

# Press Release



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## ***Newark Museum Reinstalls Arts of Global Africa Collection in Flagship Galleries*** ***Gateway by Odili Donald Odita Will Also Open December 8***

NEWARK – One of the centerpieces of the Newark Museum’s revitalization project is the relocation of the Arts of Global Africa Permanent Collection into a new gallery space on the first floor. The galleries will open to the public on December 8, coinciding with the centennial year of the collection. It is the precursor to the reopening of the Museum’s Washington Street entrance on January 14, 2018 after two decades.

In 1917, the Museum acquired its first object from Africa — a Zulu beadwork apron from South Africa. The collection has since grown to encompass nearly 6,000 works from across the African continent and its global diaspora. The reinstallation will be accompanied by the publication of its first-ever African art collections catalog. Together, they offer an expansive vision of African creative expression that embraces the continent and highlights its interconnectedness with the wider world.

“Our brand new gallery opens in the Museum’s fully renovated flagship space on the first floor and presents more than 50 works, both historic and contemporary, from throughout Africa and its diaspora,” said Steven Kern, the Museum’s Director and CEO. “In its new location just off the main lobby, the Arts of Global Africa will have greater visibility and will connect more strongly to our other collections in the North Wing galleries.”

The range of works that will be on view include Ethiopian religious icons, gold regalia from Ghana, North African jewelry, South African beadwork and studio portrait photography. They are presented in thematic sections that focus on the visual expression of spiritual beliefs, the relationship between art and leadership, and the human body as artistic canvas and source of inspiration. An introductory section, “What is African Art?,” features a selection of works from across the continent dating from the 12<sup>th</sup> century BCE to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The works illustrate how artist in Africa, as elsewhere, have introduced new ideas or materials in their art as well as borrowed creatively.

“The works presented in our gallery showcase the great range and diversity of the Museum’s collection. They acknowledge and illustrate the cultural complexity of the continent and its global ties, past and present. We think they will offer our visitors a very different vision of ‘African art,’” said Christa Clarke, Ph.D., Senior Curator, Arts of Global Africa.

The last section of the gallery, “Present Tense,” is devoted to contemporary arts of global Africa, a strength of the Museum’s collection. The works on view will broadly explore the theme of migration — of people, objects, materials or ideas. They include a metal wall sculpture made

from discarded liquor bottle tops by El Anatsui. New acquisitions include a major commission from Brooklyn-based artist Simone Leigh and photographs by New Jersey-born, Johannesburg-based artist Ayana Jackson. Elsewhere in this gallery will be works by Theo Eshetu, Lalla Essaydi, Serge Nitegeka, and Herve Youmbi.

The *Arts of Global Africa* catalog will highlight 100 objects from the collections, from the ancient Egyptian coffin lid of Henet-Met to a 2014 video installation by Berlin-based artist Theo Eshetu. More than 40 scholars from around the world have contributed to this publication, writing individual catalogue entries as well as essays focusing on the collection's distinctive strengths — North African art, textiles, art of the Yoruba, and modern and contemporary art.

The reinstallation and related catalog have received major support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities, as well as from private donations.

### ***Odili Donald Odita Commission Frames Entrance to New African Galleries***

To accompany the opening of the new gallery, the Museum has commissioned a major site-specific mural by abstract painter Odili Donald Odita. Born in Nigeria and raised in the American Midwest, Odita's abstract paintings use color, pattern, and design to explore memory and history. His mural, titled *Gateway*, will frame the Museum's new grand lobby and visitor center.

*Gateway* takes its inspiration from the history of the Museum and its global collections, especially the Tibetan Buddhist Altar. Describing his project, the artist writes:

"It is my intention to recall the spiritual and celebratory color of the Tibetan Buddhist Altar when making my wall painting in the lobby space. Furthermore, I want to reconcile the complexity of the Museum's collection in my considered use of pattern-fields that recall Africa, which will be applied to a Post-Modernist lobby surface that utilizes classic Renaissance styling through its expansive archways. In this respect, the Museum becomes the culminating source material and inspiration point for my wall painting. As I understand it, the purpose and reason for this museum is similar to the purpose I will put into my painting installation: to create an open path, or an access way, to the wealth of information and artifacts that exist within its walls."

*Gateway* invites visitors to see this public place as an entry to the Museum's global collections and a hub for multiple vantage points to come together.

"A fitting welcome to the Newark Museum, this new entry space is truly a gateway for community engagement, as well as shared and individual experiences, gained through the Museum's dynamic collections, exhibitions and events," Kern said.

### ***Also on View: Party Time: Re-Imagine America, A Centennial Commission by Yinka Shonibare MBE Opens in Ballantine House***

Currently on view is *Party Time: Re-imagine America*, a site-specific installation by internationally acclaimed British-Nigerian artist Yinka Shonibare MBE. The commission was originally created in 2009 in honor of the Museum's centennial celebration.

*Party Time* is set in the mahogany-paneled dining room of the Ballantine House, built in 1885 for the prominent Newark brewing family Jeannette and John Holme Ballantine and part of the Museum's campus since 1937.

The artist has staged an imagined scene of a late 19<sup>th</sup>-century dinner party midway through a multi-course feast. Eight headless figures, dressed in period costume made from the artist's signature "Dutch wax" fabric, are seated around an elaborately set table as a servant appears

bearing the main course, a peacock served on a silver platter. The animated body language of the guests suggests a moment in which proper Victorian etiquette has been cast away as an indulgent celebration of prosperity tips toward misbehavior and even debauchery.

Major Donors for the Arts of Global Africa Permanent Collection reinstallation are the Dickinson Family Foundation, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, National Endowment for the Humanities, Sagner Family Foundation and Victoria Foundation.

Donors are The Charles E. and Edna T.; Brundage Charitable Foundation ; Joseph L. Buckley, Esq.; Mitzi and Warren Eisenberg; Gelfand Family Foundation; Gulton Foundation, Inc.; R. Hutter Family Fund; Dorothy D. Lewis; Arlene and Len Lieberman; Judith and Lester Z. Lieberman; Cynthia and Andrew H. Richards; Margaret and Anthony Richards; Sills Cummis & Gross P.C.; and Gloria Weissberg.

Donors to the Endowment are the Estate of Anne H. Bumsted, The Hess Foundation, Paula and William J. Marino, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and National Endowment for the Humanities.

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