

The Museum of Modern Art

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NO. 111
FOR RELEASE: October 11, 1972
PRESS PREVIEW: October 10, 1972
10 a.m.-4 p.m.

AFRICAN TEXTILES AND DECORATIVE ARTS AT MODERN MUSEUM

AFRICAN TEXTILES AND DECORATIVE ARTS will be on view at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, from October 11 through January 31. This comprehensive survey, the first of its kind, includes 250 examples of textiles and jewelry from 26 countries. It is presented by the Museum under the auspices of its International Council and is made possible by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and Standard Oil Company (New Jersey).

The exhibition was installed by Arthur Drexler, Director of the Museum's Department of Architecture and Design. The works were selected by Professor Roy Sieber of Indiana University, the Guest Director of the exhibition, with Mr. Drexler and Katherine White Reswick, who prepared an initial survey of over 3,000 examples chosen from American museums and collectors.

Textiles in the show include East African bark cloth, complex woven mixtures of cotton and silk from Ghana and Nigeria, knitted objects from the Cameroons, cut-pile embroidery from the Kasai area of Zaïre, painted textiles from the Ivory Coast, applique from Dahomey, and strip weave from Upper Volta. Lengths of cloth as well as skirts, trousers, robes and costumes are shown.

Body ornaments and personal accessories 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 symbols of high status are fans, batons and whisks. Cosmetic accoutrements include containers for body paint as well as razors, combs, hairpins, wigs and tweezers.

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Hair styles and body paint are 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 includes hats, crowns and feather top knots, grouped together in a "Hat Bar" and shown on cork manikins.

The Guest Director, Roy Sieber, has spent many years in Africa. He is also the author of the first comprehensive pictorial survey of these African arts, which the Museum has published to coincide with the exhibition. The book is designed to provide a useful addition to the growing literature in African studies, and to stimulate an appreciation of this decorative material to those unfamiliar with its beauty and variety.*

All objects and textiles have been borrowed from public and private collections in this country.

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, body ornaments and jewelry have remained largely unknown to all but collectors and museum curators.

After the New York showing, AFRICAN TEXTILES AND DECORATIVE ARTS will be shown at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (March 20 - May 31, 1973), the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum, San Francisco (July 2 - August 31, 1973), and the Cleveland Museum of Art (October 2 - December 2, 1973).

*AFRICAN TEXTILES AND DECORATIVE ARTS by Roy Sieber. 240 pages; 244 illustrations, 40 in color. Published by The Museum of Modern Art, NY. Paper \$7.95. Clothbound edition \$15 distributed by New York Graphic Society, Ltd.

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