

Campbell, Craig. 2009. "Shaman's Journey." Produced three videos for the exhibition Siberian Shamans, Linden State Museum of Ethnology, Stuttgart, Germany (December 2008-June 2009).



Shamans of Siberia – Magicians, Intermediaries, Healers

Linden State Museum of Ethnology, Stuttgart, Germany

December 13, 2008 – June 28, 2009

– in cooperation with the Russian Museum of Ethnography, Saint Petersburg –

«Shamans of Siberia – Magicians, Intermediaries, Healers» is the result of a collaboration lasting several years between the Linden State Museum of Ethnology, one of Europe's oldest ethnographic museums, and the Russian Museum of Ethnography in Saint Petersburg. Curated by Erich Kasten, it is among the largest and most comprehensive exhibitions ever mounted on the subject. It features films, photographs, full-scale models of nomadic dwellings, and hundreds of artifacts including nearly 200 rare objects from the collections of the Russian Museum of Ethnography, many of them never before seen in western Europe. Instead of taking a static approach to shamanism as a historical phenomenon, particular attention is given to the dynamic features of shamanic worldviews, their openness to religious concepts of other peoples with whom shamans came in contact, and the consequent transformations and variations.

An important goal of the exhibition is to inform the museum visitor about non-western concepts of dealing with nature and the supernatural, whose representatives had to be consulted and treated in a respectful way. Early explorers and scientists viewed Siberian shamans against the background of the respective Zeitgeist of their own cultures, and many continue to do so even today. Western observers first dismissed shamanic concepts as irrational beliefs during the Enlightenment, then viewed them in romantic transfiguration, and eventually – during the past 50 years – used them as an ideological tool for growing criticism of western civilization. But how can we do justice to the phenomenon of shamanism from the point of view of the peoples of Siberia, for whom it has been an important part of their cultural identity? In the long wake of perestroika they are still seeking new ideological orientations and striving to reconnect to traditional worldviews. In contrast to a certain arbitrariness by which almost any kind of spirituality is often seen today as shamanic, this exhibition aims to show the particular historical and regional contexts from which shamanic worldviews and ritual practices evolved, within which they have been embedded in Siberia, and what shamanism can mean to people there today and in the future.

The overarching theme linking shamanic worldviews with traditional concepts of human relations with nature runs throughout the exhibition. The first section of the exhibition provides examples of particular natural environments of Siberia, establishes the historical and geographical context, and introduces the special character of sacred objects that are shown. In the next hall, overall concepts of human relations with nature and ritual interaction are explained by the examples of two different seasonal reconciliation feasts, the Yhyakh of the Sakha and the O-lo-lo of the Koryak (Nymylans). Specific shamanic concepts dealing with unexpected crisis situations are closely identified and demonstrated by regalia. Beautifully conserved sacred objects are shown side-by-side with archival photographs of them in their original contexts. Object installations focus on important themes such as becoming a shaman, shamanic cosmology, and the role of spirit helpers in traveling and communicating with the worlds beyond.



The video can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yv-EQtrL7Ik>