

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

SIXTH STREET AT CONSTITUTION AVENUE NW WASHINGTON DC 20565 • 737-4215 extension 224

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PRESS PREVIEW: TUESDAY
April 30, 10 a.m. to 12 noon
(In addition, Professor
Thompson will give a guided
tour at 10:30 a.m.)

AFRICAN EXHIBITION AT NATIONAL GALLERY

BREAKS NEW GROUND IN ART FIELD

WASHINGTON, D. C. April 23, 1974. The expression of moral character, communicated through various positions of body motion, stated or implied, ranging from everyday movements to elaborate dances or ritual, is so essential to an understanding of African art that the National Gallery of Art will document the total experience of African creativity in its original context by means of extensive audio-visual components in its major summer exhibition, entitled African Art and Motion, opening May 5 and remaining on view through September 22.

Five "motion stations" of film, videotape and sound illustrate traditional dance ceremonies of the Yoruba, Ejagham, Dan, Fon, and Banyang societies. Color film, as well as what is perhaps the first use of videotape in field research, was shot recently in West and Central Africa expressly for this exhibition. The participants use or wear objects similar to those on view in the exhibition.

The videotape will be seen on ten closed-circuit tv sets, documenting fast-paced Egúngún dances honoring illustrious Yoruba heroes and kings. Explanatory text panels and photomurals in

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each section also help relate the works of art to the exhibition's thesis, formulated by Robert Farris Thompson, Associate Professor of Art History, Yale University, and a prominent Africanist.

Over 150 works of art, including masks, sculpture, furniture and jewelry, in addition to numerous textiles, were selected to illustrate the exhibition's thesis from the collection of Katherine Coryton White of Los Angeles, one of the foremost private collections of African art in the world.

The installation of this special exhibition, which fills fifteen galleries (12,000 square feet), has been designed by Gaillard F. Ravenel and George Sexton of the Gallery's curatorial staff and James Silberman, another leading authority on African art.

The objects, which also include life-size costumed figures wearing masks and holding ritual objects, are grouped according to attitudes which complement the body in motion: standing, extending, balancing, supporting, riding, sitting and kneeling.

According to African tradition, Professor Thompson explains, "the particular phrasing of each posture can evoke the moral and psychological commitments of the Black nations. One stands, for instance, to perform or initiate important matters. Sitting is a niche for important or generous deliberation. The phrasing of each attitude often suggests that Africans ideally exist in vividness and sharing. The characteristic fusion of these idealized icons of repose, with the specialized energies of the dance, manifest in the conquest of such opposites, the highest sign of artistic power."

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An illustrated catalog by Professor Thompson discussing his ideas is issued in conjunction with the exhibition. An accompanying brochure has been prepared by George W. Ellis, Curator of the Museum of Cultural History, University of California, Los Angeles, in association with Professor Thompson and members of the Gallery's staff.

The exhibition is based on an earlier one this year at the Frederick S. Wight Gallery, University of California, Los Angeles, supported by the Art Council of the University of California at Los Angeles and by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION or photographs contact Katherine Warwick, Assistant to the Director, or Pamela Jenkinson, Information Office, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C. 20565, area code 202, 737-4215 ext. 224.