

IL SARCOFAGO DI SPITZMAUS E ALTRI TESORI

Fondazione Prada presents “Il sarcofago di Spitzmaus e altri tesori” (Spitzmaus Mummy in a Coffin and Other Treasures), an exhibition project conceived by Wes Anderson and Juman Malouf, at its Milan venue from 20 September 2019 to 13 January 2020.

Organized in collaboration with the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, the exhibition features 537 artworks and objects selected by film director Wes Anderson (b. Houston, 1969) and illustrator, designer and writer Juman Malouf (b. Beirut, 1975) from 12 collections of the Kunsthistorisches Museum (the Egyptian and Near Eastern Collection, the Collection of Greek and Roman Antiquities, the Picture Gallery, the Museum of Ethnology, the Theatre Museum, the Collection of Historic Musical Instruments, the Imperial Armoury, the Imperial Carriage Museum, the Kunstammer, the Coin Collection, the Library, and the Collections of Ambras Castle) and from 11 departments of the Naturhistorisches Museum in Vienna. The twin museums, inaugurated in 1891, are among the leading cultural institutions in Austria and Europe. The former houses over four million works collected by the Habsburg family and subsequently the Republic of Austria, since the 13th and 14th centuries. The latter is one of the largest natural history museums in the world, including over 20 million objects. The project explores a long time span from 3.000 BC, the date attributed to the oldest object in the exhibition – a bracelet with Egyptian faience beads from the Kunsthistorisches Museum, to 2018, the year of the three emu eggs from the Naturhistorisches Museum.

“Il sarcofago di Spitzmaus e altri tesori” explores the reasons behind the decision to create a collection and the ways in which it is housed, presented and experienced. Looking back to the past and drawing inspiration on the model of the *Wunderkammer*, the exhibition challenges traditional museum canons, proposing new relations between the institutions and their collections, and between their professional figures and their public. The choice of exhibited works, based on a non-academic, interdisciplinary approach, not only illustrates Anderson and Malouf’s deep knowledge of the two museums, but also reveals unexpected parallels and resonances between the works included in the project and the creative universes of the two artists. The exhibition narrative is formed by groups of works: from green objects to portraits of children, from miniatures to timepieces, from boxes to wooden objects, from portraits of noblemen and common people to natural subjects like the garden as well as meteorites and animals presented as scientific exhibits or artistic depictions.

The selection includes *Coffin of a Spitzmaus*, an Egyptian wooden box with a mummified shrew from the 4th century BC which the exhibition is titled after; classical artworks, such as the *Bust of a Matron*, a Roman marble sculpture from the second half of the 1st century BC, and the *Mummy Portrait: Young Man with Short Beard* (first half of the second century AD), a precious testimony of Roman Egyptian painting; 16th and 17th century paintings like *Portrait of Margrave Casimir of Brandenburg-Kulmbach* (1522) and *Old Man and Young Woman* (1530–40) both by Lucas Cranach the Elder, and the portrait of *Electeur Johann Friedrich of Saxony*

(1550–51) by Titian and *Isabella d'Este* (1600–01) by Peter Paul Rubens; military exhibits such as the *Fox Helmet* (1526–29), which belonged to Ferdinand I, and *Boy's Armour* (1568–70) made for Charles of Austria, the son of Archduke Ferdinand II; furnishings and precious objects like the *Phoenix* (1610–20), an ivory sculpture made by the Master of the Furies, *Shell-Shaped Bowl with Neptune* (1620–30) by Ottavio Miseroni, and *Emerald on a Gilded Copper Pedestal* (1596) from the Naturhistorisches Museum, made from emeralds of different sizes mined in Colombia and assembled in the Tyrol to simulate a specimen of exceptional size and quality.

“Spitzmaus Mummy in a Coffin and Other Treasures” was presented at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna from November 2018 to April 2019. The Milan exhibition is a second version with a larger display area and a greater number of exhibits. The original layout of rooms and vitrines, conceived by the two artist-curators with Itai Margula (Margula Architects) as a treasure chest, has been transported to the exhibition space of Fondazione Prada as a ready-made. The exhibition extends across the ground floor of the Podium to create a setting inspired by the Italian garden, with the presence of elements evoking hedges and allegorical pavilions typical of Renaissance garden. The main historical reference for this new conceptual and visual layout is Ambras Castle in Innsbruck, the palace designed in 1570 by the architect Giovanni Battista Guarienti, after the great Italian courts, to house the collections of Archduke Ferdinand II of Habsburg and his wife Philippine Welser. Today Ambras is part of the Kunsthistorisches Museum and is considered the oldest museum in the world. One of its buildings, known as the Lower Castle, was designed with the aim of sharing with guests and visitors an artistic legacy, so far only destined for the pleasure and education of the sovereign and the royal family.

The project is completed by an artist's book published by Fondazione Prada. The publication takes the form of a box including drawings, reproductions and various materials, and elaborates the idea of the portable museum and the personal collection, referring to Marcel Duchamp's *Boîte en-valise* as its inspiration. The book focuses on the contents of the project, including an introduction by Wes Anderson, a conversation between the two associate curators of the exhibition Mario Mainetti (Fondazione Prada) and Jasper Sharp (Kunsthistorisches Museum), a series of Q&A's with the 23 curators of the two Vienna museums and the description of the exhibition through the words of Wes Anderson, Juman Malouf, Jasper Sharp and actor Jason Schwartzman.

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