

# Presseinformation

## Museum am Rothenbaum

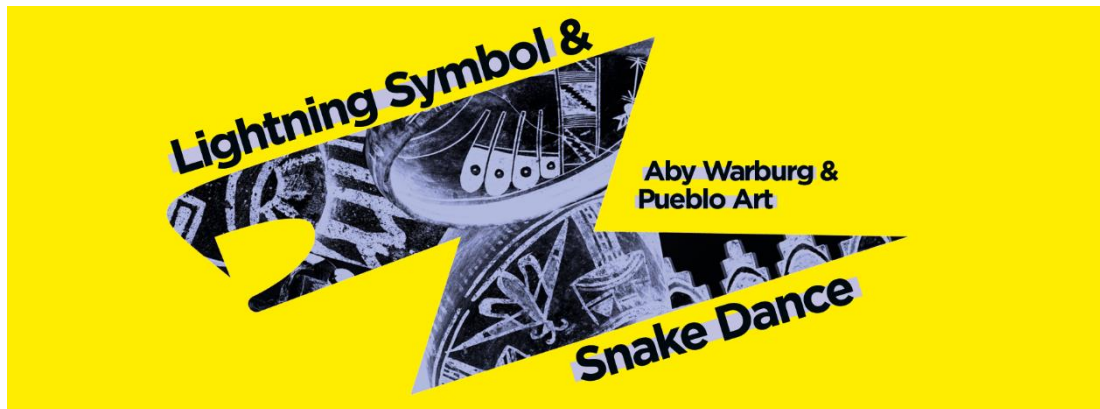
### Rothenbaumchaussee 64 | 20148 Hamburg Germany | [markk-hamburg.de](http://markk-hamburg.de)

## Lightning Symbol and Snake Dance Aby Warburg and Pueblo Art

March 4, 2022 to January 8, 2023

Press viewing: March 3, 2022 | 11 a.m., registration: [presse@markk-hamburg.de](mailto:presse@markk-hamburg.de)

Opening: March 3, 2022 | 7 p.m.



With “Lightning Symbol and Snake Dance,” the MARKK presents its Aby Warburg Collection for the first time in its entirety. In 1923, the Hamburg-based art and cultural historian elaborated on his journey of 1895/96 through the American Southwest and his encounter with the Pueblo societies there in his famous lecture on the “Serpent Ritual”. Yet, the objects he collected and donated to the Hamburg Museum had fallen in oblivion; they include ornate ceramics, ceremonial dance regalia, and impressive Katsina figures. The exhibition examines their cultural significance, sheds critical light on their acquisition history, and also incorporates artistic positions of today’s Pueblo societies. It also addresses the issue of non-displayable objects and images, and how to respectfully deal with culturally sensitive content.

Even before Warburg’s trip, Pueblo ceremonial dances and especially the Hopi ceremony known as the “Snake Dance” or “Snake Ritual” had become a tourist highlight for a white audience. Warburg never saw the ceremony himself, in which live poisonous snakes are ritually consecrated. Nevertheless, in 1923 it served him as the starting point for a scientific lecture that interpreted the snake as a universal symbol of overcoming human fear, also referring to works of European art history. Warburg’s innovative cultural comparison, his crossing of disciplinary boundaries and transcultural approach are still relevant today. On the other hand, Warburg remained wedded to the evolutionary theories of the 19th century and the associated ideas of European superiority. His behavior as a sometimes intrusive traveler and scientist in the pueblos, who did not take cultural sensitivities into account and hardly noticed socio-political upheavals that took place within the Pueblo communities during his visit, also make him a problematic figure from today’s perspective.

For the first time, the reappraisal of Warburg’s America collections involved experts from today’s pueblos. In the course of these discussions with Stewart B. Koyiyumptewa (Director of the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office), Joseph H. Suina

Weitere Medieninformationen und Bildmaterial:

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(Head War Chief of Cochiti Pueblo), Joseph R. Aguilar (Deputy Commissioner of the Tribal Historic Preservation Office of San Ildefonso Pueblo), and others, religiously and culturally sensitive objects, photographs, and documents were identified within the MARKK collection and among those on loan from the Warburg Institute. The recommendations made in this regard are taken into account in both the exhibition and the catalogue, and result in some works, images, and content, including those that have already been reproduced many times, being shown only as "visual blanks." This is intended to respond to the concern of many Pueblo and Native American Nations to regain interpretive sovereignty over their own culture after centuries of colonial experience. Related questions of intellectual and cultural property are discussed in the exhibition with the involvement of the societies concerned. Works by contemporary artists testify to the topicality of symbolic art from the pueblos and address stereotypical ideas.

The exhibition brings together all surviving holdings of the MARKK's Warburg Collection, which includes examples of Pueblo art as well as some Diné (Navajo) and Apache objects. Objects that no longer exist are represented by drawings or photographs of historical inventory cards to provide an overview of the overall collection, which has been reduced by wartime losses. Loans from the Ethnological Museum in Berlin as well as photographs, letters, sketches and drawings, and travel notes by Warburg from the Warburg Institute in London complement the exhibit.

The exhibition points to a forgotten interplay between ethnology and art research in the museum's origins. This transdisciplinarity, which characterized the MARKK and many other ethnographic museums in their history, plays a central role again in today's museum work. Collection holdings are no longer viewed one-dimensionally as describing culture, but in their complexity and ambiguity. Accordingly, the exhibition and the catalogue bring together perspectives from Pueblo experts and European and US-American voices in Pueblo research with a background in art history as well as social anthropology and archaeology.

*The exhibition and catalogue were developed and curated in close and interdisciplinary collaboration between Christine Chávez, curator of the Americas Department at MARKK, and Uwe Fleckner, professor at the Department of Art History at the University of Hamburg and member of the Warburg-Haus Board of Directors. It is held in cooperation with the Warburg Institute London and with the financial support of the Hamburg Ministry of Culture and Media, the Warburg-Melchior-Olearius-Stiftung, the Ernst von Siemens Kunststiftung, the Hermann Reemtsma-Stiftung, the Consulate General of the United States of America and the Freunde des Museums am Rothenbaum e.V.*