

CABINET OF CURIOSITIES

ZITHER

Brunndöbra–Klingenthal, Saxony, Germany

20th cent. [1900 – 1935]

Wood and metal

H 55 x L 48 x W 4 cm

MAH.R.1993.0919

This piece, at the time considered of industrial production, integrates the Angra do Heroísmo Museum Musical Instruments Management Unit and was conceived as a lay musical instrument. Meaning, without any kind of scale; just with strings that previously and capably tuned would freely vibrate even if some were organized in chord groups; if it was included the possibility of, above the buttons row, having a tablature installed, then, any person, even one without any knowledge of musical notes, would be able to pluck the strings and play the pertaining music.

It was made in Brunndöbra, a place at Saxony region, an area of pewter and iron mining, that, since the 17th century was used as refugee for Bohemian exiled protestants. These, having brought the art and skills of the string musical instruments production, turned the zone in a well-known production centre for fiddles, harmonicas and accordions, particularly in the 19th century. Among these, the zithers were also found and used specially in the traditional music; it happened that the success of its sound poured out the German Alps and East Europe, reaching the North-American mainland through the German emigrants communities.

This instrument was of simple construction: a set of metal strings, stretched over a resonance wooden box where it was placed, in the bottom right corner, a small diatonic keyboard (although its 15 buttons did not subsist, its location stays recognizable) whose levers were equipped with a set of springs.