



.... news flashes from the Ethnic Arts Council

August 2011

**GINNY, A TRIBUTE • By Alan Grinnell, Ph.D.**

The EAC lost a beloved friend when Virginia Fields died in her sleep during a recent trip to Mexico City. She, her husband David, and her assistant, Victoria, were there to attend a conference related to LACMA's upcoming 2012 exhibit, **Children of the Plumed Serpent: The Legacy of Quetzalcoatl in Ancient Mexico.**



Ginny, who came to LACMA in 1989 as the museum's first curator of pre-Columbian art, was a distinguished Maya scholar but developed an expertise that spanned all of the Americas. During her 22 years at LACMA, she effectively turned it into a powerhouse in the exhibition and study of pre-Columbian art and cultures. Under her leadership numerous outstanding exhibits travelled to other museum sites accompanied by distinguished catalogues that combined state-of-the-art scholarship with resplendent images. Everything she did was meticulously researched, elegantly presented, and richly documented. In the field of pre-Columbian scholars, she was highly respected, given her many collaborators and by her status as a Fellow and member of the Advisory Board at Dumbarton Oaks, the pre-Columbian center of Harvard University.

For more than 20 years, she attended the EAC annual dinners, summarizing LACMA's plans for the coming year in her quiet, unassuming way. A soft-spoken, unpretentious, entirely genuine person, she impressed us with her quiet expertise. At every EAC granting period, she submitted a proposal that was thoughtful and educational, asking only for what she needed, and it was always awarded. In turn she rewarded us with fascinating exhibits, guided tours, and exciting symposia. She was a regular at EAC programs--in recent years accompanied by her irresistible standard poodle, Paul.



Although Ginny was a soft-spoken, gentle person, she could be extremely persuasive and determined. And she had ambitious plans. She wanted to build the pre-Columbian collections, starting with the superb Mexican material that the museum already had. She more than quadrupled the Museum's holdings, adding the important Kramer and Ranere collections as well as many great Maya and south Mexican pieces, along with material from Panama. When Michael Govan arrived as the new Director, she found a strong ally who also wanted to make LACMA the premier museum for Latin American art in the world, and together they were making great progress toward that end. They began developing plans for a research and education center to be based at LACMA, a Dumbarton Oaks of the West. She was determined to have better exhibition space for pre-Columbian art, to be housed in a new building, and reportedly made regular unannounced visits to Govan's office to ask when she would get her new building. Indeed, rumor has it that at a Museum retreat at *Chichen Itza*, where Michael Govan had gone swimming in the noted *cenote*, she grabbed the rope that was to be used to haul him up, and asked him again, pointedly, when she was going to get her new building.

I feel a great personal loss with her passing, not only for her friendship, but also as a fellow enthusiast for Panamanian pre-Columbian art. We became strong friends and colleagues, having gotten to know each other well while setting up the display of Panamanian and Columbian material on the third floor of the Anderson Building. At the time of her passing, we were working on an upcoming display of Kuna molas and pre-Columbian pots that will open about the same time as the **Plumed Serpent** exhibit, as well as discussing a large exhibition on the art of the Intermediate Area (Costa Rica, Panama, and Columbia) projected for 2015. She had also been advising me on a book I am writing on Pre-Columbian Panamanian ceramics. I'll miss her greatly...and Paul, who always poked his nose into my pockets, knowing that I sometimes had dog biscuits there.

Ginny was the genuine article---an enormous asset to the whole community of pre-Columbian scholars and enthusiasts. We will long treasure the interactions we had with her, and hope that her visions for LACMA will become reality.

\*(photo: dating *mezcala* sculptural objects, an EAC-funded research project)

**To honor Virginia Fields, the EAC Board has established the Virginia Fields Scholars Fund (VFSF) which will underwrite educational pursuits – scholarships, research, travel, internships, publications and related activities – that would advance her interests as well as the knowledge of ethnic art in general. We ask EAC members and friends of Virginia to make donations to this fund. Donations over \$500 will be acknowledged at the Annual Dinner.**



Donations by Check should be made out to **EAC** (please note in memo line: VFSF) and sent to:

Kaija Keel  
430 Beloit Ave.  
Los Angeles, CA 90049

Donations by Credit Card are available.  
Please contact Mark Johnson at [info@ethnicartsCouncil.org](mailto:info@ethnicartsCouncil.org) for information.

## REPORT FROM MALI • By EAC member Julie Heifetz



*“We worked with the women of Banamba every day and helped them build their organization, finalize the paperwork for their Constitution and By-laws, get them linked with the government officials, and nearby agents particularly the livestock production and animal services. The women also have henna fields and are trying to make a living in henna production and appealing to the women who paint their feet with it. The women were very playful and became increasingly engaged and confident in being more formalized.*”

*I took a trip to the Dogon region, thought of EAC, especially seeing the Dogon doors.”*



## ARTICLE FROM WELLS FARGO ON LINE MAGAZINE: “CONVERSATIONS”

### FINE ART & COLLECTING

#### Collecting African Art

Curators and gallery owners offer guidance on how to build a stellar collection of African sculpture, beadwork and more.

Beth D’Addono | Posted: March 27, 2011

In a vast continent that is home to some 54 countries, countless tribes and more than 2,000 spoken languages, it is no surprise that African tribal art is as varied as the cultures that inspire it. Collecting African art is a chance to explore that continent by enjoying the work of its varied artists from throughout the centuries.



From sacred masks and carved figures to beaded jewelry and textiles, the endless array of African art has bewitched collectors for the past century. Initially, during the rise of anthropology as a discipline in the 18th and 19th centuries, African art was viewed as an artifact, a sensibility challenged by key collectors like Philadelphia’s Dr. Albert Barnes and the cosmetics magnate Helena Rubinstein. But by the early 1920s, the debate was settled.

“Collectors in France, Germany and England were discovering art in the African countries colonized by their respective countries,” explains Bryna Freyer, Curator of Collections at the [National Museum of African Art](#) in Washington, D.C. Artists like Henri Matisse were being influenced by figural work and incorporating the African aesthetic into their own creations; Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger* is considered the beginning of his African period. In Paris especially, African art became associated with the avant-garde along with other forms of expression including jazz.

#### African art gains popularity

The 1935 African Negro Art exhibit at the [Museum of Modern Art](#) in New York was a milestone in America, introducing objects from sub-Saharan Africa to a larger museum-going public. And while the show sparked a flurry of collecting — and served to drive prices up at auction — the notion today that all the “good” African art has been collected is just not true. “What was collected in the 20th century is a small fraction of what was produced on the continent at that time,” notes Dr. Christa



Clarke, Senior Curator, Arts of Africa and the Americas at the [Newark Museum](#) in New Jersey. “There are many different definitions of African art.”

### Building your collection

The main difference today, notes Freyer, is that “what we collect has expanded exponentially. It’s not just wood, bronze and ivory, and objects used in rituals or by kings. We collect pottery, textiles, tools and currency — things an ordinary (African) person would have owned.”



Dr. Gary van Wyk is Co-owner and Curator of the Axis Gallery in Brooklyn, N.Y., which focuses on contemporary and tribal African art. “You can buy fantastic tribal work from areas that are still underrepresented, especially in southern, eastern and northern Africa,” says van Wyk. “Beadwork, weaving, ceramics, textiles — these are all areas that have been neglected.

“A young collector can go in and buy a masterpiece in these areas for a few thousand dollars. If you’d like to buy blue chip, you can certainly do that, too.”

### Grow your knowledge

The most important advice for a new collector is to be aware that the market is riddled with fakes. “Establish a relationship with a reputable dealer,” advises Clarke. “Consider collecting contemporary work. Focus on an area that you can make a commitment to understanding. Visit museums, talk to other collectors. Build up your knowledge by using as many sources as you can.”



Freyer concurs, noting that the collecting life is not about a single blockbuster purchase but a journey of learning and enjoyment. “Become a friend to a museum, a relationship that often has extra perks like private tours, clinics and trips into storage areas,” says Freyer.

Then, find the right entry point, she concludes. “If you wanted to collect Western art, you wouldn’t start with a Rembrandt. So if a Dogon mask from Mali is out of your price range, perhaps a piece of pottery from the same area is where to start.”



## THE EAC HAS A WEBSITE!



The Ethnic Arts Council launched their first website: [www.ethnicartscouncil.org](http://www.ethnicartscouncil.org). In addition, the EAC has a new central email address: [info@ethnicartscouncil.org](mailto:info@ethnicartscouncil.org). We encourage you to use this email address for general communications to the EAC.

The **Home** and **About Us** pages provides an incisive view of EAC in its present form as well as its historic founding with its energetic founders and their initial contributions to the field. Additional features include: **Upcoming Programs** (a list of future EAC programs), **News & Events** (a list of upcoming, note-worthy, tribal art shows and museum exhibitions), **Past Programs** (a select list of important past EAC programs and related events with links to the original pdf format), and the **e-News Archive** (with links to previous e-News editions in their original pdf format).

Our goal is to use the new website as a general bulletin board, as well as a recruiting tool for new members. When possible, please direct interested individuals to the website for general information about the EAC, a look at past and future programs, and requests for membership applications. The website will be updated regularly with the latest information on upcoming programs and events, so please use the website to stay informed.

## UPCOMING PROGRAMS & EVENTS:



**GIFT OF THE SULTAN:  
THE ARTS OF GIVING AT THE ISLAMIC COURTS**  
**Resnick Pavilion • LACMA**  
**Monday, August 15, 2011 • 7pm**

A special summer program for 25 lucky EAC members, Gifts of the Sultan explores Islamic art through the universal tradition of gift giving. Many of the most spectacular and historically significant examples of Islamic art can be classified as gifts, a number of which will be brought together for the unique purpose of this exhibition to demonstrate the integral and complex nature of gift exchange in the Islamic world. Of special note: the world famous Ardabil Carpet, one of a pair (the other is in the Victoria and Albert Museum) of what are considered the best woven carpets ever made, will be on display within this exhibition.



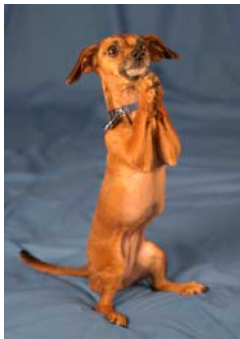
**\*Sorry, this is a sold out show, wait list only.** Please contact Feelie Lee for more information: [feelie@ucla.edu](mailto:feelie@ucla.edu).

**EAC ANNUAL DINNER & 45<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY GALA**  
**Sunday, September 25, 2011**  
**Rose Café, 220 Rose Ave., Venice, CA**



Tickets are \$125 per person. Invitations will be sent to members in August. We encourage you reserve your space as soon as possible.

**EAC SILENT AUCTION NEEDS DONATIONS!**



We need your donations for the Silent Auction held in conjunction with the Annual Dinner this September 25, 2011. We are looking for objects of art (not limited to ethnographic items), jewelry, unusual and wearable clothing, coupons/tickets for travel & tours, dinners, entertainment, and cultural events, bottles of wine, and of course hard cash! Be creative!!!

For questions and general information, please contact Mark Johnson at: [info@ethnicartscouncil.org](mailto:info@ethnicartscouncil.org).

**Drop off locations:**

Richard and Jan Baum  
362 S. Las Palmas Ave.  
Los Angeles, CA 90020  
(323) 936-0012

Christine Gregory  
201 S. Linden Dr.  
Beverly Hills, CA 90212  
(310) 277-9200



**EAC MEMBERSHIP NOTICE**

**TIME IS RUNNING OUT!**



For those who have received renewal notices please pay your membership dues by **September 1, 2011** so we can look forward to another creative year together.

Write your check today to **EAC** and send to:

Lyn Avins  
169 S. Medio Dr.  
Los Angeles, CA 90049



**ENDNOTES:**

Please send any relevant information, upcoming events, news, articles, or opinions for consideration for publication in future issues of the EAC e-news to Mark Johnson, editor, at: [info@ethnicartscouncil.org](mailto:info@ethnicartscouncil.org)

**EAC e-news • Published: August 5, 2011**  
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**The Ethnic Arts Council of Los Angeles (EAC)**  
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**and Appreciation of Ethnic Art •**  
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