

Universalmuseum Joanneum Press

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The Natural History Museum of the Universalmuseum Joanneum

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The new layout of the Natural History Museum is a striking conclusion to the renovation and revamping wave of the Universalmuseum Joanneum. Over the last 20 years the collections and locations of the Joanneum have been fundamentally renewed.

In the museum's main original building – the Baroque Lesliehof in Raubergasse, Graz – from March 15th 2013 onwards, visitors will receive fascinating insights into the evolution of life, and the resulting diversity of nature. Looking back over hundreds of millions of years up to the challenges of the present, the new Natural History Museum shows the most interesting objects in a multi-disciplinary permanent exhibition, offering insights into the research work undertaken by the team of experts.

Both the buildings and the display rooms were completely renovated as part of the reconfiguration: access to the Natural History Museum is now through the Visitors' Centre at the Joanneum Quarter. Rearranging the exhibition was sensitively handled by integrating them into the historical building substance; historically popular objects such as the Water Pine or the display mine, which many Styrians remember from earlier visits, have been restored and are on show again. Many rooms that were used as storage depots and offices over many decades are now accessible to visitors for the first time, enabling a larger exhibition area to be available.

The rearrangement covers the whole of the second floor of the Museum's building in Raubergasse on a surface of over 16,000 square feet. The exhibition areas for the earth and life sciences are arranged in corridors around the large and small courtyard. Every room is devoted to a special theme, and the design creates individual rooms; in so doing, it is not staging that occurs, rather supporting the visualisation of the objects. In addition, the Natural History Museum is construed on the principle of interaction, offering a "workbench" in every room as a chance to actively get involved in the main topic concerned. These stations are conceived to arouse curiosity among our young visitors as much as the adults. In this way, an interactive museum has been created, in which all those who are interested can find answers to questions which affect their living space and so themselves.

In the theme rooms, the geology, palaeontology, mineralogy, zoology and botany collections, both split by specialised disciplines and jointly, provide insight into the geological and mineralogical treasures of Styria as well as the almost infinite variety of life.

Treasures of Styria

With the 85 foot long (!) painted panorama of earth history, the earth sciences set a monumental example: painted by Styrian artist Fritz Messner according to the latest scientific findings, the picture cycle visualises in concise form the history of the earth from the creation of the planets to the present day, especially shown for the region of Styria. The landmasses that today make up Styria were built under water for hundreds of millions of years, hence visitors to the Natural History Museum, besides the giant deer and the cave bear, also get to marvel at large marine ichthyosaur and other sea creatures.

Similarly preserved are the two historical rooms with the original system of minerals based on Tschermak, which go back to the late 19th century. This has been deliberately kept as a historical document, as in the majority of natural history museums, such historical depictions have long since fallen victim to modernisation. In the midst of this richly ornate setting, a desk several yards long is placed, at ten stations of which visitors can try their best at determining minerals.

An absolute highlight of the Joanneum and an incomparable treasure of the Natural History Museum is the Relief of Styria, some twenty feet long and wide. A media staging links the unique historical technology of the relief with that of the present day. This modern interpretation contrasts the relief's history with state-of-the-art geographical data technology: the Geographical Information System (GIS), a scientific and popular tool for engaging with Styria's natural space.

The Diversity of Life

The biological sciences place the focus of their narration on the diversity of life. Biological diversity begins at our own "front door": the abandoned stone quarry Hauenstein, close by the Graz city district of Mariatrost, has developed into one of the richest micro-spaces in Styria. This micro-environment makes us want to go out, armed with all our knowledge, and study the biological gem *in natura*.

Another space is concerned with animal forms of movements. Skeletons and dermoplastics are on show rowed up next to each other, frozen in action, with x-ray films showing the sequences of movements concerned. A comprehensive selection of audio and colour examples reflect the diversity of individual forms of expression of living creatures, and is devoted to the way they communicate. Besides insights into the mechanisms of evolution, upon which the diversity of life is based, a model of a Styrian mantispid magnified 100 times also represents an exhibition highlight. The "giant insect" was made especially for the new layout.

Museum in Motion

As every room is devoted to a theme, individual rooms containing current topics can be extended in the medium term, without the entire permanent exhibition on the second floor needing to be rebuilt extensively.

Moreover, smaller and larger themed exhibitions drawing on in-house objects will be on show on the first floor in a one- to two-year rhythm, in which natural history questions of particular topicality are addressed. Likewise our natural history specialists can present new research findings here, or joint projects with schools, vocational universities or activists from various expert groups. For hands-on activities a further space is available, close by the ever-popular coal mine.

In-house productions of the Natural History Museum or exhibitions taken over from other museums with shorter running periods will likewise be presented on the first floor in two wonderfully vaulted halls.

By offering so rich a selection of short, medium and long-term special exhibitions, the Natural History Museum would like to keep alive the visitors' curiosity, and to motivate them to visit many times each year. The perception "I've already seen that" will thus make way for "There's always something new to see!"