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The Beginning of Time Palaeological Finds from Repolust Cave

Archaeology Museum, Schloss Eggenberg, Eggenberger Allee 90, 8020 Graz

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Opening: 21.06.2011

Curators: Daniel Modl, Peter Pakesch

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The earliest traces of man in Styria date from the last Ice Age, which began 115,000 years ago. They are associated with Neanderthal Man, who was an efficient hunter and skilled craftsman, and because of his physical advantages and intellectual capacity adjusted well to the hostile environment of Ice Age Europe. Nothing remains in Styria of the Neanderthals themselves, only their tools of hard but fissile stones that have withstood millennia of weathering. The manufacture of these tools, starting from the choice of the correct raw material down to the fine-finishing of lithic flakes into specialised tools, presupposes forethought, planning and abstract thinking, enabling us even today to understand the rudiments of the behaviour and mindsets of these people.

The caves of the central Mur Valley proved to be particularly favourable for settlement, and therefore are rich in Palaeolithic finds. Repolust Cave in the Badgraben near Peggau proved to have the most extensive collection of stone implements from the Middle Palaeolithic period in the eastern Alps, with over 1100 worked quartz and hornstone artefacts uncovered. The archaeological and scientific reassessment of the finds prior to this exhibition allows us not only to follow all production steps in the complex process of making tools but also for example to identify with assurance the source of the coveted hornstones, near present-day Rein Abbey. Neanderthal Man wrought tools from bones or antlers only in exceptional cases, so that the find of a number of bone artefacts in Repolust Cave is all the more remarkable. A wolf's incisor tooth drilled through at the root must count as one of the earliest substantiations of the use of jewellery in Central Europe.

Along with the wrought stone and bone objects, the archaeological research in Repolust Cave will itself also form a focal point of the exhibition. Beginning with the discovery of the cave in 1910, the results of individual Joanneum field seasons in the 1940s and 1950s will be illustrated by the original excavation documents, but also critically analysed in the light of the latest state of research. The presentation of stone and bone artefacts and the historical excavation documentation will be supplemented by a video installation by well-known media artist Sharon Lockhart (*1964, Norwood, USA), which will link the Archaeology Museum with the *Measuring the World* exhibition at the Kunsthaus Graz curated by Peter Pakesch and Katrin Bucher

Trantow. In a film lasting several hours, she shows how the objects are arranged in the showcase by the curators according to archaeological criteria, thereby creating a direct link between the Palaeolithic artefacts and their presentation in the present day.