

The background image is a night photograph of a modern, two-story building with a dark facade. A large, illuminated, abstract sculpture is displayed in a glass-enclosed section of the building. To the left, a vertical slat screen is lit with red and blue light. The building is surrounded by lush tropical plants and a paved courtyard with small ground lights. The overall atmosphere is artistic and contemporary.

Black Muse Art Festival 2024 Narrative Report



Foundational Edition

The 2024 edition of the Black Muse Art Festival titled *The Opening*, marked the foundational activation of Black Muse as an interconnected cultural platform in Benin City, Nigeria. The two-day programme brought together artists, curators, writers, collectors, cultural practitioners and audiences around contemporary African art, cultural exchange and the development of new cultural infrastructure in the city.



At a Glance

Indicator

2024

Programme duration

2 days

Attendees

165

Artists and practitioners

90

Countries represented

12

International institutions engaged

4

Nigerian institutions engaged

4

Exhibited Artworks

206

Public programmes

3





The foundational edition also initiated relationships between Black Muse and established cultural institutions in Nigeria and abroad. Engagements included representatives and practitioners connected to four international institutions, including MARKK Museum am Rothenbaum, Germany, Museum de Fundatie, Zwolle, Netherlands, the High Museum of Art in Atlanta and the Toledo Museum of Art in Ohio. Academic and cultural practitioners connected to Princeton University also participated in engagements around the programme. Within Nigeria, Black Muse engaged with four cultural institutions, including MOWAA and organisations within the wider Lagos and Benin City art ecosystems.

These encounters positioned Black Muse within existing national and international networks while creating opportunities for exchange around contemporary African art, museum practice, collections, cultural infrastructure and artistic production. The programme also connected visiting professionals and audiences with artists, artisans and cultural practitioners working in Benin City.



Public Engagement

The festival delivered three public programmes: Conversations, a Guided Tour and an Art Exhibition of the Black Muse Art Collection, featuring over 206 works and about 64 African artists. Together, these activities created different points of access to Black Muse, its artistic programme and its developing physical infrastructure

The Guided Tour introduced participants to the Black Muse spaces, including the Black Muse Residence and the developing Sculpture Park. The exhibition provided a sustained encounter with contemporary African art, while the Conversations programme created a forum for exchange between artists, cultural professionals and audiences.

The festival attracted 165 attendees, including visitors and practitioners from outside Benin City. This established an initial audience base for a new cultural platform and demonstrated interest in developing Benin City as a site for contemporary artistic and cultural exchange.



Establishing a Cultural Platform in Benin City

Beyond the two-day festival, the 2024 edition was significant for activating the wider Black Muse framework. The Black Muse Residence and The Black Muse Sculpture Park provided the physical foundation for a longer-term programme of artistic exchange, residency, exhibition-making and public engagement, which as of today has hosted over 26 residents from different countries including The Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, United States, United Kingdom, South Africa, Kenya, Cameroon, South Africa and Nigeria.

The establishment of this interconnected infrastructure responded to the need for cultural platforms that can support artistic production and exchange outside Nigeria's established cultural centres. The festival therefore served not only as a public event but as an entry point into a developing ecosystem connecting Benin City to wider national, continental and international networks.



Establishing a Cultural Platform in Benin City

The 2024 foundational edition established Black Muse as a platform through which artists, cultural professionals, institutions and audiences could meet in Benin City. Its participation across 25 countries, 90 artists and practitioners, eight cultural institutions, and 206 artworks provided the initial network and public foundation for the festival's continued development.





Learned Lessons

The 2024 foundational edition demonstrated the importance of building strong organisational and professional capacity alongside cultural programming. Key learning included the need for stronger production and coordination systems, continued investment in visual artists and cultural practitioners, and more structured opportunities for knowledge exchange. The experience also reinforced the value of combining exhibitions with conversations, guided tours and participatory activities to reach different audiences. These lessons informed the subsequent development of Black Muse's programming, partnerships and capacity-building activities.







