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Atlanta to host celebration of African culture in 2014

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BY HOWARD POUSNER - THE ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION

A major exhibit of African art and artifacts is coming to Atlanta in 2014 and, around it, organizers are plotting a yearlong citywide celebration exploring past, present and future cultural and economic bonds between Africa, Europe and America.

The exhibition "Kongo Across the Waters," focusing on the art, religion and culture of the Kongo region of Central Africa and how they were transformed in the U.S. and Central America following the slave trade, will open at the Jimmy Carter Library and Museum next May. Largely drawn from the Royal Museum of Central Africa in Tervuren, Belgium, the exhibit will be the centerpiece of Africa Atlanta 2014.

Other highlights of the still-growing program include additional art exhibits, a concert by the Soweto Gospel Choir and other performances, film screenings, conferences and symposiums.

The entire undertaking grew from a casual conversation between Jacqueline Royster, dean of Georgia Tech's Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts, and GlobalAtlanta publisher Philip Bolton, who mentioned that the Belgian museum was interested in touring collection highlights while it closed for preservation and renovation.

Royster contacted the Belgian Consulate in Atlanta, and not only was a tour stop soon planned here for "Kongo Across the Waters," but Tech's

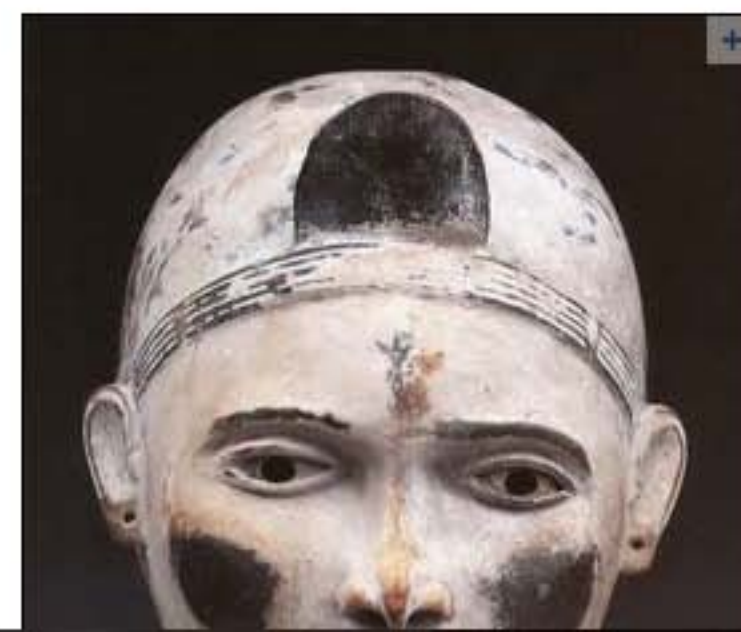
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liberal arts college and the consulate were taking the lead in adding programming around it.

In short order, 25 partners signed on to participate in Africa Atlanta 2014, and programming will continue to be added until Aug. 1, when the schedule is expected to be finalized. A Feb. 6 launch is planned.

"I was simply amazed at how quickly it grew," said Royster, who is serving as co-chair with Genevieve Verbeek, the Belgian consul general in Atlanta since August. "It was as if the stars were aligning."

Rialto Center for the Arts director Leslie Gordon, who has forged many international partnerships at the Georgia State University performance facility, said the cultural celebration, modeled on the annual France-Atlanta events here, simply seemed like an idea whose time had come.

"Africa Atlanta is very substantial and is going to be a really big deal," said Gordon, who will present the Soweto Gospel Choir, from South Africa, at the Rialto on Feb. 8.

Royster called Atlanta a "nexus for reinvention" and said the city is the perfect place to consider how new bonds can be formed between the U.S., Europe and Africa to replace the shackles of the trans-Atlantic slave trade triangle that operated from the late 16th to early 19th centuries.

"Things came together in a way that just said Atlanta is the place and this is the time," the Tech dean said.

Africa Atlanta, however, will probably not become an annual event.

"I leave the door open," Royster said, "but it's my sense that this intensity will be a one-in-a-lifetime thing."

EVENT PREVIEW

[Africa Atlanta 2014](#)

Kicks off Feb. 6, 2014. At various sites around the metro area.

AFRICA ATLANTA 2014 HIGHLIGHTS

Plans continue to be firmed up (follow www.africaatlanta.org for developments), but here is a sampling of key events:



"Mask of the nganga Diphomba," a late-19th-century work made of wood, pigment and clay from the Yombe peoples of the Lower Congo, will be part of the exhibit "Kongo Across the Waters," coming to the Jimmy Carter Library and Museum next May. The mask is from the collection of the Royal Museum of Central Africa in Tervuren, Belgium.



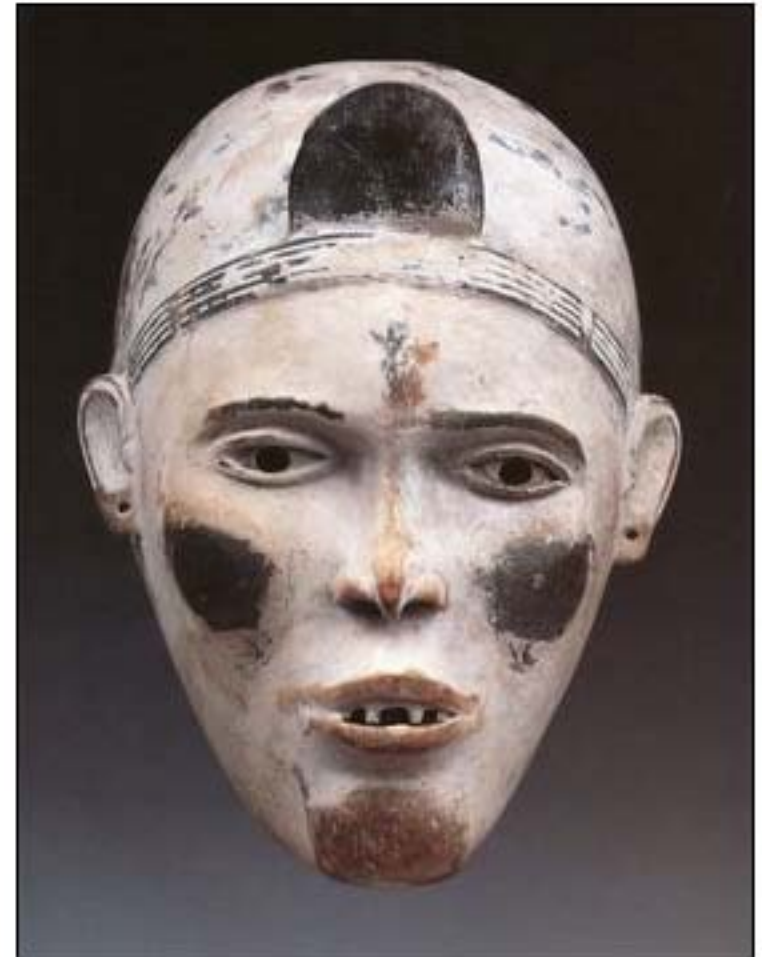
"Anthropomorphic power figure, nkisi nkondi," a 19th-century work by the Yombe peoples of the Lower Congo, will be part of the exhibit "Kongo Across the Waters," which is coming to the Jimmy Carter Library and Museum next May. The exhibit is the centerpiece of the Africa Atlanta 2014 cultural program. The figure is from the collection of the Royal Museum of Central Africa in Tervuren, Belgium.



- **“Romare Bearden: A Black Odyssey,”** Dec. 14, 2013-March 9, 2014, at Emory University’s Michael C. Carlos Museum: The late artist’s “Odyssey” series, rarely shown outside New York, created an artistic bridge between Homer’s classical mythology and African-American culture.
- **“Mapping Place: Africa Beyond Paper,”** an exhibit at Georgia Tech’s Robert C. Williams Paper Museum, officially kicks off Africa Atlanta on Feb. 6, 2014. The African dance-drumming troupe Giwayen Mata performs. Through April 30, 2014.
- **“The Growing Importance of Africa to the United States: African Ambassadors Roundtable,”** organized by the World Affairs Council of Atlanta, March 2014 (date, place details to be announced).
- **“Shuffle, Shake and Shatter,”** March 28, 2014, at Georgia Tech’s Ferst Center for the Arts, a video and art installation by artist-in-residence Sanford Biggers that includes an exploration of identity shot in West Africa.
- **Africa Belle Festival,** a springtime (details to be announced) celebration of French-speaking Africa (including film, lectures, gallery talks, children’s storytelling and more), presented by Alliance Francaise d’Atlanta.
- **“Kongo Across the Waters,”** May 17-Sept. 7, 2014, at the Jimmy Carter Library and Museum: Organized by the University of Florida’s Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art, the exhibit combines art and artifacts from the Royal Museum of Central Africa in Tervuren, Belgium, with Gullah coiled baskets, Haitian vodou vessels, New Orleans music and contemporary works by artists including Atlantan Radcliffe Bailey.



The Soweto Gospel Choir will perform at the Rialto Center for the Arts on Feb. 8, 2014. The concert is part of Africa Atlanta 2014. Photo credit: brettschewitz.com



Coming attractions: Africa Atlanta 2014 📷



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