

PAYING IT FORWARD IN AFRICA

THE GETTY FOUNDATION MARKS OVER TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF TRAINING AFRICAN MUSEUM PROFESSIONALS

African museums possess an extraordinary cultural heritage—imagine store rooms full of sculptures, ceramics, masks and ceremonial objects, and beautiful textiles of all shapes. Now imagine this important cultural heritage stored in difficult conditions, stacked on shelves, floors, subject to dust and pest infestations. Due to the lack of standardized care and training opportunities, as well as funding, African museums faced many challenges in the 1980s. Seeing a critical need, the Getty Foundation offered support for a landmark program called Preventive Conservation in Museums of Africa (PREMA), thereby launching the Museums in Africa initiative.

For over twenty-five years, the Getty Foundation has provided grants to train museum professionals in sub-Saharan Africa, often partnering with other organizations to help safeguard the continent's heritage. Through the PREMA program, hundreds of museum professionals from more than forty African countries have been trained in preventive conservation techniques. Initially, Getty grants supported intensive PREMA courses taught at the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) in Rome. Subsequent grants helped launch shorter courses throughout Africa taught by graduates of the Rome program. PREMA eventually led to the creation of the first permanent conservation organizations in Africa, the Ecole du Patrimoine Africain (EPA) in Benin and the Centre for Heritage Development in Africa (CHDA) in Kenya.

"The Foundation is proud to have supported museums throughout Africa over the past decades," said Deborah Marrow, director of the Getty Foundation. "In addition to training professionals and preserving collections, Getty grants have strengthened key service organizations and built capacity for museums across the continent."

In addition to the various grants for PREMA, over the years the Foundation has provided grants to the West African Museums Program (WAMP) for photography conservation, to the International Council of African Museums (AFRICOM) so that it could better serve the African museum community, to EPA for a diploma course in preventive conservation, and to CHDA for board training and curriculum development.

More recently, a major collaboration with the British Museum created the Getty East Africa Program, launched in 2011 to offer collections care training to museum professionals from the East African nations of Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. With Foundation support, British Museum staff had previously visited more than forty regional museums to identify training priorities. The resulting survey was the most comprehensive assessment of museums in the region ever undertaken, with detailed analyses of collections, conservation, display, visitor experience, management structures, and staff capabilities. One important finding of the survey was that most existing training programs targeted senior level managers



Abdillahi Said Kalecheza (Malindi Museum) cleaning a winnowing tray, as part of the Getty East Africa Program. Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum

and took place in universities, without the benefit of experience with actual collections in the museum environment. Another issue was that trained staff tended to be centralized in urban centers, leaving staff at key regional museums inadequately supported.

To address these problems, the East Africa Program is targeting entry and mid-level museum employees who have direct involvement with collections. It focuses on collections care, preventative conservation, storage, and exhibition display. Workshops are taking place at two regional museums in Mombasa and Kisumu, Kenya, and the practical training will result in upgraded storage facilities, new displays, integrated pest management systems, and new interpretive materials at these two host museums. The skills being taught are practical and transferable, with all materials needed for the workshops coming from local sources. This ensures that the programs are sustainable and economical during the workshop, and once applied back at the participants' own museums.

"It is said it is better to teach people how to fish rather than to give them fish. That is exactly what this training has done for me," said workshop participant Betty Karanja from the Nyeri Museum in Kenya. "I believe we have a resource team left behind in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda where we can slowly change the face of museums to world-class standards. I am now ready to implement the same in my museum."

"The British Museum program trains new trainers," agreed Marrow. "Workshop participants are able to share their knowledge with colleagues at their own museums, allowing the skills to spread. The workshops also encourage networking among museums in different countries. Together they are finding creative solutions to the region's common challenges."

The content of each workshop is customized to address the knowledge base of the participants, as well as local and cultural issues. Participants from different museums work collaboratively to encourage ongoing cooperation beyond the training course.

"The workshop was also a chance to share with colleagues from various museums, to appreciate that we share similar challenges and successes," said participant Godfrey Emanuel from the Arusha Declaration Museum in Tanzania.

Each Getty program participant is also required to plan a project at their home museums that demonstrates their new skills and makes use of local resources. One such



Above: Members of the Uganda National Museum team manually cleaning a natural history specimen using soft brushes, January 2013. Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum



Below: Charles Aongo (Kisumu Museum), Daniel Memusi (Narok Museum) and Beatrice Moraa (Kapenguria Museum) practicing pinning techniques, May 2013. Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum

project was carried out by three participants from the Lamu Museum, located in the Coast Province of Kenya, and dedicated to the heritage of the region's Swahili culture. Upon their return, the Lamu team identified for their colleagues storage and handling issues at the museum that required immediate attention. They implemented new preventive conservation treatments, such as using solar bags to eliminate pests from textiles without the use of chemicals, and a series of noninvasive techniques that helped to create a clean environment for delicate collection objects. The team also set up an organized storage area, greatly improving identification and access to the collection.

"Africa is, and always has been, a key area of focus for the British Museum. A museum devoted to the history of humanity must have Africa at its core," said British Museum Director Neil MacGregor. "I am delighted that, thanks to the support of the Getty Foundation, we are able to work in partnership with our colleagues in East Africa to develop and deliver museum skills and ensure that African museums are equipped for the future so that Africans can explore and interrogate their long history."

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The East Africa Program will continue through the end of 2014, and results thus far have been encouraging.

The National Museum in Uganda is implementing training courses for all new staff based on the program's resources and methods, with workshop participants delivering the instruction, and it is hoped that the national museums in Kenya and Tanzania will follow suit.

The Getty East Africa Program is the capstone of the Foundation's nearly three decades of work in Africa. Of the hundreds of museum professionals that have been trained in preventive conservation through the Museums in Africa initiative, many are now in charge of collections care, and some have gone on to become museum directors. While no one underestimates the challenges that African museums still face, the new British Museum program, combined with the projects previously funded by the Getty, will have significantly improved conditions and empowered a new generation of African museum professionals.



Pauline Mbethe cleaning objects for the Narok Museum displays. Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum

Project Spotlight: Narok Museum, Kenya

"You will be happy when people see that your exhibition displays have [been given] a new face lift and this is what we did. What a wonderful experience."

– Daniel Memusi, Narok Museum, Kenya

After attending a Getty East Africa Program workshop on exhibitions in Kisumu in 2013, Daniel Memusi from the Narok Museum returned home with renewed enthusiasm. The displays at Narok feature the local Maasai culture, and many collection objects were donated by community members. Despite their significance, however, the displays had been long neglected.

Working with his colleague Adam Jamal, who had also recently completed a Getty course on collections care, Memusi began reinstalling the collections. Selected objects were cleaned; display cases were upgraded; mounts and supports were made for headdresses, garments, pots, and gourds; and the brightly colored beadwork for which the Maasai are renowned were reinstalled using sleeved pins and nylon fishing line. As Memusi and Jamal shared their recently acquired object-handling and cleaning skills with their museum colleagues, a new sense of teamwork emerged. While there is more work to complete, the entire Narok staff is committed to the gradual revitalization of the museum. They are also sharing their new knowledge with another regional institution, the Hyrax Hill Museum, where Memusi led a reinstallation team.



Daniel Memusi installing objects in refreshed showcase. Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum