

Conservation as a tool for cultural rights in DRC : "We have gaps" project

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Abstract

This paper outlines the aim, methodology, and initial results of a joint initiative between two universities (Kinshasa and Liège), two conservation training courses (Academy of Fine Arts of Kinshasa and Saint-Luc Liège), and the Institute of National Museums of Congo (IMNC).

The "On a des lacunes" ("we have gaps") project plays on the notion of loss - both material and of knowledge - to involve communities in the construction of endogenous knowledge on the conservation of objects: a task to be carried out by the Congolese, for the Congolese.

For many Congolese, concepts such as museum, conservation, and restoration sound like imported products, and the notion of cultural rights remains highly abstract and theoretical. The challenge is to transform the manifestation of these rights through conservation into a real tool for empowerment.

The exhibition concept is as follows: on the one hand, conservators explain what a gap, a lack, a material alteration is, and how they remedy it, thus arousing interest in a little-known profession. At the same time, they show and explain their own gaps in knowledge, and ask the public for information about the technique, function, use, naming, or names of the mystery object in the four popular languages and numerous Congolese idioms.

The "Nous avons des lacunes" project wants to highlight the role and involvement of communities and different social entities as active guardians of their heritage, by humbly admitting the lack of knowledge among professionals.