

# Africa 05 at the British Museum

The British Museum houses one of the world's finest and most comprehensive collections of objects from Africa. Over half a million objects from two million years of history tell the story of a vast continent, a continent of many diverse cultures. From the earliest human origins to the present day, the Museum's galleries allow us to explore the unwritten story of Africa. During the Museum's 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2003, Ben Okri described the British Museum as 'the memory of mankind'. The collection asserts Africa's continuing vibrancy and creativity, evidenced from the oldest man-made objects from Olduvai Gorge, Tanzania, to the Benin Bronzes through to the newly commissioned installation, the Tree of Life. Visitors to the Museum can see Africa in its many contexts and address through objects, ancient and modern, pertinent questions of history and contemporary politics.

The British Museum is working with forty London-based partners on Africa 05 and it is also planning touring activity to venues across the UK and to Africa itself. The programme at the British Museum will include new displays and installations and a wide-ranging public programme incorporating performance - from music and dance to story-telling. African cultures are not static but dynamic, and performance is integral to an understanding of the material culture of the continent. The British Museum's Africa 05 programme will launch in the new year and continue until October. Highlights include:

## **Made In Africa**

The Asahi Shimbun Display  
27 January – 2 April 2005

The oldest objects in the British Museum, which are among the oldest man made objects in the world, come from Africa. A selection of 2 million year old stone tools from Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania will go on display in a new gallery devoted to temporary topical exhibitions. These tools remind us that human life, society, technology and art all began in Africa. Later displays in this gallery will feature work by the North African artist Rachid Koraichi and West African Bronzes.

## **The Tree Of Life**

From early February 2005

An installation of an exciting new work, commissioned by Christian Aid and the British Museum and made by a group of four artists from the Nucleo de Arte in Mozambique. The Tree of Life sculpture is made from weapons decommissioned from the Mozambique civil war. Under the Transforming Arms into Tools project, people are encouraged to hand in guns in exchange for sewing machines, bicycles and even tractors. These weapons are then dismantled and used to make works of art which are vivid reminders of 16 years of bloody civil war as well as powerful symbols of hope for the future.

## **Africa 05 Conference – Continental Dialogues**

10 – 12 February 2005

Conceived by Augustus Casely-Hayford ( Programme Director for Africa 05 ), the conference, in sessions on identity, collectives and medium, will bring together some of the most respected African artists and other experts in the field to discuss the state of African art. It is hoped that the conference will help to create a new perspectives on African cultures in this period of profound change. Guest speakers will include Lola Young, John Picton, Simon Njami, El Anatsui, Ibrahim El Salahi and Lara Baladi among others.

### **New Displays**

From 10 February 2005

Sainsbury African Galleries & Greek and Roman Galleries

To coincide with Africa 05, some of the objects on display in the Museum's popular African Galleries will be rotated. Visitors will have a chance to see newly acquired works by the artist Rachid Koraichi including a large metal sculpture from his 'Path of Roses' installation and a selection of wonderful gold embroidered silk banners. Also on display will be loaned objects by the South African artist Owen Ndou (the 'Oxford Man' wood sculpture), and an Ethiopian painting depicting 'The coronation of Haile Selassie' in the form of the Last Supper with animals instead of humans. In the Greek and Roman Galleries, changing displays will highlight the connections between Classical Greece and Africa and the Roman Empire's long involvement in the continent.

### **The Wealth of Africa, 4,000 years of money and trade**

20 January – 26 June 2005

This exhibition examines the continent of Africa through its currency, from raffia cloth to cowrie shells, from copper ingots to coins. The exhibition reveals Africa's power and influence before the arrival of European colonisers and slave traders. It explores the links between money and identity through changes to the coinage during the spread of Christianity and Islam, and the designing of currencies in the twentieth century for newly-independent African countries, for example South Africa.

### **Public Programme**

February – October 2005

The Museum will be working on community projects to draw in and engage new audiences. In addition, the public programme will include gallery talks, tours, films, handling sessions, half-term events and a special trail which will take visitors across all the galleries of the Museum to reinforce the impact and influence that Africa has had across the world.

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