

November 2022, Dortmund

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Looking back to the future - shaping a new Critical Industrial Culture

Dr Kirsten Baumann

The centre of our industrial museum, the Zollern colliery in Dortmund, was the first industrial architecture to be listed in the Federal Republic of Germany. That was in 1969, a time of belief in progress and economic growth, a time when interest in the lives of workers and working conditions in industry was also growing. Ten years later, Zollern became the first industrial museum in North Rhine-Westphalia. Times had changed a lot in the meantime: In 1973, the so-called **oil crisis** marked a deep cut in Europe's belief in industrial growth and a steady "business as usual."



Entrance of the engine house at Zollern colliery. © LWL-Industriemuseum

In this respect, the founding of this museum marks the beginning of a unique success story of industrial culture, but at the same time it is linked to the decline of 20th century industry. With eight former industrial sites, we are now one of the largest associations of industrial museums in Europe. The museum includes the Zollern Colliery, Dortmund; Henrichshütte Ironworks, Hattingen; Henrichenburg Ship Lift, Waltrop; Bocholt Textile Factory; Nightingale Mine, Witten; Hannover Colliery, Bochum; Brickworks Museum Lage and Gernheim Glassworks, Petershagen.

I would now like to tell you about our plans for the next few years, especially our exhibitions and projects in Dortmund, Waltrop and Hattingen. They show the path we are on. We are in

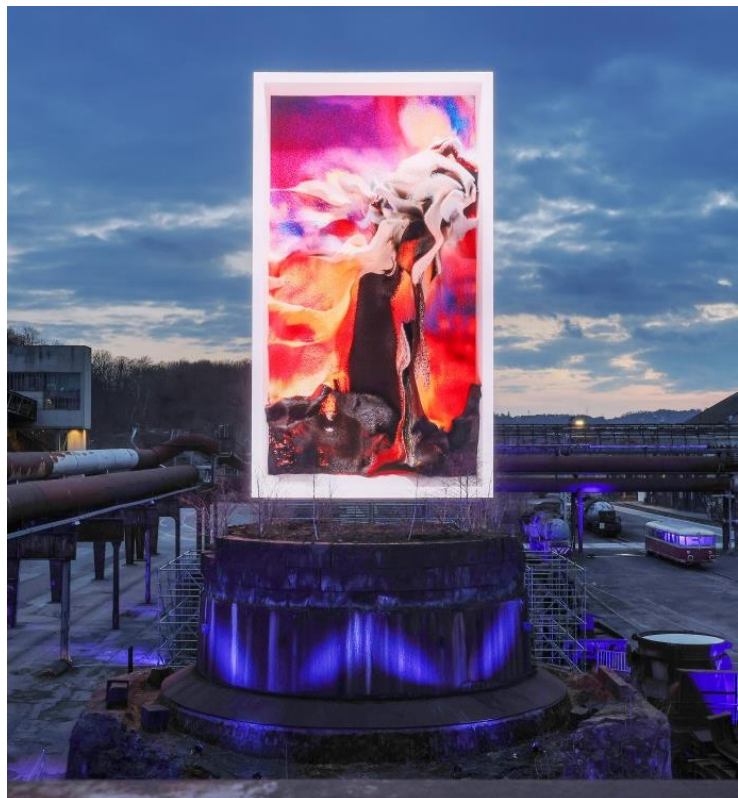
the middle of a paradigm shift and on the way to something I would like to call Critical Industrial Culture. So what are our narratives today and tomorrow?

Climate change, resource scarcity, dependence on fossil fuels, environmental pollution, species extinction - these are all issues that are not new, but have never dominated everyday life to this extent. In the coming years, we will have to radically rethink industrial society.

But where, if not at the former production sites of industry, can we better and more concretely think about causes and ways out of this crisis? In this way, we are taking up the original founding impulse of the industrial museums as cultural and social spaces that wanted to critically accompany social processes. With the success story of industrial culture since the 1990s, this had faded into the background, but today it is more relevant than ever.

Work, energy, resources, progress: these themes have accompanied us since the 1970s and were also the focus of our media art festival „FUTUR 21“, which we held this spring. In principle, these will remain our core themes in the future, but now comes the interesting question: How do we want to address the topic of industrialization and its consequences in the future? What formats do we use for mediation, what kind of museum do we want to be? How digital should our so analogue places become? What role will urban society play in our work in the future, and what role will rural society play? Where are permanent exhibitions still appropriate, and where not? How do we become more flexible and faster, more digital and more diverse?

We are, as I have already indicated, in the midst of a paradigm shift: from looking back at the history of the monument and the work to the socially relevant, cultural-historical debate about how we want to live tomorrow. Without losing sight of our past. I would like to show you a few examples that illustrate this.



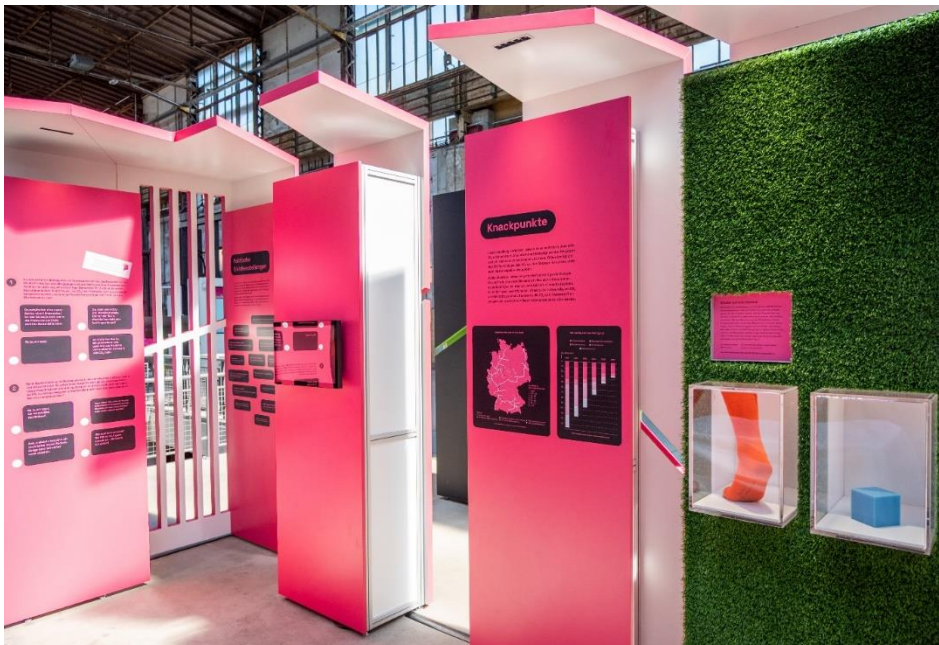
Industrial Dreams. KI Data Sculpture by Refik Anadol, Media Art festival FUTUR 21, März 2022, Henrichshütte Hattingen. © LWL-Industriemuseum / Walter Fischer.



Blast furnace at the Henrichshütte Ironworks, Hattingen © LWL-Industriemuseum / Annette Hudemann

With the „Power2Change“ exhibition, which opened at the Henrichshütte Ironworks in August 2022, we are presenting the mega-topic of energy transition, a major project in science communication.

The aim is to show possible solutions for non-fossil energy generation, better networking and the flexible use of energy. The exhibition shows how we can present today's industrial topics at yesterday's industrial sites. And it is also intended to show that, despite all the crises of the time, there can be grounds for optimism about progress. This exhibition shows very clearly the path we are on: from being part of the problem to being part of the solution. And we have more examples to show.

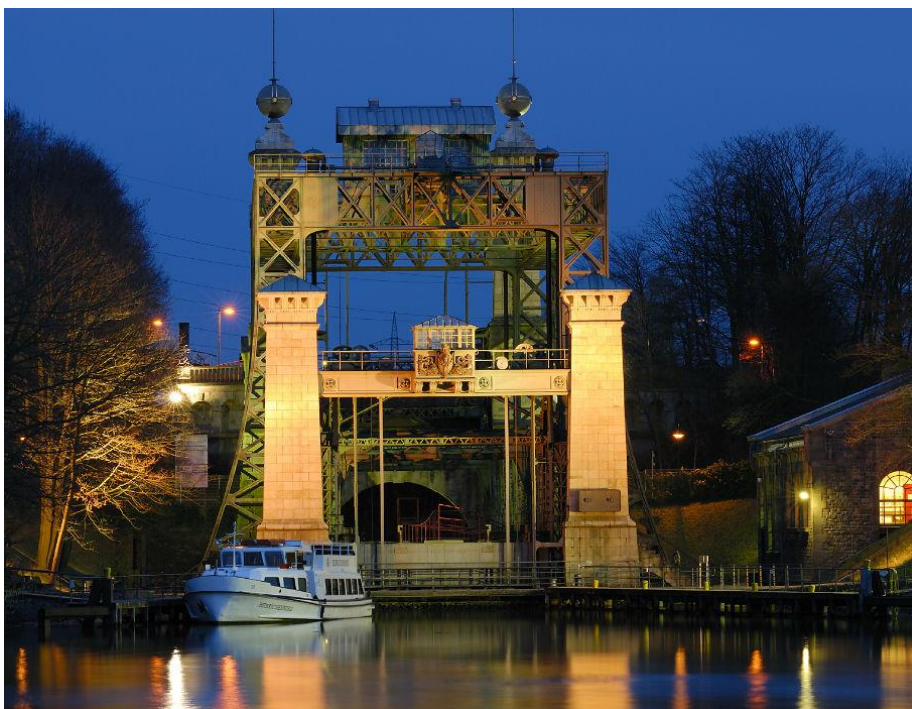


Exhibition „Power2Change“ at the Henrichshütte Ironworks. © Power2Change / Caroline Seidel



Design concept of the exhibition „In an unknown Land. Industrial Insects“ © LWL-Industriemuseum / Barbara Knievel

In 2023, the fascinating exhibition „In an Unknown Land. Industrial Insects“ focuses on the conversion of industrial sites and the extinction of species. And of course the fascination of insects with their many extraordinary abilities. This sets another focus for tomorrow: Nature, ecology, education for sustainable development. This presentation starts at the Henrichshütte ironworks and will be on view in other locations of the LWL-Industriemuseum during the next years.



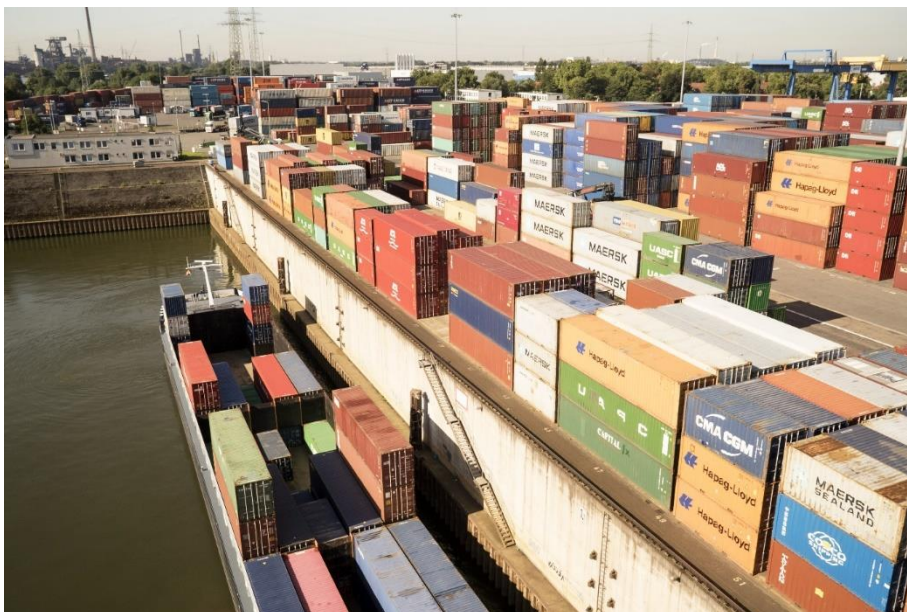
The Henrichenburg Ship Lift at night. © LWL-Industriemuseum / Joachim Jockschat

Another location of the LWL-Industriemuseum is the Henrichenburg Ship lift in Waltrop in the north of the Ruhr area. We opened a new permanent exhibition with a strong focus on digital features in spring 2022, with an excellent augmented-reality-screen and many playful elements. These features are going to be a template for other exhibitions in the LWL-Industriemuseum.



Augmented-reality-screen in the engine house of the Henrichenburg Ship Lift. © LWL-Industriemuseum / Julia Gehrmann

And another interesting exhibition project awaits us in 2024 at the Henrichenburg ship lift: „Containers - the Global Box“. No other object embodies the globalization of the last 60 years as well as the container. The impact on infrastructure, logistics and trade cannot be overestimated, and this identifies further issues for tomorrow. Particularly in times of crisis like now, the container as a symbol of global trade moves strongly into the center of perception. But today containers stand for much more: improvised container settlements symbolize worldwide refugee flows, and we all know office and school containers - but also hip architecture.



Containers in the Port of Duisburg (2017). Copyright: LWL-Industriemuseum / Brigitte Kraemer

Finally, I would like to introduce a project that is really new for us. In 2023, we will be breaking new methodological ground in storytelling at Zollern colliery in Dortmund with an exhibition lab. This experimental format will be used to prepare the topic of "Postcolonial entanglements in Westphalia," which will culminate in a major exhibition in 2024/25. This project in particular will show what kind of museum we will be in the future. In this experimental space, we are negotiating new forms of museum knowledge production, mediation and presentation. It is a kind of test for the big exhibition following, trying out various methods and formats.



Visitor evaluation on the topic of postcolonialism at the Engine House at Zollern colliery. © LWL-Industriemuseum

The focus is on anti-racist co-curating and, connected to this, a change of perspective. In an open space there will be opportunities for discussion, workshops, readings and performances. Here, as a museum, we are addressing our very basic foundations: who has the interpretative sovereignty over a topic? Do we manage to break with our Eurocentric and heteronormative exhibition narratives and ways of thinking? Are we able to sustainably promote inclusion and multiperspectivity in the museum space? Can we dare more democracy in the museum in this way?

The question is whether we will be able to visualize this process of curating, which is also a learning, communication and thinking process, with the exhibition laboratory 2023 and transport it into society together with our fellow participants? This dynamic and agile format is far removed from classic exhibition work, and the museum once again turns out to be an intelligent and experimental place.

As you can see, there is almost no current economic, ecological or social topic that we could not tie in with in our museums. Gernheim Glassworks: Sand is becoming scarce, how long can we continue to produce glass? Brickworks Museum Lage: Is clay construction our future? Nachtigall Mine, Witten: Place of education for sustainable development. Bocholt Textile Factory: The special exhibition „Beauty industry“ is coming up in 2025. And Hannover colliery has been on the trail of migration issues for years. This is a major, overarching theme for almost all industrial heritage sites.

Industrial museums have long been discursive places with a very special audience. What is new is that we will no longer just look back, but forward. We want an industrial culture that addresses the pressing issues of the day, and does so in a way that appeals to a broad audience: that is where our future lies, with these topics we remain socially relevant. In no way will we forget our research of the last 40 years, especially our large pool of interviews, our "oral-history-archive".

Our eight museums, with their large pool of creative and intelligent minds that have long studied industrialization and its consequences, are ready and able to do so and shape a new, critical industrial culture.