Smithsonian Libraries

News

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National Museum of African Art and Smithsonian Libraries Unveil "Artists' Books and Africa"

Books As Art Forms Weave Together History and Cultures of Africa

The Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art and the Smithsonian Libraries present a new exhibition, "Artists' Books and Africa," at the National Museum of African Art beginning Sept. 16. "Artists' Books and Africa" will be on display through Sept. 11, 2016.

An artist's book is a work of art that can be held and touched—one with pages to turn, flaps to unfold and enclosures to explore. As 3-D artworks, artists' books build on the traditional codex—sequential bound pages, but they expand and push those boundaries in limitless creative ways. The books are intended as visual artworks, because structure and format supersede content.

"The artistry of these books lies in their physical formats," said Janet Stanley, librarian at the Warren M. Robbins Library of the National Museum of African Art. "'Artists' Books and Africa' introduces a genre new to African art, but well established internationally—the artist's book. On view are not only artists' books by African artists, but also by international artists who choose African subjects. The books encompass everything from poetry, folk literature and personal stories to socio-political commentaries and historical encounters on the continent."

"Artists' Books and Africa" showcases fine art books as well as those employing multiple formats, materials and techniques. Through the artists' books, the exhibition explores African history and cultures by embodying collective memory and reclaiming cultural heritage and storytelling. Visitors will see several kinds of artist books, including folios, accordion folds and gatefolds.

"Artists' Books in Africa" features Willow Legge's *An African Folktale* (Guildford: 1979), Peggy Buth's *Desire in Representation* (Maastricht: 2008), Otobong Edet Nkanga's *No Be Today Story O!* (Amsterdam: 2010), Mark Attwood's *Qauqaua: A San Folk Story from Botswana Told by Coex'ae Qgam* (Johannesburg: 1996) and Daniel Halter's *Take Me to Your Leader* (Capetown: 2006).

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The 25 books displayed in "Artists' Books and Africa" are from the permanent collections of the Smithsonian Libraries' Warren M. Robbins Library and the Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art.

Support

"Artists' Books and Africa" is supported by Augustine O. Adenaike, Deirdre A. LaPin, Harriet McGuire and Ruth O. Selig.

Educational Programs

Public programs accompanying the exhibition will engage the museum's diverse audiences from K–12 to adult, including artist talks, workshops, lectures and hands-on sessions.

About the Smithsonian Libraries

The Smithsonian Libraries maintains a collection of more than 2 million volumes and serves as an educational resource for the Smithsonian Institution, the global research community and the public. The Libraries are located in Washington, D.C.; Edgewater, Md.; New York City; and the Republic of Panama. For more information, visit the Smithsonian Libraries website.

About the National Museum of African Art

The National Museum of African Art is the nation's premier museum dedicated exclusively to the collection, conservation, study and exhibition of Africa's traditional and contemporary arts. The museum is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. (closed Dec. 25). Admission is free. The museum is located at 950 Independence Ave. S.W., near the Smithsonian Metrorail station on the Blue and Orange lines. For more information, call (202) 633-4600 or visit the National Museum of African Art's website. For general Smithsonian information, call (202) 633-1000.

Note to editors: Selected images from "Artists' Books and Africa" may be downloaded by visiting the museum's media website and clicking on "press room." For further information about the exhibition, visit the official "Artists' Books and Africa" website.

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