

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

Level 2: Intermediate

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.

2 Key words

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

basement curator drowning generation heritage
living memory memorial soundscape state-of-the-art storytelling
stunning surrounding

1. created or done in order to remember somebody who has died recently _____
2. using the most modern techniques or technology possible _____
3. a room or rooms in a building that are partly or completely below the level of the ground

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 particular effect _____
6. the activity of telling or writing stories _____
7. dying because of being underwater and unable to breathe for too long _____
8. something that is completely around something else _____
9. all the people who were born at about the same time _____
10. at a time, or during the time, that is remembered by people still alive _____
11. extremely attractive, beautiful or impressive _____
12. 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 _____

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

1. The Chief Technology Officer showed her team the brand-new, _____ 3D printers.
2. Houses in Florida do not have _____.
3. The _____ flew in from Tokyo to set up the art show.
4. The rose garden _____ the palace is absolutely _____.
5. Our parents' _____ have a different opinion of the world.
6. On Saturday mornings, the library has a _____ event for children.
7. A totem pole represents the _____ of a particular tribe in the Pacific Northwest.

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30 April, 2024

- 1 Opposite the Nigerian National Museum in central Lagos, a swimming pool and a memorial hall once stood.
- 2 This year, a new pool is opening to the public alongside a state-of-the-art museum about Yoruba culture.
- 3 The John Randle Centre for Yoruba Culture and History is in 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,” Oduwole says. Yoruba words are bigger than English ones on signs and displays.
- 5 Will Rea, the Nigerian-born curator and academic, adds: “It is very different from a European museum. You walk in a soundscape, and it’s noisy, performative, and you have to move your body the whole time.”
- 6 Inside, visitors are greeted by an audio-visual display of Yoruba myths of the origin of the world, using a calabash, an important gourd in Yoruba culture and beliefs. There is a specific space for storytelling, as well as sections on customs and practices.
- 7 Former Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari announced the centre in January 2023, but it will open its doors to the public this autumn.
- 8 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 water and built a swimming pool when the colonial rulers refused to do so.
- 9 The pool Randle built in the 1920s became a huge attraction – Lagosians were excluded from the nearby club run by the British. A memorial hall was added in the 1950s, but the buildings weren’t maintained and closed in the late 1970s.
- 10 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.
- 11 “One of the things that we wanted to do here was 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.
- 12 Talks have begun to receive 12 items on long-term loans from the British Museum. This includes the Lander stool, one of the first Yoruba pieces taken from Nigeria by the British. Among the items donated to the museum is a costume worn by Nigerian musician Fela Kuti, regarded as the King of Afrobeat.
- 13 Rea, 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.
- 14 “Even today, we find that Yoruba culture is influencing the world in all sorts of ways,” says Rea. He cites Fela Kuti taking oriki singing and mixing it with American jazz. Another example is salsa, which uses Yoruba dance movements and was taken up in Brazil. You now find Yoruba cuisine in London and New York.
- 15 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.

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- 16 “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. Rather, what we’re doing is 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 there opposite the Nigerian National Museum?
2. What is the new museum called?
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 inside the museum?
6. When will the museum be open to the public?
7. Why did Randle build the pool?
8. When did the original pool and memorial hall close down?
9. How many items from the British Museum are under discussion?
10. Who has become more interested in Yoruba heritage over the past ten years?

4 Key language

a. Rearrange the words to make sentences in passive voice.

1. greeted / visitors / are / an audio-visual display / by

2. John Randle / the original / by / was / swimming pool / built

3. was announced / The centre / in January 2023 / by Muhammadu Buhari

4. by / donated to the museum / the costume / was / Fela Kuti / worn

b. Rewrite the sentences in the active voice.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

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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 does it have?
- Who will visit it, e.g., tourists, locals, young people, and families?
- How is it different from other museums and cultural centres in the area?
- How does the new museum or cultural centre help its community?

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 ...*