

# LACMA FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**EXHIBITION:** *SHAPING POWER: LUBA MASTERWORKS FROM THE ROYAL MUSEUM FOR CENTRAL AFRICA*  
**ON VIEW:** JULY 7, 2013–MAY 4, 2014  
**LOCATION:** HAMMER BUILDING, LEVEL 3

**LACMA INAUGURATES PERMANENT AFRICAN ART GALLERY WITH EXHIBITION HIGHLIGHTING MASTERWORKS FROM CENTRAL AFRICA**



(IMAGE CAPTIONS ON PAGE 6)

(Los Angeles, June 14, 2013) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) is pleased to present *Shaping Power: Luba Masterworks from the Royal Museum for Central Africa*, the first exhibition to inaugurate LACMA's new African art gallery and related educational programming. *Shaping Power* explores the artistic traditions and emblems of power from the Luba Kingdom, one of the most influential in Central African history. Co-organized with the Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA) in Belgium, a selection of rare and outstanding sculptures from the Luba people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo are on view. Objects include figurative thrones, elegant scepters, royal cups, intricately carved headrests, and ancestral figures, rarely seen in the United States and on view for the first time in Los Angeles.

The exhibition is curated by Dr. Mary (Polly) Nooter Roberts, Consulting Curator for African Art, LACMA, and Professor of World Arts and Cultures at UCLA, in collaboration with co-curator, Dr. Anne-Marie Bouttiaux, Head of the Ethnography Division, RMCA. In December 2011, Dr. Roberts was appointed to launch a program and establish a dedicated gallery for the arts of Africa at LACMA.

"As a museum of all cultures and all eras, I am proud to see a permanent space for the display of African art at LACMA," says Michael Govan, LACMA CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director. Since coming to LACMA last year, Polly Roberts has done an extraordinary job in building a foundation for our African art program. This is a new phase in a bold and important initiative for our collection."

Dr. Polly Roberts comments, "It is an honor to assist LACMA in the creation of a permanent and prominent presence for the arts of Africa at the museum. I am delighted to open LACMA's new African gallery with Luba arts, which have been the focus of my scholarly research and curatorial work for over twenty years. Not only do these works represent the virtuosity of Central African artists, but they offer insight into a rich and complex African culture. *Shaping Power* presents exciting opportunities to teach about African history, while bringing greater visibility to African arts in Southern California. The elegance and cultural significance of these classical works demonstrates LACMA's commitment to a program of aesthetic and intellectual magnitude to celebrate Africa's great artistic legacies."

### **Exhibition Overview**

*Shaping Power* conveys the beauty and complexity of Luba art and culture and presents one of Africa's remarkable sculptural and philosophical traditions. While many Luba works appear to have utilitarian purposes, they are symbolic objects, imbued with spiritual attributes and esoteric knowledge. As treasures of kings, chiefs, titleholders, and diviners, they also served as emissaries to create affiliations extending the realm. Wide emulation of Luba aesthetics and political rituals further enlarged their reach. These same objects were and continue to be memory devices, encoding the histories and precepts of Luba kingship.

Royal emblems were vital to the formation and expansion of the Luba Kingdom, a highly influential central African state that has flourished for the past several centuries in what is now Katanga Province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Sculpted thrones, magnificent scepters, and commemorative figures all played significant roles in shaping the powers of a sophisticated African royal culture.

### **Exhibition Organization**

The exhibition is organized thematically and explores the roles of sculpture in the investiture rites of a ruler, emphasizing how the works serve to transform an ordinary man into a sacred king; why Luba emblems depict women, and how the guardian spirits of Luba kingship are attracted to female figures that embellish the insignia of male officeholders; how commemorative works from neighboring groups reflect the widely influential aesthetics and precepts of Luba royal practice; and how certain objects possess powers of healing and transformation.

As the most emblematic of Luba royal arts, two caryatid stools are the first objects in the exhibition. The works are supported by kneeling female figures and once served as the thrones of kings. The stools provide a glimpse into the complex gendering of authority in Luba culture, for kings are represented by the women who surround, uphold, and empower them. As a Luba proverb states, "Men are chiefs in the daytime, but women are chiefs at night." Dr. Mutombo Nkulu-N'Sengha, a professor of Religious Studies at Cal State University Northridge and a member of a Luba royal family, states in a video near the entrance of the exhibition, "The king's role is to protect the people, to ensure human flourishing, and to serve the spirit. At the center of this is life, and women are the ones giving life. The foundation of kingship is the women."

Next, visitors encounter a mask so acclaimed that it has become the logo of the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren, Belgium. This work of art, which has never been lent to any institution before, may allude to the cultural hero who introduced political practices to Luba people—that is, the etiquette and precepts of royal bearing. The mask combines a supremely regal human face and the inward gaze of a divine being with a coiffure that suggests buffalo horns conveying stealth and strength.

*Shaping Power* also features a finely rendered bowstand that served as a powerful receptacle of royal authority, a virtuoso investiture bowl called *kiteya* and supported by two figures, and an ethereal water-pipe graced by a serene female figure. Several works on display are by identifiable master hands. These include a kneeling bowl-bearing female figure by the celebrated artist known as the Buli Master, whose honorific name Ngongo ya Chintu means "Father of Sculpted Things" and whose workshop was the first identified in Africa by art historians. Two jewel-like headrests by the so-called Master of the Cascade Headdress are also on view, and were used as wooden pillows by high-ranking persons to protect elaborate hairstyles for which the Luba were celebrated. A memory board, or *lukasa*, on loan from a private collection, is made from wood and covered with beads. The Luba describe memory as a string of beads documenting events, people, and places. This device is a library of Luba historical knowledge, encoding memories of the past to retell in the present. The colors and configurations of its beads prompt recitations of Luba royal precepts by court historians called "men of memory."

To complement these historical Luba works, a contemporary installation entitled *Congo: Shadow of the Shadow* (2005) by Aimé Mpane has been borrowed from the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African Art. A male figure formed from 4,652 matchsticks expresses the paradoxes of human fragility and strength as light plays against shadow, substance against ethereality. There results a gripping commentary on how power was re-shaped during and since the years of Belgian colonial rule in the Congo.

*Shaping Power* is presented in LACMA's newly renovated African gallery in the museum's Hammer Building. The dedicated space is next to the Egyptian gallery, fostering understanding of the relationships between sub-Saharan Africa and ancient Egypt as part of the shared continent of Africa.

#### **African Art at LACMA**

LACMA's growing collection contains approximately 200 works, including masks, figures, textiles, furniture, and body adornments from across the continent. The African art gallery will feature rotating temporary displays for the first years of its existence representing the dynamic spectrum of African artistic production from historical to contemporary

arts. Works of art from the permanent collection will be featured in forthcoming installations, as will African textiles from LACMA's Department of Costume and Textiles. The museum also has the beginnings of a collection of important contemporary arts of Africa, including works by El Anatsui, William Kentridge, Julie Mehretu, Zwi Mkhabela, and Magdalene Odundo. Explore the collection online at [www.lacma.org/art/collection/african-art](http://www.lacma.org/art/collection/african-art).

### **Related Programming**

#### **Lecture Shaping Power: Luba Masterworks from the Royal Museum for Central Africa**

Sunday, July 7, 2013 | 2 pm

Brown Auditorium | Free, no reservations required

On the opening day of the exhibition, Dr. Polly Nooter Roberts will offer a richly illustrated lecture about *Shaping Power: Luba Masterworks from the Royal Museum for Central Africa*. The program will explore why female figures are so prominently depicted in the emblems that belonged to male rulers, and how women in art and life embody the spirits of Luba kingship and the secrets of royal authority.

#### **Andell Family Sundays**

##### **Memory and Storytelling from Africa**

August 4, 11, 18, 25 | 12:30-3:30 pm

Los Angeles Times Central Court | Free, no reservations required

Designed for families with children ages 12 and under, these afternoon programs offer artist-led workshops, gallery activities and bilingual tours every Sunday. Explore the exhibition *Shaping Power: Luba Masterworks from the Royal Museum for Central Africa*, design personal memory boards and your own royal objects. On selected Sundays hear captivating stories by a master storyteller. In addition, the museum offers free transportation and admission to partnering schools and community organizations.

#### **Evenings for Educators: African Art**

October 1, 2013 | 4:30-8:30 pm

Tickets: \$15 or \$55 for a season pass.

Works of art reflect the social histories, cosmologies, and cultural practices of diverse peoples. Examine 18<sup>th</sup>- to 20<sup>th</sup>-century thrones, scepters, masks, and commemorative figures that speak to the complexity of Luba society, featuring the exhibition *Shaping Power: Luba Masterworks from the Royal Museum for Central Africa*.

Evenings for Educators is a professional development program that presents K-12 teachers with opportunities to look, learn, create, and connect with colleagues. For more information, visit

<http://www.lacma.org/programs/education/evenings-educators>

#### **Aimé Mpane: Artist in Conversation**

October 20, 2013 | 2 pm

Brown Auditorium | Free, no reservations

Exhibition curator, Dr. Polly Nooter Roberts, will engage in a dialogue with Congolese artist, Aimé Mpane, about his installation,

*Congo: Shadow of the Shadow*, and other recent work. Audiences will have a chance to hear the artist speak about the deep and complex meanings embedded in his works, as well as the extraordinary techniques he used to construct a life-size male figure from almost 5,000 matchsticks.

#### **Public Tours**

Docent-led 20 minute "In Focus" tours of the exhibition are offered on Sundays at 2:30 pm.

#### **Credit**

This exhibition was co-organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Royal Museum for Central Africa.

#### **About LACMA**

Since its inception in 1965, LACMA has been devoted to collecting works of art that span both history and geography-and represent Los Angeles's uniquely diverse population. Today, the museum features particularly strong collections of Asian, Latin American, European, and American art, as well as a contemporary museum on its campus. With this expanded space for contemporary art, and innovative collaborations with artists, LACMA is creating a truly modern lens through which to view its rich encyclopedic collection.

**Location and Contact:** 5905 Wilshire Boulevard (at Fairfax Avenue), Los Angeles, CA, 90036 | 323 857-6000 | lacma.org

**Hours:** Monday, Tuesday, Thursday: 11 am-5 pm; Friday: 11 am-8 pm; Saturday, Sunday: 10 am-7 pm; closed Wednesday

**Summer Late Fridays at LACMA:** This summer, from July 5-August 30, 2013, LACMA will keep BCAM and the Resnick Pavilion open until 11 pm every Friday. With exhibitions including *James Turrell: A Retrospective* (May 26, 2013-April 6, 2014); *Hans Richter: Encounters* (May 5-September 2, 2013); *The Presence of the Past: Peter Zumthor Reconsiders LACMA* (June 9-September 15, 2013); *Stephen Prina: As He Remembered It* (through August 4, 2013); *Ends and Exits: Contemporary Art from the Collections of LACMA and the Broad Art Foundation* (through August 4, 2013); and Chris Burden's *Metropolis II*; plus Friday Night Jazz and Ray's and Stark Bar, Friday nights at LACMA offer a great way to start your weekend.

**General Admission:** Adults: \$15; students 18+ with ID and senior citizens 62+: \$10

**Free General Admission:** Members; children 17 and under; after 3 pm weekdays for L.A. County residents; second Tuesday of every month; Target Free Holiday Mondays

#### **Image captions (L-R)**

**(Left):** *Caryatid Stool*, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Luba Peoples, 19<sup>th</sup> century, wood, glass beads, Royal Museum for Central Africa, RG 22725, photo R. Asselberghs, RMCA Tervuren ©

**(Center):** *Bowl-Bearing Figure*, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Luba-Hemba Peoples, 19<sup>th</sup> century, wood (*Ricinodendron rautaneii*), Royal Museum for Central Africa, RG 14358 (Collected between 1891 and 1912) gift of A.H. Bure, photo R. Asselberghs, RMCA Tervuren ©

**(Right):** *Male Mask*, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Luba Peoples, 19<sup>th</sup> century, wood (*Ricinodendron rautaneii*), Royal Museum for Central Africa, RG 23470 (collected by O. Michaux in 1896), photo R. Asselberghs, RMCA Tervuren ©

**Press Contact:** For additional information, contact LACMA Communications at press@lacma.org or 323 857-6522.

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