

The Museum für Asiatische Kunst of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

The Museum für Asiatische Kunst is the only art museum in Germany to boast this kind of regional specialisation and forms part of the network of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, which is overseen by the Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Against the backdrop of its comprehensive collections, the staff of the museum conserves, researches, exhibits, and conducts education and outreach initiatives pertaining to the works of visual art and related artefacts held in the museum's collections, which provide us with a glimpse into the cultures who have inhabited the largest continent on earth over a period spanning the 5th millennium BCE to the present day.

The history of the museum itself dates back to the beginning of the 20th century and reflects a general sense of appreciation and awareness of the equal value inherent in the different arts conventions around the world – a sentiment that has only grown since the museum was first established. Within this broader historical context, the museum represents visual traditions in keeping with the manner in which they were established and are currently maintained in the cultures of Asia. In so doing, the museum takes into account the knowledge that theoretical conventions – like the artworks in its collections and the ways in which these are interpreted – are subject to change in accordance with broader societal shifts. The museum itself is also a dynamic institution; it has demonstrated its adaptability throughout the course of its history and has undergone a series of paradigm shifts.

The artefacts held in the collections are what lies at the heart of museum practice, which is dedicated to using social and artistic practices and theories to investigate and illustrate the intrinsic design qualities of each specific object and its respective contexts of creation and use. A distinct discourse has also been unfolding for centuries in the objects' regions of origin – one that pertains to the ways in which the artworks held in museum collections are defined and interpreted, and what meanings and interconnections are ascribed to them. This regionally specific discourse, which is conducted through a range of different practices, has in some cases led to the compilation of comprehensive, complex object biographies, and has translated into a broad spectrum of primary and secondary sources, the indexing of which calls for a certain degree of philological expertise. Processing these sources, establishing a comprehensive understanding of them, and making them available to the public constitutes a key component of museum work. In this way, the labour performed by the museum staff provides invaluable insight into the religions, philosophies, histories, and values of the cultures that produced the objects in the collections, and establishes a link to the ways in which these are manifested and adapted in the ever more diversified daily life of our collective present. It therefore helps put Western perspectives into context, to address the intimately interwoven, shared histories of different cultures, and to foster dialogue and exchange.

The museum operates at the intersection of art, education, and science, while simultaneously functioning as a mediator between the Euro-American and Asian academic cultures of the discipline in question. The museum staff maintains a network of international collaboration and exchange with a range of arts institutions, academic institutions, and individual artists in Asia, as well as with scholars of the arts and Asian studies in Western countries.

The aesthetic principles and insight of the art theory and history of specific cultural regions in Asia, as well as the specific academic cultures that have developed there play a central role in education and outreach programmes and exhibition presentation. The design of the exhibitions is based on the aesthetic principles and display practices of the relevant local reception theory.

Targetted contextualisation is necessary for providing visitors from other cultures with access to visual phenomena and cultural codes with which they might not yet be familiar. Moreover, museum exhibits and education and outreach practices should allow visitors to make their own subjective sensory and emotional associations that will then make them aware that artistic perspectives can also evoke insights that transcend logocentric conceptualisations. Ultimately, museum practice works to empower visitors to be able to understand and contextualise a wealth of aesthetic concepts, diverse cultural codings, and artistic forms as an embodiment and expression of cultural difference and diversity.