

PRESS FILE

Reopening of the AfricaMuseum

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THE MUSEUM'S NEW PHILOSOPHY

Interview with **Guido Gryseels**,
the Director General of
the AfricaMuseum

The museum was closed for five years during the renovation. But naturally this process started much earlier. How do you approach such a gigantic undertaking



“When I was appointed Director General of the Royal Museum of Central Africa on 1 August 2001, we analysed the museum’s operations and activities, together with all the employees, and developed a strategic plan. We listed and discussed the various problems, opportunities, strengths and weaknesses. Thanks to this exercise, it soon became patently clear to everyone that our priority, as part of our institutional reform, was to overhaul the museum’s permanent collection. As no fundamental changes had been made to the exhibits since the Fifties, the message we were conveying was still largely the same. I mean that the image of Africa that we were conveying was based on a perception of Africa, from the Belgian perspective, pre-decolonization. This also explains why they called us the world’s last colonial museum.”

“So we started by developing a storyline, under the impetus of a small group of scientists and the people in our public-oriented services. We also developed a plan to restore the museum building. We realised that, in addition to a thorough overhaul of the collection’s content, we needed better infrastructure that was more suited to the requirements of a 21st century museum. The old building, for example, did not have suitable reception and admission facilities or meeting rooms and the museum shop and the restaurant were woefully inadequate. At the same time, we also implemented several reforms and innovations. This included tailoring our external and internal communications, developing a collection policy plan, an audit and enhanced public services, and a reform of the scientific research.”

Why did you choose to replace the familiar entrance with a new welcome pavilion next to the museum building?

"The museum building is a listed monument, which dates from 1910, which means structural changes require building permits and you can't just do anything. As a result, we had to contend with plenty of restrictions. The only way we could thoroughly improve the infrastructure was with a newbuild. We thus added a new glass welcome pavilion, which is just a 100-metre walk from the old museum building. All non-museum functions are centralised in the new building. An underground gallery connects the two buildings. The galleries for temporary exhibitions are also situated in this connecting gallery. This allowed us to double the floor area open to the public, from 6,000 sq.m. to just under 11,000 sq.m."

Can you tell us what is the major innovation in the permanent exhibition?

"Firstly, our new permanent exhibition aims to paint a picture of modern-day Africa. We no longer want to be a museum of colonial Africa. Instead we want to focus on Africa in the present and future, without overlooking the shared history of Belgium and the Central African countries. This means we also deal with contemporary themes such as the diasporas, biodiversity and climate change, daily life, languages and music and the paradox of natural wealth. On the one hand, Africa is a very mineral-rich continent, but its population is still very poor. Secondly, we have developed a more critical narrative about the colonial past, compared with the one-sided perspective we used to offer. In addition, we want to become a 'site of remembrance' for Belgians and for the Congolese. Thirdly, we want to provide a platform for debates which welcome all opinions. In this framework we decided to create an Afropea gallery, a dynamic gallery in which the people of the diasporas tell their story themselves. This gallery is an exhibition space, a meeting place, and a documentation centre. It was developed in close collaboration with people from sub-Saharan Africa. Visitors are welcome to suggest corrections and share documents, photos and testimonials, so we can further extend our knowledge.

We hope to become a real meeting place and a centre for dialogue for people who take a keen interest in Africa."

How does the museum approach Belgium's colonial past?

"If you look at Belgium's colonial past from a contemporary perspective, you have no choice but to conclude that colonialism as a system and a form of administration is immoral and that we need to distance ourselves from this. No country has the right to subjugate another country. I can think of no example in history of people who asked to be colonised. In almost all countries, a national holiday is the day on which a country celebrates its independence and the end of its colonization. We also explicitly refer to this in the new exhibition. You cannot ignore the fact that colonialism as a system is simply unethical. The system had racist undertones and, in the early years especially, was extremely violent. Even so, many people moved to Congo for idealistic reasons, to contribute to the well-being of the people there. And their contribution was substantial. They established dispensaries and hospitals on the village and provincial level for example, where many people were vaccinated and received medical care. That said, you cannot deny the exploitation of Congolese society for the profit of Belgian industrialists. Belgium's prosperity is founded on raw materials that were imported from Congo. The port of Antwerp and several industries only developed thanks to these Congolese contributions. Under Leopold II, the Congo Free State was a capitalist province, paying a huge human price for this position. As a modern museum you should acknowledge the material achievements but you cannot afford to minimise the violence and the exploitation. We developed this approach based on the available, sufficiently clear scientific research. We morally distance ourselves from King Leopold II's policy as the ruler of the Congo Free State.

Naturally, developing this story in a building with such a strong colonial past is anything but easy. The double L, Leopold II's logo, appears 45 times in the museum and you can also find quotes by Leopold II and Albert I in various places, which praise colonialism as a system.

Originally we intended to tell the colonial story in each of the permanent exhibition's themes, but after a peer review we decided to create a separate gallery that deals with the colonial history as it is so closely related to the history of the building and the museum. This gallery is the most intricate and most difficult one because everyone has their own views on the subject. We have definitely tried to develop a balanced narrative, by collating facts and memories, to paint the most comprehensive picture possible, giving everyone an opportunity to form their own personal opinion. As such, this gallery facilitates a discussion about this colonial legacy. At the same time, we also refer to the theme in each of the other galleries."

Has the museum become a very modern museum or has it retained its 'old charm'?

"Both the building and its interior are listed, including all the display cases and the various statues that are exhibited in it. We have tried to work with this. We did not change anything about the crocodile room for example because we think it is a very good example of what a natural history museum looked like 100 years ago and it highlights Africa's beauty and diversity. We only chose to restore the animals. We did install a screen between this gallery and the other galleries, as a symbol, to indicate that you are travelling one hundred years back in time and to explain that this section is not indicative of our contemporary perspective on Africa. A number of other galleries were also preserved unchanged such as the memorial gallery with the names of the 1,508 Belgians who died during the early colonial period (1876-1908) in Congo. Unfortunately this hall does not make any reference to the hundreds of thousands, some people even say millions of Congolese victims of colonial violence in Congo. We have left the gallery as is, with the names, but we will be installing an artwork by Freddy Tsimba, a Congolese artist, as a potent reminder and memorial to the many Congolese victims. We have applied the same principle in the rotunda, where you will find very colonial and controversial statues such as 'Belgium brings civilisation to Congo'. Here a work by Aimé Mpané, one of the leading contemporary African artists, engages in a dialogue with these colonial sculptures."

You only exhibited a very limited part of the collection prior to the museum's closure. Are there more objects on display now?

"We have created a gallery for collection exhibitions, which will change regularly, to highlight the museum's many diverse collections. When the museum reopens, we will exhibit an important collection of masks, sculptures, ivories and applied arts. Almost all of the pieces on exhibit are from Congo and primarily date from the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. We deal with specific matters, such as the notion of beauty in Africa, European views on African art, the artist's identity, or the analysis of styles. Many of the works we will be showing are regarded as some of the world's premier artworks. Together they provide a comprehensive overview of Congo's artistic richness and its many ancient cultures."

In 2020, these objects will be partly incorporated in the permanent exhibition. From then on, other collection exhibitions will be organised in this gallery, such as a butterfly exhibition or an exhibition about neck rests. This ensures that the permanent exhibition continues to be a very dynamic exhibition."

How were the Congolese involved in the development of this new museum?

"If you want to develop a museum about contemporary Africa, then you must involve the Africans themselves in the process, meaning Africans from Africa and the Africans of the diasporas. From the outset, we strived to develop a close relationship with the members of the diasporas. In 2004, we founded Comraf. Initially, we mainly focused on jointly organising cultural events, but subsequently we also discussed the renovation and our research. When the plans for the museum's renovation were in the final stages, we appointed the 'Groupe des Six', within Comraf, which commented on the proposals. In spite of our sincere intentions, the collaboration was not always seamless. We hope to better plan all future collaborations and consultations with the diasporas and intensify them. We have also consulted with African museum directors and African experts. On the European level, we are working together to develop projects in which the diasporas are more closely involved in the work of ethnographic museums. And finally, we also have partnerships with African museums, such as the national museum in Rwanda, the Musée des Civilisations noires in Senegal, the national museums in Congo, and the National Museum of Lubumbashi. They are currently building a new museum in Kinshasa which will open at the end of 2019. We want to work closely with them, and think we can contribute to the museum's design and exhibits and the training of curators and the staff and guards."

Has the employees' mindset also changed?

"The museum has experienced a radical cultural evolution. In many respects, the museum approached several themes from a Western perspective and we need to change tack, in today's multicultural society. Hence the importance of the 'perception' zone, in which we illustrate how people of different origins look at the same photo or video in different ways. African voices have much more of a presence in the new museum. I'm not just referring to the permanent collection but also to the activities we organise. As the majority of the museum's staff is white, we have decided to create a platform for Africans, so they can make their voices heard and we also try to use this approach as a filter when looking at Africa. This can be quite complex at times. There are different ways of doing this, by engaging in dialogue with Africans, through co-creation. This process will take quite some time."

It is important to remember that we are trying to diversify our institution too. We adopted a diversity plan a few years ago, which involves a proactive recruitment plan. The budgetary restrictions in recent years complicated this to some extent. There are fewer opportunities on this level now because we do not have enough vacancies to fill, to rapidly increase diversity in the museum."

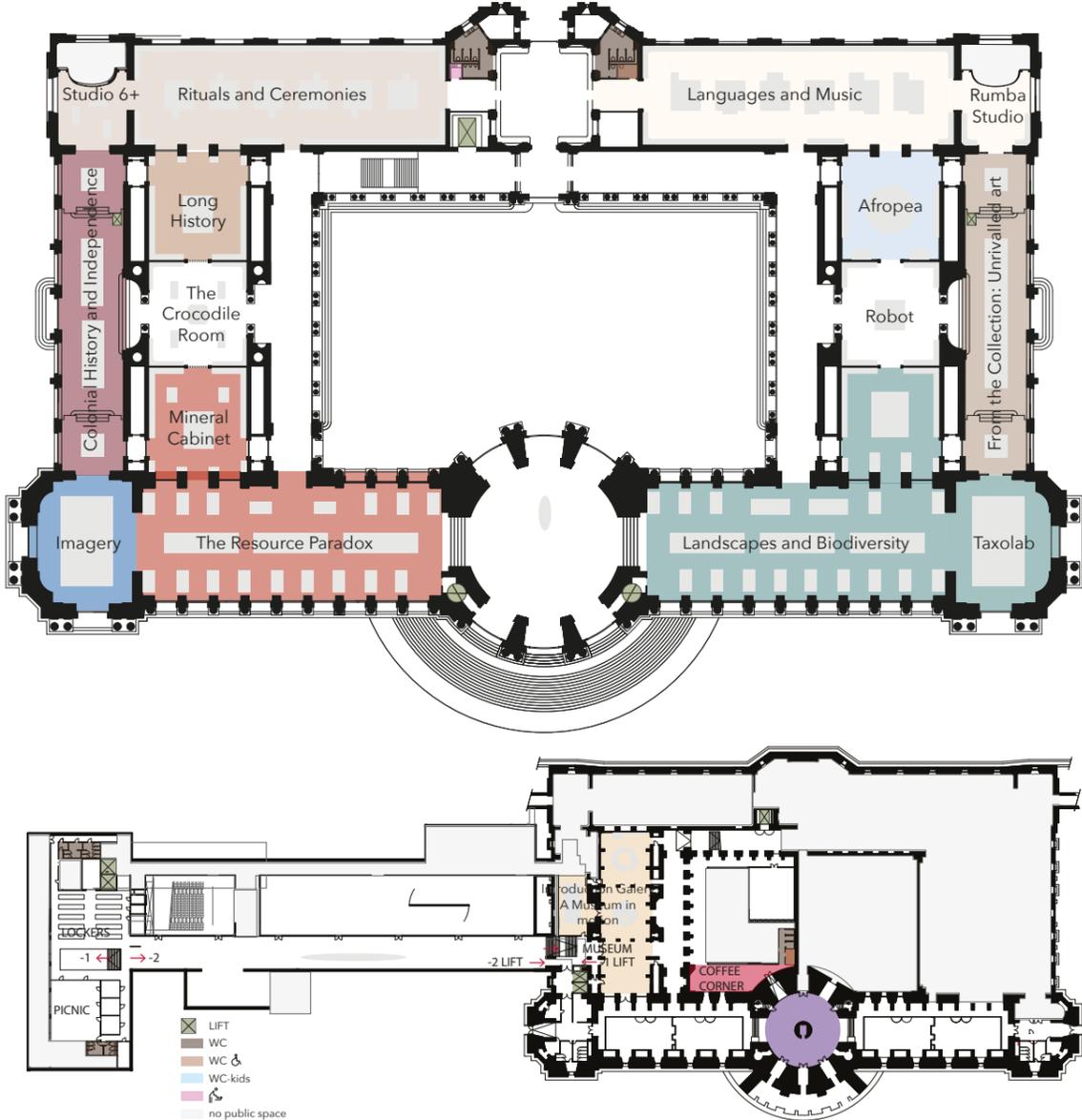
THE NEW PERMANENT COLLECTION

Finally, what is your target audience for the renovated museum?

“It may sound a little trite but we really do want to become a museum of and for everybody! We hope to attract a very wide and diverse audience, including Belgians and people of African origin, families, people who love Africa and people with a critical mind, who are always on the lookout for qualitative experiences and information. We hope that our visitors enjoy a pleasant and interesting day in our museum, that they become enthusiastic about Africa, that they want to find out more about these new themes, that they are impressed by our magnificent collections and our stunning building. We also hope that our visitors learn a lot here, and gain insights. At the same time, we want them to go home feeling happy. I hope that the new museum succeeds in raising the public’s enthusiasm about Africa and convinces them that Africa has several unique assets, in terms of human capital, biodiversity, geodiversity, entrepreneurship and artistic expression. In 30 years from now, 40% of the world’s population will live in Africa. Africa is the continent of the future!”

The permanent exhibition is structured around two closely linked parts: In the cellars, the exhibition depicts the history, present day and future prospects of the institution.

On the ground floor the museum tells a story divided into five themed areas, with Central Africa forming the core, and for which the RMCA either has vast collections or carries out research.



Introduction Gallery: A Museum in motion

The Royal Museum for Central Africa is a multidisciplinary research institution, which boasts expertise in the human and natural sciences and which manages unique and very diverse collections. The museum is active in approximately 20 countries, collaborating with African and other domestic and international partners. It establishes programmes and projects that focus on scientific research, sustainable development, and cooperation. Currently the museum employs 85 researchers, supplemented with international, mostly African, PhD students and trainees. The museum's scientific research is largely funded by the Federal Science Policy Office (BELSPO) and the Belgian Development Cooperation.

The museum's origin dates back to the World Expo of 1897. King Leopold II regarded it as a propaganda instrument for his colonial project. From the outset, Western soldiers, officials, missionaries, merchants, and scientists were encouraged to collect objects in Congo. Military expeditions often captured such weapons and other trophies during violent clashes, a fact that was glossed over in the museum.



Holotype of a frog named after Charles Lemaire (*Hylarana lemairei*).

Former Katanga province, RD Congo. Acquired from C. Lemaire. 1901. Replica. RENO 202..

A holotype is the specimen used to describe a species for the first time, and is thus of great scientific value.



The majority of the items in the museum's collection date from the colonial period, but researchers continue to gather new material as part of their field work even today. They do this in close concertation with local museums and universities on the ground. The objects are also better documented, although they remain fragments of a greater whole. The museum also acquires objects and collections through acquisitions and donations. The acquisitions commission applies strict criteria to all acquisitions and checks their integrity.

Gyela lu Zauli mask.

Tibeita, Sassandra-Marahoué, Côte d'Ivoire. [Guro]. Made by Sabu Bi Boti. Late 20th century. Wood, paint, animal skin, cotton, synthetic fibre. Collected by A.-M. Bouttiaux. 1999. EO.1999.18.73
Photo Studio R. Asselberghs - F. Dehaen © RMCA.

Various Lemba objects represent a married couple. Their attributes and postures symbolize wealth, authority and their initiation in ritual arts.

The 'Long History' gallery highlights Central Africa's very long, rich, and dynamic history. The next gallery zooms in on a relatively short period which, nonetheless, had a substantial impact on the continent's development, i.e., the colonial era. The RMCA wishes to fuel interest in this controversial period and provide a platform for a lively debate. Finally, the museum also focuses on Independence.

Long History and Colonial History and Independence



Animal-shaped helmet-mask.

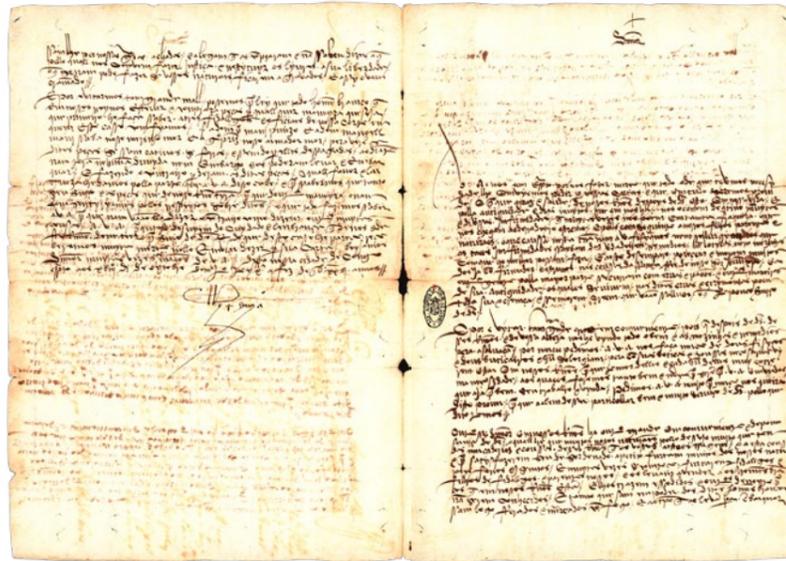
Liavela river, province of Bié, Angola. 700-900 A.D. Wood (*Pterocarpus angolensis*). Collected by M.C. Turlot during a geological expedition. 1928. PO.0.0.14796. Photo H. Schneebeli © RMCA.

The Liavela mask dates back to the 8th or 9th century A.D. and is the oldest known wooden sculpture from Central Africa. Most wooden or ivory objects crafted before the 19th century have decomposed. This animal head was found by chance in the Liavela riverbed in Angola. The long-buried piece was not exposed to air and managed to resist the ravages of time. It is thought to represent an aardvark.

Long History

All too often Africa's history starts with the arrival of the Europeans, when approached from a Western perspective. This overlooks the fact that the cradle of humankind can be found in Africa. This gallery presents a varied series of objects in chronological order, starting with the tooth of a humanoid that is at least two million years old and which was found in Eastern Congo. Stone objects reveal that the erstwhile inhabitants of Central Africa were master stonecutters. The exhibits also include pottery, and iron and copper objects. At the same time, this gallery aims to make visitors realise how much we still do not know, as some places have been barely studied, and in some cases are even largely unexplored. Moreover materials are transient. A masterpiece in this gallery is the famous Liavela mask, the oldest known wooden sculpture to have been found in Central Africa, which dates from the 8th or 9th century CE.

We use a case about the Congo Kingdom, which controlled a territory that was approximately the size of Great Britain from the 14th to the 19th century CE, to show how various scientific disciplines are collaborating to reconstruct the history of Central Africa.



Letter of Kongo King Afonso I to King João III of Portugal. 6 July 1526. Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Lisbon.

Kongo King Afonso I initially allowed Portuguese merchants to enter his kingdom and even collaborated with them, but he had to reverse his position quickly. In this letter to the Portuguese king, he complains that the merchants are disrupting the kingdom's organization.

After sustained criticism, Belgium annexed the state in 1908. The third zone in the exhibition focuses on the period of the Belgian Congo, and the new administration. The themes of education, healthcare, faith, employment, and segregation highlight the impact of the colonization on the daily life of the Congolese population.

The last zone in this gallery provides an overview of the postcolonial history of Burundi, Congo and Rwanda, with newspaper clippings, a period that was marked by complex, tragic, and controversial conflicts.

Colonial History and Independence

This zone starts by focusing on Central Africa as a turning point in the global trading networks of the late 15th Century. The emphasis is on objects that were associated with the slave and ivory trades, that attest to cultural exchanges. The exhibits then focus on King Leopold II's colonial ambition, with Henry Morton Stanley's exhibitions and the founding of the Congo Free State. The conquest and occupation of the territory give rise to violence. The ancestral statue that represents Lusinga, and which was brought to Belgium as war booty, symbolises this. Photos and archival documents reveal the excessive and extreme violence of this period, which occasioned protests both in Belgium and abroad.

Across the world, important events and phases in our lives are marked with specific customs and traditions. People everywhere are concerned about their children's education. And everywhere people want to protect themselves against disease and harm. The final farewell to a loved one is celebrated with the required ceremony. The 'Rituals and Ceremonies' exhibition uses several universal themes as its starting point. Africans explain on big screens how these themes are expressed in the varied, rich cultures of Congo, Rwanda and Burundi, in their own forms, rhythms or colours. A selection of museum objects offers a glimpse of the past, or shows which objects are still used today.

Rituals and Ceremonies

Birth, education and marriage

The exhibition opens with the theme of 'birth', with testimonials about the giving of names and the protection of newly born babies. A young woman explains how each culture in Congo has its own traditional names for twins. The display case shows a selection of mother and child figurines, which used to have a protective function. In the section on education, a musician explains how he got his love for music from his father. The *Mukanda* schools created impressive masks, which they used for performances, and which continue to startle and surprise museum visitors even today. The section on 'marriage' contains testimonials about norms and values, which have changed over time and about the meaning of the 'dowry'. The painter Schula pokes fun at the sometimes ambiguous morals of city dwellers.



Power figure, depiction of a Lemba couple. Djéno, Kouilou, Congo-Brazzaville. [Vili]. Before 1938. Wood, white pigment, iron, plant fibres. Collected by E. Darteville. 1938. Exchange with KMG-MRAH. 1979. EO.1979.1.259. Photo H. Dubois © RMCA.

Languages and Music

This gallery highlights Central Africa's amazing cultural diversity. Oral tradition is the main theme to understand this continent, in which flexibility, creativity and performance play such a vital role.

Anthropomorphic coffin.

NTOMBA (Nkundo-Mongo), Wangatawa Ibon-go, Equatorial region, RD Congo. Collected between 1884 and 1887. Wood, fibre, pigments. EO.0.0.37340



Wellbeing, leadership, death and commemoration

The theme of 'wellbeing' relates to healing and protection against visible and invisible harm. A man explains how a healer gave him the power to defend himself during conflicts in his childhood. The display cases feature objects that were used for fortune telling and healing rituals. In the section on 'Leadership' a woman explains how her father worked as an administrator in the city while he was also a clan head in his own village. Various prestige objects show how chiefs would externalise their special status in the past. In the closing section on 'death and remembrance' witnesses share their feelings about the loss of their loved ones. We also see how the decoration of graves has changed as the decades have passed.

In 'Rituals and Ceremonies', the people of Congo, Rwanda and Burundi engage with visitors, sharing their personal experiences and memories. Around them we have arranged museum objects which in some instances arrived in the museum one, two and even three generations earlier. The living testimonials and silent museum objects are combined in a story with multiple voices. There is also plenty of room for discordant voices: in various places throughout the exhibition visitors receive additional information about the circumstances in which the displayed objects were collected during the colonial period.

Languages in the spotlight

More than a quarter of the world's languages are spoken in Central Africa. Visitors can find out more about this amazing linguistic diversity through maps, popular paintings, sound fragments, and videos. The museum's linguistic research, the status of the languages, and the recording of languages that are at risk of disappearing, are also discussed in this gallery. Visitors can also experience the mechanisms of certain Bantu languages in interactive displays, i.e., how they use melody to change the meaning of certain words and sentences. Despite the importance of its oral tradition, Central Africa also has plenty of written documents. The example of Swahili and old manuscripts demonstrates that writing is just a way of committing things on paper. A display case highlights Rwandan and Luba poetry, as well as the complex relationship between literature, African and European languages. People also use visual supports when speaking. Nande statuary, Nkanu initiation panels, Luba panels, Mbala, Pende or Mbuun palaver staffs and a Lega proverb string or a Woyo pot lid are good examples of this. The proverbs are also found in the kangas or wax prints of East Africa, which convey messages. Naturally an oral culture also has a tradition of storytelling. Visitors can listen to these stories and reflect on their meaning and messages. More contemporary stories, such as the urban legends that fill the columns of Kinshasa's newspapers, are also displayed.



Proverb string

This proverb string from Lega peoples was strung out in the village square. Anyone could hang objects that referred to one or several proverbs. Villagers would gather around the rope to comment on the objects, leading them to trade stories and ideas.

Maniema, RD Congo, Lega, Wood, plant fibre, cloth, leaf, seed pods, calabash EO.1975.48.2

Finally, visitors have the opportunity to watch linguistic or musical performances in a small, semi-open theatre.



Muyemba. Lamellophone on board.
 Dilolo, Lualaba, RDC. s.d. Gourd, wood, iron,
 plant fibres. Donated by R.P. Delille. 1936.
 MO.0.0.36657. Photo J. Van de Vijver © RMCA.

Old and contemporary forms of African musical expression

The oral tradition is also important in this section of the gallery. The (holy, poetic or political) word is associated with specific types of instruments, such as string instruments and lamellophones. These are used to accompany lyrical expressions and the art of oration with music.

The imposing display case contains stunning slit drums. In the past they were used to convey drummed messages to village populations, using the tone system of spoken language.

Large musical ensembles bring group dances to life on the central stages.

The RMCA's musicological collections allow it to also concentrate on the orchestras of old courts. The various forms of musical expression – which have since become national heritage – and various contemporary acrobatic and theatrical creations of Central Africa are also highlighted. Culturally-accepted musical rules, such as the concepts of the division of the octave, the beat or the fundamental notion of 'model and variations', are also discussed.

Finally the museum also looks at the amazing African heritage in America, such as religious ceremonies and new styles of music, which emerged on the American continent.

Africa has a unique array of plant and animal species. These communities live in deserts, the savannah, tropical rainforests and even on snowy mountaintops. These biomes are constantly on the move, more than ever today. We examine the interaction between humans, animals, plants, and the climate to take a sustainable approach to this amazing diversity.

Landscapes and Biodiversity

The 'Landscapes and Biodiversity' gallery highlights the unique biomes of Central Africa. Every biome is typified by plants and animals that have adapted to the prevailing conditions. You can even find species on the high mountaintops or in the dry Namib desert, where they survive in extreme climate conditions. The main characteristics are described for every biome, as well as a number of biological themes. These themes are often studied in various disciplines within the museum. Socio-economic relationships are also established. Agriculture, fishery and nature protection play an important role in almost all biomes, both for the local population as well as on the global level. Everything that happens in Africa has global consequences as a result of globalisation.

The huge size and diversity of Central Africa mean we currently still have no idea how many and which species live there exactly. However, undescribed species cannot be protected. Our scientists still have a lot of work ahead of them...



King Kasai
 African elephant.
 © RMCA, photo
 Jo Van De Vijver

King Kasai

Man is an integral part of nature and so the dynamic interactions between humans and human activities, plants and animals, and the climate are an important theme in the museum. The objects in the zoological collection play a prominent role in this zone, where our elephant takes pride of place. Without this species, the miombo woodlands to the south of the equator would look completely different, as elephants keep tree growth under control by removing leaves, twigs and shoots with their trunks. Through their dung they also disperse seeds over long distances, fertilising them at the same time. Fire is also an important factor in this biome. While some forest fires occur naturally, others are lit. This has been done for centuries, mainly to free up space for agriculture. The black marks of fire on this tree trunk disc are evidence of regular fires. The museum's researchers use the growth rings of this tree species to study climate change.



A recent expedition to the Rwenzori mountains.
© D. Samyn

The last African glaciers

Some of Africa's last remaining glaciers are situated in the north of Virunga in the Rwenzori Mountains. In 1932, a Belgian expedition explored this mountain range. A comparison of the historic photos and watercolours the expedition's members made at the time with photos of more recent expeditions show how much the glaciers have shrunk since then. This has had dire consequences for the people who live in the foothills and for the unique alpine plants and animals. The museum's researchers have set up a weather station and a time lapse camera to monitor the evolution of these glaciers and to better understand why they are disappearing.

Three 'sites of remembrance'

The rotunda



Aimé Mpane (Kinshasa, DR Congo, °1968). New breath, or Burgeoning Congo, Nivelles, 2017, wood, bronze.

Famed Congolese artist Aimé Mpane created a work for this location to give Africans a central place in this building, which was constructed in honour of Leopold II and his colonial enterprise.

The impressive dome, the marble walls, the large statues, the richly decorated floor with the star of the Congo Free State – this rotunda looks like a temple to Leopold II and his colonial project. Between 1910 and 1966, the niches were filled with works by Belgian sculptors.

The four central gilded bronze sculptures by Arsène Matton (1873-1953) are the most striking. All statues represent a colonial vision. Belgians are presented as benefactors and civilizers, as if they had committed no atrocities in Congo, and as if there had been no civilization there beforehand. Africans are represented as smaller than Europeans or reduced to the activities they practice. African women are sexualized. An Arabo-Swahili slave trader tramples a Congolese who tries to protect his wife. It is clichéd colonial propaganda, but it is still effective more than a century later.

The Crocodile Room



The Crocodile Room is a museum within a museum. It shows how Congolese nature was collected, preserved, depicted, and exhibited in the 1920s.

The landscape paintings and black-and-white photographs sketch an image of an exotic and romantic Africa. They show the daily life of Congolese people in a pristine scenery, barely touched by colonization. For a long time, such images shaped the view that museum visitors had of the Congo.

An imagined Congo

In 1909, the Belgian symbolist painter Emile Fabry (1865-1966) was commissioned to produce a series of murals on canvas based on black-and-white photographs. They had to be compatible with the architecture and should not distract the visitor's attention from the collection. The poetic images of the Congo that you see hanging here on the walls are the result.

The memorial gallery for Belgians who died in Africa



Between the two world wars, at a time of patriotic fervour, the names of the 1,508 Belgian men who died in the Congo Free State between 1876 and 1908 were painted on the walls of the eastern courtyard entrance. The women and children who died there were not listed. The star in front of some of the names indicates that this is where the next letter of the alphabetical list begins. At the bottom of the memorial, is a quote by King Albert I: 'Death reaps without pity from the ranks of the first pioneers. We can never pay enough tribute to their memory.'

The memorial does not, however, make any reference to the hundreds of thousands, possibly even millions of Congolese who died during that same period, as the direct or indirect victims of the Congo Free State, or to the population deficit caused by all the violence. During the renovation in 2013-2018, the AfricaMuseum asked the artist Freddy Tsimba to pay tribute to these invisible and nameless victims with a new work. *Ombres (Shadows)* casts onto the white walls the shadow of the names of the Congolese who died during

that same period in Belgium, underneath the Belgian names. The list includes the names of the seven Congolese who were exhibited in African villages during the 1897 World Expo in Brussels/Tervuren, and died there. The artist asked the museum to position the steel cart used to pave the first road between Matadi and Kinshasa centrally in the corridor, as a symbol for the many Congolese who died under the colonial rule, among others due to (forced) labour.

The museum also asked Marie Daulne (Zap Mama), Fabrizio Cassol and Ronny Mosuse to write a memorial song, titled *Echo*, for this space. It will be performed by the museum's employees during the opening weekend. With this song, the museum's staff acknowledges the suffering of the Congolese and other Africans during the colonial period, which was disregarded by many institutions, including the Royal Museum for Central Africa.

The world's economic system revolves around natural resources, of which Central Africa and Congo especially have plentiful supplies. This natural wealth has not however prevented Central Africa from being relatively poor. This is known as the paradox of poverty amid plenty.

The Resource Paradox

Mineral-rich

Congo holds an important place in international economic rankings because of its mineral resources. The country is the main producer of copper in Africa and the world's premier exporter of cobalt. Cobalt is currently often used for the production of batteries for electric cars. The adjoining gallery shows a wide selection of minerals in a mineral display case.

Forests

The world's second largest tropical rainforest is located in the 3.7 million sq.km basin of the Congo River. The forests of the Congo Basin are teeming with life, and improbable numbers of plants and animals. As an oxygen producer and one of the world's largest CO2 reservoirs this rainforest helps regulate our climate. Approximately 60 million people depend directly on the forest for timber and food. The timber is used as a building material but is also a crucial energy source. About 90% of Congolese households rely on wood or charcoal (*makala* in Lingala) to cook, because they have no electricity or natural gas. Industrial logging in the Congo Basin is on the increase. Tropical wood is popular around the world because it is so durable. For instance, *Pericopsis elata* or afrormosia produces really beautiful wood that is not very heavy and is very resistant to vermin and rot.



Yangambi - adult *Pericopsis elata*.

The network of loggers' roads means the rainforest is more accessible and therefore more vulnerable. The struggle against deforestation, partly as a result of uncontrolled logging, is underway.



Market in Kinshasa, 2015
©Paul Faber @RMCA

A lively and vigorous cultural scene

Kinshasa is a very creative city: music, visual arts, dance, design and fashion. It is the home of such popular musicians as Franco and Papa Wemba. This is the city that produced such artists as Cheri Samba and Isek Bodys Kingelez. Kinshasa Fashion Week attracts a lot of industry professionals.

The main themes in this zone are exhibited on the three central platforms. Some display cases will be completed in the spring of 2019.

Virtual Reality

One display case contains a Virtual Reality station in which the visitor can follow the reporter into the Yangambi Reserve and into the lively city of Kinshasa (produced with the support of VISITFLANDERS and the national Flemish broadcaster VRT).



Water

The Congo River is the world's second largest river, after the Amazon, accounting for 13% of the world's hydro-electric potential. And then there are the large lakes of Eastern Congo, such as Lake Tanganyika, which contains approximately 17% of all freshwater on earth. This lake is also a hotspot of biodiversity: 40% of the 1,500 plant and animal species are endemic, meaning they are only found there.

Paradox and potential

Central Africa is an economically attractive region because of its natural resources, despite the political instability on the continent which is partly explained and maintained by the power dynamics in a globalised world. More sustainability would certainly improve the region's welfare. Moreover Central Africa also has enormous demographic potential and a lively cultural dynamic, two important drivers for development.



Mineral Cabinet

A selection of minerals is displayed in the fully restored showcases. Central Africa is exceptionally rich in mineral resources, and thus an important area of study for geologists. It offers a large variety of deposits of great economic value and with a wide range of chemical, mineralogical, and morphological characteristics. These deposits were formed by different processes at various periods during the long geological history of the region. Some of the specimens in this gallery are part of the museum's historical collections. The oldest samples were collected in the late 1890s.

Many specimens date from the colonial period. At that time, the museum acquired many geological samples that were collected during studies conducted for the Belgian government, such as prospecting for mineral resources, the creation of geological maps, and studies for infrastructure development. During and after the colonial period, the museum also received donations from mining companies and from geologists who worked in Central Africa. Universities, researchers, and collectors also contributed to the formation of the historical collection.

Some of the specimens that are on display in this room have been acquired by the museum for this exhibition, including through vendors in the Congo. In this way, we can show pieces that, due to their composition, dimensions, or quality, complement the historical collection.

Central Africa is exceptionally rich in mineral resources, making it an important study area for geologists. The (contemporary) issues of mining and raw material extraction, and whether these are a curse or a blessing for Central Africa, are discussed in the Resource Paradox gallery.

Afropea

Most sub-Saharan Africans only came to Belgium after the colonial era. A small number of Congolese settled here before or shortly after independence in 1960, but the largest group only came to Belgium after the year 2000. Currently, sub-Saharan Africans represent 2% of the Belgian population. 40% of them are of Congolese origin. Research has shown that they suffer greatly from racism and discrimination. And although they are absent as a group from social debates, they have still left their mark on Belgian society.

This gallery functions simultaneously as an exhibition space, meeting place, and documentation centre. It was created in close cooperation with people who come from sub-Saharan Africa. Visitors are invited to suggest corrections and to share documents, photographs, and testimonies, so that the museum can further expand its knowledge. You can do this via afropea@africamuseum.be

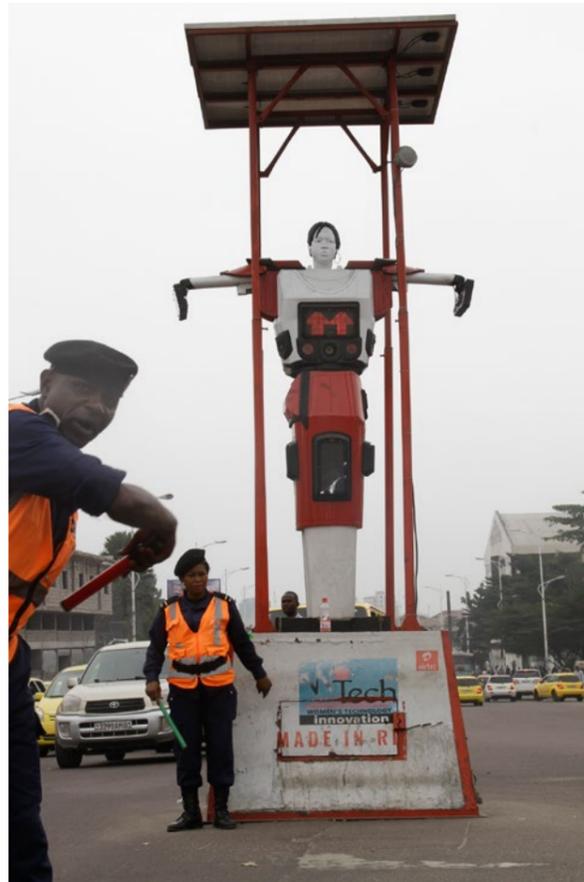
Moseka, the traffic robot

This room marks the transition between the human sciences and natural sciences galleries. In the centre stands *Moseka*, the traffic robot.

Many traffic accidents happen in Congo, often with fatal consequences. To counter this, Thérèse Izay Kirongozi and the Women's Technology (Wotech) association have come up with an impressive, incorruptible traffic robot. The android robot controls the traffic in Kinshasa and other large cities in Congo. The project was awarded the WorldSafe Awards Innovation Prize 2017-18 in Atlanta (US), and is currently being exported to other African countries.

In 2018, the museum acquired the new model of *Moseka*, 'young girl' in Lingala. She is 2.90 metres tall, stands on a plinth of 1.10 metres, and weighs 160 kg. The electric 12-volt motor from a windscreen wiper allows her to move. Just like the 540 LED lights, *Moseka* is powered by solar panels. She sings a popular song about traffic safety, which Congolese children learn at primary school.

Around the robot are large photographs by Nelson Makengo, showing the very dense traffic at the Victoire roundabout, in the heart of Kinshasa's Matonge district.



Many of the works displayed here can be considered masterpieces of world art.
© RMCA, photo Jo Van de Vijver

From the collection: Unrivalled art

In addition to the permanent exhibition, a temporary exhibition, titled 'From the collection' and which changes regularly, will be held in the eastern lateral marble gallery. Unlike the other galleries, where the content was developed by the institution itself, the final responsibility for this temporary exhibition resides with a scientist of the Royal Museum for Central Africa who develops the exhibition. The first exhibition in the series was developed by Julien Volper, a scientific researcher in the Ethnography Department.

This room contains four display cabinets with a significant collection of artistic production in the domain of masks, statuary, sculpted ivory and 'utilitarian' art. The pieces brought together here almost all come from Congo and mainly date back to the 19th and the first half of the 20th century.

Other display cabinets deal with more specific themes, which touch on considerations specific to the History of Art.

For example, in some it is a matter of trying to understand better the notion of beauty from an African perspective. In other spaces, it is about better understanding the extent to which the Belgian presence modified certain aspects of the production and sale of sculptures in Congo.

In a different part of the room, researchers will propose an alternative to the study of African material cultures outside the context of ethnography, by developing the discipline of the history of arts in Africa.

This approach, which owes much to the pioneering work of Belgians such as F. M. Olbrechts (former director of the RMCA), makes it possible to develop stylistic and iconographic analysis in African art, but also, and this is of paramount importance, the research carried out by the artist, the man behind the art.

Unrivalled art is accompanied by a booklet available in four languages (FR, NL, EN, DE) in digital and paper versions. This booklet provides all the practical information concerning the works (use, origin, dating of the works, names of the artists...) and describes the various themes.

This document, a real exhibition booklet, will be available as a free download from the museum website.

The 'Unrivalled art' exhibition received the support of Philippe de Moerloose. A special volume of the 'Collections of the RMCA' will be published as a catalogue. The international journal *Tribal Art* will also publish a special edition on the occasion of this exhibition.



Tulualembe mask-shield (Yela)

1st quarter of the 20th century. Wood (*Alstonia congensis*). RD Congo. Registered in 1927. Collected by V. Benoît (1920s). EO.0.0.29612. Photo J.M. Vandyck © RMCA.

Tulualembe masks were no longer being made in the 1920s. Their function can probably be traced back to the lilwa society, which organized aspects of the social life of the Yela.

The corner galleries

The permanent exhibition features a series of interactive installations. Visitors are invited to participate in four different areas, each located in one of the building's corner rooms.

Music Corner

In Congo, popular genres like rumba, soukous or ndombolo serve mainly as party and dance music. You hear them in the bars and at parties in backyards. Whether a song becomes a hit depends largely on the accompanying dance moves, but also on the lyrics. These are often about current events and about big cultural or social events – music as a mirror of society.

Studio 6+

Studio 6+ is a space for children aged 6 and above. Here, they can get busy with the themes from Rituals and Ceremonies, the large room behind them. They can make something, play, learn: everything is possible. Adults are also welcome! Studio 6+ will be further developed in the next few weeks.

Imagery

The RMCA has an extensive collection of colonial photographs and films. They were almost exclusively made by white people and mainly show their perspective. They determined the image that the general public had of Central Africa and of Africans until long after the colonial era, and even to this day. They also influenced other photographers and film makers.

This space offers a number of tools to better understand these photographs and films. Commentaries, images, books, and artworks by Africans invite the visitor to reflect on different ways of presenting Central Africa.

TaxoLab

TaxoLab presents a selection from the zoological collection. It serves as an introduction to the basic principles of taxonomy, one of the main research fields of the museum's biologists.

Africa possesses a rich and varied fauna and flora, distributed over a wide range of ecosystems. Museum taxonomists can rely on an immense collection of more than eight million specimens. Their research contributes to a better and more widespread knowledge of Africa's unique biodiversity.

CONTEMPORARY ART IN THE AFRICAMUSEUM

AfricaTube

In 2016, the Royal Museum for Central Africa established a youth programme. Six youngsters, mostly of African origin, were given the opportunity to develop their own space in the museum – to share their contemporary views and interpretation, their Africa, with their peers who visit the museum and with other visitors who are still young at heart

AfricaTube is a virtual library on contemporary digital Africa that connects the museum with the afrocyber-space. A group of youngsters search the web for blogs, audiovisual material, platforms, and music from Africa and the African diasporas.

AfricaTube shows the internet as a medium for cultural production and exchange without the need for territorial boundaries. Without prejudices and from different perspectives, AfricaTube seeks to share the multiple cultures of technology of the continent.

AfricaTube is made possible by the support of Texaf-Bilembo



Centres fermés, rêves ouverts. 2016
Freddy Tsimba (Kinshasa, 1967-), (outdoor installation on the museum façade.) Metal.
J. Van de Vijver © RMCA, Tervuren.

Contemporary art in the new permanent collection

Exhibiting contemporary art in the museum galleries seemed an obvious choice when the museum decided to redesign its permanent exhibition. Many museums do this, but this was far from evident in the AfricaMuseum given that the museum's collections were mainly developed in a colonial context. The museum collections and the building itself thus become a source of inspiration for artists.

The work of the artists, which was inspired by our collections, definitely offers added value for the museum, accompanying its focus on decolonization. In addition to this, artists can also fill the gaps in the museum's collection in a poetic way. This is especially the case for *Peintures Populaires*, the collection of the anthropologist Bogumil Jewsiewicki, which the museum acquired in 2014. Part of this collection was already shown in *Congo Art Works*, the exhibition by Bambi Ceuppens and Sammy Baloji at BOZAR in 2016-2017. The exhibition then travelled to Moscow (and, after being re-worked, travelled to Graz and Tübingen).

For its new exhibition, AfricaMuseum worked with artists from Africa or with African roots. They include

Aimé Mpané, Freddy Tsimba, Michèle Magesa, Aimé Ntakiyica, Méga Mingiedi, Bodys Isek Kingelez, Chéri Samba, J-P Mika, Shula, Sammy Baloji, Chéri Benga, Chéri Chérin, Barly Baruti, Iviart Izamba, Thérèse Kirongozi, and Nelson Makengo. Special attention was given to the spaces in the museum that have an explicitly colonial ambience.

Principles and objectives of the museum's approach

The AfricaMuseum always ensures that the acquisition of contemporary artworks is in line with its scientific research or with the permanent collection. It also regularly invites Central African artists to be artists in residence, and organises study visits and research projects for national, international and transnational artists.

The AfricaMuseum has no intention of becoming a contemporary art museum. It does however want to encourage artists to appropriate the existing collections, to (re)discover and interpret them.

EDUCATION IN THE SERVICE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



Fauteuil Mobutu, 2010
Iviart Izamba, © RMCA Collection, Tervuren,
HO.2011.54.1

A long tradition

The AfricaMuseum has a long-standing interest in contemporary art, organising several exhibitions, including *Exit Congo* (2001), *Het woord van de Afrikanen* (2003), *Kin Moto na Bruxelles* (2003), *Persona* (2010), *Fetish Modernity* (2011).

Since 2008, the AfricaMuseum has also been offering residencies to Central African artists. Their creations are also included in the temporary exhibitions, such as the work of Sammy Baloji and Patrick Mudekereza in *Congo Far West* (2011). More recently, Iviart Izamba (2014-2015), Freddy Tsimba and Eddy Eteke (2016), Jean Kamba, Eddy Kamuanga, Jean Katambayi (2017) and Ganza Buroko, a cultural player from Goma (2018), were given the opportunity to study the museum collections and reference them in their work.

Several Belgian and Western artists (Dirk Braekman, Renzo Martens, Sabrina Montiel Soto, Antje Vanwichel-en...) also requested to see the museum's collections and use them as a source of inspiration for new work.

As soon as it reopens, the AfricaMuseum will offer a new programme of activities, aimed at raising awareness as part of its role in global and social citizenship education. The programme contributes to the AfricaMuseum's mission, by disseminating knowledge, fostering a better knowledge and understanding of the African continent and its place in the world and promoting natural and cultural diversity, and by extension sustainable development.

The AfricaMuseum has been focusing on global and social citizenship education since the early 1990s. Initially, the museum's activities targeted school audiences, but since then they have been expanded to include other audiences. The available activities (guided tours, interactive tours, workshops, family activities, the training of (future) teachers and socio-cultural workers, etc.) are based on the experience that the museum's staff has gained over the years, about how to disseminate knowledge, raise awareness and train people, and their in-depth understanding of various audiences (school, out of school, socio-cultural associations, the African diasporas, families, the public).

Following the museum's renovation and the installation of a new permanent exhibition, it became clear that the museum had to redefine its objectives on the educational level, and rework the content of its outreach activities. From the outset, the AfricaMuseum asked the members of the renovation team, the researchers in its scientific departments, representatives of the world of education (teachers and school inspectors) as well as of the African diasporas and partners on the African continent, including the Musée national de Lubumbashi in the RDC to share their views. These partnerships are the cornerstone of the AfricaMuseum's collaborative approach.

The museum's activities are also adapted to the requirements and profiles of the different target audiences, i.e., pupils and (future) teachers, young people who visit the museum as part of extracurricular activities, and families. They are organised in the galleries of the new permanent exhibition and dedicated spaces (workshops and interactive areas).

The content was dictated by the new approach of the renovated museum, which focuses on decolonization: develop a critical narrative, better incorporate the contemporary African perspective, focusing on contemporary Africa while being a memorial site for Belgium's colonial history.

The themes of the activities in the permanent exhibition can be subdivided into three large groups:

- Cultural and artistic practice
- Biodiversity, the environment and resources
- History, stories and memories

The AfricaMuseum sees its societal role as a matter of fundamental importance and as such wishes to make a substantial contribution to creating an inclusive, fair, and sustainable world, founded on solidarity. It wishes to achieve this through its collections, its scientific research and its activities, which are designed to raise awareness and disseminate knowledge.

The AfricaMuseum's outreach programme is subsidised by the Belgian Ministry for Development Cooperation. The workshops and tours on Central Africa's resource paradox are organised with the generous support of the Rotary Clubs of Overijse-Zoniën, Tervuren, Bruxelles-Sud and Genval.

A NEW ARCHITECTURE FOR A NEW MUSEUM

At the turn of the century, the museum expressed the wish to become an internationally leading museum and research institution on Central Africa. In 2006, it organised a competition with an ambitious design brief.

A master plan for the entire site

The competition design picks up where the unfinished project of Leopold II and the master plan of his architect for the Cité Coloniale left off. The new master plan is in line with the plans of the museum's architect, Girault, and strives to combine the various functions on site, focusing on restoring the individual identity of each building.

The plan provides for three bundles on site: the public space comprising the Colonial Palace, and its media library, congress centre, and events venue; the modernised museum with a new welcome pavilion in the park; and the knowledge and research centre, with a new collection building.

Design of the entrance pavilion and the museum building

The existing museum building was restored and expanded during the first phase of the master plan's execution. In addition to the reorganisation of the museum spaces, the children's workshops, the logistics and secondary spaces, new museum galleries were built, as well as a restaurant, the admissions desk/reception, new children's workshops, a museum shop, an auditorium, and meeting rooms. The museum building's reorganisation and extension have been designed to preserve its direct surroundings as much as possible, re-establishing a relationship with the French garden.

All secondary museum functions, such as the admissions desk, the shop and cafeteria have been removed from the layout of the old museum and optimised and reassigned to the newbuild extension. As such, the museum now has more space to accommodate the new permanent exhibition.

Where possible, the existing museum building has been preserved as is. The museum's original entrance and the covered walkway in the courtyard which was open to the elements have been reinterpreted. In addition to the rigorous restoration, these purposefully-disparate interventions add a critical note to the museum's original architecture.

The welcome pavilion has been minutely aligned with the museum building's façade and is situated on the boundary between the two gardens, which date from different periods. The carefully chosen, historically inspired implantation accentuates the relationship between the museum building and the Colonial Palace, elsewhere on the site, as a symbol of the innovation the AfricaMuseum strives to achieve. The lower courtyard and green elements that refer to the underground structures have been arranged along the long axis, which is now emphasised by the new pavilion.

The new admissions desk and museum shop are on the park level while the first-floor restaurant has panoramic views of the French garden and the museum building.



Daylight falls into the underground spaces of the welcome pavilion, such as the meeting rooms, the auditorium, the foyer, the children's workshops, and reception facilities, because of its situation in the lowered courtyard. The open staircase establishes visual relationships within this stack of functions.

The galleries for temporary exhibitions are also located underground, and look as if they are suspended between the welcome pavilion and the museum building. A sequence of three exhibition galleries has been arranged along a long, publicly accessible hall. These black box spaces can be flexibly subdivided into an auditorium and two separate halls or can be transformed into one large exhibition gallery with a sliding wall.

A parallel logistics circuit, separating the circulation flows of the public from those of the logistics workers, was also developed to allow the museum to build its exhibitions discreetly. This circuit creates a direct connection with the museum workshops, the technical and storage spaces and the loading and unloading bays.

Visitors walk through a long hall from the welcome pavilion to the restored museum building, past a 'sudden' widening of the hall, which lets in daylight and serves as an orientation point. They then see one of the museum's highlights, a large pirogue, a reference to the Congo River, which leads to another bright area in the distance, i.e., the lowered courtyard of the museum building. This courtyard lets in the light and helps

visitors orient themselves. Visitors thus enter the building through the cellars, on the level of the building's foundation, from where they can start to explore the museum.

The children's workshops are situated in the cellar on the park side, not far from a music workshop which has been integrated in the lowered courtyard. The target audience of these workshops can easily access these spaces. Other spaces on the cellar level are used by logistics and maintenance, the staff, and collections management with quarantine spaces for objects. These can all be reached from the separate logistics circuit.

On the level of the lowered courtyard, a first space was created for the new permanent collection. The 'Museum zone' explains the history of the institution and the museum and highlights the AfricaMuseum's present-day position and activities. Visitors walk through this zone twice, on their way to and from the permanent AfricaMuseum exhibition in the museum building, via the new open staircase.

The museum building has been completely stripped of all its secondary functions and renovated, freeing up space to accommodate the new permanent reference collection.

Restoration and sustainability

The listed building has been renovated and restored with respect for the original, late 19th century plans. The murals with maps and landscapes have been cleaned and restored where necessary. The wall templates, which were painted over dozens of years ago, are also visible again.

At the same time, new techniques and technology have been installed in the museum galleries, enabling the museum to comply with contemporary requirements in terms of conservation and the collection's presentation. These techniques have been designed with great care and are almost seamlessly integrated in the museum spaces. They include improved thermal insulation and airtightness, controlled daylight glare, control of air quality which has been invisibly integrated in the new exhibition platforms, interventions to improve accessibility and fire safety. All these elements have paved the way for a new approach to exhibitions in this existing monument, without undermining its intrinsic value.



© David Plas

ACCESSIBILITY

From the outset of this renovation project, the Africa Museum's physical and social accessibility was a priority. The museum wanted to offer full access to people with disabilities. Large lifts ensure everyone can get to all the floors of the new and old buildings. In the renovated museum, the old spiral staircases have been replaced by platform lifts. The museum's toilets have also been adapted.

Visitors who have difficulty walking can find wheelchairs or portable folding seats at the entrance. The museum's designers also paid attention to clear signage and the legibility of museum labels to accommodate people with visual impairments.

But the museum's efforts were not limited to physical accessibility, and the new permanent exhibition strives to be enthralling and easily understood by all visitors. Special, discounted rates are offered to visitors with limited means.



A MUSEUM FOR THE ENTIRE FAMILY

The AfricaMuseum will continue to be a family-friendly museum after its renovation. The museum participated in a pilot project that was set up by VISITFLANDERS to extend the family-friendly approach in museums on every level and in every aspect. This includes the welcome that families receive, the merchandise in the shop, the experience in the permanent collection...

Admission is free for all children under 18. The museum's entire infrastructure has been adapted to families, with handrails that children can also reach and adapted toilets. The museum's front desk assistants, museum guards, guides and the museum's other employees are always on hand to help families. And finally the museum's restaurant, called Tembo, serves special children's meals and will gladly heat your baby's food.

The permanent collection features plenty of interactive exhibits. The public is invited to actively participate in activities in the four corner galleries. They can dance along in 'Studio Rumba', the corner gallery about the history of the Congolese rumba for example. Families have the red carpet rolled out for them!

THE PARK

The museum's unique location is an asset for all its visitors – and not just for families. Tervuren is a great destination for a day trip. The museum is located in the magnificent park of Tervuren, the former hunting estate of the Dukes of Brabant. Ducks, geese, and other waterfowl enjoy the tranquil ponds. The 205-hectare site connects seamlessly with the stunning museum, extending into the Sonian Forest, which was recently listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

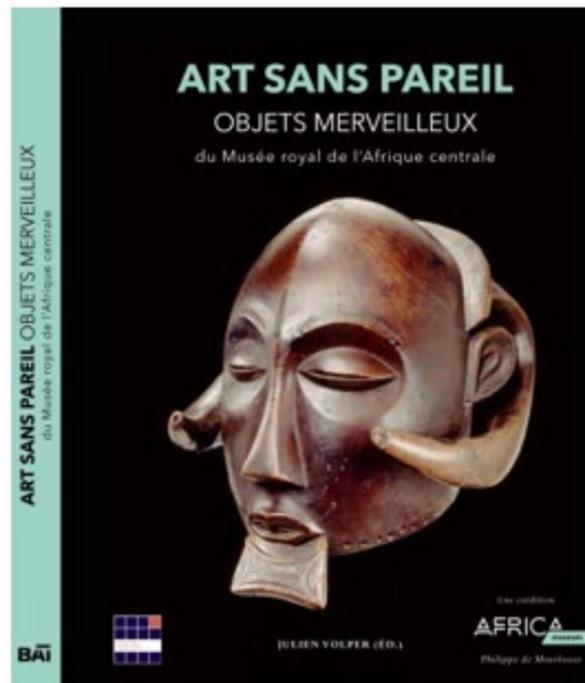
You can obtain a free map of the park from the Tervuren tourist office and buy maps of themed walks and bicycle tours. From 2019, you can also find shared bikes at the tram stop, allowing active visitors to also check out Tervuren's Arboretum.



PUBLICATIONS

Unrivalled art. Spellbinding artefacts from the Royal Museum for Central Africa

21.5 x 26 cm, 176 p, 25 €, hardcover, NL, FR, EN and DE.



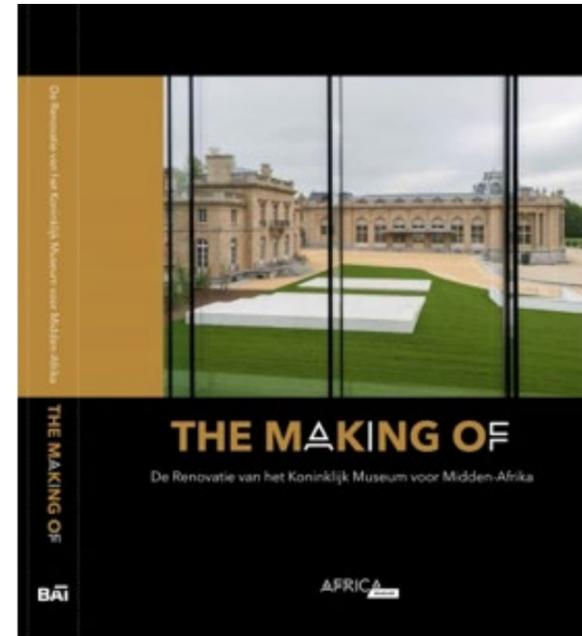
This book, which is being published to mark the opening of the museum, unveils an ensemble of 77 important works from the collection held by the Royal Museum for Central Africa. A range of academics, conservators and experts on African art provides an examination and analysis of each of these pieces. Many of the works brought together here can be found in the gallery assigned to the temporary exhibition *Unrivalled Art*. Others can be encountered in the rooms devoted to the permanent exhibition. And some of the works afford a glimpse behind the scenes at the RMCA, in the hushed atmosphere of the depots, about which the general public is largely unaware.

Researcher and curator Julien Volper has selected pieces that come not only from the Congo, but also from other countries, such as Angola or Gabon. Sometimes they are physical testaments to lost cultures dating from the eighth to tenth century, or even dating to tens of thousands of years ago!

However, most of the works belong to the more recent period of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. All of these masks, statuettes, ivories, weapons, receptacles and other artefacts express a genuine creativity – a creativity described so aptly in 1919 by the theorist Vladimir Markov: '[...] this [African] art is unrivalled anywhere else in the world.'

Making of the Royal Museum for Central Africa

21.5 x 26 cm, 176 p., 25 €, soft cover, NL, FR and EN.



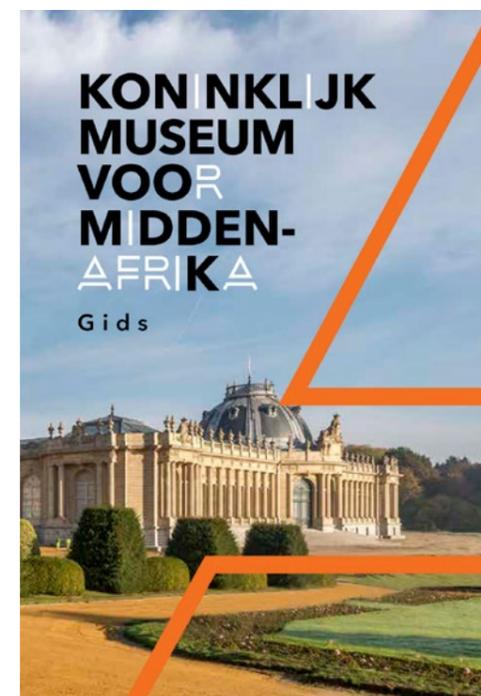
This photo album brings to life the story of how the Royal Museum for Central Africa was renovated. The original 1910 building was not only in urgent physical need of restoration, but also required a root and branch transformation to turn it into a museum suitable for the 21st century. Photographs taken before, during and after this metamorphosis bear testament to that long and complex process.

In addition to numerous splendid photographs, the book also contains a series of interviews of the most important parties involved, highlighting in each one a different aspect of this unique enterprise. In fourteen interviews, the various actors involved in the museum's renovation are given the opportunity to speak: they include the clients, the architect, the contractors, the scenographers, the restoration specialists, and members of staff.

A journey through time and space: the fascinating making of the AfricaMuseum in Tervuren.

Visitor's Guide

12.5 x 18 cm, 160 p, softcover € 7,50.



'MY AFRICAMUSEUM' OPENING CAMPAIGN

Bonka Circus developed the 'My AfricaMuseum' opening campaign.

Everyone can join the campaign by selecting a piece from the collections on the website myafricamuseum.be. An especially meaningful piece, to which you feel an attachment, that touches you. A piece that you can use to tell a tale that has something to do with AfricaMuseum or Africa, and that you want to share. A story of past or future, of yourself or of society, a tale that is positive or (highly) critical, inspiring or challenging. Friends of the museum including Coely, Eric Kabongo, Marie Daulne, Vincent Kompany, Bart Peeters, David Van Reybrouck, Cécile Djunga, Christophe Deborsu, Pierre Kroll, and Ronny Mosuse have already told theirs.

Peter Verbiest, Strategic director of Bonka Circus:

'In developing this campaign, we were very much aware of the many stories and sentiments revolving around the museum or associated with it. These emotions and stories vary enormously from one visitor to another. Some are full of nostalgia, while others are full of pain. They can be personal, societal, and critical. AfricaMuseum leaves no one indifferent.'

Vincent Jansen, Creative director of Bonka Circus:

'Given that the museum is the object of such a wide range of opinions and emotions, the campaign needed to reflect this. A campaign with a lone voice talking about the museum and its collections would have been a mistake. It needed to give everyone – regardless of age, colour, or origin – a chance to express their personal connection to the museum. In this way, the campaign can play a role in acknowledging the past and building the future.'



This is how the 'My AfricaMuseum' campaign was born. It is not a single 'My AfricaMuseum', but one of many, where each 'My AfricaMuseum' comprises a piece from the collection and a story related to it.

On myafricamuseum.be, everyone can create their own 'Mon AfricaMuseum' by selecting one of 800 collection pieces and relating the tale attached to it.

On myafricamuseum.be, you can already find hundreds of stories, from staff members, scientists, partners, the young and old, from all walks of society. And also from public figures from both sides of the country.

Rony Mosuse selected a tangible piece of history: 'It's a bill of sale between three literate Belgians and an illiterate Congolese, who gives away a great deal in return for very little. In My AfricaMuseum those sorts of things are of enormous importance.'

Cécile Djunga chose 'New breath, or Burgeoning Congo' by Aimé Mpane 'because it is directed towards the future. It sets a dialogue going between Belgium and Congo, and ensures that through art, the new generation of Belgians and Congolese are reminded of the past. It is a positive piece that addresses the confrontation of the past while stretching out a conciliatory hand to the future.'

Bart Peeters selected a drum from Senegal, more specifically Casamance, for the following reason: 'All good music finds its roots in Africa. I also played in Senegal in the first part of a concert by Youssou N'Dour, who had eight of these drums.'

OPENING HOURS

The museum is open:

- **For groups with reservations**
 - From Tuesday to Friday: 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.
 - Saturday and Sunday: 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.
- **For visitors without reservations**
 - From Tuesday to Friday: 11 a.m. - 5 p.m.
 - Saturday and Sunday: 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.

The museum is closed on:

- Mondays
- January 1st
- May 1st
- December 25th

RATES

- **Normal rate: 12€**
 - Adults >18 year
- **Discounted rate: 8€**
 - Seniors
 - Group of adults (min. 15 participants)
- **Heavily discounted rate: 4€**
 - Persons on social benefits
 - Persons with disabilities and their attendant
 - Students (18-26)
 - Youth groups (18-25)
 - Teachers
- **Free: -18 year**
- **Yearly membership : 20€**
 - Strictly personal and non-transferable.

Purchase your ticket online!

Avoid queues at the ticket counters.

www.africamuseum.be

EVENTS

The AfricaMuseum was able to expand its public space from 6,000 to 11,000 sq.m. thanks to its new architecture. As a result, it is now also better equipped to host events.

In particular, the museum can now organise more in-house scientific conferences in its convention centres, with meeting rooms for 24 to 64 participants and an auditorium that can seat 220 participants.

On other days, other parties can rent the convention centre, as well as all the catering facilities, while also enjoying access to the museum. The AfricaMuseum can also be rented for evening events.

Contact: customerservice@africamuseum.be

SUPPORT US

A museum cannot function without partners. Whatever the amount, your support is invaluable. Support from private individuals and companies is crucial to funding the conservation of the collections and their dissemination to a large audience. This support is also indispensable to scientific research.

The Royal Museum for Central Africa is in partnership with testament.be

THE AFRICAMUSEUM WISHES TO THANK ITS PARTNERS

The museum thanks the National Lottery and all its players, who have made the new AfricaMuseum a reality.



CONTACT

Royal Museum for Central Africa
Leuvensesteenweg 13
3080 Tervuren
02 769 52 11
www.africamuseum.be

ACCESS

By car

• From Leuven-Liège

- E40 in the direction of Brussels
- Exit 22 'Bertem'
- N3 in the direction of Tervuren
- Remain on N3 Leuvensesteenweg until you reach the museum.

• From Brussels

- A3 then E40 in the direction of Leuven - Liège
- Exit 22 'Bertem / Tervuren'
- N3 in the direction of Tervuren
- Remain on N3 Leuvensesteenweg until you reach the museum

or

- Belliard tunnel
- Continue on to the Avenue de Tervuren.
- Remain on the Avenue de Tervuren and go past Vier Armen/Quatre Bras
- At the second roundabout, turn left onto Leuvensesteenweg until you reach the museum.

• From Antwerp or Ghent

- Take the ring road (R0).
- Exit at 'Tervuren-Quatre Bras' (N227)
- Turn left and take the Avenue de Tervuren (N3).
- At the second roundabout, turn left onto Leuvensesteenweg until you reach the museum.

• From Charleroi or Mons

- Take the ring road (R0).
- Exit at 'Tervuren-Quatre Bras/Vier Armen' (N227)
- Turn left and take the Avenue de Tervuren (N3).
- At the second roundabout, turn left onto Leuvensesteenweg until you reach the museum.

Public transport

Parking facilities are not yet available at the museum. Visitors are advised to come via public transport.

Together with **Visit Brussels** and the **Province of Flemish Brabant**, the museum has made a special effort to make the tram or bus trip an enjoyable one.

From Brussels

Train-tram-metro: From Brussels-Central station, take metro 1 in the direction of Stockel. Alight at Montgomery and take tram 44 until the terminus, Tervuren station. The museum is 300 m away.

Every weekend and throughout the year-end holidays, you can take the **Africatram (tram 44)** and take part in a **unique experience!** During the trip (from Montgomery to AfricaMuseum and back), actors/guides in disguise will promote the museum and its new features, and also talk about the history and secrets of tram line 44 in a fun and informative way.



From Leuven

Bus: take line 317 or express bus 410, and stop at the terminus of tram 44.

Throughout the year-end holidays, a free AfricaMuseum bus will leave from the Leuven train station and the Imec parking area.



By bike: Cycling is also an excellent option. There are pleasant cycling itineraries from both Brussels and Leuven to the museum: <http://www.fietsnet.be>

Credits

Director general

Guido Gryseels

Operational director for Public-oriented services

Bruno Verbergt

The following worked on the museum renovation:

The management and the entire renovation team composed of personnel from public-oriented services, collections management, restorers, scientists, and support services.

Comraf, the Groupe des six, specialists and stakeholders of the African diasporas as well as partners from Africa

Federal Buildings Agency, the contracting authority

TV Stéphane Beel Architecten + Origin Architecture and Engineering + Niek Kortekaas + Michel Devisgne + Arup + Bureau Bouwtechniek, RCR and Daidalos Peutz, architecture and scenography

DENYS (Wondelgem), contractor
Potteau-Labo (Heule), main contractor for construction of the permanent exhibition, with Étoile Mécanique (displays), LuxLumen (lighting), Piet Hoevenaars (graphics-printing), XL digital (graphics-coordination), Helena.be (design), CR3DO (models), Bert Van Wynsberghe (models)

Anamnesia (Strasbourg), multimedia

Heyvaert & Jansen, editorial consultancy and translations

Bonka Circus, communication campaign

DaddyKate, Vincent Knecht, Bas Pattyn and Patrick Hannaert, graphic charter

Timing and budget

- Start for works for the new welcome pavilion

12 November 2013

- Closure of public galleries

1st December 2013

- Turnover of empty museum to the contractor

17 February 2014

- Delivery of the RMCA building and start of interior remodeling of the museum

31 May 2018

- Reopening of the museum

9 December 2018

Cost of the renovation

Engineering and design, architecture, and fixed scenography

€ 66 500 000

Scenography, mobile equipment, remodelling

€ 7 500 000

Press contact and press images

Phone:

Dutch: 02 769 52 98

French: 02 769 53 40

Mail:

press@africamuseum.be

Link press images and press releases

(active from 5 December 2018)

Link: <http://press.africamuseum.be>

Login: [africamuseum_press](#)

Password: [Africamuseum#Press](#)