

DALLAS MUSEUM OF ART

The Arts of Africa: Celebrating Forty Years of Collecting at the Dallas Museum of Art Dr. Roslyn Walker

December 10, 2009

Duration: 61 Minutes

Bonnie Pitman: Well, good evening everybody. My name is Bonnie Pitman. I am the Eugene McDermott Director of the Dallas Museum of Art and we are just thrilled to have all of you here this evening. It is a night of celebration, most particularly to celebrate my dear friend and colleague Dr. Roslyn Walker for her publication *The Arts of Africa*--I should be holding it up but I know you all have your own copy, right? Absolutely--which is the first publication that we have on the collection of the museum's extraordinary works in our African collection and it is also celebrating the 40 years that the museum has dedicated to creating this collection.

I am thrilled. Many of you have asked me how long does it take to write a publication like this. And I can tell you years, years and years, and Roz and I have been talking about this was her first assignment when she came to the museum.

I said, there is one thing that we absolutely have to get accomplished and she set about to do the work and then she would come back and report to me that, "but there is one more object that we need to find" and "there is one more research file that I need to look into" and "there is one more..." and I would say, "Roz keep writing."

So, in 1969, now what you probably all know is that the museum has a collection of African Art composed of almost 2000 works of art and they are a vital part of our encyclopedic collection. They present a wonderful context from within which we can tell many stories from around the world and they are of a great distinction, meriting recognition and scholars coming to us from all over the world.

And I am particularly thrilled that during the tenure that Roz and I have shared, we have made some spectacular acquisitions, including this Janus figure that you're looking at from Gabon. And I remember the thrill of being a museum director and deputy director at that time is going and seeing that great object and saying in your heart, it has to come to us and Roz and I think we both recall that day.

So part of the fun of this journey has been during her tenure at the museum, acquiring new works that could enliven and enrich our collection, but our collection really is founded around a very important family that gave a watershed gift to the museum in 1969.

At that time Margaret and Eugene McDermott purchased 200 objects from the Stillman Collection of Congo art and the McDermotts continued to work with the Stillman's over the years and they also gave money to acquire more works from their collection and then they also gave funding for the Fair Park installation of the first gallery of African Art. So it was a milestone in a number of different ways.

What's important is that they then went on, the McDermott foundation, then went on and purchased the Gustave and Franyo Schindler collection and that added another 50 works from Guinea, Liberia, Gabon and that collection continues to grow.

And Margaret McDermott's personal passion for acquisitions of enormous distinction and quality and wanting to invest and the breadth of this collection has allowed us to over the years, over these past 40 years, continue to see its growth and to see its pilgrimage to greatness achieved.

In every sense, what Margaret demands of us when we make an acquisition is a work of the highest quality. I know that Roz will speak about some of these wonderful acquisitions.

The other thing that I want to celebrate this evening is that the catalog that we have published, *The Arts of Africa*, is the first catalog of a museum's publication, that is in recent history there were earlier ones—one on the Schindler collection and then also on the Stillman collection--but they were smaller publications.

This is the first one that is solely dedicated to the comprehensive nature of our African Art that has been acquired over the past 40 years and we are very, very excited. It begins what we hope will be a series of major publications on our collections.

When Roz joined us in 2003, as the Deputy Director at the museum, it was my great privilege to look for a senior curator of African Art, Arts of the Americas and the Pacific, and it was a search that took a great deal of time and I was thrilled when Roslyn expressed interest in this.

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Not only because I certainly knew her. She had served as the Director of the National Museum of African Art at the Smithsonian Institution from 1997 until 2002. She had been the previous Senior Curator. She had also served at the University museums in Illinois state and in a number of other important places, traveled to Africa.

But most importantly in Roz and in my life is that we had been friends and played together in the museum, on Capitol Hill with our dear friend and the Founding Director of the National Museum of African Art, and we remember and recall those days with great fondness.

So that friendship and that commitment to African Art, I was actually the Curator of education at the New Orleans Museum of Art, brought us back together again and so to be able to bring onto the staff, a colleague of enormous international distinction, one

who had written some of the great books and publications for one of the leading museums, she also has done at our museum, played a leadership role in terms of wonderful Olumeye -- Olowe of Ise exhibition and that great acquisition on the Art of Romare Bearden and most recently she has been helping with Charlie Wylie, with the Jacob Lawrence in *The Life of Toussaint* exhibition that just opened and Curtis Ransom is in the back of the room and we want to celebrate that wonderful exhibition. So her breadth and care of our community, of this collection and most importantly what we have achieved tonight is something I want to celebrate. I also want you to know that there are two other things.

We are not done yet. Roz continues to look at great works of art, that's our wonderful passion and she is desperately looking out there for new acquisitions that we think will be coming into the museum. And then secondly, we are planning wonderful exhibition in the fall of next year on African masks that Roz is going to be curating and third, I want you to tell us that Stacey Lisotte and myself, that if you think that this was a good lecture tonight, whether we should convince Roz to do it again in the spring. Roz is hesitant, but I think after you hear her tonight, you're going to say like me, back by popular demand, she needs to come.

So I am going to ask a couple of you to scoot in because we still have people trying to get in, if you can scoot in and allow anybody else, we have people standing in the back. So let's get everybody seated. It's my education leadership issues here, I want to make sure everybody is comfortable.

We've got some seats down here, Stacey, and just snuggle up, it's Christmas time, pretend that you are in a sleigh, it's a little cool outside and with that, we'll settle down and there is a couple more seats down here, if anybody wants to take them, our guests in the back, there are couple of seats over here.

If you would join me in welcoming Roz and as I said at the end, if you think it was good, tell Stacey and myself so that we can convince to the come back. So thank you.

Dr. Roslyn Walker:

I just happen to have a copy. Good evening everyone. Thank you Bonnie and thank everyone for coming out tonight--all my neighbors from the Renaissance, all my leagues friends, all my colleagues, my sister and brother-in-law, my pastor. My dear friends, all of you who have been so welcoming to me here in Dallas, thank you for coming.

Some of this might be a little redundant. Bonnie and I are often on the same wave length. We don't yet finish either other's sentences, but some of this you will have heard before. This is a really strange situation. This is not my first book, but it really is a first time I have had to talk about the book that I wrote before I signed it.

So it's a little weird, but I must say that this is the -- I may be the most proud of this book. It certainly took the longest time to write and that's because there were lots of false starts and yes, I did have to check out another file.

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In the course of the past 40 years or even the past 10 years, there's been a lot of research and there are scholars, African scholars, who have been working on their own art, their own cultures, who know the language, and who understand the proverbs, who have taught us Western folks, Americans, a thing or two. There is too much to learn. There is a lot that we have had to learn.

So we wanted to get everything right and when you read the book, you know, you must look at the footnotes because it didn't all come from me. I was really going to the scholarly sources, but for continuity and maybe I want you to think I knew all of it. I footnoted that material, but I shall proceed. I'll read this because it's just so exciting, I will forget something.

The Arts of Africa at the Dallas Museum of Art offers the readers two things, just two things. One is a history of the collection that has been in the making for the past 40 years from 1969 to the present, and I divide it into two parts: 1969 to 1989 and then 1989 to the present. It offers you a selection of 110 works that are representative of the visual arts of the African continent.

Now I'll pause here and I'll show you what I mean because you all know that I am really responsible for sub-Saharan Africa, but I have claimed the whole continent. So I start in Morocco and I've taken Egypt and then I work my way into sub-Saharan Africa, actually from Mali all the way across, but this piece is from the northwest corner of Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, moving over into Tanzania, going South and moving to far here. So the continent is what I have claimed because I am looking at Africa, the Arts of Africa, at the Dallas Museum of Art.

These objects are presented in full color. It's lavishly, lavishly, lavishly illustrated. There are multiple views of most of the objects. Two views here, sometimes three, with explanatory text about the meaning and significance of the objects and places them in their context of use, and the context of use can be in an early engraving, in this case, it is from a 17th century Dutch travel book by Olfert Dapper, who as the title is in Dutch and it goes on forever but this is a view of the kingdom of Benin in the 17th century. This is the ancient kingdom of Benin in Nigeria.

Many travelers passed through many parts of Africa. Some accounts were fanciful some were not and they recorded what they saw and here you'll see the Oba, he is the chap right here. (And don't let me take too much time doing this. You have the book; you can read it for yourself.) In his glory and you see he is on horseback. Ah! Horses in Benin--where the Tsetse fly kills off horses? Yes, but he could buy others when they came in boats from Portugal and other parts of Europe.

And you see, he has a standing army with their spears and what not and you see there are leopards. There are engravings of – sorry there are cast bronze plaques that show that Oba twirling the leopards by their tails. He was that powerful and so on. Look at the architecture; look at those buildings with the turrets and ibis birds crowning them.

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This not fanciful. Archaeologists have been at work. They have excavated the foundations of those, the walls around the old city and if you go to Benin today, you can see the remnants of this, you know, that Benin fell in 1897, in the Punitive Expedition and the plaques that we have in our collection date from that time. But that's another story that you can read about.

And here is another contextual situation, the drum, you can go and see that in *All the World's a Stage* and you see women playing the drum which they do in Senufo society and there are many ways to talk about this drum, but I chose to talk about it in the context of maintaining a woman's sanity.

When you live in a society, where women do not have equal rights, where you cannot express yourself fully, you have a husband who doesn't treat you well or your mother-in-law has given you a hard time, whatever. And what do you do? You sing the blues in a language that your husband cannot understand. So you are beating and playing. I do have a sense of humor, and I hope my colleagues in the field will forgive me.

So I have placed these objects in their context of use because these are objects that are useful. African art is utilitarian. So the themes of leadership and status, the cycle of life from birth to death, departure, actually is a cycle because it never ends and you go back to the ancestors who helped to create birth again. The decorative arts, the influences of foreign trade, and that's where Pastor Odum comes in. His tippet or his stole is made of what? Is Gerald in here? My friend and docent Gerald is wearing his kente tonight. We're twins, but he's in the wrong room, he must be across the hall. So that's Reverend Odum at St. Paul in the Arts District and it is the soul of the Arts District. Yes, St. Paul is in the room.

There is also a map of Africa on which peoples are discussed in the book are located and a description of each of their cultures is provided. The book is comprised of 318 pages and it weighs in at about 4 pounds. So if you don't read it, you can -- I've written scholarly book for the general reader. You can consider this a scholarly coffee table book.

The Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, as our museum was known until 1984 when we moved to our present location, did not began acquiring African art for the permanent collection until 1969, but African Art had been part of the exhibition program as early as the 1950s. Did you know that?

One of the early exhibitions was *The Sculpture of Negro Africa* which was hosted here in 1961 and this was a revelation to me because one of the organizers of that exhibition was a man named Stolper. When I worked at the National Museum of African Art, he was one of the art dealers who passed through there and he is a British guy, and he was surprised to see his name. So I guess what goes around, comes around.

I believe the seed was planted in 1962 when the museum presented *The Arts of Man*, a selection of world art from ancient to modern times. This exhibition was a brainchild of Mrs. Eugene (Margaret) McDermott who was then the President of the Dallas Art Association.

According to John Lunsford, who was the curator of the collection at Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, Mrs. McDermott “simply came in and in her sweet way, said, ‘I think we ought to do history of art, I mean a history of all art, everywhere’ and everywhere include a Sub-Saharan Africa.

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Incidentally, that exhibition was the most ambitious and the most significant accomplishment in the museum's 50-year history and it garnered national attention. Here is Benin court art style, a piece from the Benin court art style. It was described as a Benin king, but we know now that it does not represent a king, represents an official, court official from about 16th century cast bronze – cast copper alloy.

We fast forward to 1968. In that year the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts hosted the *Art of the Congo* exhibition that was organized by the Walker Art Center which is a museum of modern and contemporary art located in Minneapolis, Minnesota. What do you think is significant about that, African art and Modern art?

Do you notice that most collectors of Modern art collect African art? Because they have understood the relationship and the influence of African art on those people like Picasso who said, “African art, what's that?,” but I think it was Skip Gates, who finally found the famous quote when he fessed up and said, yeah. These guys were visiting the old Trocadéro, the Musée de l'Homme in the old days and they could find sculptures in the bistros of Paris etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.

And they allowed themselves to be seduced and they appropriated or they incorporated or however they did and if you want to say that was an affinity, however, you want to accept what happened, it happened. One of our paintings by Picasso, we have a wonderful study, that is a study for *Demoiselles d'Avignon* in this very museum and that's in the book.

The exhibition was comprised of approximately of 100 sculpted masks, figures, furniture, elaborately decorated hair combs, tobacco pipes, and other objects selected from the vast holdings of the Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale, the Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, which is a town outside of Brussels in Belgium.

And the exhibition was accompanied by a catalog which was included in an essay by Clark Stillman, an American connoisseur of African art, who with his wife Francis had amassed one of the most outstanding private collections of Congo art in the world. He was also known as an important dealer of rare books and he had his collection in these wonderful book cases and everything was about this big, which explains something.

The Stillmans and Eugene and Margaret McDermott, had met one another and they had visited one another in their homes. Mrs. McDermott described the Stillman's collection as just so splendid. When the couple began to downsize their possessions in 1969, the McDermotts offered to purchase the 224 sculptures with the intention to donate them to the Dallas Museum of Art and as you learned earlier, they also provided funds to

display the objects and here you see the Congo gallery with the Stillman collection installed in 1972.

There is more to the motivation story, but I'll leave that for you to read because it's interesting and it also involved some attitudes about the collection on the part of the public and I almost was tempted to stop at this point and get into my own attitudes about what I'm doing, but I'll let you ask me that if you are interested.

So in 1974, this collection of 224 objects that were focused on Central Africa was augmented by the second collection, a second McDermott donation and this time it's a group of 50 objects from the Gustav and Franyo Schindler collection.

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And this was donated by the McDermott Foundation in honor of Eugene McDermott who died in 1973 and as you were told, these objects originated in West Africa, including Mali, and this is our wonderful pre-Dogon figure dated, scientifically dated from the 11 to 13 century [Standing female figure, 1974.SC.1]. She is not on view now, but she will come back.

This piece came out in Africa in the 1950s and I am pretty sure it was being used up to that date anointed with vegetable oil, time after time after times and it is still exuding oil after all these centuries.

Burkina Faso, Guinea, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire this very famous Rhythm Pounder [1974.SC.15], very elegant form. She used to be decorated with abrus seeds, red and black seeds, cowrie shells, sea shells -- or snail shells. So she would have had some color, red, black and white, but those added pieces have long since disappeared, but if she had stayed put when those elements fell off, they would have been replaced. But we have preserved her all this time and she is now on view *In All the World's a Stage*.

We have pieces from Ghana and Nigeria as well as central Africa, including Gabon, Congo-Brazzaville as well as a Democratic Republic of the Congo.

So the Schindler collection extended our reach beyond the Central African region and we later added textiles and bead art to the collection. Today the collection is comprised of approximately 19 objects, 1003 of which are beads, you can ask about that. They represent the diversity of styles, and types of objects and here is a woven hat for an Ekonda chief. Incidentally this was a gift from the defunct friends of African and African-American art, hint, hint; and Egungun costumes. So this is case of textile art, costumes. Because not all costumes are just the mask of wood carved, wooden mask but there are fiber costumes and this is on view on *All the World's a Stage* and it has a wonderful secret that I may tell you about it if you are good.

And we have terracotta--this is coming out in the not too distant future. It's a healing vessel that comes from the Benue River Valley of Nigeria. And this magnificent robe from the Hausa. Yinka Bamgbose is in the back there and she is probably looking at it and she is saying, "but that's Yoruba," right?

And that's because Yoruba men in the Southern part of the country wear this robe. It has holes for--and she is saying, "but those are for pockets"--but in the North where men ride horses, they would have put their hands through those holes to hold on to the reins, but as it makes it's way South and you don't have Yoruba men riding horses unless they are playing polo, then you know they use this robe in a different way.

This is a magnificent robe that my colleague Carol Robbins who knows an awful lot about textiles and has exquisite taste, and lot of patience, right? She will wait 30 years to get the exact wonderful, perfect object. I am a little less patient, but this is just-- and it is huge because clothes, that gets into a whole different lecture, but it's a magnificent object. So we have a very extensive and growing collection of textiles. So the representative types of African art are in this collection. By now, we have tradition based art from 52 peoples and 19 countries in Africa.

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I also reveal how many of the objects were acquired. For example, a group of 258 coptic crosses from Ethiopia. This is a processional cross that was acquired for the collection by Drs. Hebe and Kenneth Redden back in 1991, and the many curators who helped to shape the collection, including, let's go back for a minute, John Lunsford who attended the birth of the collection, Anne Bromberg who organized the first exhibition of the aforementioned Coptic crosses that were displayed at both the Dallas Museum of Art and the African-American Museum.

Alvia Wardlaw who was curator of *Black Art: Ancestral Legacy* who went on to have a brilliant career at the Museum of Fine Arts in Huston and Texas Southern University Museum, and Ramona Austin whose numerous acquisitions, included the Congo, *nkisi nkondi* which is currently on view in the Center for Creative Connections. So when you walk out, you want to go down the hall, and have a look at this magnificent object, which we incidentally have had X-rayed and we know what's inside the beard and also in its belly.

There are many people to thank for their contributions to bringing this book to fruition. I have a very long list and that would take a long, long, long, long, long time to list everyone, but some people are in the room and Jessica, Jessica stand up. Jessica Beasley right hand, left hand and we all want to shake and strangle her because she is about to leave us to take a job with a private collector, but we couldn't have done without you.

And of course Bonnie was cheering me on, I couldn't have done it without you and Reverend Stinson was across the way, on other side of the intensive care unit, when I woke up from surgery, couldn't have done it without you and, Cynthia and so many people in the room, you're all there. Eric Zeidler, works in Publications and, poor man, he should be really tired of me. Schatzie Lee gave me a copy of the Schindler catalog. I did have a copy, but I was happy to have another copy so I could mark up my own copy.

And speaking of copies, it is so interesting how life does what it does because I have had a copy of the Stillman catalog since 1969 and I don't know a graduate student, who

didn't have one since then and I just never dreamed that I would end up having such a personal contact with these objects. And this is one of those projects that went through three interns and one of them was with me when we made a marvelous discovery and that's Shannon Karol who went away and came back again and Sidney Perutz is in the room, I think. Sidney has held my hand through all this too, thanks Sidney and thanks all of you.

And I also should probably give a special shout out to people at Marquand and an extra special shout out to Brad Flowers. My brother-in-law has been just praising Brad Flowers. I hope you will praise me too, but the photographer, the photography in this book is extraordinary.

Bonnie and I, we sometimes agreed, sometimes disagreed and finally we were in total agreement about what needed to be rephotographed. These objects have personality and shooting objects is really sort of like shooting people and you want their personality to come through and everything and there are three dimensional objects and you don't want the hotspots to be so hot, that's like patent leather that you're looking at, but you don't want to tone it down so much that they are just flattened out like a cardboard.

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So that was sometimes difficult, but I think we did a pretty good job on managing that, but most of all we thank Mrs. McDermott. If we had a subtitle for the book, it would be The Eugene and Margaret McDermott gift to Dallas That Has Kept on Giving, because that is I think exactly what has happened.

So going forward, and I am also looking at Margaret Anne, Margaret Anne Cullum, who does a lot to keep me thinking and has actually led me to a wonderful acquisition, some wonderful beadwork which you will eventually see on display, and I am sure I've forgotten somebody so forgive me.

One of the directors at the Museum where I used to work, when we would open a new exhibition and he would send a thank you, he thanked everybody in the museum so he didn't leave anybody out and then he wouldn't get into trouble that way.

Going forward, I wanted to show you a picture here which shows the gallery and you see Ramona, and Mrs. McDermott, Nancy Hamon. Mrs. McDermott and Nancy were involved endowing the position of an endowed chair for African Art, which is rather unique in this world.

Dallas is very fortunate to have endowed chairs for curators and that's Ann Barbier-Miller and Cristina Lynch back in 1998 and I show you this because this was a very important moment in the history of the collection and in the top picture there is the gallery as it was in 1996 when it had just opened.

Since I have been here, we've made some small changes. We got the light levels up and we've rotated some objects in and out, changes that were necessary because we

wanted to show you new things that we have acquired and also when Tut came, we had to have a good path through there, and well, change is good. But we're going to make some dramatic changes, because a 13-year-old exhibition is tired. And so we are embarking on re-installation project that will be brightest Africa, because taupe is little dated, I think and I think Ramona would agree if she were here, she was say "let's change."

So we will be bringing out many new acquisitions that you have not seen and we'll be bringing some old friends that you would like to see again, like that gigantic Abua masquerade mask that takes up--it just needs a lot of breathing room, and I am excited about that. I am excited about continuing research on my first acquisition, the Olowe bowl. This was one of the most exciting things we did and which let me know I was really in Texas because we were doing this at auction long distance and I remember when we reached to certain point in the bidding war, I was petrified. Was it you Bonnie or Jack, Bonnie punched me on the arm and Jack said, didn't you say we're in Texas?

Now, mind you this was when we were flush, bigger and better in Texas. So we acquired this magnificent object. I have told you this Bonnie, but I have to go to Australia, some more research materials. It turns out that an Australian artist named--now you get to hear the new thing that I'm on to--

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Donald Friend, an Australian painter, went to Nigeria in 1938 and went to visit the Ogoga of Ikere, one of Olowe's patrons and while he was there, he made drawings of the architectural elements, doors, veranda posts, that sort of thing that he saw in the palace, and he also declared himself an advisor to this king. This gentleman left behind--he is dead now--left behind four volumes that are housed in the National Library in Brisbane.

A gentleman was in Washington not too long ago and he picked up a copy of my book *Olowe of Ise: A Yoruba Sculptor to Kings* and got in touch with me after he got back to Australia and was kind enough to transcribe some of the contents of the diary and I am just really excited. I am just -- I want to know surely Australia wants Americans to go and spend some time in their National Library. Of course, what I need is time to do this, but it's really exciting. Now, I told you this is the most colorful book I have done, and it's the most exciting book compared to this and I was really excited about this, there is no comparison. So I am really excited about my book.

This is other exciting thing and you'll read about this. We did an exhibition called *Capturing Motion*, remember that? It was the last exhibition we did in the space before the new Center for Creative Collections was built, was inaugurated, and in preparation for lending this piece to the new exhibition, Shannon Karol, my intern, and I were examining the piece. So I am lifting up each panel to make sure that it was stable and lo and behold I flip up this panel and turn it over and instead of finding another piece of damask or upholstery, some other material, here is this old piece of what we called praise cloth in Nigeria. And it's a picture of a man and there is some writing. There is a picture in this medallion and it is a European and there are words, part of the word is

missing, but it says *adupe*--where are you Yinka help me, Yinka speaks Yoruba. *Adupe* means *thank you*. Thanking who? Thanking who, why?

The thank you is to Lawyer Wells Palmer, okay. Why? So we're on the Internet and I am also writing to colleagues: Does anybody have anything like this? Does anybody know anything? And here is where the Internet is really useful. We are searching, searching, searching. Now, I'm not Internet savvy, I am hardly computer savvy, but I've got a young intern who knows how to use Internet and this kid goes searching, Googling, or whatever.

She typed in "Wells Palmer" which is smart thing to do and she makes her way into Nigerian law and here is Wells Palmer and not only Wells Palmer but here is the court case, the transcription. Wells Palmer, to make a very long story short. The King of Lagos was deposed by the British in the 1920s. Wells Palmer was one of the lawyers who helped to restore him to the throne.

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It took him 10 years, but the man succeeded and the next year he died. But he did succeed and that cloth was the thank you, was honoring this man for his service to the King of Lagos. So, that helps today, at least part of this costume to that period. The costume was used in a memorial masquerade, every year in Yoruba land, the Egungun masquerade brings the ancestors back to town, even the female ancestors, it wasn't always the case, that's another lecture, but brings the male and female ancestors and it would be wonderful to know if there was a special masquerade in honor of this man.

So, that's really exciting and one of these days when we calm down enough, Shannon and I are going to write a paper about that, but there is so much to learn about our collection. There are many, many objects that have stories, that are even more stories than ones that I have told you here. So, there will probably another volume just on the stories about the stories and Mr. Camey is in the room, where are you Mr. Camey? is it going on two years?

Mr. Camey: Yeah.

Dr. Roslyn Walker: Yeah. He brought me a piece and it's going on two years now. It's a really intriguing story because he owns an equestrian figure, it's called a divination cup in the form of an equestrian that is the spitting image of one in the Newark museum collection and the question is, which one is the right one because they both date from the 1920s and they don't seem to be mirror images exactly.

We have to put them together or use the same scale, the same measuring instruments to try to sort that out. So, my colleague in Newark is -- we are interested in seeing what we can do with that. So, there are a lots of exciting things to learn and to do, just you know, we need time. So, stay tuned, more to come, more to come. Thank you. I will take a question or two. Questions. Yes.

Audience Member: You told us if we were good you would tell us a secret.

Dr. Roslyn Walker: That's a secret. That's one secret. That's a secret, a secret.

Audience Member: What's your favorite piece in the collection?

Dr. Roslyn Walker: Oh! That's like asking who is your favorite child.

Audience Member: Pieces.

Dr. Roslyn Walker: I don't -- well my favorite is what intrigues me the most at a particular time. So, I never fall out of love with anything, but the Olowe Bowl has got me jazzed up again and the Dogon piece, because there is this war—Djennenke or Soninke, there are two scholars that are, yeah they are at war over what to call it and so, that's intriguing.

We have a pair of Egungun costumes that came from the Republic of Benin that, have you ever seen Vodou flags from Haiti? No, okay. Well, you will come back in the late summer and see the show and that will make sense. Gosh! I don't know where to start.

Audience Member: Well that's good.

Dr. Roslyn Walker: Yes.

Audience Member: You mentioned the figure that was x-rayed [Standing power figure (*nkisi nkondi*), 1996.184.FA]. What did you expect?

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Dr. Roslyn Walker: Well, it -- we were curious about -- Yeah what was happening the mouth and the belly and what was behind this cowrie shell and this part. The beard is -- there is resin, the beard is made of resin, but the armature for it is nails and that was not unexpected, but we were glad to discover that they were there because that's what they were on all of these.

These sculptures, there are--Gosh! How many of them are there. The Metropolitan Museum just recently acquired one and they are all supposed to have come from Chiloango River area of the Democratic Republic of the Congo about 1910 and most of them are in, were in German Museums.

And this one it ended up in a Swedish collection and then it made it's way out in -- it was in an auction and eventually in a British deal or in the end in our hands. But there is material in it's belly and the material we are told, at least what's been in others is grave dust, grave dirt and vegetable material. But this little stuff that is magical when it's in the hands of Egungun, the specialist who knows how to activate it.

Audience Member: And you can see the X-rays in C3.

Dr. Roslyn Walker: Yeah, you can see the X-rays in C3. Yes.

Audience: Do the governments or areas that these pieces came ever want to reclaim them?

Dr. Roslyn Walker: The only government, there are two governments that show concern. One is Nigeria, used to. I remember waking up one morning and it was 1997, well I didn't wake up 1897 but it was in 1997. I woke up and the BBC is on, on public radio and there was -- one of the members of the oba of Benin at the gates of the British Museum and he was saying, you know give us back our things.

And most recently in Chicago when the Royal Benin exhibition was held there, representatives from the Oba's family attended that exhibition and they read a proclamation and then went in and had a lovely time at the dinner, a \$1000 plate dinner.

Anyway, the pieces in our collection and in every collection in this whole world that's real, that wasn't made day before yesterday, that came from Benin are objects of war booty, spoils of war, 1897 Punitive Expedition in retaliation for the massacre the year before. The Edo people said, we don't want company, don't come. The British came anyway, that's the short story.

(00:54:54)

So, they were ambushed and the British put together an army, came back the next year and razed the palace, took away the bronzes, the ivories. They sold most of them to raise money for the survivors, the soldiers, survivors of the soldiers and some they reserved for the British museum.

The British museum has hundreds and hundreds and hundreds and hundreds. Between 1950 and 1970-something, the keeper of the British museum who was then William Fagg, would periodically sell "duplicates" on the open market, (a) to find out what they were worth and (b) to raise money to build the museum in Lagos--a National Museum.

The bronze plaque in our collection, originally had a number, an inventory number from the Punitive Expedition. It still bears the British Museum accession number, because it was one of those pieces that were sold on the open market to find out what it was worth and to raise money to build a National Museum, okay.

I doubt very seriously that we will be acquiring any more Benin material. I could be wrong, but the prices are just prohibitive. Mali has an extra protection over the usual cultural property protection law. Jenne terracottas, bronzes are all protected under the UNESCO convention, but they went for some extra protection. I forget which year that was, let me see, I have to remember what things happened by who happened to be there and this before Philip Ravenhill died. We both went to the state department and witness the signing.

So when I worked at the National Museum of African Art and President Konaré would come to visit, we always, proudly showed him all we had was what he had seen a year before he came. When we bought those pieces, we notified the government that we

wanted to acquire them, did we have permission, could we have first refusal and whatever. That's the way we handled that.

It's archaeological material that is, is usually what people are mostly concerned about. I think most museums really try -- most museums do try and you know you write a letter, or if you are in Washington you go to the Embassy, you say, you know I want to do such and such.

I tell you a story. It took five years once to try to get clearance to acquire some veranda posts that we are going to be a gift to the museum and it really did take five years and the reason it took five years is because government changed hands, then the minister of culture got sick, then I got sick and by the time we were both well, it had taken five years and I just managed to do that, before I left town.

So -- but I tell you this. The former Director, the retired Director of the Department of Antiquities addressed the Association of Art Museum Directors several years ago. He said, we know, and I think he was speaking for Nigeria, but he could have been speaking for many countries that, "You're going to acquire these objects, but what you should do is let us know you have them, that there is some record of where they are."

I think that the objects are in a good place. They are preserved, the world has a chance and I am not sounding like the British Museum because I've heard what they have to say too, but people in Africa can't see these things. People in America wouldn't see them unless they came to a museum.

We're repository of culture, of heritage, how do you learn about yourself and other people if you don't visit a museum? You read my book. Please! You may please read my book.

Other questions? Thank you so much. Thank you very, very much!

Audio file: 20091210_RozWalker_ArtOfAfrica.mp3