

AfricaMuseum Code of Ethics

The AfricaMuseum (AM – Royal Museum for Central Africa) is a federal scientific institute under the authority of the State Secretary 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.

Given its specific historical and colonial context, the AM is especially attentive to racism and Afrophobia, 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 participate in deconstructing this negative representation.

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.

The AM acknowledges its responsibilities to the society in which the consequences of colonialism are felt to this day. This code of ethics clarifies 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. The AM distinguishes between two types of events organized by third parties:

1. Private events. Such events are accessible only to the guests of the organizers, with no external public communications (off- or online) regarding the event. Examples of private events are groups reserving a guided tour of the museum for their members or renting our meeting rooms; scientists, institutions, or international universities presenting conferences; or museum sponsors organizing a nocturne for their professional relations.
2. Public events. Such events are accessible to the general public, and are announced or covered (off- or online). Examples include events by museum sponsors that are open to the general public, debates held in the meeting rooms which are livestreamed or recorded for later broadcast, or events held in the outdoor spaces immediately surrounding the museum.

The code of ethics applies to both private and public events. Public events are also subject to additional guidelines detailed in this code of ethics, which are referred to in the agreement signed between the AM and the organizer. In all cases, European and federal legislation are applicable.

Context: this code of ethics also applies to all third parties – individuals or organizations – working in and/or collaborating with the AfricaMuseum.

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, deprived of history, physically stronger, and oversexed. 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 and Asia, reaching as far as China. Africans had already visited Europe a century before Europeans crossed the equator in Africa 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.

In addition to its scientific mission, the AM therefore pursues the following objectives:

- through its public outreach activities, 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 investigation for a better understanding of the African continent and persons coming from or living there, and their place in the world;
- restore 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;
- promote a caring, equitable, inclusive, and sustainable world;
- stimulate the competences and institutional development of our scientific and artistic partners in Africa or of African 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 historical, 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; that they shall refrain from any act or declaration that would compromise the said objectives; and that they shall respect the guidelines listed below.

The following guidelines concern all activities organized by third parties in the AM.

The organizer shall ensure that the guidelines below are observed in all communications or promotional materials, including audio or video recordings made during the event by the organization or the event's attendees:

- The organizer shall prohibit the use of any stereotype that may be offensive to people of African descent. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:
 - No depictions of animals, in or out of their natural environment, to refer to the cultures of Africans or people of African descent;
 - No stereotyped representation of Africans or people of African descent, suggesting for instance that they are closer to monkeys than to other people;
 - African cultures shall not be reduced to precolonial cultures or represented as traditional, without history, unchanging, isolated, and not influenced by contacts with the outside world;
 - The use of blackface is prohibited;
 - No costumes are allowed, except for carnival-related events or for actors in theatre performances. In these cases, care should be exercised to ensure that costumes are not used in a manner that is offensive to minorities, Africans, people of African or other foreign descent, for instance by dressing as them;
 - Caution must be exercised when using adjectives that may stereotype Africans or people of African descent. Such adjectives include 'colourful', 'poor', 'joyful', 'backward', 'wild', 'savage', 'traditional', and expressions such as 'they have rhythm in their blood', suggesting that the behaviour of Africans, unlike other people, is not acquired (cultural) but rather innate (biological). The same holds true for practices, words, and depictions that could be interpreted as a form of cultural appropriation.
- The organizer shall clearly communicate the role of the AfricaMuseum in the organization of the event, and 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 have their place in 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 management 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.