

**Press release from the
German Leather Museum in Offenbach/Main**

beastly beautiful?

3 October, 2020 - 30 May, 2021

The question mark in the title of the exhibition ***beastly beautiful?*** at the German Leather Museum (DLM) refers to the relationship between humans and animals – one that is both symbiotic and ambivalent. Moreover, the ever-increasing current debates on animal welfare provide continual food for thought and repeatedly raise ethical and ecological questions regarding how the sustainable coexistence of humans and animals can be achieved.

It goes without saying that a museum whose collection concentrates on exhibits made of animal materials can and should make a contribution to this discussion. With its focus on leather and related materials, the DLM in Offenbach/Main occupies a unique position in the museum world: Over 30,000 objects testify to both the use of leather down through the millennia and the highly diverse cultural historical significance of this material from the prehistoric age until today. In recent years specific efforts have been made to add vegan and recyclable materials to our collection of alternative substances.

With the exhibition ***beastly beautiful?*** the DLM is directing its focus towards the ambivalent aesthetic of the exhibits and takes a critical look at its own collection: What animal products were used and continue to be used by humans and to what purpose? What role does the division of animal types into farm and domestic animals play, or the cultural meaning ascribed to animals? What brings about changes in fashions and tastes? What significance do the protection of species and veganism have? Another issue that is explored is the sustainability of leather as a material.

The DLM invites visitors to embark on a tour of the exhibition rooms beginning in the redesigned studio room and then reconsider the exhibited objects in light of the focal issues raised. Here, the intention is not so much to find answers to ethical questions relating to animals and instead to provide food for thought and discussion.

More than 50 exhibits tell of the handling of animals, how they were domesticated and appropriated by humans, and also reveal changes in society's attitudes.

Animal materials that have been used for clothes not only afford protection from the cold and wet, but also serve as adornment. For example, a coat of python leather or a handbag of iguana leather sporting a stuffed lizard highlight the owner's desire to express extravagance. Animal prints have been hugely popular for many years; the prints are applied to textiles or occasionally to the animal hide as is the case with the pumps designed by Walter Steiger that are on show.

Apart from acting as protection or decoration, furs and fleeces are also used for their symbolic and cultural significance. Accordingly, a helmet from the Democratic Republic of Congo or a shield from North America reveal the idea that the strength of an animal can be transferred to the human through a lion's mane or an eagle's feathers. Man's powers over the shot quarry is further demonstrated beyond the actual act of killing in the collection and presentation of (large game) hunting trophies.

These days, animals populate our homes more than ever before; they are omnipresent in children's rooms, but also in furniture design, as the design classics of Omerca demonstrate – one exhibit is his stool in the shape of an elephant. Yet it's not only in our living spaces, but also in literature and film that cute and humanized animals appear as primary actors. Hence, for example, the characters of the "museum rats" in a TV series by the Augsburger Puppenkiste marionette theatre (1967), of which there is an episode playing in the DLM.

The collection show is supplemented by selected contemporary artistic positions that enter into dialog with the exhibits. For example, the sculpture *St. Bernetto* by Marcel Walldorf comments at several levels on the ambivalent relationship between humans and animals as well as the idea of the perfect pet. The Campana Brothers, meanwhile, who are known for their playful designs, are represented with a humorous and surreal design entitled *Cake Stool*, which is made from dozens of soft animal toys.

Also on display are works by Heide Hatry, Christian Jankowski and Eva Ruhland.

The exhibition ***beastly beautiful?*** is part of the cooperation project ***Artentreffen*** (by museums located along the route of LRT Line 8) with the Kunst- und Kulturstiftung Opelvillen Rüsselsheim and Nassauischer Kunstverein Wiesbaden. By hosting parallel exhibitions, the three cultural institutions will be spotlighting the various facets of the relationships between humans and animals.

Artentreffen is sponsored by Kulturfonds Frankfurt RheinMain.

The press conference on the ***Artentreffen*** collaboration will take place on Wednesday,

30 September 2020 at 11 a.m. with Karin Wolff, Managing Director of the Kulturfonds Frankfurt RheinMain, and the cooperation partners in the Kunst- und Kulturstiftung Opelvillen Rüsselsheim.

Deutsches Ledermuseum

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Tuesday to Sunday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.,

From October 2020 every second

Thursday in the month to 8 p.m.



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From Frankfurt main station: LRT lines S1, S2, S8, S9
to station "Ledermuseum", exit
Ludwigstrasse (approx. 10-minute walk)