

MO_Advisory Board 2024 in Review

Bubble Be Gone

This year, we made a part of our annual acquisitions budget available to the MO_Beirat, the advisory board of the Museum Ostwall. When we told visitors, colleagues and friends about this, it often earned us puzzled expressions. The most common response was, "That's a brave thing to do!", and it was often uttered in a tone of doubt. It was apparent that many were quite concerned that an artwork might be chosen that did not meet the standards of a historically grown museum collection.

This concern was clearly unfounded. The advisory board selected two works by Camille Chedda and two by Joséphine Sagna, all of which enrich the museum collection in a special way. Chedda exposes colonial structures and viewing habits in her works; Sagna, on the other hand, breaks with racist stereotypes and beauty norms. This brochure contains an introduction to their works by Dr Nicole Grothe, Head of the Collection.

As a museum, we have not entered into this process naively, but have trusted that the advisory board members, after thoroughgoing discussions with Dr Nicole Grothe and Michael Griff, Curator for Community Engagement, would make choices that not only complement the existing collection in a meaningful way, but also bring in positions that are not currently represented at the Museum Ostwall. The advisory board looks at our collection from the outside, perceives it from a perspective that differs from ours, which is conditioned by years of working with the collection. They discover gaps, incongruities and problems that we cannot discern from our internal perspective.

The advisory board has approached its task with a great sense of responsibility: Since March 2023, it has been meeting every fortnight and working with us to expand the scope and approachability of the museum. From our perspective, working with the advisory board is an in-depth and labour-intensive process from which we can learn a great deal. It is one of several building blocks in preparing the Museum Ostwall for the future and developing ourselves further as a museum that is in concert with the definition of the museum as adopted by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in 2022: inclusive, diverse and participatory – a place for education, enjoyment, reflection and an exchange of knowledge.

Regina Selter
Director of the Museum Ostwall

● The advisory board purchases art. How does this work?

In 2024, we dared to take an important step – the advisory board purchased art! The acquisition of artwork for the MO collection was a central goal for the advisory board in 2024. This process began in February. But how is an artwork acquired at the museum? You can learn about the process in the following.



The advisory board at the 75th anniversary of the Museum Ostwall at
Dortmunder U.

● Past and Present

As a first step, the group gained an overview of the collection, its focuses and its history. They also discussed how the museum is currently developing and structuring the collection with new acquisitions and donations.



Advisory board member Alexis gives a Spanish-language tour of the collection presentation *Art → Life → Art*.



Alexis Rodríguez Suárez

I'm Alexis and I was asked to join the MO advisory board when I was still working for a queer youth centre in Dortmund, where I was heading up a counselling and empowerment project for young people of colour. An important question for us on the board is: Why are we here? The advisory board has older and younger members. Some are new to the country; others aren't. I'm not the only person of colour on the advisory board. Some of us are tradespeople; some are academics. I believe that in putting together an advisory board like this, transparency

is important. And besides that, the question is: Have I been invited because of my body or because of what my body means in this society? Or have I been invited because of my experience, which could benefit the group? I know this is a complex question.

A year ago, those of us on the advisory board went through the collection presentation with the museum team and took on the role of Critical Friends. There were practical questions: How big should the signs be? Which chairs are people allowed to sit on and which are works of art? Where does the exhibition tour begin? Our feedback was actually accepted and implemented.

This year, we discussed with the museum team how to purchase art professionally – whatever that means. My idea at the same time was that if we wanted to purchase art that was different than what is already in the museum collection, we could use different acquisition practices. I had the idea of an open call, where artists could submit their work. But because of limitations in time and resources, we decided to make suggestions ourselves. I was surprised that my suggestions were accepted by the other members, and I hope that, through purchasing, we are supporting the production of more artworks.

Why are we here?



1. Objektidentifikation identification of the object	
Künstler*in artist	Camille Chadaa
Titel/Datierung title, date	Views, 2022
Inv. Nr. / inv. no.	A.16/2024
Objektart type of artwork	Installation
Material, Technik material, technique	Installation aus Steinernen, Beton, Holz und Fotografien
Maße dimensions	variable → min/max: noch zu ermitteln
Gewicht weight	Noch zu ermitteln
Anzahl der Teile number of elements	Noch zu ermitteln
Eigentümer*in owner	Museum Ostwall im Dortmunder U

1.2 Objektbeschreibung | description of the object
Die malerisch angeordnete Installation besteht aus verleimten Kanthölzern, die den Rahmen für mehrere Fotografien bilden sowie Holzblocksteinen und anderem Baumaterial. Auf den Fotografien sind verschiedene Szenen aus dem Leben von Camille Chadaa abgebildet.

A record is created for each new work when it enters the museum collection. The record includes a description of the item and basic information about the work. It also notes what information is still missing.



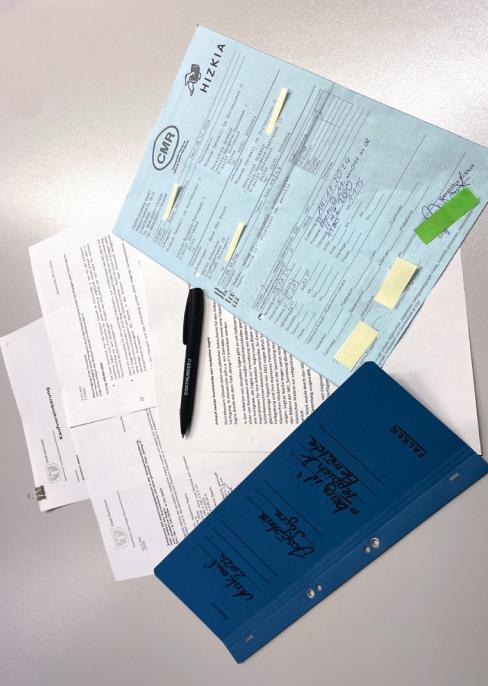
Registrar and Restoration

Not every work of art fits into the collection – literally! The restorers and the registrar of the Museum Ostwall gave the advisory board information about the museum's storage and exhibition capacities, which must be considered when making a purchase. The advisory board also paid attention to the type and materiality of the respective works when making its selection. These factors determine how long and in what way certain artworks can be exhibited.



Formalities

What formal requirements must be observed? In April, the advisory board received a crash course on the formalities of the purchasing process. In addition to the budget, many other factors play a role here, such as the question of where to purchase a work, the transport details and any associated costs.



The acquisition files contain the purchase agreement, documentation on the process and the documents relating to the transport of the works.

True Participation Means More

Birgit Rothenberg

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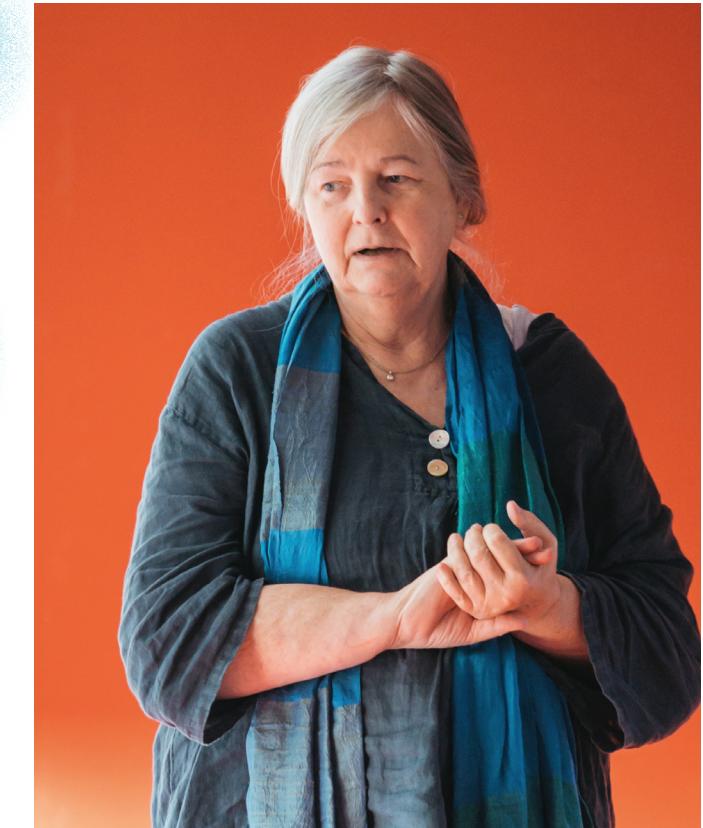
My name is Birgit Rothenberg. I became a member of the advisory board because the association I am involved in, MOBILE – Selbstbestimmtes Leben Behindter e. V. (MOBILE – Independent Living for People with Disabilities), was contacted with this request. The organization is part of the self-help movement of disabled people, which has a political focus, and we have a different concept of disability than is usually found in society. The fundamental question is: What constitutes a disability? In relation to museums, the question might be: How can people with impairments visit museums, but also: What is necessary for them to be represented in the objects or have a presence as artists? True participation goes beyond “barrier-free” visits to a museum.

For our art purchase, I proposed three artists with disabilities and their works, which also appeal to my personal taste. I was aware that these works might not be supported by the majority of advisory board members, but it was important to me to propose these artists. One of the artists is Dorothea Buck. She was forcibly sterilized during the Nazi period because of her psychosis. In her sculpture, she worked through this discrimination, this physical and emotional trauma.

There have always been works of art depicting disabled people. One example is the portrait of a disabled man from the 16th century in the Chamber of Art and Wonders at Ambras Castle in Innsbruck. Researchers from Vienna teamed up with disabled

people to study this painting and new questions emerged: How did the picture get there, and why? What does it have to do with the role of disabled people in society? I see it as the advisory board's task to bring these questions and issues to the Museum Ostwall. For example, our perspectives could be incorporated into the next collection presentation.

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As part of their research, the advisory board visited other museums, galleries and art fairs, for example the Discovery Art Fair in Cologne..

••• Why will this be important, even 100 years from now?

Like every museum, the Museum Ostwall seeks to make acquisitions that will potentially “last forever”. This perspective had an impact on discussions in the advisory board because not every work that looks good on the wall above a couch is a good choice for a museum collection.



••• Criteria

In order to give their search more purpose, the members first established criteria for artists whom they would consider suitable. The group quickly agreed that the acquisition should support FLINTA* and/or BIPOC** artists. In addition, the advisory board wanted to use the purchase to highlight gaps in the collection and help close them.

Females, lesbians, inter, non-binary, trans and gender

Black people, indigenous people and people of colour, a positive self-designation used by people who have experienced discrimination



The advisory board presenting a shortlist to the Museum Ostwall team.

Damian Sombetzki

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The Task I Like Least

My name is Damian and I was asked to join the advisory board when I had a studio at the cultural centre Speicher 100 on Speicherstraße in Dortmund's harbour district. I am a master painter and decorator and I do graffiti. I also started training as a restorer in the trades. That's why I perhaps have a different, more craft-oriented view of art. So far I'm not someone who goes to museums on a regular basis. I tend to go to exhibitions by lesser-known artists in smaller galleries. These are also institutions, but they come across as less official than museums. When I think of exhibitions in museums, I really tend to think of the medium of painting. The Museum Ostwall collection is much more diverse; it also includes video art by contemporary artists for example, which I find interesting.

I am happy with the artworks we purchased as an advisory board, and I fully support the decisions. But if I am completely honest, the purchasing was the advisory board task I liked least. When I heard the concept – the museum was going to give the advisory board 30,000 euros to buy a

work of art, and the museum would display it – I thought of it mostly as a move to attract media attention. If the advisory board could have had more discretion with the funds, I would not have voted to buy art. When an artwork is added to a museum's collection, you don't know if it will ever be shown again. We might have been more inclined to invite artists to present their work in small temporary exhibitions or at events. What the process has shown me, however, is that the purchase is really an attempt to expand the scope of the museum's collection and make it more accessible.

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My name is Horst Luckhaupt, I am seventy years old and a doctor by profession. Since my school days, I have been interested in art, especially modern art. I've been going to the Museum Ostwall on a regular basis since 1986. The idea of establishing an advisory board was appealing to me. The board is meant to give community members in the city an opportunity to get involved. The Friends of the Museum Ostwall Association has been around for a long time, and I am also a member. Friends and sponsors play an important role because they raise awareness about the work of the museum and provide real support through membership fees.

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The structure of the advisory board is different: There are no membership fees, and we do not have a chairperson, vice-chairperson, secretary or treasurer, as is customary for German associations. The museum advisory board focuses on practical museum work. For example, we developed a questionnaire for visitors and participated in the conference The Radically Democratic Museum. One of the museum's tasks is to continue to promote diversification – with

respect to its audience and the acquisition of artworks. For example, unhoused people could be invited to the museum. When the advisory board was purchasing art, our guiding question was: What is missing from the Museum Ostwall's collection? We quickly noticed that female artists were underrepresented, and I am very happy with the choice we made. I am curious to see how the public will react to the fact that we, people who are not professional art historians, made decisions about the museum's acquisitions.

Horst Luckhaupt



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**What Matters
Is What's
Missing in the
Collection**



From Different Directions

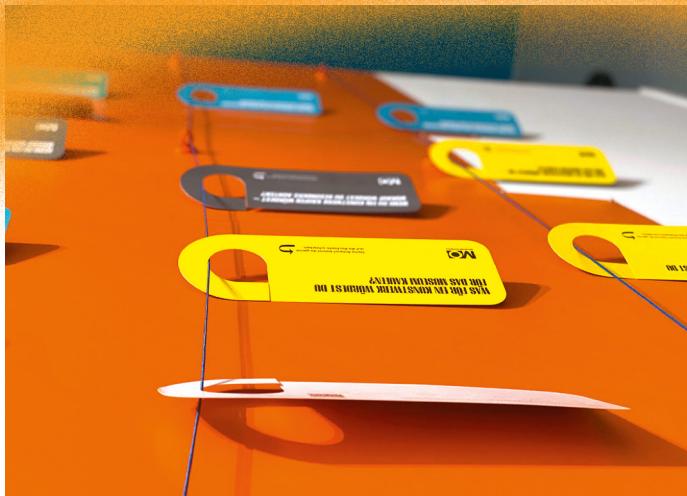
My name is Nesrin and I am the “spring chicken” on the advisory board. I am currently training to be a pastry chef. Last year, I trained as a presenter, and I am now putting what I learned to good use as a youth spokesperson at the cultural centre Dietrich-Keuning-Haus, for example. It was through my involvement there that I became connected to the advisory board.

It was clear from the outset that we, as the advisory board, would be purchasing a work of art. I was only seventeen or eighteen at the time. I found it exciting to know that, as a very young person, I would be involved in deciding which work of art to buy. It was a bit like first love, like butterflies in my stomach! I had suggested a different artist, but I became convinced of Camille Chedda. One of her artworks consists of several stones, each showing two photos. I can still remember one stone very clearly. One photo showed a woman on a sugar cane plantation and the photo right next to it showed two

Nesrin Altuntas

men playing golf. The relation between these photos made a strong impression on me. On the one hand, there was a woman who once worked there for little money to be able to feed herself and her children, and on the other, men were now playing golf in the same place and just having fun.

Being on the advisory board gives me a lot of knowledge and opens up new opportunities for me. For example, I took part in a workshop on memorial sites, which dealt with questions that have always interested me: Why has this particular memorial been placed at this location in the city? Why is a building listed? And it's the same with the museum. We all come together on the advisory board with our different backgrounds. We all bring our own experiences to the table and exchange ideas. In this way, even an art lover like myself gets to learn about other types of art.



Voting

Based on a shortlist, we voted on which works by which artists were to be acquired. The established criteria formed the basis for our discussions in the advisory board.

Finalizing the Purchase

Two artists had been selected – now the advisory board got to decide which artworks to acquire. The museum team helped determine whether the chosen works can be preserved and exhibited long-term.

As part of the acquisitions process, the shortlist was shown in the advisory board's space in the collection presentation – and visitors were asked their opinion.



Part of the Collection

After a long time in transit, the works reached the museum. Our conservator first examined and documented them. Next, our registrar assigned them inventory numbers and entered key information in the databank. She also devised a plan for how to store the works when they are not on show. They can currently be viewed in the collection presentation *Art → Life → Art. The Museum Ostwall Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow.*



The works by Joséphine Sagna purchased by the advisory board arrived at the museum, where conservator Lisa Schiller examined them.

Reaching Other People

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I'm Sarah and I joined the advisory board after talking with someone who works at the Museum Ostwall. We were discussing how people who regularly go to the museum have a sense of belonging in the museum, which I was missing. I'm generally interested in the work of museums but privately and in my work as a teacher I hadn't been in contact with art much. Now when I'm in a museum, I often ask myself what might be interesting for my pupils.

Through my membership on the advisory board I've come to understand that museums think about how to reach not only museum-goers but other people as well. I hadn't quite expected that. Of course, "What does the museum do?" is not the same as "What does the advisory board do?". As long- and short-term goals of the advisory board, I would name community participation and acquisitions respectively. The Artist Camille Chedda won the vote about whose art should be purchased, and Joséphine Sagna came second.



I believe it makes sense to retain some of the funds to acquire works by the runner-up. Both of these women make art in which I recognize myself personally. They have subjects to which I relate as a black woman.

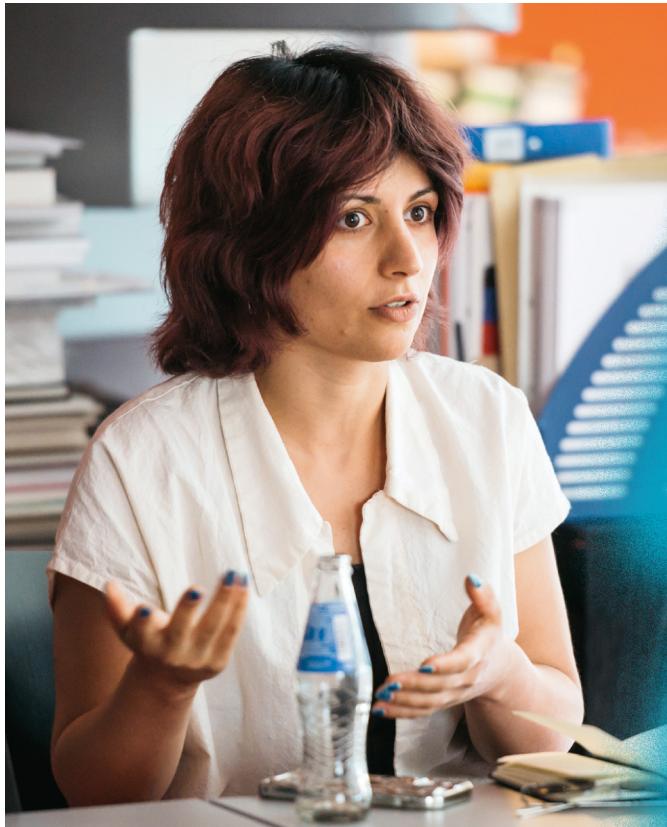
However, I also voted for Dorothea Buck. Her story moved me very much, and I find her sculptures very aesthetic.

Sarah Kalabuch

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Making Art More Accessible

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Members of the Advisory board

My name is Scherwin. I studied communication design. I was asked if I wanted to join the advisory board because I founded the Blend Haus, a coworking space and meeting place for young creatives in Dortmund. I've always been interested in art history and liked going to museums. I've long had the dream of being able to choose art that would be shown in a museum – but I didn't know that there was something like an advisory board. I see myself as an ambassador for a younger, independent scene, though I'm aware that it's impossible for one person to represent a large group. This scene can also be described as a subculture in which many independent artists and musicians along with many BIPOC* and queer people feel at home.

Now that this purchase has been made through the advisory board, the question is how to get the word out, to introduce or present these items. There is a lot of space in the Dortmunder U which we could use, and there is the advisory board space on the fourth floor. This would be a

great opportunity to invite people from our bubble to take a look at the museum. After all, many independent artists think that the Museum Ostwall is not a place for them.

I could also see us offering tours or hosting a small exhibition for local artists. This might make art more accessible – both for people who regularly go to the museum and want to see this art and for people who are interested but unsure because they might think, "If I go, I won't understand anything". For the same reason, it would be a good idea to make museum guides. They would give visitors some orientation in the Dortmunder U and in the Museum Ostwall.

* Black People, Indigenous People and People of Colour, a positive self-designation used by people who have experienced discrimination

Scherwin Hosseini

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Members of the Advisory board

Acquisitions Shortlist

Proposed by Birgit
Dorothea Buck

Dorothea Buck was an artist who is connected to disability culture. She is not represented in the mainstream cultural sector. At best, her art is shown in medical contexts, as the work of a psychiatric patient who engaged in artistic activities.

“My psychotic experiences have enriched my life very much. But the shock of being treated as an enemy, devalued and forcibly sterilized because of this illness was devastating and continues to have an impact on me to this day.”

(Dorothea Buck)

Vorschlag von Birgit
Mary Duffy

Mary Duffy first became known in the art scene in 1995, when she gave a live performance as “disarming venus”. The principle of “being stared at” was a leitmotiv in her work. Forming a part of disability studies, which have been established in the Anglo-American world for several decades, disability arts and disability culture continue to be highly underrepresented in German museums. Their art and their view and bodily expression are absent in German museums but will remain relevant 50 or 100 years from now.

Proposed by Scherwin
Naudline Pierre

Naudline Pierre’s paintings combine fantasy and iconography to create alternative worlds full of ecstasy, devotion and tenderness. Her prismatic figures break with traditional myths and art history, while personal mythology and historical formats create new perspectives. Her works are represented in many museum collections. In 50 or 100 years, her works will still be significant at the Museum Ostwall because their timeless quality and emotional depth promote healing and reflection. In today’s world, where healing is urgently needed, they offer visionary perspectives and inspire future generations.

Proposed by Birgit
**Marion Weirauch &
Peatc Voßmann**

Marion Rauch and her “tandem partner” Peatc Voßmann present works they created in their Tandem Whisperings. The idea behind Tandem Whisperings is to connect artists with and without disabilities so they can work together. Dortmund artist Marion Weirauch works tirelessly, drawing, pasting and gluing her fantasy animals. She likes watching animal programmes most of all and knows a lot about them. Numerous exhibitions and performances have made Voßmann known in Dortmund. In this project, he presents works with animals in unreal positions or surroundings.

Proposed by Scherwin
Mónica Hernández

Mónica Hernández’s large, flowing figures – often self-portraits or depictions of women from her circle – wear no make-up and are not shy. Her oil paintings show BIPOC in everyday situations, reflecting their confidence as they project their own image. Hernández, originally from the Dominican Republic, relocated to New York City when she was six. She sees social media platforms as works of art in their own right and questions the self-portrayals found there. Her works will be significant for future generations in the Museum Ostwall because they offer authentic and powerful representations of female life. Her open and honest art challenges traditional representations and strengthens female perspectives.

Proposed by Horst
**Marie-Louise von
 Rogister**

The artist became particularly known for her contribution to informal painting. After meeting the painter Fritz Winter in 1938, she developed a lifelong friendship with him. Von Rogister repeatedly emphasized the inspiration she received from him. In the 1960s, their house in Dortmund-Kley became a popular cultural meeting place in the city. She is one of the few women in the 20th century to have earned a recognized place in informal painting. She is also connected with North Rhine-Westphalia and the Museum Ostwall: After she had participated in exhibitions in 1951 and 1958, the museum gave her a solo exhibition in 1980. She deserves to be better known, especially in North Rhine-Westphalia.

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Proposed by Alexis
Camille Chedda

Camille Chedda is a visual artist who explores concepts of race and postcolonial identity through drawing, painting, collage and installation. The work by Chedda that I propose is *Views* (2022), which was exhibited at documenta 15. It deals with the colonial history that connects Europe and the Caribbean. The work is relevant not only because it is an artistic approach to colonial history, but also because it is embedded in recent history. It seems to me that the relevance of this work at the MO could contribute to a fundamental understanding of artistic productions on the subject of colonialism.

Proposed by Horst
Hal Busse

Hal Busse was an artist who created paintings, graphic works and objects. After dedicating herself to painting, Busse proved fluent in a wide artistic spectrum, producing, for instance, nail paintings and expansive reliefs. She exhibited with the Zero group. While Busse was at the centre of the art avantgarde for several years, she never received due recognition and was only rediscovered in the 2000s. Busse stands out for her artistic versatility: Compositions such as her nail paintings are always associated with the world-famous Günther Uecker. But wouldn't it be interesting and timely to juxtapose a nail painting by this unjustly forgotten artist with one by Uecker?

Proposed by Alexis
Joséphine Sagna

The Hamburg-based artist Joséphine Sagna addresses a current theme: that of blatant clichés with which BIPOC women are confronted in a hierarchical system. Attributes such as strength and self-sacrifice are imposed on them, which finds reflection in their ongoing struggle for identity and social belonging. One question I ask myself regarding the long-term relevance of her work is: How does her art reflect our current discourses on the visibility of racialized people in the German context, and in particular the experiences of women?

Proposed by Nesrin
Tahlia Stanton

The art of Tahlia Stanton is timeless, and it is characterized by her unique technique and style. Each picture comes with its own history, which she captures as social and cultural commentary in the form of videos. In this way, she preserves the process behind these artworks for generations. Stanton communicates with her audience via social media, where she presents her art through photos and videos as well as live formats. I think this type of art and its popularity/format via social media will continue to be relevant in the future, as digital networks such as Instagram are playing an increasingly important role – especially among young audiences.

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For more information about the artists and their works, please scan the QR code.

Good Choices

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**Works by
Camille Chedda and
Joséphine Sagna for
the collection of the
Museum Ostwall**

**A statement by
Nicole Grothe**
Head of the Collection

**The experiment to involve Dortmund
residents in an expansion of the
collection has been successful:**

In a multi-step process, the members of the advisory board selected two works by Camille Chedda and two by Joséphine Sagna. The works follow the collection guideline in that they are art that has real-life relevance, and they also add new artistic perspectives to the collection of the Museum Ostwall.

Camille Chedda was born in Manchester, Jamaica, in 1985. Her *Installation Views* (2022) consists of squared timber, hollow brick and other construction materials, which form the frames for several photographs. The photos show palm trees, a golf course and a colonial-style villa but also destroyed houses and men working on a plantation. This is Chedda investigating the effects of colonialism on present-day life in Jamaica. The villa, called Rose Hall, is a well-known colonial-era building that is now rented for events. Where enslaved people were once forced to work, people now play golf. Guided tours tell the story of slave owner Annie Palmer, who gained notoriety for being especially cruel and whose ghost is said to still haunt the house. A historical site associated with violence and exploitation has been turned into a venue whose element of creepiness is being monetized. By integrating this history into a framework of unsound building materials, Chedda reflects on the way Jamaica's historical heritage has been addressed since independence in 1962: oscillating between acts of overcoming, appropriation and repression.

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Views (2022), Camille Chedda, varying dimensions, mixed media, documenta 15, Kassel, 2022

This is also the context for her large self-portrait *Cemented* (2023). The ambiguous title refers to the multi-layered interdependencies between a person's identity and their social surroundings. Since independence, cement has often been used as a building material in Jamaica but is often brittle and unstable due to the addition of cheaper materials. The Dunce logo in the background alludes to a brand of rucksack that was very popular among schoolchildren in Jamaica in the early 2020s and sparked heated debate. It recalls the dunce cap, which was used in Europe until the 19th century to humiliate and punish schoolchildren who did not follow lessons with sufficient discipline or were slow learners. In the course of colonization, the dunce cap came to Jamaica, where it was often used to stigmatize pupils who did not behave in accordance with European customs. Chedda asks: Does adopting the colonizers' label of "dunce" perpetuate this stigmatization, or is it a defiant gesture of self-empowerment?



Cemented (2023), Camille Chedda, 91.5 x 133 cm, mixed technique, drawing on paper

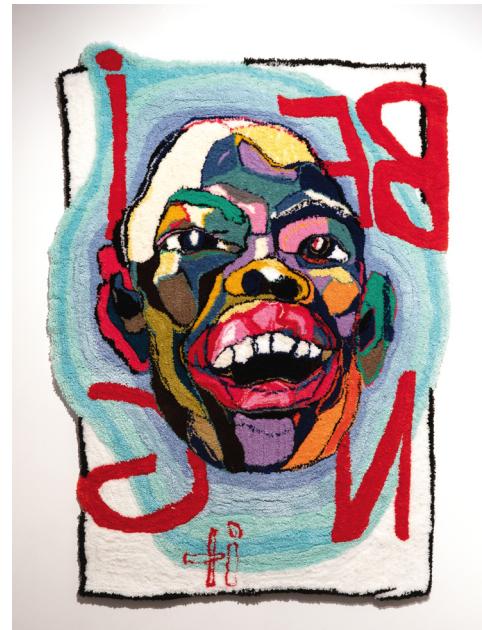
Joséphine Sagna's works are likewise about self-empowerment, although the circumstances are altogether different. Born as a black person in Stuttgart in 1989 and socialized among a largely white population, she addresses structural racism and assumed stereotypes. In her artwork, she counters prejudiced perceptions, particularly of black women, with confident self-presentation. She finds inspiration on platforms like Instagram, which she uses to network with other BIPOC* women. Sagna draws on images that purposely undermine common normative and stereotyping ideas of beauty. Her painting *being it* (2024) and the carpet with the same title (2021) show BIPOC women the way they see themselves. The works' colouration and expressive formal language connect them with modernist portraits in the Museum Ostwall collection, which, however, predominantly depict white people. Sagna's works thus not only help reflect the diversity of society in our museum collection; they also build a bridge between the classical genre of painting and contemporary visual language in social media.

* BIPOC: Black People, Indigenous People and People of Colour, a positive self-designation used by people who have experienced discrimination

being it (2024),
Joséphine Sagna, 180
x 180 cm, acrylic and
oil on canvas

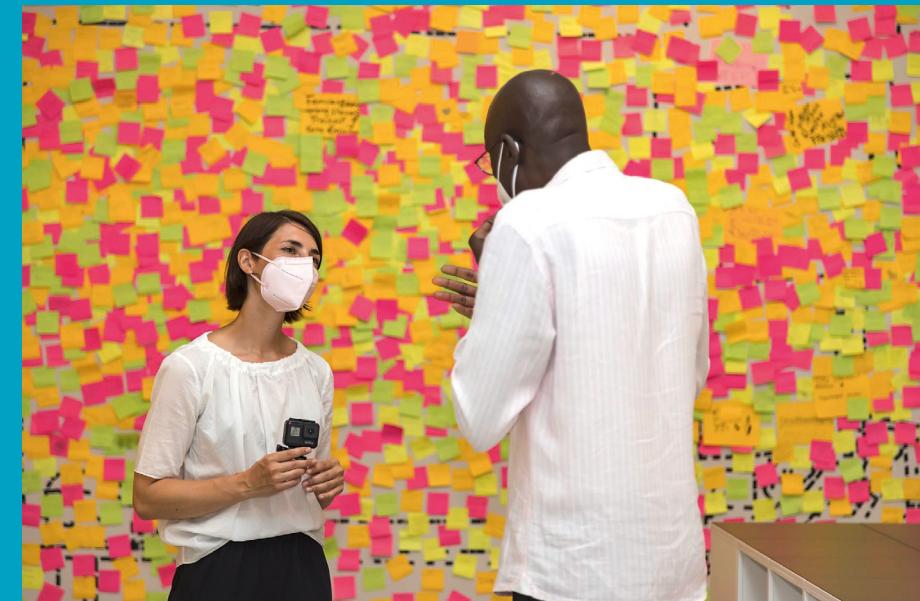


being it (2021),
Joséphine Sagna, 150
x 120 cm, tufted rug



From Listening to Working Together

A contribution by
Luise Reitstätter



Accompanied tour in the House of Austrian History with "Recht auf Museum?"- advisory board member Mbaye Cisse and Luise Reitstätter, photo: Karl Pani, Department of Art History, University of Vienna

Community Advisory Boards in Museum Practice

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If museums, as public institutions with a social mission, are to be used by the general public, the question arises as to how they can better understand the views of local residents and respond to their needs. One way to involve many in developing a museum as a social space for many is to set up a community advisory board. With community advisory boards, members of the public are invited to provide feedback on museum programming or to actively participate in museum work. Community advisory boards also encourage museum staff to develop listening skills and forms of collaboration. In this short article, I would like to situate the work of community advisory boards in museum practice between listening and collaboration. Listening is a skill that goes beyond merely hearing another person's words. It is an attentive communication process in which one attempts to understand the meaning of the words and the person who is using them. Collaboration, on the other hand, means agreeing on a common goal in a group involving diverse actors and working towards it through joint action.

At the same time, mechanisms of exclusion that inhere in museums need to be considered when engaging in the practice of both listening and collaboration. For even though the opening of museums in the wake of the Enlightenment granted citizens a fundamental right to visit the formerly aristocratic collections, their increased accessibility should not be equated with democratization.¹ In particular, the prerequisite for competency in understanding visual language to partake in "civic seeing" systematically excluded audiences of different ages, genders, ethnicities and classes.² Today, the still very middle-class museum visitors and the small group of only up to 15% who are active in cultural activity demonstrate the discrepancy between museum concepts designed to speak to a broad

segment of society and the de facto use of museums by only a few.³ Out of his conviction that museums as centres for informal learning, cultural rights and the promotion of democracy provide the greatest single contribution to society, David Anderson makes a case for the "listening museum".⁴ While he bases his analysis on the epistemic injustice of cultural institutions and on children as a disadvantaged group, we can nevertheless follow his general conclusion that museums need to develop their empathic abilities by learning to listen to a diverse range of visitors and actively seeking out opportunities for participation.

It should be noted that community advisory boards in museums – in contrast to advisory boards with renowned experts – are currently still the exception rather than the rule. They are also rarely featured prominently on websites not to mention publications, which makes it difficult to compile comprehensive data. An early example took place at the Denver Art Museum, where, in the course of reorganizing its collections, visitor panels were used to improve interpretive materials.⁵ As another example, the advisory board for documenta 12 was assembled two years prior to the opening of the mega-exhibition to act as a bridge between local residents and the contemporary art scene: The advisory board supplied the documenta team with local knowledge, helped discuss the themes of the exhibition in the Kassel community and supported local initiatives.⁶ Because museum work in the USA is more sensitized for questions of diversity, many examples for community advisory boards can be found there, such as C3 (Creative Community Committee), which operated as an intercultural leadership network at the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History from 2012 to 2019 and has since ramified into several community groups.⁷ What is more, advisory boards explicitly reach out to children and youth in order to bring in young perspectives on programming evaluation and development, which adult staff don't bring to the table.⁸ Examples here are the Tate Collective Producers Team⁹ and the Junges Schloss Landesmuseum Baden Württemberg.¹⁰

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My own work with community advisory boards came out of the research project *Recht auf Museum? (Is Going to Museums Our Right?)*. With fellow researchers, I looked at five museums in Vienna and studied how their public relations strategies changed over time, comparing them with current perceptions of the museums.¹¹ Specifically, the *Recht auf Museum?* advisory board consisted of twenty members who did not represent



Accompanied tour in the House of Austrian History with *Recht auf Museum?* advisory board member Mbaye Cisse and Luise Reitstätter, photo: Karl Pani, Department of Art History, University of Vienna

the traditional museum audience but instead came from the broader Viennese populace, based on six diversity criteria: gender, age, educational background, migration background, disability and museum affinity. What happened, however, is that the 233 applications received for the citizens' advisory board revealed a great homogeneity of interested persons: The majority of them had a university degree (69.1%) and went to museums often (66.8%). To counteract this tendency, advisory board members were selected by choosing from among those who had responded to the call and, in addition, approaching others actively. In-depth field research with the advisory board was carried out over the course of 100 accompanied

museum tours (all 20 members visited representative areas of the permanent exhibition in each of the five museums), including follow-up information gathering through museum diaries and interviews using vignettes. The results, which highlighted both the specific characteristics of the respective museum scripts and the individual acquisition strategies of the advisory board members, were fed back to the museums in oral presentations and through documentation; also included was joint reflection about which conclusions to draw regarding practice. The project-specific *Recht auf Museum?* advisory board did not interact with the museums themselves; rather, we researchers acted as a mouthpiece for their perceptions and wishes.

Given the desideratum to address the urban population of Dortmund in its diversity, the Museum Ostwall advisory board shares common ground with the *Recht auf Museum?* project. At the same time, the selection of the advisory board members, their constitution as a group and their activities indicate a clear difference in focus. Instead of an open call for applications, the Museum Ostwall chose the strategy of directly approaching individuals. This made it possible, on the one hand, to avoid reproducing the museum-savvy audience with an academic background on the advisory board and, on the other hand, to assemble a group of creative individuals with strong ties to the city and civic engagement (but who were not previously associated with museum work). The eight advisory board members therefore not only act as everyday representatives of urban society, whose individual biographical backgrounds are appreciated, but also act as multipliers who create interest among and for various urban initiatives. The Museum Ostwall's advisory board further stands out for being firmly anchored in the museum, which is reflected both in terms of budget (in the form of expense allowances and professional moderation) and structure (e.g. in the form of employment contracts and specially developed statutes). While earlier in the process, the advisory board's radius of activity was largely defined by reflections on the existing exhibition programme, it became clear in the course of the

collaboration that decisive expectation management and specific goals are beneficial to the advisory board's work – as demonstrated in the participatory collection work, including acquisitions decisions, documented in this brochure.¹²

This brief overview with examples of community advisory boards illustrates that various forms of participation – from the exchange of opinions and feedback within a museum's panel function to the co-development of programming and activities directly linked to the museum's strategic orientation – can be realized in museum practice. While the

„Consciously engaging with community members' views, needs and desire to take action“

project Recht auf Museum? was focused on listening to and assessing the perceptions of advisory board members, the example of the advisory board at the Museum Ostwall goes to show that community advisory boards can also be involved in museum work much more actively. This article has made a case for viewing work with community boards as an opportunity to consciously engage with community members' views, needs and their desire to take action – without judging the quality of the board primarily by their degree of involvement in museum work. In my opinion, it is much more important to listen carefully to feedback from community members, to assess it and to look for meaningful forms of collaboration and opportunities for change. After all, if museum public relations strategies can be shifted towards more empathy for and participation by community members, this must not only happen on paper, but also be tried out in practice.

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- 12 Luise Reitstätter in conversation with Michael Griff (Curator for Community Engagement at the Museum Ostwall), 11 Oct. 2024.

Colophon

Do you have ideas or suggestions that could inform our work?

Please get in touch!
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The **Museum Ostwall** at the Dortmunder U (MO) aims to involve the urban community more in the work of the museum. The goal has been to create a programme and an art collection with which all residents of Dortmund can identify. To achieve this level of participation in a sustainable manner, the Museum Ostwall established an advisory board in March 2023 whose aim was to embody different perspectives from the community. Working with the team from the museum, the advisory board has been providing input about the collection, forms of presentation and acquisitions. The MO advisory board has been slated for a five-year period, and its goals include acquiring an artwork for the museum and helping make the museum's presentations more accessible to a wider public.



For more information on the MO advisory board, please scan the QR code.

