

Press article – 03-05-2001

Swiss gallery returns 44 Nigerian artefacts | Press Release

BY OZOLUA UHAKHEME, STAFF REPORTER

FORTY-FOUR artefacts from Nigeria were returned to Lagos from Zurich, Switzerland, on Wednesday night, barely 20 days after a government delegation on a recovery mission returned home with two objects.

On April 29, a three-man delegation led by Dr. Omotosho Eluyemi, the Director-General of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments(NCMM), went to Europe to negotiate all possible terms under which the stolen treasures would be retrieved. Specifically, the team visited some gallery corners and arts dealers in Zurich, Paris, Hague and London.

The recovered treasures worth several billions of naira have been described as one of the largest single haul ever handed over by a single foreign gallery since the battle to retrieve the nation's looted properties began, include 19 Benin bronzes, 10 Ife terra cotta objects, several NOK terracotta, Yoruba cultural figures, Igbo-Ukwu works and Esie stones. For safe delivery of the priceless pieces to the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, the works were accompanied by the donor, Mr. Jean David, director of Galerie Walu, and Mr. Habu GwanĪbrahim, a Senior Counsellor from Nigeria Embassy in Berne, Switzerland. Officials of the National Museum, Onikan, Lagos, where the artefacts are kept, were seen on Thursday verifying every object as well as crosschecking them with the accompanying files showing the description, origin and photographs of the returned antiquities. This exercise was followed by the final receipt and handing over of the works in compliance with Article Two of the Memorandum of Understanding between National Commission for Museums and Monuments and Rene David of Galerie Walu, Zurich, Switzerland signed on May 4 this year, in Switzerland.

Signatories to the handing over documents are Jean David (who handed over the objects on behalf of the gallery), Umebe Onyejekwe, curator, National Museum, Lagos (who received the works on behalf of the museum), and Mr. Bode Adesina, curator of National Museum, Ife, as witness.

According to Eluyemi who was happy receiving such a large number of objects, the commission's effort is the beginning of a new direction. He noted that the real task of incorporating the returned objects into national collection has just started. He explained that there is a lot to do in the areas of documentation, classification and coding of the treasures.

Uhakheme Ozolua

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