

More than simply a tree

The exhibition “Alive – More than human worlds” at the Museum der Kulturen Basel brings all the occupants of this world to life and presents visions for a new togetherness – not least for the sake of our planet’s future.

Mimih are humanlike beings with extremely thin and drawn-out bodies that inhabit a parallel world of rocks in the outback of Australia. Their world has its own rivers, trees and a sun, as we know from indigenous bark paintings. They go hunting and perform ceremonies. Mimih are shy and usually good-natured. However, if spooked they are liable to punish human trespassers with sickness.

Getting along with these spirits is important. This is something that already young children learn by listening to stories about the Mimih. But Mimih are not the only spirit beings in the world with whom peaceful coexistence is of advantage. In the exhibition “Alive – More than human worlds” at the Museum der Kulturen Basel (MKB) as of 8 September you get the chance to discover many others, including lightning and water spirits from Australia and Mali or spirit beings that dwell in fruits and vegetables in Mexico. For special occasions, the latter are represented in paper cut-outs. By unfolding the silhouettes, their forces are activated, allowing the plants to grow and flourish.

Communication between these beings and their human counterparts is often established with the aid of such things as slit gongs, sacrificial offerings or altars. With the help of 165 objects from MKB’s collections, curator Ursula Regehr shows how other cultures co-exist and deal with mountains, rivers, trees, animals, fungi, micro-organisms, but also with associated spirit beings, and what forms their experiences with them take on. They serve as examples to show how we humans could shape relationships with our co-world differently.

Tree stories

We need new perspectives, new options to save the earth from the present, man-made crisis. To stop or at least slow down processes such as global warming or the mass extinction of plants and animals. One of the aims of the exhibition is to encourage visitors to think about new ways of peaceful coexistence between humans and other forms of life. An installation consisting of string bags from three continents invites viewers to gather stories and ideas, pack them in a bag, take them home, and spread them as far and wide as possible.

The Basel environmental activist Bruno Manser was a trailblazer in many respects. For the first time, MKB is now exhibiting twenty pages of his diaries in which he recorded scenes from the everyday life of the Penan on Borneo in words and detailed drawings. Inspired by his struggle to save the rainforest, the Basel Institute of Textile Research has created a giant woven tree which visitors are invited to add to through knotting. One of the ideas behind the display is to show how everything in the world is interconnected, or in Bruno Manser’s words how “the earth in all its manifestations operates like a living organism where each thing is related to the other”.

A particularly impressive exhibit is the carved tree, *thulu*, which, for the Kamilaroi people of Australia, represents much more than simply a tree. It is an ancestor, a close member of the group. Embodied therein are ritual knowledge and practices; at the same time, it reminds the people of the trauma of colonization. In a special ceremony in December 2022, a group of descendants reconnected the tree with the Kamilaroi communities – visitors can follow this event in a video recording. The tree, by the way, is to return home.

The exhibition comes with an accompanying publication in German and English, purchasable at the Museum shop. You will also find pictures of the exhibition on our [website](#).