



Dust & Silk
Steppe and Silk Roads
16 December 2021 to 3 May 2022

The exhibition *Dust & Silk. Steppe and Silk Roads* takes visitors on a fascinating journey through the past and the present, exploring connections between these historical routes and the “New Silk Road”.

Silk textiles and ikat fabrics, tea, and “wild apples” made their way to Europe along these legendary historical trade routes, which also Marco Polo to travel across Asia. Nevertheless, there has never been such a thing as *the* Silk Road. Neither today nor in the past does it concern only one road or silk as the singular good. Rather, it was and is a loose, changing network of routes by land and sea that connects China with Europe and other parts of the world.

The term “Silk Road” was coined by German geographer and cartographer Ferdinand von Richthofen in 1877. Not only silk but also tea, gold, jade, china and horses were transported on paths through the steppe and deserts between Asia and Europe. In addition, also weapons, musical instruments, Golden Peaches, “wild apples” and spices as well as ideas, religions, art, dreams, knowledge, diseases, conflicts and dust were in motion.

Today, it is also about contact, movement and transport, albeit with other speeds and wares. Large-scale infrastructure projects dominate the regions along the old Steppe and Silk Roads, producing not only dust but also mining raw materials. In Europe, China's planned, global infrastructure network, the “Belt & Road Initiative”, is often called the “New Silk Road”.



The exhibition presents its objects to track these movements and relationships between Asia and Europe, and to establish new connections between various topics and places. Against this backdrop, the exhibits also reflect the interests of the travellers who brought them to Europe.

The exhibition juxtaposes more than 200 historical objects, artworks and photographic recordings with contemporary artistic positions and current research documents. The exhibits include outstanding collection pieces from the Weltmuseum Wien, numerous loans from national and international museums and collections, and the works of contemporary artists.

The exhibition was developed by the Weltmuseum Wien together with the Museum am Rothenbaum (MARKK) in Hamburg, where it was on display from 12 December 2020 to 7 November 2021. Moreover, it is the result of the research project "Dispersed & Connected" (project director and curator Maria-Katharina Lang/Austrian Academy of Sciences), funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) / Programme for Arts-based Research (FWF/PEEK-AR 394-G24).

Paths through the exhibition

The starting point of the exhibition is the steppe: the landscapes between the Caucasus and China are an in-between space connecting East and West. Both travellers and transport routes pass through them. This space was the site from which early Central Asian empires emerged which also had a huge amount of influence on settled people in China and Europe.

The exhibition directs our attention to hardly noticed in-between spaces and rarely heard voices. Visitors may follow these stories and trajectories along guided paths through the exhibition:

The "Objects of Encounters", for example, feature a golden chasuble from Regensburg, made of precious Mongolian "Tartar fabrics", Chinese porcelain, or wild apples with their origin in the heart of Asia, the Tian Shan Mountains.

The "Places of Longing" take visitors to such legendary trade cities as Tbilisi or Samarkand, to the bazaar in Bukhara or the Chinese Imperial Court.

In "Objects of Desire", visitors encounter not only precious, woven ikat fabrics, which spread from India and South China to Central Asia, but also the legendary "Heavenly Horses" from the Fergana Valley and, of course, gold, tea and Chinese silk.

These trajectories are also connected to collectors, travellers and contemporary artwork.



European expeditions: travel, collect & exchange

The travels to China by the merchant Marco Polo (1254–1324), and the written reports of the stories he told, inspired travellers centuries later to follow in his footsteps along the Silk Roads. Many of the things they acquired along the way, as fragments of the Silk Roads they imagined, entered the collections of European museums and libraries, such as the Weltmuseum Wien.

Franz Heger, who became the director of the Anthropological-Ethnographic Department of Vienna's Naturhistorisches Museum (today the Weltmuseum Wien), travelled to Central Asia, documenting architectural monuments and collecting "ethnographic" objects that caught his interest. Georg von Almásy, who set out in 1900, was one of the first Europeans in centuries to explore and photograph the peaks and glaciers of the Heavenly Mountain, or Tian Shan, between Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and China.

The travellers and collectors of the early 20th century also included women. The proportion of women collectors of the selected objects from the MARKK is extraordinarily remarkable, as are their life stories. The exhibition devotes particular attention to Viennese painter and illustrator Lene Schneider-Kainer (1885 Vienna–1971 Cochabamba, Bolivia) and her expedition via Constantinople, Tbilisi and Baku to Iran and through South Asia to China.

Needless to say, many of these journeys not only served to further science, but also to provide expanding European empires with information to support their political and economic ambitions. The objects with which Europeans returned are a mixture of the sublime and the commonplace: goggles for protection against the dust and sand of the steppe, panoramic photographs of immense mountain peaks and valleys, domestic utensils from inside a yurt, knucklebones and silk ikat.

Contemporary art

The works of contemporary artists assume a prominent role in the exhibition. Within the framework of the research project as the foundation of this exhibition, the artists were invited to approach the topics of infrastructure, speed, distance and closeness, globalisation, colonialism, nomadism and resource depletion. In the combination of current perspectives with historical artwork and cultural goods, surprising and hardly noticed stories are told. The voices of contemporary artists describe their own paths and present their own, often critical visions.

Paul Kolling's *Break of Gauge* unfolds cinematically in a single continuous image of the train connection between China and Germany, tracing a freight delivery in June 2019 as it traverses time and space. Dilyara Kaipova's textile artworks touch on Uzbekistan's colonial past and issues of globalisation. *The Scream* addresses the incorporation of globalised images in Uzbek cultural forms and highlights the price exacted for acceding to certain demands of globalisation. *Time Link*



by artist Nomin Bold, whose works were also featured as part of documenta 14, depicts the invisible links between the past and the present in the style of contemporary Mongolian painting.

Two impressive short films by Jack Wolf are the result of his reflections on his research trip to Xinjiang and Kazakhstan in 2019.

The paintings of Khosbayar Narankhuu, which at first glance draw strongly on the imagery of Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhist paintings, are particularly powerful. Upon close inspection, they also reveal details and narratives that sharply critique contemporary culture and politics. Through the extraordinary generosity and support of the Friends of the Weltmuseum Wien and John D. Marshall, the museum was able to acquire both paintings for its permanent collection.

The research project "Dispersed & Connected"

The exhibition builds upon the art-based scientific research project *Dispersed & Connected. Artistic Fragments Along the Steppe and Silk Roads* (FWF/PEEK-AR 394-G24), headed by Maria-Katharina Lang of the Austrian Academy of Sciences' Institute for Social Anthropology. The transdisciplinary project team of researchers and artists was composed of Tsetsentsolmon Baatarnaran, Georg Czernin, Johannes Heuer, Erdenebold Lhagvasuren, Tatia Skhirtladze, and Christian Sturminger. Fieldwork, museum research and the collaboration with artists in Asia and Europe laid the foundation to this project. <https://dispersedandconnected.net>

Along with Christian Sturminger, who contributed video material from their research trips in the project and designed the exhibit's scenography, Maria-Katharina Lang has curated an exhibition that presents fragments from the many imagined Silk Roads, placing the steppes at their centre. It brings the long lives of things and images – slow narrations of time and space – together with new artistic, scholarly and local perspectives. Johannes Heuer designed the artful imaginary walk-on map and the exhibition catalogue; he also created the video montage at the end of the exhibition.

Precious loans and exceptional collection objects

Aside from numerous objects from the collection of the Weltmuseum Wien, some of which on display for the very first time, the exhibition also features precious loans from Austrian and international museums and collections, including the Museum am Rothenbaum – Kulturen und Künste der Welt in Hamburg (MARKK), the Benediktinerstift Admont, the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, the Centrum für Naturkunde Universität Hamburg, the Kunstammer of the Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, the Kunstsammlung des Bistums Regensburg, the Naturhistorisches Museum Wien, the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg, the Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst (MAK), and private lenders.



Quote Jonathan Fine, Director Weltmuseum Wien:

"The Steppes, through which the Silk Roads ran, were once at the center of the world. They were so famous for their riches that they still captivate us today. If we examine the history of the Silk Roads more closely, we begin to see them not only as paths for trading and transporting wares, but also power, knowledge, religions, diseases, and art. From such a vantage, the 'New Silk Road' becomes all the more interesting: What will it bring us besides increased trade? How will it change the world?"

Quote Maria-Katharina Lang, curator of the exhibition:

"This exhibition focuses on the spaces in-between and the polyphony of voices, which are rarely heard or taken into account in public discourse. These spaces are marked by a changing network of paths and stories. The exhibition is a montage of objects and stories from people whom we encountered – sometimes by chance – during research at the museum depots, in the archives and in the field. It is a fragmented travelogue along the Steppes and Silk Roads, between Beijing and Hamburg or Vienna, and on their byways."

PRESS PHOTOGRAPHS

Press photographs are available in the press section of our website free of charge, for your topical reporting: <https://www.weltmuseumwien.at/en/press/>

Poster image
Designed by Johannes Heuer
© KHM-Museumsverband



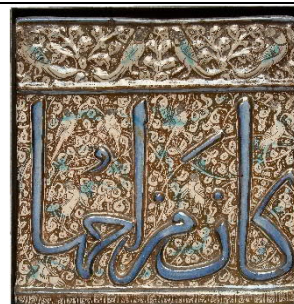
Shisha container
Anonymous
Iran, Safavid dynasty, c.15th–16th century
Quartz frit, painting with cobalt and black under transparent glazing
H 29 cm, Ø 18 cm
Acquired from Elisabeth Hellebronth
Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg 2004.197
Property of the Hamburg Art Collections foundation
© Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg, Jörg Arend

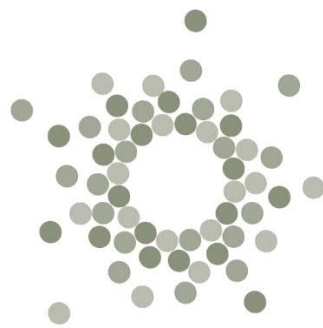


Paper flower bouquet
Anonymous, Yarkant, Xinjiang, China, 1889 or earlier
Paper, wooden sticks, pompons from silk fibers, silk thread, brass thread, horsehair
H 18.3–23 cm, W 6.3–16 cm, Ø 4–7.8 cm
Josef Troll Collection, Weltmuseum Wien VO 38032
© KHM-Museumsverband



Relief tiles
Anonymous, Kashan, c.1308
Quartz frit ceramics with scripted relief and painted décor in lustre,
cobalt blue and turquoise
H 37 cm, W 36 cm
Purchased in 1873, MAK KE 2091
© MAK/Georg Mayer





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Horizontal scroll: The return of lady Cai Wenji to Han-Empire amongst hunting Mongolians

Anonymous, Suzhou, China, 18th century

Cotton, paint, paper, silk, wood

38 × 1,200 cm (with frame)

Acquisition from W. Jessel, Entry 1916 , MARKK 16.10:1

Restored with funds from the Ernst von Siemens Art Foundation

© MARKK, Photo: Paul Schimweg



Chasuble From Regalia I of Henry's Vestments

Kollegiatstift Alte Kapelle in Regensburg

Fabric: Central Asia, 14th c.

Silk, strips of gilded leather, silk fabric (lampas)

L 123 cm, W 111 cm

Regensburg, Kollegiate Alte Kapelle L 2019/0001.1

© Kollegiatstift Unserer Lieben Frau zur Alten Kapelle, Regensburg, Photo: Philipp Schönborn



Coat for women khalat

Uzbekistan, late 19th century

Anonymous

Silk, cotton, wool , L 122 cm, W 148 cm

Fritz Willfort Collection, Weltmuseum Wien VO 180542

© KHM-Museumsverband



Carpet

Anonymous, Khotan, Xinjiang, China, 1889 or earlier

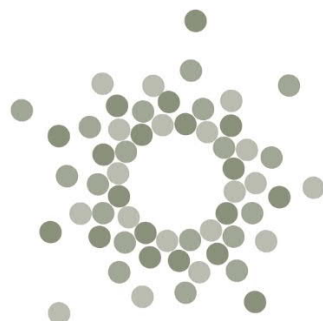
Silk

L 206 cm, W 92 cm

Josef Troll Collection, Weltmuseum Wien VO 38203

© KHM-Museumsverband





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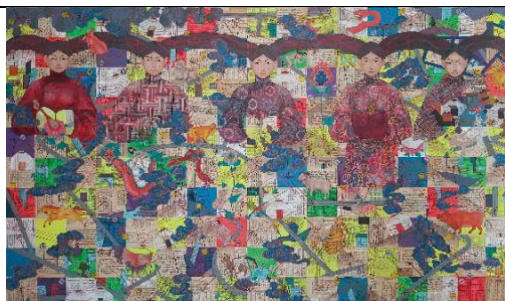
New street in the desert Gobi
Mongolia, 2018
© Maria-Katharina Lang



Coal trucks on the way to China
Tavan Tolgoi, Ömnögovi, Mongolia, 2018
© Maria-Katharina Lang

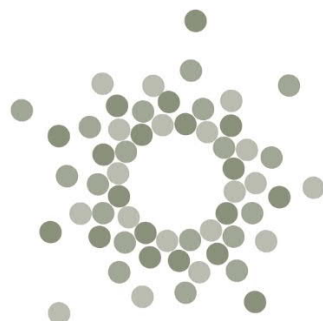


Nomin Bold
Time Link
Mongolia, 2020
Antique scriptures, acrylic, canvas , 245 × 145 cm
Acquisition by the artist
Financed by the Friends of Museum am
Rothenbaum MARKK e.V., MARKK 2020.9:1
© Nomin Bold



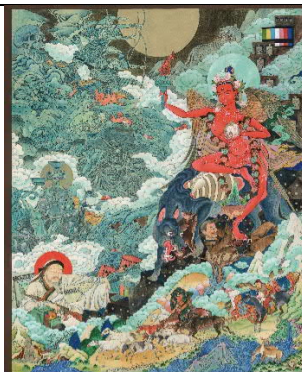
Khosbayar Narankhuu
Ten Grams
2020
Mongolian painting style, watercolour, canvas
90 × 70 cm
Painted for the project Dispersed & Connected
Gift of John D. Marshall to the Weltmuseum Wien
© Khosbayar Narankhuu





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Khosbayar Narankhuu
Instant Food
2020
Mongolian painting style, watercolour, canvas
90 × 70 cm
Painted for the project Dispersed & Connected
Acquired through the support of the Weltmuseum
Wien Friends
© Khosbayar Narankhuu



Dilyara Kaipova
Chapan from the series 'Scream'
Uzbekistan, 2019
Ikat fabric, lined, H 130 cm
Acquisition by the artist
Financed by the Friends of Museum am Rothenbaum
MARKK e.V., MARKK 2020. 10:1
© Dilyara Kaipova





TALKS AND LECTURES

<https://www.weltmuseumwien.at/en/exhibitions/dust-silk/#accompanying-programme>

DISCOVERING THE EXHIBITION WITH CHILDREN

In the exhibition *Dust & Silk. Steppe & Silk Roads*, a children's riddle rally awaits the young visitors. Even 1000 years ago there were many trade routes between Asia and Europe. Camels, horses and people transported many things. Find out why people talk about the Silk Road today, what the sky horses are all about and what "bound clouds" are.

An entertaining tour through the exhibition for the whole family, especially for children from 6 to 12 years.

The accompanying booklet is available for 2 euros at the ticket office!

<https://www.weltmuseumwien.at/en/exhibitions/dust-silk/#program-for-children>

CATALOGUE

Dust & Silk. Steppe and Silk Roads

Edited by Maria-Katharina Lang

200 pages

German/English

€ 24,95

OPENING HOURS

Daily except Wednesday

10 am to 6 pm

Tuesday

10 am to 9 pm

TICKETS

For more information about tickets, please visit <https://www.weltmuseumwien.at/en/information/>
Entry to the Galleries of Marvel is free of charge!

The Annual Family Ticket for two adults and up to three children or teens under the age of 19 for only € 79! For more information, please visit <https://www.khm.at/en/family/>



CONTACTS FOR YOUR VISIT

Information, questions & suggestions

+43 1 534 30-5052, info@weltmuseumwien.at

Cultural education & outreach programme, guided tours, and programme registration

+43 1 534 30-5150, kulturvermittlung@weltmuseumwien.at

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We request that, in addition to mentioning your medium, you also specify the date of your visit and attach a scan of your valid press pass.

Many thanks for your understanding!

PRESS CONTACT

Nina Auinger-Sutterlüty, MAS (Head of Department)

Mag. Sarah Aistleitner

KHM-Museumsverband

T +43 1 525 24 -4021 /-4025

info.pr@weltmuseumwien.at