

The Museum of Modern Art

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Advance Fact Sheet

revised.

Title: AFRICAN TEXTILES AND DECORATIVE ARTS

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Auspices: International Council of The Museum of Modern Art

Dates: October 11, 1972 - January 31, 1973

Guest Director: Roy Sieber, Professor of Art History, Department of Fine Arts, Indiana University; assisted by Roslyn Walker, Visiting Lecturer in the African American Studies Program, Indiana University. In the course of planning the exhibition, Katherine White Reswick prepared a photographic survey of textiles and jewelry in American collections. Museums and private collections revealed a totally unexpected wealth of examples. In the course of the survey Mrs. Reswick traveled 75,000 miles to visit 23 public institutions and 57 private collections. Three sets of slides were made for deposit as research tools of great value for the study of African crafts. They will be deposited in educational centers on the West Coast, at Indiana University and in New York City. The exhibition installation is by Arthur Drexler, Director of the Department of Architecture and Design, The Museum of Modern Art.

Contents: Approximately 250 examples of textiles, jewelry and ornamental objects, and a few complete costumes, from areas ranging from Senegal to Nigeria, the Cameroons to South Africa, the Republic of Zaire to Ghana. (While examples illustrating the influence of the Moslem world appear in the exhibition, the textiles and ornamental arts shown are drawn primarily from Black Africa south of the Sahara.) Audio-visual orientation gallery.

African art has been known to the western world since Portuguese explorers first visited the West African coast almost 500 years ago. In this century the West has come to understand and appreciate the power and beauty of African sculpture, but textiles, ornaments and useful objects -- particularly as they relate to the decoration of the body -- have remained largely unknown to all but collectors and museum curators.

The United States is particularly rich in both public and private collections of such material, and the goal of this exhibition is to present some of these little-known treasures in a survey of Africa's arts of ornamentation.

The exhibition is divided into two major categories:

- 1) textiles and apparel;
- 2) body ornaments.

(more)

1. Textiles range from selected East African bark cloth through complex woven mixtures of cotton and silk from Ghana and Nigeria; knitted objects from the Cameroons; cut-pile embroidery from the Kasai area of Zaire; painted textiles from the Ivory Coast; applique from Dahomey; and strip weave from Upper Volta. Examples shown include lengths of cloth as well as skirts, trousers, robes and costumes.

2. Body ornaments and useful objects include rings, bracelets, anklets, necklaces, pendants and earrings; in gold, silver, brass, iron, ivory, straw and leather. They range from delicate bead necklaces of the Zulu to massive brass Ibo anklets, and from the exquisite workmanship of Ashanti gold to brutally powerful forms from Liberia.

Among the useful objects of particular interest are such symbols of high status as fans, batons and whisks. Cosmetic accoutrements include containers for body paint as well as razors, combs, hairpins, wigs and tweezers.

Hair styles and body paint will be shown in photographs of contemporary examples, as well as in reproductions of engravings from books published by the early western travelers in Africa. Because African head ornaments are particularly inventive, the exhibition will include hats, crowns and feather top knots, grouped together in a "hat bar."

Publication:

The accompanying book by Professor Sieber offers background information on the people whose works are exhibited and detailed commentaries describing the objects along with approximately 250 illustrations, of which 32 are in color.

The exhibition will be shown at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art from March 20 through May 31, 1973, the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum of San Francisco from July 2 through August 31, 1973, and The Cleveland Museum of Art from October 2 through December 2, 1973.

Additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53 St., New York, NY 10019. Phone: (212) 956-7501, -7504
