

## AfricaMuseum Code of Ethics

The AfricaMuseum (AM – Royal Museum for Central Africa) is a federal scientific institute under the authority of the Minister for Science Policy. As a public institution, the AM is particularly vigilant about applying international commitments and legislation aimed at protecting human rights and fighting discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, or skin colour.

The AfricaMuseum and its partners adhere to the International Council of Museums (ICOM) Code of Ethics (<https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICOM-code-En-web.pdf>). Section IV, on interaction with the communities of origin, is a particularly important guideline for the AM.

Given its specific historical and colonial context, the AM is especially attentive to racism as well as other forms of intolerable discrimination, and wishes to apply a number of standards regarding 1) respect for people and objects of African origin and 2) the treatment of colonial history. In the past, the AfricaMuseum contributed to forging stereotyped representations of Africa, its inhabitants, and people of African descent. Today, in our twofold role as a museum and research institution, we wish to contribute to the deconstruction of this negative representation and promote a better knowledge and understanding of Africa and people of African descent today.

The AfricaMuseum works with many external partners: scientists, artists, civil society, and people from all over the world. This code of ethics applies to all of our partners, including third parties who, for commercial purposes, use the infrastructure of and around the AfricaMuseum. It also applies to the activities of the AfricaMuseum itself, as well as to its own personnel.

The AM acknowledges its responsibilities to the society in which the consequences of colonialism are felt to this day. This code of ethics clarifies the manner in which it seeks to assume these responsibilities. It applies to the AM itself, as well as to all third parties that, in one way or another, are involved in scientific activities (and their related communications), exhibitions (permanent or temporary), cultural events, guided tours, educational programs, etc. organized or facilitated by the AM.

This code of ethics also applies to events organized by third parties and for which the role of the AM is limited to providing event spaces or other logistical support. In all cases, European, federal, and local legislation are also applicable.

### **What is the socio-historical context of this code?**

During the colonial period, Africans and people of African descent were depicted as the negative reflection of white people, and characterized by what they lacked or had in excess: they were deemed racially and culturally inferior, closer to animals than to white men, less intelligent and rational, lacking in history, physically stronger, and hypersexual. Yet genetics show that human ‘races’ are a myth. Within the AfricaMuseum’s research institute, anthropologists, historians, art historians, musicologists, and linguists investigate colonial racial theories, colonial history, representations of Africans and people of African descent, African history, and the languages and art of Africa. Africans and people of African descent

are not fundamentally different from other people. They speak languages, not dialects. As the cradle of humanity, Africa is where human history began. Centuries before Europeans colonized huge swathes of the African continent in the late 19th century, many Africans lived in organized states and, through trade networks, were in contact with North Africa, Europe, and Asia, reaching as far as China. Africans had already visited Europe a century before Europeans crossed the equator in Africa for the first time in the 15th century. The AM's goal is to share this knowledge with the public, not only for its scientific value, but also because research has shown that stereotypes and racist representations of Africans and members of African society affect all aspects of their lives: they are faced with prejudice in their daily encounters or when they seek work or housing, and this takes a toll on their psychological well-being.

For these reasons, the AfricaMuseum and its partners pursue the following objectives, among others:

- spread knowledge about Africa and call attention to the history of racism and its ties to colonial history;
- promote a contemporary image of Africa;
- encourage critical thought for a better understanding of the African continent and persons coming from or living there, and their place in the world;
- enhance the value of cultural and natural diversity and foster a better understanding of the global challenges of our time;
- fight stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination against Africans and people of African descent;
- stimulate the competences and institutional development of our scientific and artistic partners in Africa or of African or other descent by providing better access to the expertise and collections of the RMCA;
- encourage co-creation, thereby increasing the visibility of the partners involved;
- through cultural and scientific outreach, deconstruct and replace stereotypical images and representations of Africa, Africans, and people of African descent;
- strengthen synergies between Belgian, African, and international stakeholders in the fields of culture, education, and science communication;
- avoid the instrumentalization or other abusive use of objects, texts, or images created in a colonial context, particularly when they reinforce racist stereotypes and prejudices, and maintain respect for human dignity and integrity in all circumstances;
- indicate, when scientific imperative requires the reproduction of dated and colonial language, that such language is 'an outdated colonial description that does not reflect the current vision of the AM'.

Each person or entity working with the AM, conducting activities facilitated by the establishment or carrying out tasks which they have been assigned by the AM, for example as a guide, researcher, or scientific or artistic curator, etc., shall share these objectives and shall refrain from any act or declaration that would compromise the said objectives. Should there be a violation of this code of ethics, the AM reserves the right to immediately terminate the collaboration or contract, request police intervention, and/or lodge a complaint with the courts or other competent authority.

## Specific guidelines for public events organized in the AfricaMuseum and its immediate vicinity

Prior to organizing a public event in the spaces of the AfricaMuseum or its immediate vicinity, the organizers shall declare in writing that they shall: adhere to this code of ethics, including the abovementioned objectives; refrain from any act or declaration that would compromise the said objectives; respect the guidelines listed below; and prohibit, in all communication or promotion and public relations (including audio or video recordings made during the event by the organization or the event's participants), any form of stereotyping that is offensive to Africans or people of African descent, or any other origin, conviction, religion, disability, gender, sexual orientation, age, etc. This signifies in particular that:

- No use shall be made of stereotyped representations of Africans and people of African descent;
- African cultures shall not be reduced to precolonial cultures or represented as having no history, unchanging, isolated, and not influenced by contacts with the outside world;
- No costumes or disguises are allowed, except for actors in theatre performances or participants in a fashion show;
- participants shall dress in a manner that is not hurtful to minorities, Africans, people of African or other foreign descent (particularly through the use of blackface);
- There shall be no suggestion that the behaviour of Africans, unlike other people, is not acquired (cultural) but rather innate (biological).
- No use shall be made of practices, words, and depictions that could be interpreted as a form of cultural appropriation.
- These directives apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to any form of discrimination or stereotyping of any other category of persons, whether based on origin, beliefs, religion, disability, gender, sexual preference, age, etc.

The organizer shall clearly communicate the role of the AfricaMuseum in the organization of the event. Express authorization must be obtained from the AM and any relevant individuals prior to the use of the museum's name, the museum logo, names of AM staff members, etc.

Events of a political or electoral nature do not correspond to the vision and mission of the AM and shall not be authorized.

Organizers are requested to submit all promotional materials related to their public event (including materials published after the event takes place) for approval by the AM.

In case of non-compliance with the provisions of this code of ethics, the museum reserves the right to cancel the event after informing the organizer, or – if it is too late to cancel the event – to distance itself publicly from the said event. To do so, the AM may disclose its communications with the organizer. By signing this code of ethics, the organizer hereby declares that it consents to the potential publication of personal data, such as the names of individuals representing the organization or the signatories of this agreement. Moreover, the organizer cannot hold the AM liable for any financial or reputational damage

owing to event cancellation, public distancing, or publication of documents related to the event, whichever is applicable.

During the event, AM representatives may issue instructions to the organization or demand changes to aspects of the event or its communications that do not adhere to this code of ethics or the commitments made in accordance with it.

The AM can seek compensation from the organizers or its guests for damage, particularly reputational, suffered as a result of their non-compliance with this code of ethics.