

***Kumbi Saleh 3020 CE*, by Toronto artist Ekow Nimako, joins Aga Khan Museum's permanent Collection**

An Afrofuturist cityscape rendered in black LEGO®, the Museum's latest contemporary art acquisition celebrates the cultures of the African diaspora and the power to creatively reimagine the past.

TORONTO, CANADA (February 8, 2021) – *Kumbi Saleh 3020 CE*, Ghanaian-Canadian artist Ekow Nimako's futuristic reimagining of an ancient, bustling west African trade hub, is the latest work of contemporary art to join the Aga Khan Museum's permanent Collection.

Constructed of approximately one hundred thousand black LEGO® pieces, the 30-square-foot sculpture was the unmissable centrepiece of Nimako's Museum-commissioned series [*Building Black: Civilizations*](#). The show was a creative response to the Museum exhibition [*Caravans of Gold, Fragments in Time*](#) (originally organized by the Block Museum in Evanston, Illinois), which showcased medieval west Africa's significance in global trade and history, as well as its role in the spread of Islam. Displayed together in the Museum's second-floor gallery, the two exhibitions wowed audiences from their premiere in September 2019 to their closing five months later.

"I feel a deep sense of honour and gratitude that my artwork is now a part of such a historical and culturally relevant collection," Nimako says. "The Aga Khan Museum provided me with the resources and platform to explore my artistic craft and Ghanaian history, while making it possible to share my insights and ideas with a vibrant and curious community. *Medasi*."

The acquisition of *Kumbi Saleh 3020 CE* channels the Museum's mission to bridge cultures through the arts and foreground cultural narratives that often remain unheard, according to Curator Dr. Michael Chagnon. "With his sculpture Ekow not only honours his own cultural identity but also celebrates the vibrancy of African civilizations and their central role in world heritage," he says. "It also reflects our ongoing efforts to open new windows on geographies often overlooked in Islamic art studies, including sub-Saharan Africa and southeast Asia."

The sculpture's title nods to the capital of the medieval Kingdom of Ghana. In planning *Kumbi Saleh 3020 CE*, Nimako looked to the ancient city's illustrious past and reimagined it as a futuristic metropolis. "In both concept and aesthetic, the piece represents an uninterrupted, uncooped narrative of Black civilizations that seeks to reclaim histories, reconcile ancestral traumas, and imagine liberated futures for all African peoples," Nimako wrote in his 2019 artist's statement for the work. "The Afrofuturistic sculpture is situated within the genre's celebration and reimagination of a Blackness that is not constructed against the backdrop of enslavement, colonization, and violence."

"The use of LEGO® as a sculptural medium," the Toronto-based artist added, "further evokes a futuristic aesthetic to capture architectural forms and elements from the natural world, transcending the medium's geometric form."

With its doors temporarily closed to the public, the Museum is marking Black History Month with a series of online experiences highlighting the stories and contributions of Black artists, including Nimako. In [“Picking up the Pieces: Reimagining Black Civilizations,”](#) his December 2019 talk at the Museum, he delves deeper into the inspiration behind, and the painstaking process of building, *Kumbi Saleh 3020 CE*. People wishing to see how the sculpture was constructed can do so by watching [this time-lapse video on Nimako’s YouTube channel](#). In addition, *Kumbi Saleh 3020 CE* is set to go on display when the Museum reopens later this winter or in the early spring.

“The meticulousness of its construction, the glittering, jewel-like quality of its materials, and its impressive scale all make *Kumbi Saleh 3020 CE* an aesthetically impactful addition to our Collection,” Dr. Chagnon says. “More importantly, though, it is a powerful reappropriation of entrenched historical narratives. It speaks to the Museum as a place where multiple voices are welcomed and honoured for their contribution to a broader mosaic of cultural representation.”

Support

The Museum wishes to thank Zahoor, Taslim, Zayana, and Amaara Samji for their support in the acquisition of *Kumbi Saleh 3020 CE*.

About Ekow Nimako

Ekow Nimako is a Toronto-based, internationally exhibiting LEGO® artist who crafts futuristic and whimsical sculptures from the iconic medium. Rooted in his childhood hobby and intrinsic creativity, Nimako’s formal arts education and background as a lifelong multidisciplinary artist inform his process and signature aesthetic. His fluid building style, coupled with the Afrofuturistic themes of his work, beautifully transcend the geometric medium to embody organic and fantastical silhouettes.

About the Aga Khan Museum

The Aga Khan Museum in Toronto, Canada, has been established and developed by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), which is an agency of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN). The Museum’s mission is to foster a greater understanding and appreciation of the contribution that Muslim civilizations have made to world heritage while often reflecting, through both its permanent and temporary exhibitions, how cultures connect with one another. Designed by architect Fumihiko Maki, the Museum shares a 6.8-hectare site with Toronto’s Ismaili Centre, which was designed by architect Charles Correa. The surrounding landscaped park was designed by landscape architect Vladimir Djurovic.

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