

# 1897 Raid Of Bini Kingdom Resurfaces At Festival

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*Jelili Atiku in performance of Rawson's Boat*

IN the quiet and a bit distanced Museum hall of the Freedom Park was mounted the visual arts segment of the three-day Lagos Book and Art Festival, LABAF, featuring the installations of Nkechi Nwosu-Igbo, the paintings of Tolu Aliko, and Ben Uwagboe; and the video installation of Aderemi Adegbite, but the sixth artist in the collection, a performance artist, Jelili Atiku, soon brought the show to the central stage of the festival ground as he mounted his act titled "Rawson's Boat".

In fascinating performance, Atiku re-enacted the history of Benin kingdom 1897, when the British punitive force struck, devastated and raided the palace of the king, Ovonramwen, looted the artefacts and sent him on an exile.

Dressed in a golden colour replica of the Oba of Benin's regalia, the artist painted himself with copper, a crown from Benin on his head, and his ankles shackled even as the British flag laid siege to the personae in the narration. Like someone under attack from epilepsy, he threw

himself down at interval. His installation and medium consist of an old broken canoe, which he said had been found there in the park. The canoe is tethered with a rope to a machine gun which means destruction. On top of the canoe he mounted an old black and white television set, which is an element of history and under it a picture which suggests boldness.

Explaining the performance installation, Atiku stated: “This is warning to the British to bring back all they have stolen, the ivory masks and bronze statues. This is our civilization; it is what make us who we are and part of us and what we represent. It is our cultural artefacts, which were stolen and sent all over the world. It’s barbaric because I have not seen any people who go to another people’s place and stole and destroy their things. They said they are afraid Nigeria does not have the facility to keep those things, that’s why they are still holding on to them. This is a protest and the nex

t move is to take to National Assembly. I am going to begin an intense fight for reparation. It is our cultural heritage. It is our own property; it belongs to us. Those are the creative monuments of our forefathers. All of them must return because I can’t have my body dismembered in different countries — one leg in U.S, one arm in Germany and the other leg in Britain”

### **...And A Rich Offering For Children**

THE children and students segment of the festival, otherwise known as the Green Festival, also had a whole segment of the Freedom park space to itself. Receiving an average of 300 per day, the segment offered the young ones opportunity to interact with books, authors and learn about reading and importance of education. There were creative workshops on writing, dance and drawing and craft.

The children went home with a ot of Book gifts, which were donated to them by the Office of the Bring Back the Book initiative of President Jonathan.

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