

"AFRICA IN MUSEUM"

DIALOGUE ON AFRICAN ARTIFACTS IN SWITZERLAND

12.3.2024 / 18H / HEILIGGEISTKIRCHE, SPITALGASSE 44, 3011 BERNE

1. Background Information.

Beginning in December 2021, the African Diaspora Council of Switzerland (ADCS) and the African Foundation for Migration & Development (AFMD) initiated a congenial and peaceful process towards researching the presence of African arts in Swiss museums. The approach consists of identifying African artifacts, their provenance, mapping, and eventual restitution. This project was initiated under the auspices of the Forum of Sovereigns and Traditional Leaders of Africa (FSTLA).

This approach also follows the general global trend and public discourse on the diverse African artifacts deposited in museums in the Global North and elsewhere. There were reports in Swiss media underscoring the need for research on provenance and eventual restitution of African artifacts in Switzerland. Indeed, "the development of African youths is particularly threatened by the forfeiture of rights to artistic and cultural heritage. A large part of this cultural heritage is now stored in museums in Europe," as reported in (Swissinfo, 13.12.2020). In addition, "decolonization only works if you find all the people involved, bring them to the museum, listen to them, and involve them in the decisions. It is only when they feel that they are part of the project that it is a success" (Swissinfo, 13.12.2020).

In this process, delegations have been sent to several Swiss museums which led to the discovery of other different individual and group initiatives already ongoing in the same direction, such as the **Swiss Benin Initiative (SBI)**. An initiative of a coalition of 8 Swiss museums that conducts research and studies on the provenance of the art collections of the ancient Benin Kingdom of Nigeria. This collaborative research work is carried out in collaboration with their Nigerian colleagues and supported by the governments of both countries. Unfortunately, these ongoing initiatives are not well known and communicated to the larger Swiss public. This public dialogue aims to bring the initiative to a larger public domain. Furthermore, in 2020, the Swiss Provenance Research Association was founded with the aim of bringing together researchers active in the field of provenance research in museums, archives, libraries, universities and the provenance art market and to provide opportunities for exchange and sharing of results.

On January 12, 2024, the Federal Office of Culture (FOC) appointed **Nikola Doll** responsible for the area of looted art and provenance research.

2. Objectives and Impact

The aim of the event during the week against racism, as a side event of the Museumsnacht (Museum Night) in Bern, is primarily to raise awareness about the presence of African artifacts in Swiss museums. Additionally, it aims to highlight ongoing and completed research and studies regarding the origins and significance of these artifacts in their respective communities. The event provides a public platform for the museums and relevant authorities to inform the public about their activities, achievements, opportunities, and any challenges they may face, thereby helping to prevent misinformation in the public sphere. Furthermore,

the event aims to promote best practices in the decolonization process. Members of the public will have the opportunity to express their views and ask questions for clarification. Ultimately, this initiative ensures that the Swiss public is informed with accurate, first-hand information about this commendable project, enabling them to discern against any negative narratives surrounding the subject matter."

The event will feature an art exhibition.

It is organized in the margin of the week against racism pararel to the "Museumsnacht" and the "Festival der Kulturen,". It aims to gather a diverse array of artists and cultural groups in Bern during this week. The event is coordinated by a coalition of interested partners, including the African Diaspora Council of Switzerland (ADCS), Offene Kirche, African Foundation and Development (AFMD), Ajere African Heritage...

06:00pm A. OPENING CEREMONY

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Pat Santschi
Host / Präsidentin
Celeste Ugochukwu
African Diaspora Council
of Switzerland | 2. Moderation
Elisa da Costa
BA in Social Science (Media, Communications, Film)
MA Student, Center for African Studies
University of Basel |
| 3. Andreas Nufer
Pfarrer und Projektleiter
Offene Kirche Bern | 4. Hon Chijoke Ani
Chargé d'Affaires
Nigeria Embassy Bern |

06:15pm GUEST SPEAKERS

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Swiss Benin-Nigeria Initiative
Dr. Michaela Oberhofer
Curator Collections Africa und Oceania
Co-Leiterin der Benin Initiative Schweiz
Stadt Zürich, Museum Rietberg | 2. Initiative South Africa
Julien Glauser
Conservateur adjoint
Curateur collections d'Afrique
Musée d'ethnographie Neuchâtel |
| 3. Initiative Rwanda
Dr Alexis Malefakis
Curator Collections Africa
Völkerkundemuseum der Universität Zürich | 4. Initiative Namibia
Samuel Bachmann
Curator Collections Africa
Bernisches Historisches Museum |

07:15pm Q & R, comments, observations

07:30pm Aperitif