



# Africa Interweave

TEXTILE DIASPORAS



SAMUEL P. HARN MUSEUM OF ART, UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

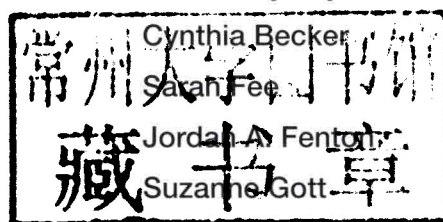


# Interweave

TEXTILE DIASPORAS

**Susan Cooksey**

with essays by



Courtney Micots

Robin Poynor

Christopher Richards

Victoria L. Rovine

MacKenzie Moon Ryan

**Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art**

University of Florida, Gainesville

*Africa Interweave: Textile Diasporas*  
February 8—May 8, 2011  
Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art  
University of Florida, Gainesville

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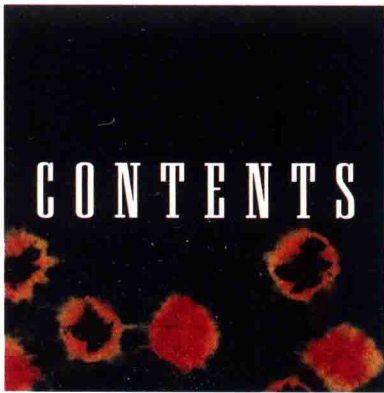
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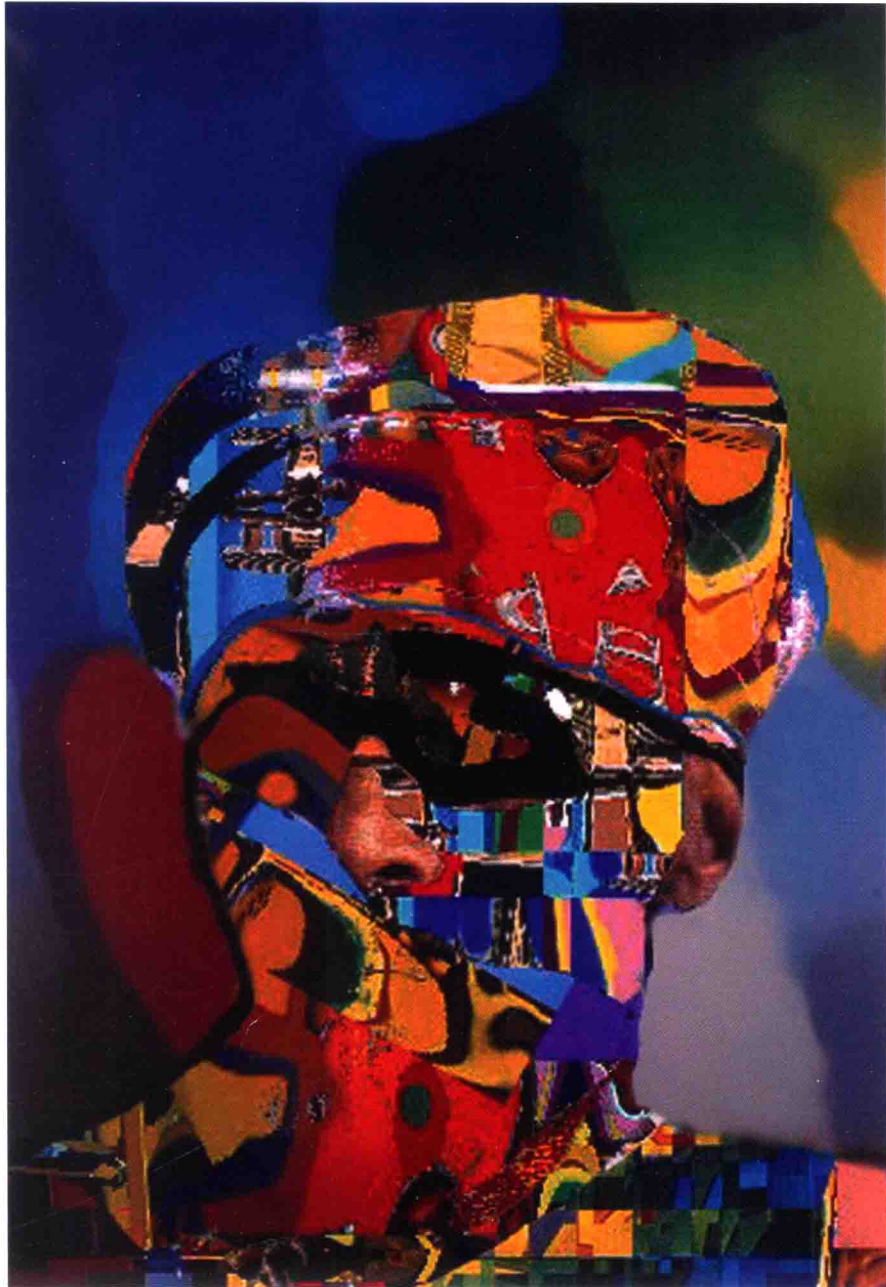


front cover: (detail) Fulani People, Goundam, Mali,  
*Wall Covering (arkilla kereka)*, 20th century

back cover: Ekpenyong Bassey Nsa, Nigerian, b. 1973  
*Ebonko Masquerade Ensemble*, 2010

page one: Achamyeleh Debela, American, b. Ethiopia,  
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across from title page: (detail) Akan People, Ghana,  
*Adinkra Cloth*, late 20th century







# Africa



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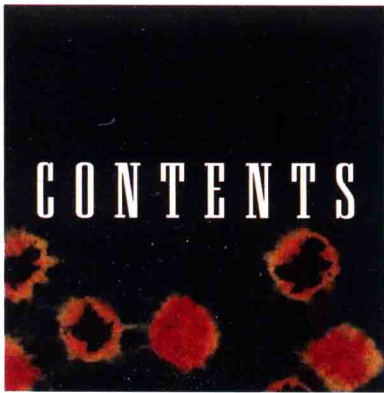
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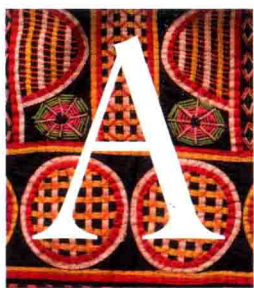
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## FOREWORD



s a great admirer of beautiful textiles, I am personally delighted that the Harn Museum is presenting *Africa Interweave: Textile Diasporas*, the end result of years of exhaustive research and committed collection-building

by Curator of African Art Dr. Susan Cooksey. And I am equally pleased that the impact of the exhibition will live on and be extended through the insightful essays and rich illustrations of this fine accompanying publication.

In developing a major collection of African textiles for the Harn, Dr. Cooksey has assembled a marvelous variety of pieces ranging in technique and style from traditional to contemporary and including textiles used for ritual, ceremonial, prestige, and domestic purposes. Complete ensembles of clothing for a range of occasions are represented, as well as high-fashion attire and elaborate masquerade costumes for various performances. The textiles represent all regions of the continent, from Tunisia to South Africa and Ghana to Tanzania. They come from many diverse cultural traditions and display stunning achievements of weaving, dyeing, embroidery, appliqué, and beadwork in a dazzling array of colors and designs. In addition, the exhibition includes works by contemporary African artists who employ textiles or have been inspired by textile traditions in their work—El Anatsui, Viyé Diba, Skunder Boghossian, Seydou Keïta, Achamyeleh Debela, and Yinka Shonibare.

We are committed at the Harn Museum to exploring ideas and topics of global significance in our exhibitions, publications, and programming. This exhibition clearly demonstrates the continuity of African artists' fascination with textiles. It shows the interrelationships of textiles across cultures on the continent, and also reveals how global market, fashion, and other trends affect the production, meanings, and uses of textiles. We learn how the mobility of textiles across chronological, spatial, and ideological boundaries influences their corresponding visual, technical, and aesthetic aspects.

In keeping with the Harn's mission to weave the work of the museum into the academic fabric of the university, this exhibition and catalogue have been a collaborative effort in which Dr. Cooksey has engaged University of Florida faculty and graduate students as well as scholars from other institutions.

University of Florida art history professors Dr. Robin Poynor and Dr. Victoria Rovine contributed essays to the catalogue, as did textile scholars Dr. Cynthia Becker, Dr. Sarah Fee, and Dr. Suzanne Gott. Ph.D. candidates Jordan Fenton, Christopher Richards, and MacKenzie Moon Ryan, and (now Dr.) Courtney Micots conducted field research in Nigeria, Ghana, and Tanzania; purchased textiles, garments, and a masquerade costume for the exhibition; and wrote entries for this catalogue. They will also join our faculty colleagues as presenters in the educational programming accompanying the exhibition.

Every aspect of *Africa Interweave*—the exhibition, the publication, and the educational programming for visitors of all ages—has been made possible by the contributions of many people. In her acknowledgments Dr. Cooksey recognizes the generous friends of the Harn who have donated textiles to the collection, as well as those whose financial contributions have supported the project. She thanks the dedicated and hard-working members of the Harn Museum staff who joined her in making the exhibition a reality and those whose talents produced the handsome catalogue. I add my sincere appreciation to hers, and close with heartfelt thanks to Susan herself for her great gift to the Harn and the University of Florida in organizing this remarkable exhibition.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



he planning and implementation of this exhibition and catalogue have rewarded me in ways I could not have predicted, but being the beneficiary of such an outpouring of support from so many generous and talented people

has been the most deeply gratifying part of this project.

I must begin by thanking the students and faculty of the University of Florida who contributed their expertise to shaping the concept and organization of the exhibition in many ways. Dr. Robin Poynor, my longtime mentor from the University of Florida's School of Art and Art History, built the foundation for the textile collection at the Harn Museum and donated four textiles that appear in the exhibition. He also wrote an essay on his research in Owo and contributed contextual images for several works that appear in the exhibition and the catalogue. His suggestions about acquisitions and scholarly contacts were much appreciated as well. Dr. Victoria Rovine generously contributed her advice on the concept and organization of the exhibition and the catalogue, and traveled to Mali twice to research textile artists and acquire objects for the exhibition. Her essay on embroidery includes discussion of a woman's robe from Timbuktu she commissioned for the Harn, as well as an object loaned from her personal collection. I am also grateful to her for introducing me to several scholars in the field of African textiles and fashion, including Dr. Sarah Fee and Dr. Suzanne Gott who contributed essays to the catalogue.

Drs. Rovine and Poynor also suggested that I involve doctoral students with textile-related field research. Thanks to their recommendations, Jordan Fenton, Dr. Courtney Micots, MacKenzie Moon Ryan, and Christopher Richards contributed essays based on their latest research (in Nigeria, Ghana, Tanzania, and Ghana, respectively), and assisted with acquiring objects for the Harn's collection and for the exhibition. Jordan Fenton, who conducted research in Calabar, commissioned a dazzling Ebonko masquerade costume and collected an entire ensemble of chiefly ceremonial attire. Dr. Courtney Micots did research on Fante *awafo* flags in Ghana and collected the cloth commemorating President Obama's visit there. She also helped me with commissions of cloth from Samuel Cophie. MacKenzie Moon Ryan assisted with the translation of Swahili on *kanga* cloths in the collection and acquired cloths in Tanzania, including the eye-catching *kanga* cloth in the exhibition. MacKenzie and Courtney also assisted with additional interpretive texts for the exhibition. Christopher Richards, who studied textiles and fashion in Ghana, kindly agreed to meet with Samuel Cophie to retrieve two commissioned works for the Harn. In addition, I am truly appreciative of the efforts of Eugenia Martinez, who assisted with many tasks, including research, translations, technology, and contacts in Senegal and Mali. The new works brought from various locations in Africa, and the insights of these scholars, have infused the exhibition and catalogue with a fresh and timely perspective on the role of textiles in Africa today.

I am deeply grateful to each of them for their unique contributions to this exhibition.

Many of the textiles on view in the exhibition were newly acquired or loaned with the help of private collectors. Norma and William D. Roth generously donated a beaded Ngwane bridal cape that is featured in the exhibition, and recently gave several more textiles to the Museum. Barbara and William McCann guided me through the long process of choosing textiles from their cherished collection, gathered during their travels in Africa, that were acquired for the Harn. Thanks to these collectors' appreciation for textiles and their generosity of time, energy, and expertise, the Museum has fulfilled its goal of building a strong collection of textiles that spans the continent. Many thanks also go to the Richardson family, whose endowment supported the purchase of several textiles for the exhibition, including five commissioned works. Ambassador Kenneth Brown and Bonnie Brown kindly loaned two delightful *awafó* flags from their collection. I also would like to express my gratitude to the staff of the Norton Museum of Art, who generously agreed to lend their wonderful example of Yinka Shonibare's work, *Victorian Couple*.

The installation of this exhibition presented many challenges, but the Harn registration and preparation staff worked together to find creative solutions. My thanks go to Laura Nemmers, registrar, and Jessica Uelsmann, associate registrar, for their patience and attention to the slightest details in preparing art works for this exhibition. Their ability

to handle a myriad of tasks simultaneously is essential, but also astonishing. I am particularly grateful to them, and to Elizabeth Bemis and Dushanthi Jayawardena, for organizing the textiles and preparing them for photography. Michael Peyton, chief preparator, devised innovative and elegant methods for mounting textiles. Tim Joiner, assistant preparator, and Nathan Ahern were meticulous in preparing the gallery and hanging the art. They have been responsible for maximizing the aesthetic impact of the work in the space of the gallery. Many thanks to textile conservators Muffie Austin, for going above and beyond all expectations to restore the beauty of two of our textiles, and Stephanie Hornbeck, who ably assisted us in mounting the textiles.

The production of this catalogue has involved a host of contributors. I've had the pleasure of working with three scholars who contributed essays and contextual images — Dr. Sarah Fee, Dr. Suzanne Gott, and Dr. Cynthia Becker. I thank them for their enthusiasm in embracing this project, and for the insights they have shared about their subject areas and the overall theme of the exhibition. I am particularly grateful to Dr. Gott, who kindly agreed to meet with weaver Samuel Cophie in Kumasi and transport his gift of a *kente* cloth to the Harn.

I would also like to thank Dr. Sarah Worden, curator of Africa collections at the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh, who shared her research on Hausa textiles. Dr. Sally-Anne Coupar, curator of archaeology at the



Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow, and Tracey Hawkins, curatorial assistant, and Dr. Patricia Allan, curator of world cultures, both at the City Museum Resource Center, Glasgow, helped me to select and view textiles in their collections. I am grateful as well to Dr. Maxine Downs, a UF alumna whose doctoral research on women dyers in Mali inspired the section of the exhibition on *bazin*. She and her colleague Maureen Gosling have produced a stunning film on the women dyers that is featured in the exhibition. Dr. Jean Borgatti sparked my interest in the Okakagbe masquerade and the mask-maker Lawrence Ajanaku, and the Museum now owns an Ajanaku mask she commissioned. She was kind enough to give us photographs and videos that are on view in the exhibition. Thanks also to Dr. John Pemberton, who contributed two photographs for the exhibition. My friend and colleague Barbara Thompson provided information on *kanga* cloth use and meaning, and shared her photographs for the exhibition and the catalogue. Thanks to the following scholars for their assistance with imperative materials: Doran Ross, Dr. Patricia Darish, Dr. David Binkley, and Venny Nakazibwe. I am grateful to Achamyeleh Debela and Viyé Diba for allowing me to interview them.

Dr. Courtney Micots was responsible for locating and securing contextual photographs for the catalogue and the exhibition. I greatly appreciate her dedication and discernment in seeking out these images. I had exceptional interns during the course of preparing for this exhibition, whose work has been invaluable: Christopher Richards, Courtney Hammer, MacKenzie Moon Ryan, Dushanthi Jayawardena, Kerri Duffield, and Michael Pagan. Each assisted eagerly and efficiently with research, organization, design, and a plethora of other tasks—many thanks to all of them. Tami Wroath, director of marketing and public relations at the Harn, oversaw the production of the catalogue, and I am truly grateful for her time and positive energy. The visual appeal of this publication can be attributed to designer Ron Shore, and I thank him for his unflagging

enthusiasm in working closely with me and my colleagues to help shape the vision for this catalogue. Thanks also to Randy Batista, who photographed all the textiles in this catalogue. I am grateful to Victoria Scott for her patient and careful editing of all text.

Several individuals and institutions offered funding to support the exhibition and the catalogue. I am grateful to the University of Florida's Center for African Studies, Michael and Donna Singer, and Mary Ann and Richard Green for helping to fund the exhibition, and to Robert and Joelen Merkel, and Storter Childs Printing, for their support of the catalogue. The exhibition and catalogue also received generous support from the John Early Publications Endowment, the Harn 20th Anniversary Fund, the 1923 Fund, the Dr. Madelyn M. Lockhart Endowment for Focus Exhibitions at the Harn Museum of Art, and the Harn Program Endowment.

Finally, I would like to express my thanks to the many colleagues, friends, and family who offered their support. To the Harn's director, Dr. Rebecca Nagy, who encouraged me to pursue this exhibition from the beginning; Phyllis Delaney, who worked tirelessly to find support for the catalogue and the exhibition; Brandi Breslin, curatorial secretary, who spent endless hours organizing my materials, contacting contributors, and processing paperwork; to Mary Yawn, who worked through all budgetary issues so effectively (and even cheerfully); and to my fellow curators Dulce Roman, Kerry Oliver-Smith, Jason Steuber, and former colleague Tom Southall, who gave me insight, guidance, and many other forms of assistance in the last few years—you have all proven the meaning of cooperation. To my sister Melanie Cooksey, my husband Scot Smith, and my friends Ann Lindell and Madeleine Traoré, thank you for your moral support. I credit all of you and those named above with the realization of the exhibition and this publication.







detail of *Man's Robe*, Nigeria (Pl. 19)