

African Headwear: Beyond Fashion

New Exhibition Explores the Artistry of African Headwear Featuring Never-Before-Seen Objects

Celebrating African decorative design, *African Headwear: Beyond Fashion* presents forty objects from the Dallas Museum of Art's internationally acclaimed collection of African art and from several private collections, including those of Michael and Shelly Dee; Susan Montgomery; Taiye Ozigbo; Sidney Perutz; and John and Karen Reoch. Through form, materials, and imagery, African headwear communicates information about the wearer, including an individual's ethnic group, gender, age, marital status, social and economic status, military rank, role in government, religious affiliation, and profession. This exhibition presents headwear from sub-Saharan Africa, where what one wears on one's head is both fashionable and meaningful, and explores the ways in which headwear signifies status in traditional African societies.

"*African Headwear: Beyond Fashion* highlights works from our renowned collection of African art, including works that have never been on view, in a dramatic and inviting way," said Olivier Meslay, the DMA's Interim Director as well as its Senior Curator of European and American Art and The Barbara Thomas Lemmon Curator of European Art. "With the accompanying color brochure, visitors are able to take an in-depth look into the history and artistry of the hats. We are also fortunate to have many exquisite loans of objects from private collections that beautifully enhance the exhibition."

On view August 14, 2011, through January 1, 2012, the exhibition includes objects in a range of materials, including the skin from a pangolin (spiny anteater), wood and copper, various types of nutshells, lion mane, and human hair. In tradition-based African societies, the hat one wears on one's head is fashionable and an outlet for creative self-expression. Regardless of the traditional context in which it is worn, headwear reflects what is new in the environment, such as glass beads, exotic shells, plastic buttons, and synthetic, factory-made dyes and fabrics that are acquired through long-distance trade. Visitors will be encouraged to view six additional hats in the Museum's Arts of Africa galleries on the third level; they are among the 150 objects from the collection that are currently on view at the DMA. The exhibition includes a video demonstrating how to transform a rectangular cloth into a *gele*, the head-tie worn by fashionable Yoruba and other African women in Dallas on special occasions.

"The head is considered the most important part of the body in sub-Saharan African societies and the exhibition demonstrates the importance of headwear as a means of nonverbal communication about the wearer's position in society and at what stage they are in the cycle of life," said Roslyn A. Walker, Senior Curator of the Arts of Africa, the Americas, and the Pacific and The Margaret McDermott Curator of African Art at the Dallas Museum of Art.

African Headwear: Beyond Fashion contains three thematic sections and includes these highlighted works of art:

- Professional Headwear in the exhibition includes hats signifying military and religious occupations. On display for the first time is a Tabwa diviner's headdress from the Democratic Republic of the Congo made of beadwork and decorated with fur and feathers and a Lutuxo warrior's brass-clad helmet from South Sudan that is lined with human hair.
- Men's and Women's Headwear includes a Himba wedding headdress from Namibia made of leather that allows the bride to see in only one direction, toward her husband's home and her new life, and a child's hat made of basketry from the Democratic Republic of the Congo that is large enough to shield the entire body from the elements.
- Headwear for Kings and Chiefs features a Yoruba beaded royal crown with fringe from Nigeria; a Baule velvet crown from Côte d'Ivoire decorated with gold leaf ornaments; and a Lega hat from the Democratic Republic of the Congo decorated with seeds, boar teeth, and cowrie shells and surmounted by a hornbill bird skull.

Accompanying the exhibition is a brochure that examines the history, importance, and artistry of headwear in African societies, highlighting specific works in the exhibition. Dr. Walker will lead a Gallery Talk, *African Headwear: Beyond Fashion*, on Wednesday, September 7, 2011, at 12:15 p.m. For additional programming information, visit DallasMuseumofArt.org.

African Headwear: Beyond Fashion is organized by the Dallas Museum of Art and curated by Roslyn A. Walker, Senior Curator of the Arts of Africa, the Americas, and the Pacific and The Margaret McDermott Curator of African Art at the Dallas Museum of Art. Dr. Walker is also the author of *The Arts of Africa at the Dallas Museum of Art*, the first catalogue dedicated to exploring the Museum's collection of nearly 2,000 objects. Commemorating the 40th anniversary of the collection in 2009, which began with a gift of more than 200 objects from DMA benefactors Eugene and Margaret McDermott, the catalogue draws from both historical sources and contemporary research to examine over 100 figures, masks, and other works of art that represent fifty-two cultures, from Morocco to South Africa.

About the Dallas Museum of Art

Located in the vibrant Arts District of downtown Dallas, Texas, the Dallas Museum of Art (DMA) ranks among the leading art institutions in the country and is distinguished by its innovative exhibitions and groundbreaking educational programs. At the heart of the Museum and its programs is its global collection, which encompasses more than 24,000 works and spans 5,000 years of history, representing a full range of world cultures. Established in 1903, the Museum welcomes approximately 600,000 visitors annually and acts as a catalyst for community creativity, engaging people of all ages and backgrounds with a diverse spectrum of programming, from exhibitions and lectures to concerts, literary readings, and dramatic and dance presentations.

The Dallas Museum of Art is supported in part by the generosity of Museum members and

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For more information, please contact:

Jill Bernstein
Dallas Museum of Art
214-922-1802
JBernstein@DallasMuseumofArt.org