



Museum Ulm | Marktplatz 9 | 89073 Ulm

: Press Release 19101|2022

Stadt Ulm

ulm

# We need to talk!

The cathedral nativity scene in a controversy

19 February 2022 - 19 June 2022

Opening: Fri | 18 February 2022 | 7 pm



In autumn 2020, a national debate flared up over the depiction of a black royal figure from the christmas cot, which has been placed in Ulm minster every year since 1992. Carved in the mid-1920s by Ulm sculptor Martin Scheible (1873-1954) on a private commission for a family in Ulm, the figure serves racist clichés and discriminatory stereotypes. With the removal of the figure and the decision of the cathedral congregation to set up the nativity scene without the three wise men from the Orient, a heated exchange of controversial opinions unfolded in public. The fierce reactions provide the occasion for an exhibition project that aims to

objectify the discussion, point out explanatory approaches and make a contribution to postcolonial cultural mediation in our society.

With the emotionalised controversy about the black king in the minster nativity, different questions developed that the exhibition project would like to take up and add to in order to broaden the discourse. Who was the artist Martin Scheible? What works of art did he create? What artistic style did he represent? How are the three wise men from the east depicted in art history? Is there an explanation why Martin Scheible gave the black king his figure? Did he create comparable figures? Which features of the Black King correspond to colonial racist stereotypes? When and why do stereotyped distorted images of black people develop? What colonial traces has our art and cultural historical heritage left us as a reflection of its time? How do colonial structures continue to have an effect today? Why could this debate come about?

The exhibition project aims to shed light on these and other questions. On the one hand, the focus of attention is the art historical classification of the minster nativity figures in the work of Martin Scheible as an artist of the 20th century, the consideration of the epiphany tradition and its pictorial implementation through the centuries, as well as the evaluation of the black royal figure in the context of its time. On the other hand, the contextualisation serves as a connecting point to enlighten about the manifestations of everyday racism during Martin Scheible's lifetime as well as about the origin, development, conceptualisations of racism in general and its effects until today.

The plethora of divergent global movements and attitudes expressed in terms such as "Black Lives Matter", "Cancel Culture" or "Racial Profiling", authoritarianism or hate crime only highlight the fact that decades after the end of slavery, imperialism and colonialism, we are only at the beginning of coming to terms with the impact history of the racism associated with it. Racist stereotypes are still present in our everyday life, in language, literature, music, art and customs.

**We have to talk!** is the prelude to a process in which the **Museum Ulm** wants to enter into a socially relevant and institution-critical discourse with white and black scholars, artists and other affected population groups. For the critical reappraisal of globally interwoven colonial history and its consequences is one of the most important remembrance policy tasks of our time. As a place of cultural education and encounter, the **Museum Ulm** would like to contribute to this and call for more sensitivity in dealing with each other in a diverse society.

The exhibition is accompanied by a comprehensive programme of events and a publication.

**: Press conference | Thu | 17 February 2022 | 11 am**  
**With the curator and museum director Dr. Stefanie Dathe**

Fig.: Exhibition poster We need to talk!, Museum Ulm, Design MüllerHocke GrafikDesign

Further information is also available at [www.museumulm.de](http://www.museumulm.de).

**Museum Ulm**  
Marktplatz 9 | 89073 Ulm  
T : +49(0)731 161-4312  
[presse.museum@ulm.de](mailto:presse.museum@ulm.de)

**Opening Hours**  
Tue - Sun : 11 a.m. - 05 p.m.  
Sat - Sun : 11 a.m. - 06 p.m.  
[www.museumulm.de](http://www.museumulm.de)