

## First repatriation of a Bakor monolith to Nigeria

**The Chrysler Museum, the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, and Factum Foundation for Digital Technology in Preservation are using digitisation and 3D printing to shift the debate on repatriation**



© The original at The Chrysler Museum of Art



© The facsimile at Factum Foundation

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On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 2023, two visually identical monoliths were exchanged at the Nigerian Embassy in Washington DC. One is an authentic basalt monolith carved between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, which was located in the village of Njemetop in Cross River State, south-eastern Nigeria. Either during or after the Biafran Civil War (1967-1970), it was either sold or stolen, likely travelling over the nearby border to Cameroon and afterwards onto the international antiquities market. In 2005, it was bought at auction for €4200, then in 2012 it was bequeathed to the Chrysler Museum in Norfolk, Virginia.

The Chrysler Museum of Art is voluntarily repatriating this authentic Bakor monolith to Nigeria. In recognition of this act, world-leading pioneers in digital preservation Factum Foundation have produced an exact facsimile of the monolith on behalf of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, which will be installed in a permanent exhibition on looting and repatriation at The Chrysler Museum of Art. This marks the first time an original Bakor Monolith is to be returned to Nigeria. It is also the first time a museum has agreed for a facsimile to replace an original in a case of repatriation.

The Bakor monoliths are carved from basalt and limestone and represent community leaders and ancestral figures. Factum Foundation, generously supported by the Carène Foundation, has worked with NCMM since 2016 to document the monoliths on-site and in international collections, and are currently preparing a submission of the sites to UNESCO for World Heritage Site status. In Spring 2023, an exhibition on the project *The Bakor Monoliths: Endangered Heritage* was held at the British Museum.

Commenting on the project, Professor Abba Tijani, Director General of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, stated:

*“In the spirit of the ongoing repatriation of cultural artefacts to Nigeria, especially the Benin Bronzes, the restitution of this ancestral carved stone by the Chrysler Museum is a welcome and laudable development. This action, as well as the roles played by Factum Foundation and the Carène Foundation, will contribute immensely to support conservation and protection of cultural heritage with the participation of host communities.”*

Dr Ferdinand Saumarez Smith, Director of Projects in Africa for Factum Foundation:

*We hope that the Chrysler Museum is the first of many museums to explore this solution to the debate on restitution. Factum Foundation welcomes the opportunity to work with any museum or private collection wishing to return cultural artefacts to their rightful owners.*

**Useful links:**

- [The Chrysler Museum – Akwanshi Head](#)
- [Factum Foundation Bakor Monolith Book](#)
- [Carene Foundation – Cross River Monoliths](#)

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**On Factum Foundation**

The Factum Foundation for Digital Technology in Preservation is a not-for-profit organisation founded in 2009 in Madrid by Adam Lowe. It works alongside its sister company, Factum Arte, a multi-disciplinary workshop in Madrid dedicated to digital mediation and physical transformation in contemporary art and the production of facsimiles. The Foundation was established to demonstrate the importance of documenting, monitoring, studying, recreating and disseminating the world's cultural heritage through the rigorous development of high-resolution recording and rematerialisation techniques. The Foundation's activities include: building digital archives for preservation and further study, creating and organizing touring exhibitions, setting up training centres for locals to learn the different technologies developed by the Foundation to record their own cultural heritage, and producing exact facsimiles as part of a new approach to conservation and restoration.