



The British Museum's Africa Programme

In London, in the UK, in Africa

This year Africa will be the focus of important political and cultural events and, against this backdrop, the British Museum will be engaging intensively with African arts and cultures in London, in the UK and in Africa itself. The British Museum houses one of the world's finest and most comprehensive collections of material from Africa. Over half a million objects from two million years of history tell the story of a vast continent, a continent of many rich and diverse cultures. The African collection at the British Museum tells the largely unwritten history of Africa.

The British Museum is a key partner in the **Africa 05** season and special displays, new installations and an extensive public programme will run at the Museum between February and October. But the Museum also aims to stimulate debate about African issues across the UK as it tours the **Throne of Weapons** to over twenty venues in 2005. The Throne, which was made in Mozambique from decommissioned arms, will travel on short-term loan to museums and galleries, but in **a first for the British Museum**, it will also tour on day trips to non-museum venues including schools, cathedrals, community and shopping centres. The Throne of Weapons tour is supported by the UK National Commission for UNESCO.

In Africa itself, the first phase of the British Museum's **Africa project** is underway. The project, funded for three years by DCMS and the British Council involves extending relationships and developing partnerships with African museums through skill sharing, loan programmes and joint research and conservation work. British Museum curators have worked in African countries for decades researching, collecting and collaborating with African colleagues. Through the Africa project the Museum now hopes to encourage an alternative, African, interpretation of its collection. Several curatorial secondments have already been arranged including one with the National Museums of Kenya. Kenyan curator Kiprop Lagat is currently at the Museum choosing around 150 objects which will be loaned to Kenya for an exhibition examining East African trade, traditions and transitions in spring 2006. This will be the **first time the British Museum has loaned objects in this way to sub-Saharan Africa**.

The British Museum hopes the Africa project will enable us to build lasting partnerships with African institutions, to share knowledge, skills and objects in a reciprocal, collaborative way. The Throne of Weapons tour will extend the focus on Africa across the UK, encouraging different venues to pose questions which challenge pre-conceptions of African contemporary society. Africa 05 in London aims to stimulate a new perspective on the cultures of the continent.

For further information or images please contact Hannah Boulton on 020 7323 8522 or hboulton@thebritishmuseum.ac.uk

In London – Africa at the British Museum

The British Museum will present a series of special displays and exhibitions on a broad range of African themes. A new gallery space will open with '**Made in Africa**' a display of stone tools from the Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania. These two million year old tools are some of the oldest man-made objects in the world and remind us that human society, art and technology all began in Africa. '**View from Africa**' will open in April, featuring objects which show African depictions of Europeans, reflected through the complex set of changing relationships between the two continents. The current **Wealth of Africa** exhibition in the coins and medals gallery examines the continent of Africa through its currency, from raffia cloth to cowrie shells, from copper ingots to coins.

The dramatic **Tree of Life** sculpture from Mozambique is on display in the Great Court. Made by artists from the Nucleo de Arte using decommissioned weapons from the Mozambique civil war, the sculpture serves as both a powerful reminder of sixteen years of bloody conflict and as a symbol of hope for the future. The sculpture was made under the Transforming Arms into Tools programme (TAE) which is supported by Christian Aid.

New displays in the Sainsbury African Galleries offer a chance to see recent acquisitions and star loans. A specially designed trail will be available to guide visitors to the objects from Africa throughout the collection. In addition, personal responses to African objects have been sought from members of London's African heritage communities. These responses will be displayed by objects in relevant galleries across the Museum.

The public programme includes a lecture by popular Senegalese singer Baaba Maal on 10 February and a major conference on African Art on 11- 12 February entitled 'In and Out of Africa' and supported by the British Council. The BBC World Service will broadcast two debates from the conference, looking at whether art can change and challenge a nation. Dance and music performances, gallery talks, family events and film and documentary seasons will run throughout Africa 05.

Notes to Editors

- The Sainsbury African Galleries display the greatest permanent collection of African arts and culture in Europe including many contemporary works. Over 600 objects from across the Africa reveal the diversity and vitality of the continent's artistic achievements.
- **Africa 05** is a series of major cultural events taking place in London that celebrates contemporary and past cultures from across the continent and the diaspora. Key partners for Africa 05 are Arts Council England, the British Museum and the South Bank Centre, in association with the BBC. For further information on Africa 05 please contact Georgina Langdale on 020 7631 2666 or email georgina@colmangettypr.co.uk

In the UK – Throne of Weapons Tour

Supported by the UK National Commission for UNESCO

As part of its Partnership UK scheme - the largest and most wide-ranging of any partnership scheme between a national institution and other museums around the country - the British Museum will be touring the Throne of Weapons made by the Mozambican artist Kester. The Throne will tour to many venues across the country, to museums and galleries but also for the **first time** to non-museum venues such as cathedrals, schools, community centres, a shopping centre, national Youth Parliaments, and forums in Scotland. It is hoped that taking the Throne into these different environments will stimulate debate and challenge assumptions about African cultures.

The Throne, like the Tree of Life, is made from weapons decommissioned after the Mozambique civil war under the auspices of the Transforming Arms into Tools (TAE) project established by the Christian Council of Mozambique and supported by Christian Aid. The components of the Throne reflect the extent of the international arms trade, and the Throne has an added significance in Africa where carved stools and chairs are symbols of power and prestige. More information on the Throne can be found at www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/compass or www.christian-aid.org.uk/africa05

The Throne is a thought-provoking sculpture which represents both conflict and resolution. It encourages its audience to consider questions of contemporary politics and the complexities linking Africa to the rest of the world. But it also provokes contemplation of questions closer to home including gun crime, decommissioning in Northern Ireland and conflict resolution. The Throne will tour to venues such as the Horniman Museum in London, Ulster Museum in Belfast and the National Museum and Gallery of Wales in Cardiff. Debates, discussions and workshops at these venues will encourage visitors to engage with and respond to the questions posed by the Throne. **Day trips** to primary and secondary schools and Gateshead Metro Centre and short term loans to Liverpool Cathedral, the J8 Summit in Edinburgh and Stirling University for the sitting of the UK Youth Parliament, will place the chair in unusual, potentially provocative contexts, ones which may generate a new kind of response from its audience.

Tour Dates:

9 - 28 February: Horniman Museum, **London**

2 March: Launch to MP's at Westminster, London

5 March – 10 April: **Belfast**, Ulster Museum

13 -18 April: New Walk Museum, **Leicester** with day trips to Moat Community College on the 14 April and Sir Jonathan North Community College on the 18.

20 April – 8 May: Shipley Art Gallery in **Gateshead** with Day trip to a school in Kingsmeadow, Gateshead and the Gateshead Metro Centre on 5 May

10 May - 5 June: National Museums and Galleries of Wales, **Cardiff** with day trips to Mount Stuart Primary School and the new Millennium Centre

7 - 12 June: **Liverpool** Anglican Cathedral

14 June – 3 July: **Manchester** Museum.

4-5 July: J8 Summit in **Edinburgh**

9-24 July: **Perth** Museum and Art Gallery

25-29 July: **Stirling** University for national sitting of UK Youth Parliament

1 – 30 October: Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery

In Africa – The Africa Project

Funded by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and in partnership with the British Council

Funding for the Africa Project was announced by the Prime Minister in December 2003. Since then the British Museum has begun to develop and extend its partnerships with museums and institutions in Africa in order to broaden engagement with its collection. The objectives of the project include skill sharing, loan agreements, the development of research techniques and the establishment of a programme of interpretation of the collections. Curatorial exchanges have also been developed with museums in Sudan where the British Museum is already involved in rescue archaeology at the Merowe Dam. Two Sudanese curators will arrive at the Museum shortly to commence a training programme covering collections management, exhibitions, conservation and fieldwork techniques. A partnership was agreed in 2004 with the Supreme Council of Antiquities in Egypt to bring three museum professionals from Egypt to the British Museum annually for a period of eight weeks to provide work-shadowing and training. This programme will last for five years in the lead-up to the opening of the Grand Museum in Cairo scheduled for 2009. The British Museum has an extensive excavation programme in Egypt. No objects come to London but they are jointly researched by British Museum and Egyptian scholars.

Already underway is an exchange with the National Museums of Kenya. Mr Kiprop Lagat has been at the British Museum since September 2004 on a 7 month secondment from Nairobi. Whilst he is in the UK he will be reviewing the British Museum's East African collections with a view to sending an exhibition to Nairobi in 2006. This is the **first time that an exhibition has been conceived in this way** and we anticipate that it will provide an opportunity for an alternative interpretation, an African one, of the Museum's collections. The exhibition for East Africa is being developed with the British Council in Kenya who will take on the logistics and delivery of the exhibition in partnership with the British Museum.

In the near future we will also be establishing a training programme with the National Museum of Ethiopia following a discussion of the museum's conservation needs next year. The Museum is also investigating how it can assist with the rebuilding of southern Sudan's cultural infrastructure subsequent to the signature of peace agreements in the area. This work clearly demonstrates the role that cultural institutions can play in helping to rebuild post-conflict nations and fostering long-term relationships.

Joining the British Museum in late Spring as curator of the west African collections is Dr Claude Ardouin, former Director of the National Museums of Mali. He will be looking to broaden the programme by developing strong relationships with museums in west Africa.

The Museum is also engaged in preparing a major conference with the British Council in Mombassa next autumn on the issues facing cultural institutions in Africa. This conference will we hope be a catalyst for further initiatives in addition to those planned for other parts of Africa in 2005/06. A conference on maritime archaeology in Zanzibar is also under consideration.