

**YALE UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY IN COLLABORATION WITH YALE UNIVERSITY  
LIBRARY LAUNCHES JAMES J. ROSS ARCHIVE OF AFRICAN IMAGES, 1590-1920 (RAAI)**

A new and exciting website of published images of African art, the James J. Ross Archive of African Images, 1590–1920 (RAAI), has been launched at Yale University, in New Haven, Connecticut. This unique archive, accessible at <http://raai.library.yale.edu>, significantly enriches the broad range of resources available to students and researchers of African art at Yale, including the significant collection of African art held by the Yale University Art Gallery.

RAAI contains approximately 5,000 illustrations of African art published before 1921. It is the result of an eight-year collaboration between the project’s codirectors James J. Ross, B.A. 1960, African art collector and member of the Gallery’s Governing Board, and Susan Vogel, filmmaker and former director of the Museum for African Art, who were assisted by an editor, researchers, a software developer, and others. RAAI is a work in progress, aspiring to include every African object that has appeared in a book, periodical, catalogue, newspaper, or other source published in or before 1920. The majority of entries date between 1800 and 1920, a period of heightened international presence in Africa. As trade increased between Africa and the West in the early 19th century, voyagers from the West began intensively recording and collecting the material culture of the African coastline. After 1920, an enormous profusion of collecting, exhibiting, and publishing created a flood of images and a whole new regard for African art. The archive does not include postcards or pamphlets of limited distribution and focuses exclusively on figurative art. It is based mainly on the personal library of James J. Ross, augmented by publications from the libraries of Yale University and a few other institutions.

RAAI is a collection of rich historical data and extensively catalogued and annotated images. Images include prints, drawings, paintings, and photographs of objects from a range of contexts: in situ in the original performance context, in exhibitions, in casual snapshots, and in studio photography. Its historical sources afford exceptional insight into early European and American views – both literal and figurative – of Africa’s art. Foreign texts appear in English translation followed by the original language. Many of the images include numerous objects. All of the individual objects from these 5,000 “parent” images are catalogued separately for ease of use and many such objects appear separately in approximately 2,500 “subimages.” Eventually most of the multiobject parent images will be divided into a subimage for each object.

Current scholarship appears separately in the comments, keywords, and collections fields, making the site informative and easily searchable with contemporary terminology. Images or objects appearing more than once in the database are flagged for comparison. Tools for viewing details in high resolution, searching by multiple specific variables, and comparing images side by side are built into the site, along with the ability to record user comments.

Using the “Add a Comment” option, the sponsors urge informed users to suggest images that they may have overlooked and to augment and/or correct the information presented. As of October 2010, data from publications on the Kingdom of Benin have not been fully vetted, and images and data on South African art are just beginning to enter the archive; these areas, therefore, may be in particular need of supplementation. Users’ comments may include provenance and collection history, current location, attribution, and additional information on the image or object portrayed. Corrections of erroneous information, as well as opposing viewpoints and debate, are encouraged. Additional noteworthy items, references, or anecdotes are also welcome.

The James J. Ross Archive of African Images is an indispensable research tool for students and scholars of African art and history. It is the hope of its creators that RAAI will remain dynamic and, with the assistance of its users, continue to be enriched and updated.

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For additional press information or visual materials, please contact Adrienne Webb, Public Information Coordinator, at 203.432.2124 or [adrienne.webb@yale.edu](mailto:adrienne.webb@yale.edu).