

PRESS RELEASE

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## Louvre Abu Dhabi Unveils *Kings and Queens of Africa: Forms and Figures of Power* Exhibition Celebrating African Art and Majesty

*The first-of-its-kind exhibition in the UAE and the region dedicated to African art*

*Running until 25 May 2025, the exhibition displays over 350 African artworks*



©Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi.

Photo (right to left): Marwa Al Manhali, Director of Museum Shared Services; Manuel Rabaté, Director of Louvre Abu Dhabi; Rita Aoun, Executive Director of the Culture Sector at DCT; H.E. Saood Al Hosani, Undersecretary of DCT - Abu Dhabi; H.E. Noura Al Kaabi, Minister of State; H.E. Sheikh Shakhboot bin Nahyan Al Nahyan, Minister of State; H.E. Hannatu Musa Musawa, Minister of Art, Culture, Tourism and Creative Economy of Nigeria; H.E. Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak, Chairman of Louvre Abu Dhabi; Emmanuel Kasarhérou, President of the Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac; Hervé Barbaret, CEO of the Agence France Muséums; H.E. Nicolas Niemtchinow, Ambassador of France in the UAE; Françoise Niemtchinow, wife of the Ambassador of France in the UAE; Sandra Lagumina, Chairperson of the Board of Directors of the Agence France Muséums; Hélène Joubert, General Curator of the exhibition and Senior Curator of the African Heritage Department, Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac; Dr. Guilhem André, Director of Scientific, Curatorial and Collection Management at Louvre Abu Dhabi; El Hadji Malick Ndiaye, Associate Curator, Head of the Museums Department and Curator of the Musée Théodore Monod d'Art Africain; Cindy Olohou, Associate Curator, Head of Collections at the Regional Collection of Contemporary Art, Île-de-France; Mariam Al Dhaheri, Curatorial Assistant at Louvre Abu Dhabi; Faiz Imam, Assistant Minister of Art, Culture, Tourism and Creative Economy of Nigeria

**Abu Dhabi, UAE – 29 January 2025** Louvre Abu Dhabi has unveiled its first exhibition of the year, *Kings and Queens of Africa: Forms and Figures of Power*, marking a milestone as the first exhibition of its kind in the UAE and the region dedicated to African art. Inaugurated by H.E. Shaikh Shakhboot bin Nahyan Al Nahyan, Minister of state; The Honorable Minister of Art, Culture, Tourism, and the Creative Economy of Nigeria, Hon. Hannatu Musa Musawa; H.E. Noura Al Kaabi, Minister of state; and H.E. Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak, Chairman of Louvre Abu Dhabi, this groundbreaking exhibition is presented in partnership with Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac and France Muséums, with the support of HONOR as the exhibition official partner and Valrhona as the exhibition sponsor.

Open until 25 May 2025, the exhibition celebrates Africa's rich history, creativity, and cultural legacy from the 11th to the 21st centuries, and highlights its vitality in contemporary art. Visitors can explore an extraordinary collection of royal portraits, sculptures, ceremonial objects, and textiles, discovering the enduring connection between art, power, and identity across the African continent.

The exhibition is curated by three curators in ancient and contemporary African art: **Hélène Joubert**, Exhibition General Curator, General Curator, Head of the African Collections at the Musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac, Paris; **El Hadji Malick Ndiaye**, Associate Curator, Head of the Museums Department and Curator of the Musée Théodore Monod d'Art Africain, Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire – Cheikh Anta Diop (IFAN-Cheikh Anta Diop), Dakar; and **Cindy Olohou**, Associate Curator, Head of Collections at the Regional Collection of Contemporary Art, Île-de-France, and Independent Art Critic. Support was provided by Louvre Abu Dhabi Curatorial team represented by Mariam AlDhaheer, Curatorial Assistant at Louvre Abu Dhabi

The showcase features over 350 objects from West, Central, Southern and East Africa, including intricately crafted royal attire and spiritually significant figures, highlighting the exceptional skill of artisans while offering deeper insight into the continent's rich and diverse heritage.

*Kings and Queens of Africa* evokes the concept of kingdoms while exploring diverse expressions of power. Spanning empires, kingdoms, city-states, chiefdoms, and figures from divine rulers to heroic leaders, it highlights the many dimensions of power and influence in African history.

**H.E. Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak, Chairman of Louvre Abu Dhabi**, said: "Kings and Queens of Africa offers a remarkable glimpse into the lives of Africa's revered rulers. Its extraordinary curatorial vision reveals how their cultural legacies continue to inspire contemporary African art and culture and beyond, reflecting Louvre Abu Dhabi's mission to share universal stories through art. In Abu Dhabi, we view cultural history in all its richness, spotlighting diverse forms of creative expression from cultures around the globe. I hope that visitors are inspired and enriched by these treasures that tell such compelling stories."

**Manuel Rabaté, Director of Louvre Abu Dhabi**, said: "In line with our commitment to presenting pivotal moments in the history of art, *Kings and Queens of Africa: Forms and Figures of Power* offers a profound exploration of Africa's rich artistic heritage. Africa, as the cradle of humanity and a continent with rich and diverse traditions, has long been a source of resilience and creative expression. By shedding light on its enduring legacy, this exhibition resonates with our mission to engage diverse audiences by presenting stories that transcend boundaries and connect cultures. Louvre Abu Dhabi is honoured to present this exceptional exhibition, thanks to Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac and the invaluable contributions of the curators, lenders and partners."

**Emmanuel Kasarhérou, President of the Musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac**, said: "Kings and Queens of Africa' explores the intricate notion of power through works from the collections of the Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac and numerous African museums. Enriched with contemporary references, the exhibition is a thousand-year journey that pays tribute to the creative force of an entire continent. Above and beyond the narrative, I salute the approach: a multi-vocal project embodied by a shared curatorship, Kings and Queens of Africa was conceived in a spirit of fertile cooperation. I am also delighted by the forthcoming symposium 'Encounters & Connections: African Museums Today & Tomorrow' which will bring together representatives from museums across Africa and further demonstrating the links that have been forged and this open, horizontal working method. I am pleased

that this exhibition will further strengthen the relationship between the Musée du Quai Branly - Jacques Chirac and the Louvre Abu Dhabi in their shared ambition to promote our heritage and the knowledge it reveals.”

The exhibition is divided into three sections, each exploring the art and power of Africa's great kingdoms. West Africa highlights the artistic legacies of Ife, Benin, Akan, Yoruba and Danhomè showcasing exquisite sculptures, royal regalia, and art’s role in shaping power and identity. Central Africa features the Kongo, Luba and Teke kingdoms, with ceremonial objects and imagery reflecting the connection between art, spirituality, and leadership. Southern and Eastern Africa spotlights the Zulu and Ethiopian kingdoms, presenting artefacts that celebrate the region’s rich artistic traditions. The journey concludes with an African Pop Art section, featuring contemporary comics and video games.

**Hélène Joubert, Exhibition General Curator, General Curator, Head of the African Collections at Musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac,** said: “*Kings and Queens of Africa: Forms and Figures of Power* grew out of my reflections on objects of power and the pursuit of a universal theme. Drawing on the collections of the Musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac with numerous exceptional masterpieces lent for the first time and recent targeted acquisitions, I envisioned an expansive exhibition introducing African art from the 11<sup>th</sup> century to today. Spanning all major regions of sub-Saharan Africa, it explores interconnected themes, highlighting the notions of excellence and beauty in service of power. In addition to the collections of the Musée du quai Branly, we collaborated with other international institutions, particularly in Africa, and to private lenders.”

**She added:** “This exhibition is a collective achievement, with two associate curators joining me in this exceptional project – El Hadj Malick Ndiaye and Cindy Olohou. They have enriched the exhibition’s historical narrative with contemporary insights, deepening its exploration of royalty through a dialogue between past and present. Additionally, Mariam AlDhaheri, Curatorial Assistant at Louvre Abu Dhabi, contributed by exploring local resources. The input and insights of everyone involved have woven a vibrant and unique project that I hope will inspire admiration, surprise, and curiosity in the Emirati public towards the arts of this continent.”

**Dr. Guilhem André, Scientific Curatorial & Collection Management Director,** commented: “Bringing *Kings and Queens of Africa: Forms and Figures of Power* to the UAE represents a significant milestone in broadening the spectrum of art history presented in our exhibitions and honouring Africa’s extraordinary cultural legacy. This exhibition provides audiences with a rare opportunity to delve into the pivotal role of African art in shaping concepts of leadership, identity, and power over centuries. From regal artefacts to contemporary masterpieces, the remarkable works on display illuminate the richness and global influence of African artistry. We are also happy to host the forthcoming symposium, *African Museums Today and Tomorrow*, which will bring together thought leaders from African and international museums, providing an unprecedented platform for exchange between these institutions and an ideal opportunity to take stock of their current situation.”

Highlights of the objects on loan include **Crowned head of Queen Oluwo**, Ife, Nigeria (14th/15th century); **Royal shoes gilded with leaf**, Baule, Côte d'Ivoire; **Akan chair**, Côte d'Ivoire/Ghana; **Akatahounto drum**, Fon, Benin; **Okuyi anthropomorphic mask**, Punu, Gabon; **Nkisi nkondi magical zoomorphic figurine**, Kongo, Congo, and **Lefem statue**, Bangwa, Cameroon. Contemporary artworks include **Mali, a Treasure** by **Abdoulaye Konaté**, and **Eddy Kamuanga Ilunga’s** painted skins of electronic circuits, amongst others.

The influence of Islam on the African continent is reflected through significant artworks on display, including: *A Koran Manuscript* with accompanying cases (late 19th to early 20th century), a *Koranic Tablet* (pre-1972), and a contemporary artwork by Louis Barthélémy and Tarek El Safty of *Mansa Musa in Hajj* depicting Mansa Musa's 14th-century pilgrimage to Mecca on a cotton tapestry, symbolising the Mali ruler's profound legacy.

Louvre Abu Dhabi also presents a significant new acquisition, *Fluctuating Throne* by renowned Mozambican artist Gonçalo Mabunda. Crafted from decommissioned weapons from Mozambique's civil war (1976–1992), this powerful sculpture transforms instruments of conflict into a symbol of resilience, hope, and the transformative power of art. With its anthropomorphic design and mask-like face, the throne reflects the duality of human struggle and strength, enriching the exhibition's narrative of history, identity, and creativity in African art.

The exhibition brings together a diverse collection, combining works from Louvre Abu Dhabi's permanent collection with pieces loaned by prestigious international institutions from Nigeria, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, South Africa, and France. Notable contributions from UAE-based institutions, including Guggenheim Abu Dhabi and Sharjah Art Foundation, further enrich the showcase. This collaboration of local and global partnerships creates a dynamic tapestry of African art, highlighting its cultural richness and global connections.

**Laurance Li, General Manager, HONOR GCC**, said: "We are honoured to partner with Louvre Abu Dhabi on this remarkable exhibition. This collaboration reflects our dedication to fostering innovation and creativity, not only through technology but also by supporting cultural and artistic initiatives that inspire and unite communities. Our partnership with Louvre Abu Dhabi is a true testament to this commitment."

### Cultural and Educational Programme

A rich cultural and educational programme will accompany *Kings and Queens of Africa: Forms and Figures of Power*, offering an array of events:

- **A symposium:** From 28 to 30 January, Louvre Abu Dhabi will host a three-day symposium, featuring over 23 speakers from the African continent and bringing together over 30 international institutions from across four continents. This event will explore key topics such as shifting museum narratives, renewed approaches to collections management, shared international collaborations, and the role of youth in shaping the future of museums in Africa. This symposium, commissioned by Louvre Abu Dhabi and produced by France Muséums, offers a dynamic platform for dialogue, innovation, and cultural exchange between museum professionals worldwide.
- **The Coffee Festival:** From 14 to 16 February, coffee lovers are invited to explore the cultural ties between Africa and the Arabian Peninsula through coffee traditions at Louvre Abu Dhabi Park. Visitors will enjoy live Ethiopian and local coffee ceremonies, enriched with storytelling. The festival will also feature *Fables from the Land that Stood Still*, a contemporary dance performance that connects audiences to Nama culture through storytelling and movement.
- **Masquerave:** On 15 February, guests are invited to an unforgettable Masquerave, headlined by DJ Black Coffee, with an opening act by his son, Sona. The Masquerave will be a fusion of classical masquerade and the artist's blend of house, African percussions, and electronic

music. In collaboration with the DCT Abu Dhabi Events Bureau, the event features stunning masks designed by artist Zak Ové, alongside captivating performances like the Espresso Martini Acrobat, Coffee Cup Roly Poly, and dynamic dancers, offering a mesmerising blend of music and art.

- **Community activities:** A diverse range of educational activities for adults, families, and youth will be offered, including family weekends and guided tours to provide deeper insights into the exhibition.

For the first time ever, Louvre Abu Dhabi Park will transform into an outdoor gallery, featuring *Black Starliner*, a 12-metre monumental totem by British-Trinidadian artist Zak Ové. This striking contemporary artwork explores themes of the African diaspora, Afrofuturism, multiculturalism, and globalisation, reflecting the complexity and interconnectedness of identity.

At night, visitors can enjoy stunning projections against the museum architecture with vibrant geometric African patterns known as '*Projection of Harmony*' created by the renowned South African artist, Dr. Esther Mahlangu.

The *Kings and Queens of Africa: Forms and Figures of Power* catalogue is available in Arabic, English and French at the museum's boutique.

For more information about the exhibition, and to book tickets, please visit [www.louvreabudhabi.ae](http://www.louvreabudhabi.ae) or call Louvre Abu Dhabi at +971 600 56 55 66. Entrance to the exhibition is free with the museum's general admission tickets.

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## NOTES TO EDITORS

### Louvre Abu Dhabi's operating hours

**Museum:** Open: 10 am – 6.30 pm (Tuesday – Thursday); extended hours: 10 am – 8.30 pm (Friday - Sunday); closed on Monday.

**Dome:** Open: 10 am – midnight (Tuesday - Sunday) - last entry 11 pm; closed on Monday.

**Museum Café:** Open: 10 am – 7 pm (Tuesday - Thursday); extended hours: 10 am – 9 pm (Friday – Sunday). Closed on Monday.

**Art Lounge:** Open: 3 pm – 12 am (last order 11 pm); closed on Monday and during summer.

**Fouquet's Abu Dhabi and Marta Bar:** Open: 12 pm – 12 am (last orders at 10 pm) (Tuesday – Thursday, Sunday); weekends: 12 pm – 1 am (last order at 10.30 pm) (Friday – Saturday); closed on Monday.

**Aptitude Café:** Open: 9 am – 10 pm (daily including Monday)

Follow Louvre Abu Dhabi on social media: Facebook ([Louvre Abu Dhabi](https://www.facebook.com/LouvreAbuDhabi)), Twitter ([@LouvreAbuDhabi](https://twitter.com/LouvreAbuDhabi)) and Instagram ([@LouvreAbuDhabi](https://www.instagram.com/LouvreAbuDhabi)) #LouvreAbuDhabi.

### ABOUT LOUVRE ABU DHABI

Created by an exceptional agreement between the governments of Abu Dhabi and France, Louvre Abu Dhabi was designed by Jean Nouvel and opened on Saadiyat Island in November 2017. The museum is inspired by traditional Islamic architecture and its monumental dome creates a rain of light effect and a unique social space that brings people together.



Louvre Abu Dhabi celebrates the universal creativity of mankind and invites audiences to see humanity in a new light. Through its innovative curatorial approach, the museum focuses on building understanding across cultures: through stories of human creativity that transcend civilisations, geographies, and times.

The museum's growing collection is unparalleled in the region and spans thousands of years of human history, including prehistoric tools, artefacts, religious texts, iconic paintings, and contemporary artworks. The permanent collection is supplemented by rotating loans from 19 French partner institutions, regional and international museums.

Louvre Abu Dhabi is a testing ground for new ideas in a globalised world and champions new generations of cultural leaders. Its international exhibitions, programming and Children's Museum are inclusive platforms that connect communities and offer enjoyment for all.

#### ABOUT MUSÉE DU QUAI BRANLY

The musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac is dedicated to the arts and civilisations of Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas. Designed by the architect Jean Nouvel, the building has become an iconic signature of Paris' heritage just a stone's throw from the Eiffel Tower. Since its opening in 2006, the museum welcomes some 1.3 million visitors from all continents every year.

With 370,000 objects, 700,000 images and over 200,000 reference works, its collection is one of the largest in the world and includes many masterpieces. A testament to human genius and the life of societies, these pieces are of major cultural and scientific interest. The many scientific, cultural and technical activities run by the establishment in partnership with the countries its collections originate from contribute to the study, conservation and circulation of works, thus encouraging the spread of knowledge to a broad audience, both in France and internationally. At the same time, a rich and multi-annual programme allows visitors to discover or add to their knowledge of non-European arts and societies.

Permanent and temporary exhibitions, concerts, performances, readings and conferences all play their part in making the musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac a living forum for culture where cultures meet every day in dialogue.

[www.quaibrantly.fr](http://www.quaibrantly.fr)

#### ABOUT FRANCE MUSÉUMS

Following the intergovernmental agreement between France and the Emirates of Abu Dhabi signed in 2007, France Muséums, a cultural consulting and engineering agency, was created to work towards the creation of Louvre Abu Dhabi and support the project in all its dimensions (strategic, scientific, cultural, building, human resources).

Since the opening of the UAE museum in 2017, France Muséums continues to support Louvre Abu Dhabi in four main fields of activity: the management and coordination of loans from French museums for the permanent galleries of the museum, the organisation and production of international exhibitions, training of teams and a wide range of consultancy and auditing assignments in all areas of museum management.

France Muséums mobilises its teams based in Paris and Abu Dhabi and a network of 18 major French cultural institutions and museum partners: Musée du Louvre, Centre national d'art et de culture - Georges Pompidou, Musées d'Orsay et de l'Orangerie, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac, Réunion des Musées Nationaux et du Grand Palais (RMN-GP), Château de Versailles, Musée national des arts asiatiques-Guimet, Musée de Cluny - musée national du Moyen-Âge, École du Louvre, Musée des Arts Décoratifs (MAD), Musée d'Archéologie nationale - Saint-Germain en Laye, Musée Rodin, Domaine national de Chambord, OPPIC (Opérateur du patrimoine et des projets immobiliers de la culture), Musée de l'Armée, Institut National du Patrimoine and Centre de Recherche et de Restauration des Musées de France (C2RMF).

<https://francemuseums.com/>

**About HONOR**

HONOR is a leading global provider of smart devices. It is dedicated to becoming a global iconic technology brand and creating a new intelligent world for everyone through its powerful products and services. With an unwavering focus on R&D, it is committed to developing technology that empowers people around the globe to go beyond, giving them the freedom to achieve and do more. Offering a range of high-quality smartphones, tablets, laptops and wearables to suit every budget, HONOR's portfolio of innovative, premium and reliable products enables people to become a better version of themselves.

**About Valrhona**

Valrhona has been a partner to flavor professionals since 1922 and a pioneer in setting the standard in the world of chocolate. Today, it defines itself as a company whose mission - "together, let's do good things with good food" - expresses the strength of its commitment. Together with its colleagues, chefs and cocoa growers, Valrhona imagines the best of chocolate to create a fair and sustainable cocoa industry and inspire gastronomy that tastes good, looks good and does good.

Every day, Valrhona is driven by a determination to build direct, long-term relationships with producers, seek out chocolate's next innovation and share expertise. Valrhona works with chefs to support skills and craftsmanship, guiding them on their quest for a unique identity by constantly pushing back creativity's boundaries.

In January 2020 Valrhona became a B Corporation®. The company is proud to have been awarded this demanding label for the second time in January 2024. It rewards the world's most ethically conscious companies, all of which combine economic performance with social and environmental responsibility. This distinction is a recognition of "Live Long", the company's sustainable development strategy shaped by our desire to co-construct a model that would have a positive impact on producers, employees, flavor professionals and everyone who loves chocolate.

Choosing Valrhona means making a commitment to ethical chocolate. 100% of our cocoa beans are traced back to our producers, so you know exactly where they come from, who harvested them and that they were produced in the right conditions. Choosing Valrhona means choosing chocolate that respects people and the planet.

[www.valrhona.com](http://www.valrhona.com)

**ABOUT THE DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE AND TOURISM – ABU DHABI**

The Department of Culture and Tourism–Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi) drives the sustainable growth of Abu Dhabi's culture and tourism sectors and its creative industries, fuels economic progress and helps achieve Abu Dhabi's wider global ambitions. By working in partnership with the organisations that define the emirate's position as a leading international destination, DCT Abu Dhabi strives to unite the ecosystem around a shared vision of the emirate's potential, coordinate effort and investment, deliver innovative solutions, and use the best tools, policies, and systems to support the culture and tourism industries.

DCT Abu Dhabi's vision is defined by the emirate's people, heritage, and landscape. We work to enhance Abu Dhabi's status as a place of authenticity, innovation, and unparalleled experiences, represented by its living traditions of hospitality, pioneering initiatives, and creative thought.

**ABOUT SAADIYAT CULTURAL DISTRICT**

Home to Louvre Abu Dhabi, Berklee Abu Dhabi, Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abrahamic Family House and the soon-to-open Zayed National Museum, teamLab Phenomena Abu Dhabi, Guggenheim Abu Dhabi and Natural History Museum Abu Dhabi, Saadiyat Cultural District is one of the greatest concentrations of cultural institutions.

Saadiyat Cultural District is a global platform, emanating from a rich cultural heritage, celebrating traditions, and advancing equitable culture. It is an embodiment of empowerment, showcasing museums, collections, and narratives that supports the region's heritage while promoting a diverse global cultural landscape.

Restricted



**HONOR**



Saadiyat Cultural District is a testament to Abu Dhabi's commitment to preserving heritage while embracing a forward-looking vision. The District invites the world to engage with diverse cultures, fostering dialogue exchange, and offers a global cultural space that supports the region and the global South.

Restricted