

ART OF AFRICA

Sub-Saharan art on display at Huntington museum

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HUNTINGTON — Warren Robbins was working for the State Department in Europe when he saw some African art in a gallery.

He bought a few pieces, and his life would never be the same.

Now 85, Robbins has amassed more than 5,000 pieces of African art with which he founded the National Museum of African Art, now a branch of the Smithsonian Institution.

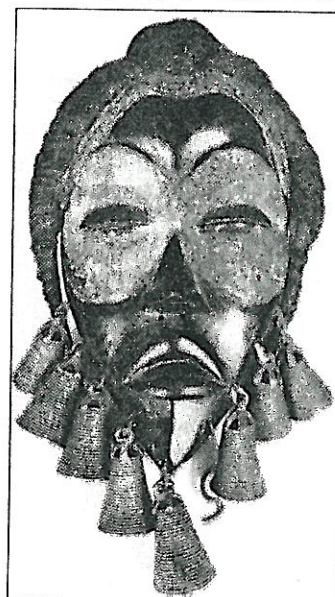
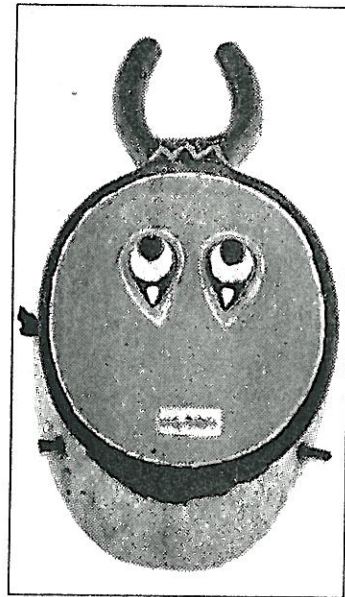
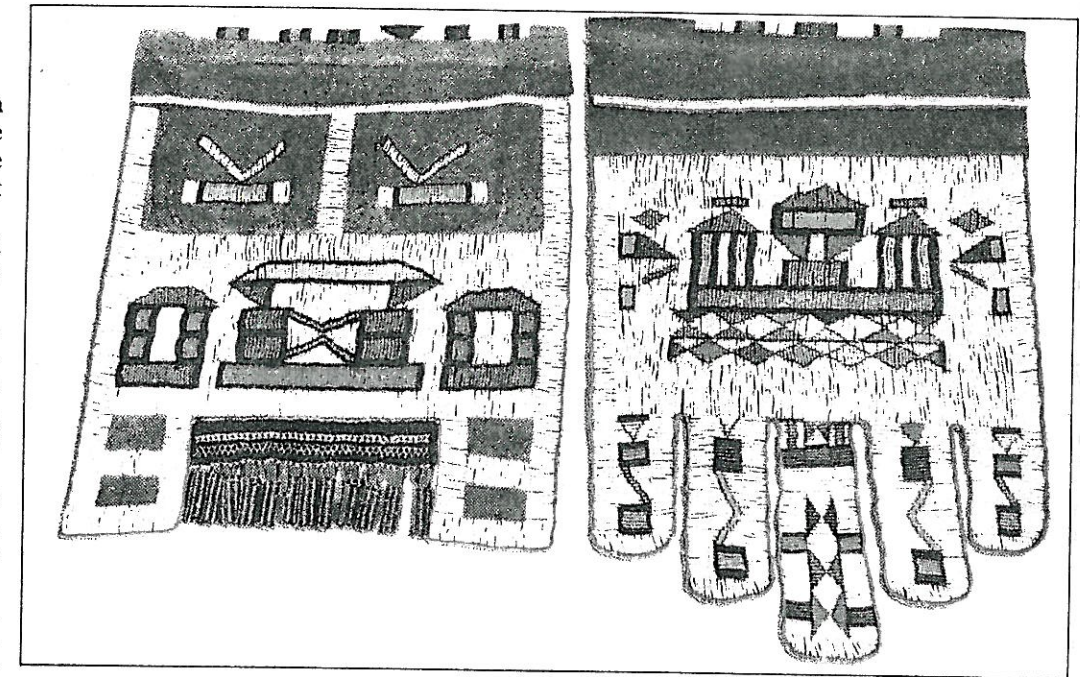
Eighty select pieces of art from that amazing collection are now up through Jan. 4 at the Huntington Museum of Art.

“Art of Africa: Objects from the Collection of Warren Robbins” opens with a free opening reception at 6 p.m. Friday with African food and drumming to celebrate the arrival of this traveling exhibit that features sculpture, textiles, beaded clothing and jewelry representing the creativity and diversity of artistic expression of 30 cultures of sub-Saharan Africa.

Jenine Culligan, senior curator at the museum, said Robbins was really on the forefront of collecting African art in the United States.

“He’s a pretty amazing person who started collecting in the late 1950s and who started collecting African art serendipitously,” Culligan said. “He went to a gallery with African art, and as he has said, it changed his life.”

Based in Washington, D.C., Robbins started the Robbins Center for Cross Cultural Communications whose goal



ABOVE: “Married Woman’s Aprons” (ijogolo), made by the Ndebele People of South Africa, is on display at the Huntington Museum of Art as part of its 80-piece “Art of Africa: Objects From the Collection of Warren Robbins” exhibit. The exhibit runs through Jan. 4.

FAR LEFT: “Initiation Ceremonial Mask” (kplekple), made by Baule People of Cote d’Ivoire

LEFT: “Ceremonial Mask,” made by Dan People of Liberia, Cote d’Ivoire and Guinea

Courtesy of the Huntington Museum of Art

is to get people to talk about the culture and art from Africa and from around the world.

Robbins also wrote one of

the first comprehensive books about collecting African art in the United States.

“African art was first collect-

ed because of its anthropological importance and artifacts

Please see **ART/5C**

WHAT: The 80-piece, "Art of Africa: Objects from the Collection of Warren Robbins"

WHEN: Now through Jan. 4

WHERE: The Huntington Museum of Art, 2033 McCoy Road, Huntington

OPENING RECEPTION: The opening free reception is 6 p.m. Friday, Oct. 10, with African food and drumming.

ABOUT THE SHOW: The 80 objects in this exhibition, including sculpture, textiles, beaded clothing and jewelry, broadly represent the creativity and diversity of artistic expression of 30

cultures of sub-Saharan Africa. The collection is on loan from Warren Robbins, founding director emeritus of the National Museum of African Art, now a branch of the Smithsonian Institution.

AFRICAN FILM SERIES: At 7 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 14, see "African Art," followed by a discussion led by Reidun Ovrebo, of West Virginia State University.

At 7 p.m. Oct. 28, the film "In and Out of Africa," with discussion by Phillip Adkins, collector.

SATURDAY KIDS ART: A special presentation at 2 p.m., Saturday, Oct.

18, by the Marshall University African Student Organization.

SPRING HILL SHOW: Two student projects from each Spring Hill Elementary School class will be on view in the Education Gallery during Parent's Night at the museum, at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 2.

CONSERVATORY: Enjoy African orchids and other plants from Africa in the museum's C. Fred Edwards Plant Conservatory.

MORE INFO: Call 304-529-2701 or visit www.hmoa.org.

Art

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found their way into natural history museums or history museums but was never thought of just for its aesthetics," Culligan said. "A lot of European modernists like Picasso and some of the post impressionist people who started cubism were looking at African art for different reasons, but it still really wasn't collected as art until the mid-20th century."

Robbins initially purchased a D.C. row house that had belonged to Frederick Douglass, and began building his museum, which eventually expanded to other adjacent row houses, and then evolved into the Smithsonian.

"So many people in the United States can trace ancestry to Africa, so people should be interested in what is coming out of Africa," Culligan said. "It's a reason people should be interested, and not just African Americans, but everybody."

The show cuts a wide swath through the Dark Continent showcasing more than 30 different cultures in sub-Saharan Africa.

"There are a lot of different media as well," Culligan said. "There's everything from carved wooden masks and textiles to beaded works. There's ivory, metal and just a great variety and stylistically as well. It mostly dates to the late 19th and early 20th century."

As the Museum of Art does with any of its main exhibits, there's a variety of multi-media

WEB EXTRA

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presentations and events to help people gain a deeper understanding of the art around them.

With Art of Africa, there's two films, a special Saturday KidsArt, the opening reception, a partnership with Spring Hill Elementary, as well as African orchids and other African plants in the Conservatory.

The first movie night is at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 14. "African Art" will be screened and followed by a discussion led by Reidun Ovrebo, of West Virginia State University.

Next week, there is also a special presentation at 2 p.m., Saturday, Oct. 18, by the Marshall University African Student Organization.

There is also a short documentary showing in the gallery to give people a better understanding and context for the art.

"What is interesting about this show is that the objects

on view are just completely out of context," Culligan said. "Paintings were made to hang on somebody's wall or in a museum. These are way out of context here, because they are used in so many ways, to

show status, or to help social problems, or for spiritual guidance. There's so many different ways these object are used. When they are just hanging on a wall, you don't see the big picture."