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Curator of African Art, Susan Cooksey Retires from the Harn Museum of Art

GAINESVILLE, FL, Jan. 26, 2021— Dr. Susan Cooksey, curator of African art at the Harn Museum of Art at the University of Florida retired on November 30, 2020. Cooksey joined the staff in 2000 working in the curatorial department, and in 2005 became the museum's first curator of African art. During her curatorial career spanning nearly twenty years, she has made a significant impact on the development of the Harn's collection and exhibitions of African art while forming partnerships with UF's Center for African Studies, International Center and College of the Arts.

Dr. Cooksey oversaw the museum's African collection which has more than doubled in size to include nearly 1,200 works at the time of her retirement. The Harn's African collection is distinctive in the strength of its holdings that include a broad range of geographic regions, media and historical periods, dating from the 5th century BCE to the 21st century. Objects in the collection include wood sculpture, textiles, ceramics, beadwork, metalwork and painting by artists from West, Central, South and East Africa, with a particular focus on women artists. Cooksey has augmented the African collection with work by important artists such as Ghanaian artist El Anatsui, British-Kenyan artist Magdalene Odundo, Nigerian artists Nike Davies-Okundaye, Yelimane Fall and Ekpenyong Bassey Nsa, and Senegalese artist Viyé Diba.

Dr. Cooksey has organized more than twenty exhibitions, many with accompanying catalogues. Several of her major exhibitions have traveled to other art museum venues, helping to increase awareness of the University of Florida and the Harn Museum of Art. Dr. Cooksey's most recent exhibition *Peace, Power and Prestige: Metal Arts in Africa* is accompanied by a catalogue (2020, University Press of Florida). Her work on the exhibition and catalogue is a finalist for the Alfred H. Barr Jr. Award honoring museum scholarship and authors of distinguished catalogues in the history of art. The *Peace, Power and Prestige* exhibition will travel in 2022 to both the Ackland Art Museum, at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the Figge Art Museum in Davenport, Iowa. *Kongo across the Waters* (2014), co-organized with the Africa Museum in Tervuren, Belgium, traveled to the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum, Princeton University Art Museum and New Orleans Museum of Art, and was accompanied by a catalogue co-edited with UF Prof. Robin Poynor and Royal Museum for Central Africa curator Hein Vanhee (2013, University Press of Florida). Additional exhibition highlights organized by Dr. Cooksey include *Africa Interweave: Textile Diasporas* (2011); *A Sense of Place: African Interiors* (2009); *Between the Beads: Reading African Beadwork* (2008); *African Arts of Healing and Divination* (2007); and *Sense, Style, Presence: African Arts of Personal Adornment* (2004).



Dr. Cooksey has contributed to the field of African art by presenting at conferences for international organizations such as the African Studies Association and Arts Council of the African Studies Association (ACASA). Her roles as a consortium editor for “African Arts” quarterly journal and her service on the advisory board for the UF Center for African Studies have demonstrated her commitment to collaboration and teaching. This commitment is also evident in her work with UF faculty from diverse departments who have utilized her exhibitions in class teaching and her supervision and mentorship of more than 30 UF students in their independent study projects and internships focusing on African Art.

“Susan has helped to create and nurture a meaningful and relevant African art collection during her time here at the Harn,” said Dr. Lee Anne Chesterfield, Harn Museum of Art Director. “I am joined by many of my colleagues at the University of Florida in congratulating Dr. Cooksey for her great achievements, from years of research and writing to exhibition creation.”

About the Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art

Founded in 1990, the Harn Museum of Art is an integral part of the University of Florida. The Harn contributes to an interconnected, international community by integrating the arts and culture into curricula throughout the university’s system of colleges and centers. Its holdings include more than 13,300 works in five main collecting areas: Asian art, African art, photography, modern art of the Americas and Europe, and international contemporary art. The museum also has noteworthy collections of Oceanic and Ancient American Art and works on paper. In addition to rotating installations drawn from its permanent collection, the Harn organizes traveling exhibitions, public lectures, panel discussions, academic symposia, and educational programs for adults, students, and children. The Harn Museum of Art, at 3259 Hull Road in Gainesville, Florida, is part of the University of Florida’s Cultural Plaza, which is also home to the Florida Museum of Natural History and the Phillips Center for the Performing Arts. Admission is free.

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