

Aga Khan Museum Celebrates Africa's World-Shaping Stories

A must-see exhibition, an Afrofuturist Lego installation, talks from influential scholars, and pan-African music and film are all part of our fall season, *Africa!*

Toronto, July 10, 2019 — As African countries gain recognition as 21st-century global leaders, the Aga Khan Museum celebrates the continent's power — past, present, and future — with our fall season, *Africa!*

In line with our mission to connect cultures, we've partnered with African nations and members of the African diaspora to bring Toronto the groundbreaking exhibition *Caravans of Gold, Fragments in Time*; an Afrofuturist art installation made of Lego; and world-class thought leaders and performers who reveal new dimensions of this vast and complex continent.

Opening September 21, 2019, *Caravans of Gold* takes you back to medieval times, when western Africa fueled the economies of three continents with culture-changing ideas, much sought-after luxuries, and treasured commodities such as salt, ivory, and gold — a world-shaping story largely left out of our Western history books.

The exhibition was curated by Kathleen Bickford Berzock and organized by the Block Museum of Art at Northwestern University, where it made *Christie's* list of Must-See 2019 exhibitions.

Caravans features a cutting-edge curatorial approach that sets stunning masterpieces alongside recently unearthed archeological fragments, and includes many loans from the national collections of Mali, Nigeria, and Morocco. This juxtaposition reveals how deeply connected medieval Africa was to a wide swathe of the world, influencing art and culture across Europe, the Middle East, and Asia.

The exhibition also introduces the legendary medieval figure, Mansa Musa, 14th-century ruler of the West African empire of Mali — thought to be the one of the wealthiest people of all time. Mansa Musa's astounding gold riches were celebrated in his time, with accounts suggesting that the value of gold dropped because of his extravagant spending during his pilgrimage to Mecca.



Horseman and Four Figures; Bankoni, Mali; Terracotta, 14th/15th century, Art Institute of Chicago

“With this exhibition we’re upending common misperceptions and filling in areas of world history that have been overlooked,” says Henry Kim, Director and CEO of the Aga Khan Museum. “Our hope is that our programming can contribute to critical conversations in Canada that expand our understanding of the past, helping to bridge cultures today and tomorrow.”

Speaking to the future, the Museum simultaneously presents *Building Black: Civilizations*, an Afrofuturist art installation made exclusively of black Lego bricks by contemporary Ghanaian-Canadian artist, Ekow Nimako. His series of surrealist sculptures, featuring a six-foot wide centerpiece, links medieval Africa's advanced civilizations with a vision of the continent's powerful future.

The Museum's pan-African focus comes to life with our 2019/20 Performing Arts season, *Listening to Each Other*, which pays tribute to the role of music in connecting communities, preserving culture, and spurring social change. The season launches with Toko Telo, a trio that unites Madagascar's biggest stars to explore new elements of the country's folk music.

In partnership with Toronto's Batuki Music, the Museum also presents two groups that are blurring the borders of gender and geography. The Magreb Project features North African women who play instruments traditionally only played by men, and the Okavango African Orchestra creates a new musical language by bringing together musicians from African countries (Burundi, Eritrea, Somalia, Madagascar, Senegal, Zimbabwe, and Ghana) that historically have had little interaction.

A lineup of films will offer insight into modern cultural aspects of the continent: *Nollywood Babylon* examines Nigeria's thriving film industry, the second-largest in the world; and *Mali Blues* takes viewers to the birthplace of the blues musical tradition where today's modern blues artists are in peril. The Museum also partners with the Toronto Middle Eastern and North African Film Festival to present films from Egypt and Tunisia that open windows into daily life.



Exiled Malian blues rocker Ahmed Ag Kaedy will perform at the Museum in November.
Photo by: Konrad Wadmann

Finally, a vibrant array of educational programming spotlighting aspects of the African continent will challenge what we know about the world. We start with a keynote lecture from *Caravans* curator Kathleen Bickford Berzock, Associate Director of Curatorial Affairs at the Block Museum of Art, illuminating the partnerships with Mali, Morocco, and Nigeria that made the exhibition possible.

We continue with an exciting range of talks from prominent speakers. The Director of the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, Gus Casely-Hayford, will join us to discuss the many golden ages of African art, and Victoria and Albert Museum Curator, Dr. Mariam Rosser-Owen, will give a talk exploring the medieval

politics of gold and ivory. Other highlights include a multi-week course on the far-reaching impact of African trade prior to the medieval era, and an artist talk and tour from Ekow Nimako.

Caravans of Gold, Fragments in Time: Art, Culture and Exchange Across Medieval Saharan Africa was organized by the Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University. *Caravans of Gold* has been made possible in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities: Exploring the human endeavor, as well as by Northwestern University's Buffett Institute for Global Studies. An anonymous donor made possible the exhibition's travel to the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution. Additional support is provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Myers Foundations, the Alumnae of Northwestern University, the Robert Lehman Foundation, the Elizabeth F. Cheney Foundation, and the Illinois Arts Council Agency.

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 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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