

Box 951549, Los Angeles, California 90095-1549  
phone 310/825.4288 fax 310/206.7007  
www.fowler.ucla.edu

**Erin Connors**  
erinconnors@arts.ucla.edu  
310/825.4288

For Immediate Release  
November 29, 2016

Spectacular, rare headdresses from Sierra Leone coming to Fowler Museum  
**“Joli! A Fancy Masquerade from Sierra Leone”**  
December 11, 2016–July 16, 2017



Left: Artist Unknown, Freetown, Sierra Leone, Masquerade headdress, circa 1970s. Wood, pigment, wire, fabric, tinsel, fringe, ribbon, metal; Right: Artist unknown, Freetown, Sierra Leone, Masquerade headdress, circa 1970s. Wood, pigment, wire, fabric, tinsel mirrors, fringe, ribbon, metal

Los Angeles, CA — A new exhibition at the Fowler Museum at UCLA will feature a rare group of 11 headdresses worn in masquerades held in Sierra Leone’s capital city of Freetown during the 1970s. The complex headdresses that will be on display in [“Joli! A Fancy Masquerade from Sierra Leone”](#) reflect the blending of cultural influences and peoples in the port city. The Joli masquerade was performed to mark the end of the Muslim month of Ramadan and on other festive occasions.

Created by Joli Society members, each headdress is composed of an elaborate armature made of bent and twisted wire, which was padded with polyurethane foam and then covered with textiles, brocades, velvets, netting, Christmas tinsel, fringe, lace and mirrors to create a fancy superstructure. These superstructures took recognizable shapes, such as a mosque, an elephant, a biplane (which symbolized Western modernity), as well as other mythical or spiritual beings. Lastly, one or more painted wooden face masks were attached to the structure, which was worn on top of the head of the fully dressed performer.

After Sierra Leone achieved independence from Britain in 1961 an influx of young migrants from the countryside moved to Freetown. In response to socioeconomic concerns regarding the integration of these young people, charitable organizations in the city offered food, shelter and a variety of guided activities — including the sponsorship of masquerades — to help youth adjust to urban life. Two charitable groups, The Zorrow Unity Society and the Young Men’s Muslim Association formed the Joli Society to produce a citywide festival to celebrate Eid al-Fitr, the holiday that marks the end of Ramadan, as well as other festive occasions. Members of the society were tasked with helping to create the headdresses that they would wear during the festival’s parades.

During the course of planning this exhibition, the Fowler Museum partnered with the UCLA radiology department’s Translation Research Imaging Center to examine one of the Joli headdresses using a CT scan. This process allows the viewer to see inside the headdress and to appreciate the intricate artistry of the elaborate bent-wire armature. Visitors will be able see the results of using this technology displayed on a monitor in the exhibition.

[“Joli! A Fancy Masquerade from Sierra Leone”](#) was organized by Gassia Armenian, curatorial and research associate at the Fowler Museum at UCLA.

**The Fowler Museum at UCLA** is one of the country’s most respected institutions devoted to exploring the arts and cultures of Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and the Americas. The Fowler is open Wednesdays from noon until 8 pm, and Thursdays through Sundays from noon to 5 pm. The museum is closed Mondays and Tuesdays. The Fowler Museum, part of UCLA Arts, is located in the north part of the UCLA campus. Admission is free. Parking is available for a maximum of \$12 in Lot 4. For more information, the public may call 310-825-4361 or visit [fowler.ucla.edu](http://fowler.ucla.edu).

#### **Select Related Events:**

[Culture Fix: Curator Talk with Gassia Armenian | Friday, January 13, 12 pm](#)

The Joli masquerade originated in the urban port city of Freetown, Sierra Leone. Its elaborate headdresses are unique in their materials and composition. Join Gassia Armenian, Curatorial and Research Associate, Fowler Museum, as she peels away the layers of these intricate masks to reveal their history and artistry.