

Axé: Art and Spirituality in the Black Diaspora (Vienna/online, 22–24 Apr 26)

Vienna, Weltmuseum Wien / Online, Apr 22–24, 2026

Registration deadline: Apr 21, 2026

Franziska Wasserberg, Wien

The upcoming international conference "Axé: Art and Spirituality in the Black Diaspora" explores the Yoruba concept of Axé/Aché/Aṣẹ – the understanding that every being, object, and expression carries a spiritual force granted by the creator Olódùmarè. Transported across the Atlantic through the histories of enslavement from the 16th century onward, this vital energy continues to shape artistic, spiritual, and cultural practices throughout the African diaspora, particularly in regions such as Brazil, Cuba, and Haiti.

Taking place from 22–24 April 2026 at the Weltmuseum Wien, the three-day event brings together scholars, artists, worshippers and independent researchers from Europe, Africa, and the Americas. The conference examines how diasporic identities—echoing Stuart Hall's notion of identity as a "matter of becoming and being"—emerge through material culture, sound, performance, spirituality, and embodied practices. Panels and discussions address themes including ancestral epistemologies, contested collections, music as archive, ritual objects, and the intersections of art and spirituality. Across sessions on care, memory, and artistic self-definition, participants dive into how communities across Central and South America and the Caribbean have created alternative spiritual and artistic spaces, sustaining diverse Black identities and living knowledge systems while critically engaging with colonial histories and the politics of memory.

Program

Wednesday, 22 April 2026

9:30–10:00 Registration

10:00–10:30 Welcome

10:30–12:30 Notions of Care (Chair: Noémie Etienne)

Elizabeth Adetola: Egúngún Masquerades' Costume: of living material culture – not "mere garments" but bodies archives of ancestral presence

Samuel Umoh: What Stays the Same vs. What Adapts: Ifa Yoruba cosmology and Liturgical Objects as Living Community Care Ancestral obligation

Oliver Antczak, Rennan Lemos, Fidel Rodríguez Velásquez and Caio Victorino: Living Legacies: Àse and the Politics of Memory in Venezuela and Brazil

12:30–14:00 Lunch Break

14:00–16:00 Contested Collections (Chair: Henrie Dennis)

Suelen Calonga: The Power of the UNseen – Axé and the Infrastructures of Invisibility

Larissa Carvalho Fontes: Vida e morte dos objetos sagra afro-brasileiros: na encruzilhada entre patrimonialização e reparação

Luisa Karman: Uprooted sounds: 19th century African-Brazilian musical instruments in Britain's economic botany museum

16:00–16:30 Coffee Break

18:30 Evening Program (see conference website)

Thursday, 23 April 2026

10:00–10:30 Coffee

10:30–13:00 Music as Archive (Chair: Rodrigo Chocano Paredes)

Alex da Silva Cadilho Jr: Os pontos cantados e a transmissão de axé: entre saberes ancestrais e saberes emergentes

Kamai Freire: Music and Spirituality in the Haitian Revolution: Sounding Counter-Plantation and Spiritual Warfare

Sebastián Eduardo Dávila: "La Afroamericana Marimba": Sonic Transmissions between Diaspora and Indigeneity in Modern and Contemporary Guatemala

Lisbety Mirabal Diaz: Lengua yoruba y comunicación ritual en la Santería: archivos orales de resistencia y memoria

13:00–14:30 Lunch Break

14:30–17:00 Art and Spirituality (Chair: Mariama de Brito Henn)

Rachel G. Newman: Love Suspends Time: Infinite Black Womanhood in Simone Leigh's Last Garment

Julia Alexandra Richard: On Photography, Spirituality and the Black Atlantic: The Works of María Magdalena Campos-Pons and Eustáquio Neves in Conversation

Cynthia Brannvall: Iconography in the Continental Crossroads of the Sang Mélé: Guillaume Guillon-Letièrre's Oath of the Ancestors (1822)

Friday, 24 April 2026

10:00–10:30 Coffee

10:30–13:00 Building(s) World (Chair: Noit Banai)

Rafael Kouto: Notes & artefacts from altared futures

Maya Suemi Lemos and Bruno Melo: Da Rifula ao Moyo: a cozinha de santo como espaço de memória de um saber-fazer complex

Raísa Inocência Ferreira Lima: Banhos em Axé: Força Vital e Descolonização na Experiência Vivida

Mariama de Brito Henn: Material Memory: Ritual Dress as Archive

13:00–14:00 Lunch Break

14:00–15:30 Ancestral Epistemologies (Chair: Luisa Karman)

Jaqueline de Oliveira e Silva: Na Angola, nada se faz calado: renascimento e resistência numa casa de candomblé Angola em Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais

Clarissa Barcellos: Memória e Ancestralidade no ofício de Tia ira Rezadeira

Ebomi Cici de Oxalá & Lohana Kárita

15:30–16:00 Closing Notes

The conference is organized by Mariama de Brito Henn and Luisa Karman. The conference is free. Registration is available via: <https://axeconference.wordpress.com/registration/>
For more Information please contact Mariama de Brito Henn (mariama.de.brito.henn@univie.ac.at).

Reference:

CONF: Axé: Art and Spirituality in the Black Diaspora (Vienna/online, 22-24 Apr 26). In: ArtHist.net, Apr 6, 2026 (accessed May 28, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/52168>>.