

Exhibition: *African Cosmos: Stellar Arts*
On View: August 24–November 30, 2014
Location: Hammer Building, Level 3



Image caption on page 3

African Cosmos: Stellar Arts is the first major exhibition to explore the historical legacy of African cultural astronomy and its intersection with traditional and contemporary African arts. Documented since the kingdoms of ancient Egypt, for thousands of years Africans throughout the continent have contemplated the celestial firmament and conceived stories about the heavenly bodies. People of many cultures have used such observations to navigate their physical environments and to regulate agricultural and ritual calendars.

African Cosmos considers how the sun, moon, and stars, as well as ephemeral phenomena such as lightning and thunder, serve as sources of philosophical contemplation in the creation of arts from historical times to the present. Far from abstract concepts, African notions of the universe can be intensely personal, placing human beings in relationships with earth and sky. This is expressed in the exhibition through a culturally diverse selection of works including 40 objects in wood, stone, beadwork, silver, gold, and bronze, and ranging from ancient Egyptian sculptures to traditional Dogon masks of Mali, Yoruba divination instruments of Nigeria to evocative creations by contemporary South African artists who still look to the cosmos for inspiration today.

African Cosmos also includes a time-based work titled *Deep Survey* (2009), which represents a remarkable collaboration among one hundred scientists and South African artist Karel Nel. The work was made using scientific data, video animation, and sound to evoke moving into deep space.

The exhibition originated at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African Art and was curated by Dr. Christine Mullen Kreamer, the museum's deputy director and chief curator. LACMA's presentation of *African Cosmos* is organized by Dr. Mary (Polly) Nooter Roberts, consulting curator of African Art at LACMA and professor in UCLA's Department of World Arts Cultures/Dance, in collaboration with Dr. Nancy Thomas, LACMA's senior deputy director and longtime Egyptologist. In December 2011, Dr. Roberts was appointed to launch a program and establish a gallery dedicated to the arts of Africa at LACMA.

Publication

A major publication accompanies the exhibition. Dr. Christine Mullen Kreamer is lead author and editor of *African Cosmos: Stellar Arts*, which includes essays by a diverse range of noted scholars and artists. The 352-page publication features 250 illustrations.

African Art at LACMA

LACMA's growing African art collection contains approximately 200 works including masks, figures, textiles, furniture, and body adornments from across the continent. The African art gallery features rotating temporary displays representing the dynamic spectrum of African artistic production from historical to contemporary arts. In 2013, LACMA inaugurated the galleries with the exhibition, *Shaping Power: Luba Masterworks from the Royal Museum for Central Africa* (July 7, 2013–May 4, 2014). *African Cosmos* is the second exhibition to be featured in the galleries.

Credit

This exhibition was organized by the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African Art.

About LACMA

Since its inception in 1965, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) has been devoted to collecting works of art that span both history and geography, in addition to representing Los Angeles's uniquely diverse population. Today LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection that includes over 120,000 objects dating from antiquity to the present, encompassing the geographic world and nearly the entire history of art. Among the museum's strengths are its holdings of Asian art; Latin American art, ranging from masterpieces from the Ancient Americas to works by leading modern and contemporary artists; and Islamic art, of which LACMA hosts one of the most significant collections in the world. A museum of international stature as well as a vital part of Southern California, LACMA shares its vast collections through exhibitions, public programs, and research facilities that attract over one million visitors annually, in addition to serving millions through digital initiatives such as online collections, scholarly catalogues, and interactive engagement at lacma.org. LACMA is located in Hancock Park, 30 acres situated at the center of Los Angeles which also contains the Page Museum and La Brea Tar Pits and the forthcoming Academy Museum of Motion Pictures. Situated halfway between the ocean and downtown, LACMA is at the heart of Los Angeles. Location: 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, 90036 | 323 857-6000 | lacma.org

Image caption: Gavin Jantjes, *Untitled*, 1989–1990, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, purchased with funds provided by the Smithsonian Collections Acquisition Program, 96-23-1, photograph by Franko Khoury.

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