CONNECTING MEDITERRANEAN TO AFRICA: A PROJECT OF THE NATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM OF REGGIO CALABRIA

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African Head-Shaped Unguentarium from the necropolis of Lokri, Tomb 449 (ca 500 BCE).
National Archaeological Museum of Reggio Calabria.

ABSTRACT

The MArRC is among the seven Italian institutions chosen to host in spring 2026 the 4th edition of the International School of Cultural Heritage, promoted by the Scuola Nazionale Patrimonio Attività Culturali. Four cultural professionals from Africa will develop the project “Inheriting Alterity: Materialty & Ideas from the ancient World to the modern” dealing with the theme of diversity. Interdisciplinary approaches, including performative arts, will bring into dialogue different heritages. Social and cultural accessibility will be also ensured by a public engagement to attract new publics from Africa.

THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

The National Archaeological Museum of Reggio Calabria (MArRC) is situated at the geographical and cultural heart of the Mediterranean. The museum overlooks the Strait of Messina and occupies a strategic position at the intersection of historical routes connecting the eastern and western Mediterranean, as well as southern Europe and the regions of North and Central Africa.
It has been chosen to host the 4th edition of the the International School of Cultural Heritage “Managing Art Collections: from ancient to contemporary Interdisciplinary approaches for museum professionals from the Mediterranean and Africa”, promoted by the Scuola Nazionale Patrimonio Attività Culturali.
On April and May 2026, four professionals from African cultural institutions (Morocco, Congo, Senegal and Kenya) will participate to a residency involving collaborative activities centred on the co-design of a micro-exhibition project exploring the theme of alterity through selected artefacts from the museum’s collections, chosen to provide valuable evidence of how different forms of “otherness” were represented in the Ancient world.

PROJECT FOCUS AND OBJECTIVES

The project is consistent with the cultural and institutional mission of MArRC and is structured around two main axes of intervention:
1. Scientific research and heritage valorisation, focusing on the development of new interpretative perspectives on museum collections;
2. Cultural accessibility and social engagement, aimed at expanding the museum’s audience and fostering dialogue with diverse communities.
Within this framework, the project seeks to promote intercultural dialogue and knowledge exchange among museum professionals from different geographical and cultural backgrounds. Through collaborative reflection on the theme of alterity, the initiative encourages the exploration of how cultural difference has been perceived, represented, and interpreted from Antiquity to the present day.
The project also aims to stimulate the cross-fertilisation of professional practices and experiences, strengthening opportunities for collaboration between the host institution and the participants’ home institutions, while contributing to the broader goals of ISCH in promoting international exchange and mutual valorisation of cultural heritage.

EXPECTED OUTPUTS

The project will lead to the development of several outputs associated with the two main axes of the initiative.
Within the research and heritage valorisation axis, expected outputs include:

- the development of a shared reflection on the project Inheriting Alterity: Materiality and Ideas from the Ancient World to the Modern, resulting in the production of four interpretative panels or totems synthesising the themes explored;
- the creation of a visual art performance inspired by the reflections developed during the residency, establishing a dialogue between artefacts preserved in the MArRC collections and those belonging to the participants’ institutions;
- the production of an audiovisual multimedia output documenting the residency experience and presenting the results of the project;
- the establishment of collaboration agreements between MArRC and the institutions represented by the participants, aimed at promoting future joint initiatives and mutual valorisation of collections.

Within the cultural accessibility and social engagement axis, the project also foresees the development of the educational and public engagement initiative “Meet the MArRC – The MArRC meets you.” This programme aims to attract new audiences by organising guided visits and participatory activities designed especially for communities originating from the countries represented by the residency participants, who are often significantly present in the local territory but remain underrepresented among museum audiences.

These initiatives will be developed in collaboration with local cultural associations in the city of Reggio Calabria and in the wider metropolitan area, fostering opportunities for dialogue, cultural exchange, and social inclusion through the shared experience of the museum.

WEBLIOGRAPHY

National Archaeological Museum of Reggio Calabria https://museoarcheologicoreggiocalabria.cultura.gov.it/

International School of Cultural Heritage, 2026 edition
https://www.fondazionescuolapatrimonio.it/internazionale/international-school-of-cultural-heritage/international-school-of-cultural-heritage-edizione-2026/