

Noisy, performative and unapologetically non-European: Nigeria welcomes a museum like no other

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

a. What makes a good museum? Make a list of the top three things that make a museum great. Compare with your classmates. Give reasons to support your opinion.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

2 Key words

a. Write the correct words from the wordpool to complete the definitions below. Then, find and highlight them in the article so that you can read them in context.

counerpant	craftmanship	curator	dedicated	deity
drowning	fusion	heritage	interrogate	memorial
repatriation	settlement	soundscape	unveil	visibility

1. created or done to remember somebody who has died _____
2. working hard at something because it is very important to you _____
3. a person or thing with the same position or function as somebody/something else in a different place or situation _____
4. a person whose job is to be in charge of the objects or works of art in a museum or an art gallery _____
5. the mixture of different sounds heard in a particular place or a work of art or performance that combines sounds to create a specific effect _____
6. a place where people come to live or the process of coming to live in such a place _____
7. a high level of skill at making things _____
8. a god or goddess _____
9. show or introduce something new to the public for the first time _____
10. dying because of being underwater and unable to breathe for too long _____
11. ask someone a lot of questions for a long time to get information _____
12. sending or bringing someone or something back to their own country _____

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13. the process or result of joining two or more things together to form one _____
14. the fact of attracting attention or being easy to see _____
15. the history, traditions, buildings and objects that a country or society has had for many years and that are considered an important part of its character _____

b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity. You might have to change the form of the word.

1. At the bazaar, we admired the _____ of the jewellery and rugs.
2. After the car accident, the parties agreed on a(n) _____ of £100,000.
3. How many _____ are worshipped in Hinduism?
4. The _____ of the new statue will happen in the town square tomorrow.
5. The police _____ the suspect for an hour.
6. There is a big push for the _____ of art and artefacts held at museums around the world.
7. That new restaurant offers _____ cuisine, a mix of Peruvian and Japanese.
8. The painter's magazine interview gave her more _____ in the art world.
9. _____ usually have art-history degrees and work in museums.
10. This wing of the hospital is _____ to caring for pediatric patients.
11. The installation at the museum was in a dark room with a musical _____ and a light show.
12. This is my _____ from the Madrid office. We hold the same position but work with different clients.

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The John Randle Centre for Yoruba Culture and History in Lagos 'pops with colour and sound' in a dazzling departure from the colonial model

Saeed Kamali Dehghan

30 April, 2024

- 1 Opposite the Nigerian National Museum in central Lagos, a swimming pool and a memorial hall once stood as an integral part of the city.
- 2 This year, a new pool is opening to the public alongside a state-of-the-art museum dedicated to Yoruba culture.
- 3 The John Randle Centre for Yoruba Culture and History is in the Onikan area, the cultural heart of Lagos island. Unlike the National Museum, built in the late 1950s on a Western model, the centre is “unapologetically Yoruba”, according to Seun Oduwole, the site’s lead architect.
- 4 “If you go to a Western museum, the African section is often in the basement, it’s dark. But this museum pops with colour and sound to highlight the vibrancy and the dynamism of the Yoruba culture,” Oduwole says. Yoruba words are bigger than their English counterparts on signs and displays.
- 5 Will Rea, the Nigerian-born curator and academic who has helped steer the project, adds: “It is very different from a European museum. You walk in a soundscape, and it’s noisy, it’s performative, and you have to move your body the whole time.”
- 6 The external walls of the centre are concrete and finished in earth-coloured pigments similar to the mud features in old Yoruba settlements. The gold lattice is a reference to the craftsmanship of the Yoruba people.
- 7 Inside, visitors are greeted by an audio-visual display that animates Yoruba myths of the origin of the world, using a calabash, a gourd with significance in Yoruba culture and beliefs. A separate room exhibits various deities and saints. There is a specific space for storytelling to reflect the Yoruba oral tradition, as well as sections on customs and practices.
- 8 Former Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari unveiled the centre in January 2023, but it will open its doors to the public this autumn.
- 9 The original swimming pool on the site was built by John Randle, a Sierra Leone-born doctor from a returnee slave family. He saw how young Lagosians were drowning in the surrounding lagoon and built a swimming pool when the colonial rulers refused to do so.
- 10 The pool that Randle built in the 1920s became a huge attraction – Lagosians were excluded from the nearby members-only club run by the British. A memorial hall was added in the 1950s, the buildings fell into disrepair and closed down in the late 1970s.
- 11 Oduwole, who works for the Lagos-based firm SI.SA, says that many Lagosians of his parents’ generation learned to swim in the original Randle pool and went to the theatre in the memorial hall.
- 12 “One of the things that we wanted to do here was to interrogate museology as a construct and ask the question about why the Western model doesn’t work within the African context and how we can create a space that isn’t a museum in the traditional sense but is more like a theatre of living memory,” he says.
- 13 Talks are underway to receive 12 items on long-term loans from the British Museum, including the Lander stool, one of the first Yoruba pieces taken from Nigeria by the British, which has been the subject of repatriation calls. Among the items donated to the museum is a costume worn by Nigerian musician Fela Kuti, regarded as the King of Afrobeat.
- 14 Rea, who is a senior lecturer at the University of Leeds, says: “Yoruba culture is without doubt one of the great artistic, musical and oral-literature cultures of the world. It is stunning in its creativity and art history.”

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- 15 “Even today, we find that Yoruba culture influences the world in all sorts of ways, with Fela Kuti taking it out of oriki singing tradition into a fusion of west-coast American jazz. For example, salsa is, in origin, a Yoruba dance movement that was taken up in Brazil. You now find Yoruba cuisine in London and New York. There is a real sense that Yoruba culture needs more visibility.”
- 16 A team of academics and experts has contributed to the centre’s design and purpose, including the Nigerian-American scholar Rowland Abiodun, whose book *Yoruba Art and Language* is a key resource in the academic world.
- 17 Rea says that Lagos has deep connections to Yoruba heritage. “The whole Onikan area had become rather lost in the expansion of the city of Lagos, so the new centre is very much aimed at developing this area as a cultural quarter,” he says.
- 18 Interest in Yoruba heritage has increased among young Nigerians over the past ten years, and “that’s what the Randle Centre absolutely plays into”, according to Rea.
- 19 “The key thing about the centre is a refusal to talk about the idea of the traditional. When you talk about traditional African art, it’s a very Eurocentric view of African art, it’s a historical notion. Rather, we’re looking at the traditions of Yoruba culture.”

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3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. What was once opposite the Nigerian National Museum?
2. What is the new museum dedicated to?
3. How does Oduwole describe the African section in Western museums?
4. How is this new museum different from a European one?
5. What are visitors greeted by when they enter the museum?
6. When will the museum be open to the public?
7. When did the original pool and memorial hall close down?
8. How many items from the British Museum are under discussion?
9. What two examples of Yoruba culture's influence on the world are mentioned?
10. Who has become more interested in Yoruba heritage over the past ten years?

4 Key language

a. In the sentences below, underline the subject. Double-underline the verb—circle by and the doer that follows.

1. Inside, visitors are greeted by an audio-visual display that animates Yoruba myths of the origin of the world.
2. The original swimming pool on the site was built by John Randle.
3. Lagosians were excluded from the nearby members-only club run by the British.
4. The costume donated to the museum was worn by Nigerian musician Fela Kuti.

b. Rewrite the sentences in the active voice.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

c. Write two pairs of sentences using the active voice and the passive voice.

- 1a. (active) _____
- 1b. (passive) _____
- 2a. (active) _____
- 2b. (active) _____

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5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- “When museums only present one viewpoint, they miss a lot of the story.”
- “Life imitates art far more than art imitates life”. (Oscar Wilde)
- “Culture is what remains when all else is forgotten.” (Édouard Herriot)

6 In your own words

a. Do some research about a new museum or cultural centre.

- What kind of art, history or culture do they focus on?
- Who is the audience?
- How are they different from other museums and cultural centres previously built?
- How do the new museums or cultural centres serve their communities?

b. Report your findings to the class and share your opinions. Here are some phrases to help you when you discuss facts.

- *The research said ...*
- *One example is ...*
- *The museum helps its community by ...*
- *The article said that ...*
- *One / Another reason is ...*

Here are some phrases to use when stating your opinion.

- *I think (that) ...*
- *From what I have seen/read, ...*
- *I'm (not sure) about ...*
- *In my opinion, ...*
- *I (dis)agree with ...*