

# The Eloquence of Emptiness: Invisible Inventories Exhibition in Nairobi

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It is true in Kenya as with many African countries that European colonization took away more than just land from the people. The omission, extraction and invisibility of unique artefacts in local museums is a testament to what was stolen from us. Many exhibitions in museums across the continent only have labels and replicas of ancient, sacred artefacts while they stay on display in European and U.S. Museums denying Africans their own heritage.

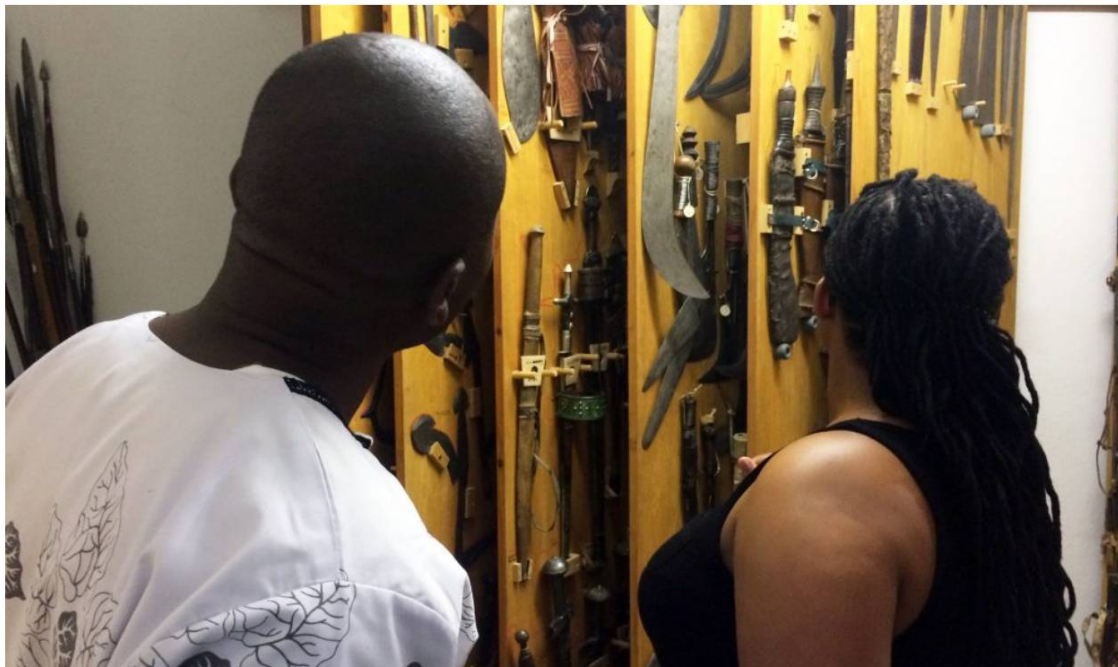
In 2018, a debate was ignited by French president Emmanuel Macron on the urgent need to return African historic treasures stashed in European and American museums. The debate is gaining pace while rekindling painful memories of Europe's forceful entry to Africa and the impacts it has had on generations.

The cultural relics including metal castings, human remains and carvings, were stolen over a period of 200 years. Reports indicate that over 90 percent of these artworks lie outside Africa. Numerous leaders are calling on their repatriation as an honest gesture to address colonial injustices.

How can Kenyan cultural objects that are in the possession of cultural institutions in Europe and the US be made accessible in Kenya? This question is being investigated by the exhibition series **Invisible Inventories**, which opens on the 17th of March at the National Museums of Kenya in Nairobi — in the absence of said historical objects.



The artist collective The Nest, represented by Jim Chuchu and Njoki Ngumi, reflects on and visualises the sheer amount of objects recorded in the database. They address their different values – from acquisition, to insurance and emotional value, as well as the power relations exerted by individual Western dealers and institutions – with seemingly endless chains of shipment labels.



Ten empty display cabinets will represent objects which are absent from the collection of the National Museums of Kenya, yet found in those of the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum and the Weltkulturen Museum. These ten objects have been selected and closely investigated as a collaborative project between museum professionals from all three institutions.