



I find it of particular significance that this exhibition, which offers us a rare artistic and cultural overview of the Democratic Republic of Congo, is hosted in the rooms of Palazzo Strozzi Sacratì, home of the Presidency of the Region of Tuscany. Of and in itself this is further confirmation of what surprises art can hold for us all, and what bridges it can build between very distant countries with very different histories and civilizations.

Of the Congo, in fact, over recent centuries it has not been difficult to know the country's troubled history, marked by colonialism and many other tragedies. Yet today it is another history that we have before our eyes; a history, moreover, that also gives us a measure of the many identities that coexist in the Congo, with exhibits covering twelve different cultural groupings.

With this exhibition we enter into the heart of African art and gather insights of great significance concerning, for example, spiritual existence; the relationship with nature and the world of the ancestors; and material culture.

I would like to sincerely thank all those who have made it possible to create this exhibition which is unique to the city of Florence.

Eugenio Giani
President of the Region of Tuscany

In the Heart of the Congo (R.D.C)

Welcome TO THE HEART OF CONGO, an exhibition presenting an artistic and cultural overview of the Democratic Republic of Congo. A central country geographically and also central in terms of its political importance in the relations and management of balances with neighbouring countries, in trade and in the management of extra-African interests concerning its vast and very rich territory.

As large as Western Europe, certainly complex to administer and control, DR Congo has been independent from Belgium since 1960. In these sixty years, governments have alternated that have found their most constant feature in instability. Even today, three north-eastern regions are experiencing a season of serious instability fomented by their neighbours Rwanda and Uganda. In this vast territory, also very diverse in terms of its natural environments, live more than 250 ethnic groups that express an impressive cultural richness. It is also a central country in terms of the exploitation of natural resources (just think of the extremely rich mining areas of Kivu, Katanga and Ituri, where we find coltan, cobalt, gold, diamonds, copper, uranium and precious wood); in terms of environmental protection and climate change (the second largest

forest area in the world after the Amazon is located here); in terms of migration issues, both for the many Congolese forced to leave the country and for the presence of refugees from neighbouring countries. We think it is our duty to present this country in all its complexity, to stimulate in the visitor knowledge, the desire for information. Certainly the 35 pieces in this exhibition have much to tell.

The exhibition belongs to the African Museum of the Comboni Missionaries in Madrid, but the objects were collected by Ambassador José Antonio Bordallo Huidobro during his years of diplomatic service in this country. Out of his love for this territory and its people, this collection was assembled, bringing together a sampling of pieces from 27 villages in DR Congo, presenting an artistic overview covering 12 cultural groups. The exhibition consists of traditional works of art, with masks and a rich selection of statuary.

Fundamental to the artistic exhibition will be the discovery of the contexts and meanings linking material culture to the religious fabric of which the objects are the means. The search for the spiritual world, religions, the communication and prayer of spirits, magic and the power of certain evocations, contact with nature and the world of the ancestors, are some of the themes we invite you to learn about, discover and appreciate.

Fondazione Nigrizia
Museo Africano

