

# ARCK

Artistic Research and Communal Knowledge



HEINRICH BOLL STIFTUNG  
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GERDA HENKEL STIFTUNG



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Preußischer Kulturbesitz



**MEDIA RELEASE**

## Namibian Museums Collaborate to Create Safe Spaces

By announcing the opening of this exhibition, the National Art Gallery of Namibia (NAGN) and the National Museum of Namibia (NMN), are showcasing their collaborative efforts to create a safe space for the Namibian artist and researchers their perspectives based on engagement with archival communal knowledge. Together with the Museums Association of Namibia (MAN), the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation (SPK), the University of Namibia (UNAM), the University of Bonn, and the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (MoEAC) of Namibia, the institutions present the *Artistic Research and Communal Knowledge: Reconnecting with Returned Cultural Belongings* Exhibition, otherwise known as ARCK. This ground-breaking showcase opens on Thursday afternoon, 11 April 2024, at 17h30 at the National Art Gallery of Namibia and looks to enlighten exploration into the origins of Namibian material culture.

The *Artistic Research Communal Knowledge: Reconnecting with Returned Cultural Belongings* (ARCK) project, co-funded by the Heinrich Böll Foundation, is a sub-project of the larger [Confronting Colonial Pasts, Envisioning Creative Futures Project](#) (CCP, ECF) which is funded by the Gerda Henkel Foundation. It targets the last part of the title *Envisioning Creative Futures*, bringing together contemporary artists, knowledge keepers and artisans in Namibia to develop new, more equitable ways of sharing knowledge and skills across generations and urban-rural divides.

At the heart of the CCP, ECF project is the collaborative research into 23 culturally and historically significant belongings that returned from the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin to Namibia in May 2022, as well as the historical collections at the National Museum of Namibia. Contemporary artists and knowledge keepers worked together to reactivate the knowledge and skills related to the belongings. Ultimately, this collaborative research and creation process highlights the importance of understanding, sharing, caring, and developing further cultural heritage to create a better future.

As a result, the project contracted five artists, namely Tuauovisioua Katuuu, Keith Vries, Nesindano Namises, Prince Kamaazengi Marenga, Vitjitua Ndjiharine worked closely alongside seven community researchers: Munu Godfrey Kuyonisa, Immanuel Xamro !Keib, Ngombe Ngarerue, Iyaloo Moshana, Tamace Rabbie Naici, Riana Vries and Bonifasius Mushongo, who served as researchers and translators of communal knowledge, commonly understood as oral histories, performative knowledge, and artisanal skills, preserved, and cared for within communities despite their violent suppression during colonialism and continued marginalization after Namibia's independence.

The artists used the knowledge they found and represented it in a variety of artistic mediums, ranging from poetry and performance to sculpture, amongst other mediums. The project further incorporated work from photographer Willem Vrey, and filmmaker, Joe Vision Production, both local specialists in their fields. These different collaborators worked together to reactivate understanding and mastery related to the belongings and, thereby, address and redress silences and gaps in Namibia's historiography and cultural heritage resulting from the colonisation of the country by the German Empire (1884-1915) and South Africa (1915-1990).



In close collaboration with their communal research partners, the respective artists created new bodies of work for display in dialogue with the historical museum collections. This display sets a platform to engage a wider Namibian public on matters concerning the repatriation of belongings from colonial contexts and the restitutive processes that follow. It also highlights the role and value of communal knowledge and artistic research in Namibia's post-colony, past, present, and future.

The exhibition offers:

- a. Rare insights into the histories of various cultural belongings. The artistic research has uncovered stories of resilience, survival, and the cultural tapestry that weaves these artworks into the fabric of history.
- b. A multimedia showcase. This diverse body of work will include the repatriated belongings, artistic research findings, and interpretations alongside the communal researcher insights from their respective communities. This diverse array of belongings, spanning different periods, are not only from the German colonial era but they span over multiple periods and have been collected under a number of different circumstances.
- c. Engaging and interactive displays that will guide visitors through the artistic research and communal knowledge research journey. The visitor will learn about the meticulous work undertaken by researchers to trace the origins, ownership, and movements of each display/exhibit. Visitors will have the opportunity to contribute their own valuable insights and their knowledge as members of the community to develop the narratives around the repatriated belongings as well as the greater Museums collection.
- d. Collaborative efforts between the museum, art historians, artists, curators, and international partners towards uncovering the provenance of these belongings underscores the importance of multicultural and multi-sectoral cooperation in preserving Namibian cultural heritage.
- e. Educational programs will include panel discussions, workshops, and guided tours, all to deepen the public's understanding of artistic research and communal knowledge and its role in preserving Namibian cultural heritage.

NMN Senior Curator, Golda Ha-Eiros and Project co-lead reveal that curating this body of work was a captivating and altruistic journey through time. "Through unveiling the stories that have shaped our artistic and cultural heritage, this exhibition is an invitation to connect with the rich histories of our own people that lie beneath the surface of each cultural belongings", she said.

NAGN Chief Curator, Ndeenda Shivute-Nakapunda and co-lead of the Project further add that this impeccable show feeds into the Gallery's mission of researching, collecting, and celebrating local arts and crafts. "ARCK underscores the Gallery's potential in terms of space and fluidity, as well as its ability to involve locals and visitors through honouring cultural heritage and human connectedness", she stated.

The exhibition will be on display until Saturday afternoon, 18 May 2024, and entry is free.

The Gallery is open on Mondays (14h00 – 17h00), Tuesdays to Fridays (08h00 – 17h00) and Saturdays (09h00 – 14h00).

## **An Institutional Overview**

### **National Art Gallery of Namibia (NAGN)**

The National Art Gallery of Namibia (NAGN) is a state-owned enterprise situated in central Windhoek, the capital city of Namibia. It's strategic focus as the national guardian of visual arts is to establish operations and systematic programmes informed by arts-based activities that aim to inform and inspire

the public about visual art and its role in Namibian culture, as well as developing and promoting the visual arts sector in the country. The Gallery concerns itself with providing a dedicated space and human capacity for the exhibition, appreciation, acquisition, conservation, preservation and research of visual art and craft within a Namibian context.

The NAGN also encourages the formation of a Namibian, African and global consciousness of the value of visual art and craft for the continued development of humankind. It further aims to be the leading institution for celebrating, collecting, preserving, exhibiting, and researching visual art and craft, as a component of our national identity, cultural heritage, and human connectedness.

### **National Museum of Namibia (NMN)**

The National Museum of Namibia, formerly known as the Landesmuseum is a cultural institution located in Windhoek, the capital city of Namibia. Established in 1907, it is one of the oldest museums in the country and serves as a repository of Namibia's rich cultural, historical, and natural heritage.

The museum was founded during the German colonial era and initially served as a repository for natural history specimens and ethnographic belongings collected from across Namibia. Today, its mission is to preserve, understand and research the material heritage of Namibia. Additionally, showcasing Namibia's diverse cultural and natural heritage, in return educating visitors about the country's history.

The National Museum of Namibia houses extensive collections that encompass a wide range of subjects, including archaeology, paleontology, ethnography, social history, and natural history. The museum's collections include archaeological belongings dating back thousands of years, cultural belongings representing Namibia's diverse ethnic groups, fossils of prehistoric animals, historical documents photographs.

The museum has permanent exhibitions that explore various aspects of Namibia's cultural, historical, and natural heritage. These exhibitions cover topics such as traditional lifestyles and customs, colonial history, the struggle for independence and environmental conservation.

In addition, the National Museum of Namibia offers educational and programs through EduVentures Trust, guided tours at its display center the Independence Museum of Namibia and within its various collections. These tours aim to promote a deeper understanding and appreciation of Namibia's heritage and to foster dialogue about important social, cultural, and environmental issues facing the country.

### **Museum Association of Namibia (MAN)**

Launched in 1990, MAN is a Non-Governmental, community development focused organisation representing museums and heritage, institutions, and practitioners throughout Namibia. MAN is an organisation of museums, institutions, and people in Namibia, which aims to promote museology and all matters pertaining thereto. Since 2002, MAN has been officially recognized by the Namibian Government as the voice of Namibian museums and receives an annual grant-in-aid from the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture "... to facilitate the establishment of heritage institutions at the regional and local level and to support such institutions by providing guidance, assistance and expertise where necessary and possible".

MAN strives to define, support and aid museums and museum institutions, establish and reinforce the museum profession in Namibia, and facilitate cooperation and mutual assistance between museums and between members of the museum profession locally, regionally, and internationally. Finally, MAN strives to emphasise the role played by museums and the museum profession within each community and in the promotion of more excellent knowledge and understanding among people. It is a facilitating organisation for museums and other institutions in the heritage sector. It aims to establish, maintain, and

strengthen relations between all concerned with the study, practice, preservation, protection, dissemination, and promotion of national heritage in Namibia in cooperation with regional and international organisations for the benefit of all Namibians.

### **Gerda Henkel Foundation**

The Gerda Henkel Foundation was established in June 1976 by Lisa Maskell in memory of her mother Gerda Henkel as an incorporated foundation under civil law, headquartered in Düsseldorf.

The Gerda Henkel Foundation provides financial support for the historical humanities. Research projects that explore current issues in a larger historical context or consciously focus on topics of relevance to the present or the future receive support from programmes of a limited duration such as, for example, the “Democracy”, “Forced Migration” and “Lost Cities” funding programmes. As part of the Lisa Maskell Fellowship programme, the Foundation supports young scholars in the humanities in both Africa and Southeast Asia. With its “Patrimonies” funding initiative, it promotes the preservation of the cultural heritage, specifically in regions experiencing crisis. In connection with funded projects, the Foundation also aids with social support measures as part of complementary projects. The Gerda Henkel Foundation can by virtue of its statutes pursue its objectives both inside and outside Germany.

### **Heinrich Böll Foundation**

For more than 40 years, the Heinrich Böll Foundation has supported and promoted the consolidation of democracy, human rights, gender justice, ecological justice, and constructive dialogue in the Southern African region.

Active in Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe, the foundation proudly identifies with the struggles and victories of progressive civil society and non-state actors in the realisation of a just society. Their work is underscored through strong partnerships, alliances, and networks across the rights spectrum.

For many organisations and individuals, the Foundation has become a reliable funding partner, a collaborator, a promoter of constructive dialogue and a pathway to an international network of progressive rights organisations. The Foundation also contributes research and analyses of contemporary political events in the region, on the continent and across the globe. Our Focus Areas in Southern Africa consists of four programmes: Democracy and Social Justice, Human Rights and Gender Justice, Ecological Justice, and International Dialogue and African Perspectives.

**END**

For more information, you are welcome to contact the National Art Gallery of Namibia (NAGN) through the Marketing and Communications Department:

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**Photo caption:**

*The creation of safe spaces allowed for unprecedented team discussions.*

Group photo taken in Okombahe by Willem Vrey (September, 2023)