

Nové expozice Etnografického muzea v Grazu:

Stálý vývoj stálé expozice /

New Exhibitions of Ethnographic Museum in Graz:

Permanent Development of Permanent Exhibition

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Permanent exhibitions are usually planned for decades, at least for some years. So isn't it a contradiction to talk about permanent development of a permanent exhibition?

The Volkskundemuseum (Museum of Ethnology/Ethnography, Museum of Folk Life) in Graz/Austria, is an example for different steps of development that have been taken from its foundation in 1913 until the first decade of the 21st century but especially since 2003 when the permanent exhibition was reopened twice within five years.

The Volkskundemuseum in Graz is part of the Styrian Landesmuseum Joanneum which is Austria's oldest and second-largest museum founded in 1811 by Archduke Johann of Austria. Today the Joanneum consists of 20 departments and institutions with about 500 staff members on 13 locations. Due to its size it is the most important regional museum of Austria presenting a comprehensive picture of the historical development of the nature and culture, of the country and its people.

The history of the Volkskundemuseum starts one century later when in 1911 the young ethnologist Viktor Geramb was invited to build up an exhibition of folk art items that had been collected in the department of Cultural History and Arts and Crafts of the Joanneum since the late 19th century under esthetical aspects. The foundation of a special ethnological department was the result of this research. In 1913 Geramb was authorized to build up an ethnographic museum at its present location. Before doing so, he attended museological lectures by the German expert Georg Hager who supported the following theory:

Objects in a museum only live an apparent existence but respect commands that we at least put them into rooms, whose "spirit" harmonises with them. So the building Viktor Geramb chose for his new museum was a former capuchin friary built in 1602. It was best suited to the idea "spirit of the room". This basic museological principle was consequently implemented in the first display of the Volkskundemuseum in Graz. Rural stylised ornaments could be found on showcases, curtains, inventory boxes, labelling and even on the cash box. Architecture, decorative elements and exhibits blended into one great work of art. This kind of presentations could be seen in parts of museum until the late 1980s when the period of renovation and redesign began.

The development of the Volkskundemuseum is marked by four main concepts each containing a different approach: In the late 19th century, the Museum of Cultural History and Arts and Crafts at the Joanneum Provincial Museum started to collect objects of folk art. The most important criteria for the acquisition were the technical and artistic quality of an object. Their main purpose was to serve as models for production in trade and industry. The first exhibition of rural arts and crafts was staged in the Museum of Cultural History and Arts and Crafts in 1895 and followed the romanticising atmosphere of Historicism. The presentation was staged according to the historicist concept of that time that freely combined collected objects of different temporal and

geographical origin. The aim was to create the impression of an ideal room that never actually existed in real rural living conditions.

When in 1913 the Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art was founded in its present premises, architecture, decorative elements and exhibits blended into one great work of art. The bareness and the simplicity of the objects provided an exciting contrast to the overall decorative design of the museum. This way Geramb was among the first to consequently realise the new idea of a "room's spirit", being lively discussed among museum specialists of that time. Geramb moved away from the strictly esthetical view and began collecting and documenting simple everyday-life objects found in any household. He mainly focused on the life and culture of Styrian village communities. The result is a unique collection reflecting how difficult life was for Styrian people in rural areas during the 19th and early 20th century.

Viktor Geramb also was the first person to hold a chair for Ethnology at the University of Graz. He set about sorting out the stock of regional folk art from the cultural historical collection, and, at the same started to move in a different direction which has continued to be of great importance for the museum. On his collecting journeys through the Styrian regions Viktor Geramb got into close contact with local residents. He managed to acquire a great number of objects, primarily from the rural working world, and thus systematically extended the collection. At the same time Geramb also took down extensive notes that still provide a large source of information for ethnological research.

Every museum and every exhibition reflects the theoretical positions and the social context present at the time of its creation. In this regard, the way in which the exhibits are presented to the public, is very telling indeed.

The architectural design of the exhibition set up from 2003 onwards is in complete contrast to the former principle of the "spirit of the room". The exhibits completely capture the attention of visitors with their unique characteristics on a neutral backdrop.

The redesign of the building was a great challenge for the architects. They had to change the old monastery building into a contemporary museum. The authenticity of the existing building's substance was to be preserved, while nevertheless giving the complex a clear contemporary identity. The external walls were left untouched. Only a coat of white paint on the outside (which contrasts with the usual yellow of the surroundings at the foot of the Schlossberg and in the old town of Graz) moves the museum into a different light and enables it to emerge self confidently as a complete ensemble. The newly created entrance zones, the glass bridge that spans the courtyard and in the first floor level connects the exhibition area with the "Trachtensaal" (folk costume hall), were further signs that behind the walls of the museum – which incidentally, was closed for 16 years – something was once again happening.

Internally the primary aim was also to strip down the structures and, using deliberately reductive interventions, to allow the visibly cramped spatial sequences of the old friary's cellular layout to flow as a continuous exhibition area while still ensuring that the spatial edges remain noticeable. In terms of material the alterations are characterized principally by glass, metal and light whereby the showcases in the exhibition area play a very special role. They almost seem to hover, each is built around a pillar and together they rhythmically define the sequence of spaces and exhibitions. Showcases on plinths with presentation elements complement the display area. The play of glass and light as well as the dematerialised nature of the presentation means that the emotional atmosphere is created entirely by the context of the exhibits – this is the particular accomplishment of the exhibition architecture from 2003.

The permanent exhibition highlights those factors that support human existence, such as living, clothing and credence. Selecting from the everyday objects collected for almost one century, and against the background of the abstract architecture, a contemporary analysis of the theme of folk culture has been achieved. Living, clothing and credence can also be seen as three basic protective factors in human life. They are shown in relation to the great changes which were taking place in village life all across Styria during the 19th and early 20th century when the beginning of industrialisation gradually influenced each and every aspect of people's living conditions. Many things were lost, new things came up and other things changed. Our everyday lives are linked with history through a network of relations, of which we are sometimes not aware. The exhibition attempts to make these relations visible and comprehensible through a varied and interesting collection. Authentic objects contain diverse, often forgotten pieces of knowledge that are passed on from generation to generation. The task entrusted to the museum by society, is to present these objects in such a way as to make this knowledge accessible. To learn from the past and to benefit from this experience in the future is what makes a museum valuable for society.

Three and a half years after the reopening of the completely renewed permanent exhibition and the renovation of the museum building an extraordinary temporary exhibition was offered to Landesmuseum Joanneum and the general management decided to execute this exhibition in our museum.

For this purpose the entrance hall and all the exhibition rooms on the ground floor (almost half of the permanent exhibition's area) had to be evacuated. In cooperation with the Styrian Government, the Styria Touristboard and the HARIBO Company the history of the HARIBO jelly bears was successfully presented in the Volkskundemuseum with more than 25.000 visitors within seven months. The two following temporary exhibitions benefited from that big space, but the permanent presentation remained reduced and somehow incomplete for 18 months. So a relaunch had to be planned. There were two options how to remake the ground floor area: either without any change, just replacing all the objects that had been removed or taking the opportunity for a change. We decided to make a change and in November 2008 the Volkskundemuseum was reopened a second time within five years under the motto "Back – with a difference".

The concept of the permanent exhibition of the Volkskundemuseum 2008 differs from the approach in 2003. While still focussing on the main fields of the collection – living, clothing and credence – the presentation now takes a closer look at everyday objects and the various relations people have with them. The "new" Volkskundemuseum tries to be as close to the audience as possible. Various hands-on areas transform visitors from mere "lurkers" into active participants. People are encouraged to analyse the world of everyday objects for themselves. A simple box from our collection presented in different context symbolises the main idea of the new concept. Visitors are invited to look at objects from various points of view and to think about the biography of an object. This extensive dealing with objects creates understanding for the microcosm of relations between people and things.

Permanent development of a permanent exhibition also aims at attracting more visitors. Concerning this hope we made the experience, that even change and development taking place in short intervals obviously do not attract as many people as temporary exhibitions do.

Resumé

V květnu roku 2003 muzeum v Grazu (založeno 1913) znovuotevřelo po dlouhotrvající renovaci svoji stálou expozici, s novým architektonickým designem a novou prezentací sbírek zaměřenou na tři základní prvky lidského života: živobytí, šaty a víru. Kvůli výstavě na jaře roku 2007 byla však téměř polovina prostor stálé expozice vyklizena. Po 18 měsících byla stálá expozice zmenšená a neúplná, proto bylo nutné naplánovat její obnovu. Výsledkem této situace bylo, že muzeum bylo znovuotevřeno dvakrát během pěti let.

Koncepce nové stálé expozice v roce 2008 se liší od přístupu z roku 2003. I když se stále zaměřuje na hlavní oblasti výzkumu – živobytí, šaty, víru – prezentace nyní podrobně nahlíží na předměty každodenní potřeby a různé vztahy, které k nim lidé mají. „Nové“ Volkskundemuseum se snaží být návštěvníkovi co nejbližší. Různé „praktické“ části výstavy přetváří návštěvníky z pouhých „diváků“ na aktivní účastníky. Lidé jsou vedeni k tomu, aby si pro sebe analyzovali svět předmětů každodenní potřeby. Toto extenzivní zabývání se předměty vytváří porozumění mikrokosmu vztahů mezi lidmi a věcmi.



1 Postcard showing the front view of church and museum around 1920.



2 The museum's first assembly in the tradition of „Raumgeist“.



3 View of the museum entrance square after the 2003 makeover.



4 View of the new entrance area after the 2003 makeover.



5 Exterior view of the Volkskundemuseum after the 2003 makeover.



6 The „smoke-room “ (black kitchen) – existing parts of the „old“ exhibition were integrated into the new concept of display.



7 The “Trachtensaal” (hall with 42 life-size figurines wearing traditional costumes) – the room was left untouched in 2003 in order to create a “museum within a museum”, a direct reference to the concept of Viktor von Geramb.



8 The first of four topical areas of the new exhibition 2003-2007: a scientific approach, reflecting the history of the academic discipline *Völkunde* and of the museum's collection.



9 The „Raumgeist principle“ in contrast to the modern museum design of 2003.



10 Spring 2007: HARIBO's trademark bears installed on the museum's exterior. The HARIBO exhibition marked the end of the permanent exhibition of 2003 and was reason for the 2nd makeover in 2008.



11 Entrance area during the special exhibition „HARIBO“. The permanent collection had to yield for a temporary exhibition.



12 The colourful world of HARIBO sweets – where months before the history of the museum collection was explained.



13 Winter 2007/08: Pictures of the exhibition „Small worlds“ presenting a new way of using the display cases.



14 Objects on display during „Small Worlds“.



15 The Permanent Exhibition is back: Advertisement for the 2008 makeover. Slogan: „Return with new emphasis“.



16 Long shot of the entrance area after the 2008 makeover.





17, 18, 19 The 2008 Makeover created areas of interaction for the visitors.



20 In contrast to the concept of 2003 the makeover of 2008 puts its emphasis on the position and tasks of people in every day context. Different social classes are examined as well as the contrast between rural and city life.





21, 22 Picture of a cupboard in the entrance area. This object can be explored by the visitors as pure „objects on display“ as well as in depth via a multimedia terminal attached to the display case.



23 The 2008 concept emphasizes different areas of relations between people and objects. The exhibition compares values of nowadays “throwaway society” with past times, when skillful reparations out of necessity were more common than replacing objects.



24 „Customs go – customs come“. This display case proves the liveliness of ethnology as a research matter.