

9 LOCAL PERSPECTIVES ON INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES TO SUSTAIN INDIGENOUS CULTURES IN KAMCHATKA

Aleksandra Urkachan, Raisa Avak, and Tjan Zaotschnaja

Fieldwork with Koryak to Document and to Inspire Interest in Indigenous Knowledge¹

Aleksandra Urkachan

In the aftermath of *perestroika*, several German-Russian international scientific and practical conferences and seminars have been held in Kamchatka. In 1999–2000, two scientific and practical seminars on the cultural heritage of the peoples of Kamchatka and the problem of its transmission to future generations were held in the village of Ezzo in the Bystrinskii District of Kamchatka. These events were aimed at summarizing the scientific and practical experience of their participants on this topic. In addition, young people participated in a children's drawing competition and a dance festival, in which children's ensembles from Palana, Anavgai, and Ezzo demonstrated to the seminar participants what was at stake, namely the preservation and development of cultural diversity. Both seminars led to concrete results. The first seminar, on the topic "The Spiritual World of the Peoples of Kamchatka," led to the staging of a theatrical performance by the Even ensemble Nulgur entitled "The Shaman's Journey to Other Worlds" (author Kirill Ichanga), as well as a tour of the Even ensemble Nulgur in Germany.²

The most important issue in the first seminar was how cultural traditions are reinterpreted and further developed in the search for new forms of artistic expression in art. The second seminar, entitled "Children of the North – Lessons in Culture," was held in 2000 in the Bystrinskii district, as part of the scientific and practical project "Summer Camps for Children," with the support of the Francke Foundation, Halle, Germany.³ The general director of these seminars was Erich Kasten, and the executive directors were Galina Fedotova, Aleksandr Savchenko, and Elena Zlotnikova. The main objective of these seminars was on preserving and further developing or reviving the traditional knowledge of the Indigenous peoples of Kamchatka, which is currently at risk of being lost. Preserving this knowledge, passed down by ancestors, and subsequently putting it into practice using modern knowledge and technologies, is the goal of developing special educational programs. They should serve to help younger generations, as they grow up, to find their place in a rapidly changing world

1 First published in Kasten 2010: 147–149, 185–189 (in Russian).

2 <https://dh-north.org/dossiers/gastspielreise-des-ensembles-nulgur/en> [accessed 30.11.2025]

3 <https://dh-north.org/dossiers/workshop-zu-tanz-und-gesang-in-esso/en> [accessed 30.11.2025]

and, at the same time, not to lose touch with their homeland and their people. This scientific and practical goal was emphasized in discussions during seminars, in articles in the relevant collective volume (Kasten 2002), and was discussed in dialogue among scientists, educators, and other representatives of the Indigenous intelligentsia.

In the fall of 2000, Erich Kasten took part in an international scientific and practical seminar entitled “Preservation and Revival of Traditional Rituals festivals among the coastal Koryak (Nymylan),” organized by me, together with others and held in the village of Lesnaya (Kasten et al. 2004). After participating in the seminar, Erich Kasten became interested in the culture of the coastal Koryak. Together with me, he decided to conduct several ethnographic expeditions over the next years, at different times of the year, first to the territories inhabited by the Nymylan, and later to other areas in the east and north of the peninsula, where other Koryak groups live. This project was initially supported by the German Research Foundation (DFG). In the village of Lesnaya, several seminars were held in the form of open lessons in nature – continuing the new methods that had proven useful during earlier seminars in Esso and Anavgai (see above).



Fig. 1 Vera Yaganova demonstrates to Erich Kasten how to extract the inner pith from the willowherb plant, near Lesnaya, 2002. Photo: Aleksandra Urkachan.

The main goal of these expeditions was to record the local dialect and traditional knowledge of the Indigenous population with the help of video recordings for further processing. Special topics included traditional ecological knowledge, such as that related to gathering wild plants, hunting, and fishing. The history of the village and the memories of its elders were recorded, as well as the process of making skin boats

(*matev*), sleds, and applied art products. Ritual festivals such as *Ololo*, family melodies, dances, and tales were also documented.

The result of this work, in which the villagers actively participated, was presented in form of films in September 2006 in the village of Lesnaya. After the screening, the films, together with equipment (video player), were transferred to the village library under the responsibility of Antonina Popova, and to primary and secondary schools, where films from the series “Peoples and Nature of Kamchatka” and from the series “Koryak Language and Culture” (with subtitles in Russian and English and with a booklet in Koryak and Russian languages) (Kasten 2016, 2017) have been widely used. Since then, the films that had been handed over to the villagers have been excellent teaching aids for school, various local events and youth clubs, with the participation of elders and experienced craftswomen – in this way, preserving the culture and way of life of the Nymylan people.

Continuing this work, Erich Kasten and I organized and held a scientific and practical workshop in April 2008 in the village of Ossora on the topic of “Folklore and Art of the Peoples of Northern Kamchatka.”⁴ The goals were clearly defined: to preserve and develop the cultural heritage of the Indigenous peoples inhabiting the peninsula (especially its northern part), to teach the use of folklore materials, and to promote Indigenous song and dance art (Kasten et al. 2010). The first day of the workshop began with performances by the folk ensembles Nunun (led by L. Katovinina), Kenaketoi (led by L. Appolon), and Il’kiv (led by E. Popova). During the work, our common goals became evident, which is the revival of folklore, the preservation of traditions, the discovery of new talents, their uniqueness and the diversity of creative styles. This is remarkable, because once again we saw how rich in nuances Indigenous dance culture is. The leaders of the folklore groups briefly talked about the history of the ensembles’ creation and their activities, and shared their work experience. The continuity between generations is very valuable, as older people pass on their skills to younger ones, which makes folk culture imperishable.

Erich Kasten gave a lecture on “Preserving Cultural Heritage with the Help of Modern Digital Technologies,” which was accompanied by a presentation of the multimedia DVD “Melodies and Dances of the Coastal Koryak of the Karaginskii District” and “Karaginskii Khololo.” The lecture by E. T. Gil’, “Understanding Dance,” aroused great and quite natural interest among those present. After it ended, this Honored Artist of Russia was asked many questions, which she gladly answered. One of the highlights was a visit to the district museum of local lore, where its director, E. V. Popova, gave a detailed account of the history of the district and its people and showed the visitors around the exhibition.

At the museum, the conference continued with A. P. Appolon, who spoke about the national characteristics of hunting tools, the culture and way of life of reindeer

4 <https://dh-north.org/dossiers/workshop-in-ossora-kamtschatka/en> [accessed 30.11.2025]

herders and fishermen. The guests also had much to share. A.P. Pastushina talked about how Koryak ritual holidays, such as the Sea Festival, the New Moon Festival, and the Seal Festival, are being revived in the village of Tilichiki.

Tat'iana and Savelii Golikov, a couple famous for their Indigenous knowledge not only of the Karaginskii district but also beyond, talked about how they make decorative and applied art items, especially burial clothes and accessories. They presented their handcrafted products which they explained in detail.

The final stage of this conference took place in the district library. A unique master class was conducted by the elders – former participants in the artistic activities of the villages of Ossora and Karaga. It was conducted in their native language (which everyone understood, even though they spoke different dialects) by Tat'iana Golikova. Using her observations, she imitated the singing of ducks and loons and accompanied it with a dance, while Savelii Golikov demonstrated the movements of the “Achuach”



Fig. 2 Performing and discussing dances, Ossora, 2008. Video still: Erich Kasten.

fish. M. E. Nutave sang “Tundra-Melody” about how she rode reindeer sleds and how she learned to herd reindeer, N.I. Voronova performed the ancestral melody of her grandfather Vaiam. L. Rokovav beautifully performed a melody from Rekinniki, which is somewhat similar to a melody from Lesnaya. D.P. Uvarova told the tale “How the Goose Courted,” and E.T. Gil performed the dance “Forest Path” to the melody of M. G. Belousova. The participants couldn’t resist joining in the dancing themselves.

Here, in the library, an exchange of experience took place, during which young beginning leaders of folklore groups could learn the craft from their elders. It was touching and palpable: the mutual interest, the desire of each to get to know others as well as possible, to imbibe the spirit of Koryak groups living in other parts of the district.

In more field research with Erich Kasten, we also applied conventional methods of individually documenting Indigenous knowledge, now with special consideration of digital and visual recording techniques. During our expeditions we carried out ethnographic work to record field materials in various villages in the Koryak district, where the way of life and culture, customs, oral traditions, tales, and legends are still preserved. We recorded Indigenous crafts – fishing, hunting for sea and fur animals, reindeer herding.

The well-known Kamchatka researcher S. P. Krasheninnikov, having familiarized himself with the folklore of the Indigenous people, wrote: “The Kamchadals are as skilled at storytelling as the ancient Greeks.” We listened with interest to one master of folklore tales, M. G. Yaganov, in the village of Lesnaya in the Tigil’skii District. The tale was accompanied by the actor’s facial expressions and imitations of the animals and birds mentioned in the story. This unique and vivid art form came to us over the course of many centuries.

The Koryak, who live on the coast of the peninsula, dedicate reconciliation festivals to the sea and tundra animals that provided them with sustenance. In this way they show their respect and reverence for them. These festivals are called *Ololo*⁵ in the village of Lesnaya and *Khololo*⁶ in the villages of Ossora, Tymlat and Karaga in the Karagin-skii District. Dances have always been a mandatory part of such festivals. T. Petrova-Bytova, director of the Northern Lights dance ensemble at the Herzen Institute of the Peoples in Leningrad, wrote in one of her works during a business trip to the village of Palana in Kamchatka: “The Koryak and Itelmen performed their dances imitating the sounds and movements of animals and birds. They are very skilled at this.”



Fig. 3 Natal'ia Yaganova (right) demonstrates seagull movements to Aleksandra Urkachan, Lesnaya, 2001. Video still: Erich Kasten.

During our ethnographic expeditions, a resident of the village of Lesnaya, N. A. Yaganova, showed us this skill to the accompaniment of a drum, with the singing of the family melody of E. G. Yaganova. The filming was done by E. Kasten on the banks of the Lesnaya River, and the movements were later further demonstrated and discussed at her home.⁷ It was precisely this skill that T. Petrova-Bytova extolled in her descriptions. N. A. Yaganova, with smooth movements, imitated the surf of the sea, masterfully depicted the flight of a seagull, and the movements of a seal were accompanied by guttural singing.

In the small villages of northern Kamchatka, where Koryak have been engaged in reindeer herding and hunting animals living in the tundra for centuries, their particular festivals have also been preserved and documented by us, such as the *Kilvei* festival

5 <https://dh-north.org/dossiers/das-o-lo-lo-fest-der-nymylanen/en> [accessed 30.11.2025]

6 <https://dh-north.org/dossiers/das-cho-lo-lo-fest-der-korjaken-and-der-ostkueste-kamtschatkas/en> [accessed 30.11.2025]

7 <https://mu-north.org/videos/natalya-yaganova-reports-on-the-support-provided-by-women-in-seal-hunting> [accessed 30.11.2025]

in Achaivaiaim.⁸ At such celebrations, it is impossible to do without masters of throat singing, as guttural singing is characteristic of the indigenous people of Kamchatka. It is their state of mind. The women of the village of Khailino are famous for this skill. The oldest participants in the amateur art group, L. A. Lil'kiva, L. Mirkhini, and A. Ankhani, are wonderful performers of this type of singing. D. P. Uvarova, who also has masterful control of her voice, lives in the village of Tymlat.

Folklore is the soul of a people, its wisdom, its culture. Therefore, I want to seek out and record folk songs, the roots and traditions of the people, their holidays and customs. In this way, we will preserve the way of life and culture of the Koryak and other peoples of Kamchatka today.

Looking back, I see how participants in our exchanges and I, as well as the people in the villages we had talked to, are also experiencing the real fruits of the work done; most of them feel a surge of creative energy. We were convinced once again that our folk art is alive – and will live on!

Even Language and Culture⁹

Raisa Avak

Erich Kasten suggested that we collaborate on a research project studying the language and culture of the Even people, who live in Kamchatka – following a similar methodology that he had previously implemented with the “Itelmen Language and Culture” project.¹⁰ The aim of this work was to preserve and pass on knowledge of the unique dialect of the Even elders to future generations through the publication of printed textbooks and the use of DVD and other digital technology. My personal experience with the project “Even Language and Culture” was that we succeeded on time to record original speakers of the language and experts on Even culture, especially from the older generation, whose numbers dwindle with each passing year. The project was carried out in German-Russian cooperation: the language material was recorded by Erich Kasten during his ethnographic expeditions, and he was also the editor-in-chief of the DVDs and booklets (Kasten and Avak 2014, 2018). The transcription and translation of the Even texts into Russian was done by me.

The peoples of Siberia and the Far East speak more than 70 different languages. Some languages are on the verge of disappearance: their functions are narrowing, their vocabulary is becoming impoverished, and their grammatical structures are becoming simplified. Yet the language of any people is a means of developing thought, preserving and transmitting information about cultural values, traditions, and the life experience of many generations of northerners. The languages of the Indigenous

8 <https://dh-north.org/dossiers/das-kilvej-fest-der-cukcen-und-korjaken/en> [accessed 30.11.2025]

9 First published in Kasten 2010: 141–144 (in Russian).

10 <https://bolt-dev.dh-north.org/files/dhn-pdf/kasten2009.pdf> [accessed 30.11.2025]

peoples of the Far North are in the process of gradual extinction due to their displacement by the Russian language in all spheres of human life. Unfortunately, knowledge of one's own language is not currently a vital necessity for northern people. The language of communication throughout our region has become Russian. The younger generation is deprived of a linguistic environment, as children spend most of their time in preschool and then in general education institutions.

Due to the intensified exploitation of natural resources, there have been changes in the traditional culture of nature use among the Indigenous peoples of the North, which formed over centuries and determined the inseparable connection between humans and the environment and the interconnection between generations of any people. The situation is further exacerbated by insufficient attention to the specifics of environmental education and training for representatives of Indigenous peoples. There is a shortage of qualified teachers of ecology, of teaching materials and modern teaching aids, all of which leads to the younger generation developing incorrect views on the causes of, and solutions to, ecological problems.

Russia is known for its great diversity of ethnic groups, where over many years of coexistence, peoples developed positive experiences of interethnic communication and learned to live in peace and harmony with one another. In modern times, this invaluable phenomenon of mutual understanding and mutual trust is in high demand. Our goal is to instill in the younger generation a sense of pride in their homeland, their people, their family, tolerance towards representatives of other ethnic groups, the development of children's literary creativity, and the identification of the most talented in this type of creativity. We must teach the younger generation to deeply understand themselves as representatives not only of a particular people, but also of a regional community. Young people must learn to truly appreciate the role of their compatriots in Russian history and their undeniable contribution to Russian and world culture.

In the current circumstances, it is simply necessary to increase young people's interest in their Indigenous languages and cultures, including the prestige of their own indigenous languages as a means of transmitting the spiritual experience and cultural values of their people to the younger generation. The revival of customs, rituals, traditions of Indigenous peoples, a return to the roots of their ancestral culture – all of this needs to be done constantly, because the old people are passing away and we must hurry to learn from them the secrets of their craft, their knowledge of customs, and their culture. Important tasks for this include: promoting scientific knowledge about the languages of different ethnic groups living in a particular territory; creating conditions for identifying gifted children; providing career guidance to graduates of secondary educational institutions on the study of native languages; and activating the work of elective courses, clubs, sections, student scientific societies, as well as other forms of extracurricular and out-of-school work on the study of the languages of the peoples living in the region.

This project has had positive results, as the unique teaching aid “Even Language and Culture”¹¹ contains a series of recorded stories, tales, and songs by native speakers of the Even language of Kamchatka. The texts are reproduced in Even script, with Russian and English translations, as well as in audio form on DVD.¹² In these films, the texts are narrated by the storytellers themselves, accompanied by facial expressions and gestures, which often contain important additional information. The texts are grouped by theme and arranged in separate volumes.



Fig. 4 Ivan Tylkanov recalls his youth, near Anavgai, 2000. Photo: Erich Kasten.

The purpose of these publications, as I have already said, is to preserve the local Even dialect of our region and make it possible to pass it on to future generations with the help of modern teaching aids. In addition, the English translation of the texts may interest other Indigenous peoples of the world in learning more about the culture of the local population of Kamchatka, and thus contribute to a broader understanding of each other, as well as cultural exchanges in the future.

I consider the project successful because, in my opinion, the best solution was found when dealing with the complex issues of transcribing Even texts. On the one

11 <https://dh-north.org/publikationen/even-theses-songs-and-worldviews-bystrinski-district/en> [accessed 30.11.2025]

<https://dh-north.org/publikationen/clothing-and-decorative-arts-evens-kamchaka-bystrinski-district/en> [accessed 30.11.2025]

12 Published and non-published recordings with texts are, for some time now, more widely accessible on the Internet: <https://dh-north.org/dossiers/evenische-sprache/en> [accessed 30.11.2025]

hand, the current textbooks on the Even language used in Kamchatka are based on the standard Magadan dialect of the Even language and the Ol'sk dialect of the Even people of the Okhotsk coast. On the other hand, the primary goal is to preserve the unique local dialect of the Kamchatka Even as a key element of traditional cultural heritage. Therefore, this transcription of texts focused primarily on how people speak rather than on educational standards. As for the Russian translation, a freer literary translation was used to make the content of the texts more understandable to general readers.

The current series, "Even Language and Culture," contributes to the preservation of the unique cultural heritage of the Even people of Kamchatka. The most memorable moments associated with this project are that people who, unfortunately, are no longer alive, left behind something most valuable – their life histories – beautiful in the past and sometimes sorrowful in the present.

Exhibitions in Germany on the Cultures of the Peoples in Kamchatka¹³

Tjan Zaotschnaja

Since 1996, Erich Kasten has regularly organized exhibitions in major German museums dedicated to the culture and art of the peoples of Kamchatka and Siberia.¹⁴ The aim of the exhibitions is to introduce and interest the German public in the artistic creativity and cultural heritage of the peoples of Kamchatka, as well as to inform them about the unique ecological wealth and its preservation for future generations. During the exhibitions, in addition to displaying exhibits and showing videos, lectures and other informational events are usually held to draw public attention to the current situation of the indigenous peoples of Siberia.

STELLER UND DIE ITELMEHENEN

(Steller and the Itelmen)

As part of the exhibition "The Great Northern Expedition (Second Kamchatka Expedition): Georg Wilhelm Steller (1709–1746). A Lutheran Explores Siberia and Alaska," held at the Francke Foundation in Halle from June 15 to September 8, 1996, photographs and paintings by Itelmen artists were displayed. This section of the exhibition was organized by Erich Kasten in collaboration with Sergei Longinov and Michael Dürr. While the main part of the exhibition was devoted to the life and work of G.W. Steller, explorer of Siberia, Kamchatka, and Alaska, in a historical perspective, here photographs, paintings, and drawings were displayed by three Itelmen artists: Valerii Zaporotskii, Sergei Longinov, and Alexander Pritchin, were intended to draw the public's attention to the contemporary life and creativity of the Itelmen people. They

13 First published in Kasten 2010: 173–179 (in Russian).

14 <https://dh-north.org/dossiers/ausstellungen/en> [accessed 30.11.2025]



Fig. 5 Exhibition “Steller und die Itelmenen” in Halle/Saale, 1996. Design: Erich Kasten, Michael Dürr.

served as a supplement to the historical materials about the Itelmen people that were collected and described in detail by Steller 250 years ago.¹⁵

The Itelmen ensemble El’vel’ and a delegation of cultural workers from Kovran and Tigil’ were invited by Erich Kasten to participate in the opening of the exhibition,¹⁶ for which a catalog was published: “Lachsfang und Barentanz. Die Itelmenen 250 Jahre nach ihrer Beschreibung durch G.W. Steller” (Kasten 1996). A concert of traditional Itelmen music and dance was held at the opening of the exhibition, which coincided with the “Lindenblütenfest” (“linden blossom festival”) in Halle, which usually attracts many townspeople and visitors, was graced by a performance by El’vel’ on stage in the large green courtyard of the Francke Foundation complex,

where G. W. Steller taught at the school from 1731, thus earning his living (see Kravchenko, *this volume*, p. 244). On those warm days, filled with the wonderful scent of linden blossoms, a meeting took place between the past and the present, and between representatives of Itelmen and Germans living far from each other. After all, due to the strained relations between Germany and Russia over the past 250 years (to put it mildly), there had not only been no active communication; Steller’s materials and information about him himself had remained inaccessible to the Itelmen.¹⁷

KINDER MALEN IHRE WELT:

KINDERZEICHNUNGEN AUS SIBIRIEN UND VON DER NORDPAZIFIKKÜSTE

(The world as seen by children:

children’s drawings from Siberia and the North Pacific coast)

From November 10, 1998 to January 3, 1999, again at the Francke Foundation in Halle Erich Kasten organized an exhibition entitled “Kinder malen ihre Welt – Kinderzeichnungen aus Sibirien und von der Nordpazifikküste”. It was then shown at the Ethnological Museum in Berlin, the Übersee Museum in Bremen, and Gallery 90 in Munich.

15 <https://dh-north.org/dossiers/steller-und-die-itelmenen/en> [accessed 30.11.2025]

16 <https://dh-north.org/dossiers/gastspielreise-des-ensembles-el-vel/en> [accessed 30.11.2025]

17 Afterwards, the Itelmen delegation took part in seminars at the Freie Universität Berlin [Note by E. Kasten].

The exhibition featured children's drawings and essays collected by Erich Kasten during his collaboration with several schools and kindergartens in Kamchatka. The Art School (Anastasia Novikova) and the library (Viktorii Mikhailova) in the village of Mil'kovo made a particularly valuable contribution to the joint project. The drawings, along with photographs, were intended to demonstrate both school and educational programs, as well as the lives and environments of the children and young people themselves. In addition to Kamchatka, the exhibition featured materials on the same theme from children in Eastern Siberia (Evenk), Chukotka (Chukchi), Alaska (Yupik), and from the First Nations in the Pacific Northwest in Canada (Kwakwaka'wakw), where Erich Kasten had previously conducted ethnological research. A catalogue including a book and a disc was also published for the exhibition (Kasten 1998).

When we showed the catalog to Erika Henning, director of Gallery 90 at the "Center for Work with Children and Youth" in Munich, she was so enthusiastic that we immediately began looking for funding to bring the exhibition to the Bavarian capital. Munich residents were able to view it from June 29 to October 27, 2000. During that time, we also organized informational evenings with slide shows and films about Kamchatka. After one of the evenings, one photographer immediately expressed his desire to go to Kovran for the *Alkhalalalai* festival.

ZWISCHEN TUNDRA UND MEERESKÜSTE:

KORJAKEN UND EVENEN IM FERNEN OSTEN RUSSLANDS

(Between the Tundra and the Coast: The Koryak and Even in the Far East of Russia)

From July 23, 2003 to January 2005, an exhibition entitled "On the Road – Nomads Yesterday and Today" was held at the Natural History Museum in Münster. Part of this exhibition, prepared by Erich Kasten, was dedicated to Kamchatka. Afterwards, the exhibition traveled to Namibia, where from September 2005 to November 2007, it was on display at the National Museum of Namibia in Windhoek.¹⁸

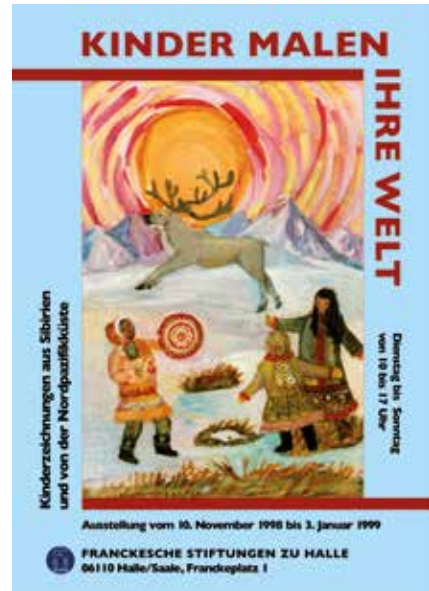


Fig. 6 Exhibition "Kinder malen ihre Welt" in Halle/Saale, 1998. Design: Erich Kasten.

18 <https://dh-north.org/dossiers/zwischen-tundra-und-meereskueste/en> [accessed 30.11.2025]

The exhibition brought together nomads from several continents under one roof: the Sami, Kyrgyz, Tuareg, Germans, Koryak, Even, and others. Visitors were able to learn about the arts and crafts, means of transportation, and special tools of the reindeer herders of Kamchatka. A particular chapter in the catalogue was dedicated to the Koryak and the Even (Kasten 2003).

OFFEN FÜR DAS FREMDE – KUNST UND KULTUR AUS KAMTSCHATKA

(Open to the Other – Art and Culture from Kamchatka)

From January 29 to April 2, 2005, an exhibition was held at the Central and State Library in Berlin, which, along with ethnographic objects, primarily featured carvings by Aleksander Pritchinn and Anatolii Solodiakov. For this purpose, a catalog entitled “Rentierhorn und Erlenholz” was published in German and Russian (Kasten 2005). Computers were set up in the foyer, and visitors could view video recordings made by Erich Kasten.¹⁹

Berlin is not only the political but also the cultural and scientific capital of Germany. During the opening of the exhibition, it suddenly occurred to me that this was a moment where theory and practice met – after all, this central library in Berlin is important for people working in a wide variety of fields of science and art. And all visitors had to pass through the exhibition before reaching the hall they needed.



Fig. 7 Exhibition “Offen für das Fremde” in Berlin, 2005. Design: Erich Kasten.

19 <https://dh-north.org/dossiers/offen-fuer-das-fremde/en> [accessed 30.11.2025]

SCHAMANEN SIBIRIENS: MAGIER, MITTLER, HEILER

(Shamans of Siberia: Magicians, Mediators, Healers)

On December 13, 2008, the Linden Museum in Stuttgart held the grand opening of the exhibition “Shamans of Siberia: Magicians, Mediators, Healers.” Welcoming speeches were given by Thomas Michel, director of the Linden Museum, Günther Öttinger, Minister of Culture of Baden-Württemberg, Vladimir Lipaev, Consul General of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Grusman, director of the Russian Ethnographic Museum in St. Petersburg, and Erich Kasten, the curator of the exhibition. The exhibition ran from December 13, 2008 to June 28, 2009 (Kasten 2009, 2021).²⁰

At this joint exhibition, in cooperation with the Russian Ethnographic Museum in St. Petersburg, more than 200 objects from the famous ethnographic museum in St. Petersburg were shown for the first time, as well as items from the Linden Museum itself that had never been exhibited before. Erich Kasten said of the exhibition: “... this exhibition is an attempt to present shamanism in Siberia with its regional characteristics, its dynamics between the past and the present...” (notes from the opening, T.Z.). Many people in Kamchatka know the ethnologist Kasten and how he constantly seeks to connect the past and the present.

Thus, at this exhibition, along with exhibits from the past, such as clothing, shamanistic attributes, etc., there were also contemporary objects, mostly from Kamchatka, photographs, and films telling about how shamanism in one form or another continues in the everyday life and art of the Indigenous peoples of Siberia, despite the fact that shamans have been systematically and cruelly persecuted for several centuries. Even now, anyone living in Siberia can recall some “strange” things being done in one family or another.



Fig. 8 Exhibition “Schamanen Sibiriens” in Stuttgart, 2009. Design: Christian Ebner.

20 <https://dh-north.org/dossiers/schamanen-sibiriens-magier-mittler-heiler/en> [accessed 30.11.2025]

I was particularly pleased to watch video recordings of Kamchatka artists and carvers Aleksandr Pritchin, Anatolii Solodiakov, and Egor Chechulin talking about their thoughts and visions while working on a particular object.

To delve deeper into the history or description of an exhibit, a particular ethnic group, etc., the exhibition organizers offered an audio guide: one dialed the necessary combination of numbers and learned additional information about them. During the exhibition, visitors of all ages were offered a varied program: a special hall with contemporary art works by young people from St. Petersburg and Berlin, guided tours, readings, seminars, events especially for children and teachers, and concerts. At the end of June 2009, a concert by the dance ensemble *Or'iakan* (led by Valentina Zhdanova) from Anavgai and distinguished artists Ekaterina Gil', Aleksandra Urkachan, Maia Lomovtseva, and Antonina Koerkova was held with great success, for whom Erich Kasten had organized a tour through Germany and Switzerland at that time.²¹

DER TRAUM VOM FLIEGEN – THE ART OF FLYING

Be it birds that are deities or angels, Icarus or Superman: the dream to fly has been and remains virulent. Every culture allows human consciousness to see itself fly or to draw a real image of its surroundings from above.
(*Thomas Hauschild and Britta N. Heinrich, curators of the exhibition*)

The “Der Traum vom Fliegen” exhibition, at the House of World Cultures in Berlin from March 3 to May 8, 2011, was curated by Thomas Hauschild and Britta N. Heinrich. During this exhibition, Erich Kasten presented in his contribution, “Flight in Mythology and Dance of Siberian Peoples,” which included several of his film recordings alongside ethnographic objects. The subtitles of the films explain the characteristics of the flight-like movements portrayed in the dances.²²



In conclusion, I would like to say that until the 1990s, many people in Germany, apart from a small circle of specialists, were completely unaware that large- and small-numbered peoples

Fig. 9 Exhibition “Der Traum vom Fliegen” in Berlin, 2011.
Photo: Erich Kasten.

21 <https://dh-north.org/dossiers/gastspielreise-des-ensembles-or-jakan/en> [accessed 30.11.2025]

22 <https://dh-north.org/dossiers/die-kunst-zu-fliegen/en> [accessed 30.11.2025]

lived beyond the Urals. Thanks to his tireless energy, great patience, and persistence in working with people in Germany and Russia, Erich Kasten managed to organize exhibitions that gave the German public an idea of both the past and present of the peoples of Kamchatka, Siberia, of the unique culture of reindeer herders, hunters, fishermen, gatherers, and of the Indigenous languages through which it is expressed.

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Figures

- 1 Vera Yaganova demonstrates to Erich Kasten how to extract the inner pith from the willowherb plant, near Lesnaya, 2002. Photo: Aleksandra Urkachan.
- 2 Performing and discussing dances, Ossora, 2008. Video still: Erich Kasten.
- 3 Natal'ia Yaganova (right) demonstrates seagull movements to Aleksandra Urkachan, Lesnaya, 2001. Video still: Erich Kasten.
- 4 Ivan Tylkanov recalls his youth, near Anavgai, 2000. Photo: Erich Kasten.
- 5 Exhibition "Steller und die Itelmenen" in Halle/Saale, 1996. Design: Erich Kasten, Michael Dürr.
- 6 Exhibition "Kinder malen ihre Welt" in Halle/Saale, 1998. Design: Erich Kasten.
- 7 Exhibition "Offen für das Fremde" in Berlin, 2005. Design: Erich Kasten.
- 8 Exhibition "Schamanen Sibiriens" in Stuttgart, 2009. Design: Christian Ebner.
- 9 Exhibition "Der Traum vom Fliegen" in Berlin, 2011. Photo: Erich Kasten.