

Glenbow

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LEGO® Artist Uses Unique Medium to Reimagine Epic Voyage

Building Black Civilizations: Journey of 2,000 Ships now open at Glenbow at The Edison

CALGARY, AB – April 11, 2024 – Open now at Glenbow at The Edison and running until May 19, *Building Black Civilizations: Journey of 2,000 Ships* is the work of Ghanaian-Canadian artist Ekow Nimako. As a LEGO® artist, Nimako builds whimsical and elaborate sculptures incorporating Afrofuturistic themes rooted in history and political inquiry – using thousands of black LEGO® elements.

“It’s such an important role for an art museum to provide opportunities to revisit and reimagine historical events through a contemporary lens,” says Glenbow President & CEO Nicholas R. Bell. “We are thrilled to have Ekow Nimako’s monumental pieces on display at Glenbow at The Edison for our visitors to experience. It’s vital to demonstrate diverse perspectives and mediums in the visual arts and provide opportunities for deeper conversations about who we are and how we engage with our past.”

In *Building Black Civilizations: Journey of 2,000 Ships*, Nimako reimagines ancient African kingdoms, with four major works featured in the exhibition. Using various LEGO® elements as his medium, Nimako explores the mysterious 14th century sea voyage of Mansa Abu Bakr II, predecessor of Mansa Musa, ruler of the medieval empire of Mali.

“For this body of work, I really got to explore a very specific narrative. Once I learned about this massive fleet that was assembled, I was completely captivated,” says Nimako. “They represented the culture there, which, at the time, was guided by African, Black, Muslim monarchy and social structure. It was such a significant voyage, and one that notably occurred almost 150 years before Columbus.”

Combining architecture, Akan iconography, science fiction and fantasy elements, Nimako transcends the geometric LEGO® forms to create artworks that uniquely transcend history.

“I thought it would be inspiring to build work that reflects this particular voyage,” says Nimako. “Historically, whenever we think about the coast of Africa and ships, it’s hard to avoid the association with the transatlantic slave trade. Creating work that is about an intrepid, non-colonial, African expedition for science and exploration was important for me to bring to the forefront.”

Building Black Civilizations: Journey of 2,000 Ships is organized and circulated by Dunlop Art Gallery and curated by Alyssa C. Fearon. *Building Black Civilizations: Journey of 2,000 Ships* runs from April 10 to May 19, 2024 at Glenbow at The Edison (150 9th Avenue SE). The exhibition is open Wednesday to Friday from 11:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Admission to this exhibition is free thanks to support from Calgary Foundation; free, timed tickets are available at glenbow.org.

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LEGO® Artist Ekow Nimako speaks about his piece *Bay of Banjul (The Abdication of Abu Bakr II)*. The piece is part of the exhibition *Building Black Civilizations: Journey of 2,000 Ships*, on now until May 19 at Glenbow at The Edison.

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About Glenbow

Founded in 1966 as an independent, non-profit museum, archive and gallery, Glenbow cares for an extraordinary collection of more than 250,000 works of art and historical belongings – from Canada and cultures around the world – on behalf of the people of Alberta. *Glenbow Reimagined* is a project to renovate the museum's 50-year-old building and provide a vibrant, thriving cultural resource in the heart of Calgary, committed to expanding the accessibility and impact of arts and culture. Glenbow's main building is closed as it renovates to become the JR Shaw Centre for Arts & Culture. While renovations are underway, visitors can experience exhibitions at the museum's satellite gallery, Glenbow at The Edison.

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