

PRESS KIT

PRESS CONFERENCE

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RESTITUTION: the proposal by Thomas Dermine,
State Secretary for Economic Recovery and Strategic Investments,
in charge of Scientific Policy

Inauguration of the AfricaMuseum provencance tour

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Freddy Tsimba (1967), *Centres fermés, rêves ouverts*, Tervuren, 2016.
Outdoor installation on the museum façade

GENERAL FRAMEWORK

The AfricaMuseum reopened its doors in December 2018 following extensive renovations. Since the first concrete plans for its renovation were developed in 2002, the museum has engaged in a long process of decolonisation. This is an ongoing, long-term undertaking, which has therefore continued with the reopening. The next steps are reflected in the themes of the temporary exhibitions, the collaboration with African partners for the organisation of activities, the content of our workshops and activities for the general public, the attitude towards restitution, and the importance given to provenance research within the institution.

The majority of the museum's ethnographic collections were acquired during the colonial period. Approximately 40% of these collections came to the museum after the 1960s, mainly through donations. Over the past few years, and more especially since the AfricaMuseum reopened in 2018, many have raised questions concerning the provenance of its objects and the circumstances surrounding their acquisition, particularly regarding the ethnographic collections from the colonial period. In recent years, priority has been given to researching the way in which these were acquired.



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Some of the AfricaMuseum's collections were acquired during the colonial period under unjust circumstances, which was certainly the case during the Congo Free State period (1885-1908), when items were acquired through violence or pillaging. According to approximate estimates, some 900 objects may have been obtained during this period. In-depth research into their provenance is currently being undertaken.

Nowadays, objects are collected as part of research or study projects in the field, in close collaboration with local museums and universities. The scope of research is no longer limited to Central Africa, but covers the whole of sub-Saharan Africa. The objects are also well documented, even though they are still only small pieces of a much larger whole. More focus is now being given to intangible cultural expressions, such as language and music, than previously. International ethics standards are applied during the acquisition of museum collections.

The Scientist in Residence programme seeks to involve African scientists like Professor Placide Mumbembele Sanger from the University of Kinshasa, who is currently conducting research into the provenance of the collections. Alongside this programme, a masterclass will be organised for artists, students, writers, journalists and anyone with a particular affinity for and interest in Africa, focusing on research into the provenance of the museum's collections.

Provenance research seeks to obtain knowledge and information about the acquisition of a piece or a collection. This study aims to establish the manner and means in which the objects were acquired and came to the museum.

When carrying out provenance research, the AfricaMuseum can use the valuable archives compiled for its collections. But this archive material sometimes proves insufficient, and a field study in the country of origin is necessary. Additional time and resources must therefore be invested in provenance research, including in Congo, as was done to learn the history behind the acquisition of the Nkisi statuette from Ne Cuco.

Provenance research always closely involves our African partners. In order to facilitate research and dialogue, they have access to our inventories and archives. The AfricaMuseum is also making great efforts to digitise its archives, photos and films in order to publish them online.

The National Archives of Belgium, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Rwandan partners are currently working together on a project to digitise Rwanda's historical archives in Belgium. All of Rwanda's geological archives that were stored at the AfricaMuseum have been handed over to the Rwandan authorities.

In-depth research into the provenance of the AfricaMuseum's collections requires significant additional resources. There is also renewed interest in the issue of restitution, and not just in Belgium. A large portion of Africa's material collections are held by Western museums or private collectors. In recent years, there have been increasing calls for African heritage illegally acquired by Westerners to be transferred to their countries of origin. The museum has an open and constructive attitude toward restitution. The museum's restitution policy was approved at the start of 2020 and can be viewed on our website. This is a process that must be carried out in dialogue with Congolese partners and other countries of origin. Congo is also pressing for a representative 'reconstitution' of its own collection. The AfricaMuseum will contribute toward this with a vast, multi-annual programme for scientific and museum cooperation and capacity building.

The issue of restitution was accelerated on the suggestion of Thomas Dermine, Belgian State Secretary for Scientific Policy.



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RESTITUTION: the proposal by Thomas Dermine

State Secretary for Economic Recovery and
Strategic Investments, in charge of Scientific Policy

Restitution: “we must disentangle the symbolic stakes linked to the ownership of looted objects from the operational stakes linked to their material return” - Thomas Dermine’s Copernican proposal based on two principles and three categories of objects

One of the resources exploited by the “colonial powers” is cultural heritage. Thus, thousands of objects, as well as human remains, were either acquired in a situation of manifest unequal exchange or taken without consent from the Congo during the colonial period, i.e. the years of political domination of the Congo from 1885 to 1908 and from 1908 to 1960.

This situation deprives the citizens of the former colony of access to their own history, culture, creativity and spirituality of their ancestors. Access to these objects is now de facto restricted to Westerners and those living in the diaspora in Europe.

The question of the restitution of objects that are now the property of the Belgian State is a pressing issue in the national and international public debate. This question of material restitution mixes symbolic issues - linked to the legal ownership of the objects in question - and operational issues - linked to the methods of conservation, transport, etc. These operational issues have often prevented concrete progress on the symbolic front.

Two principles

It therefore seems important to me to start, as soon as possible, a dialogue with the Congolese authorities, a dialogue that would take a concerted and shared approach to the question of the restitution of objects acquired illegitimately during the colonial era and indicate the support that will be given to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in order to facilitate the conservation and enhancement of the objects that would be materially restituted.

In order to overcome the difficulty of operationalising the restitution and to deal with the symbolic issue without delay, I proposed to the Belgian Government to apply two principles:

- 1.** It is important to legally recognise the alienability for restitution purposes of property from the colonial past, i.e. property acquired during the period 1885-1960. The legal character of alienability symbolically acts that - in the absence of certainty as to the consequences of the possession of these objects by Belgium - they are likely to be alienated for restitution purposes. This is therefore a prerequisite for serenely opening up the provenance studies and increasing scientific knowledge about these objects.
- 2.** The proposed approach is intended first and foremost to initiate a dialogue with the authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in order to provide them with a framework to facilitate the return of legal ownership of all property for which a provenance study concludes that its possession by Belgium is illegitimate. This transfer of legal ownership must take place immediately, regardless of whether a claim for physical restitution has been made. With this transfer of legal ownership, the legitimate owner - the Congolese state - is recognised as having the right to request material restitution, based on strengthened scientific and cultural collaboration. I would like to build this framework jointly with my Congolese counterparts and allow it to be based on a joint scientific commission, which brings together scientists from our two countries.

¹ *The notion of illegitimacy of the acquisition by Belgium of the objects can be considered as the acquisition of the objects by force or as war booty.*

Three categories

More concretely, this two-principle approach will materialise in three categories of objects currently present in our collections in Belgium:

1. For all the objects for which it could be determined after a provenance study that Belgium acquired them illegitimately :

- These would be transferred from the public domain to the private domain of the State and thus made alienable for restitution purposes. This is a necessary preliminary step towards a legal transfer of ownership between states.
- A convention between Belgium and the Democratic Republic of Congo would be concluded in order to restore legal ownership of these objects and simultaneously provide for their deposit in Belgium for conservation, research and development purposes. This agreement would set out the conditions under which the Democratic Republic of Congo could require - if they so wished - the physical transfer of the objects to its territory.

2. For all the objects that could be determined to have been legitimately acquired by Belgium:

These are obviously kept in the public domain of the State.

3. For all objects that could not be determined to have been legitimately acquired by Belgium:

- These would be transferred to the private domain of the State and thus made alienable for restitution purposes. Pending the provenance studies, the Royal Decree would provide for the conservation conditions applicable to public collections to be maintained (principles of responsibility and standstill).
- If the provenance studies determine that the objects were acquired legitimately, they will be transferred back into the public domain; if not, they will be subject to the agreement described for illegitimately acquired objects (see above).
- Objects awaiting investigation or whose investigation would not make it possible to determine the legitimate or illegitimate nature of the acquisition would remain in the private domain, which would symbolically distinguish them from legitimately acquired objects. They would remain in the private domain until a study or new investigations made it possible to place them in the category of legitimately acquired objects or in the category of illegitimately acquired objects.

It goes without saying that scientific and cultural cooperation must be strengthened. My objective is to begin work to identify a series of measures and joint initiatives aimed at strengthening scientific and cultural collaboration between Belgium and the DRC, in the context of restitution and more broadly in the context of conservation, research and the development of these objects. It would be appropriate to ask the representatives of the DRC about the support that could usefully be provided by our country to enable and accompany the effective physical restitution: transfer of certain skills acquired by the institutions holding the objects in terms of conservation, assistance in creating suitable storage and enhancement spaces, support in terms of inventorying the collections, etc. Restitution would be at the heart of the dialogue to be initiated, but the “reconstitution” of collections, as well as the possibilities of digitisation, loans and travelling exhibitions would also be discussed.

At the same time, we want to strengthen our capacity for provenance studies to establish scientifically the conditions under which each of these objects was acquired.

I look forward to starting this dialogue as soon as possible!

Thomas Dermine



PROVENANCE TOUR:

introduction

As part of the revamped permanent exhibition, visitors can download a Faro Heritage App tour on their smartphone. This tour highlights objects with various different origins and gives a detailed insight into the complexity surrounding acquisition, conservation, appropriation, accessibility and restitution.

Military campaigns were swiftly launched in Congo to subdue the population, define borders and establish the authority of the colonial system. These expeditions often “collected” items along the way, such as weapons and other trophies acquired during violent confrontations. These illustrated the successful conquest of the African populations. A number of items of very controversial origin are of course included in this tour. In addition to military personnel, civil servants, missionaries, traders and scientists were also encouraged to acquire objects in Congo.

For some items, we have abundant information, for others, we only know their place of acquisition and the name of the “collector”, but not the name of the artisan or the significance of the object. What do we know about its context? What was the object’s journey before arriving at the museum?

This tour is not intended to be complete or exhaustive and will be regularly expanded with the findings of provenance research. The African diaspora will also be involved in this tour.

The three displays in the museum area offer an introduction to the tour by illustrating the complexity of this issue.

1. Looted cultural items

After extensive, in-depth provenance research, the violent context in which this Kitumba sculpture was brought to Belgium is now known. The statue is considered a "looted cultural item".

Alexander Delcommune (1855-1922) was the first Belgian to settle in Boma, at the mouth of the Congo River. He worked for a French trading company and managed an overseas trading post. Any Europeans wanting to settle in Boma had to negotiate with the nine kings of Boma for ownership of the land and the right to trade.

Delcommune came into conflict with them. In 1878, he seized the famous nkisi nkonde power figure from chief Kongo Ne Kuko, one of the nine kings, during an armed attack. This type of statue, which the Kongo people believe holds magical powers, was often called a "nail fetish". Delcommune treated the statue as a hostage and brought it back to Belgium.



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AfricaMuseum podcast

Het beeld van Ne Kuko:
over koloniale roofkunst &
herkomstonderzoek

Episode in Dutch



<https://www.africamuseum.be/fr/learn/podcasts/tout-passe-sauf-le-passe/episode1>

Nkisi nkonde. Beeld / Statue / Statue / [Yombe; Kakongo].RD Congo. 1st quarter of the 19th century. Wood (Canarium schweinfurthii. Seized by A. Delcommune. 1878. Registered in 1912. EO.0.0.7943.

2. Recent acquisition

This object is a recent acquisition, acquired according to current rules.



Likishi lya kashina kaji. Masker / Masque / Mask. Chingalala, Northwestern Province, Zambia. [Lenga Navo]. Created by Kenneth Lizambo. Late 20th century. Hide, plant fibre, pigment, paper, tar or resin, plastic. Field-collected by B. Wastiau. 1997. EO.1998.14.44.

3. Study pieces

The provenance of this mask is currently being researched.



Idimu. Masker / Masque / Mask. [Lega]. RD Congo. 2nd quarter of the 19th century. Elephant ivory. Collected by D. Biebuyck. 1952. Registered in 1955. EO.1955.3.53.

△ SELECTION OF THE TOUR

Power figure. *Nkishi*

Nkishi. Krachtbeeld / Statue de force / Power figure. Lomami, RD Congo. [Songye]. 20th century. Wood, copper alloy, iron, plant fibre, horn, hide. Bequest from J. Walschot. 1980. EO.1980.2.492.



A private collection

This piece entered the Museum's collections in 1980, following a bequest from the Brussels merchant and collector Jeanne Walschot, who died in 1977. The three-year period between the collector's death and its entry into the Museum's inventory can be explained by, among other things, the size of the collection, which consists of more than 3,000 objects and archives.

Incomplete information about the origin

This collection was built in Belgium throughout the 20th century, from the period of the First World War to the early 1970s. Walschot, an art dealer, had a shop in the centre of Brussels, which became renowned - also internationally - as a place for Congolese objects. She also bought through advertisements by/to former colonials and actively researched the places where they had been.

Unfortunately, as is the case for many objects from private collections that are now held in the Museum, there is no information regarding the context of their acquisition in Congo itself. A relative identification of this type of object can only be obtained through comparative studies of style, iconography, materials, etc. conducted on similar and better-documented artefacts.

A preliminary provenance investigation has already been carried out for this object, but we still do not know who the original owner was or how it was collected. This object may require additional research in DR Congo.

Helmet mask

Helmmasker / Masque-heaume / Helmet mask. Kindundu, Kwilu, RD Congo. [Suku].
Early 20th century. Wood (*Ricinodendron heudelotii*), pigment, plant fibre. Gift from the
Compagnie du Kasai. 1913. EO.0.0.15374.



This mask was offered to the museum by a concession company, the Compagnie du Kasai, which established a reign of terror in Kasai during the Congo Free State period. The company attempted to burnish its image through exhibitions and donations of ethnographic objects.

When it was created in 1901, the Compagnie du Kasai (CK) was granted a thirty-year concession to harvest rubber, among other things, throughout the entire Kasai River basin, an area covering some 360,000km². The CK was one of the Congo Free State's key partners.

The provenance of this mask is currently being researched.

Bedpost

Fragment van een *kumbi* bedstijl / Fragment d'un montant de lit *kumbi* / Fragment of *kumbi* bedpost.
Kangu, Kongo-Central, RD Congo. [Yombe]. Late 19th century. Wood (*Adansonia digitata*), black pigment.
Gift from N. De Cleene. 1934. EO.0.0.35776.



This fragment of a Kumbi bedpost was acquired by a missionary, probably in the early 1900s. During this early period, the missionaries and their families were placed under a strict authoritarian regime in which the use of violence was not unusual and objects used in non-Christian rituals often confiscated or destroyed. The object was offered to the museum in 1934 by the family of Dr Natal De Cleene, one of the leading theorists of colonial ethnography and indirect governance in the 1920s-1930s. He was the nephew of the eminent missionary, Monsignor Natalis De Cleene.

This piece is to be researched in more detail.

Elephant mask

Olifantenmasker / Masque d'éléphant / Elephant mask. Former province Katanga. RD Congo. [Luba]. 19th century. Wood (*Ricinodendron sp.*), pigment. Gift from C.F.A. Lemaire. 1899. EO.0.0.3722.



At Leopold II's behest, Lieutenant Charles Lemaire (1863-1925) led a large expedition through the province of Katanga from 1898 to 1900 for the purpose of establishing borders, concluding treaties, and finding raw materials. The heavily-armed expedition was involved in several clashes along its route.

Throughout the voyage, the expedition would take advantage of its occasional rest breaks at colonial posts to 'collect' plants, animals, and objects that were then transported to the coast by hundreds of porters, many of whom would perish along the way. This mask was taken in 1898.

This object may fall under the category of 'looted objects' and will be the subject of further investigation.

Ancestral statue Lusinga

Voorouderbeeld dat bekendstaat als Lusinga / Statue d'ancêtre connu sous le nom de Lusinga / Ancestral statue known as Lusinga. Marungu, Tanganyika, RD Congo. [Tabwa]. Before 1885. Wood (*Vitex madiensis*), pigment, chicken feather, warthog tooth, monitor lizard, cotton, glass beads. War booty. Gift from the widow of E. Storms. 1930. EO.0.0.31660.



Acquired during a violent period

The widow of military officer Emile Storms (1846-1918) gave her deceased husband's collection to the museum in 1930. The collection comprised several items of Storm's equipment, a few documents, and nearly 340 ethnographic objects. These were accumulated by Storms in the east of DR Congo whilst on an expedition to explore the area around Lake Tanganyika for the *International Association for the Exploration*

and Civilisation of Central Africa. This expedition culminated in the founding of the Mpala post on 10 May 1883, where Storms settled for more than two years until his final departure from Congo in July 1885.

Symbol of victory

This statue represents the male ancestors of Lusinga Iwa Ng'ombe (c. 1840-1884), a Tabwa chief from the region of Marungu in eastern DR Congo. A key rival and adversary of Emile Storms, who was seeking to secure control over the territories to the west of Tanganyika, Lusinga was decapitated during a punitive military operation led by Storms on 4 December 1884. In addition to his enemy's skull, provisions and property were seized, including this statue. By

taking the statue, and therefore capturing the representation of the matrilineal line of the dead chief, Storms symbolically consolidated his victory. The sculpture's inclusion in the officer's private collection in Belgium, and the fact that it was put on display in a curio cabinet in the reception rooms of his Brussels home, demonstrates its value as a 'war trophy'.

The violent context in which this piece was acquired and brought to Belgium is known. The object is considered "looted property".

Luba mask

Antropo-zoömorf masker / Masque anthropo-zoomorphe / Anthropo-zoomorphic mask.
Luulu, Katanga, RD Congo. [Luba]. 2nd quarter of the 19th century. Wood (*Ricinodendron
rautanenii*). Purchase from the widow of O. Michaux. 1919. EO.0.0.23470.



Collection circumstances

This Luba mask was taken in March 1896 in the village of Luulu in DR Congo during retaliations against the so-called “Batetela rebellion” within the Congo Free State’s military force, the *Force publique*. During the rebellion, Commandant Oscar Michaux was given full powers to lead the military operations against the insurgents. In a military advance by his armed unit, the village of Luulu was occupied by force when the chief refused the troops permission to make camp in the village. When the inhabitants fled into the forest, their provisions and a number of possessions, including this mask, were looted from the deserted village.

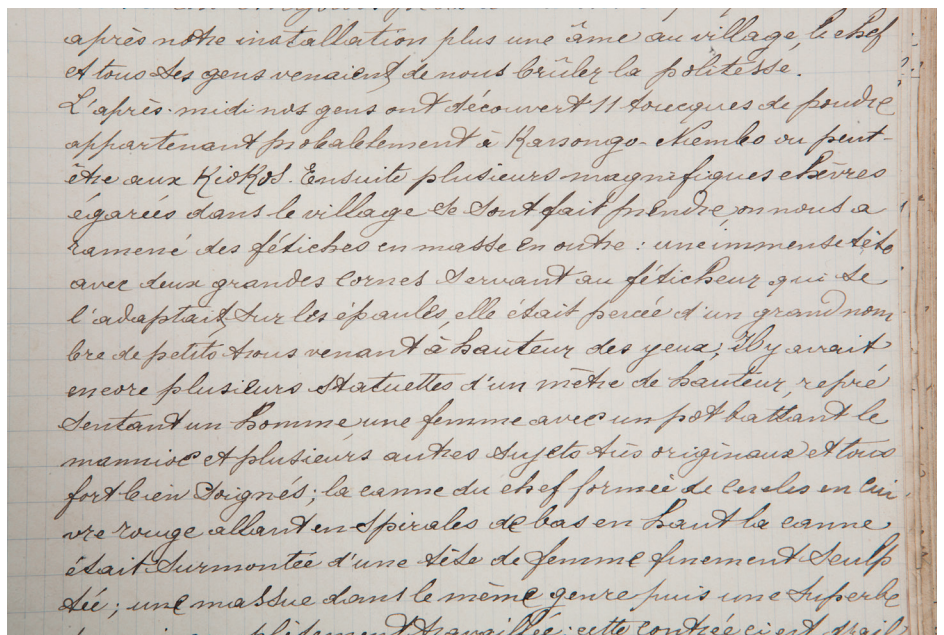
Michaux’ collection comprises 715 objects and was sold to the museum by his widow in 1919. It is the only mask in the collection, which also includes bowls, horns, boxes, statuary, sceptres, combs, ivory items, a number of woven raffia textiles, weapons, musical instruments and chairs, all acquired by the officer during nearly seven years in Congo.

The objects in the Michaux collection seem to have been indifferently traded or taken without permission during his military campaign, depending on the circumstances, with no clear objective, and independently of a higher command. The Michaux collection was most likely put together as “military souvenirs” and for their appeal as “pretty exotic objects”.

The broad context in which this mask was acquired and brought to Belgium is known and will be the subject of further investigation. It is probably “looted property”.

Field journal

Albert Lapière, an officer accompanying Michaux at that time, kept a journal of which the museum holds a copy. Thanks to this document, there is an account of the pillaging of the Luba mask in Luulu. Lapière's account of the events in Luulu was somewhat embellished by O. Michaux in his book 'Carnet de campagne' (1913). However, the journal by Albert Lapière was studied by Dr. R. Ceyskens who, in 2011, published a complete study of the O. Michaux collection with the museum's press.



après notre installation plus une âme au village, le chef
et tous les gens venaient de nous brûler la politesse.
L'après-midi nos gens ont découvert 11 bocaux de poudre
appartenant probablement à Kersongo. Chembo ou peut-
être aux Hichés. Ensuite plusieurs magnifiques etèves
égarés dans le village se sont fait prendre, on nous a
ramené des fétiches en masse en outre : une immense tête
avec deux grandes cornes servant au féticheur qui se
l'adaptait sur les épaules, elle était percée d'un grand nom-
bre de petits trous venant à hauteur des yeux; Il y avait
encore plusieurs statuettes d'un mètre de hauteur, repré-
sentaient un homme, une femme avec un post battant le
mammifère et plusieurs autres sujets très originaux et tous
fort bien soignés; la canne du chef formée de cercles en cui-
vre rouge allant en spirales de bas en haut la canne
était surmontée d'une tête de femme finement sculptée;
une massue dans le même genre puis une superbe
... complétement travaillée; cette contée-ci est d'ail-

Lapière relate longuement le contexte de l'arrivée de leur troupe à Luulu et détaille la prise du masque :
« le 26 [mars] la route est fort longue, nous n'arriverons au village de Lulu que vers 2h et par contre il n'y a pas une goutte d'eau sur la route, [...] »

Quelques instants après notre installation, plus une âme au village, le chef et tous ses gens venaient de nous brûler la politesse. [...]

Ensuite plusieurs magnifiques chèvres égarées dans le village se sont fait prendre, on nous a ramené des fétiches en masse, en outre : une immense tête avec deux grandes cornes servant au féticheur qui se l'adaptait sur les épaules, elle était percée d'un grand nombre de petits trous venant à hauteur des yeux, il y a avait encore plusieurs statuette d'un mètre de hauteur représentant un homme, une femme avec un pot battant le manioc et plusieurs autres sujets très originaux et tous fort bien soignés ; la canne du chef formée de cercles en cuivre rouge allant en spirales de bas en haut la canne était surmontée d'une tête de femme finement sculptée ; une massue dans le même genre puis une superbe pagaie complètement travaillée ; cette contrée-ci est d'ailleurs très riche en fait d'objets de collection. [...]

La nuit s'est passée sans incident.

Le 27 nous quittons Lulu, plus de marais seulement forêts tout le temps [...] »

Sclerophrys regularis

Sclerophrys regularis. Bokaal met specimens in alcohol / Bocal avec échantillons en alcool / Jar with specimens in alcohol. Parc national Albert, Kivu, RD Congo. 1955. Field-collected by G.-F. de Witte. 1955. B.119166, B.119175, B.119176, B.119191-92, B.119193-94.



A research expedition

The amphibians shown here are specimens, conserved in alcohol, acquired in 1955 by the herpetologist (reptile expert) Gaston-François de Witte (1897-1980), during a research expedition in the King Albert National Park (the current Virunga National Park).

In 1920, G.-F. de Witte joined the Museum of Belgian Congo where he worked in the Department of Zoology and Entomology. From 1924, he travelled several times to Congo, where he took samples of fauna and flora. In 1936, he joined the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences.

Not just de Witte

Alongside the name de Witte should be the names of the hundreds of anonymous people who contributed to the collections and made them possible. In the early colonial period, the expeditions were generally organized by a small, multidisciplinary research team composed exclusively of Westerners. However, they were accompanied by many Congolese, who were indispensable in terms of strengthening such collection trips, aimed at gathering as many specimens as possible.

Thanks to the various research expeditions led by de Witte, Belgian museums such as the Museum of Tervuren and the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences were able to acquire a large number of animal and plant species.

The zoological collection acquired by de Witte includes 153,031 amphibians, 6,004,000 insects, 3,326 mammals, 13,447 birds, 32,377 fish and 20,028 reptiles. The botanic collections comprise 16,944 African herbarium numbers. In addition, the Museum of Tervuren preserves about a hundred ethnographic objects acquired by de Witte during his expeditions.

The Congolese were recruited as porters to transport the crates containing the collections. They were also engaged in tracking and hunting, or were hired to slaughter the animals. In 1954, the technical staff of the King Albert National Park consisted of 34 Congolese (preparators, hunters, botanists, taxidermists, etc.), who were in charge of feeding, sorting, and packing the collected specimens.

Mask Tshokwe Cihongo

An ethnographic acquisition by a biologist

These masks were acquired by the biologist Gaston-François de Witte during his first expeditions for the Museum. In 1931, while on a mission in Katanga, de Witte acquired numerous Chokwe masks in the town of Dilolo, close to the Angolan border, together with their integral costumes. It was a very valuable acquisition, because few collectors did this. Whether for aesthetic considerations or for logistical reasons, most collectors limited themselves systematically and strictly to the 'face' of the mask.

Moreover, the biologist photographed most of these masks from a full-length, front and side view. This is an important visual record to specify their material characteristics (costume, accessories), although it is not sufficient to reconstruct their immaterial context (dances, songs).



Cihongo. Masker / Masque / Mask. Dilolo, Katanga, RD Congo.[Tshokwe]. Branch, feather, pith, paper, plant fiber, bark cloth, hide. Field-collected by G.F. de Witte. 1931. EO.0.0.33780-1.

The collection is influenced by the interests of the collectors

On his research expeditions, de Witte was accompanied by porters. This allowed him to acquire as many objects as he did. Although he had a genuine interest in Congolese cultures, the information about the collected objects remains very limited because he was not an ethnologist. Frequently, only the name of the place of collection and the population group were noted.

During his first two missions to Congo, in 1925 and 1931, G.-F. de Witte sought to collect all elements - natural and cultural - from an area. Afterwards, he concentrated exclusively on biological samples.

The collections gathered by zoologist Gaston-François de Witte demonstrate a passion for collecting. In addition, his systematic approach offers a starting point for provenance research.



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Zoologist G.-F. de Witte with his Chokwe mask collection, 1931. EP.0.0.5825.

Ivory whistle

Ivoren signaalfluit met modulatiegat / Sifflet en ivoire à trou de modulation / Ivory whistle with modulation hole. [Pende]. Kwilu, RD Congo. Late 19th century. Ivory. Purchase. MO.0.0.15678.



Acquired during a violent period

This whistle comes from a collection of 117 objects from the Congo Free State. They were brought to Belgium by the Belgian soldier Léon Rom. The collection primarily consists of small utensils, comparable with other collections put together in this period, mostly Kuba objects that correspond to the aesthetic taste of the time (cups, boxes, textiles). This whistle was sold to the museum by Léon Rom's widow in 1925.

Léon Rom (1860-1924) joined the civil service in the Congo Free State in 1886. He was appointed District Commissioner of Matadi and then, in 1890, he became a second lieutenant in the Force Publique; later, he was made chief of the military post in Léopoldville (present-day Kinshasa). It was here that Rom could have met the Anglo-Polish writer Joseph Conrad (1857-

1924), the author of *Heart of Darkness*, who drew on his memories of the Congo - but also on the messages that reached him after his return in December 1891 - when writing his novel, which was published in 1899.

Apparently, Rom was the inspiration for one of the most infamous characters in this book, Kurtz, an ivory trader. Many certainly see some of Kurtz's character traits in a story inspired by the violence that Rom demonstrated at his post in Stanley Falls (1894-1895), where his house had a flowerbed encircled with human skulls.

Prestige object without context

It is difficult to ascertain the context in which this piece was acquired because the circumstances are not specified in the museum archives, unlike all the other pieces in this collection.

Older labels on the objects indicate that they were not necessarily obtained by Rom, as the title 'collecting officer', followed by a personal name, appears alongside other designations, such as 'indigenous name, village name, category', etc.

Most objects, however, appear to have been transported without descriptive labels; so, as is often the case, their identification within the Museum's departments happened by comparison with the institution's already known and documented collections.

This object may have been a 'looted possession' and will be the subject of further, more in-depth, study.

Manuscript

Kiswahili-manuscript, geschreven in aangepast Arabisch schrift (correspondentie over de handel in stoffen en ivoor) / Manuscrit kiswahili en caractères arabes adaptés (Correspondance relative au commerce des étoffes et de l'ivoire) / Kiswahili manuscript written in adapted Arabic script (Correspondence concerning ivory and textile trade). Purchase from widow of L. Rom. 1925. HA.01.0139.2.

Hali b. Sulim, or Ruma Lisa
il y a que Meunié Peube a pris de l'homme
et de femme de gongo - beaucoup de fils
peube et Raphael
le 25 pour les que le bonhomme avait Meunié Meuhon
et de son père (celui-ci en de son)

الى حضرة الشيخ الأجل الأكرم كصو الكهنه اللاح فضلنا عبد الله
 حنتظدا الله وبقا و من كل مؤ و قناه لام عليه و رحمة
 وبركاته في كل ما نبتنا من الطاهر و هبانه على الدوام اخوان
 ابا معروف قد خبر فكم مرادنا لا رتيد في حال العذر و النعم المتعم
 و هذه الاطراف لا نرا على عذر اخذ و نعلم نكان و منته ملاف
 منك على بيان نكل الله ان تكون في حال العافية و اخبار هذه
 الاطراف تاد الحرب و اير و بالامر و رخصه ان مني بيتي في
 مهران هجم على خا كمد غوغ مرتبة و صح بينهم قتال كبر و انهم
 غوغ و من مؤمن الكافرين و قتلوا من باعده غوغ جمله اطارم و اخذ
 اموالهم و نفاق و باروت و خا ك مات و هذه ا لوقعة استوت بعد
 ا لوقعة الاولى و في هذه الايام خرج مني متاجري و ما عنده
 قاصدا الى عند غوغ و في عامه و خرجت جمله من خيوس و انكسرت الخا
 و ما انصر الا من عند الله ما بانتم اظهرت الله اللام بلعه
 سيف من بلاد و صالح من كماله معجم غيم و كانه و هبنا للموا عليه
 الوالد حميد و اخوانه على زعمه و صيد خلقا و عمار بنصور و عبيد
 و عبد علي و شاهد و من ماله خان و اني شريه و هاسم
 وكان هذين من كنه اخذ على امر عبيد الكهنه من يوم 18

Memories of an enemy in the Rom collection

Intercepted correspondence about campaigns against the Swahili-Arab.

The collection of the Belgian soldier Léon Rom features several handwritten letters in Arabic-Swahili, addressed to Muhammad bin Halfān, an infamous ivory and slave trader, better known by the nickname Rumaliza. They correspond to the period during which Rom was assigned to Stanley Falls (present-day Kisangani) in eastern Congo, where armed conflicts against Swahili-Arabs took place. The Force Publique's campaign against Rumaliza lasted several years, but Rom's decisive intervention was limited to the last few weeks, the final attack of which he describes in his notes.

It was almost certainly in the context of Rom's participation in this violent conflict that such a document came into his hands. We do not know if this document was seized by/given to Rom during this violent conflict. Logically, keeping this 'souvenir' of a defeated enemy could confer on him its trophy value. However, unlike many of his peers, Rumaliza, who repeatedly opposed the installation of the German and Belgian armed forces in the Tanganyika region, survived the various attacks and managed to escape, eventually settling in Zanzibar, where he continued his trading activities.



Portrait of Léon Rom

EXHIBITION PROGRAMME

2021-2023

The temporary exhibitions during the period 2021-2023 will all reflect this continuing process of decolonisation, each one touching on a different aspect of the path.

- What role did the AfricaMuseum play in the way of thinking about and relating to Africa, Africans and Belgians of African origin?
- What is the origin of the collections? Nearly all the collections were originally presented principally by white men. How do Africans themselves view the collections? In most cases the debate is about ethnographic collections and archives, but what about the natural history collections?
- How can we play a leading role in promoting world citizenship and combatting stereotypes and racism?

In each of our exhibitions, the point of departure is co-creation. The input of contemporary artists also remains important.

Programme 2021 -2023

HUMAN ZOO

9 November 2021 - 6 March 2022

EUROPA OXALÁ

September 2022- December 2022

TIERRA INFINATA

October 2022- December 2022

WALSCHOT

Spring 2023 - Summer 2023

DECOLONIZING NATURE

Autumn 2023

Human Zoo (working title)

9 November 2021 - 6 March 2022

Human Zoo is a travelling exhibition created by Pascal Blanchard (ACHAC) that sheds light on the forgotten history of the Human Zoos. In Tervuren, the exhibition is linked to the anniversary of the colonial exhibition held there 125 years ago as part of the 1897 International Exposition in Brussels. As part of the latter, three Congolese villages were reproduced in Tervuren's Warande Park as a visitor attraction.

Two of the 269 Congolese forced to temporarily populate these villages died during the journey to Tervuren. A further seven Congolese - Ekia, Gemba, Kitukwa, Mpeia, Zao, Samba and Mibange - failed to survive the chilly summer and are buried in Tervuren.

The curators of the exhibition are Pascal Blanchard (ACHAC), Maarten Couttenier (MRAC) et Mathieu Zana Etambala.



Europa Oxalá

September 2022 - December 2022

The Europa Oxalá exhibition is a contemporary travelling exhibition on the subject of the 'New Europeans'. It is a co-production by the KMMA, MUCEM (Marseille) and Gulbenkian (Lisbon), at the initiative of the European research project MEMOIRS - Enfants d'Empires et Postmémoires Européennes conducted by the study centre for social studies at the University of Coimbra, and of the Gulbenkian Foundation in Paris.

This exhibition sheds light on the search for a European identity seen through the eyes of Afropean artists.

The exhibition asks questions about what Europe is and what the European identity means for generations who live in Europe, with a European background, but whose origins lie in former

colonies. The exhibition seeks to listen to their voices, to these children of the former colonies who see themselves as "newcomers". They are often considered to be non-European but they are a part of European history. How should one respond to that? What do they think of Europe and how can a new vision of Europe take shape?

The exhibition Europa, Oxalá presents about sixty works (paintings, drawings, sculptures, films, photos, installations) by twenty-one artists: Aimé Mpane, Aimé Ntakiyica, Carlos Bunga, Délio Jasse, Djamel Kokene-Dorléans, Fayçal Baghriche, Francisco Vidal, John K. Cobra, Katia Kameli, Mohamed Bourouissa, Josèfa Ntjam, Malala Andrialavidrazana, Márcio de Carvalho, Mónica de Miranda, Nú Barreto, Pauliana Valente Pimentel, Pedro A.H. Paixão, Sabrina Belouaar, Sammy Baloji, Sandra Mujinga, Sara Sadik.

© Márcio de Carvalho, courtesy de l'artiste



Márcio Carvalho, Falling Thrones 2019 Statue: King João I Athlète: Josina Muthemba Machel, 2019, micro pigment ink and acrylic on paper, 1,60 x 1,50m



© Sabrina Montiel-Soto

Tierra Infinita

October 2022 - December 2022

Tierra infinita is a contemporary art installation by the Venezuelan artist Sabrina Montiel-Soto that is part of the AfricaMuseum's permanent exhibition. The work is the culmination of two years' research by the artist. The objects and specimens presented in the display cabinets are her starting point; to these she adds elements such as drawings, sculptures, objects, words, films, sound and photographs. As a result, these items are transformed and

tell new stories. She explores what connects and divides Africa and America, now and in the past. Themes include ecology and the environment, colonial history and post-colonial societies.

Jeanne Walschot (working title)

Spring 2023 - Summer 2023

This exhibition unravels the complex process by which Africa collections found their way here. The intriguing figure of the Brussels art dealer and collector Jeanne Walschot forms the exhibition's unifying thread. Her collections were left to the KMMA as a legacy.

The collection was built up by Walschot in Belgium over the course of the 20th century, from the time of the First World War until the early 1970s. She had a shop in central Brussels that became known, also internationally, as a place to go to for "Congoliana". She also bought through adverts placed by old colonials and

undertook active research at the places where they originated.

As is often the case for items from private collections that are now in the museum, a lot of information about the circumstances of their acquisition in the Congo has been lost.

© J. Van de Vyver, RMCA Tervuren



Nkishi. Krachtbeeld / Statue de force / Power figure. Lomami, RD Congo. [Songye]. 20th century. Wood, copper alloy, iron, plant fibre, horn, hide. Bequest from J. Walschot. 1980. EO.1980.2.492.



© edliadi/CIFOR

Deforestation in the DRC.

Decolonizing Nature (working title) Autumn 2023

Decolonize nature (working title) refers to the literal colonization of nature by humans, but also to the link between the current crises and our colonial history. Colonization of other societies and colonization of nature went hand in hand, starting in the 15th century. Lastly, it also refers to the fact that we are currently colonizing our future.

This exhibition will make the visitor realize that the underlying ideology of Western colonization not only impacted populations in large parts of the world, but also defined the way nature is viewed and treated. This Eurocentric vision and exclusionary approach alienates non-white audiences and perpetuates the belief that racialized people are not interested in the environment.

Cutting off and ignoring local communities also dismisses centuries of indigenous knowledge systems.

By adding African perspectives and narratives, and by including artists' voices, the exhibition aims to expose the blind spots and to (co-)create an inclusive story of Nature (and how to respect and protect it).

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

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The press kit and photos can be downloaded at <https://press.africamuseum.be>.

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