features, rituals, techniques, materials, etc. It emphasises multiperspectival research on the objects as well as the question of the means by which they reached other countries and how they changed in the process. Particular emphasis is placed here on how migrants from Europe (e.g. people in the USA with Italian origins) orient their daily lives and rituals today based on their culture of origin as well as examining whether processes of cultural essentialisation occur in such contexts – and if so, which – that can clearly manifest exclusionary, nationalist tendencies. The form of

#### **Hat in the shape of a beer mug, China, 2013**

The Oktoberfest is no longer celebrated just in Munich in the 21st century, but in many other countries around the world as well. These celebrations are an example of the appropriation of a cultural phenomenon that originates in Bavaria. They influence the image of German culture in other countries. This is represented in commercial products, such as a souvenir hat in the shape of a beer mug from an Oktoberfest in Beijing.

global appropriation is also significant: here the MEK is interested first and foremost in so-called hybridisations of objects, that is, when objects are used in a different way or adapted in a new cultural or social context. “Europe within a global context” means adopting two different perspectives: collecting the “external view” of Europe through the inclusion of objects that represent a European culture outside Europe, but also examining and re-evaluating existing objects and collection areas from non-European perspectives.

## **Sustainability and the new understanding of the correlation between culture and nature**

Life around the world is increasingly affected by the impact of climate change and environmental pollution caused by industrial production. In Europe and beyond, this is raising questions about the cultural use of nature and prompting an interest in objects, materials, behaviours and lifestyles that are negotiated under the buzzword “sustainability”. Images of “natures” – in both urban and rural contexts – are constantly being culturally reconstructed and negotiated. Sustainability strategies and the relating discourses are in part legitimised by linking them to a (real or imagined) past, such as replacing plastic shopping bags with fabric bags. This retraditionalisation enables substantive links to be formed to the MEK’s existing collection areas.

**Coffee cup, Berlin, 2019** The goal of reducing plastic waste is producing new products. A reusable thermos mug was therefore included in the collection to accompany the single-use plastic cup (see above).

The sustainability debate is accompanied by social interest in developing a “rurban” society, that is, an attempt to reconcile the contrasts between urban and rural lifeworlds. On the one hand, Europe is experiencing massive migration towards urban conurbations, while rural life is being romanticised on the other (similar to its romanticisation at the end of the 19th century). This is exemplified by the growing interest in allotments and urban gardening projects in cities as well as in sustainable food

production. From the perspective of rural regions, current developments are sometimes viewed as neglect for rural lifeworlds. The aim here is to collect tangible and intangible cultural assets that document these negotiations in people’s daily lives or represent solutions to the problems that are being negotiated.

## 8. Collecting strategies and methods

The collection profile and collecting methods of the MEK and its forerunners have constantly changed. The initial desire to document disappearing rural lifeworlds as comprehensively as possible by the means of serial collecting has long since given way to other forms of collecting and other goals. Establishing links to the present is particularly important for current collection practice. But this does not mean that the existing collection is simply left to rest. The MEK examines, adds to and expands its collection based on the strategic perspectives set out in the following section.

### Strategic approach to the collection

#### a) Thematic further development of the collection

The collection is being further developed thematically based on the criteria set out in Chapter 7. These new thematic focus areas will apply for a period of a few years and will then be reviewed and, if necessary, redefined. To represent these themes across subject groups in the collection, targeted new acquisitions – of both material and immaterial culture – are required. The existing collection holdings are simultaneously being re-examined from this new perspective.

##### **Grow-with-your-child dress, Berlin and Rathenow, 1943**

The child's dress was made with sewn-in pleats. As the child grows in size over the years, material can be added, and the dress thereby lengthened. Originally motivated by austerity in home sewing, today the object can be read as a way to act sustainably in clothing choices.

#### b) Continuing the collection lines through exemplary documentation of leaps in development

##### **Ramadan calendar, Bielefeld, 2010**

The first Ramadan calendar for children sold by a Turkish supermarket chain in Berlin was added to the MEK collection as a further development or adaptation of the advent calendar. While this does not mean that every Ramadan calendar in the following years has to be acquired, the first Ramadan calendar sold by a *German* supermarket chain represents a leap in development and was added to the collection in 2018.

Significant collection lines of objects relevant to people in Europe up until the present day will be continued. However, the abundance of products in the age of mass production makes it impossible to continually document new developments comprehensively. The MEK therefore focuses on documenting leaps in development within existing object areas. These can include technological leaps in development but also sociopolitical or legal developments that result in new types of objects.

### c) Identifying and filling gaps

The MEK collection is continually reviewed and re-evaluated. In this way, existing gaps in the collection can be identified and systematically filled. It is important that a substantive review is conducted here: new objects are added to the collection only if they represent a thematic addition; stylistic variations of already existing objects are not included.

#### The contraceptive gap

Although modern contraceptives have transformed everyday life in all European societies, the MEK collection to date does not include a specimen of the pill or other contraceptives. This gap should be filled.

Participatory projects can also provide the basis for re-evaluations. In this way, new perspectives and interpretations can supplement or change knowledge on existing objects. Symposiums on individual complexes of themes are envisaged in order to also incorporate non-European perspectives on the collection. These events will provide a forum for determining together with curators, experts and community members from different countries around the world which tangible and intangible cultural assets should be added to the MEK collection.

### d) Increasing the inclusion of intangible cultural heritage

#### GDR Textile Art (2016-2017)

This project aimed to capture all the MEK's material objects relating to GDR textile art in the museum's database. At the same time, nine interviews were conducted with eleven contemporary witnesses; these provide insights into the objects' context and their production. The digitised interviews were given an inventory number and added to the collection.

The MEK aims to intensify and expand the acquisition of intangible cultural heritage that relates directly to the material culture in the collection. Many of the material objects in the MEK collection are the products of craft and trade techniques and hence bear witness to intangible cultural heritage. More of this knowledge is to be documented and collected in addition to the product so that changes can be archived and made visible. Particular use will be made of contemporary film and photographic documentation here. In addition, retrospective documentation extending beyond the intangible cultural

heritage immanent in the object is to be recorded in exemplary form for individual significant objects. This can take place within the framework of projects or field research conducted in connection with exhibitions. This retrospective documentation includes audio recordings of interviews as well as photos and videos.

Suitable technological solutions and dynamic further development of existing database systems are needed in order to link the tangible and intangible cultural heritage in the MEK collection in a meaningful way.

### e) Digitalisation

All interested individuals should be able to access the collection digitally. The number of data sets available online on the SMB-digital platform and other platforms, currently approximately 13,200 as of February 2018, is being gradually increased. At the same time, a tool is provided for external individuals to assess and supplement existing object information. This is not only a way to supplement existing inventories of knowledge in the MEK; it is essential for extensive collection-

based research projects. Digitalisation will also enable participatory citizen science projects and allow object information to be supplemented with biographical elements provided by users and visitors in the future. The essential prerequisite for this is faster digitalisation and documentation of the collection's holdings. This is to be accelerated through the acquisition of external funding, among other means.

## **f) Deaccessions**

Planned deaccessions of individual objects or entire inventory groups is excluded for the time being. Provenance research already conducted on individual objects and convolutes is to be expanded. Any restitution claims from third parties arising as a result must be resolved with the Legal Office of the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz and fulfilled where applicable.

## **Forms of acquisitions of new objects**

The MEK collects both actively and passively. When objects are offered to the museum (passive collecting), decisions on whether to accept them are taken based on the substantive criteria set out in Chapters 6 and 7. The active methods employed by the MEK include the purchase of objects that document a leap in development, fill a gap or further develop the collection thematically. In addition, more field research and collecting expeditions are to be conducted as project-related field research enables a more "European" collection. Cooperations with partner institutions (museums, universities, NGOs) in other European countries will be used to acquire contemporary objects based on the complexes of themes set out in Chapters 6 and 7 within the framework of this field research work or to document their use in everyday life through interviews and film and photographic documentation.

For the MEK, an important method for incorporating the knowledge and understanding of external individuals into the collection is participatory collecting. Since its foundation, the MEK has used participatory methods to ensure a certain diversity of voices in the collection and to make democratic decisions on the inclusion of new objects. Objects of importance for the collection are identified and selected together with representatives of relevant social groups or interest groups on a project and thematic basis. The MEK is conscious of the responsibility that it has towards the individuals involved in collecting: participatory projects must not be a burden on those involved in the project.

### **Döner, Services and Design (2009-2010)**

Responsibility in the context of participatory projects, such as Döner, Services and Design, means respecting the opinions of those involved and giving them equal importance in the decision-making process. On this project for example, the Berlin entrepreneurs involved decided themselves which objects should enter the MEK collection.

The crucial factor for new additions to the collection – in both active and passive collecting – is that the proposed new objects are in line with the collection concept. As a general rule, all new acquisitions are to be integrated into existing subject groups, and no new subject groups are to be created where possible. It is a prerequisite for each new addition that the provenance of the object in question is known and secure. A further critical factor is how extensive the documentation of the

object is and whether it will also enable future generations to classify the object, to use it from multiple perspectives and to mediate knowledge about the object. All new acquisitions made in the ways set out above are to be both internally and externally transparent.

### **Summary: Key questions for acquisitions**

- Does the object pass the substantive review based on the collection concept?
- Do the MEK's research staff agree on the object's significance for the collection?
- Is the object's provenance documented?
- Does supplementary information on the object's biography exist?
- Can objects be selected jointly with representatives of relevant interest groups?
- Is the object's condition sound from a conservation and restoration perspective?
- What consequences will the acquisition have (storage, preservation, restoration work, costs, etc.)?