

A Mandate and a Lamp

Where People Find Shelter

1. The Mandate and the Lamp about Themselves

We are a former mandate and a lamp. One might think there couldn't be more disparate objects than us. She is a piece of paper, printed, stamped, and signed, and I am a lighting device, best suited for illuminating desks. Yet we have found a common theme. We both recall the challenging housing conditions in the post-war era in the Siegerland region. Many homes were destroyed at the time and the arrival of many people, particularly from the former East German territories, exacerbated the housing shortage.

However, our perspectives on this were quite different. The mandate authorized the inspector Wilhelm Fries to allocate living space in vacant but also occupied houses to the forced migrants – without the consent of the owners. The mandate was thus presented to seize housing.

For some, it was coercion, but for others, it meant not being homeless. Like for my former owner, I, the lamp, belonged to her deceased husband, and she took me along on her flight from the Red Army – I was in her suitcase when she arrived in Weidenau and was eventually assigned such a dwelling.

It was the room of a missing soldier. And it would turn out that she would live well and long with his parents, beyond the acute housing shortage. So, I wasn't discarded when she passed away in her eighties. No, I am even, as the family says today, „honored“, now in the fourth generation.

Above all, I am glad to be able to tell the former mandate about it. Because she naturally only remembers the moments of confiscation. She never experienced how good neighborliness, and even friendships, arose from it. She was not a welcome thing. She carries the burden of having done what was necessary – whether one wants or not – because of the housing shortage at the time.

Fine Print:

Inspector Wilhelm Fries was tasked with using this mandate, issued in Weidenau on December 8, 1948, to provide housing for forced migrants, and he was authorized, as the document states, to exercise „immediate coercion“.

The lamp had moved into a similarly confiscated room in Weidenau with a refugee from Zittau. She shared the kitchen and toilet with the couple who already lived there. However, the forced cohabitation harmonized, she became a member of the family, and was later called „Grandma“ by the couple's granddaughter. She lived there until she passed away.

2. The Upper Castle („Oberes Schloss“) to the Mandate and the Lamp

I am not a single object; I am an entire castle, the Upper Castle. I am currently offering space to you, the mandate and the lamp, and also to you, dear guests, I offer space for walking around, staying, and simply being. I have been doing this since the Middle Ages, and people have stayed in me at various times.

The exhibition „The Upper Castle: Architectural history drawn“, which you are currently standing in, informs you about my construction history and various uses throughout the centuries. However, you, mandate and lamp, remind me of something else: After I became a museum in 1905, apartments were soon set up inside me for employees. Then, after the war had left Siegen in ruins, some of my rooms were temporarily converted into emergency accommodations. This was for people urgently in need of housing, similar to those you mentioned.

Fundamentally, I am a house, and so I gladly welcomed all these people. For us houses, there is nothing better than keeping people warm and dry, and protecting them. It is through this that we also come alive.

However, that is just my perspective as a building. I cannot truly empathize with the affected people.

Can you? And do you believe that today, in the worst-case scenario, it would still be conceivable to arrange housing for people in the living spaces of other people?

A Piece of Amber

What Stones Know

1. The Amber about Itself

I am an amber. And if you knew what I have seen... You would have to stay for millions of years to hear it all. But that's too long. So, I'll limit myself to the last century, which is closest to you, and I must also say: It was quite a stirring time.

I came into the possession of a human rather late, and it happened right on the „Amber Coast“ – we were scattered far and wide, and she picked me up. And then, on January 30, 1945, as she desperately tried to secure places on the „Wilhelm Gustloff“ for herself and her family, there I was, solely due to a human custom, in her handbag. And that's why I stayed *with her* when her suitcase vanished amidst the chaos, and I was *still* with her, safely by her side, when the ship sank – fortunately, we lingered still, for the time being, at the harbor, waiting for the next ship.

And so, I remained *with her* thereafter. The war ended, she had another child, a son, who grew up and married. When she died, I passed into the possession of her daughter-in-law – so today, I am with *her*. She keeps me in a jewelry box, like a gem, and sometimes I wonder there, what would have happened if I hadn't turned into stone back then. If I had remained the drop of tree resin that I was. Then I would never have experienced this feeling of being charged with *meaning* and *memory* – simply because I was *with her*.

Fine Print:

The original owner of this amber fled East Prussia in 1945 from the Red Army. Along with her brother and two children, they traveled from Gotenhafen across the Baltic Sea towards the west. If they had obtained places on the „Wilhelm Gustloff“, which was torpedoed and sunk by a Soviet submarine on the same day, they would likely have perished.

2. A Piece of Clay Slate with Iron Spar and Quartz to the Amber

I am a piece of clay slate with iron spar and quartz. At least from Earth's history, I could tell far more than you... I agree with you though, it was much quieter before humans came along – all the truly complex events, they only started with humans.

I came through Eisernhardt into the modern world, where I was excavated from the ground along with many others, amidst groans and creaks. However, the mine is closed since 1957.

The iron spar in me was in demand back then. And they made a lot of use of it – if you look around, iron is in all sorts of things. But they left my iron in me – because I was used for „*representational purposes*“. I served as a sample stone for all the other stones of my kind in theoretical lessons in mineralogy at the Bergschule Siegen. There were miners, senior miners, foremen, mine surveyors (underground surveying engineers), but that school no longer exists.

That might not sound as remarkable as your ship story. But let me tell you, I've experienced all sorts of incidents, mishaps, accidents, and other occurrences. I've been part of so many people's everyday life and have witnessed their careers, with all their successes and quarrels and affairs... Countless episodes, forgotten by everyone. All sedimented in time – like stones in the earth.

Do you happen to have stones at home that remind you of something? Because these stones were *with you*? In a moment you can't forget?

One of Two Shells

Families and Their Impacts

1. The Shell about Itself

I am a shell – not the mussel, only the *shell*. But I was together with a mussel a long time. She carried me through the sea, and I protected her. Today, I say we were like a little family. But eventually, she died, and I was left helpless against the currents. I washed up on a beach littered with empty shells like me – and I thought, *that's it then*.

But a woman, Martina, found me and took me home to *her* family, along with another shell, very similar to me – like a sister – and there she gave us a new purpose, a very special one.

She placed me under a photo of her and her deceased father, in Germany. And she inscribed my sister shell with her father's name and birthdate, and hid it in an old oak. She placed it in a small crevice, large enough for a shell. And this oak stood in a field, right in front of her father's place of origin – in present-day Poland.

This was where *his* family had come from. But as a child, he had to leave – under duress – and he never returned. His daughter had been troubled by this for a long time. But now, with my sister shell lodged in the oak and me lying beneath the photo, something seems to have changed there – in some very special way.

Fine Print:

Martina Kratzel's father spent his early childhood in Silesia, in the former Ludwigsdorf. However, when the state borders shifted as a result of the Second World War, this formerly German region became part of Poland, and he was forced to leave his hometown at the age of nine, under coercion and violence. With his mother and three siblings, he traveled by horse-drawn cart and train through the former Czechoslovakia to Wittgenstein. He often spoke about his childhood and the horrors associated with the expulsion measures.

2. The Portrait of William I of Orange to the Shell

I am a portrait painting, created to resemble a specific individual: in my case, that person is William I, Prince of Orange, Count of Nassau-Dillenburg. Because I closely resemble him, I have always thought about him a lot.

You see, *he* was born not only into a family but also into a web of power interests. His own ideas and interests were secondary; his future was largely planned out for him. At the age of 11, he became a „prince“, and the Emperor determined who would educate him and how. Simply marrying whomever he wanted to was, of course, unthinkable.

I understand the impact of a family. Now, knowing your story, I wonder how it is when one does *not* grow up in noble circumstances and inherently has a comparatively *powerless* position... Nonetheless, one is born with certain things one did not choose and must find a way to deal with them. Just like you, who simply grew up in the sea – and could still lie on that beach today just as well.

To what extent were you shaped by your family? Were paths already set for you?
If so, how did you deal with it?

A Tapestry

Where Appearances Deceive

1. The Tapestry about Itself

I am a tapestry. I am a typical German furnishing item because I depict the roaring stag. Tapestries with roaring stags can be found in almost every German household. Perhaps. Perhaps I just pulled the wool over your eyes?

If so, then I would have managed that for the second time. The first time was even better though, because it lasted a bit longer, for decades in fact! Marios, who loaned me to the museum, fell for my trickery from childhood into adulthood. But that wasn't entirely his fault. I'm simply mischievous.

In truth, I come from Greece, just like Marios' family. I hung in his mother's room – quite useful back then: I kept the cold from creeping in at night. Later, she took me to Germany and spruced me up with these fringes! And then I hung in Dillenburg, where Marios grew up, in the living room – as decoration – and I surprisingly complemented the entire rustic decor so well that no one questioned my presence. Even though I immigrated, they thought of me as native. Because I'm just that mischievous.

Although... Surely it also played into my hands that, where I come from, I quickly look like an immigrant again. It's really a bit twisted.

Fine print:

Marios Mouratidis' mother came to the Federal Republic of Germany as a young woman under the recruitment agreements between Greece and Germany, bringing along this tapestry – now the sole memento of her childhood. For a long time, Marios and his siblings assumed it was a typical German furnishing item, until one day Marios asked her about it.

2. Frans Post's „The Village of Ipoçuja“ to the Tapestry

I am an oil painting from the 17th century, and I can't help but feel like I'm doing something quite similar to you. The more I think about you and your story, the clearer it becomes to me.

I mean, you're quite an incredible thing yourself, with your merry herd of deer and that cozy landscape – that sort of thing doesn't really exist. Or, let's say, similar views certainly exist, but well, the way you exaggerate it... You even say it yourself: You're a mischievous thing, you like to tease people a bit. And now I realize that I know that from myself too...

You see, I was painted by someone who may have seen comparable places, like the one I depict. Frans Post, that was his name, he had indeed spent eight years in Brazil, with Count Johann Moritz von Nassau-Siegen. But I also remember his eagerness to make me as interesting as possible – to instill some sort of, let's say, mystery in me. I don't know, maybe because that's how he saw it himself, but certainly also because that's what people wanted to see.

Like you, I – somehow – have something fantastic about me, something uplifting, and I always thought that was simply beautiful. But now I would say it more precisely: It may be beautiful as long as people know that it's also an illusion. As long as they know that the truth may lie elsewhere. I thank you for this insight.

What places, things, landscapes do you have in your mind? Do they really exist like that? And what feelings do they evoke?

Bed Linens

How Closeness is Created

1. Bed Linens about Themselves

We are a pillowcase and a bedspread, but people simply refer to us together as „bed linens“.

We belong together, and something would not be right if we were separated. And that's why we understand exactly what our owner misses.

You must know: She was politically persecuted in her home country and had to flee from there. She was able to take us with her, but her mother had to stay. Although they are in contact and talk a lot with each other, it's only on the phone or through screens – only at a great *distance*.

However, it has now been shown that we, although we are just bed linens, can do something about it. We didn't even know that we have this ability, but apparently we provide her with special comfort and even create a kind of connection to her mother. That's why we are not used in the usual way, but simply carefully kept.

You must know, we were a wedding gift, from her mother, and that's why we now seem to carry something of her *within us*. Something that is now with us *in proximity* – or that is *there*. We can't describe it better, but we will continue to fulfill this task until hopefully it is no longer necessary.

Fine Print:

The owner of these bed linens is currently unable to return to her home country, Turkey. She is among those who have been held responsible by the Turkish government for the coup attempt in 2016 or classified as oppositional – parts of the Turkish military had attempted to overthrow the Turkish government. As part of the subsequent wave of dismissals and arrests, the lender was also forced to flee.

2. The „Madonna with Jesus and John the Baptist as a Boy“ to the Bed Linens

I am an oil painting from the 17th century depicting Mary with the infant Jesus – in a very specific situation: Mary holds her child in her arms and breastfeeds him. I emphasize this because it's a particularly intimate form of *closeness* between mother and child – and yet so natural and inherent.

For that reason, I can also understand very well the difficult situation you are talking about. And then I see something else – and I must say, it was beyond my horizon that even pillowcases and bedspreads are capable of this: This kind of closeness you create seems very familiar to me for another reason – that is: not only because I depict two people who are close to each other, but also because I am simply a picture.

Because actually, physically, Mary and the child are *not there*. They are far away, somewhere, who knows where – if at all. But *still* they are here – and that's because I bring them *close* to those who look at me. That's something we pictures always do. We are very good at doing that. What I find even more remarkable, though, is that you two, pillowcase and bedspread, in your own way, create something very similar.

Do you also have such an object? Something that connects you with a loved one? And that also manages to create this special kind of closeness?

A Viola

Coming and Going for the Profession

1. The Viola about Itself

I am a viola, a bit like a violin, some say, but quite different. I am larger and can play lower tones, I sound somewhat huskier – and smokier. I usually paint a dark shadow for the violin when we play together. What often happens.

Whoever built me had to learn a lot. And Daniel, who plays me, professionally – he also had to learn a lot, very much, and... really practice a lot. I can't help it, I am just an all-around demanding instrument – but only because people are demanding. And Daniel had to be demanding too. After all, he wanted to become a professional musician.

He started in Spain, his country of origin. But there, he was told that if he wanted to make something of himself, he had to go to Germany. Especially because it's particularly demanding in Germany (at least in terms of classical music). And so he went.

At some point, I came along, and another viola too – we always have to be in pairs, in case something is wrong with one of us. Anyway, we have now arrived in Siegen and are played by Daniel in an orchestra, the Philharmonie Südwestfalen. Many of our colleagues there had similar experiences. This profession is demanding, not only, but also because it can sometimes lead you to another country.

Fine Print:

Daniel Ibáñez García studied musicology at the University of Oviedo and obtained his bachelor's degree at the local conservatory. However, he then moved to Germany – to the conservatories in Mannheim and Stuttgart, where he pursued his master's degree and played with the Württembergische Philharmonie Reutlingen and the State Theatre Darmstadt. Why Germany? Germany is internationally renowned for its high quality in classical music. Talent and skill play the most significant role, orchestra members themselves vote on the admission of new colleagues, and classical music, politically and socially, enjoys a comparatively high reputation. Since 2016, Daniel Ibáñez García has been the deputy principal viola player with the internationally staffed Philharmonie Südwestfalen.

2. The Self-Portrait by Peter Paul Rubens to the Viola

I am a self-portrait by the famous painter Peter Paul Rubens. This man would have understood exactly why Daniel went to Germany. Because back then, over 400 years ago, he traveled across the continent alone for art too. But for him, it wasn't music; it was painting. And that of course led him to Italy.

I say „of course“ because many artists before and after him did the same – Italy, that's where they all went, really. Because Italy was considered the cradle of the Renaissance, the land of the great masters like Leonardo, Michelangelo, Titian... and Rubens wanted to, yes he had to, live and work there, study everything, and network well to advance as a painter.

So, that was also a form of, today we sometimes call it, „labor migration“ – as you can see, something completely normal, but often made into a problem. Much is said about so-called „skilled workers“ but, in reality, many migrants also work in the low-wage sector. And although this work is hugely important too, it is valued differently – instead of prestige, it is more associated with prejudices...

How about you? Would you move abroad for work? Or have you already done so?

Children's Bedding

A Sense of Home

1. The Children's Bedding about Itself

We are a pillowcase and a duvet cover for children. At home in the bedroom closet, there's another set as well.

„Home“. It's good to finally be able to say that. You see, we served as bedding for two children who didn't have a home for a long time, night after night. Every night, it was us and the children.

He was six, and she was two. These two, along with their parents, had to flee their home country. And they took us with them – that wasn't too long ago. It was 2017 when they journeyed from Turkey, through many different places until reaching Siegen. We don't remember how many stops there were. But each time, there was a new and different place to sleep.

We, the two sets of bedding, were always there. We went the whole way. And we understood why: We were supposed to give the children at least a small sense of „home“. At least at night they could snuggle into something familiar. And that eventually created a bond between all of us, even stronger than we ever imagined.

Fine Print:

The parents of the children who brought this bedding from Turkey, through Macedonia, to Germany were politically persecuted and forced to flee after the coup attempt in 2016 – parts of the Turkish military had attempted to overthrow the Turkish government. Even after their arrival in Germany, they were housed in three different refugee camps for more than six months, in Gießen, Donauwörth, and Neu-Ulm.

2. The „Adoration of the Kings“ to the Children’s Bedding

I am an oil painting by an unknown artist, but I depict a very familiar scene from the Bible. Those who observe the child and the entire event surrounding it may already think of the adult Jesus Christ. However, here he is still a child, just as dependent on the care of his parents as any other.

In the biblical story, his parents were also solely concerned with finding a place for the night and ensuring that their child felt safe. They were also not at home but saw the necessity of a substitute, at least for the night. However, the stable they found was not quite sufficient. Something else was needed to envelop the child, a small corner in the world that belonged only to him. And that was the manger.

Therefore, I understand very well how important you were. You also provided such a small, personal corner. It was truly fortunate that you were there.

Do you also have things that give comfort to you and a sense of home?
Even in more challenging situations?

A Life Jacket

Portrayal and Memory

1. The Life Jacket about Itself

I am a life jacket. Essentially, I assist people in staying afloat in the water – but depending on the situation, I *can* also „save“ them.

There are various sizes of my kind – I am suitable for small children. But only once was I actually worn by a small child, for no more than half an hour – yet for me, understandably, it was the most crucial of all half hours.

We embarked on a rather small boat that kept filling up, far too crowded, and then crossed the river „Maritsa“, „Meriç“, as it is called on the Turkish side, over to the Greek side, where it is called „Evros“ – whatever it’s called, it’s a dangerous river. Many have drowned in it.

Our escape ended well, and the child and its mother soon found the father again. I thought I would soon be discarded – but I am *still* with them today. I believe because I remind them of it all. The fears they had, but also the joy of having successfully fled and now „standing at the threshold of a new and hopeful life“. That’s how my owner described it when she loaned me to the museum.

Fine Print:

Due to political persecution, the owner of this life jacket fled from Turkey in 2016, crossing the Turkish-Greek border river Meriç or Evros, to Germany, together with her child. Crossing the river is an alternative route to the Mediterranean route. Her husband had already left the country earlier. They reunited on German Unity Day.

2. Andreas Achenbach's „Sailing Boats on Stormy Sea“ to the Life Jacket

I am an oil painting by Andreas Achenbach, depicting this dangerous situation at sea since 1894. And I depict it without being dangerous myself. I can do that because I am a painting, an artwork that many may find exciting or even beautiful – with all the movement, the waves, the great force you see here...

Often, I've also thought about the unknown fishermen in the storm-tossed boat. They're probably not thinking about art right now. They are at the mercy of the elements, *experiencing* something dangerous. There's nothing less than their *lives* at stake.

Now, dear life jacket, with your story in mind, I am once again reminded that the fishermen I depict are just painted figures and not real people. And I wonder: How do I affect *real* people, *living* people who have *actually* survived such dangers? Painfully? Or do I perhaps remind them of the luck they had?

What would you say, can you imagine such danger? Or what memories do you associate with coasts, rough waters, and the sea? How do I affect you when you look at me?

A Pan

What One Takes along

1. The Pan about Itself

I am a pan – or rather, an oven dish. I'm glad to still be in use despite lacking a handle. I could have ended up in the trash long ago, but Elena keeps me. And I would keep her just the same.

You see, we are both from Russia. She was born there, and I was cast there – not from iron, but from aluminum, and perhaps that was my luck. I am relatively lightweight for a pan. Maybe I'm just versatile... at least I've outlived nearly ten Teflon pans... Howsoever, I was *taken along* – from Siberia all the way here to Siegen. 5000 kilometers. First by train, then by plane, then by bus. Only with bags and suitcases – and beside me, only *one* other thing remains from that journey: a volume of poetry by Pushkin.

So we are the last remnants that recall Siberia and this long journey, each in our own way: a piece of grand, old literature *and* a quite ordinary utensil, that's me, the pan. Or the oven dish...

The handle is gone, I don't remember why. But I do remember all that we've experienced and these memories I share with Elena – or does she share them with me?

Fine Print:

Thirty years ago, the owner of this pan, Elena Groß, emigrated to Germany with her Russian-German husband and their three-year-old son. The train journey from Omsk to Moscow lasted two days. They then flew to Hannover and finally took a bus to the Friedland reception camp for registration. She recalls how they stood in a crowd there, waiting – and how her husband suddenly asked, panic-stricken, where their little son was. She didn't know whether to laugh or cry, as he was carrying him in his arms the whole time.

2. The Chest of the Siegen Bakers' Guild to the Pan

I am the chest of the Siegen Bakers' Guild. Crafted in 1765 from oak wood and adorned with pretzels made of iron, I am familiar with the concept of „*securing possessions*“.

Chests like me were kept in the guild hall or the house of the guild master and contained various items: seals, certificates, invoices, letters, minutes... When we were opened, it was often a ceremonial occasion because all these things were crucial for the guild and its members. They were highly official objects, unique and original...

...and that's why I find *you* so incredibly fascinating. I don't mean to offend you, but you are essentially „*standardized*“! There are countless pans that can do pretty much the same as you. Yet, you were transported 5000 kilometers in a suitcase, you are still in use today despite missing a handle. And you are exhibited here in a museum!

This makes me reconsider what actually determines the value of things. I mean, what makes us important? Perhaps you are a much more important object than all the seals and certificates I once protected... Or you are important in a different way... perhaps in a more important way.

For a long time, I thought I knew which things were important. Now I realize that it depends on many factors.

What things are important to you? What would you take with you if you could only take a few things?

A Postcard and a Photo

At Home in Landscapes?

1. The Postcard about the Photo and Itself

I am a postcard. And I learned something important from this photograph. You see, we are kept together in a shoebox. One day, the photograph asked me what I was actually showing. And I began to explain.

I said, that was Brigitte's grandparents' inn – Brigitte is our owner. „Karl Fiebig's Guesthouse for Relaxation“ in Liebichau, that's what it was called back then, in Silesia. The place where she spent her early childhood – her home. And I was just about to start describing the „green hills and valleys“ she often mentioned – when suddenly, I noticed that the photograph looked very strange, almost unbelieving... So I paused and asked what was wrong.

The photograph said this couldn't be. Her home was the „Setzer Halde“ in Geisweid. It reminded me of things Brigitte had said about that place. It was „great for playing“, all „green“, there was „lots of mud“, and that ruin of a swimming pool. And the photograph stretched itself, so I could view it as best as possible. Yes, there was a place that matched that description but it was different from what I showed – however it was *still me* who represented her home, I insisted on that.

There was great excitement, but soon it gave way to our desire for clarification. So, we delved into our memories, we thought and reasoned... and ultimately concluded that Brigitte must have at least *two homes*. That was the only thing that seemed conclusive and sensible to us, and we agreed on that.

Fine Print:

Brigitte Lanko spent her first five years in the former Liebichau in Silesia. After the end of the Second World War, she and her family were forced to leave there and they arrived, after a long journey by car, on foot, and by train – and after various stops – in a residential barrack on the Setzer Halde in Geisweid. Other forced migrants and bombed-out families were also accommodated here. Her father had found a job at the Geisweider Eisenwerke. Today, she does not speak of *a* home, but of several „homes“.

2. Two Landscape Paintings to the Postcard and the Photo

We are two landscape paintings by Johannes Christian Deiker. Our names are „Littfeld“ and „Grube Silberart bei Littfeld“, and we originate from the 19th century. We support your conclusion. We can well imagine that someone can have two or more homes.

If it were different, we paintings would have agreed on a specific place long ago – or those who painted us. But there are so many different pictures of so many different places and regions, all of which can be viewed as home pictures. Even though certain motifs occur more frequently than others – like the idyllic landscapes we depict. Yet even gray buildings made of steel and concrete can be home for some people. It all depends on who it is, whether they get a certain feeling when thinking about the respective place – and whether they then call it that.

Therefore, we believe that one can imagine several homes, especially for people who have lived in multiple places. We think you have done well to come to such an agreement. Both of you show one of her homes.

Do you also consider a specific place as your home, a particular landscape, for example? Do you know this feeling? Or perhaps there are multiple places for you as well?

A Film Projector

Creating Community through Films

1. The Film Projector about Itself

I am a film projector, a Bauer P5, for 16mm film. There was a time when I was highly regarded, back in the early 1960s when I was still new. However, I envy the advancements of today, including the modern televisions. Although, back then, we managed to achieve quite a lot, and perhaps even better in some respects – especially when it came to *bringing people together*.

I remember vividly how the room would slowly fill up – I, already in position, loaded with the first reel, waiting for the lights to dim. It was in the heart of Siegen. Not in a cinema, as I was too small for that – but in the „Spanish Center“. Most of the time, I showed Spanish-language films for people whose native language was Spanish. And I often played German language learning films too, as there were also German lessons, and I soon became very familiar with those. One was called „Guten Tag“. And another, „Viel Glück in Deutschland“.

I'm not sure what was better: When everyone sat there transfixed, with only the sound of my whirring to be heard... or when the final reel ended and everyone turned back to each other.

Either way, I belonged to a community there. Yes, and I even contributed to making people *feel* like a community. I think people knew that too – because even though different devices are in demand today, I was kept there for a long time before finally coming to this museum.

Fine Print:

The Spanish Center was established in the 1960s by the archdiocesan vicariate and built on the premises of the parish community of St. Michael, using public and church funds – for people who had come to Siegen from Spain as part of the recruitment agreements between the Federal Republic of Germany and Spain. In addition to social and religious support, leisure activities were also organized there, including Spanish-language film nights, and German courses. The film projector was regularly used for these events.

2. The video portal ,Our Siegen' (,Unser Siegen') to the Film Projector

I am a video portal. I am nowhere and everywhere at the same time – I am simply where I am *accessible*, via the internet. In this regard, dear projector, I am very different from you. I would really like to know what it's like to be so heavy and metallic, and above all, so *physically present*, wherever people are...

But we both have something in common: We enable people to watch movies, perhaps not of the same genre, but still. I am a collection of videos, mainly interviews, of people from Siegen talking *about* Siegen. And anyone who wants to can watch it, listen, and connect, basically anytime and anywhere. So even if people are not all in the same room at the same time as they were with you back then, they are doing something communal through me: they are looking together at the region and the city and perhaps experiencing themselves as part of it.

The fact that the focus in your case back then was more on Spain or other Spanish-speaking countries was, of course, also because most people assumed they were only in Siegen for a short time. And for many, that was indeed the case. But many also stayed here. By the way, the man who used to teach the German courses with your help, Alfonso, I know him too, from my videos.

Do you know that feeling when movies create a sense of community? Or when they even promote identity?

A Passport

How Life is Restricted

1. The Passport about Itself

I am a passport, a Spanish passport indeed, but with a considerable amount of German words, written and stamped, mostly in blue and black, often in admonishing red. And in all sorts of handwriting – I still feel the poking and tickling of the pens, and more vividly, the pressing, yes often the striking, of the stamps. Yet it has been a long time since I was in use...

One can clearly deduce from me, for that is what I am made for: Issued in December 1962, invalidated in December 1966, after just four years. And yet, there was so much to clarify, approve, note, and endorse. Until I was eventually replaced by a new passport.

So, I actually have no function anymore, yet Alfonso still keeps me – he is the man about whom I provided information back then. Although I didn't really provide information about *him*, but solely about where, when, and how he was allowed to live and work.

Anyway, I am glad for his current passport, which has a quieter life than I did back then – and I am glad for Alfonso himself. After all, he was able to settle here, according to official records as the second of several thousand foreigners in Siegen at that time.

Fine Print:

In 1963, trained carpenter Alfonso López García took up a job in Germany for the first time as a so-called „guest worker“, not through the traditional channels of recruitment commissions, but via the job offer from his brother-in-law, in a workshop in the Frankfurt area. In the early 1970s, during a visit to friends in Geisweid, he became aware of a vacant position as a social worker for the Spanish community at the Caritas Association. His application was successful. When he wanted to apply for an indefinite residence permit (now the settlement permit) – after over a decade in Germany – he was told that among the several thousand foreigners in Siegen, only one person had received it so far. He was likely the second.

2. Five Guild Seal Stamps to the Passport

We are five stamps, perhaps a bit like those that once bore down on you. However, we are old *guild seal stamps*: we belonged to five different guilds that existed in Siegen in the 18th century: the hat makers, the tanners, the ropemakers, the weavers, and the masons.

The mobility of people was well regulated even back then, mobility through the world, but also in terms of work. If someone wanted to make hats or ropes or fabrics or leather, or work as a mason, they had to adhere to the rules of their respective guild.

What do you think, how much paper have we touched or, as you rightly say, *struck* over time? We still feel it as if it were yesterday, that strictness and clarity. We have always represented that with great dedication.

But now, as we look at you, something becomes clear to us that we have not seen all this time – perhaps we *could not* see it because we always had new documents in front of us, and we never really got to engage with any one of them. But if we engage with *you*, stamped as you are, we realize that you are not just a collection of matters, but that you concern a *person* who has a name and a life. And barriers were set for this person, just like for all the craftsmen back in our time. We need to think about that...

Have you experienced this too – have such barriers ever been set for your desires and life plans? How did you feel about it?

A Music Box

The Step into Self-Employment

1. The Music Box about Itself

I am a music box. I was manufactured in China, but at some point, I was packed into a crate along with many others of my kind and *exported*. It's been almost 50 years since then. After a long journey, we landed in Geisweid, Germany, so we were *imported* again – and I thought: As long as you're not just *exported* but also *imported* again, everything is fine.

The man who imported us was named Ihsan, he was from Turkey, and together with his wife Sevim, they ran a grocery store. When we heard that, someone said that the people in Geisweid might eat music boxes... But no, Ihsan wanted to expand his store with items like us, especially for customers who wanted to take us to Turkey. That made me laugh at the thought of people constantly transporting us halfway around the world – and I feared it might never stop. But it turned out we were meant as *gifts* – and that was something very special: To be a gift usually pleases an object a lot. And so, it all ended very well for us – including me:

Although I didn't become a gift, I became an *exhibit*: Not only here in the museum but also elsewhere, in a display case in Ihsan's store, which has grown incredibly in the meantime and, by the way, is called „ELIH Import Export“. When I think back to how they put me in some crate in China... I never would have thought that I would one day be exhibited to recall the beginnings of a large company.

Fine Print:

Ihsan Elmaağaçlı arrived in Siegen in 1963 as one of the first Turkish „guest workers“. He worked as a welder, initially at Schallex and later at the Stahlwerke Südwestfalen, while also running a small-scale travel business on the side. In 1974, he and his wife Sevim established a grocery store in Geisweid, which thrived, prompting him to resign from the steelworks. Recognizing an untapped niche market, he ventured into household goods and gift items (like this music box), catering specifically to fellow nationals who also migrated to Germany under the recruitment agreements and particularly for those who regularly visited their families in Turkey. Subsequently, export business and online trading were added, expanding the customer base. Today, his youngest son, Ertan, manages the company. The main focus remains on high-quality household products such as glassware, porcelain, and dinnerware.

2. The Company Sign to the Music Box

I am a company sign – or *was* I a company sign? At any rate, I used to *serve* as a company sign, back in the late 19th century, a time when there were no cars and people walked much more frequently – and wore hats much more often than they do today.

For me, this was quite good because it was my job to show people *where the hat shop was*. So, I always had something to do – and I also had responsibility. Next to my hat shop, there were *five* others in Siegen. Hats were sold as far as the eye could see.

This went on for quite a while, until the 1960s. But when you entered Ihsan's product range in the 1970s, the heyday of hats had just passed – so I finally had nothing left to do.

How different the situations are in which people start their own businesses, right? I mean, on the one hand, you experienced many things just like me, such as the excitement when customers come and look and maybe even buy – and on the other hand, many things were different for you, also because your Ihsan was an immigrant. The opportunities for migrants were often limited in both directions, whether as employees or as self-employed people.

Have you ever considered starting your own business? Or have you already done so?

A Song

Views on Siegen

1. The Song about Itself

I am a song. I am a thing that one cannot see or touch. With my lyrics and notes, of course, that's possible. But as a song, I am truly myself only when I am sung. I fill the air, sounding different depending on the voice, and when there are multiple voices, they even blend together. That's how it is when Valentina, Soja, and Svetlana sing me.

I also enjoy it very much when there are instruments involved, each with its own unique voice. Like the guitar played by Mikhail.

But songs don't *only* sound, we also always *say* something. That's why we always can have a clear theme and be *about* something.

I am about a city, about our city here, about Siegen – and more than that. I like to think that I am a notably friendly song, an *affirmative* song. I *affirm* this city. And I do so in the spirit of Svetlana, who wrote me. She is half Russian and half Ukrainian and moved to Germany, to the Siegerland, for love. And she always emphasizes how she was „welcomed with open arms“ here. And that's it, exactly what *resonates* within me now. Wherever I am heard again, it's a new echo of this feeling – being „welcomed with open arms.“

Fine Print:

Svetlana Ochs majored in German studies in Krasnodar, supervised German tourist groups, and met her current husband during this time. Through him, she came to Fellinghausen in Kreuztal and felt welcome there from the very beginning. For 17 years, she has been a founding member of the singing group „RadOst“. This song, written by her, was performed for this exhibition here in the museum with Valentina Kramer, Soja Fuhr-Buschmelev, and Mikhail Zakharov on the guitar. The costumes are inspired by Russian attire from the 18th/19th centuries.

2. Two Siegen-Paintings to the Song

We are two paintings from the late 19th century. Jakob Scheiner painted us, and we are called „Siegen: Unteres Schloss mit Mühlenweiher“ and „Scheiner Blick“. We both could be said to depict Siegen. And we both harbor affection for Siegen.

Listening to you, we found many things quite familiar. The Sieg River, for example, or the hills – we portray those too. But what particularly resonates with us is the line about the sunflowers. You compare the Lower Castle (Unteres Schloss) to sunflowers – for their color. But by doing so, you express something else as well. You could have compared it to mustard or bananas. But you say: sunflowers. And by doing so, you place the Lower Castle in the sun, and perhaps you even let it grow and bloom, metaphorically of course...

Anyway, that mainly depends on how your writer views Siegen. Her perspective is very personal. And of course, we know this well; we too don't merely show the city, we offer our views of it. Because our painter had a perspective too. And perhaps there's no other way. Each person has their own perspective – and things like us, whether songs or paintings, attest to that.

What's your perspective on Siegen? What makes the city stand out for you? What facets would you highlight?

A Workbook

Language and Identity

1. The Workbook about Itself

I am a workbook. For the first grade – and my subject is Armenian. Many children in Armenia have learned to read and write with my help. So, I was curious when one day I was packed up and shipped to Germany. Not only because of the language – they don't even use my letters there.

I became even a bit more curious when I was unpacked again – there was no elementary school child, but a teenage girl. For a moment, I thought I had been delivered to the wrong address, *but then* I found out that she already *spoke* Armenian. And anyway: It's never really too late to learn something new. It was just unusual for me.

So, she learned with me – and not like an elementary school child, but, how should I say, like someone who cares about something *else*, so consciously, as if she would gain something *else* besides just knowing the alphabet. She didn't really *need* it anyway. She read in me and soon also in Armenian poetry collections, for practice she copied down poems – it seemed to already make a difference just that I lay in her nightstand.

Today I know the answer. She felt German *and* Armenian. And as long as she hadn't mastered the Armenian language along with its alphabet, she felt something was missing. By now she's an adult, but other than when I'm on display in this museum, I still lie in her nightstand – and still, I'm brought out from time to time.

Fine Print:

The parents of the now 21-year-old owner of this workbook originate from Armenia and moved to Bielefeld in the 1990s for professional reasons – the father being a laser physicist – and then to Siegen-Wittgenstein. She herself was born in Germany, grew up with both languages, and never felt solely German or solely Armenian. By her teenage years, as her first trip to relatives in Armenia approached, she also wanted to learn the alphabet – and had this workbook sent to her.

2. The Poster of „Siegerländer Wörter“ to the Workbook

I am a poster. Essentially, I only offer a colorful selection of vocabulary samples from a Moselle Franconian dialect, but I often make people laugh with it. Although – not everyone. Some just look stoically, some study me eagerly, some are not particularly interested – it depends on who is looking at me at the moment – and, I would say, what the person „*identifies*“ with.

I can very well imagine how excited the girl was back then when you arrived in the mail! Because you were a kind of key. Only with your help she could eventually feel „complete“ – not only „completely German“, but also „completely Armenian“. She just felt that speaking Armenian wouldn't be enough. Reading, writing, mastering the alphabet was also necessary.

In any case, I thank you. You showed me that I can do something very similar to you, even though I'm just a poster – I'm not at your level, one can really learn a lot from you. But both of us can help people not only *find their words* but also *find each other*, if not even *find themselves*.

How about you – do you also find yourself when you hear certain languages or dialects? Or read? Or write yourself? Or speak?