

Wereldmuseum Berg en Dal

Abstract

The Wereldmuseum Berg en Dal, previously known as the Afrika Museum, was a museum in Berg en Dal, a village close to the city of Nijmegen. The museum was founded in 1954 by the catholic Congregation of the Holy Spirit. Since 2014, the museum was part of the Dutch National Museum of World Cultures until it closed its doors in 2023.

History of the museum

The Wereldmuseum Berg en Dal, hereinafter referred to as the Afrika Museum, was founded in 1954 by the [Congregation of the Holy Spirit](#) (sometimes abbreviated as CSSp) at villa Ooster Meerwijk near Nijmegen. Before long there was not enough space to exhibit the objects brought back by missionaries from African countries and so in 1957 the museum was moved to a new building in Berg en Dal, which remained in use until the closure of the museum in 2023. Although the collection initially consisted of objects donated by missionaries, in the second half of the twentieth century it expanded to include donations from expats living in Africa and African embassies and eventually also through acquisitions.

As early as 1956 the museum was operated by the Stichting Afrika Museum foundation and received, in addition to the collection, an annual donation from the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. Because of this independent position, the focus during the 1960s and 1970s shifted more towards the scientific approach to African cultural objects, leading to cooperation with the Roman Catholic Radboud University in Nijmegen. In 1974 the congregation decided to discontinue its contribution to the museum, as a result of which the Afrika Museum became entirely dependent on government funding. The museum grounds were subsequently put at the museum's disposal by the congregation and the Stichting Afrika Museum was charged a peppercorn rent for the building. The collection was loaned to the foundation.

The Afrika Museum was known for the various replicas of African homes built on the museum grounds which were open to visitors. This outdoor museum, firstly also featuring an animal park, was founded in 1958 and expanded in 1987. As part of a centralisation policy in 2014 the Afrika Museum was merged with [Museum Volkenkunde](#) in Leiden, [the Tropenmuseum](#) in Amsterdam and subsequently also [the Wereldmuseum](#) in Rotterdam into the National Museum of World Cultures. As of 2023 the museums continue under the name of Wereldmuseum.

In 2021 a dispute arose between the Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen (National Museum of World Cultures) and the Congregation of the Holy Spirit over the future course of the museum. The positions of the museum foundation, which rents the building and has part of the collection on loan from the congregation, were so far apart that it was decided to close the museum at the end of 2023. In late 2024 the court ruled that the collection of the former Afrika Museum is the property of the fathers of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. What this ruling means for the future accessibility of the collection is still unclear.

[image] *A few of the African houses on the terrain of the former Wereldmuseum Berg en Dal, 2007* ([Rokus Cornelis](#))

Provenance research

The Afrika Museum collection consists of a large number of African art objects and artefacts, some of which were brought back by missionaries and some of which were purchased. The Afrika Museum collection can be recognised within the Wereldmuseum collection by the attribute 'AM'.

The archives of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit are available through the [Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven](https://erfgoedcentrum.nl/) heritage centre in St. Agatha. The archives of the Stichting Afrika Museum foundation can be found under 'Overige deelarchieven'. Documents relating to the Afrika Museum can also be found in the congregation's other archives. Prior permission from the provincial government is required to view records. Permission can be requested through the Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven by sending an email to studiezaal@erfgoedkloosterleven.nl.

For specific information on objects the Wereldmuseum can also be contacted at collectieinfo@wereldmuseum.nl. The museum database contains the original inventory cards and handwritten object registers.

Related Aids

- [Sources](#)
- [Christian missionaries in colonised territories](#)
- [Nederlands Volkenkundig Missiemuseum](#)
- [Nederlandsch Zendeling Genootschap](#)
- [Nijmeegs Volkenkundig Museum](#)
- [Wereldmuseum Leiden](#)
- [Wereldmuseum Rotterdam](#)
- [Wereldmuseum Amsterdam](#)
- [Missiemuseum Steyl](#)
- [Natuurhistorisch en Volkenkundig Museum Oudenbosch](#)

Primary sources

Archive:

AR-P009 Archiefinventaris Congregatie van de H. Geest - 3.1 Stichting Afrika Museum Archive of the Stichting Afrika Museum within the archives of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. Contains a wide range of documentation related to the Afrika Museum, from catalogues to rental agreements.

<https://proxy.archieven.nl/1212/06C31EFBB73F49409D979D5EF05DF9D4>

Secondary sources

Book:

Grootaers, Jan-Lodewijk, Eisenburger, Ineke, and Damme Annemieke van. Vormen van Verwondering : De geschiedenis en de collecties van het Afrika Museum, Berg en Dal. Berg en Dal: Afrika Museum, 2002. This book from 2002, consisting of two volumes, describes the history of the establishment of the Afrika Museum and provides an overview of the collections held by the museum at the time.

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