



For Immediate Release: January 28, 2005

Media Contact: Kelly Lastrapes, 225.389.7212; klast@lsu.edu

LSU Museum of Art Brings Dazzling African Gold to Baton Rouge

Grand opening exhibition showcases the first of many major traveling exhibitions

BATON ROUGE, LA –*African Gold: Selections from the Glassell Collection, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston* opens March 5, 2005 at the LSU Museum of Art and runs through May 31, 2005. Approximately 135 works of art from the region formerly known as the Gold Coast will be displayed.

“This exhibition provides visitors to our new space in the Shaw Center for the Arts an example of the major traveling exhibitions that we will bring to Baton Rouge,” notes LSU Museum of Art interim executive director Dr. Laura Lindsay. “Our previous space was not able to accommodate exhibitions of this size or caliber. Now, Baton Rouge residents and visitors can experience exhibitions from major cities nationwide.”

Organized by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFA,H), *African Gold: Selections from the Glassell Collection* includes objects from the MFA,H permanent collection that were donated by Alfred C. Glassell, Jr., a Louisiana native who graduated from LSU. The Glassell Collection is considered the most substantial museum collection of African gold in the United States.

The exhibition focuses on African gold from the Akan people of the west coast of Africa, including works created by peoples of the Ivory Coast and Ghana. The objects represent the cultures and art traditions, still flourishing today, of the Fulani people of Mali and the Swahili of Kenya.

Visitors will see exquisitely crafted gold jewelry, royal counselors’ staffs covered in gold leaf, kente cloths, crowns, sandals, swords and figurative sculptures dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Spectacular full-color photomurals offer visitors an understanding of the splendor and abundance of Akan kingdoms, which are still vital today in Ghana.

“Visitors will revel in this exhibition. It presents works associated primarily with royal courts, and the personal items on display offer vast appeal,” notes LSU Museum of Art deputy director Dr. Donna McAlear.

Akan Cultures Examined

Akan cultures share a rich tradition of oral literature, and Akan artists often tap into the ancestral wisdom that is conveyed through proverbs to create their wealth of visual

imagery. As an example, the sankofa bird with its head turned backward is a common image in Akan cultures, representing the idea that in order to move forward, one must reflect upon the past.

Also on view are two Akan crowns, which demonstrate how chiefs used head adornment to distinguish themselves. Akan chiefs typically favored headbands and caps made from imported velvet and covered with numerous gold-leaf ornaments fashioned in various designs, including shells, leaves, flowers, butterflies, lions, Christian crosses and Islamic amulets. Like most Akan art, these figurative forms are intended to teach lessons about the rights and duties of the chief or to demonstrate his best qualities.

This exhibition has been organized by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and its presentation at the LSU Museum of Art is possible due to a generous grant from Mr. and Mrs. Alfred C. Glassell, Jr.

About Alfred C. Glassell, Jr.

A founder of the Transcontinental Gas Pipe Line Corporation, Alfred C. Glassell, Jr., lived in Baton Rouge as a young man and attended Louisiana State University (LSU '34). He distinguished himself as president of the student body and was a member of 13 honor societies and a ROTC commander. Glassell went on to pursue excellence in the petroleum industry and became an avid art collector. He was an aide to General Troy Middleton during World War II and was last on the LSU campus in the 1950s when Middleton became President of LSU. Glassell's father owned the Auto Hotel, an historic downtown Baton Rouge parking garage constructed in the 1920s, which has been incorporated into the site of the new LSU Museum of Art at the Shaw Center for the Arts.

The LSU Museum of Art

The beautiful, expanded LSU Museum of Art opens March 5, 2005, in the Shaw Center for the Arts, featuring a fine and decorative arts collection in 15,000 square feet of gallery space. Started in 1959 by anonymous donor, the museum collection includes more than 3,500 objects with an impressive range, including 17th–20th c. paintings, Newcomb pottery, rare Chinese jade, pre-Civil War New Orleans silver, Inuit sculpture and an array of prints that represent artists and techniques from England, Japan, India and the US. The museum will offer visitors top-tier exhibitions.

Location, Hours & Admission

The LSU Museum of Art is located in the Shaw Center for the Arts at the corner of Convention Street and Lafayette Street in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The museum is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Sunday. On Thursday, the museum is open from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Admission is free for LSU MOA members. Admission fees: \$8 adults; \$6 university students and seniors; \$4 children ages 5-17; children under 5 free.