

African Art at the DMA: A Brief History

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Part One: 1969–1989

The Dallas Museum of Art (DMA) has long championed the inclusion of African art in the discourse of the world's art. Before acquiring its first African object in 1969, the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts (DMFA, as the Museum was known then) hosted and organized a number of exhibitions that introduced the public to this non-Western visual expression. Among these exhibitions were *African, Oceanic and Pacific Primitive Artifacts* (1954), *The Sculpture of Negro Africa* (1961), and *The Arts of Man: A Selection of World Art from Ancient to Modern Times* (1962). *The Sculpture of Negro Africa* included a diverse selection of sculptures from twenty-seven ethnic groups that were made of ivory, forged iron, cast copper alloy (bronze), terracotta, and wood between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries (fig. 1). The exhibition, organized by the Art Center in La Jolla, California, and arranged by the Stolper Galleries of Primitive Arts in New York and Los Angeles, showcased sculptures from the Stolper collection and works from a group of private collectors that included William Moore of Los Angeles and Jay C. Leff of Uniontown, Pennsylvania. Paul S. Wingert, the leading American authority on African art at the time and a professor of art history at Columbia University, authored an informative introductory essay for this groundbreaking exhibition.¹

As this exhibition toured the West Coast and its Texas venues of Dallas and San Antonio, the Museum was in the throes of organizing *The Arts of Man*, which featured more than eight hundred objects from the world's major civilizations. The twenty carved wood masks and figures, gold and copper alloy (bronze) castings, and carved ivory sculptures of ancient Egypt and sub-Saharan Africa included in the exhibition were borrowed from the Museum of Primitive Art, the Heeramanek Collection, the Carlebach Gallery of New York City, and Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Marcus of Dallas.

The works of art selected for *The Arts of Man* exhibition reinforced a fact established in *The Sculpture of Negro Africa*—significant works of African art existed before the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, when most extant examples were made, and in materials other than wood. A reporter reviewing the exhibition for the *Dallas Times Herald* noted, “some of the societies we think of as primitive or aboriginal produced art of great technical skill and highly sophisticated design.”² He must have had in mind a casting that in the catalog is identified as a sixteenth-century statue of a Benin “king” from Nigeria (fig. 2).

The Arts of Man, undoubtedly the most ambitious exhibition the Museum had undertaken up to that point, was the brainchild of Mrs. Eugene (Margaret) McDermott, president of the Dallas Art Association from 1962 to 1964.³ According to John Lunsford, then the curator of collections, Mrs. McDermott “simply came in and in her sweet way said [to Lunsford and the director Jerry Bywaters] ‘I think we ought to do a history of art...I mean a history of all art, everywhere.’”⁴ Several months later her ambitious idea came to fruition in that extraordinary exhibition, which was the Museum's most significant accomplishment in its fifty-year history and garnered national attention. It would also expand popular notions about “art.”

Art of the Congo followed in 1968 and left a lasting impression. Organized by the Walker Art Center, a museum of modern and contemporary art in Minneapolis, the more than one hundred sculpted masks, figures, furniture, and personal objects (e.g., elaborately decorated hair combs and tobacco pipes) made in the Congo (which had recently gained independence from Belgium) were selected from the vast holdings of the Royal Museum for Central Africa (Koninklijk Museum voor Midden-Afrika / Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale) in Tervuren, a suburb of Brussels. The exhibition catalogue included an essay written by Clark Stillman, a connoisseur of African art, who with his wife Frances had amassed one of the most outstanding private collections of Congo art in the world.⁵

In the meantime, Eugene and Margaret McDermott had met Clark and Frances Stillman in 1966. They were introduced by Ida and Jerry Rubin, friends and fellow supporters of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who were also friends and neighbors of the Stillmans. The McDermotts went to New York to visit them and their African art collection, which Margaret McDermott described as “just so splendid.”⁶ Her admiration for African art evolved, through study and collecting, to reflect the acumen of a seasoned connoisseur. The McDermotts and Stillmans became lifelong friends.

When the Stillmans began downsizing their possessions, the McDermotts offered to purchase their collection of African sculptures, which had been assembled over a period of almost forty years. The offer was accepted, and the McDermotts acquired the collection, but not to keep. Instead, they donated a large portion of it (224 objects) to the Museum in 1969.⁷

They also provided funds to renovate a gallery in which to display the objects (fig. 3, opposite). In addition to filling a gap in the Museum's encyclopedic collection, the McDermotts' donation of African art "could present the extraordinary cultural heritage of Dallas's African-American citizens."⁸ Their motivation may not have been public knowledge, but an African American reporter at the *Dallas Morning News* noted:

African Art is as strange to Negro students as it is to whites or any other race, because it historically has been pretty much unknown to them. Now, the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts has a collection of Congo sculpture on permanent display that is not only relevant to their search for black identity, but fits well into the pattern of broadening their knowledge of African history and development of race pride.⁹

This extraordinary gift was, as Lunsford describes it, a "watershed event [which] . . . set for [the McDermotts] a new level of committed interest that would grow by geometric progressions over the ensuing years."¹⁰ It was also a watershed event for the Museum, as the Clark and Frances Stillman Collection of Congo Sculpture was "esteemed all over the world and...its final museum resting place has long been a matter of excited competition and interest."¹¹ With the acquisition of the Stillman Collection, the Museum now numbered among the institutions with significant collections of African art.

The Stillmans began collecting African art in the early 1930s in Brussels, where Clark Stillman was a cultural attaché at the American Embassy. In those days, one could find genuine objects—and sometimes major treasures like the Boma figure (fig. 4, overleaf)—at the Sunday flea market and art dealers' shops.¹² The couple was mentored by Frans M. Olbrechts (1899–1958), a Belgian anthropologist and author of *Les Arts plastiques du Congo belge* (1959) who eventually became the head of the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren (the source of the *Art of the Congo* exhibition).¹³ Under Olbrechts' guidance, the Stillmans became connoisseurs of Congo art and knowledgeable about the original context in which the objects functioned. The collectors patronized the Belgian art dealers Jeanne Walschot (1896–1977 [Kanyok water pipe]), who had inherited a vast collection of old African objects from relatives who had been well-placed colonial bureaucrats in the Belgian Congo;¹⁴ Gustave De Hondt (also spelled Dehondt, d. 1952 [Luba male figure standing on animal and Mbala female with child]), who was in charge of the Belgian Pavilion at the New York World's Fair of 1939 and also had colonialist family connections;¹⁵ and Raoul Blondiau (Chokwe chief's chair). Blondiau was a connoisseur of African art whose collection was the foundation for the Blondiau-Theatre Arts Collection of Primitive Art that was exhibited in New York and Chicago in 1927, nearly a decade before the epoch-making *African Negro Art* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (1935).¹⁶

The collection, presented to the public in 1969, was named the Clark and Frances Stillman Collection of Congo Sculpture to honor the previous owners and to reflect the geographic origin of the objects. Lunsford organized the inaugural exhibition, which was enthusiastically received by the art critics and public alike. *African Art and the Modern Tradition*, an exhibition mounted in an adjoining gallery, revealed the relationship between traditional African art and twentieth-century art through the use of original works, photographs, texts, and quotations from the early European modernists.

Inspired by the collecting activity at the Museum, several Dallas collectors became enthusiasts and began to acquire African works for their own collections. They patronized both established art dealers and "runners," as itinerant art dealers from Africa were called. In 1972, *African Art from Dallas Collections* showcased over three hundred diverse works of art grouped under the themes of Metal: Adornment, Amulets, and Power; Figures: Spirits to Man to Spirit; Instruments of Magic: Status and Control; and Masks and Dance: Transformation, Discipline, Theater. Those identified as lending to the exhibition included Bernard Brister, Mr. and Mrs. Alfred L. Bromberg, Mr. and Mrs. Otis Dozier, Steve Farr, Mr. and Mrs. E. E. Fogelson, Mr. and Mrs. Walter Foxworth, Donald W. Greaves, Mr. and Mrs. James A. Ledbetter, Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Marcus, Mr. and Mrs. Richard K. Marks, Madelon Mosier, Mr. and Mrs. Raymond D. Nasher, Mr. and Mrs. George Perutz, Judith Robinson, Linda Robinson, and Mr. and Mrs. Dan C. Williams.¹⁷ Several of these lenders later donated their treasures to the Museum.

The Museum continued to bring traveling exhibitions of African art to Dallas. *African Art of the Dogon: The Lester Wunderman Collection* (1974) was organized by Michael Kan, the curator of African art at the Brooklyn Museum and the DMA's first Eugene McDermott Visiting Curator (1986). Kan maintained ties with the Museum, serving as a consultant on new acquisitions. *Primitive Art Masterworks* (1975) afforded Dallas citizenry an opportunity to view the African, Oceanic, and ancient American art collections of the Museum of Primitive Art (MPA), which co-organized the exhibition with the American Federation of Arts, New York.

The Museum's African art collection reached another milestone in 1974 when its holdings grew to include the important and well-known collection of Gustave and Franyo Schindler of New York City. Presided over by the

then-director Harry S. Parker III, the acquisition was made possible by the Eugene McDermott Foundation in honor of Eugene McDermott, who had died in 1973. At the time Margaret McDermott said,

My husband possessed a genuine joy in giving. His interest and the majority of his giving were directed toward education. The arts, he felt, were an integral part of education—vital for individuals and communities. So he would have approved, I know, of our gift of the Schindler Collection of African Art to the museum. Besides adding to its growing collection of art, he would have derived pleasure from supporting the museum's fine staff while making a gift to Dallas—a city which had been so good to him and for which he had an enduring affection.¹⁸

Named The Gustave and Franyo Schindler Collection of African Sculpture, the assemblage of fifty works extended the stylistic and geographical reach of the Dallas holdings with objects from West Africa (Mali, Upper Volta [now Burkina Faso], Guinea, Liberia, the Ivory Coast [Côte d'Ivoire], Ghana, and Nigeria). The Museum's Central African holdings were augmented by objects from Gabon and Congo (Brazzaville) as well as Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo). In contrast to most of the small-scale objects and focus on figurative sculpture in the Stillman Collection, the Schindler Collection offered large-scale statuary and masks. The acquisition of the Schindler Collection established the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts as the leading repository of African art in the Southwest.

Gustave and Franyo Schindler first encountered African art in the late 1940s in Germany at a display of German Expressionist paintings coupled with African sculptures. Franyo Schindler was a painter who had a special eye for the African forms and "was fascinated by the mysticism connected with them."¹⁹ Because few American art museums displayed or collected African art, the Schindlers developed their connoisseurship by studying African works at the British Museum in London, the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, and the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren. As they began to build their collection, the Schindlers primarily patronized art dealers in New York City. They did not try to collect all the sculpture-producing cultures or seek only rare objects, but were attracted to objects that displayed "...a certain simplicity and purity of conception, and the presence in a piece of the dignity and the almost religious force which makes one feel that it had actually served in the ceremonial rites for which it was created."²⁰ Indeed, the result of their efforts was a collection of rare finds, among which are a centuries-old pre-Dogon standing female figure from Mali, an elegant Senufo rhythm pounder from Côte d'Ivoire, a colossal Baga D'mba headdress from Guinea, an Igbo standing female figure from Nigeria, and a Hembra ancestor figure and Zande *yanda* figure, both of which are from the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The acquisition of the Schindler Collection prompted Parker to declare, "The extraordinarily high quality of these pieces combined with the Stillman Collection of Congo Art moves us into the top ranks of African art collections in the country."²¹ The collection was installed in the renovated West Wing in galleries adjacent to the Ancient American and Pacific art on one side and the classical collection on the other.

Both the Stillmans and the Schindlers continued to be involved in the Museum's collection building efforts until they died. In 1971, for example, The Eugene and Margaret McDermott Art Fund, Inc., acquired a group of nine masks from Clark Stillman, and in 1978, following the death of his wife, the McDermott Art Fund acquired fourteen more sculptures from their collection. In 1980, Stillman donated the couple's extensive collection of books about Congo art and culture to the Museum's Mildred R. and Frederick M. Mayer Library. Most of the books, like the rare works of art in the Stillman Collection of Congo Sculpture, are collectors' items today. For their part, between 1976 and 1987 the Schindlers donated several more sculptures to the Museum, including a Bobo mask from Burkina Faso, a Mumuye standing figure from Nigeria, and an Ovimbundu pipe from Angola. A Dogon door lock was a joint donation with the Bezalel Foundation.

The African art collection continued to grow in depth and quality with generous financial assistance from the McDermott Fund and donations of art from local and out-of-state supporters. In 1975 the Museum acquired an Igbo headdress from Nigeria—rarely encountered in public or private collections—through The Eugene and Margaret McDermott Art Fund, Inc., and the generous contributions of Mr. and Mrs. Algur H. Meadows, the Meadows Foundation Incorporated, and Stanley and Billie Marcus. Lester Wunderman, a New York art collector whose passion was the art of the Dogon peoples, donated a *nommo* statue. The acquisition of a male effigy vessel by Voania Muba, a Woyo potter from Congo, and an effigy bell from the Lower Niger River area of Nigeria resulted from the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Eugene McDermott. With these additions, the African art collection offered a wider range of materials, works by named artists (which countered the notion that traditional African art is anonymous), and art that reached back in time.

Dallas was one of three venues for the 1978 exhibition *The Arts of Ghana*, which was organized by Herbert M. Cole and Doran H. Ross for the Museum of Cultural History at the University of California, Los Angeles. The exhibition presented an array of object types, from popular *kente* cloth and *akua'ba* figures that had become part of American fashion and

popular culture to the visual arts of lesser-known cultures such as the Lobi, Nafana, and Moba. Nearly twenty years later, a Vagala mask displayed in this exhibition entered the Museum's collection as a gift from John Lunsford. Dallas was one of three venues for the 1978 exhibition *The Arts of Ghana*, which was organized by Herbert M. Cole and Doran H. Ross for the Museum of Cultural History at the University of California, Los Angeles. The exhibition presented an array of object types, from popular *kente* cloth and *akua'ba* figures that had become part of American fashion and popular culture to the visual arts of lesser-known cultures such as the Lobi, Nafana, and Moba. Nearly twenty years later, a Vagala mask displayed in this exhibition entered the Museum's collection as a gift from John Lunsford.

The 1970s closed with the purchase of a rare terracotta ritual bowl by a Yoruba or Edo (Bini) artist from Nigeria. Gifts included a large-scale Igbo standing female shrine figure from Mr. and Mrs. Lee M. Singleterry and a Songye male figure from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and a Yoruba ivory tapper carved in the form of a kneeling female figure from Nigeria that were donated by the Art Museum League Travel Fund. The Eugene and Margaret McDermott Art Fund, Inc., acquired the fourteen aforementioned sculptures from the Clark and Frances Stillman Collection, including a Bwa standing male figure from Burkina Faso, a Pende cup with back-to-back standing male and female figures, a Luba headrest with a female caryatid, a Lulua standing figure with an extraordinarily long neck, and an elegant Zande figurative harp from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Schindlers donated the Bobo Nwenka mask from Burkina Faso that still bears traces of the original pigment.

Despite the two-story wing that was added to the building in 1965, the museum was bursting at the seams. Dallas voters agreed on November 6, 1979, that a new and larger building was in order. This new building was to be designed by Edward Larrabee Barnes and built downtown in what has become the Arts District. While the new building was under construction, exhibitions and collection building continued in the existing facility. In addition to the Schindlers' largesse, there were gifts from the local art collector Henry W. Hawley III, who donated an Asante *akua'ba* fertility figure, an Asante hair comb (both from Ghana), and, from Côte d'Ivoire, a Baule ointment box with an anthropomorphic head. A monumental *arugba* caryatid vessel that was later attributed to the Yoruba sculptor Akobi Ogun Fakeye and a Senufo footed drum decorated with relief figures were donated by Stanley and Linda Marcus, also of Dallas, to the Foundation for the Arts. The Foundation for the Arts was established in 1964 as a holding agency for the collection formerly held by the Dallas Museum for Contemporary Arts (which had merged with the DMFA in 1963), with the power to solicit funds and acquire art objects to be placed at the disposal of the Museum.

The new museum building, which was renamed the Dallas Museum of Art, was opened to the public in 1984. The Director Harry S. Parker III explained the reason for the name change, saying, "This title better describes this inclusive collection which ranges from painting and sculpture to textiles and photographs, African masks and pre-Columbian pottery."²² In celebration of opening the new building, the longtime supporters Gustave and Franyo Schindler donated a monumental Dogon "ark," and Stanley and Linda Marcus donated over one hundred fertility figures from around the world and covering a time span from 5,000 BC to the mid-twentieth century. Twenty-two of the figures originated in African countries, among them Ghana, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. An Igbo *ikenga* seated male shrine figure and an elaborately decorated, lidded bowl by the renowned Yoruba sculptor Arowogun (Areogun) of Osi-Ilorin were donated by Carolyn C. and Dan C. Williams of Dallas.

Although growing, the DMA's African art collection essentially still consisted of sculpture. This situation changed in 1984 when Carol Robbins, then the curator of textiles, acquired four woven raffia cloths from Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) with funds from The Eugene and Margaret McDermott Art Fund, Inc., and an anonymous donor. Three of the textiles, which are between fifteen and twenty feet long and decorated with appliqué, were originally worn by Kuba women as wrapper-style skirts on ceremonial occasions. The fourth and smallest panel is decorated with cut-pile embroidery, a technique for which the Shoowa, a Kuba subgroup, have long been famous. In addition to providing two-dimensional art forms, the textiles provided much needed examples of women's art in the collection. In 1985, the estate of Robert Plant Armstrong—a professor at the University of Texas at Dallas, an avid art collector, and the author of many articles and books on African art—donated a Teke mantle from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, then Zaire.

Between 1985 and 1989, the Dallas Museum of Art hosted three major traveling exhibitions focused on African art. The Museum of Modern Art's "*Primitivism*" in *20th-Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* explored the impact of so-called tribal African, Oceanic, American Indian, and Eskimo art on the art of such European modernists as Picasso, Brancusi, Modigliani, Klee, Giacometti, and others. Dallas was one of three venues and the only one west of the Mississippi River. While the Dallas Museum of Art did not lend to this exhibition, a Baule sculpture in the exhibition became part of the Dallas collection several years later. It should be noted that the Eugene McDermott Foundation supported publication of the exhibition catalogue. The singular focus of *Ancestral Arts of Gabon*, which was organized by

the Barbier-Mueller Museum in Geneva, Switzerland, nicely complemented the Museum's sculptures from that country. *Art/Artifact*, organized by the Center for African Art, New York, explored the changing methods of exhibiting and interpreting African art in Western museums with objects from the collections of the Buffalo Museum of Science, the Hampton University Museum, and the American Museum of Natural History.

In 1989 the Museum's adjunct curator of African American Art, Alvia Wardlaw, organized the traveling exhibition *Black Art—Ancestral Legacy: The African Impulse in African American Art*. Works from the collection featured in the exhibition included the Fang four-faced helmet mask and the Lega figure with four heads from the Gustave and Franyo Schindler Collection of African Sculpture that inspired and influenced African American artists. Following its Dallas debut, the exhibition traveled to the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, the Milwaukee Art Museum, and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond.

In his preface to the *Black Art—Ancestral Legacy* catalogue, the then-director Richard Brettell wrote

The Dallas Museum of Art had the wisdom and foresight to purchase two internationally significant private collections of African art as early as 1969 and 1974. Indeed, the Stillman and the Schindler Collections represent the core of a collection of African sculpture that rivals that of the Metropolitan Museum of New York and is among the greatest collections of African art in any American art museum.²³

By 1989 the collection of African objects amounted to 350 and was destined to continue growing in both depth and quality.

Part Two: 1990–Present

The 1990s began with an extraordinary gift of approximately one thousand loose and strung African trade beads from the Dozier Foundation. The Museum became the repository of one of the largest public collections of such objects (fig. 5). The donation was inspired by comments that the art historian Susan Mullin Vogel had made to Velma Davis Dozier during a visit in 1988. Vogel, one of several renowned African art specialists called upon to help guide the African art collection, suggested enlivening the African gallery with colorful African trade beads. The assistant curator Carol Robbins knew that Velma Dozier had amassed an outstanding collection of beads and her husband Otis had bought masks and figures from itinerant African art dealers. In addition to displaying a wide array of colors, textures, and shapes, trade beads reflect Africa's contact with the outside world (Asia and Europe). Beads adorned both sculpture and human beings. In some societies, they signified an affiliation with a particular religious practice, but because of their value as imported objects, they generally indicated individual or group prestige and prosperity. The Otis and Velma Davis Dozier Fund established in 1988 also enabled the Museum to purchase, among other objects, a classic Ndebele woman's beaded cape from South Africa in 1991.

In 1991 the Museum acquired 258 Coptic Christian crosses. Ranging in size from a few inches to over two feet tall, the crosses made of carved wood and cast metal alloys date from about the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries. This important collection was assembled between 1964 and 1967 in Ethiopia by the professors Hebe and Kenneth Redden. Because Ethiopia did not have a law governing the exportation of cultural property at the time, it was legal to collect cultural objects. At the behest of Emperor Haile Selassie, Kenneth Redden—a member of a legal team from the U.S. Department of State that established the first law school in Ethiopia—drafted Ethiopia's first Antiquities Protection Law. Redden was allowed to keep the crosses he had collected as a token of the emperor's appreciation and with the understanding that the crosses would "ultimately be placed in an educational setting, where scholars and the public could learn from them about Ethiopian culture."²⁴ The collection was subsequently exhibited at the Grand Palais in Paris (1966), the Musée Dynamique à Dakar, Senegal, during the first World Festival of Negro Arts (1967), and at the University of Virginia (1972). Originally donated to St. Mary's University in San Antonio, the collection of crosses was permanently moved to the Dallas Museum of Art so that it could be accessible to a broader public. In addition, the Museum had "remarkable African holdings" and was willing to share the collection with the African American Museum. Presented to the public in 1992–1993 in an exhibition organized by Anne Bromberg, The Cecil and Ida Green Curator of Ancient and South Asian Art, the crosses have since been displayed selectively in installations such as "Afterlife," a long-term multicultural exhibition on the theme of death and the hereafter.

In 1992 the Museum hired the art historian and African art specialist Christopher D. Roy as an adjunct curator to research and organize a temporary exhibition of the African art collection (figs. 6 and 7). In this role, he advised Jay Gates, the Museum's director, to acquire types of African art (such as royal art or textiles) especially from West African cultures to create a balanced collection. Broadening the collection in this way would also demonstrate that African societies are not monolithic but differ in terms of sociopolitical and religious structures and associated art forms.²⁵

Roy's advice was duly acted upon and in 1992 two examples of prestige headwear were acquired: a Yaka chief's beaded bihorn headdress donated by Linda and Stanley Marcus and an Ekonda chief's tiered basketry hat (*botolo*) donated by the Friends of African and African-American Art. In 1993 the Otis and Velma Davis Dozier Fund supported the purchase of an important Guro *gye* helmet mask from Côte d'Ivoire. That same year, *Africa Explores: 20th Century African Art*, an exhibition organized by the Center for African Art, New York, and *Eternal Egypt: Objects of Daily Life, People, and Religion*, the second phase of a three-part exhibition of Egyptian and Nubian artifacts on long-term loan from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, were the featured exhibitions focused on Africa.

Ramona Austin, an art historian and veteran art museum curator, was hired in 1994 to fill the new fulltime position as curator of African art, which was endowed as The Margaret McDermott Curator of African Art in 1999.²⁶ During her tenure, Austin added over one hundred objects to the collection and oversaw the reinstallation of the collection into its designated space on the third floor of the Museum. This space became available when the Nancy and Jake L. Hamon Building was completed in 1993, providing 140,000 additional square feet. The African, Asian, and Pacific collections were installed in adjoining galleries. The completely refurbished galleries, opened with great fanfare in 1996, showcased approximately 125 objects from the collection arranged according to geographic style regions (figs. 8 and 9). Diane Pelrine, an authority on African art and a curator at Indiana University Art Museum, Bloomington, writing for *African Arts*, pronounced the exhibition "an excellent introduction to sub-Saharan Africa's sculptural traditions."²⁷

Several African objects were generously acquired for the Museum in 1994 by the Eugene and Margaret McDermott Art Fund, Inc., including an ancient (200 BC–AD 200) terracotta male figure from Sokoto in northwestern Nigeria and a group of royal objects from the Owo-Yoruba and Benin kingdoms in Nigeria—a finely carved ivory equestrian figure, a copper alloy casting of a chief of Udo, and an elaborately carved ivory waist pendant plaque. These prestigious works of art were complemented by a richly carved and pigmented ivory side-blown horn from the Mende peoples of Sierra Leone and a seated male figure from the Baule peoples of Côte d'Ivoire.

An *nkisi nkondi* (power figure) from the Yombe peoples of the Democratic Republic of the Congo acquired in 1996 for the Foundation for the Arts Collection by the Eugene McDermott Foundation is outstanding—as much for its formal qualities as its grand dimensions. Bristling with handwrought and imported iron nails and wearing a finely woven raffia wrapper, the figure is one of several extant figures from the same workshop that were brought out of Africa between 1910 and 1913. Well traveled, this impressive sculpture has been shown in several major European and American exhibitions.

Although African masks are the most popular African art forms, the collection could boast but a few. During her tenure Austin acquired several, including a fierce Senufo *komo* helmet mask²⁸ that had been on display in the *Animals in African Art: From the Familiar to the Marvelous* exhibition, which traveled to the Museum in 1997. David T. Owsley, a long-time supporter of the Museum's Ancient and South Asian art collections and owner of the mask, generously donated it to the Museum. General acquisition funds financed the purchase of a massive and colorful Abua *obukele* headdress that was also on display in *Animals in African Art*, and the Eugene and Margaret McDermott Art Fund, Inc., was used to acquire an Igbo polychrome *igri* face mask for the Museum. A *Mukenga* bead- and cowrie-covered helmet mask, given in honor of Peter Hanszen Lynch and Cristina Martha Frances Lynch, and a very fine old Makonde helmet mask, donated by the Cecil and Ida Green Foundation in 1999, rounded out the Museum's collection of masks during this acquisition phase.

In 1997 the Junior Associates, a membership group, donated funds to acquire three prestige hats from the Grasslands region of Cameroon, and a royal Kuba beaded *mpaan* hat from the Democratic Republic of the Congo was donated by Alma L. McKinney in honor of Frederic A. Luyties III. In 2000 Mr. and Mrs. James H. W. Jacks donated a Dogon granary door with a sun lizard motif, and a bequest from Juanita K. Bromberg gave the Museum a group of Akan miniature cast-brass figures and counterweights from the Alfred and Juanita Bromberg Collection.

In 2003 John R. Lane, The Eugene McDermott Director (1999–2008), and Bonnie Pitman, the Deputy Director, hired the author of this volume to join the DMA staff. An art historian, seasoned art museum curator, and former director of the National Museum of African Art at the Smithsonian Institution, I joined the Museum as Senior Curator, the Arts of Africa, the Americas, and the Pacific and The Margaret McDermott Curator of African Art. Thanks to the extraordinary generosity of the Eugene and Margaret McDermott Art Fund, Inc., my first acquisition for the collection was an *olumeye*, or kneeling female figure with a bowl, by the renowned Yoruba court artist Olowe of Ise (c. 1875–c. 1938). Introduced to the public in the focused exhibition *Variations on a Theme: Three Olumeye by Olowe of Ise* in 2005, the bowl was presented with two others that Olowe carved and compared with a fine but conventional *olumeye* carved by Agbonbiofe of Effon-Alaiye, a contemporary of Olowe's. It is my assertion that Olowe reinvented the form of the *olumeye* as he did other sculptures. The exhibition was supported with funds provided by the Dallas Museum of Art League.²⁹

With “highest quality” always a criterion, there has been a conscious effort to obtain works of art that reveal the diversity of forms, styles, techniques, and materials found in African art and to represent more of the major art-producing peoples, especially from West Africa. Since 2004 several important works of art from Nigeria have helped to close the disparity between the West African and Central African holdings. Among the works of art that have been acquired since 2004 are an elaborately beaded *ile ori* (“house of the head”), a beaded *ibori* (the symbol of an individual’s “inner head”), and a circa-eighteenth-century cast copper alloy ring depicting a gruesome scene of human sacrifice in high relief. The solid form, which weighs about seven pounds, is believed to have been used in kingship rituals. All the objects are from the Yoruba culture in Nigeria and were purchased with funds from the African Collection Fund. This fund derives from the endowed African Art Acquisition Fund that was established in 1988. Additional recent acquisitions of Yoruba art include a pair of cast copper alloy and iron tongs, donated by George and Sidney Perutz in 2005, that date from the mid-twentieth century and were used in Oshugbo society rituals. A cast copper alloy altar stand dating from the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century was financed by the African Collection Fund.

By 2008 the collection housed fifty-one masks and three complete masquerade costumes. Additions in 2005 and 2006 included a Budja abstract bird-form headdress from the Democratic Republic of the Congo that was worn in a performance in 1986 to honor the king of Belgium during a visit to the country; a pristine Deangle face mask from the Dan peoples of Liberia and Côte d’Ivoire that complements a venerable old Dan mask from the Schindler Collection; and a well-worn Sande society helmet mask from the Mende of Sierra Leone. In 2007 the Museum acquired an unusual blackened Pende forehead mask that, as indicated by its facial details, represents a “hyper male.” It complements a classic Pende face mask that was donated by the Eugene and Margaret McDermott Art Fund, Inc., in 1971. Other recently acquired masks include a large-scale, multfigured Yoruba Epa headdress and an Ijo water spirit headdress that the dancer wears horizontally on his head. The images carved on the mask face the sky rather than the human audience standing on the ground. The Museum has plans to mount a special exhibition in 2010 to showcase its noteworthy collection of masks.

The Eugene and Margaret McDermott Art Fund, Inc., supported two major acquisitions in 2005: a cast bronze single-figure plaque that was made by a master brasscaster in the Benin kingdom in the sixteenth or seventeenth century and a large-scale brass- and copper-clad reliquary guardian figure, with back-to-back faces, from the Kota peoples of Gabon. Margaret McDermott had seen the plaque in the 1960s when she visited Edward A. Bragaline, a well-known collector of modern art, to view a painting by Picasso. The plaque was put on the market following the owner’s demise in the late 1990s but the Museum was not in a position to purchase it. Several years later, however, the plaque was again available and this time the acquisition was possible. It complements the group of bronze and ivory sculptures that was acquired in 1994. The extraordinarily large Kota Janus-faced reliquary guardian figure, which once belonged to a clan rather than a family, complements a similar and smaller single-faced guardian figure from the Schindler Collection.

Textiles now have a greater presence in the African art collection with the addition of classic, and sometimes rare, examples from throughout the continent. The collection includes cloths from Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia in northern Africa, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, and Cameroon in West Africa, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Central Africa. The cloths, some of which were used as garments, were selected in collaboration with Carol Robbins, the Ellen and Harry S. Parker III Curator of the Arts of the Americas and the Pacific, and generously supported by The Eugene and Margaret McDermott Art Fund, Inc., The Textile Fund, and proceeds from the African Art Acquisitions Endowment.

Since 1969, the Dallas Museum of Art’s collection of African art has grown from one that focused primarily on sculpture to one that reflects the wide range of the visual arts of Africa’s ancient and traditional cultures. Ancient works like the pre-Christian era Sokoto bust exquisitely demonstrate Africa’s long history of civilization and creativity. The Museum’s collection reflects the diversity of Africa’s societies that range from highly stratified, as exemplified by the royal arts of Yoruba and Benin kingdoms, to those of the village-based Igbo and Lega. Yet, there is room to grow and gaps to fill. For example, there are few works made of gold and iron in the collection; East African and women’s art are critically underrepresented. As the Museum looks to the future, we seek to forge bonds with museums in Africa to display their protected artifacts on long-term loan and to share our resources to further their staff development.

By continuing to build on the foundation of the Schindler and Stillman Collections, the African art collection and associated programs will contribute to the realization of the Museum’s mission as adopted in 2002:

The Dallas Museum of Art collects, preserves, presents, and interprets works of art from diverse cultures and many centuries, including that of our own time. We champion the power of art, embracing our responsibility to engage and educate our community, to contribute to cultural knowledge, and to advance creative endeavor.

Notes

1. Wingert 1960
 2. "The Arts of Man," *Dallas Times Herald SundayMagazine*, October 7, 1962, p. 13; Kosinski 2003: no. 94
 3. The Dallas Art Association was established in 1903 to support the visual arts with a goal to create a permanent institution, the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts. A brief history of the Dallas Museum of Art is found on the museum's website, www.DallasMuseumofArt.org.
 4. Lee and Lee, in Kosinski 2003: no. 17
 5. Stillman, in Walker Art Center 1967: 11–12
 6. Margaret McDermott to Bonnie Pitman and the author, personal communication, May 1, 2009
 7. The other half of the Stillman collection went to the Museum of Primitive Art (from 1966 to 1972); the Nelson A. Rockefeller Collection in that museum was transferred to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, in 1978.
 8. Lunsford, in Kosinski 2003: no. 28
 9. Julia Scott Reed, "The Open Line: African Art Put on Exhibit," *Dallas Morning News*, January 21, 1970, p. 22a
 10. Lunsford, in Kosinski 2003: no. 28; Lunsford 1972: 12–19, 88
 11. "A Prestigious Collection," *Dallas Morning News*, November 1, 1969, p. 2
 12. John Neville, "Art and Artists: Congo Expert Talks of His Collection," *Dallas Morning News*, October 28, 1969, p. 5; Stillman and Stillman, in Dallas Museum of Fine Arts 1969: 5–7
 13. Olbrechts, who greatly influenced the study of African art, was one of the first scholars to identify the hand of an individual traditional African artist on purely stylistic grounds. For his biography, see Petridis 2001.
 14. Wastiau, in Shelton 2001: 237–38
 15. Louis de Strycker, personal communication, June 28, 2006
 16. New Art Circle 1927
 17. Dallas Museum of Fine Arts 1972
 18. Janet Kutner, "Scene in Art: McDermott Gift Boosts Museum," *Dallas Morning News*, September 29, 1974, p. C1
 19. Schindler, in Dallas Museum of Fine Arts 1975: 7
 20. Ibid.
 21. Kutner, "Scene in Art"
 22. "Report of the President and Director," Dallas Museum of Fine Arts Annual Report 1981–1982, [1]
 23. Brettell, in Dallas Museum of Art 1989: 8
 24. Louise Cantwell to Anne Bromberg, personal communication, August 14, 1992
 25. Christopher D. Roy to Jay Gates, personal communication, September 12, 1993
 26. The Margaret McDermott Curator of African Art Endowment Fund was established by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in 1995 with additional gifts by Irvin Levy, Caren and Vin Prothro, and Deedie Rose. In 1999 Mrs. Eugene McDermott made an additional gift to name the endowment. Income is used to support the salary of a curator of African art to supervise the African collection.
 27. Pelrine 1998: 76–77
 28. This mask was previously identified as *kponyungo*.
 29. Walker 2005
- Essay from *The arts of Africa at the Dallas Museum of Art* / Roslyn Adele Walker. [Dallas, Tex.] : Dallas Museum of Art, c2009.