

Mission Statement of the Ethnographic Museum at the University of Zürich

The Ethnographic Museum is a science museum at the University of Zurich which preserves important cultural assets: over 50,000 objects, as well as photographs, audiovisual media and written material. The foundation of these collections and archives was laid at the end of the 19th century at the height of European colonialism. The museum collection was initially intended to educate the public in Switzerland about people's ways of life in other parts of the world.

Today the museum is a place of research, dialogue and encounter. We do not claim authority over the value and cultural significance of the artefacts preserved here. We are conscious of our responsibility not to perpetuate the global inequalities inherited from the colonial era. We also reflect on the links that were established with originator communities at the moment of collecting. We actively seek dialogue with these communities and constantly question our own practices of researching, organising and displaying the objects.

We are committed to diversity and polyphony, both internally and externally. For us, inclusion is both an attitude and a duty. We promote a coexistence that is characterised by respect and openness between people of different cultures, origins and identities – in the conviction that mutual understanding and respect form the basis of a peaceful and sustainable future.

The artefacts we preserve both oblige us and create opportunities for renewed encounters with members of the originator societies, with international experts, and with our public in Switzerland and around the world.

We preserve the collections and archives in a professional, transparent and accessible manner and, where possible, proactively inform originators and their descendants about the cultural heritage we hold. We research, develop and expand the collections in collaboration with various interest and stakeholder groups in Switzerland and abroad. Through exhibitions, events and workshops, we provide insights into the processes and results of our research, and we invite and facilitate discussion. Our programmes are aimed at different generations and offer many points of contact for school classes and university students.

In making social and cultural anthropology accessible to the general public, we make diversity and polyphony tangible, and thus contribute to current professional and social debates in the context of global interdependencies.