

BLOW-UP IN BISSAU

**PHOTOGRAPHY AND MUSEUM
REVIVAL IN WEST AFRICA**



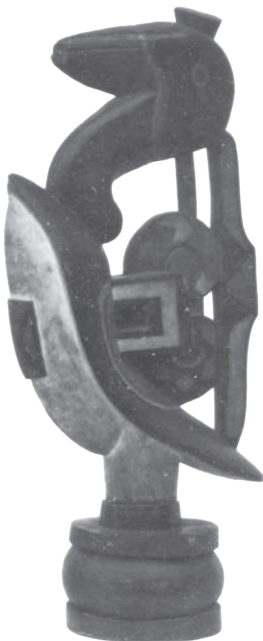
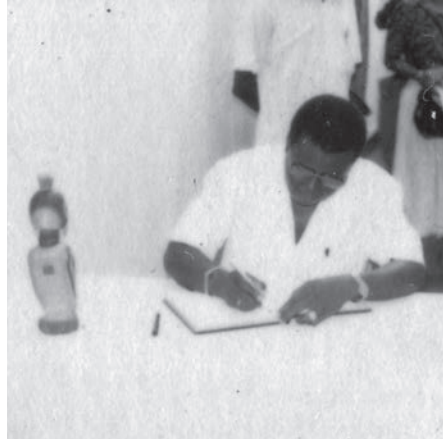
Ramon Sarró and Ana Temudo



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The National Ethnographic Museum of Guinea-Bissau, which opened in 1988, once housed a unique collection of objects from different cultural groups in West Africa, with photographs displayed alongside showing them being used or worn. During the civil war of 1998–9 the Museum was occupied by Senegalese troops who had joined government forces, resulting in damage and loss to the Museum and its collections.



However not everything was destroyed; 450 sheets of contact prints did survive, documenting the collections that the Museum once housed in the country's capital Bissau, and the ethnographic work its staff undertook during the 1980s in order to found their museum. The contact prints, so called for the way they are developed directly from negatives, have been revisited, digitised, enlarged ('blown-up') and reproduced here to tell the story of the Museum and its history. Working with Museum Director Dr Albano Mendes, it was possible to reconstruct the early history of the Museum and create an exhibition in Bissau in 2017.



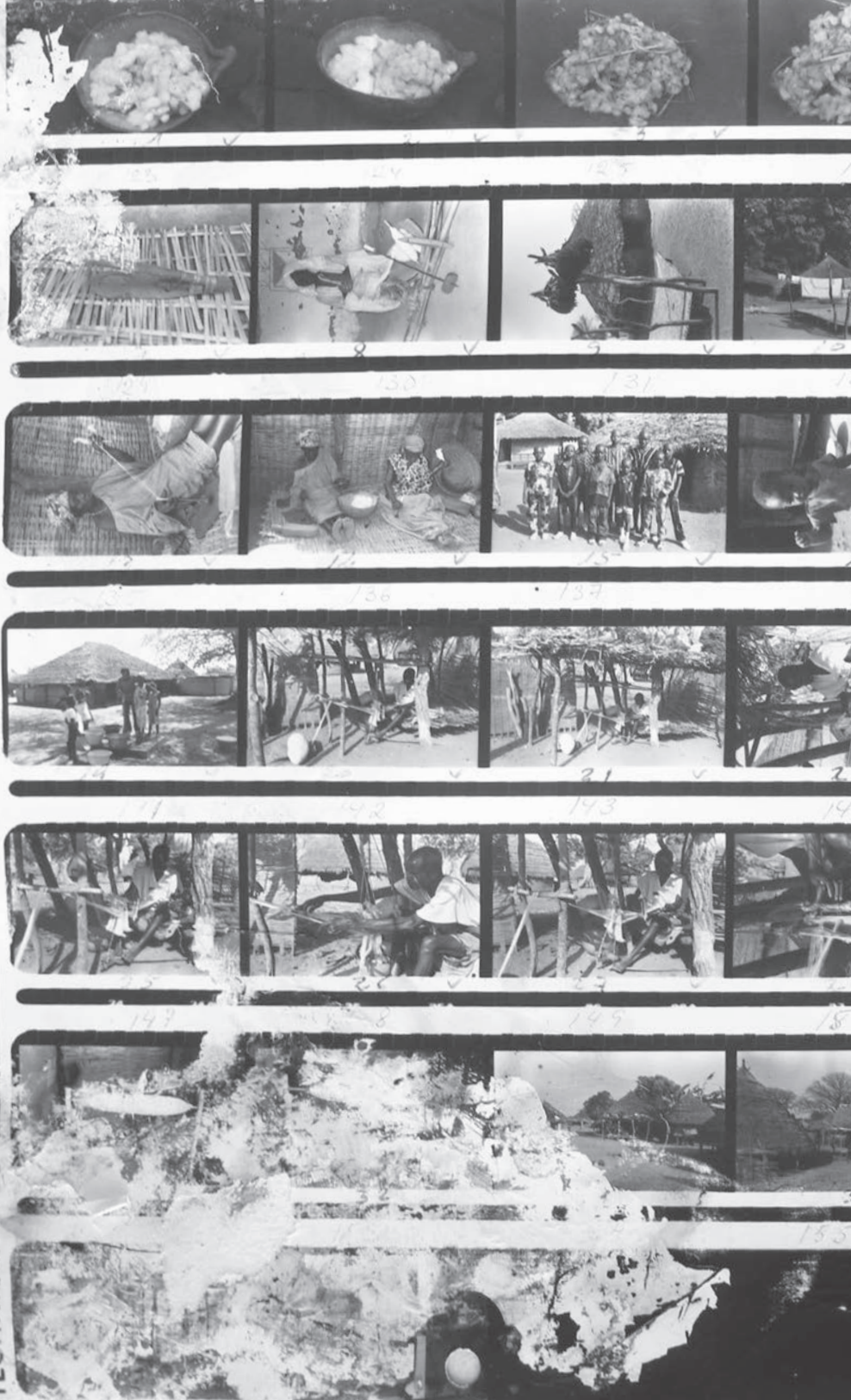
Contact prints

The contact prints that survived depict the Museum's various interests and past displays, photographs of its objects, fieldwork photographs showing objects being used, as well as members of local communities. Thematic displays included local architecture, arts and craft, performances, and food production. Developed as quick reference prints, many of the contact print sheets are worn and punched with holes for filing. Connections between the small rows of images can be seen on closer inspection, helping to weave together the Museum's history. Here, contact prints displaying the importance of vernacular architecture and weaving traditions in Bissau are blown-up as examples.

DATE

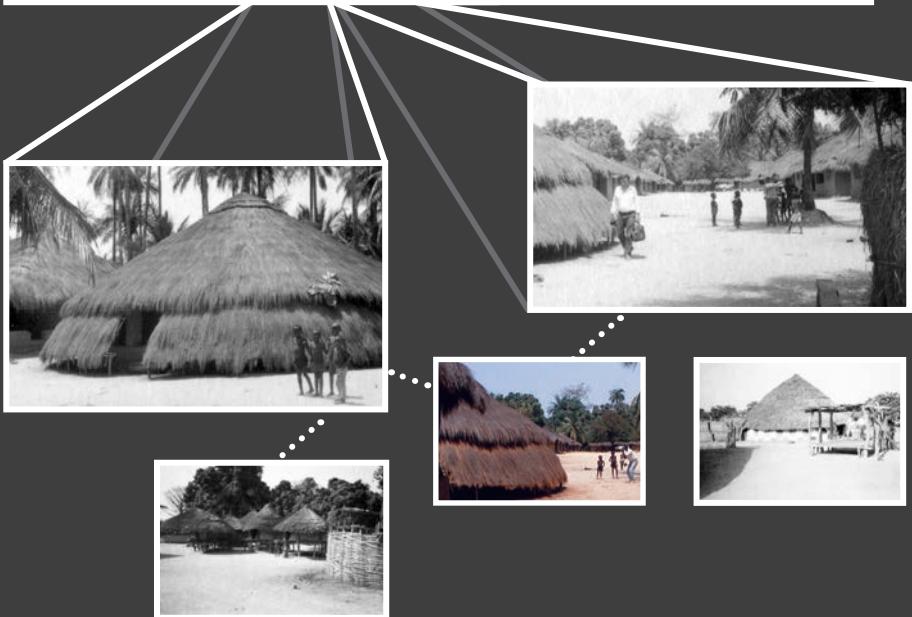
SUBJECT

TECHNICAL DATA



Architecture

These images of architecture show forms of material knowledge and building types that were present in the rural areas of Guinea-Bissau in the late 1980s but that are now becoming rare. Styles of houses and granaries varied across cultural groups (the enlarged images show Nalu, Mandingo and Fula houses). Two of these images show British anthropologists Philip Ravenhill, founder and director of the West African Museums Programme (WAMP), and Malcolm McLeod, then Keeper of Ethnography at the British Museum. In 1987 McLeod spent half a year in Guinea-Bissau collaborating with the Museum team. He also took the colour photograph of Mussa Camara, the photographer of the Guinean team, taking a photograph of the same Nalu house.



Weaving

Guinea-Bissau is at a crossroads between different weaving traditions (Fula, Mandingo, Mandjak, as well as Western ones). Many of the prints show the diverse methods of constructing and using looms in the country, as well as the different practices, strongly gendered, associated with the art of cotton weaving. Between 1988 and 1998 the Museum dedicated several exhibitions, in Bissau as well as touring, based on its unique collection of textiles (now largely missing) and of photographs documenting these weaving practices.



Nalu Art

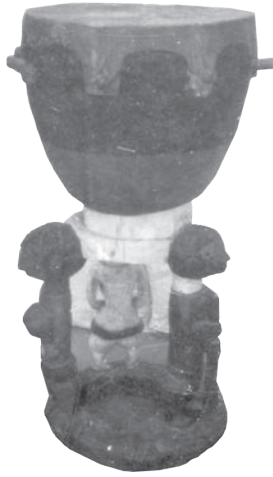
In the 1980s, the Museum was keen to document the culture of the Nalu, a group of mangrove rice farmers living in the southern part of the country. Nalu carvers are the makers of some of the most impressive forms of art anywhere in Africa, even though their tradition has been mostly overlooked by Western scholars of African art.

The images taken in 1986–90 by Mussa Camara and other members of the Museum team show Nalu objects such as the Nimba headdress, the Ninte Kamatchol headdress (a long- beaked bird head), the Tchamtchok (a sculpture with a similar bird head, but with the beak upwards instead of downwards), the Koni bird (a standing bird, which was also the logo of the Museum), the Numbe headdress (of indeterminate zoomorphic aspect), and the Banda (a long headdress in the shape of a crocodile's head).

The original Koni bird used in the Museum's logo is lost, but surviving contact prints depict a very similar bird in the hand of a carver – this bird is in the Museum's collection in Guinea-Bissau today.

The three colour images of the Ninte Kamatchol, the Nimba and the Numbe masquerades were taken by British anthropologist Malcolm McLeod, during his time collaborating with the Guinean team in 1987.








A BARRAGEM E SUAS CONDIÇÕES DE VIDA

Apresentamos a história da Barragem de São Carlos, desde a sua construção até os dias atuais. Este projeto visa informar a população sobre a importância da barragem para a geração de energia e a preservação ambiental. O texto descreve o processo de construção, os desafios enfrentados e o impacto social e econômico da obra. Também são abordados os aspectos de segurança e manutenção da estrutura.



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MUSEU ETNOGRÁFICO
ACIONAL



ENTRADA



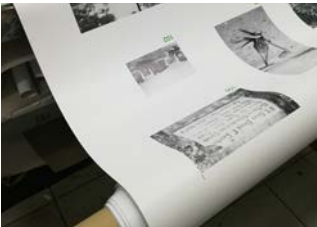
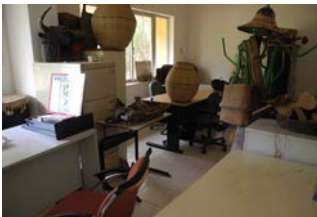
MUSEU ETNOGRÁFICO NACIONAL



Small logos and text at the bottom of the banner, including the word 'Cultura'.



Museum Revival

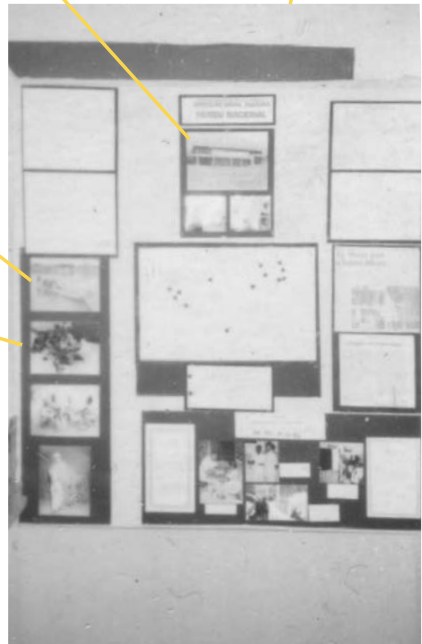
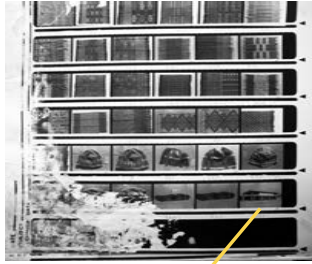


The National Ethnographic Museum (founded 1988) was relocated in 2010, rehousing the objects and records that had survived the civil war. The Museum's new building used to house the old Museum of Portuguese Guinea (1946–1974) that had been set up in colonial times. With a new home, new displays could be organized, although this took some time. In September 2017 an exhibition using blown-up images from the contact prints and surviving objects was finally created in the Museum, to tell its past and signal a future.

Working with the Museum team, the curators of this exhibition selected contact print images to be reprinted in graphic displays. Images were organized thematically (weaving, livelihoods, religion, historical places, games, etc.) with texts for each theme, on 13 roll-up banners, and with objects displayed on plinths nearby. Among the many visitors who came on the day of the opening, 15 September 2017, was the Minister of Culture, who promised financial support for the Museum. The exhibition was reviewed by the media as the revival of the Museum, and ever since that day the Museum remains open daily to the public, with schools and universities visiting it regularly. The roll-ups with the reconstructed images played the same role as the images on the walls of the lost Museum, reviving the important work that the Museum once did in documenting and celebrating the remarkable cultures of Guinea-Bissau.

Visual Essay





Exhibition Credits

Curation

Ramon Sarró and Ana Temudo

Design

Creative Jay

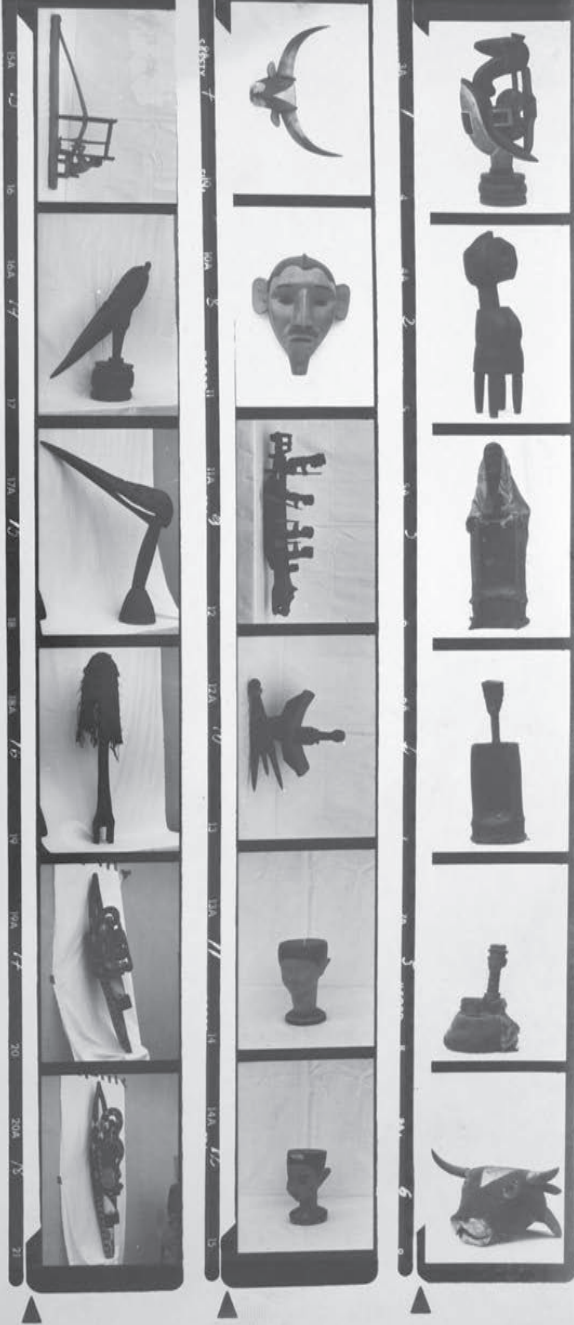
Research

Albano Mendes, Ramon Sarró and Ana Temudo

Contact prints by kind permission of National Ethnographic Museum of Guinea-Bissau

Additional content courtesy of Malcolm McLeod, Roger Canals and National TV of Guinea-Bissau

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www.prm.ox.ac.uk/Blow-up-in-Bissau