

African theme woven into art, film and plant life

Meijer Gardens to feature
80 works
from 30 cultures

BY GAIL PHILBIN
THE GRAND RAPIDS PRESS

GRAND RAPIDS — French sculptor Ossip Zadkine's 1922 bronze work, "Standing Woman," has beefy, sharp-angled limbs, one concave and one convex breast and a triangular head cleaved by a long flat nose. The large, geometric depiction of a female reflects the Western art world's Cubist-led obsession with new ways of looking at and representing things a century ago.

The sculpture, which is in the collection of Frederik Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park, also underscores the influence of African art on European artists. Picasso, Matisse and other giants of modern art were attracted by the elemental approach to the human figure in African masks and other "curios" collected by European explorers and ethnologists.

As such, "Standing Woman" provides a vivid connection between the Gardens' sculpture collection and a new exhibit of African art opening in its galleries Friday. "Art of Africa: Objects from the Collection of Warren M. Robbins" features 80 works from 30 cultures in West Africa, sub-Saharan and South Africa, including masks, carved figures, jewelry and some tapestries and cloths.

In the show, a photograph of Zadkine's piece is displayed alongside a ceremonial

mask by the Yaure people on Africa's Ivory Coast.

"It very clearly draws a connection with the way Zadkine realized the face and body and shows the genesis in his way of looking at African sculpture," said Joseph Becherer, the Gardens' curator and director of sculpture.

In another pairing, the exhibit offers a photograph of "Male-Female," an aluminum sculpture by American artist Jonathan Borofsky in the Gardens' collection, and two small figures by the Yoruba people of Nigeria and Benin. Borofsky's featureless silhouette of a man and woman intersecting at 90-degree angles echoes the simplicity of the Yoruba pieces.

"In African art, the aesthetics are not to make it realistic as in Western art," Becherer said. "Generalizations are made about how the eyes and other things are represented, and in Borofsky's piece, generalizations are made, too."

Other examples from the Gardens' collection of artists inspired by African art include Henri Laurens, Jacques Lipschitz, Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth and Dietrich Klinge, Becherer said.

To make the most of the links between the works in "Art in Africa" and the Gardens' collection, the staff has created a series of educational activities for the run of the exhibition. They include an African art version of the popular TV show "Antiques Road Show" led by local gallery owner George Bayard on Jan. 27 and a "cultural fashion show" of Kente cloth from Ghana offered by Georgia Farr of Creations by Georgia on Feb. 2.

The film "Five African Art

IF YOU GO

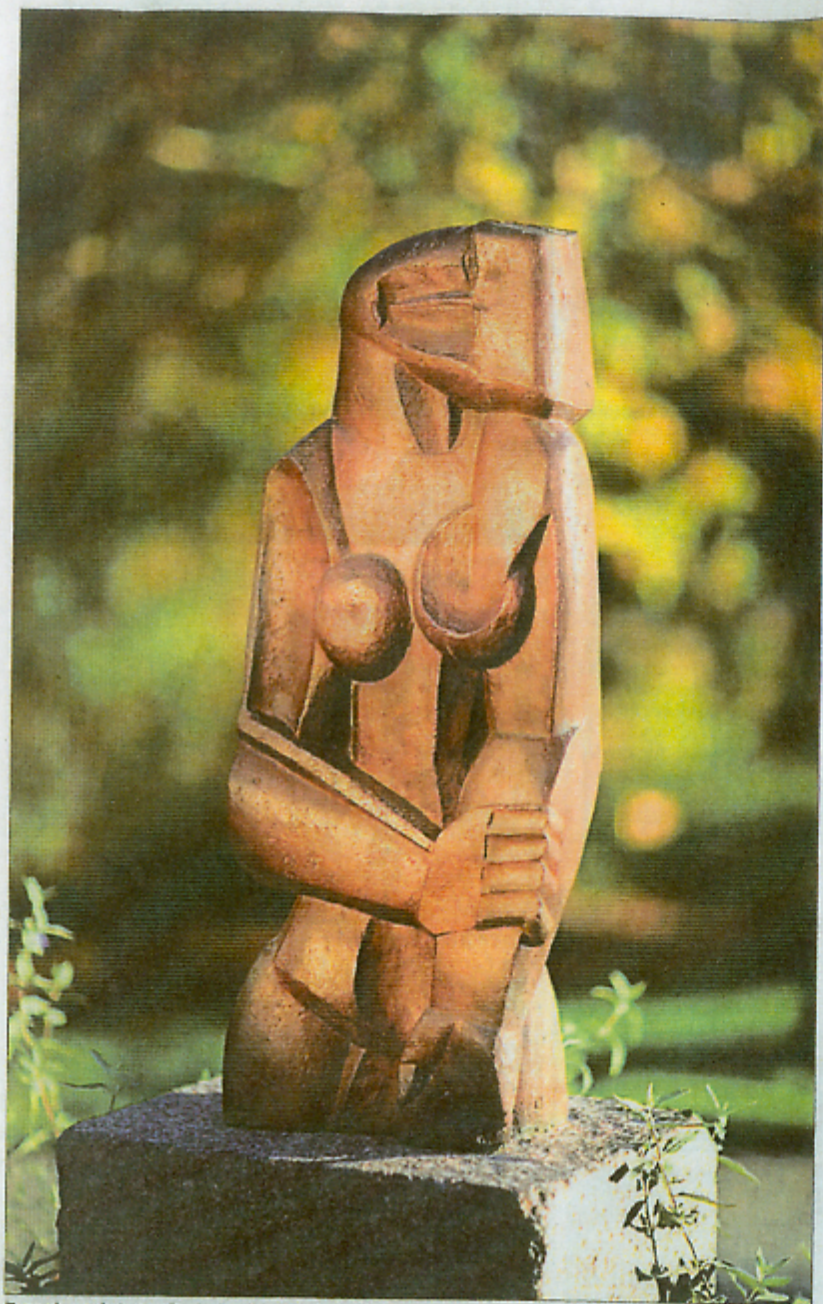
'Art of Africa: Objects from the Collection of Warren M. Robbins'

When: Friday-May 4
Where: Frederik Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park, 1000 East Beltline Ave. NE
Hours: 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday; 9 a.m.-9 p.m. Tuesday; noon-5 p.m. Sunday
Admission: \$12 for adults 14-64, \$9 for seniors 65 and older and students with ID, \$6 for ages 5-13, \$4 for ages 3-4, free to those 2 and younger
More information: 957-1580

Facts" from the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts will run in the Gardens' Hoffman Auditorium for the duration of the exhibition, and videos and maps will be available. The Gardens also is offering a 60-minute educational tour for schools and other groups that will emphasize the functionality, spirituality and ceremonial use of African art as well as general information about the continent of Africa and its people.

The Gardens' staff also has linked "Art in Africa" to its horticultural programming. There will be displays of plants native to Africa in its conservatories, and the African Moon Moth will be the star of this year's "Foremost's Butterflies are Blooming" exhibit in March and April.

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French sculpture: Ossip Zadkine's "Standing Woman" is part of Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park's permanent exhibit and provides a connection to a new exhibit of African art opening Friday.