



EAC Program



**March 9, 2019 • NOON • Fowler Museum w/ Collector Mark Clayton**

This *Fowler in Focus* gallery exhibition celebrates the promised gift of two large, marvelous collections of **bronze bells and ofos** amassed by Mark Clayton. Originating in Southern Nigeria, the bells and *ofos* were used in a variety of ritual contexts. The selection of bells includes examples large and small, richly adorned or spare in profile, and some that stretch our expectations about the fundamental meaning of what a bell is. Many appear in multiples, standing like kindred souls; others represent unique forms. The bronze *ofos* derive from wooden staffs of power. As personal and communal possessions, they are held in the right hand when used, or placed on ritual altars, and represent the physical connection between ancestors and their descendants.

Mark Clayton is an unusual, philanthropic collector who has a “more idiosyncratic sensibility,” following his own “particular desires like a truffle pig on the scent.” He seeks out the overlooked, rather than the traditional prizes among cultural artifacts. The result is a “wonderful ethnographic payoff in terms of the preservation of material culture and the insights to which that contributes.” Clayton’s approach and resulting gifts can be found in museums around the world: over 5000 baby carriers in the National Art Museum of China and Remin University in Beijing, China; some 233 Kru Rings (*nitiens*) at the Peabody Museum at Harvard; and 152 bronze bells and ofos that will now be joining the Fowler’s permanent collection. Following Clayton’s personal tour, **Kathryn Gunsch** from the Boston Fine Art Museum will speak at 2 p.m. on the Benin bronze sculptures which also honor the ancestors.

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