

News Release

Creative Africa, A Vibrant Season of Exhibitions and Activities

Ruth and Raymond G. Perelman Building
Press preview: May 13, 2016, 9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

This spring the Philadelphia Museum of Art is presenting five exhibitions and a series of related programs that feature a broad spectrum of the arts from across the African continent. These exhibitions will include historical works of art as well as contemporary fashion, photography, design, and architecture. The centerpiece is *Look Again: Contemporary Perspectives on African Art*, a major exhibition drawn from the collection of the Penn Museum, on view from May 14 through September 25, 2016. It examines the rich artistic heritage of West and Central Africa, and is designed to acquaint visitors with the diverse styles and functions of African art through the act of close looking.

Timothy Rub, The George D. Widener Director and CEO, Philadelphia Museum of Art, notes: "This season of related exhibitions will offer our visitors a wonderful opportunity to make connections between centuries-old traditions and contemporary artistic practices. We are especially grateful for the loan of a large number of works from the Penn Museum's world-renowned collection, which will be presented in an exhibition that anchors our celebration of African art."

Look Again takes advantage of some of the greatest strengths of the Penn Museum's collection, placing a strong emphasis on process, materials, and ornamentation as well as the understanding that can be gained through an examination of context, function, and provenance. Highlights from the kingdom of Benin include carved ivories and bronzes, among them plaques that once adorned the Oba's palace, a magnificent architectural complex at the heart of Benin City in present-day Nigeria. Bronzes created as early as the 16th century include

commemorative heads, ranging from the very simple to the extremely ornate, that would have been placed on altars.

Many of the works on view are sculptures from Central Africa, including power figures created to strengthen, protect, or heal their users. These works can range in size from small handheld objects to figures of imposing scale. In some cases, nails and blades were inserted into these figures as part of their ritual use. Wooden sculptures originating from West, Central, and South Africa present a wide array of poses and expressions, and some incorporate the figure into functional objects, such as headrests or tools.

Art from the Kuba culture (from the present-day Democratic Republic of the Congo) will include cloth, made from dyed raffia and other natural fibers showing bold and lively geometric designs, along with carved wooden cups, bowls, and boxes adorned with patterns. The exhibition also features brass weights from present-day Ghana that were used by the Akan peoples to weigh gold. Made through lost-wax casting, they are miniature sculptures of people, animals, objects, and abstract patterns that reflect motifs and proverbs from West Africa.

The exhibition closes with a display of Kota reliquary figures, from present-day Gabon and Republic of the Congo, which were made to protect bundles of ancestral relics and are distinguished by exquisite applied metalwork. Through the use of an interactive digital program jointly developed by the Pulitzer Arts Foundation, Rampant Interactive, and Frederic Cloth, visitors can further explore the individual qualities and intriguing stylistic associations of these works.

Look Again is curated by Dr. Kristina Van Dyke, noted scholar and curator of African art, and former Director of the Pulitzer Foundation.

The exhibition is coordinated at the Philadelphia Museum of Art by John Vick, Project Assistant Curator.

Creative Africa Season

The four other exhibitions of the *Creative Africa* season focus mainly on modern and contemporary African art and design or offer a dialogue between past and present, tradition and innovation, and local and global concerns. Each calls attention to the continuities and differences between African art forms over the centuries.

All of the exhibitions are presented in the galleries of the Ruth and Raymond G. Perelman Building.

Three Photographers/Six Cities (April 30–September 25, 2016) presents work by artists—Akinbode Akinbiyi (Nigerian, born 1946), Seydou Camara (Mali, born 1983), and Ananias Léki Dago (Ivorian, born 1970)—who document contemporary life in some of Africa’s growing urban centers. The photographs in the exhibition were made in Bamako, Cairo, Johannesburg, Lagos, Nairobi, and Tombouctou (Timbuktu) and offer an in-depth look at the work of each of these artists. Akinbiyi and Léki travel extensively throughout Africa and take months and even years to craft photographic series about the cities on which they focus their attention. Camara photographed manuscripts in Tombouctou from 2009 until 2013, documenting fragile Islamic texts as well as efforts to conserve and transcribe them.

The exhibition is organized by Peter Barberie, The Brodsky Curator of Photographs.

Vlisco: African Fashion on a Global Stage (April 30, 2016–January 22, 2017) explores this celebrated company’s most enduring designs, examines the process of creating a new textile, and showcases a selection of contemporary fashions by African and European makers as well as Vlisco’s in-house design team. Known for its bold and colorful patterns, Vlisco creates fabrics that marry tradition with luxury and have long been synonymous with African fashion.

The exhibition is organized by Dilys Blum, The Jack M. and Annette Y. Friedland Senior Curator of Costume and Textiles.

The Architecture of Francis Kéré: Building for Community (May 14–September 25, 2016) features a site-specific, immersive environment designed by this world-renowned Burkina-Faso-born architect. Kéré is best known for work that emphasizes the collaborative and

collective nature of building, responding to local cultures, knowledge, materials, and technologies. Kéré's Berlin-based firm has received growing international attention and acclaim for its community-focused, contextually sensitive work. The installation invites visitors to interact with the environment and reflect on the relationship between architecture and the Philadelphia community.

The exhibition is organized by Kathryn Bloom Hiesinger, The J. Mahlon Buck, Jr. Family Senior Curator of European Decorative Arts after 1700.

Threads of Tradition (April 30, 2016–January 2017) focuses on the traditional patterns in West and Central African textiles and the techniques used to create them, including strip weaving, resist dyeing, piecing, appliqué, and embroidery. The works are drawn primarily from the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, with additional loans from the Penn Museum.

The exhibition is organized by H. Kristina Haugland, The Le Vine Associate Curator of Costume and Textiles and Supervising Curator for the Study Room.

In preparation for the *Creative Africa* season, the Perelman Building will be closed for a period of installation starting April 4 and will reopen April 30.

Events and Activities

The exhibitions will be accompanied by lively events highlighting the dynamism of African art and artists. They range from school programs and artists' residencies to Art After 5 live music performances and the Museum's summerlong Art Splash family festival.

Art Splash

From July 1 through September 5, the Perelman Building will be home to the Museum's popular annual Art Splash, which will engage children and families from across the city and region with activities centered on the *Creative Africa* exhibitions and other aspects of African art and heritage, through performances, tours, stories, art-making, and other creative parent/child experiences. An Art Splash press preview is scheduled for Friday, July 1, 8:30–10:00 a.m.

Other Public Programs

Creative Africa will feature artist-in-residence programs and extensive public programming and events. Among them will be a discussion with photographer Ananias Léki Dago and Peter Barberie, the Museum's Brodsky Curator of Photographs (June 25) and a performance by dancer and choreographer Nora Chipaumire, which will be presented in collaboration with FringeArts (September 23, 24). Visit philamuseum.org for program updates.

Support

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Look Again: Contemporary Perspectives on African Art was organized by the Philadelphia Museum of Art in cooperation with the Penn Museum.

Art Splash is presented by PNC Arts Alive. Additional generous support is provided by Origlio Beverage and The Honickman Group.

Note to Editors

About African Art at the Penn Museum

The African Section collection at the Penn Museum (University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology) is among the largest and most distinguished of its kind in the nation, with more than 15,000 ethnographic and 5,000 archaeological objects. Largely collected between 1891 and 1937, this wide-ranging collection features sculpture, masks, jewelry, ritual wear, textiles, and utilitarian (domestic) objects, much of it dating from the 1600s to the 1900s. The collection features material from nearly every major cultural area of the African continent.

Highlights from the Penn Museum's African collection include objects from the Benin Kingdom, Sierra Leone and the Belgian Congo, now the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Benin Kingdom collection includes an important selection of bronzes and ivories, dating

from the seventeenth to twentieth centuries, from one of West Africa's most powerful political states. From Sherbo Island, Sierra Leone, there are nineteenth century artifacts related to the Poro and Sande Secret Societies.

Other highlights include an exceptional range of sculpture, masks, textiles, and ceramics that, in addition to offering great insight into diverse African cultures and traditions, together are recognized as superb examples of the canons of African art, with representation from numerous areas of Africa—including the Congo, Angola, Morocco, the Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Namibia, and Botswana.

In addition to the African Section collection, the Museum has renowned ancient collections from Egypt and Nubia. Many of these objects were excavated by Penn Museum archaeologists, and the collection is housed in the Egyptian Section.

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#CreativeAfrica

The Philadelphia Museum of Art is Philadelphia's art museum. A place that welcomes everyone. A world-renowned collection. A landmark building. We bring the arts to life, inspiring visitors—through scholarly study and creative play—to discover the spirit of imagination that lies in everyone. We connect people with the arts in rich and varied ways, making the experience of the Museum surprising, lively, and always memorable. We are committed to inviting visitors to see the world—and themselves—anew through the beauty and expressive power of the arts.

For additional press information contact the press office at 215-684-7860 or pressroom@philamuseum.org. For general information, call 215-763-8100 or visit philamuseum.org.