

A⁴

International
Issue No. 8

A⁴

Magazin
für Ausereuropäische
Kunst und Kultur

Afrika
Australien
Asien
Amerikas

01 / 09

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Bildwelten

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StudienVerlag

David Zemanek

AUF DEN SPUREN VON ALFRED MANSFELD

Die Kunst und Kultur der EJAGHAM

Die expressiven und aggressiv anmutenden Masken der Ejagham lösen noch heute bei vielen Betrachtern und Betrachterinnen ein Schauern aus; Sammlern und Missionaren vergangener Tage galten sie als Inbegriff des Bösen. Nur wenige wissen um die tiefere Bedeutung dieser gewaltigen Masken, die – in Afrika einmalig – mit menschlicher oder tierischer Haut überzogen sind.

Erste Ansätze einer tieferen Deutung lieferte Dr. Alfred Mansfeld (geboren 1870 in Tetschen, gestorben 1932 in Graz). Im Jahre 1904 trat der Stabsarzt eine Stelle als Bezirksamtman des Ossidinge-Bezirk in Kamerun an. In einem Klima gegenseitiger Feindseligkeiten – Aufstände und ihre blutige Niederschlagung waren den Menschen noch gut im Gedächtnis – etablierte Mansfeld ein neues System. Er wurde sogar Mitglied der Ekpe-Gesellschaft („ewi-ngbe“) und versuchte, diese so in den administrativen Ablauf einzugliedern (Michels, 2004: 337). In kürzester Zeit konnte er ein System von Vertrauen und Stabilität in der Region etablieren, welches unter dem Schlagwort „System Mansfeld“ in die Geschichtsbücher einging. Von 1904 bis 1915 leitete er die Station. Bei den Einheimischen war er unter dem Namen „Dr. Mamfe“ oder „Dr. Mamfred“ bekannt (Michels, 2004: 324). Mansfeld, der bereits Erfahrung mit tropischen Gegenden hatte – mit Dr. Hermann Meyer hatte er 1897 an der Xingu-Expedition teilgenommen – sammelte Objekte der Ejagham-Kultur und ihrer benachbarten Gruppen anfangs recht wahllos und unstrukturiert. 1904 schickte ihm Felix von Luschan seine Anleitung zum ethnologischen Sammeln. Eine seiner umfangreichen und gut dokumentierten Sammlungen

gelangte durch Ankauf des Kunstmäzens Ernst F. Gütschow ins Museum für Völkerkunde Dresden. Auch nach Berlin, St. Petersburg (via Berlin) und Stuttgart vermittelte er ethnologische und anthropologische Sammlungen. In „Urwald-Dokumente – Vier Jahre unter den Crossflussnegern Kameruns“ (aus dem Jahr 1908) und „Westafrika. Aus Urwald und Steppe zwischen Crossfluss und Benue“ (1928) beschreibt er seine Erfahrungen mit der Kultur der Ejagham. Neben Percy Amaury Talbot lieferte er als einer der Ersten eine ausführliche Studie über die Lebenswelt der dortigen Menschen. Nach dem Krieg arbeitete Mansfeld im Reichskolonialamt, wo er eine Auskunftsstelle für Auswanderer leitete. 1930 kehrte er als Beauftragter für eine internationale Gesellschaft nach Mamfe (früher Ossidinge) in Kamerun zurück.

Schönheit, so sagt man, liege im Auge des Betrachters. Die ausdrucksvollen, aggressiv anmutenden Tanzaufsätze und Masken der Ejagham erscheinen vielen Betrachtern und Betrachterinnen unheimlich, nur wenige wissen um ihre Bedeutung. Hinzu kommt, dass sich Objekte der Ejagham – herkömmlich bekannt unter dem Begriff „Ekoï“ – zunächst nur schwer zuordnen lassen. Handelt es sich bei den Tanzaufsätzen um ein Werk der Boki, der Anyang oder der Keaka? Um hierfür den Blick zu schulen, gilt es, stilistische Merkmale und historische Sammlungsangaben zu vergleichen. Eine Unterteilung in einen naturalistischen und einen abstrakten Stil wie bei vielen Autoren halte ich für problematisch. Masken von unbekanntem Künstlern der Boki waren im gesamten Crossriver-Gebiet geschätzt und begehrt. So findet man diese bei den



Historische Aufnahmen von Mansfeld in Westafrika



Kopfaufsatzmaske mit Männergesicht
Herkömmliche Zuordnung: Boki, Kamerun
H: 28 cm, Ex Galerie Simonis, Düsseldorf
© Foto Lothar & Volker Thomas, Nürnberg



Janusgesichtiger Tanzaufsatz
Herkömmliche Zuordnung: Boki, Kamerun, H: 26 cm, Ex Hermann Sommerhage, Germersheim. Vor jedem Fest werden Tanzaufsätze mit Palmöl berieben und neu bemalt.
© Foto Thomas Lother & Volker Thomas, Nürnberg

Kopfaufsatzmaske mit Frauengesicht
Herkömmliche Zuordnung: Ejagham, Kamerun, H: 23 cm, Sammlung Seliger, Dresden, seit 1911
© Foto Thomas Lother & Volker Thomas, Nürnberg

Kopfaufsatzmaske mit Frauengesicht
Herkömmliche Zuordnung: Ejagham, Kamerun, H: 25 cm, Privatsammlung
© Foto Zemanek-Münster, Würzburg

Janusgesichtige Stülpmaske „mit 4 Köpfen gekrönt“
Herkömmliche Zuordnung: Ejagham, Kamerun, H: 41 cm, Ex Carlo von Castelberg, Zürich
© Foto Zemanek-Münster, Würzburg

Die Kunst und Kultur der EJAGHAM

Ejagham, Banyang und bei den weit entfernten Bangwa. Masken wanderten entlang der ehemaligen Handels- und Sklavenrouten. Rechte an Bündeln und Gesellschaften wurden von einer Gruppe einer anderen verkauft, was das Recht beinhaltete, auch eigene Masken zu erwerben und herzustellen. Um einen Tanzaufsatz erwerben zu können, muss man Mitglied eines Bundes sein. Im Ngbe-Leopardengeheimbund beispielsweise muss man verschiedene Ränge durchlaufen, um das Privileg zu erlangen, einen Tanzaufsatz zu besitzen. Wittmer (2005: 60) behauptet, dass jeder Rang seine eigenen Masken trägt und diese nicht nur stellvertretend für transzendente Wesen stehen, sondern auch für die Identität und die Autorität des Mitglieds. Das Tragen von Stülpmasken ist den höchsten Bundmitgliedern vorbehalten (Wittmer, 2005: 60).

Um die Herstellung der Tanzaufsätze ranken sich einige Mythen. Mansfeld (1908: 151) schreibt dazu: „Früher hat man angeblich Sklavenhaut oder Haut gefallener Feinde benutzt.“ Die meisten der Tanzaufsätze im Bestand deutscher Völkerkundemuseen sind m. E. mit Ziegen- oder Zwergantilopenhaut überzogen. Schädler (1982: 9) schreibt, dass auch Affen- oder Schaffhaut sowie Schweineblasen verwendet wurden. Menschliche sowie tierische Schädel, Holzköpfe und Holzmasken dienen hierbei als Medium

zum Überziehen der Haut (Hahner-Herzog, 1999: 86), welche mit Bambusstiften oder einer Art Gummi (Nicklin, 1974: 14) auf dem Holzkorpus angebracht wurde. Die Hautoberfläche war mit schwarzer Farbe ornamental bemalt, Skarifikationen wurden mittels Pyrogravur eingebrannt. Für die Zähne verwendeten sie Holzstifte (meist Rinde von Palmblattrippen), Horn oder Metallstücke, Elfenbein, Knochen oder menschliche Zähne. Vor jedem Fest wurden die Köpfe wieder mit Palmöl eingerieben und neu bemalt (Röschenthaler, 1993), oft wurden auch Ziernarben an den Holzkörpern angebracht oder angeschnitten, um einige Elemente unter der Haut hervorzuheben. Zinnblech, zurechtgeschlagene Spiegelscherben oder Kaurischnecken (*Cypraea moneta*) wurden in die Augen eingesetzt, die Pupillen wurden durch schwarze Bemalung oder eingeschlagene Nägel angedeutet. Die Kopfpattie ist entweder durch eine dunkle Bemalung, die eine kappenartige Form aufweist, gekennzeichnet oder es sind menschliche Haare auf dem Kopf befestigt. An anderen Köpfen sind Stränge aus Pflanzenfasern angebracht, die Haare nachahmen sollen. Bei manchen Objekten kann man auf dem Kopf befestigte Holzzöpfe sehen. Manchmal finden sich auch Tier- und Holzhörner, welche die Verbindung zum Ngbe, zur Kraft der Tierwelt, verstärken sollen.

Wie darf man nun als Betrachter solche Tanzaufsätze interpretieren? Zuerst betrachten wir die Geschichte des Ursprungs des Schädelkultes. In vorkolonialer Zeit tanzten die jungen und alten Krieger mit den abgeschlagenen Köpfen ihrer Opfer (Nicklin, 1979: 56). Durch die Tötung eines Fremden, von jemandem, der nicht der eigenen Gemeinschaft angehörte, wurde man als Mitglied in die Gesellschaft initiiert. Wen oder was stellen die Masken eigentlich dar? Sind es nur idealisierte Typen oder gar individuelle Porträts von Verstorbenen? Lokale Informanten der Ejagham teilten Röschenthaler (1993: 230) mit: „Die Maske ist unser Ahne.“ Mit dieser Aussage meinen sie, dass die Maske einem bestimmten Ahnen gewidmet ist, aus dessen Besitz sie stammt. Im weiteren Sinne meinen sie den Ahnen, der sie zuerst besaß. Die Maske ist jedoch kein Porträt des Ahnen. Sie stellt nach Röschenthaler (1993: 230) entweder den Kopf eines gefangenen Feindes oder einen nachgebildeten Kopf eines solchen dar und trägt relativ realistische Züge. Röschenthaler beschreibt die Bedeutung der meist gelben oder weiss gefärbten Tanzaufsätze im Kontext ihrer verschiedenen Ursprungsmythen: „Das helle Gesicht der weiblichen Aufsatzköpfe der Männer mit seiner als schön geltenden Gesichtsbemalung und den Nsibidi-Zeichen, das gleichzeitig auch für monenkin und die Grazie der jungen Mädchen steht, kann also auch als Darstellung der Tochter des Dorfoberhauptes gelten, einer fremden Frau,

die das Geheimnis des Leoparden in ihrem Gefäß in der Wildnis fand und in der das Opfer der Tochter des Dorfoberhauptes durch den Hautüberzug des Maskenkopfes erinnert wird.“ (Röschenthaler, 1993: 252)

Die dunkel oder braun gefärbten Masken stellen nach Röschenthaler (1998) Männer dar. Die Männer bemalen sich, wenn sie in den Krieg ziehen, ihre Gesichter dunkel. Selten findet man Nsibidi-Zeichen auf männlichen Masken. Viele der männlichen Gesichtsmasken weisen einen Bart auf, obwohl die Ejagham keine Bärte tragen. Die weiblichen Gesichter sind idealisiert, manche männlichen Gesichtsmasken hingegen entstellt. Das heisst, sie stellen eine Gesichtskrankheit oder -deformation dar. Röschenthaler (1998) weist auch darauf hin, dass eine Anzahl von Masken Feinde darstellte, diese Masken tragen auch Skarifikationen anderer ethnischer Gruppen (z. B. der Tiv aus dem Benue-Gebiet).

Die bekanntesten und am häufigsten publizierten Masken des Crossriver-Gebietes sind die Janusköpfigen Tanzmasken (Campbell, 1988: 19). Blier (1980: 17) schildert, dass diese im Crossriver-Gebiet wichtige gesellschaftliche Ideale vertreten und eine Balance zwischen der individuellen Kraft und der Harmonie der

Gemeinschaft herstellen. Ob nun als Stülp- oder Aufsatzmaske, sie repräsentieren eines der ältesten Prinzipien der Menschheit: männlich und weiblich, Nacht und Tag, Leben und Tod, stark und schwach, hell und dunkel (Schädler, 1982: 10). Die helle Seite steht für die Welt der Frau, die schwarze oder dunkelbraune Seite für das Wesen des Mannes (Wittmer, 2005: 60). Die Aufsatzmasken haben entweder zwei, drei oder vier Gesichter (Blier, 1980: 5). Doppelköpfige Masken kommen in der Kombination weiss-dunkel oder dunkel-dunkel vor. Während des Tanzes mit einer doppel-, drei- oder viergesichtigen Maske sieht immer die männliche nach vorn, die weibliche nach hinten. Dies ist bei Stülpmasken bereits durch die im männlichen Gesicht angebrachten Augenlöcher vorgegeben (Röschenthaler, 1993: 221). Neben den anthropomorphen Masken gibt es auch Tanzaufsätze von wichtigen Tieren der Vergangenheit (Krokodile, Antilopen u. a.), welche vor allem von Jagd-Bünden unterschiedlicher Art verwendet werden (Blier, 1980: 13). Das Wissen um die Deutung der Tanzaufsätze erlaubt, sich mit diesen Tanzaufsätzen erneut auseinanderzusetzen und die indigenen Schönheitsvorstellungen (Zahn deformationen, Skarifikationen, Bemalung) in unsere Interpretation mit einzuschliessen. Somit können wir den wild anmutenden Charakter dieser Masken entschlüsseln.

Zusatzinformation

Im Kunsthandel, bei Auktionen und in vielen Sammlungen werden Objekte der Ejagham-Kultur und ihrer benachbarten Gruppen zumeist mit dem Label „Ekoi“ bezeichnet. Der Name Ekoi leitet sich von der englischen Aussprache Efik ab. Die Efik leben an der Küstenregion um Calabar. Die Engländer hatten zuerst Kontakt mit den Bewohnern Calabars und bezeichneten quasi alle Gruppen stellvertretend als „Ekoi“.

Historische Illustration aus den Urwald-Dokumenten von Alfred Mansfeld



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largest parts of the collection stored in the Ethnological Museum in Berlin and the Linden-Museum in Stuttgart. The ethnological aspect immerses itself in a synopsis of such images, which show aspects of the everyday and ritualistic lives of the inhabitants of the Great Plains, as well as individual locations charged with special cultural significance. The ongoing influence of Bodmer, which has specific importance in



Zurich, is exposed by a detailed examination of various editions of the *Naturgeschichte* by Hans Rudolf Schinz, amongst which the most interesting is the one in which the first great portraits appeared, generated on the basis of Bodmer's sketches and prior to the illustrations in *zu Wied's Travels*. A cursory glance at "Bodmer und die Folgen" can do nothing more than allude to the numerous reprints, adaptations and malapropisms of his work and to the various ways in which his thinking has remained a living entity. The exhibition shows no more than a small portion of the vast range of material, which (for reasons of space) could not be accommodated by the small NONAM. However, it is necessary to note in reference to Bodmer's later (French) work, that this differs radically in character from the American.

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*Stage victory
Reopening of the Exhibition
of Southern Asia, South East
Asia and Himalayan
Countries at the Museum
of Ethnology in Vienna
Julia Kospach*

The reopening of the Viennese Museum of Ethnology was long awaited with great anticipation. To be more specific: For years. The museum, located in the New

Palace (the south easterly wing of the Imperial Palace of Vienna) has been closed since 2004 due to urgently required refurbishment works. The building required a new warehouse and new offices for its employees, who previously persevered with their work in tomb-like chambers. Above all however, there was a need for the renovation of the exhibition rooms and a new configuration of the exhibits. The reopening took place – as a visitor to the opening ceremony in mid November put it – "zizerweise"; an Old Austrian expression for "in small steps or stages". Back in May 2007, the fully renovated special exhibition rooms on the mezzanine level were opened with the grandiose exhibition "Benin – kings and rituals. Courty art from Nigeria". After its end, four months later, the doors of the museum were closed once more, only to reopen to the public on the 19th November 2008: This time with the reopening of the newly designed exhibition of the collection from Southern Asia, South East Asia and the Himalayan Countries, with the title "Images of Deities". This is a particularly important and logical first step in the direction of the resumption of complete exhibition operations following the general refurbishment measures – even if this initially encompasses no more than a seventh of the complete collection of the exhibits held by the museum.

Whether and when it will be possible to tackle the other collection pieces is presently unclear. The museum is short by 7 million Euros, and the state has not yet granted its definitive approval for this amount. Some doubt the reasoning behind reopening the museum in stages, although in the opinion of the "Images of Deities" curator Christian Schicklgruber it is well worth a try: "We are also doing it to show the politicians what is possible if one has a bit of cash in one's hand." The success of Christian Schicklgruber and his team has catapulted the Viennese Museum of Ethnology (which works under the umbrella of the Museum of the History of Art) back to hip in an instant. It has maybe also been so delightful because such beneficially subjective, elegant, modern and light-footedly accessible museums (Museum of the History of Art, Natural History Museum, Museum of Ethnology) have not yet been entirely familiar amongst the buildings of the Vienna Ring - and certainly not within the framework of permanent exhibitions. "We have opened up internationally. And it was high time" says Christian

Schicklgruber. The traditional requirement, that an ethnological collection of pieces must deal with its theme exhaustively and comprehensively, is knowingly replaced with sketchiness. This demonstrates just how well the whole can also be reflected by taking a closer look at mosaic pieces: In 25 large glass display cases in four rooms, the new exhibition tells of the religious beliefs in Asia. This is the central theme and as such visitors seeking Indian household effects, the dowry of a Vietnamese bride or agricultural tools from Cambodia will search in vain. Apparently "a cow from every village" was "relatively unexciting" for Christian Schicklgruber. And the fact that this was replaced by the systems of faith of Asia; this is because his interests have lain here throughout many years of research. A good thing too. The most striking effect of the new concept by far is that one receives instruction in a comfortable way, and furthermore that one feels one's knowledge of Asia has expanded by the time one leaves the exhibition. And all this without even once having to overpower the familiar laboured breathing that accompanies a museum overdose. One suddenly acquires a context, a framework, within which one is able to discuss. For example, the North East Indian



tribal groups of the Naga, who stand for a whole host of belief systems of the Indian subcontinent, which exist alongside Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. No more than 10 or 15 objects in two large display cases document how a culture, which practiced ritual head-taking (right up to the 1950's), merged with Christianity. Divine wooden figures or skull trophies stand for the old. A statue of Jesus and a statue of Mary stand for the new Christian Nagaland, cheaply mass-produced in India and displayed alongside a

children's bible in the language of the Ao-Naga and a blue and red, woven chasuble which combines Christian symbols with traditional Naga patterns. However, the most original piece is a photo originating from the office of the Catholic Bishop of Nagaland: The picture shows the bishop excitedly shaking hands with Pope Benedikt XVI in Rome, where he – to his great pride – first laid a Naga cloth with traditional head-taking symbols over the shoulder for the purpose of the photo. "Shamanism in Korea", "Burial and Divine Rites in China", "Len Dong Cult of Mediums in Vietnam", "The Taoist Priests", "The Holiness in Indian Dance", "The Many Deities of Buddhism", "Buddha and his Guises", "Lama and Ritual" "Protective Gods" and "Cham Dance in Tibetan Buddhists" are some of the themes of the display cabinets. The best things about them is that all objects stand alongside each other as equal and that one – depending on inclination – is able to visit these exhibits as in a museum of art or like a collection of ethnological theme portraits. Each piece tells a great deal: A cheap, shockingly loud piece of kitsch art showing the god Shiva and a fine miniature painting of Shiva from the 18th Century. The curved inconspicuous wooden stake that a Taoist priest recently knocked on the ground in order to summon the gods is carefully staged as an important exhibit, in equal measure to the grand slate statue of the sitting Buddha from the 2nd Century. A Ho-Chi-Minh altar with golden plastic bust and a packet of cigarettes as oblation tells in parallel of the godlike adoration of the Vietnamese revolutionary leader and of his ardent nicotine addiction. And then there is the complete alter from a village in North East Thailand, which was donated to the museum by an old healer, more than 80 years in age. She had no successor and was therefore prepared to leave it to the museum: It is a stepped arrangement, in which Buddha figures stand next to Hindu gods such as Vishnu or Brahma and helpful spirits from folk religion, alongside kings from Thai history. And in between plastic flower arrangements, hectic flashing orange fairy lights and a local protective spirit – a small boy – together with his toy car. An ethnological museum could hardly demonstrate more effectively the colourful status of religious practices presently found amongst the people of Asia, than with a display cabinet exhibiting this syncretic "Palace of the Deities". www.ethno-museum.ac.at

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*The Tropicana syndrome
Gert Ches*

Togo was one of the countries lucky enough to experience modest interest from tourists soon after decolonialisation. In the 1970s the Tropicana Hotel was developed. At the time, it was considered to be a magnificent facility. Four hundred Europeans, mostly Swiss and German nationals regularly visited. The area was a novelty for both the visitors and residents of the tiny village of Avepozo. It was a novelty in many senses. It involved people meeting who lived vast distances apart but what created major confusion was the clash of cultures. Disenchanted Europeans could not get enough of the elementary power associated with African



traditions rooted in magical thoughts and actions. Whether this reflects the longing for a lost paradise or whether it is simply the response to the demystified ideology which is attracted to logic. In the view of western journalists, ethnologists and movie makers, the peoples of Africa are still uniquely mysterious. Their cultic actions are marvelled at but rarely understood.

In addition to major festivities and ceremonies, the movie material shot by an Austrian company over the past two years mainly demonstrates how clashing cultures change one another and how the resulting new forms are understood by contemporary Africans. To illustrate this change, it is necessary to look back at the founding year of the Tropicana Hotel and to review the cultural situation. From the guests' point of view, there was this new country to discover featuring a habitat created for them. From the point of view of the Togolese, the adventure-seeking foreigners represented a welcome source of income and potential wealth. Small local enterprises offering a variety of services were quickly established: taxi services,

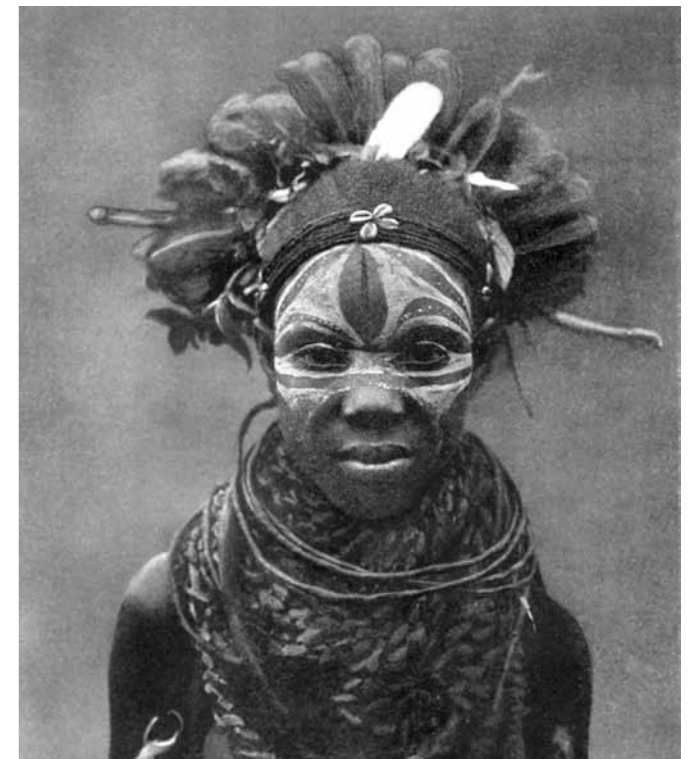
tour guides, boat rentals, trade with souvenirs and food, all kinds of textiles including cheap tailor-made suits. Entertainment included everything from round trips to folklore shows and prostitution.

This is precisely the point that was relevant for the development of a new culture, namely the willingness of the Africans to show their dances and rituals in such a way that they met the tourists' expectations. Discussions were held between the hotel director and the dancers, intended to clarify that the shows were going to be presented in fancy costumes and the bast fibre skirts everyone was expecting. It was made clear that more mature women – if the group included any – were covering their saggy breasts with a bra and that no animal cruelty was to take place during the shows. The entire show was to be presented within a defined timeframe, coordinated with the serving of the meals and curfew. Trance dances were to be avoided due to the unpredictability of the media. For the local residents who were used to exchanging their gods for others within their voodoo rituals and to modify their ancestral traditions any time they had an opportunity, the hotel director's request was not viewed as arrogance but instead a welcome change. They started tailoring new costumes and carving masks, and they used any type of imaginable materials to create show accessories that had nothing in common with traditional festive ceremonies. This development is much the same everywhere in the Third World. In Europe, the traditional alpine cultures have long been lost when new forms of entertainment were created in post-war period. These were perverted forms of old traditions which managed to enthrall visitors at "Tyrolean evenings". This trend continues to this day, thanks to audience support. But everything was different in Togo. Political turmoil, mismanagement and corruption quickly destroyed what was hailed as the solution to poverty for entire regions. Ten years after the glamorous grand opening of the Tropicana hotel its demise was sad certainty. Little tourism occurred in the 1990s with the exception of the initiatives of Swiss citizen Alice Mettler who uses brings visitors who are housed in a campground. She has provided the dancers and drummers a new home where they continue what started at the Tropicana. Meanwhile, more than thirty years have passed since the grand opening of the Tropicana, and the question arises whether a cultural

return took place after the end of the major tourism influx. The answer is no. History does not repeat itself, although this is sometimes bemoaned. Today's dancers and drummers are too young to remember how the villages looked back then. They became the representatives of a culture created by accident. They are carrying the old traditions, yet they are children of a generation who has internalised the new. These modern cultural hybrids evolved and this new generation believes that they are African. They are now acting within this new culture, creating astonishing works. Like the voodoo that is capable of including everything, the modern secular movements show that they are capable of cross-border flexibility. The ballet by Gazo sums up the problem, and camera man Peter Roehsler captured it with a billion pixel; and so it will be possible to ask the question about the cultural identity of a nation again in thirty years.

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*The art and culture of the
Ejagham // In the footsteps
of Alfred Mansfeld
– a stony path to worldwide glory
David Zemanek*

Even today, the expressive and aggressive appearances of the masks of the Ejagham evoke a shudder in many observers; collectors and missionaries in times past



considered them the epitome of evil. Very few know the deeper meaning of these powerful masks which – uniquely in Africa – are covered with human or animal skin. The first proposals of a deeper meaning were delivered by Dr. Alfred Mansfeld (born in 1870 in Tetschen, died 1932 in Graz). In 1904 the medical officer took up a position as the district exchange officer for Ossidinge in Cameroon. In a climate of mutual hostilities – uprisings and their bloody abatement were still fresh in the minds of the people - Mansfeld established a new system. He became a member of the Ekpe community ("ewi-ngbe") and attempted to organise this in terms of administrative procedures (Michels, 2004: 337). In just a short time he was able to establish a system of trust and stability in the region, which was entered into the history books under the term the "Mansfeld System". He ran the station from 1904 to 1915. He was known by the local inhabitants by the name "Dr. Mamfe" or "Dr. Mamfred" (Michels, 2004: 324). Mansfeld, who already had experience in tropical areas – he took part in the Xingu Expedition with Dr. Hermann Meyer in 1897 – collected objects from the Ejagham culture and their neighbouring groups, initially in an entirely unstructured and haphazard manner. In 1904, Felix von Luschan sent him his introduction to ethnological collections. One of his comprehensive and well documented collections was

delivered to the Museum for Ethnology in Dresden following its procurement by the patron Ernst F. Gütschow. He also provided ethnological and anthropological collections to Berlin, St. Petersburg (via Berlin) and Stuttgart. In “Urwald-Dokumente – Vier Jahre unter den Crossflussnegern Kameruns” (from 1908) and “Westafrika. Aus Urwald und Steppe zwischen Crossfluss und Benue” (1928) he described his experiences with the culture of the Ejagham. Alongside Percy Amaury Talbot, he was one of the first to deliver a comprehensive study on the lives of the people living there. After the war Mansfeld worked in the colonial office for the German Reich, where he managed an information office for emigrants. In 1930 he returned to Mamfe (formerly Ossidinge) in Cameroon as an employee of an international company. Beauty, so it is said, lies in the eye of the beholder. The apparently impressive and aggressive dance crests and masks of the Ejagham seem sinister to many observers, although few know their meaning. Furthermore, the objects of the Ejagham – conventionally referred to as “Ekoi” – are initially very difficult to classify. Are the dance crests pieces from the Boki, Anyang or Keaka? In order to train one’s eye it is necessary to compare stylistic characteristics and historical collection details. Like many other authors, I consider a subdivision into a naturalistic and abstract style to be problematic. Masks from unknown Boki artists were held in high regard and treasured throughout the Crossriver region. Thus, one finds these amongst the Ejagham, Banyang and the far removed Bangwa. Masks made their way along the former trade and slave routes. Rights to societies and communities were sold by one group to another, and with them the rights to acquire and produce the respective masks. In order to be able to acquire a dance crest one had to be a member of a society. For example, in the secret Ngbe-Leopard society one is required to move through various ranks in order to be awarded the privilege of wearing a dance crest. Wittmer (2005: 60) states that each rank wears its own mask and that this does not stand only as representation of transcendental being, but also for the identity and authority of the member. The wearing of helmet masks is reserved for the highest members of the society (Wittmer, 2005: 60). A few myths surround the production of the dance crests. Mansfeld (1908: 151) writes in this

regard: “Earlier, one apparently used the skin of slaves or a fallen enemy.” The majority of dance crests held by the German Museum for Ethnology are covered with the skin of goats or dwarf antelopes. Schädler (1982: 9) writes that the skin of monkeys and sheep, as well as the bladders of pigs were also used. Human and animal skulls, wooden heads and wooden masks serve here as mediums for the drawing of the skin (Hahner-Herzog, 1999: 86), attached to the timber corpus with bamboo nails or a type of rubber (Nicklin, 1974: 14). The surface of the skin was ornamentally painted with a black paint, scarifications were burned into the skin using pyroengraving. Wooden pegs were used for teeth (usually the rind of the palm-leaf veins), horn or pieces of metal, ivory, bone or human teeth. Prior to each festival the heads were once again rubbed with palm oil and newly painted (Röschenthaler, 1993), and scarifications were applied to / carved into the wooden bodies in order to make certain elements prominent beneath the skin. Sheet tin, shards of mirror broken to size or cowries (*Cypraea moneta*) were placed in the eyes and the pupils were created with black paint or by hammering in nails. The scalp is identified either with dark paint, applied in the shape of a cap, or through the fastening of human hair to the head. Strands of plant fibres were applied to other heads, intended to bear a resemblance to hair. In some objects fibrous braids have been attached to the head. One sometimes also finds animal and wooden horns which are intended to strengthen the connection to the Ngbe, to the power of the animal world.

As an observer, how should one interpret such dance crests? Firstly one must examine the history of the origins of the skull cult. In pre-colonial times, young and old warriors danced with the decapitated heads of their victims (Nicklin, 1979: 56). The killing of an outsider by someone who did not belong to the society meant the initiation of that person into the community. Who or what do the masks actually represent? Are they simply idealised individuals or actual portraits of the dead? Local intelligence on the Ejagham informed Röschenthaler (1993: 230) that: “The masks are our ancestors.” With this statement it meant that the masks are dedicated to specific forefathers by whom they were owned. Furthermore, they mean the ancestors who first owned them. The mask is not however a portrait of the ancestor. According to Röschenthaler (1993: 230) it is either

the head or recreated head of a captured enemy and bears relatively realistic features. Röschenthaler describes the meaning of the usually yellow or white dance crests in the context of their various original myths: “The light face of the female crest heads, the men with the face paint considered to be attractive and the nsibiri sign which also stands simultaneously for monenkin and the grace of the young girl, can also be the depiction of the daughter of the village leader, a strange woman who found the secret of the leopards in her vessel in the wilderness and in which the victim of the daughter of the village leader is remembered through the skin covering the mask head.” (Röschenthaler, 1993: 252). According to Röschenthaler (1998), the dark or brown coloured masks represent men. The men paint themselves to make their faces darker when they are at war. It is rare that one finds the Nsibidi sign on a male mask. Many male face masks exhibit a beard although the Ejagham do not wear beards. The female faces are more idealised, whilst in contrast many of the male face masks are disfigured, appearing to present a facial disease or deformation. Röschenthaler (1998) also points out that a number of masks represent the enemy, and that these masks also bear scarifications of other ethnic groups (e.g. the Tiv from the Benue region). The best known and most frequently publicised masks of the Crossriver region are the Janus-headed dance masks (Campbell, 1988: 19). Blier (1980: 17) described that these represent important social ideals in the Crossriver region and form a balance between the individual power and the harmony of the community. Whether these are helmet or crest masks, they represent one of the oldest principles of humanity: Male and female, day and night, life and death, strength and weakness, light and dark (Schädler, 1982: 10). The light side stands for the female world, the black or dark-brown side for the realm of men (Wittmer, 2005: 60). The crest masks have either two, three or four faces (Blier, 1980: 5). Double-headed masks come in the combinations white-dark or dark-dark. During the dance with the double, triple or quadruple faced mask, the male face always looks ahead whilst the female face looks behind. This is presupposed with the helmet masks, in which the eye holes are already formed in the male face (Röschenthaler, 1993: 221). In addition to the anthropomorphic masks, there are also dance crests from important animals from the past (crocodiles,

antelopes etc.) which are used predominantly by hunting societies of various types (Blier, 1980: 13). Knowledge about the meaning of the dance crests enables one to re-familiarise oneself with these dance crests and to incorporate the indigenous ideas of beauty (teeth deformation, scarification, painting) into our interpretations. Thus, we are able to decipher the apparently wild characters portrayed by these masks.

Additional information
Objects from the Ejagham culture and neighbouring groups are usually labelled “Ekoi” by art dealers, at auctions and in the majority of collections. The name Ekoi is derived from the English pronunciation Efik. The Efik live in the coastal region around Calabar. The English made the first contact with the inhabitants of Calabar and gave all groups the representative name “Ekoi”.

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Leon Pollux – The spirit of Africa
Gert Chesi

The museum „Haus der Völker“ (museum for the arts and ethnology) is continuing its series of exhibitions of contemporary art by contrasting two very different and yet related personalities. The pictures taken by Benin native Dominique Zinkpè are set off against the sculptures created by German sculptor and painter Leon Pollux. This encounter is the result of an error, a blatant misjudgement by Gert Chesi. Below, he explains how it all happened. Large, lean figures were standing there, androgynous and of ravishing beauty. Sinister and yet of irenic grace. With their long, armless bodies, they eluded the familiar anatomy without looking like miscarriages to the observer. Their extremely detailed heads bore



graceful faces, they were so beautiful that the traces of colour running down their cheeks like tears had a liberating effect. They liberated from the fear of being taken in by an idyll, aesthetics that must be considered suspicious in this form. Artist Leon Pollux’ virtuosity is seen here for the first time. He breaks the idyll before it materialises, he questions what appears to be valid, provokes the opposing party by not meeting the expectations and by contrasting the shiny surfaces of the faces with rough bodies cut from one trunk. I wish I was surrounded by these protective spirits – as he refers to them – in times of misery and threat. But what was the error I made? It was the error of believing that these sculptures and the accompanying pictures and installations were created by an exceptionally gifted African citizen who was capable of creating such scenes from the depth of mythology and based on an animist world outlook. People who were living in Africa for long enough know how difficult it is to remain true to the rationality of the correspondence to reality. In this country in which trees have souls and spirits are omnipresent, in which drums talk and witches are recognised by the leaves they move while dancing, in this county which draws its truth from dreams and trances, ideas and images like the ones created by Leon Pollux are part of everyday life. He cultivated them and plucked them from the mysteries, he continued to defoliate them until the core was exposed, a core which is no longer tied to local myths or sectarian rituals. The key question was how this European-trained artist was capable of internalising the spirit of Africa in such a subtle way? In case the presumption made is not part of the error, his childhood - part of which he spent in Liberia - would be the key to the insight. Children knowingly or unknowingly internalise impressions which emanate from foreign cultures to a greater extent. Whatever he experienced there, the forms and designs of his creations may be the result of the proliferation on the sediment of these experiences. New art within the European meaning must reflect the historic period in which it was created. It must be critical and do justice to the sociocultural aspects. The guidelines of art are multifactorial, but many a path considered the “truth” later proved to be wrong. How could the works created by Leon Pollux be viewed under European criteria? Not at all! He distances himself from the common requirements with originality, he

contradicts many rules of art by allowing the objects to speak for themselves and by offering those who don’t understand this language a broad bandwidth of possible interpretations. It is what it is, his figures remain figures, even if they are ascribed protective functions. The constant effort to obtain in-depth knowledge undertaken by the observer leads to religiousness which is no longer capable of looking at the beautiful garden without assuming that it is inhabited by fairies, or to enjoy the aesthetics of a piece of art without perceiving a supernatural message in it. It is legal for the artist to include messages in his works. And it is equally legal for the viewers to act out their fantasies in them. However, it must also be permitted to view the work of art based on an atheistic aspect and to be satisfied with what we see. In the case of Leon Pollux, the scope is so rich that even those who are unwilling to dig deeper are able to reap rich rewards. L’art pour l’art, the self-sufficient form is enough to fascinate. The mythological substructure may be fascinating as an addition, but it is not necessarily required because every human has made similar experiences, irrespective of how he thinks or what he is dreaming of. Getting these experiences involved would mean pocketing the work of art, annexing it and utilising it as the bearer of a personal existential orientation. This access may also be part of the freedom we grant the art, artists and the viewers. If we advocate the freedom of art, anarchy and the rejection of every system of rules are the answer.

Leon Pollux is a craftsman and artist like he is a painter, philosopher and sculptor. With his installations, he creates total works of art with flowing limits. He might as well be an architect, locksmith or potter. In a world of increasingly tightening limits, there must be a type of art that goes beyond traditional peripheries. The once narrow horizons have made room for a global view, the mountain spirits and spirits of the seas are contrasted with world religions attempting to solidify their positions without a clear orientation, without recognising the syncretism that has long started to grip humanity. Artists like Leon Pollux are providing an answer. Global art is their language, it is an art that integrates everything, both the spiritual and material. It is art that illustrates and addresses what might be. It does not exclude anything because tolerance is its basic principle. It has few enemies, including the dogmas of art history, ignorance and poor

quality. Within this meaning, his art is sociopolitical not party political. It reveals both the ugly grimace of cultures as well as the immortality of all things beautiful. It incriminates religious fanaticism (the gardeners) or acknowledges facts (dream passage, catalogue p. 32). It denounces the cruelty of power (trinity, catalogue p. 52), it is scary (apotrope, catalogue p. 70), and it takes position. It is arrogant to write about an artist with whom one only has a nodding acquaintance. Therefore, my thoughts are spinning around



his work, in the hope that the latter will identify the human behind it, revealing and unmasking him with all his most intimate sensations. The driving force behind this is not voyeurism, but the desire to find a relative who is telling the same stories with different means. This closes the circle of the searcher who always ends up at the beginning again, irrespective of how much they may have found. Their goal is to preserve the ability to marvel and to select those inspirations among the multitude of available ones which are interesting enough to be cut into to wood or rock. This is how Leon Pollux spreads out his allegories before us and he would not be an artist if he did not wish to be recognised by as many people as possible who understand his language.

There is no need for me to apologise that I though he was an African citizen. In fact, this error is a compliment. It is irrelevant whether it was Picasso, Braque or Kirchner, they all found their masters in the heart of Africa, in the fetish priests of the Songor or the master carvers of the Yoruba. They taught us to convey our feelings through expressions and abstractions and to understand the truth which can be found beyond rationality, in the arts and creativity.

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In the land of gross social happiness
Julia Kospach

The Buddhist Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan is successfully pursuing a policy of taking small steps toward opening up for tourism and democracy. On the 4th December a new museum on the history of the country was opened in central Bhutan, with Austrian support. When asked about the Gross Domestic Product of his country,

Bhutan’s fourth king, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, spoke a few years back of another form of national performance that he sees as more significant: The “Gross Social Happiness” of the people of his country. Even if this cannot be measured with figures: According to the kingly initiative, the “Gross Social Happiness” of Bhutan’s Bhutanese is superior in importance to the total economic profit of the small Himalayan kingdom. In Bhutan things are different than elsewhere. This also remains true if one discounts the romanticism of western travellers. Bhutan is opening up slowly in accordance with a precise plan. The neighbouring country of Nepal, with its unleashed mountain tourism, its cultural sale, the smoggy capital city of Kathmandu and the deforestation of its woods may have served as a negative example here. Bhutan is not in a hurry to leap onboard the global market and tourism carousel and to water down its traditions in the process. A few stumbling blocks stand in the way of the country catapulting itself from a middle ages feudal state into the 21st Century in the space of just a few decades. Bhutan has managed to circumnavigate this rather successfully to date. Only in 1999 – as the last country on the planet – did it introduce television;