

Artist re-imagines ancient African kingdoms using LEGO® bricks

Building Black Civilizations: Journey of 2,000 Ships

Artwork by Ekow Nimako

May 24 to August 24, 2025

MEDIA PREVIEW: Thursday, May 22: 10:00 am

May 15, 2025 – Kelowna, BC: Kelowna audiences will soon get a chance to see an art installation that has been making waves across the continent. *Building Black Civilizations: Journey of 2,000 Ships* continues Ghanaian Canadian artist **Ekow Nimako**'s afrofuturistic reimagining of ancient African kingdoms. It opens at the Kelowna Art Gallery on May 24, 2025.

What makes this art exhibition unique is that Nimako uses LEGO® bricks as his medium. Through complex sculptures that take between 50 to 800 hours to construct, the artist explores the mysterious fourteenth century sea voyage of Mansa Abu Bakr II, predecessor of Mansa Musa, ruler of the ancient Mali Empire.

Visitors will experience this narrative through Ekow Nimako's combination of architecture, historical accounts, and fantastical possibilities that transcend the geometric form of LEGO® to recreate the epic voyage. According to legends, Abu Bakr II was an intrepid explorer, who abdicated his throne and took 2,000 ships on an expedition into the Atlantic, but was never to return or to be heard from again. Some accounts suggest the massive fleet reached as far as the Americas, but where they went beyond this is still unknown.

Building Black Civilizations: Journey of 2,000 Ships features six distinct art installations that comprise half a million LEGO® bricks, including *ASAMAND*, *BAY OF BANJUL*, *SEPOW*, *ISLA EWI*, *WAWA ABA*, and *DAME DAME*. To further enhance visitors' experiences, an "Imaginarium Area" will be part of the exhibition, where guests can use art supplies to sketch their ideas of what a world fueled by their imagination would look like. Adjoining this will be a reading nook with a selection of books for visitors of all ages. The Art Lab in the Gallery will be transformed into a "LEGO® Making Space" where Gallery-goers can reflect on their experience and express their own creativity by constructing their own sculptures.

Ekow Nimako is a Toronto-based, internationally exhibiting LEGO® artist who crafts futuristic and whimsical sculptures from the iconic medium. Rooted in his childhood hobby and intrinsic creativity, Nimako's formal arts education and background as a lifelong multidisciplinary artist inform his process and signature aesthetic.

An **Opening Reception** will be held on **Friday, May 23, 2025**, from 6 to 8 pm at the Kelowna Art Gallery. The artist will be in attendance, and the public is welcome to attend.

Building Black Civilizations: Journey of 2,000 Ships runs from May 24 to August 24, 2025. It is presented with support from Pushor Mitchell Lawyers and Kelowna Paint Supply. The exhibition is organized and circulated by the Dunlop Art Gallery and Curated by Alyssa C. Fearon.

Block & Build: A LEGO® Night at the Gallery is planned for Wednesday, June 4, 2025, from 6 to 8 pm. Tickets are \$25 for this ages 19+ event and are required to attend.

The Kelowna Art Gallery is located at 1315 Water Street in the heart of Kelowna's Culture District. For more information visit kelownaartgallery.com or call 250-762-2226.

- 30 -

About the Kelowna Art Gallery

The Kelowna Art Gallery engages, inspires, and enriches the community it serves through the exhibition, collection, and interpretation of visual art. Work by Canadian artists, both historical and contemporary, are presented in five distinct exhibition spaces. The Kelowna Art Gallery is invested in the idea that art helps to bring people together; and that life is simply better with art in it. Programs for people of all ages and backgrounds help to instill confidence in ones' creativity and to foster meaningful dialogue on matters important to Canadians.

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Media Inquiries

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