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**On the return of cultural treasures
Press Release 04.05.01**

The Walu Gallery has been involved with Africa and with trading in African art for more than 45 years. In countless trips and field research projects in Africa, the gallery has also made some startling discoveries such as the famous terracotta pieces from Komaland. Committed collectors, museums and institutions were able to purchase authentic original African artworks from the gallery.

Most of the high quality objects came directly from Africa thanks to René David's close ties with tribal representatives, local institutions and government officials. Others were purchased from collections (divisions of estates, liquidation, sales). The gallery always actively sought to confirm the authenticity and genuineness of the pieces with the help of scientific age determination tests (thermal luminescence, C14, wood analyses, spectral analyses, spectrometry, etc.)

Valuable and unique works of unsurpassed quality were shown time and again at exhibitions at the gallery and in museums (e.g. Vitra Design Museum, the Jewelry Museum in Pforzheim, Neue Galerie in Linz). Many objects found their way to various museums and into the hands of serious collectors.

Earlier returns of cultural treasures

Over the years, the gallery repeatedly received offers of objects already covered in the literature. Between 1994 and 1997 the Walu Gallery worked together with Interpol, the police of the Canton of Zurich, Cultural Department, and the Federal Office of Culture in Bern as well as other competent authorities and institutions and succeeded in putting world famous pieces it had been offered on the open market into safe custody. One such piece was the 400 year-old bronze head of a king from the ancient Ife culture.

During the arduous negotiations with the UNESCO and the museum officials in Ife, René David kept the objects in safe custody. It was only after the negotiations conducted in Nigeria and with the help of the Nigerian ambassador in Switzerland and the Swiss ambassador in Lagos that suitable arrangements could be made for a safe return. In a ceremony at the Embassy of Nigeria in Bern on 3 October 1997, six significant artworks were handed over as a gift to Nigeria, represented by Ambassador Ola M. A. Abiola.

For some time, the gallery, in cooperation with different inter-national organizations, had been able to secure other precious artworks on the open market and put them into safe custody.

The pertinent officials were notified in each case. Owing to the uncertain political situation and upheaval in Nigeria, it had been inopportune to repatriate these artworks directly, as no assurance could be given that they would arrive at their intended destination at the corresponding museums in Nigeria and would then remain there.

Situation has much improved today

The current government, the committed and recently elected Minister of Culture and Tourism, Boma Bromilow-Jack, and the executive board of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments now appear to have the wherewithal, the will and the serious intention of safeguarding this cultural legacy at an appropriate place in keeping with its significance. In recent days, the ministry launched a sweeping campaign within the Nigerian population to promote greater understanding of Nigeria's history and of these artistic testimonies to the past.

The current constellation of museum structures and staff and the improved security installations under the active leadership of the executive director of NCMM (National Commission for Museums and Monuments in the new capital city Abuja), Dr. (Chief) Omotoso Eluyemi, have also done much to ensure that significant cultural treasures do not again end up on the market through some obscure channels. The awareness of the importance of these valuable cultural treasures was also demonstrated by the high ranking delegation that came to Zurich to take the Nigerian artworks back to their homeland. The delegation included Executive Director of NCMM Dr. Omotoso Eluyemi, museum curator and archeologist M. O. Bode Adesina, government representative and attorney at law Ibrahim Haske Dikko, and Senior Counselor Haba A. Gwani Ibrahim from the Nigerian Embassy in Bern.

Gift to Nigeria and its museums

With this official hand-over of 44 objects, including internationally significant works such as Esie sculptures, Ife and Benin bronze heads and terracotta heads, as a gift to the Nigerian state and its museums, René David and his wife Denise wish to express their thanks for the superb cooperation and the long-standing friendships they have had with important figures in Nigeria and their respect and appreciation for this country and the African continent with whose culture they have lived in such close contact for over 45 years. The gallery will now be run by their son Jean David.

René and Denise David are convinced that these unique cultural treasures will assume their rightful place as part of the national legacy in the museums of Nigeria and will remain there.

The international public should act as witnesses and protectors to ensure that this is so.

Galerie Walu | www.walu.ch