



... news flashes from the Ethnic Arts Council

MARCH 2014

EAC RECENT PROGRAMS:

Program 2: Shaping Power - Luba Masterworks at LACMA- November 16, 2013



EAC members were treated to a special walk-thru of LACMA's inaugural exhibit on Luba masterpieces at the newly established African Art Gallery. With only 26 prized objects carefully selected by Dr. Polly Nooter Roberts - some never shown outside of Belgium - we spent nearly two hours viewing the rich and complex aesthetics of Luba art from the DRC, a region marked by colonial exploitation, turbulence, and internecine warfare between tribes today. These pieces are

complemented by a memory board from a private collection and a powerful, room-size contemporary art installation by artist Aime Mpane, entitled "Congo: Shadow of the Shadow," on loan from the Smithsonian Institution. In a kind of *pas de deux*, or "call and response," Polly, and her husband Dr. Allen Roberts, discussed the ways that these works of art were instrumental to shaping power in the pre-colonial era and why they are shaped as they are -- as female bodies intended as repositories for spiritual and political authority. Standout objects included two sculpted wooden thrones supported by female figures, three elegantly elongated scepters, and an ethereal ceremonial pipe. Polly and Al introduced us to Luba concepts of beauty and to the ways that Luba people recorded and preserved their history and royal culture through remarkable works of art, such as the complex beaded wooden tablet called a *lukasa*, and a monumental mask depicting a serene male face combined with the horns of a buffalo. The Roberts's also brought attention to works by several well-known artists' hands in the Luba repertoire, such as a deeply moving bowl-bearing figure by the great Buli Master and two dynamic headrests attributed to the Master of the Cascade Headdress. All the works have stories to tell, including a great Tabwa chief's figure and a male-female pair with horns protruding from their heads, and are emblematic of an indigenous African kingdom that exerted its influence far and wide through the aura of its prestige and artistic prowess.





Program 4: Fowler at Fifty - January 25, 2014

A notable triumvirate - Marla Berns, Roy Hamilton, and Patrick Polk - treated 50 fortunate EAC members to a two-hour filled tour of the eight exhibits that mark the celebration of the Fowler Museum turning 50! Starting with Dr. Marla Berns, the museum director and Africanist, we were introduced to the philosophy behind the selection of objects, the special curatorial emphasis, and the unique and often never shown works in the vast holdings at the Fowler. The 250 Ibeji pieces - ranging from very simple carvings to masterworks, the unexpected treasure nicknamed Mickey Mouse from the Wellcome Collection, the Maori feather work cloaks and textiles - an exhibit that involved four Maori natives to guide and bless the pieces, or the first exhibit of the New Guinea holdings - to the very imaginative three Cabinets of Curiosity, a commissioned work that combines artifacts from the Fowler with those from the artist Amalia Mesa-Bains's personal moments - all deal with issues of immigration, colonialism, and identity in a personal but oddly universal way. Roy Hamilton and Patrick Polk, both curators at the Fowler, provided running commentary and historical background alongside Marla Berns's remarks. This walk-thru was a remarkable *tour de force* for all who attended!







African Art Seminars visits Ernie Wolfe Gallery – November 25, 2013

The EAC African Art Seminars group visited the Ernie Wolfe Gallery, specializing in African tribal and contemporary art, for an enjoyable talk by the always entertaining and knowledgeable Ernie Wolfe. He detailed his adventures in Africa in search of rare Vigango posts (commemorative/ancestor veneration sculptures) from Kenya, contemporary African paintings and sculpture, including FAVs (Fantastic After-Life Vehicles) and hand-painted Golden Age movie posters from Ghana.







Tribal Asian Study Group discusses ancestral effigies from Sulawesi Island – February 15, 2014

Held at the residence of Avrum and Martha Bluming, the Tribal Asian Study Group focused their most recent meeting on the ancestral effigies of the Toraja people of Sulawesi Island, Indonesia. These carved wood figures, called “Tau-Tau” represent important ancestors and are placed in cliff-face balconies to honor the deceased, immediately after elaborate and expensive funerary rites. The discussion started with a media presentation of images and video, put together by Avrum and Martha with Paul and Isabel Greenwald, from their recent trip to the Toraja region. Mark Johnson showed a series of slides depicting additional Tau-Tau figures, traditional structures, and funerary sites, taken on trips to the area in the 1980s. Additionally, Mark made note of the differences between earlier and later traditional examples as well as reproductions made for the tourist market.



EAC STUDY GROUPS:

Individual EAC members are forming study groups to focus on the traditional arts of specific regions. The concept is to create an intimate and relaxed environment for the discussion of art objects including their use, authenticity, and relative quality.

For more information on joining or developing new study groups, please contact these individuals:

Tribal Asia Study Group:

Mark Johnson at: gallery@markajohnson.com.

African Art Seminars:

Richard Baum at: rnbaum@hotmail.com.

Native American Study Group:

Philip Garaway at: philipgaraway@earthlink.net.

Latin American Study Group:

Larry Kent at: larryknt@yahoo.com.



OTHER NEWS:

The EAC Welcomes Our New Members:

Kathleen Barrutia and Charles Lohrstofer, Judi Donin, James Finley and Barbara Cooper, Ellie Gale, Abigal and Shawn Ghose, Dr. Selma Holo (USC-Pacific Asia Museum), Guerra N Gaston and Melissa Lubbock, Ellen Pearlstein, Lois Ramirez, Dr. John Rowe, John Watson

And Returning Members:

Judy Reidel and Alan Hamburger, Ernie and Diane Wolfe, David & Koon Goldberg, Barry Josselson and Yvonne Meyer, Sam Singer



Endnotes:

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The Ethnic Arts Council of Los Angeles (EAC)

• Dedicated to Advancing the Knowledge, Interest, and Appreciation of Ethnic Art •

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