

Wednesday, 16 January 2008

'ART OF AFRICA' AT FREDERIK MEIJER GARDENS & SCULPTURE PARK



Dance Headdress - Yoruba People - Nigeria, All photos are courtesy of International Arts & Artists

GRAND RAPIDS, MI - Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park, the most significant sculpture and botanic experience in the Midwest and an emerging cultural destination on the national scene, is pleased to host a major museum presentation of works from Africa. **The exhibition, *Art of Africa: Objects from the Collection of Warren M. Robbins* is open from January 25 through May 4, 2008.**

This exhibition is the first major museum presentation of its kind in West Michigan and will explore the function and context of more than 80 objects, as well as their cultural significance. **Meijer Gardens is the only Michigan venue for this exhibition.**

An understanding of the roles African art has played and how it is an integral part of life in most African cultures will be apparent upon visiting the exhibition. *Art of Africa* will display art objects representing the traditions and ceremonies of 30 cultures from sub-Saharan Africa. Created for ceremonial purposes as well as utilitarian objects of daily life, these items have had a profound influence on Western culture since the beginning of the 20th century.

The objects are from the collection of Warren M. Robbins, Founding Director Emeritus and Smithsonian Senior Scholar at the National Museum of African Art. **Robbins established the first museum in the United States devoted exclusively to the art and culture of Africa and is among the nation's foremost authorities on African Art.**



Mask, Nafana People, Cote d'Ivoire

“Since the opening of the 20th century, African sculpture and art objects have exerted a potent influence across Western culture and have been collected for their aesthetic and cultural significance,” said Dr. Joseph Becherer, Director of Exhibitions and Curator of the Sculpture Program at Meijer Gardens. “We are honored to have been selected to host this important exhibition.”

Five African Art Facts, courtesy of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, will be playing in the Hoffman Auditorium. The film helps viewers understand the special uses and forms of traditional African objects. Several masks and ritual items from different sub-Saharan cultures show how ancient customs and traditions continue to add richness and guidance to the lives of many people in Africa today. The exhibition will be supported with videos of traditional ceremonies, Kente cloth weaving and mask carving, maps and a comprehensive gallery guide explaining key concepts in the exhibition.

During the annual exhibition of *Foremost's Butterflies are Blooming (March & April 2008)*, the largest temporary tropical butterfly display in the United States, the African Moon Moth will be the newest addition in conjunction with this exceptional presentation. Numerous other horticultural elements will be highlighted throughout the exhibition as well. Plants such as Living Stones from South Africa, Sausage Trees and Bananas from Tropical Africa will be presented with fascinating label text and questions sparking interest



Drinking Horn, Cameroon Grassfields

About Art of Africa & Warren M. Robbins

Originally collected by European explorers and ethnologists as academic specimens or curios, African sculptures had by the end of the 19th century begun to accumulate in European natural history museums and found their way into the hands of dealers in antiques and the exotic arts. At the

beginning of the 20th century a handful of European artists in France and Germany were intrigued by the unique forms and styles of African art and began to draw creative inspiration from them. The aesthetic significance of African art became highly appreciated and respected in Europe and served as a catalyst for the artistic revolution that ushered in modern art around the world.

***Art of Africa* is from the collection of The Robbins Center for Cross Cultural Communication and organized by International Arts & Artists, Washington, DC.** The exhibition is sponsored by The Meijer Foundation, Sculpture Society of Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park and Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs. Meijer Gardens is the only Michigan venue for this important exhibition.

About Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park

The 132-acre Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park, which currently serves more than a half-million visitors annually, features Michigan's largest tropical conservatory; one of the largest children's gardens in the country; arid and Victorian gardens; carnivorous plant house; outdoor gardens; the Midwest's most comprehensive sculpture experience featuring internationally-acclaimed works by Rodin, Oldenburg, Moore, Rickey, di Suvero and others; indoor galleries with changing sculpture exhibitions, as well as a 1750-seat outdoor amphitheater, featuring an eclectic mix of world-renowned musicians every summer, café and gift shop. For additional information, please visit www.meijergardens.org