

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**HIGH MUSEUM OF ART CELEBRATES RECENT GIFTS AND ACQUISITIONS WITH EXHIBITION OF AFRICAN MASKS***African Mask/Masquerade: More Than Meets the Eye**Jan. 25 – Sept. 14, 2014*

ATLANTA, Jan. 6, 2014 – To highlight recent gifts and purchases in the Museum’s growing collection of African Art, the High Museum of Art presents “African Mask/Masquerade: More Than Meets the Eye,” an exhibition that brings together 17 dynamic works of art from western and central Africa.

On view from Jan. 25 through Sept. 14, 2014, the exhibition celebrates the diversity of creative expression of African masquerade performances and will feature 15 masks, one of which will be presented in full costume, as well extraordinary tunics made with feathers and porcupine quills. All of the works date from the late 19th century and 20th century, and they include 15 works from the High’s permanent collection and two significant loans.

Within their original contexts, the masks were worn with full costumes in performances that served vital communal functions. Music, song, and dance were essential to their effectiveness. To show how the masks were utilized in performances, the exhibition will include large photos featuring the masks and a short video accompanying the presentation of a fully costumed Mossi mask from Burkina Faso.

Masquerade performances served diverse purposes, including to transmit ancestral wisdom from generation to generation and to promote social harmony by inspiring collaboration and celebrating community achievements. Some masquerades used humor to provide social critique while discouraging antisocial behavior. Many masquerades continue today—even within African Diaspora communities in Atlanta—which have been reinvigorated and adapted to contemporary life.

“African masquerades take many forms from serene, joyous and majestic to playfully raucous and fiercely intimidating,” said Carol Thompson, exhibition curator and the Fred and Rita Richman curator of African art at the High. “This exhibition shows that the wooden face coverings that hang on museum walls represent just the tip of the iceberg of this dynamic, multisensory art form.”

Included in the exhibition is a Lwalwa mask from the Democratic Republic of the Congo that has never before been on view at the High. A 2004 gift from African art patrons Fred and Rita Richman, the mask presents an ingenious variety of forms, with a concave face bisected by a long, vertical nose, narrow slits for eyes, small round ears, and a tiny rectangular mouth. “Mask/Masquerade” includes six works from the High’s Fred and Rita Richman Collection.

In addition to works from the Museum's collection, the exhibition features two major loans: a hunter/warrior tunic made of porcupine quills from the collection of Atlanta-based artist/collector Jon Eric Riis and a two-foot-tall Suku mask known as "Kakuungu," on loan from the Royal Museum of Central Africa, Tervuren, Belgium.

Other exhibition highlights include:

- Pende mask from the Democratic Republic of the Congo featuring a distorted face resembling one of the women in Picasso's 1907 painting "Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. Version O)" (acquired by the High in January 2013)
- A water spirit headdress from Nigeria, which will be hung from the ceiling in the center of the exhibition
- A Kanaga mask from Mali used in funeral ceremony performances to honor and commemorate the dead

African nations represented in the exhibition include Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burkina Faso, Mali, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire and Angola.

Thompson will present a lecture about the exhibition in the High's Hill Auditorium on Jan. 30, 2014 at 7 p.m. Tickets to the lecture will include the opportunity to view the exhibition following the event.

This exhibition is part of Africa Atlanta 2014, a city-wide, year-long series of events highlighting Atlanta as a nexus for reinventing the cultural and economic bonds among Africa, Europe and the Americas.

High Museum of Art

The High is the leading art museum in the southeastern U.S. With more than 13,000 works of art in its permanent collection, the High Museum of Art has an extensive anthology of 19th- and 20th-century American and decorative art; significant holdings of European paintings; a growing collection of African American art; and burgeoning collections of modern and contemporary art, photography and African art. The High is also dedicated to supporting and collecting works by Southern artists. This year, the High celebrates the 30th anniversary of the Stent Family Wing, designed by architect Richard Meier. For more information about the High, visit high.org.

About The Woodruff Arts Center

The Woodruff Arts Center is ranked among the top four arts centers in the nation. The Woodruff is unique in that it combines four visual and performing arts divisions on one campus as one not-for-profit organization. Opened in 1968, the Woodruff Arts Center is home to the Alliance Theatre, the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, the High Museum of Art and Young Audiences. To learn more visit www.woodruffcenter.org.

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