

**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?** refers to the relationship between humans and animals, one that is not always symbiotic and is, moreover, ambivalent. Recent debates on animal welfare only serve to amplify ethical and ecological issues and prompt us to give constant consideration to how the millennia-old relationship between man and beast can be adjusted to take into account sustainable aspects.

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 placing the emphasis on the ambiguous aesthetics of the exhibits and taking a closer look at its own collection: Which animal raw products were used by humans, which are still used, and for what purposes are they used? How significant is the division of animals into those that are livestock and those that are pets or the cultural importance ascribed to some animals? What brings about changes in fashion? What significance do the protection of endangered species and veganism have? What can be considered sustainability with regard to leather as a material?

The presentation begins in the redesigned studio room and as visitors walk through the exhibition halls of the DLM they are invited to look at the objects from the perspective of the issues addressed. Moreover, the aim is not so much to answer questions concerning animal ethics, but rather simply to offer ideas and food for thought.

Over 50 exhibits illustrate how animals are treated, used and appropriated by people – and also allow visitors to identify how society has changed over the years. Animal materials fashioned into garments not only serve to provide protection against cold or rain but can also be an adornment and an indication of social status. 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 around for several years; the prints are either made on textiles or occasionally straight onto animal hides as is the case with the pumps designed by Walter Steiger that are on show.

Apart from the aspects of protection and decoration, animal skins and feathers are also infused with a symbolic and cultural meaning for their wearers. 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.

In recent years the popularity of animals has increased and they are to be found everywhere in various guises in our homes, not only in children's rooms but also in the other areas as the design classics of Omerca demonstrate – one exhibit is his stool in the shape of an elephant. However, animals not only occur in furniture design; cute and humanized animals also feature as the protagonists in literature and film. 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 presentation of the collection is complemented by contemporary artistic positions that engage 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 joint project **Artentreffen** by institutions along LRT Line 8 – with Kunst- und Kulturstiftung Opelvillen Rüsselsheim and Nassauischer Kunstverein Wiesbaden. With contemporaneous exhibitions the three cultural institutions are highlighting the various different sides to relationships between human beings 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**

Frankfurter Strasse 86  
63067 Offenbach/Main  
Tel.: 069 829798-11  
[www.ledermuseum.de](http://www.ledermuseum.de)  
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)