

**News Release
Public Information
Department**

February 2001

Major Reinstallation of African Galleries at the
Brooklyn Museum of Art Scheduled to Open May 4, 2001

More than twenty important objects, previously not on view, will be integrated into a major reinstallation of some 250 works from the Brooklyn Museum of Art's exceptional holdings of African art. This new presentation, in the Museum's first-floor African galleries, of one of the most important collections of its kind in the United States is scheduled to open on May 4, 2001.

Among the masterpieces new to this installation are an extraordinary stone figure of a man holding a crocodile, created by an unknown Sapi artist of Sierra Leone in the fifteenth century; a striking Kanaga mask constructed of wood, leather, pigment and vegetable fiber, created by an unknown Dogon artist in the Sanga region of Mali; a large selection of Ethiopian crosses produced from the thirteenth to the twentieth centuries for personal and ceremonial purposes; and an exquisite pair of silver anklets made by an unknown nineteenth-century Berber artist in the southern Sahara.

Also included will be the familiar masterpieces that are icons of the Museum's African collection, among them the superb fragment of a terra-cotta head from the Ife Kingdom of Nigeria, an idealized representation of a sacred king and one of the oldest surviving sculptures from West Africa; a wood and brass figure, carved by an unknown Kuba artist, of King Mishe miShyaange maMbul, the earliest known surviving example of a Ndop or a figure representing the spirit double of a king; and the sixteenth- or seventeenth-century metal figure of a horn blower by an unknown Edo artist in the Royal Court of Benin.

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Although a wide selection from the hundreds of African cultures will be represented in the reinstallation, it is particularly strong in works from Central Africa, particularly those from the Kongo, Luba, and Kuba peoples of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The majority of the items on display were created for religious or political ceremonial life. Staffs of office and crowns indicate political office and rank, while masks link the world of the living with the spirits of the worlds beyond. Wooden figures serve as vehicles for honoring the dead or as a means of summoning spirits that can protect communities from witchcraft or disease. The reinstallation will also include furniture, textiles, architectural fragments, household items, and objects of personal adornment.

The objects will be presented geographically, with some thematic labels. For the first time in recent memory the collection will be presented against a backdrop of brightly colored gallery walls, and the installation will also include approximately ten large-scale photographs. Among them will be several by Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher, whose outstanding photographs were shown last summer in the BMA's exhibition *Passages*, images that will illustrate how some of the objects on view are used by contemporary African cultures.

The reinstallation has been organized by William C. Siegmann, Chair of the Department of the Arts of Africa and the Pacific Islands at the Brooklyn Museum of Art.

The African collection at the Brooklyn Museum of Art was started by Stewart Culin, the institution's first curator of ethnography. In 1922 Culin traveled to London, Brussels, and Paris, where he acquired thousands of objects from dealers and antiques shops, and the entire collection of more than 1,500 Congo works from a retired Belgian colonial military officer. These works form the core of the collection that today numbers more than 6,000 objects. Following Stewart Culin's death in 1929, there was not any significant expansion of the collection until the 1950s, when it began a period of new growth that has continued to the present.

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GENERAL INFORMATION

Museum Hours:

Wednesday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.;
First Saturday of each month, 11 a.m. to 11
p.m.; all other Saturdays, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.;
Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Closed Thanksgiving,
Christmas, and New Year's Day. Museum Café
open until 4 p.m. Wednesday through Friday
and 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Saturday, Sunday,
and holidays. Museum Libraries and Archives
are open by appointment. Museum shops are
open 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; till 6 p.m. on
Saturdays and Sundays.

Directions:

Subway: Seventh Avenue express (2 or 3) to
Eastern Parkway/Brooklyn Museum stop. Bu:
B71, B41, B69, B48. On-site parking available