



**Media Contacts:**

Anne Mannix, amannix@artbma.org  
Jessica Novak, jnovak@artbma.org  
Sarah Pedroni, spedroni@artbma.org  
443-573-1870

## **HAND HELD DISPLAYS MORE THAN 80 RARELY SHOWN AFRICAN WORKS OF ART FROM BMA'S COLLECTION**

*Exhibition reveals one theme of the African collection reinstallation*

*"We cannot live without such beautiful things." – A Guro carver, Côte d'Ivoire (1960)*

BALTIMORE, MD (August 22, 2011)—***Hand Held: Personal Arts from Africa*** brings together more than 80 artworks from the BMA's collection that skillfully merge artistry with utility. On view **September 25, 2011–February 5, 2012**, the exhibition includes a variety of seats, vessels, blankets, combs, hats, and other objects created for individuals and households in 21 African countries. Each of these artfully crafted pieces was repeatedly handled or worn by their owners, suggesting that beautiful objects are essential to life. The exhibition also celebrates a facet of the BMA's rich and historic African art collection, which will be reinstalled as part of the BMA's major renovation project.

*Hand Held* begins by focusing on individuality through objects that transcended their basic purpose to also proclaim the wearer's personal style and identity. Often these artworks became so associated with their owners that they were retained by the family as heirlooms or as memorial objects. Highlights include dramatic and refined hats and combs, sculpturally crafted loom pulleys, and vibrant skirts and wrappers. There is also a selection of intricately carved and embellished staffs that proclaimed the ranks of royal officials and other leaders. The second half of the exhibition presents domestic objects that not only served but also beautified the household and its surroundings such as ceramic and fiber vessels that collected and safeguarded water, milk, and grains, or wood and brass containers that protected cosmetics and jewelry. Woven textiles and carved architectural elements offered comfort and protection while also adorning and delineating living spaces.

The exhibition is installed in galleries adjacent to the museum's African collection, providing a more expansive view of the BMA's remarkable holdings. The African countries represented by artworks in *Hand Held* are: Angola, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Malawi, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, and Zambia. Several works in the exhibition come from major recent acquisitions being shown for the first time. A selection of videos and photographs will show how the objects were created and used.

*Hand Held: Personal Arts from Africa* is curated by Nichole Bridges, Associate Curator for African Art.

### **REINSTALLATION OF THE AFRICAN COLLECTION**

The exciting reinstallation of the BMA's African collection will significantly enhance the visitor's experience with the African artworks. Increased gallery space will allow for dramatically improved displays of African masks, textiles, and other objects in ways that better convey their original scale and context. Objects will be organized

thematically rather than geographically to show cross-cultural connections. The reinstallation will also include a designated space for special thematic displays so that visitors can look forward to seeing more of the collection each time they visit.

### **AFRICAN ART AT THE BMA**

One of the first African holdings in an American art museum, the BMA collection was inaugurated with its first gifts in 1947, the year after the Museum organized a pioneering exhibition titled simply: *An Exhibition of African Art*. The BMA's historical participation at the vanguard for presenting African art set the stage for Alan and Janet Wurtzburgers' generous gift of non-Western art in 1954. Today there are more than 2,100 artworks in the African collection, ranging from a pre-dynastic Egyptian ceramic beaker to a contemporary Nigerian bead painting. The collection is particularly strong in West African art with masks, figures, stools, and other sculptural forms in wood, many with attachments of metal, fiber, and organic material. In addition, there are brass cast weights, ceramics, beadwork, ivory miniatures, jewelry, carved stone, and metal currency forms and weapons. Many pieces are distinguished by their use in royal courts, performances, and religious contexts, and several are internationally known as the best of their type, such as *D'mba*, an unparalleled Baga female dance headdress from Guinea.

### **ABOUT THE BALTIMORE MUSEUM OF ART**

The Baltimore Museum of Art is home to an internationally renowned collection of 19th-century, modern, and contemporary art. Founded in 1914 with a single painting, the BMA today has 90,000 works of art—including the largest holding of works by Henri Matisse in the world. Throughout the Museum, visitors will find an outstanding selection of European and American fine and decorative arts, 15th- through 19th-century prints and drawings, works by established and emerging contemporary artists, and objects from Africa, Asia, the Ancient Americas, and Pacific Islands. The Museum is located in a park-like setting in the heart of Charles Village and adjacent to the main campus of The Johns Hopkins University. The BMA's 10-building complex encompasses 210,000 square feet and is distinguished by a grand historic building designed in the 1920s by renowned American architect John Russell Pope. Two beautifully landscaped gardens display an array of 20th-century sculpture that is an oasis in the city. As a major cultural destination for the greater Baltimore region, the BMA organizes and presents a variety of dynamic exhibitions and innovative programs throughout the year, and frequently hosts special events with cultural and educational partners.

### **VISITOR INFORMATION**

**NOTE: The BMA will be closed at 3 p.m. on Christmas Eve, December 24, 2011.** General admission to the BMA is free. The BMA is open Wednesday through Friday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, 11 a.m.–6 p.m. The Museum is closed Monday, Tuesday, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day. The BMA is located on Art Museum Drive at North Charles and 31st Streets, three miles north of Baltimore's Inner Harbor. For general Museum information, call 443-573-1700 or visit [artbma.org](http://artbma.org).

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