Museum der
Kulturen Basel

animalistic! No Culture Without Animals

27 August 2021 to 22 November 2022

The exhibition “animalistic!” at the Museum der Kulturen Basel reveals that human culture cannot do without animals and that the relationship between humans and animals is highly diverse, but ambivalent at the same time.

Kamadhenu with her calf, god Krishna and his beloved Radha; India; before 1981; marble, colour, gold leaf; Basel Mission Collection, gifted in 2015 © Museum der Kulturen Basel

Animals are omnipresent in human society. The exhibition traces the relationship between humans and animals with the aid of roughly 350 exhibits.

The relationship is marked by familiarity and proximity. In a cosy living room, visitors encounter a range of pets along with everyday items and toys in the shape of animals.

Humans surround themselves with animals. They pamper and embellish, but also use and exploit them. In a rustic setting, visitors come across feeding troughs, milking stools, yokes, fetters, and saddles.

Passing through an enclosure featuring numerous traps, visitors arrive in an animal fight arena lined with trophies. Here the power that humans wield over animals is revealed.

Despite this, animals have always been able to retain a certain degree of sublimity; often they are even deified in the shape of statues. People seek their protection, often in the form of animal amulets.

For children we have a few extra stations: here they can turn into animals themselves, listen to animal stories, write cat postcards, and laugh about animals who outsmart us humans.

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