



2nd Rehearsal (Feat. Tear-Down-Ensemble)

**Wednesday 2pm, 16.12.2020
Schinkel Platz**

Dead on Arrival

A few days ago, the Humboldt Forum theatrically announced its postponed partial opening would take place digitally rather than in person. Their catchphrase “Ready, set, stop!” suggests that the building is done and the program is ready to go but the coronavirus stopped them in their tracks. The closure of museums due to the pandemic conveniently covers up the reality that the Humboldt Forum is, in fact, stumbling into its own opening. Rumours of thousands of remaining structural faults have been flying through the press in recent weeks. A memo exchanged between Humboldt Forum council members at the last meeting corroborates construction reports stating that “a partial opening on December 17, 2020, is still fraught with risk.”

Let us begin with a reminder: the estimated cost of this building is now at 677 million Euro after another 33 million was added on October 6 of this year. The Humboldt Forum bleeds an additional 2 million every month it remains unopened due to technical shortcomings, making it the cultural equivalent of the bottomless money hole of the BER airport – a newly built ruin that, if the pride of German engineering weren’t at stake, would be beyond repair. Both mega projects are self-destructing by way of their conceptual hubris, revived by yet untold sums of taxpayers’ money.

Just this week, the Humboldt Forum finds itself at the centre of yet another scandal. The Nigerian government has officially demanded the return of stolen objects, including the Benin Bronzes, which were slated to become centrepieces of the Humboldt Forum’s contemporary colonial spectacle. And this is not the first time: disgracefully, the Berlin government has consistently ignored or delayed acting on such demands. Kwame Opoku has called this ignorance out as “singular in its audacity and [flying] in the face of history and veracity.”

Meanwhile, the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation (SPK), whose non-European collections will be housed in Humboldt Forum, has responded to demands for increased transparency regarding its colonial collections with a cry that it needs more funds to do so. One thing is clear to us: healing the wounds wrought by imperialism’s violence will never be achieved by funneling more money into its monuments. Instead, as Duane Jethro asks: “how do we tease apart colonial history, Christian missionary work, ethnographic collecting and the social role of ethnographic museums today? (...) It is a matter of concrete action that requires the radical, real revision of material relations with the past. ” Or, as Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung puts it: “‘Shared heritage’ must be dissected from an economic perspective.”

The Coalition of Cultural Workers Against the Humboldt Forum welcomes the “stop” as a great starting point for ending this undead project altogether. With today’s non-opening, the Humboldt Forum begins its fall into the widening gaps of its budget, into a bottomless pit of spending, and into the ugly void of its own conceptual hole. Today is the beginning of the end, and we are here to say goodbye.

And while we witness the Humboldt Forum digging its own grave, burying even more money with it as it sinks, we have a better suggestion: Let’s turn the haywire piggy bank upside down! Defund the Humboldt Forum now and redirect the money flow to a sustainable and meaningful decolonizing of Berlin’s cultural institutions, collections, and programs!

To that end, we’d like to propose some reallocations. Imagine the minimum 60 million Euro needed each year to keep the building running used instead to organize the return of stolen objects and human remains to their lands of origin. Or the 7.5 million that the Humboldt Forum has still failed to secure for its facade being used to initiate an independent Defund-the-Humboldt-Forum council. This could be formed by those who have been dealing with the intergenerational trauma inflicted by colonialism and imperialism, and who have been committed to decolonial perspectives in the fight for justice, dignity, and symbolic as well as material reparations. This might include the Decolonize Berlin Alliance as well as initiatives based in present and formerly colonized lands. The eight million funding the Berlin-Global exhibition could rather be used to dismantle the cross bearing orb and recycle its components for more interesting uses. Until this happens we see any engagement with the Humboldt Forum as an injury to the world we wish to build.

The institution’s self-acclaimed restitution achievements are baseless, as they have yet to begin! As long as the inventories are not made public and transparent, independent provenance research is hampered, and knowledge production emanating from the Humboldt Forum is made dubious. Decolonial efforts have long challenged white interpretive sovereignty over cultural heritage. An appropriate response to these voices is long overdue!

PLEASE SPARE US YOUR “OPENING”! STOP ALREADY!

We are already holding our breath, not because of the glycol leaks or the unstable humidity or the flaws in the indoor climate.

We are already tired, not because of flaws in the security lighting system, the constant delays, the perpetually rising costs, or the poor management of the construction site.

We are already fed up, not because of the outer doors that don’t close properly, the general doubt over the functionality of your access management, or the other 2000 faults that won’t be fixed by the scheduled opening.

We are holding our breath because your very idea and your undead appearance stink to high heaven. We are holding our breath because your basement is full of bodies. Because you are the opposite of unlearning imperialism.

We are tired because you are fundamentally unfit to become an institution of the 21st century. Because you are a nightmare from the past, because you don't let our dead rest, because we won't sleep until you're done in.

We are fed up because you crowned your miserable, deep fake existence with your provincial symbols of imperialist ambition and Christian dominance. Because you obstruct the view with your neo-Prussian kitsch. Because you are the marriage altar for monarchists and capital. Because you don't listen and you decided to proceed with your haphazard, shady plans against all better judgment.

We will sing until the golden cross-bearing orb and abominable insignia are taken down. We will sing until the Humboldt Forum is torn down and turned upside down.

You say: We will finish. We will open. We commence. We become Humboldt Forum.
We say: You are finished. You have started your end. You have always been a very bad idea and will become undone.

You say: The Humboldt Forum will be expensive.
We say: It will be so much more expensive than in your worst nightmares.

You are dead by a thousand cuts, and we've been saying this since your first proposal. So: we won't participate! Tear it down and turn it upside down! Defund the Humboldt Forum now!

The Coalition of Cultural Workers Against the Humboldt Forum

Berlin, December 14, 2020