



North Carolina Museum of Art



Smithsonian
National Museum of African Art



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North Carolina Museum of Art Receives National Endowment for the Humanities Grant in Partnership with the National Museum of African Art

Grant supports the planning phase of New Masks Now: Artists Innovating Masquerade in Contemporary West Africa

Raleigh, N.C., Washington, D.C.—The North Carolina Museum of Art (NCMA) received a [National Endowment for the Humanities](#) exhibition planning grant to fund the planning phase of a new, groundbreaking exhibition entitled *New Masks Now: Artists Innovating Masquerade in Contemporary West Africa*. This collaboration with the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution (NMAfA) will be a nationally and internationally traveling exhibition and feature an accompanying scholarly publication and series of public engagement programs.

The curatorial planning team is led by Amanda M. Maples, curator of African art at the NCMA. Jordan A. Fenton, assistant professor of art history at Miami University Ohio, and Lisa Homann, associate professor of art history at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, will serve as co-curators and experts in the field of masquerade. Hervé Youmbi, a leading contemporary artist in Cameroon, is a collaborating researcher and contributing author. Kevin D. Dumouchelle, curator, National Museum of African Art (Smithsonian Institution), is a contributing curator and author on the project. During the planning process for this project, eight national and international scholars will further



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advise on curatorial and academic content as well as research methodologies during the planning process for this project.

“We are thrilled to partner with other leading institutions to highlight the varied and powerful work of contemporary masquerade artists in Africa,” says Valerie Hillings, NCMA director. “This exhibition will open at the NCMA during an exciting period of change in the display of the NCMA collection, which features a dedicated focus on African masquerade and reflects our strong commitment to enhancing and expanding our African arts holdings and programming.”

“The Smithsonian’s National Museum of African Art is delighted to collaborate with our colleagues at the North Carolina Museum of Art for the upcoming *New Masks Now* exhibition and publication,” says Interim Director Deborah Mack. “Showcasing the agency and innovations of Africa’s artists is central to our mission, and this collaborative project will underscore the importance and relevance of contemporary African performance artists for audiences in the United States and beyond.”

Masquerade has long stood as the iconic African performance genre, and yet the artists who create masquerades are often unacknowledged and underrepresented in exhibitions and publications. *New Masks Now* will showcase the artworks and voices of individual creators and offer a fresh take on the vitality of masquerade arts. *New Masks Now* makes clear that creativity in African masking is fundamentally contemporary. The project challenges both the widely held ideas of the “anonymous African artist” and assumptions that masquerade is an unchanging, static artform solely rooted to the distant past. This innovative exhibition will share the stories of four masquerade artists: Chief Ekpenyong Bassey Nsa (Nigeria), David Sanou (Burkina Faso), Sheku “Goldenfinger” Fofanah (Sierra Leone), and Hervé



Youmbi (Cameroon). *New Masks Now* will explore their motivations, their artistic choices, the patronage and economic networks with which they engage, and how the artists adapt their respective genres in response to current circumstances and changing trends, locally and globally. This project is rooted in humanist ideas, questions, ethical methods, and a concerted effort to foster meaningful engagements with public audiences and communities.

Currently, the exhibition is planned to open in 2024 at the NCMA and travel to the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution (NMAfA). Following presentations at the two venues, it will then travel to the New Orleans Museum of Art (NOMA), and two or more North American host venues.

Image captions (top to bottom):

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Chief Ekpenyong Bassey Nsa, *Cloth Ebonko Masquerade Costume*, created August 2016, Calabar South, Calabar, Nigeria; Photograph: Jordan A. Fenton; acquired by the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution

Bamileke Tso Scream Mask, Series: *Visages de Masques* (unactivated), 2015-17, wood, pigment, fiber, beads, and textile, H. 61 3/4 × W. 23 1/2 × D. 9 in.; Photograph courtesy of Axis Gallery

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About the North Carolina Museum of Art

The North Carolina Museum of Art's permanent collection spans more than 5,000 years, from antiquity to the present, making the institution one of the premier art museums in the South. The Museum's collection provides educational, aesthetic, intellectual, and cultural experiences for the citizens of North Carolina and beyond. The 164-acre Museum Park showcases the connection between art and nature through site-specific works of environmental art. The Museum offers changing special exhibitions, classes, lectures, family activities, films, and concerts.

The Museum, located at 2110 Blue Ridge Road in Raleigh, opened West Building, home to the permanent collection, in 2010. It is the art museum of the State of North Carolina, Roy Cooper, governor; an agency of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources under the direction of Secretary D. Reid Wilson; and led by Director Valerie Hillings.

About the National Museum of African Art

The National Museum of African Art is the only museum in the world dedicated solely to the collection, conservation, study, and exhibition of Africa's arts across time and media. The museum's collection of over 12,000 artworks spans more than 1,000 years of African history and includes a variety of media from across the continent—from sculpture and painting, to photography, pottery, jewelry, textile, video and sound art. The museum is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. (closed Dec. 25). Admission is free. The museum is located at 950 Independence Ave. S.W., near the Smithsonian Metrorail station on the Blue, Orange and Silver lines. For more information, call (202) 633-4600 or visit the National Museum of African Art's website: Africa.si.edu. For general Smithsonian information, call (202) 633-1000. Follow the museum on Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and Facebook and join in the discussion about the exhibition on social media using #AfricanHeroes.

About the National Endowment for the Humanities

This exhibition has been made possible in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities: Democracy demands wisdom.

Created in 1965 as an independent federal agency, the National Endowment for the Humanities supports research and learning in history, literature, philosophy, and other areas of the humanities by funding selected, peer-reviewed proposals from around the nation. Additional information about the National Endowment for the Humanities and its grant programs is available at www.neh.gov.

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