

North Carolina Museum of Art Opens Expanded African Art Gallery with More Opportunities to Learn and Interact

Museum celebrates new gallery with summer programming and September community event for all ages, including free concert with Grammy award winner Angélique Kidjo

Raleigh, N.C.—On Friday, June 30, the North Carolina Museum of Art (NCMA) opens its new, expanded [African art gallery](#). The 6,500-square-foot gallery, reinstalled on the entry level of the Museum’s East Building, is three times as large as the old gallery and features African creativity spanning 16 centuries. Highlights of the gallery include improved light control, a site-specific wall drawing by Nigerian-American artist Victor Ekpuk, a special North Carolina lender wall, and nearly twice as many works of art on view—including some that have not been on display in a

decade. The Museum also opens an interactive learning space that invites visitors to learn more about the collection and create their own art. To launch the new gallery, the Museum will host several public programs this summer and an [all-day community celebration](#) and [free concert](#) on September 23.

“We are excited to welcome the community to explore and celebrate the rich, diverse cultures of Africa in our new African art gallery,” says Director Lawrence J. Wheeler. “This expanded gallery and new interactive learning space elevates our African collection to a central showcase in the Museum, giving it the attention it so deserves and offering visitors countless opportunities to engage with and experience this powerful art.”



Highlights of the New African Art Gallery

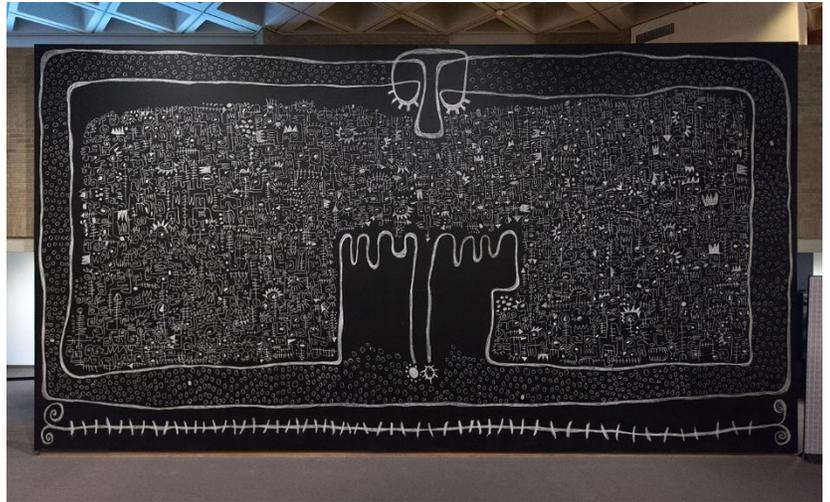
The expanded African art gallery in the NCMA’s East Building features:

- **African art spanning 16 centuries:** The scale and scope of this permanent collection installation provides visitors the opportunity to see African creativity that spans 16 centuries. The gallery emphasizes the ongoing dynamism of the continent in both ancient times and today: the oldest work on view is a circa 600 terracotta sculpture, and the newest is a site-specific drawing by Nigerian-born artist Victor Ekpuk. The new gallery highlights additional modern and contemporary works by African artists, including El Anatsui’s large-scale *Lines That Link Humanity*.
- **African art spanning the continent:** In the new gallery, geographic focal spaces highlight distinct stylistic trends and conceptual themes from across the continent. To complement previous strengths in West and Central Africa, the gallery includes a new focal area for Southern and Eastern African art.
- **More gallery space:** The new gallery is three times as large as the old gallery. The larger space allows more works to be on view and also dedicates more space to each individual work. With the additional space, 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 grows from 65 at a time in the old gallery to 125 in the new, including works that have not been on view in over a decade and new acquisitions

and donations that have never before been displayed. In the new gallery's curated rotation schedule, 107 works 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.

- **Improved lighting controls:** The new gallery in East Building has lighting controls that allow the Museum to safely display a variety of materials. Light-sensitive art—such as textiles, costumes, and photography—will be shown in curated rotations, offering more visibility to these types of works.
- **North Carolina collections:** The new gallery includes a wall dedicated to North Carolina collections, both public and private. The first rotation of this exciting new space focuses on 10 works of art, such as the beaded skirt pictured above, from the Bennett College art collection recently donated from the estate of Warren M. Robbins. Robbins was 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 enhances the public's awareness of the uniqueness of this form of art as well as fostering 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."



- **Site-specific work by Nigerian-American artist Victor Ekpuk:** The first rotation of the new African art gallery features *Divinity*, a 30-by-18-foot site-specific chalk wall drawing by Nigerian-American and D.C.-based artist Victor Ekpuk (pictured above right). His recent exhibitions at the Havana Biennale and in London have earned him international acclaim. This installation highlights the grandeur of the new East Building location and emphasizes the NCMA's commitment to accentuating Africa's role as a nexus of contemporary art.

Interactive Learning Space: Threads of Experience

Based on responses collected from online surveys, visitor intercepts, and community panels, the Museum's Education Department developed a new interactive learning space—called Threads of Experience—that engages the visitor through experiences that cultivate creativity, imagination, and experimentation. The learning space, adjacent to the African art gallery and focused on Central and West African textiles, features several hands-on activities, including:

- **An interactive mirror** in which the visitor's image is made up of images of patterned works of art including textiles, beads, carved wood, and crinkled metal from objects in our African collection.
- **A floor-to-ceiling loom installation** created by Raleigh design firm Tactile Workshop, where visitors can weave high-quality yarns from North Carolina sheep and goat farms with various recycled materials.
- **Embroidery-making activities** inspired directly by Kuba Kingdom textiles.
- **Massive magnetic boards** where visitors can create patterns based on works of art on view in the gallery.
- **A comfortable reading area** created in partnership with Wake County Public Libraries.
- **A family guide** for children and adults to have fun looking closely and making connections while exploring the gallery.
- **Signage** designed to help visitors look more closely and understand what they are seeing.

Summer Programming

In conjunction with the new gallery, the NCMA will host several public programs in July and August, including family activities and artist conversations, as well as ongoing programs and events celebrating the collection and space.

“Ask Me!” Roaming Docent
Saturdays, 1–3 pm
East Building, African Art Gallery

Ask a question, learn the inside story about what’s on the walls, or just talk about what you see.

Panel Discussion on Contemporary Diaspora Art
Thursday, July 20, 7 pm
East Building, SECU Auditorium
Free ([ticket required](#))

A lively conversation on the relationship between African art and the global art community. The panel includes Nigerian-born artist Victor Ekpuk and other artists of African descent, and the moderator is Richard J. Powell, the John Spencer Bassett Professor of Art and Art History at Duke.

Weekend Family-Friendly Tours: Museum Safari
August, Saturdays and Sundays, 10:30 am
Meet at West Building Information Desk
Free

Animals from around the globe make their home at the Museum. Find some of them on an art expedition through the new African gallery. Half-hour tours for kids ages 5–11 and their adult companions.

Pop-Up Art at Wake County Regional Libraries
Tuesday, August 8, 10:30 am at West Regional Library
Tuesday, August 8, 4:30 pm at Eva Perry Regional Library
Friday, August 11, 10:30 am at East Regional Library
Friday, August 11, 4:30 pm at Southeast Regional Library
Tuesday, August 22, 10:30 am at Northeast Regional Library
Tuesday, August 22, 4:30 pm at North Regional Library
Friday, August 25, 4:30 pm at Cameron Village Regional Library
Free

Join these drop-in programs to make your own artwork inspired by colorful cloth weaving from Western Africa.

Family Fun Saturday: Textile Explorations
Saturday, August 12, 10 am and 1 pm
East Building, Education Studios
\$5 Members, \$8 Nonmembers
Families with children ages 5–11

Explore fabrics and threads in the Museum’s new African art gallery. Then, create your own experimental textile using techniques of weaving, embroidery, and more. Please note: All participants (children and adults) must have a ticket. These popular workshops sell out quickly, so reserve your spot early.

Pop-Up Art: Fabric Fantastic
Sunday, August 20, noon–3 pm (drop-in)
Museum Park, Lowe’s Pavilion
Free; no reservations needed
Open to all ages; children must be accompanied by an adult

Spray, drip, and splatter to explore the colors and textures of painted cloth, inspired by artist Yinka Shonibare. Come dressed to get messy!

Fall Celebration

The NCMA celebrates the new African art gallery with a [free community event](#) featuring performances, art making, food trucks, and more.

Threads of Africa: A Celebration of Art, Nature, and People
Saturday, September 23, Noon–5 pm (free concert follows at 6 pm; doors open at 5 pm)
Rain date: September 30 (no evening concert)

**East Building and Museum Park
Free (ticket required for concert)**

Join us as we unveil the newly reinstalled African art gallery in our East Building with a [daylong celebration](#) of African art, nature, music, and culture! The Museum Park comes alive with music and dance performances, drum-making workshops, collaborative community art activities, food, African cultural activities, and more! Walk the new gallery and experience conversations with experts and storytellers, and participate in a collaborative art project with artist Maya Freelon Asante.

The day concludes with a [free concert](#) by world-renowned West African artist Angélique Kidjo (ticket required; tickets available August 1).

**Outdoor Concert: Angélique Kidjo with Diali Cissokho and Kaira Ba
Saturday, September 23, 6 pm (doors open at 5 pm)
Joseph M. Bryan, Jr., Theater in the Museum Park
Free; ticket required ([tickets available August 1](#))**

To conclude our Threads of Africa celebration and the 20th anniversary summer concert series, the NCMA presents a free concert by Angélique Kidjo, hailed by *Time* magazine as "Africa's premier diva." Kidjo blends the West African traditions of her childhood in Benin with elements of American R&B, funk, and jazz, as well as influences from Europe and Latin America. A three-time Grammy winner, Kidjo is admired throughout the world.

Opening for Angélique Kidjo is Diali Cissokho, a griot born to a family of professional musicians in Senegal, who currently makes his home in North Carolina. Cissokho is a master of the kora, a traditional West African instrument with strings and a skin-and-gourd resonator. Cissokho and his band Kaira Ba have created an electrifying style of West African dance music that has attracted a fervent following.

Behind the Scenes

During the reinstallation process, the NCMA documented the conservation, planning, and design of the new gallery through a series of videos, blog posts, and an image slideshow. This content, along with information on related programming, can be seen at ncartmuseum.org/africangallery. More videos, images, and events will be added.

Credits

This installation is made possible through generous funding by the William R. Kenan Jr. Charitable Trust. Additional support is provided by the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources and the North Carolina Museum of Art Foundation, Inc. Research for this exhibition was made possible by Ann and Jim Goodnight/The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Fund for Curatorial and Conservation Research and Travel.

Generous support for the Threads of Africa celebration is provided by Lee and Libby Buck.

Support for drum residency, drum making, and performance is provided by the North Carolina Museum of Art Catawba Valley Fund.

Images

Top image: Kapsiki or Higi artist, *Beaded Skirt*, 20th century, beads, cowrie shells, and fiber, 8 1/4 x 31 in., Courtesy of Bennett College, Greensboro, North Carolina

Bottom image: Victor Ekpuk, *Divinity*, 2017, white chalk, 30 x 18 ft., Commissioned by the North Carolina Museum of Art, courtesy of the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources and the William R. Kenan Jr. Charitable Trust

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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, Roy Cooper, governor, and an agency of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, Susi Hamilton, secretary.