

In the collection of the Museum of Ethnography are united more than two hundred thousand individual artefacts, along with several hundred thousand photographs, drawings, manuscripts, audio recordings and films. Here, in the ZOOM exhibition space, this monumental body of material appears in its primordial state, the cast out flotsam of a museal Big Bang. When completed, the institution's new permanent exhibition will seek to provide insight into how such chaos gives way to order—how a 'museum galaxy' coalesces as a result of systematisation and interpretation. To fulfil this purpose, it will traverse various historical points of view, examining each problem from multiple angles and pointing out as it goes all the new and exciting possibilities each change in perspectives—and each contemporary interpretation—has to offer. ZOOM, on the other hand, presents both the museum's hoard of material—and select objects within it—via a more playful approach, without interpretation or textual explanations: it is itself a change in perspectives. Here, viewpoint and approach become physical experience as we zoom in,

turn things over, break them apart, turn them in-side-out, stir them together—and visitors, for their part, lose themselves in a soup of objects, images, and script until they emerge at a few select examples, perhaps even see themselves in ZOOM's sea of faces. The possibilities opened up by changing perspectives—by zooming in and out—are probed primarily through pairs of opposing concepts:

many/few, small/large, part/whole, near/far, up/down, flat/multi-dimensional, positive/negative, black-and-white/colour, wide-angle/zoom, acceleration/deceleration, assembly/disassembly, extraction/incorporation, static /dynamic, ordered/disordered.

It is these that hold ZOOM's varied themes together and these that reach beyond them, imparting coherence to the seemingly incoherent, putting distance between things that otherwise stand side-by-side. Where there is no sequentiality, there is no set starting point. Hurry through or browse slowly, see it all or pick and choose, dive in or skim it over, stand back or peer closely, loom over or hunker down....



Zoom

A Change in Perspectives

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Close-Ups

If we zoom in on the invisible dimensions of an object, we can put the whole together from the parts, or—taking the opposite tack—disassemble the whole into its constituent elements. An example is this Persian bow, collected during the Zichy expedition to be discussed in the permanent exhibition's Early Hungarian Histories section: its secrets reside in the layering of materials only an x-ray photograph can reveal. In a similar vein, the age and place of origin of this rare Mexican mosaic mask were determined by putting its materials under a microscope. Photographs—simultaneously physical and virtual artefacts—are a means to more than documentation: both individual media, and the technical innovations that lay behind them have contributed to the cause of ethnographic research, enriching collections and archives with their use. Glass negatives, film negatives, printed photos, and digital images—just one more perspective that can emerge from infinitely complex museum collection.



Multiplicity: Fire Strikers

Why does the museum often have hundreds of examples of the same ordinary object? What can be done with so many iterations of the same thing? Take fire strikers, for instance. A fire striker is a simple, but attractively shaped, (in some cases) decorated wrought iron object that—for many centuries in many places—served as an important accessory for lighting fires. The museum has more than five hundred of them: a collection within a collection.



Around the World in 365 Images

The museum's collection is one of not only artefacts, but also reams of archive materials, whose many hundreds of thousands of photographs pose just as many curatorial dilemmas. Seen here are 365 portraits from every corner of the globe: men and women, adults and children, sad faces and happy: one for each day of the year. Who are they? Who are we? Do we see anything of ourselves in them? One of the focal points of the museum's future permanent exhibition is the diversity of actors that define the life of an object. The people in these photographs, too, are 'actors'. What is their story? What can we learn of them by peering into the telescope or reading their QR codes? What do their catalogue cards have to say? What can be learned from an uncut photo? Are there any ethnographers hiding among this multitude of faces?



Shaving Cases

What key will unlock the problems a museum collection holds? Is there only way to probe them? The excitement in these shaving cases—products of the herdsman of the plains west and east of the Danube—resides not only in their inscriptions and ornamentation: it often takes a trick or two to uncover their secrets. But how? This reproduction offers a chance to try them out, while touching, turning, and moving them opens up new perspectives of its own.



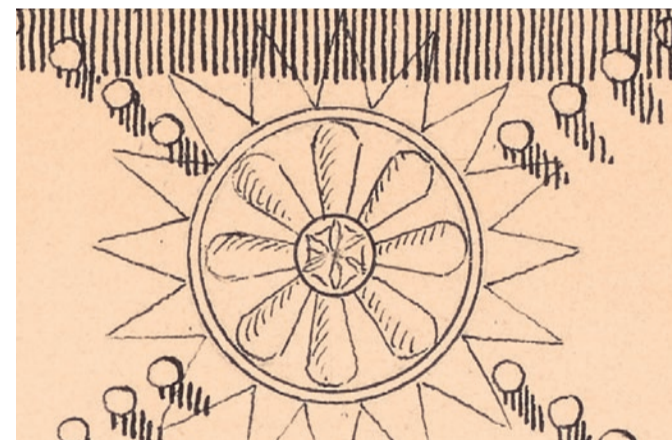
Positive/Negative

What happens when everything is reversed? When the negative—be it of a 3D object or a 2D photo—is what is on view. A biscuit mould; an iron brand; a ceramic bundt pan; tile and textile stamps from Hungary and Africa; a wafer iron; an official seal; a cheese mould. Which negative goes to which positive? What is teased out of each object and image? Whatever the case, one thing is certain: not everything is black and white.



Objects and Writing

Shaving case, chest, anthropomorphic jug, flask, wall hanging, ceiling coffer, pillow edging, salt cellar, tablecloth, glass window hanging, groomsmen's scarf. What do all of these have in common? Each is embellished with some kind of writing: names, dates, wedding information, prayers, memories, and stories all 'step down' from their places to tell their tales, new voices in a polyphonic chorus, in the thick of a crowd of actors. Who speaks to whom? Who wrote them, and with whom in mind?



Big Bang

How can the impenetrable jumble of a museum collection be made to feel ordered? What story or stories might it tell? In how many ways can a collection be interpreted? It is these questions, among others, that Museum Galaxy will seek to answer. Yet ZOOM, for its part, eschews orderings and stories, statistics and reflections, instead capturing the state of the collection's myriad objects in the moment of the Big Bang, before the galaxy came into being. Browsing among the great profusion of objects, one might even hear what they say and in how many different voices. Indeed, one of the principles that will shape the permanent exhibition is that of polyphony: of the multiple voices that tell us what an object is and the many ways in which they speak.

Dugout Canoe

What is the object seen floating in the air here? The answer: it is the museum's longest artefact, a canoe hollowed out of a single trunk of wood, seen from the perspective of the shorebound observer, but also from that of the fish. What makes it interesting? That it was once used on Lake Balaton? That it was collected by Ottó Herman in 1898? That when the new museum building was designed, it was to accommodate this boat that the width and angle of curvature of every line of transportation was dimensioned? Where does the canoe's story end? How long has it interacted with its environment? How about the actors that populate it? Now that it is here, is its story over? It is these questions and others that the Object Biographies section of the permanent exhibition will seek to explore.

Salt Cellars

These decorated horn salt cellars were also made by herdsmen, the scenes they are carved with representing new stories with new actors, calling out in invitation to join the game. Because herdsman's art was one of the very first genres to capture the interest of aficionados, both the shaving cases, and the salt cellars will figure prominently in the permanent exhibition's folk art section.

Székely Gate

On display here is yet another enormous object: a crossbeam, all that is left of an original Székely Gate. For this reason, it falls under the dichotomy of not large/small, but part/whole, and is again interesting for its relation to the question of original versus reproduction. Because a museum is this, too: the interrelationship between artefact, photograph, and graphic representation. Here, only a piece of the original gate—the oldest of its kind in the collection—is seen. Its story, beginning with its construction in Mikháza in 1673, will be told in the section dealing with ethnography In the Field. Here, in ZOOM, there are other perspectives to consider: a photograph of the gate where it last stood; an idealised drawing, executed in regular lines based on the researcher's own measurements; an installation in turn built around the drawing. The last of these reveals both its original size, and how much of it has survived. From how many perspectives does one passing through the gate see it?



Beneath the 'real' watercraft—in the shadow of the museum's 'largest' artefact—is a tiny canoe from the 1960s or '70s, a souvenir from late-socialist-era Mohács. Is this minute object any less 'real'? Does it count as ethnography? The object relates to the masked carnival customs of the town of its origin, a topic to be covered in the Heritage section of the permanent exhibition.

