

EXHIBITIONS AND ACQUISITIONS OF AFRICAN ART AT THE HARN MUSEUM OF ART

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Over the last four years, the Harn Museum of Art has opened two major original exhibitions, both of which have travelled to US venues. Each has been a collaboration with UF faculty and institutions in the US and Europe.

In 2011, the exhibition *Africa Interweave: Textile Diasporas* featured fifty three textiles spanning the continent, including garments, wall-hangings, flags, masquerade costumes, and contemporary artworks. Immediately after the opening of *Africa Interweave*, the Harn entered into a major collaborative project with the Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, Belgium. The RMCA is a leading museum and research institution for the study of African art, culture and science. Working with Harn Museum of Art director Rebecca Nagy, and the RMCA's director, Guido Gryseels, collections manager and researcher Hein Vanhee, curators, linguists, musicologists, anthropologists, conservators and contemporary art specialists, Harn curator Susan Cooksey and Robin Poynor, devised a plan for an exhibition on Kongo art and culture and its trans-Atlantic impact. The three exhibition curators, Cooksey, Poynor and Vanhee, assisted by UF art history graduate student, Carlee Forbes, also worked together on a major publication by the same title, *Kongo across the Waters*. The co-edited publication included essays by scholars in the US and Europe, and a full color catalogue section of works selected for the exhibition.

The exhibition included over 160 objects, many of which were seldom-displayed treasures from the RMCA. New research in archaeology and documentation of African-American life starting with the Middle Passage incorporated into the exhibition in the form of artifacts from slave villages in the US and works by contemporary artists. These along with a selection of works of art and artifacts by African American artists from 13 collections in the

US, including the Smithsonian Museum for American History and the Smithsonian Museum of American Art, told the story of Kongo creolization in the New World. A website, kongoacrossthewaters.org, was developed and will be maintained for the entire run of the exhibition. Extensive programming highlights featured two after hours events for students and community called Museum Nights, a UNESCO sponsored program focusing on Gullah culture, and the Gwendolyn M. Carter conference in 2014, *Kongo-Atlantic Dialogues: Kongo Culture in Central Africa and the Americas* with thirty panelists from the Caribbean, Africa, the US, Canada and Europe. The exhibition's travel schedule includes the Jimmy Carter Presidential Museum and Library in Atlanta, the Princeton University Museum of Art, and the New Orleans Museum of Art.

These two monumental exhibitions cap off 25 years of the Harn's origination of innovative and significant exhibitions and publications on African art. The Harn is looking ahead to a reinstallation of its African Gallery in 2015. In February 2015, it will present *Kabas and Couture: Contemporary Ghanaian Fashion*, guest curated by UF alumnus Chris Richards, who worked with designers in Accra in the course of his doctoral research. This exhibition will look at fashion in Ghana since Independence with a number of garments by internationally recognized designers. A major purchase in 2014 of South African artist William Kentridge's film, *Tango for Page Turning*, is a milestone in the Harn's history of collecting African contemporary art. The upcoming exhibition, and exciting new works it will feature, as well as newly acquired works in both the historical and contemporary collections affirm the Harn's legacy of collecting and researching African art in collaboration with local and international partners.

Susan Cooksey is curator of African art. Support for these exhibitions from: Michael and Donna Singer, the Harn 20th Anniversary Fund, the 1923 Fund, the Center for African Studies, the Madelyn M. Lockhart Endowment for Focus Exhibitions at the Harn Museum of Art, and Mary Ann and Richard Green, the Harn Program Endowment, the AEC Trust, Christie's, UF Office of the Provost, UF International Center, UF Office of Research, UF School of Art and Art History, UF Center for African Studies, the C. Frederick and Aase B. Thompson Foundation, Hyatt and Cici Brown, William and Hazel Hough, Robert and Janet Kemerait, Nella Taylor, Drs. Israel and Michaela Samuelli, Robert Haiman, Mary Kilgour, the Londono Family Endowment, the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities, and anonymous donors.

