

N.C. Museum of Art to Feature African Creativity Spanning 16 Centuries in New, Expanded Gallery
Gallery to open in summer 2017

Raleigh, N.C.—This summer the North Carolina Museum of Art (NCMA) will open a new, expanded African art gallery in the Museum’s East Building. The new gallery will be three times as large as the current West Building gallery, allowing the Museum to display nearly twice as many works—including some that have not been on view in a decade, and others that are newly acquired and have never before been seen. The new gallery will feature improved light control so that light-sensitive works of art, such as textiles and works on paper, can be given more visibility, shown in curated rotations. Additionally, the gallery will include a designated space to highlight North Carolina collections of African art from private collectors and public institutions, beginning with work from Bennett College.

The Museum’s curatorial, design, conservation, and education teams have been working with consulting curator Elizabeth Perrill on a cohesive reinstatement plan. The Museum’s East Building’s 3,000 square feet of entry level spaces will be repurposed into galleries, participatory studios, and interpretive spaces to better engage the visitor through experiences that cultivate creativity, imagination, and experimentation.



Consulting curator Elizabeth Perrill explains her curatorial vision: “The permanent African galleries will guide visitors following a geographic orientation, with maps to orient visitors. These geographic zones are enriched through thematic emphases, as well as areas featuring individual artistic traditions. The plan features stylistic comparisons and continuities, with a particular stress on the diversity of African creativity.” Object displays and gallery sections—focusing on the intricacy and stylistic specificity of artworks—include gold and regalia, masquerade (enlivened by films of performances and two reconstructions of full-scale masquerade ensembles), and modern and contemporary art.

The reinstatement project is funded by a \$500,000 grant from the William R. Kenan Jr. Charitable Trust. The grant also funded the creation of a new media and photography gallery, and the renovation and expansion of one of the Museum’s educational studio spaces.

Features of the New Gallery

- **African art spanning 16 centuries:** The scale and scope of this permanent collection installation provides visitors with the opportunity to see African creativity that spans sixteen centuries. The gallery will emphasize the ongoing dynamism of the African continent in both ancient times and today: the oldest work on view will be a circa 600 terracotta sculpture, and the newest work will be a site-specific drawing by Nigerian-born artist Victor Ekpuk to be created in June 2017. The new gallery will highlight additional modern and contemporary works of art by African artists, including El Anatsui’s large-scale *Lines That Link Humanity*. Contemporary African works will also continue to be seen in both the NCMA’s Ann and Jim Goodnight Museum Park, as well as in West Building’s modern and contemporary galleries.
- **African art spanning the continent:** In the new gallery, geographic focal spaces will highlight distinct stylistic trends and conceptual themes from across the continent. To complement previous strengths in West

and Central Africa, the gallery will include a new focal area featuring Southern and Eastern African art. The NCMA's Egyptian Gallery will stay in West Building to maintain the historical timeframe and context with the Museum's other ancient art collections, including Greek and Roman.

- **More gallery space:** The new gallery will be three times as large as the old gallery, both allowing more works to be on view and dedicating more space to each individual work. With the additional space, the Museum can organize the collection in meaningful ways, and even small works can be viewed closely and appreciated as great works of art.
- **More works of art on view:** The average number of works on view will grow from 65 in the old gallery to 125 in the new gallery, including works that have not been on view in over a decade and new works that have never before been displayed. In fact, in the new gallery's curated rotation schedule, 107 works of art that are newly acquired, loaned, or have not been on view for over 10 years will be on display. Additionally, the presentation of African women's creative practices has been bolstered by new inclusions of ceramic arts.
- **North Carolina collections:** The new gallery will include a wall dedicated to North Carolina collections, both public and private. The first rotation of this exciting new space will focus on 10 works of art from the Bennett College art collection recently donated from the estate of Warren M. Robbins, founder of the National Museum of African Art at the Smithsonian. Says Dr. Phyllis Worthy Dawkins, interim president of Bennett College, "Bennett College is pleased to be a part of this exciting African art exhibition. The sharing of these items from our African Art collection undoubtedly enhance the public's awareness of the uniqueness of this form of art as well as an appreciation for the preservation and exhibition of various art cultures. We welcome the opportunity to continue the collaboration with the North Carolina Museum of Art in future exhibitions."
- **Improved lighting controls:** The new gallery in East Building will have lighting controls that allow the Museum to display a broader range of materials than in the West Building gallery. Light-sensitive art—such as textiles, costumes, and photography—will be shown in curated rotations, offering more visibility to these types of works.

- **Site-specific work by Nigerian-born artist Victor Ekpuk:** The first rotation of the new African art gallery will feature a 30 x 18 foot site-specific wall drawing commissioned by Nigerian-born and D.C.-based artist Victor Ekpuk (pictured right), whose recent exhibitions at the Havana Biennale and London have earned him international acclaim. This installation will highlight the grandeur of the new East Building location and emphasize the NCMA's commitment to accentuating Africa's role as a nexus of contemporary art.



- **Interactive studio space:** The education gallery (Studio 3) will serve as an interpretive space for the newly installed African Gallery and focus on Central and West African textiles. This three-room gallery will showcase African textiles from the collection, reading areas for children and adults, interactive technology, and hands-on activities. A focal point in this gallery will be a massive collaborative loom where visitors will be invited to experiment with a variety of materials and weaving techniques.

While the collection is off view this winter and spring, the Museum's conservation and design teams will work to prepare the collection and the new gallery space. The Museum's collection and the works on loan will receive conservational review and treatment—including removing dust, dirt, and debris; stabilizing any structural weaknesses due to insect damage in the wood; and cleaning decorative elements such as metal applique, feathers, plastic fibers, and fabric. Additionally, new mounts will be created for some of the works to accommodate the new gallery's design and to display the works appropriately and safely.

Timeline

- **December 2016:** Works of art go off view in West Building African art gallery.
- **December 2016–June 2017:** Works of art (including the works on loan from local collections) undergo conservational review and treatment; new mounts are created.

- **February 2017–June 2017:** The new East Building gallery is renovated and prepared; works are installed.
- **June 2017:** Contemporary Nigerian-born artist Victor Ekpuk creates site-specific mural in new gallery.
- **June 30, 2017:** New African art gallery is complete.
- **July–September 2017:** After a soft opening of the new gallery, the Museum hosts programs celebrating African art, including lectures, concerts, film screenings, and more.
- **September 2017:** The Museum hosts an African art celebration.

"We are eager to celebrate the rich, diverse cultures of Africa and—at last—elevate them to a central showcase in the Museum. This new, expanded gallery will give the African collection the attention it so deserves, welcoming our visitors as they enter the building and offering opportunities to engage with and experience the art," says Lawrence J. Wheeler, director of the NCMA. "We are grateful to the William R. Kenan Jr. Charitable Trust, whose critical and generous grant served as a catalyst to the Museum's master plan to rehabilitate the Museum's East Building as a dynamic place for enjoying art and educational activities."

Visitors are encouraged to follow along as the Museum prepares to open the new gallery by visiting ncartmuseum.org/africangallery. The web page includes a timeline, highlights of the collection, and a continually updated slideshow featuring behind-the-scenes images of the conservation and design process. Additional video and blog content will also follow the reinstallation project.

Image captions (top to bottom):

Conceptual rendering of East Building African Art Gallery

Victor Ekpuk works on *Meditation on Memory* at the Havana Biennial in 2015

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About the North Carolina Museum of Art

The North Carolina Museum of Art's permanent collection spans more than 5,000 years, from ancient Egypt to the present, making the institution one of the premier art museums in the South. The Museum's collection provides educational, aesthetic, intellectual, and cultural experiences for the citizens of North Carolina and beyond. The 164-acre Museum Park showcases the connection between art and nature through site-specific works of environmental art. The Museum offers changing national touring exhibitions, classes, lectures, family activities, films, and concerts.

The Museum opened West Building, home to the permanent collection, in 2010. The North Carolina Museum of Art, Lawrence J. Wheeler, director, is located at 2110 Blue Ridge Road in Raleigh. It is the art museum of the State of North Carolina, Pat McCrory, governor, and an agency of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, Susan Kluttz, secretary.