



NATIONAL
MUSEUM OF
AFRICAN ART

Strategic Plan



Smithsonian
National Museum of African Art

2006 TO 2011

*If African art was not made by
people who thought of themselves
as Africans; if it was not made
as art; if it reflects, collectively
no unitary African aesthetic vision;
can we not still profit from this
assemblage of remarkable objects?¹*



FOREWORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

THE FIRST DECADE of the twenty-first century poses challenges unlike those the National Museum of African Art (NMAFA) faced when it became part of the Smithsonian Institution in 1979. The environment in which we operate—constrained Federal funding, more museums with established African art galleries and curators, increased prices for African art, and increasing demands from schools to provide art education for children—has precipitated this new strategic plan.

Our mission prevails—to educate people about Africa through art, to show how African art represents one of the greatest humanistic endeavors, and to bring value to each of our lives with each encounter with African art.

The National Museum of African art is committed to leadership, effective communication, ongoing dialogue and involvement with the community, and professional best practices. We are committed to providing the highest quality professional service to our public, who we consider stakeholders—educators, students of all ages, scholars, collectors, families and youth, and those whose cultures are represented by this museum. Furthermore, we are dedicated to providing learning opportunities and resources that enrich each visitor’s experience at the museum or via the museum’s website. Our goal is to make our museum a welcoming place.

This Strategic Plan for 2006–2011 provides a template for continued success and for realizing a vision that the staff and advisory board hold dear: recognition as the premier destination for African art in the United States.



Sharon F. Patton

Male head
Benin Kingdom, Court style,
Nigeria
Late 15th to early 16th century
82-5-2, purchased with funds
provided by the Smithsonian
Collections Acquisition
Program



INTRODUCTION

AFRICA—THE CRADLE OF HUMANITY—is part of everyone’s heritage, part of your heritage. The Smithsonian National Museum of African Art’s (NMAFA) goal is to foster an appreciation of that heritage and an understanding of the African continent.

African art embodies one of humanity’s greatest achievements—fusing imagery with spiritual beliefs, cultural significance, and social purpose. This art bears witness to the creative ingenuity and skill of its makers.

As the only national museum of African art, NMAFA assumes leadership in educating the public about the power and significance of African art, from ancient through contemporary times. With its programs, exhibitions, publications, collections, state-of-the-art conservation, and status as a Smithsonian museum, NMAFA distinguishes itself from other art museums that collect and exhibit the arts of Africa.



Artist Berry Bickle discusses her work during a gallery talk.

Headrest
Luba peoples, Democratic Republic of the Congo
Mid- to late 19th century
86-12-14, museum purchase



BACKGROUND

NMAFA BEGAN as a private educational institution in 1964. Founded by Warren M. Robbins, a former U.S. Foreign Service Officer, it was known as the Museum of African Art and was located in a duplex townhouse on Capitol Hill that was the home of Frederick Douglass, the African American abolitionist and statesman. In August 1979, by enactment of Public Law 95-414, the museum became part of the Smithsonian Institution. It was formally renamed the National Museum of African Art in 1981.

On September 28, 1987, a new facility, located on the National Mall at the heart of the Smithsonian complex, opened to the public. In 1994, the museum broadened its collecting scope and programs to include both modern and contemporary works, thus covering works of art of the entire continent across time.

In 2005, NMAFA received a transforming gift of one of the world's finest collections of traditional African art: The Walt Disney-Tishman African Art Collection. It is the largest private collection donated to an American art museum in nearly 25 years. The donation of 525 pieces, representing 75 peoples in 20 countries, includes most major styles of African art and enhances the museum's leadership in the field.



Entrance to the National Museum of African Art
Photograph by Henry Eastwood, 1990
Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives, National Museum of African Art

Pair of armllets
Yoruba peoples, Owo, Nigeria
16th to 18th century
2005-6-7.1, 7.2, gift of Walt Disney World Co., a subsidiary of The Walt Disney Company



Today, NMAFA's collection of approximately 8,000 objects includes over 400 modern and contemporary works of art, making it the largest publicly held collection of modern and contemporary African art in the United States. Objects range from ceramics, photographs, and works on paper to textiles, sculpture, and video; all highlight individual creativity and reflect global and indigenous aesthetics, cultures, and identities.



In addition, NMAFA has an exceptional and unique photographic archive dedicated to Africa, the Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives. It contains approximately 300,000 images of African life, some of which were bequeathed by Eliot Elisofon, the internationally known photographer and filmmaker whose works were published in magazines such as *Life*

and *National Geographic*.

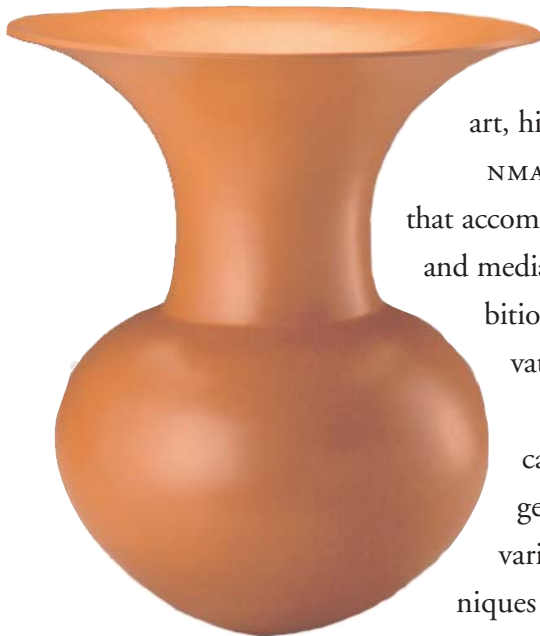
NMAFA is a major resource for the preservation and study of African art. Our renowned conservation laboratory provides expertise to other museums in the United States and Africa and to the general public.

The Warren M. Robbins Library, regarded

as a world-class scholarly resource has a collection of over 30,000 books and 400 periodicals on art, history, and culture.

NMAFA has state-of-the-art galleries that accommodate a broad range of artwork and media and enjoys a reputation for exhibitions that are groundbreaking, innovative, and beautifully designed.

NMAFA has an important educational mandate. Its programs target visitors of all ages, deploying a variety of teaching and learning techniques such as hands-on workshops, teacher training workshops, storytelling, and



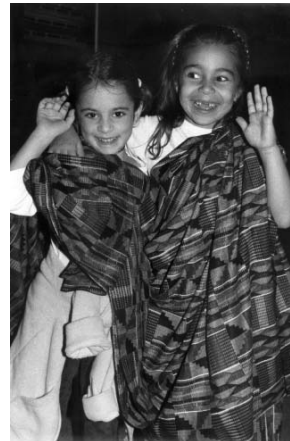
The Asantahene tours collection storage with museum staff.

Son of a Wolof chief, Dakar, Senegal
Photograph by J. Benyoumoff, c. 1910
Postcard Collection
Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives, National Museum of African Art

Magdalene Odundo
Untitled #1
1994
95-8-1, museum purchase



interactive sites within exhibitions. The museum is a source of curriculum materials on Africa and African art for local schools. Augmenting the museum's outreach, NMAFA boasts a large docent corps, many of whom have personal experience living and traveling in Africa. Furthermore, the National Endowment for the Humanities recently designated NMAFA as having one of the nation's best educational websites.



Museum director Sharon F. Patton with children in the exhibition *Playful Performers*

Children try on kente cloth.

Mask (detail)
Idoma peoples, Nigeria
c. 1950
2005-6-89, gift of Walt Disney World Co., a subsidiary of The Walt Disney Company



NMAFA's strategic plan articulates a vision for the museum to build on its many strengths, prioritize goals, and identify key strategies for achieving those goals, thereby enabling the museum to realize its vision.

NMAFA . . .

One Continent under One Roof

NMAFA STRATEGIC PLAN 2006 TO 2011

NMAFA'S MISSION AND GOALS flow from the Smithsonian's mission—the increase and diffusion of knowledge—and the Institution's four strategic goals: increased public engagement; strengthened research; enhanced management excellence; and greater financial strength.

Mission Statement

The Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art fosters the discovery and appreciation of the visual arts of Africa, the cradle of humanity.

Core Values

As a museum preserving art and archives for the benefit of present and future generations, we value:

Mission Fulfillment

NMAFA is dedicated, first and foremost, to the fulfillment of the museum's mission to serve the public through art.



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Museum visitors at an educational activity

Female figure with child
Kongo peoples, Mayombe region, Democratic Republic of the Congo
Mid-19th to 20th century
83-3-6, purchased with funds provided by the Smithsonian Collections Acquisition Program



Relevance

NMAFA seeks to be meaningful to people's lives, imparting the understanding that Africa is part of everyone's heritage.

Audience

NMAFA strives to make the experiences of its physical and virtual visitors educational and enriching, as well as lively and engaging.

Respect

NMAFA is committed to honesty, respect, open communication, and mutual support among members of its staff and with the museum's stakeholders and the general public.

Excellence

NMAFA strives for and provides the highest quality programs, exhibitions, publications, and public service.

Public Trust

NMAFA holds one of the world's more important cultural heritages in public trust. As such, the NMAFA staff performs its professional duties with honesty, integrity, and transparency commensurate with its responsibilities and its accountability to the Smithsonian Institution, the museum advisory board, and the museum's communities.



Children performing at the museum



Bell
Kongo peoples, Democratic
Republic of the Congo
Late 19th to early 20th century
98-15-9, gift of Lawrence
Gussman in memory of
Dr. Albert Schweitzer

VISION STATEMENT

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN ART will be America's premier site for African art—renowned for its African art collection; a leader in African art education, scholarship, programs, exhibitions, and conservation; and an institution with a reputation for innovation and creativity.

NMAFA will have endowments to secure its future and fulfill its mission. The museum will be “the” place where all manner of African artistic expression, including music performances, artist residencies, and other activities, attracts people with different interests and needs.

NMAFA will also be a place where young people mingle with families, where lively conversations among scholars and connoisseurs intertwine with the sounds of music or storytelling, creating an invigorating and stimulating learning environment.

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Ndebele woman, South Africa
Photograph by Constance
Stuart Larrabee, 1936–49
Constance Stuart Larrabee
Collection
National Museum of African
Art



STRATEGIC GOALS

To realize its vision, NMAFA will work toward accomplishing the following goals over a five- to ten-year time frame:

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Goal 1

NMAFA will be known as the premier art museum for African art in the United States.

Goal 2

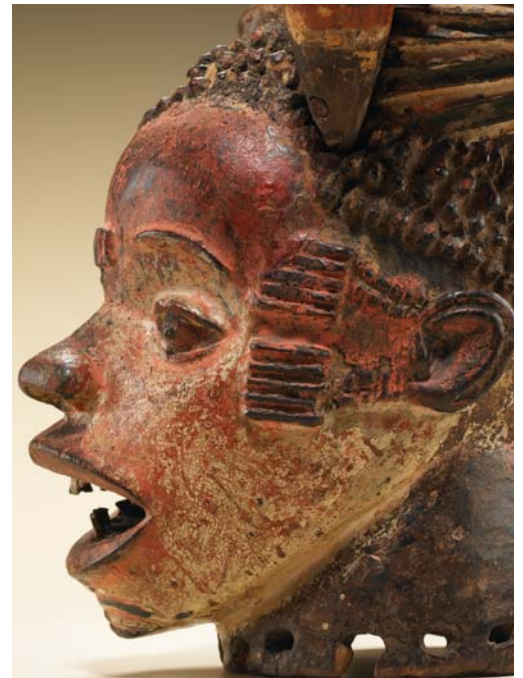
NMAFA will establish itself as a destination on the National Mall, “the” place to be.

Goal 3

NMAFA will become more financially secure.

Goal 4

NMAFA will be a congenial workplace that promotes respect and professionalism—among staff members and in their interactions with museum stakeholders and the public.



Mask (detail)
Possibly Boko peoples, Nigeria
Late 19th to early 20th century
2005-6-90, gift of Walt Disney
World Co., a subsidiary of The
Walt Disney Company

STRATEGIES



Goal I

NMAFA will be known as the premier art museum for African art in the United States, which attracts collectors, scholars, museum professionals, artists, and major gifts and garners awards for excellence in best practices.

I.1

Develop the strongest possible art and archival collections, reflecting the traditional, modern, and contemporary arts of Africa.

I.2

Maintain the highest standards in caring for and conserving collections.

I.3

Produce exemplary programs and publications.

I.4

Demonstrate leadership in fostering and hosting African art scholarship and studies.

I.5

Forge alliances with other museums and not-for-profit institutions within and outside the Smithsonian Institution.

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II

Chokwe masquerader near Gungu, Democratic Republic of the Congo
Photograph by Eliot Elisofon, 1970
Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives, National Museum of African Art





Goal 2

NMAFA will establish itself as a destination on the National Mall, “the” place to be, by appealing to and reaching audiences with diverse needs and expectations, inside and outside the museum premises.

2.1

Develop a multiyear marketing/communications plan.

2.2

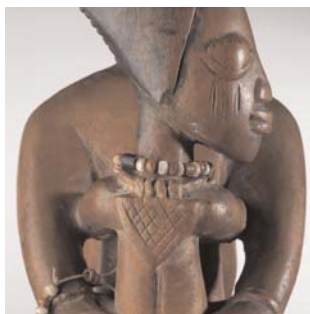
Present innovative, memorable “must see” exhibitions and programs and activities with great public appeal.

2.3

Establish mechanisms for engaging key stakeholders, especially special interest groups and communities such as African Americans and African expatriates.

2.4

Use the Web to its full potential.



Goal 3

NMAFA will become financially secure by obtaining unrestricted non-Federal funds and major cash gifts.

3.1

Strengthen the fundraising capacity of the museum advisory board.

3.2.

Increase annual giving.

3.3

Secure major donations.

Equestrian figure
Inland Niger Delta Style, Mali
13th to 15th century
86-12-2, museum purchase





Goal 4

NMAFA will be a congenial workplace that promotes respect and professionalism—among staff members and in their interactions with museum stakeholders and the public.

4.1

Encourage transparency in all aspects of museum operations and management.

4.2

Ensure that staff members know and support the mission and strategic plan of the museum.

4.3

Promote entrepreneurship and strengthen accountability among staff.



The museum's interior

1. Kwame Anthony Appiah, "What Africa? Why Art?" in *Africa: The Art of a Continent*, edited by Tom Phillips (Munich: Prestel, 1995), page 24.