



Image: Kumema Luwengwa Nyau Society mask, Chewa tribe, Malawi

## The Elephant Has Four Hearts: Spirit Dancers and Chewa Cosmography

April 30, 2017 • 3 – 5 pm • Barker Hangar

*Gule Wamkulu* (The Great Dance) is the traditional spiritual practice of the Chewa people of Malawi, performed as part of significant life passages, including funerals, chief's initiations, fertility rites and initiations into adulthood. Long-oppressed by British colonial administrators as an exhibition of "obscenity, sensuality and cruelty," and subsequently by missionaries seeking converts to Christianity, the public performances of The Great Dance have survived and adapted to retain a hold on the spiritual imagination of the rural Chewa. The dance is performed by the *nyau*, a semi-secret association of men whose affiliations with each other, and their connection to the ancestors' World of the Dead, is concealed through coded language and signing, creating an internal logic that informs the membership, its activities and their relationship to the Chewa cosmography. Through the vivid and cathartic psychodrama of *Gule Wamkulu*, the masked spirit entities of the Chewa cosmos dance the *mwambo*, the core lessons of Chewa morality and identity.

**Doug Curran**, a Vancouver-based photographer has documented a wide range of exotic groups and their beliefs, from travelling tent preachers in the US to UFO cultists. As an initiated member of the *nyau* brotherhood, Curran set out on annual, dry season trips across Malawi, to record the masks and rituals of the Chewa spirit masks on film, video and sound. A reception follows at the Loving Monro Gallery which features a wide display of *Nyau* masks. Program co-sponsored with Fowler Museum & Loving Monro Gallery. **RSVP by Noon April 26, 2017 via [feellie@ucla.edu](mailto:feellie@ucla.edu)**