

PRESS RELEASE

New Exhibition
The Beauty of Early Life: Traces of Early Life
March 26 – July 10, 2022

In collaboration with the State Museum of Natural History Karlsruhe

Dates: March 26, 2022 – July 10, 2022
Press conference: March 25, 2022, 11 a.m.

A journey through time to the origin of life — based on art and science.

The ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe, in collaboration with the State Museum of Natural History Karlsruhe, invites you to take a journey through time to the origins of life, based on art and science. The exhibition The Beauty of Early Life presents fossil finds and art works to illustrate and elucidate the beauty and diversity of early life on Earth, and links Charles Darwin's theory of evolution with recent findings in evolutionary research. In the process, the most important issue is always present: What can be concluded from the history of the Earth for the preservation of biodiversity today and thus for the future of humanity?

This exhibition project is part of the ZKM's current focus on biophilia, in which the ZKM explores manifold questions about the future of the Earth at the interface of art and science. The Beauty of Early Life focuses attention on the richness of biodiversity and the close interrelationships in which the world's biological systems exist. Today, this biodiversity is threatened as never before.

The origins of life remains one of the most challenging questions of all time in natural history and has lost none of its fascination for us today. When Darwin's seminal work on the Origin of Species was published in 1859, he lacked fossil evidence from the early days of life to prove that evolution was not a theory but a fact. Today, more than a century and a half later, fossil finds that evidence evolutionary processes have been discovered on all continents, but in the main are known only to experts. The ZKM and the State Museum of Natural History in Karlsruhe want to change this with a joint exhibition. When and how did the first living organisms arise on our planet? Which laws, which aesthetic phenomena can be identified, according to which the evolution of the infinite variety of forms and functions can be broken down and understood? These are the questions addressed

March 2022

The Beauty of Early Life
26.03.-10.07.2022

Location
ZKM
Lichthof 8+9, 1. OG

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Founders of ZKM



Baden-Württemberg

MINISTERIUM FÜR WISSENSCHAFT, FORSCHUNG UND KUNST

Partner of ZKM



Partners of the exhibition



by the current exhibition *The Beauty of Early Life* at the ZKM — a collaboration with the State Museum of Natural History Karlsruhe.

What constitutes life? Where did it come from? What is life? What diverse manifestations has it evolved over billions of years, including from an aesthetic perspective? The current exhibition at the ZKM Karlsruhe *The Beauty of Early Life* invites visitors to immerse themselves in the history of early life, from the Precambrian through the Cambrian to the Ordovician geologic period. The time period covered by the exhibition is thus from around 3.8 billion years ago to 444 million years before the present. Over 200 scientific exhibits and artistic perspectives from the 1920s to the media arts of the present day await the visitors.

Highly diverse are also the artistic explorations of early forms of life. While representatives of classical modernism such as Jean/Hans Arp celebrate purist organic forms in their near-stereotyped simplicity, artists like Martin Walde from Austria, a former Documenta participant, stage the complexity of the organic using media, and investigate with delight in experimenting the transformations of the most diverse materials.

The threatened beauty of biodiversity

By making it possible for people to experience and grasp the history of life on Earth through fossil finds and art works, the exhibition succeeds in bringing to light the entire beauty and diversity of early life for the first time. The exhibition enhances awareness of the immeasurable richness of the biodiversity that exists on planet Earth and the close interconnected relationships which sustain the world's biological systems, while at the same time revealing that today Earth's biodiversity is threatened as never before. Biodiversity always evolves within the context of biospheres, their specific context of environment and living organisms, and particularly in the interaction of reproduction and food resources. Changes to habitats can mean changes for everyone and everything.

The exhibition links Darwin's theory of evolution and natural selection with current and recent findings in evolutionary research, such as Lynn Margulis's endosymbiont theory. The question always remains: What insights can we derive from Earth history for the preservation of today's biodiversity, for its protection, and for our future?

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Professsor Norbert Lenz, Director of the State Museum of Natural History Karlsruhe and co-curator of the exhibition with Peter Weibel, on this joint project: “In the 20th century, Ice Age art, the art of the Upper Paleolithic, was an important source of inspiration for many artists of classical modernism. In the 21st century, archaic life forms are becoming an increasingly important subject in contemporary art. The ancestors of our current biodiversity needed hundreds of millions of years, some even billions, to emerge — inconceivably long periods of time that should motivate us, as we stand on the threshold of a global mass extinction, to take much more and, above all, better care of this biodiversity, so that life on Earth not only has had an exciting past, but also a future.”

Professor Peter Weibel, Director of the ZKM, confirms this statement, “At the historical moment when, from Covid-19 to climate crises, there is increasing universal awareness that human life on planet Earth is fragile and endangered, and there appears to be an awakening of interest in how life came into existence. When it seems that the end of life is approaching, people want to know more about the beginnings of life. By studying the origins of life and its beauty, we can learn how to shape life in the future: as the coexistence of all fellow beings on the symbiotic planet Earth. Art works and surprising scientific discoveries of recent years are painting a whole new picture of the origins of life and the fantasy of evolution.”

Featured artists:

Memo Akten – Suzanne Anker - Hans Arp - Brett Baker & Laura Hug - Willi Baumeister - Sonia Mehra Chawla - Paul Rosero Contreras - James Darling & Lesley Forwood - Anna Dumitriu & Alex May - ecoLogicStudio (Claudia Pasquero & Marco Poletto) - Max Ernst - Thomas Feuerstein - Ernst Haeckel - Jens Harder - Aleš Hieng, Ida Hiršfenfelder, Robertina Šebjanič - Institute for Biological Interfaces 1, Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) - Manfred Kage - Agnieszka Kurant - Sonia Levy - Bernd Lintermann - Derek Hauffen - Martin Lisec - Andy Lomas - Len Lye - Louise Mackenzie - Reiner Maria Matysik - Joan Miró - Jakub Nepraš - OOZE (Eva Pfannes & Sylvain Hartenberg) - Marjetica Potrč - Kersten Rabe (KIT) - Dan Rees - Maija Tammi - Yves Tanguy - Xandra van der Eijk - Martin Walde - Carmel Wallace

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Events program

Program highlights include tandem guided tours with arts educators from the ZKM and the State Museum of Natural History Karlsruhe, and the Transgressions: Theologians Meet Contemporary Art program, which will take place for the first time on April 1, 2022. On the first Friday of each month, the Protestant and Catholic Churches, in collaboration with the ZKM Museum Communication department, will organize the Friday guided tour. On these dates, theologians together with arts educators from ZKM Museum Communication will guide visitors through the exhibition and encourage them to think outside the box.

Curatorial Team

Norbert Lenz, Director, Natural History Museum Karlsruhe

Peter Weibel, Director, ZKM

Eduard Harms

Hannah Jung

Philipp Ziegler

In collaboration with The State Museum of Natural History Karlsruhe



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You can find all the information at www.zkm.de

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