

# Doran H. Ross

## His Fabulous Fowler Years

Marla C. Berns

*I strongly believe that the best exhibitions are those that actively intervene in people's thinking about the world around them. The creation and presentation of art should make a positive difference in our relationships with the rest of the planet.*

—Doran H. Ross, 1998<sup>1</sup>

**D**oran H. Ross had a long and distinguished engagement with the Fowler Museum, beginning in the late 1970s when it was called the UCLA Museum of Cultural History and was housed in the basement of Haines Hall. He, along with his mentor and UCSB graduate school advisor, Herbert (Skip) M. Cole, co-curated the 1977 landmark traveling exhibition *The Arts of Ghana*, which set a standard for focused exhibitions concentrating on a single geographic area or a specific ethnic group (and was only the second major African exhibition in the museum's history, following on *Black Gods and Kings: Yorùbá Art at UCLA* in 1971). As Cole notes in his essay in this issue, the project was a mammoth undertaking, featuring more than 600 objects borrowed from 102 museums and private collections. This is something I cannot fathom, even having participated in organizing large and complex exhibitions at the Fowler for twenty years. This maiden project set the stage for what I have always thought one of Doran's guiding principles: "More is more is even more." Additionally, the project pioneered an interpretive strategy that became a Fowler trademark: the incorporation of film, videos, slide shows, and photographs to contextualize objects and their original users, makers, purposes, and meanings. *The Arts of Ghana* was also accompanied by the most comprehensive multiauthor publication the museum had produced to date (Cole and Ross 1977), and it was the first exhibition the Fowler traveled. I wonder whether Doran understood then the auspiciousness of his decision to accompany Skip Cole to Ghana and to tackle an exhibition whose monumental success set the stage for his and the museum's future.

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1 Installation view of *The Essential Gourd: African Art from the Obvious to the Ingenious*, 1986. Wight Art Gallery, UCLA. Photo: Unknown photographer, courtesy of the Fowler Museum at UCLA

This view shows how a gourd made by each of the various peoples of the Lower Gongola Valley was "mapped" onto the gallery wall to illustrate their stylistic distinctions and relationships.

When I first met Doran in 1978 in a storeroom in Haines Hall he was a visiting curator and he had already moved on to another exhibition project, much smaller in scope but no less important in terms of its original research and insights, elaborating on one of the art forms introduced in *The Arts of Ghana*. *Fighting with Art: Appliquéd Flags of the Fante Asafo* was scheduled for the museum's modest Haines Hall Gallery 2 in 1979 as part of a series of student-produced projects the museum had launched with funding from the Ahmanson Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities. At the same time, I was preparing my first Fowler exhibition on the museum's Yorùbá collection as part of my year-long graduate student internship. Mine was set to open two months earlier than Doran's in the same gallery and my publication was Volume 1, Number 4 in the UCLA Museum of Cultural History Pamphlet Series while his was Volume 1, Number 5. This may have been the only time I was one step ahead of him! As so many others have mentioned in their essays, initial encounters with Doran remain unforgettable, in part because of his imposing stature but also because even on a casual basis he made a connection and left a strong impression. I can still picture him coming into that classroom-cum-storeroom while I sat at my tiny study carrel and we shared information about our respective projects and decision to pursue research on the arts of Africa.



2 Installation view of *The Essential Gourd: African Art from the Obvious to the Ingenious*, 1986. Wight Art Gallery, UCLA.

Photo: Unknown photographer, courtesy of the Fowler Museum at UCLA

3 Doran modeling the Nigerian decorated gourd I gave him, c. 1987. Such gourds could be strapped around a mother's back to serve as sun bonnets, shielding the heads of babies.

Photo: Marla C. Berns



It is not surprising that in 1981 Doran became the museum's associate director and curator of Africa, Southeast Asia, and Oceanic Arts on the basis of these two earlier projects despite not having had any other formal museum training. Clearly, he had proven himself as a fine young scholar and thoughtful curator and one with a proven capacity to manage the complex logistical details of organizing a major exhibition, producing scholarly essays, and using astute judgment in identifying works to build the collections. The museum took a chance and won. Doran was in the right place at the right time and also was the absolute right person for a museum that had been established with a clear global mandate, an emphasis on interdisciplinarity, and an openness to new approaches for interpreting art and material culture. It suited his temperament and boundless intellectual curiosity to be free of the rigid constraints of either an anthropology museum or an art museum, but rather to participate in shaping one dedicated to cultural history writ large, with a young staff committed to refining and expanding the museum's mission and priorities. Doran inherited the legacy of two

adventurous curatorial predecessors—Ralph Altman and George R. Ellis—and found a willing and enthusiastic partner in the museum's faculty director, Christopher Donnan, an Andean archaeologist. Together they pursued the important priorities of organizing exhibitions and producing scholarly publications, building an audience for the museum on and off campus, and working toward moving the museum out of its rudimentary classroom digs (and borrowed exhibition space across campus) into a purpose-built facility that could house its burgeoning collections and distinctive programmatic mandate.

When I returned to Los Angeles in 1984 after completing my dissertation research in Northeastern Nigeria, I went to visit my friends at the Fowler and to discuss the disposition of some of the objects I had collected in the field, for which I was seeking an institutional



home. As a student of the late UCLA art historian Arnold Rubin, who had already donated much of what he had collected in the Benue River Valley to the museum, I knew that my collection would complement his. At this point Doran had already overseen the implementation of *Igbo Arts: Community and Cosmos* (a second major endeavor initiated by Herbert M. Cole with Chike G. Aniakor) and was actively nurturing other new projects, especially those, like the one on the Igbo, that drew on new field research. Meeting with Doran about my nearly three years of fieldwork led to an invitation that I organize a small exhibition for Gallery 2 to coincide with the 1986 ACASA Triennial at UCLA, to be hosted by the Museum of Cultural History. The project would be based around the women's art of decorating gourds that I had researched among more than twenty-five different peoples living across the Lower Gongola Valley (Fig. 1). An exhibition and book, *The Essential Gourd: Art and History in Northeastern Nigeria* (Berns and Hudson 1986) would combine my early 1980s research with that done by Rubin's wife Barbara in 1969 and 1971. I paused writing my dissertation so I could dive into the rich data, photographs, and films I had collected about this tradition, which had flourished to a remarkable degree in this region and was as yet very little known. Barbara Rubin Hudson had already given a collection of these gourds to the museum, and I was facilitating a donation of mine as well. As many others describe in their essays here, Doran's management style was to let the curatorial process unfold and to participate by encouraging a creative and improvisational outcome.

4 Doran Ross and Christopher Donnan in the new Fowler Museum of Cultural History offices, 1993. Photo: Unknown photographer, courtesy of Betsy D. Quick

5 Elephant shrine in Doran's office, ca. 1992. Photo: Unknown photographer, courtesy of Betsy D. Quick

My modest assignment became a large one when the main exhibition commissioned for the 1986 ACASA Triennial did not materialize, and we shifted gears to filling a space nearly three times that of Gallery 2! This allowed for Doran's "more is more" dictum to reign supreme and soon we were looking at every African gourd in the Fowler's holdings, surprising ourselves with what we found, and creating a second exhibition that featured everything from musical instruments, smoking pipes, beaded regalia, and more from across the continent (Fig. 2). We drove up the California coast to Paso Robles to visit Al and Edna Heer's Pumpkin Farm and Gourd Place to source examples of the many *Lagenaria siceraria* shapes they grew related to African cultigens; several were installed on the exhibition's dynamic entry wall. We both also discovered the many ways "crafters" were turning gourds into cute ducks, penguins, and more, which Doran called "gourd abuse." Our project would be a



corrective to what Americans knew about gourds (or calabashes) and reveal their remarkable transformation by African artists. We renamed the two-part exhibition: *The Essential Gourd: African Art from the Obvious to the Ingenious*. The intense work of getting this all done in the short time we had, including a lengthy companion volume I authored with the contributions of Barbara Rubin

Hudson on the gourds from Northeastern Nigeria, was made rewarding with Doran's input, sense of fun, and wordplay (Fig. 3), as was the chance to work closely with Betsy D. Quick (director of education) and other museum staff on an in-depth interpretive presentation. Doran's instincts about the appeal of an exhibition featuring such humble but gloriously ornamented objects from a remote part of Nigeria were certainly spot-on, and the exhibition garnered a five-venue tour and the publication was reprinted to serve the expanded audience.

I was not the only graduate student Doran entrusted with an effort of this magnitude, and it is a testament to his openness and generosity that he gave us such opportunities so early in our careers. After all, he had been given the same chance at the beginning of his, and he had already established a paradigm for exhibition development that incorporated new and exciting field research, fresh interpretive perspectives, and a choice of subjects and genres that pushed beyond the typical emphasis on the "fine art masterpiece" that dominated most American museum programming. Director Christopher Donnan, who as a UCLA professor divided his time among teaching, archaeological research, and Fowler oversight, gave space for Doran to supervise the museum's day-to-day operations and promote its ambitious, innovative programming (Fig. 4). As several authors in this issue attest, Doran was masterful at intuiting the potential of particular exhibition ideas, whether of his own origination or those of colleagues he knew and respected, and then equally adept at finding the support and resources to make them happen.

Knowing Doran well in those early years of his tenure in the 1980s, I was stunned by his work ethic and long 12-hour days. He started at 5 AM and left at 5 PM, enjoying the quiet of the morning hours and the chance to confer with colleagues on the east coast. He rarely ate lunch and once he left the office for home chose not to rehash the day but rather to relax with a tall gin and tonic and to think. He had an incredible capacity to focus and to be present 100%, and it was this skill that enabled him to accomplish so much and set a pace and level of performance far beyond what would be expected for a museum of the Fowler's modest size.

During this same early period, UCLA's administration, especially Chancellor Charles E. Young and Vice Chancellor for Institutional

**6** Doran riding Dumbo in his office, ca. 1992.  
Photo: Unknown photographer, courtesy of Betsy D. Quick

**7** Johannes Segogela (b. 1936, South Africa)  
*Apartheid's Funeral* (1994)  
Wood, paint; dimensions variable  
Fowler Museum at UCLA, X94.31.1-27; Gift of Patricia Altman in Memory of Franklin D. Murphy, Chancellor of UCLA, 1960–1968.  
Photo: Don Cole, courtesy of the Fowler Museum at UCLA.



Relations Elwin Swenson (to whom the Fowler reported), made building a permanent home for the museum a priority, sharing this goal when they appointed Donnan to be director in 1975. Later, when Doran joined Chris Donnan in this effort, the two began the process of crafting a program to guide the design of the new building, a strategy for meeting its fundraising goals and challenges (studies reported it couldn't be done), a plan to implement a digital database for the collection in anticipation of moving it, and establishing a blueprint for an inaugural suite of four exhibitions to fill its new galleries (each with its own publication). I think it is fair to say that the outsize plans for the opening program rested on the goal of signaling a new identity and role for the Fowler Museum of Cultural History on the UCLA campus. When it officially opened in September 1992, Chancellor Young called it "the premier cultural facility in the Los Angeles area dedicated to non-Western artistic traditions" (Muchnic 1992: 5). In a review in the *Los Angeles Times*, art critic William Wilson (1993) described the new building as "space to spread its riches and show what it can really do as an institution of national and international significance."

Among the four opening exhibitions, the largest and most expansive was *Elephant: The Animal and Its Ivory in African Culture*, which Doran curated as part of a broad cross-cultural, interdisciplinary collaboration, funded with a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (and others). Conversations about this exhibition dated back to 1985, when Doran spoke with colleagues Skip Cole and Arnold Rubin about a project that would explore "the relationship of animals to the material culture, art, and ritual of Africa" (Ross 1992: xx). They discussed certain criteria for determining the choice of animals to feature and the requirement that their presence extend to a range of African cultures. As

Doran reflected on these discussions, "Significantly, the elephant was not included, losing out to the leopard as a representative of Mammalia" (Ross 1992: xx). Basically, the elephant was "too cute," given all the ways it conjured up Dumbo, Jumbo, and Babar. But, upon further reflection, the huge animal's extraordinary qualities and pervasiveness won out, and the project's goals were to counter false stereotypes about it and emphasize instead the remarkable dimensions of its cultural, intellectual, and scientific significance as well as the specter of its potential extinction.

Unlike most of the other exhibitions Doran organized before and after, largely around his own considerable field documentation, this project necessitated a deep and sustained dive into a subject of vast scope and complexity that spanned the continent. Never seeking to "go it alone," he invited a long list of colleagues to write for the accompanying 424-page book (the largest and heaviest the museum had yet produced, with nineteen chapters and eighteen "interleaves"—the name for the mini-essays that could highlight focused topics that have become a mainstay of Fowler publications).<sup>2</sup> Doran committed to writing three of the book's chapters himself, and as Henrietta Cosentino, the museum's senior editor at the time recalls, "Doran wanted this volume to be

8 Installation view of *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*, Fowler Museum, 1995.  
Photo: Dennis J. Nervig, courtesy of the Fowler Museum at UCLA





9 Installation view of *Sleeping Beauties: African Headrests and Other Highlights from the Jerome L. Joss Collection* at UCLA, Fowler Museum, 1993. Photo: Dennis J. Nervig, courtesy of the Fowler Museum at UCLA

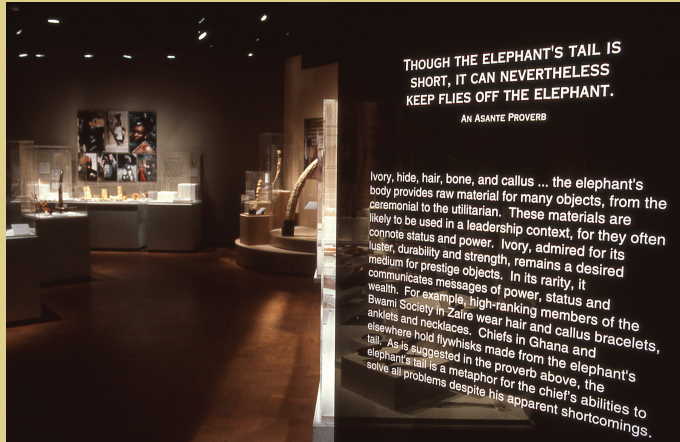
as comprehensive and as perfect as humanly possible. He couldn't bear the thought of missing one word said about the subject—a possible revelation.<sup>3</sup> This is partly why it was not published until after the exhibition closed, but who could blame Doran—not only the consummate researcher but also charged with overseeing three other books and exhibitions opening simultaneously, and preparing for the new museum's grand launch.

*Elephant* was perhaps the paradigmatic Fowler team-based effort, given the many individuals across a range of disciplines who were consulted and the herculean efforts of the Fowler's staff to brainstorm about the interpretation and presentation of its exhibition narrative (see Interleaf). Doran notably plumbed the depths of the Fowler's own collections to build the exhibition's checklist and also raised funds from the museum's key donors to buy select additional objects. With more than 250 objects and 70 lenders, this was the Fowler's capstone inaugural effort, which William Wilson (1993) described as "mesmerizing" and the "most ambitious organizational effort ever concocted by this museum and one of the most moving." Henrietta Cosentino also shared a fond memory of experiencing the exhibition:

I recall that, leaving the exhibition, you came eyeball to eyeball with a closeup of an elephant's eye. It was the most poignant moment of a show that was already momentous and almost too much to absorb. Encountering that elephant's eye was like catching a glimpse of Doran, unveiled—his shy soul for a split second naked and unflinching.<sup>4</sup>

Staff and anyone who visited the new Fowler before the exhibition opened (and even long afterward) may remember, as I do, the shrine Doran created in a bookshelf in his office as an ode to all things pachyderm (Fig. 5). It was de rigueur to bring him a treasured elephant tchotchke and to search for them wherever you went to find the most obscure or inventive examples (I think this gifting tradition went on for years, as did Doran's penchant for regifting things back to others). It was quite hilarious to see him riding his bouncing Dumbo to the squeals of kids and adults alike (Fig. 6). Doran became, simply put, besotted with elephants! It is to his credit that no matter the seriousness of his scholarly goals, fun was never far from center stage. A project on the African elephant, even if he initially worried the subject was too "cute," proved to be of equally outsize consequence. In keeping with his more is more maxim, the project's funding also allowed for an elementary school initiative, "Elephant Tracks," which ensured that participating teachers and their classes could attend special programs at the Los Angeles Zoo and the Los Angeles Country Natural History Museum as well as at the Fowler. And, in true Doran Ross fashion, he even compiled a two-sided CD of fifteen classical and modern musical compositions to accompany the exhibition, including the likes of Igor Stravinsky's "Circus Polka for a Young Elephant" (1942) or Henry Mancini's "Baby Elephant Walk" (1961) written for the film *Hatari*.

# Interleaf: Elephant: The Animal and Its Ivory in African Culture



The exhibition was presented in the Fowler Museum's Jerome L. Joss Gallery and was organized around a number of thematic sections, including those that offered a focused look at the artistic transformation of elephant imagery by specific ethnic groups, how the elephant's body offered many raw materials for making objects, and the history of European expansion on the continent that led to the overseas trade violently exploiting the animal's ivory.

(top to bottom)

A: Focus on Asante art

B: Text introducing the section on the materials of the elephant's body used for making objects

C: Focus on the Cameroon Grassfields

D: Focus on the Ivory Trade

All installation photographs by Dennis J. Nervig, 1992, courtesy of the Fowler Museum at UCLA.





**10** Installation view of *Music in the Life of Africa, 1999*.  
 Photo: Jonathan Molvik, courtesy of the Fowler Museum at UCLA

In 1990, Doran was promoted to deputy director and curator of African art, a dual position he held until 1996 when he was made the museum's first nonfaculty full-time director. Until he hired Africanist art historian Mary (Polly) Nooter Roberts in 1999 to serve as the Fowler's first chief curator, Doran continued his active curatorial role and also served as project director on nearly every major exhibition and publication effort, regardless of geographical focus, until his retirement in 2001 (totaling thirty-six on African or African Diaspora topics plus several that opened post-retirement). A selection of these key 1990s endeavors is described in the essays that follow this overview.

Doran also played an equally significant role in building the Fowler's permanent collection, especially in the course of conducting research for specific projects, starting with *The Arts of Ghana*. Cognizant of the controversies and ethical dilemmas around field collecting, Doran did so strategically and astutely, with careful attention to sources, accessibility, and the "nonprivileged" status of certain

categories of objects, and only after careful consultation with owners, artists, and project collaborators. Beyond aesthetic considerations, he defined three other principles that guided selections: "the need to address underappreciated genres of art, the interpretive potential of an object or group of objects, and even possible audience interest" (Berns, Roberts, and Ross 2010: 191). When he began collecting for the Fowler in the late 1970s, his emphasis was on the "popular arts" of Ghana and this is reflected in the museum's now-extensive holdings of *asafo* flags and *kente* (the royal African cloth and its myriad manifestations in African American culture), two of his primary arenas of sustained research and writing (see Forni and Quick, this issue). These early efforts set a precedent for much collecting to follow, often in support of identifying key visual materials needed to amplify the interpretive themes integral to exhibition narratives as defined by their curators (see Roberts, this issue; see also Berns, Roberts, and Ross 2010: 193–96). Increasingly, Doran was also attentive to the work of contemporary African artists, especially those responding to timely political and social issues and reflecting on personal values, as was certainly the case with Kwame Akoto, a.k.a. Almighty God (see Forni, this issue). During his many official trips to Africa, Doran seized upon these opportunities, whether collecting the charming paintings of the Tinga Tinga collective in Tanzania (see Kratz, this issue) or going to South Africa in 1994 after the fall of apartheid and the democratic election of Nelson Mandela to acquire key works marking this momentous transition (Fig. 7). Several of his other wide-ranging collecting pursuits included such popular forms as commemorative textiles, painted barber signs, and soccer memorabilia, especially from the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa (the first African nation to host the soccer finals).





*Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*, which opened in 1995, was one of Doran's most intense preoccupations, as we've learned here from Donald Cosentino (see First Word, this issue). He helped facilitate the acquisition of a distinguished collection of Vodou arts from Virgil Young, which became a highlight of the exhibition. A substantial number of other objects were purchased directly from and with the support of Vodou religious specialists, which were essential to building the checklist of a stunning 900 objects that filled the displays, altars, and ritual space of the installation (Fig. 8; see Berns, Roberts, and Ross 2010: 193). Without Doran's acuity in these matters, respect for the religious traditions in which such things are so deeply embedded, and insistence on collaborating transparently with Haitian colleagues and the project's co-curators (Cosentino and the late anthropologist/art historian Marilyn Houlberg), an exhibition like this one would never have had the power and resonance to do its intended work of demystifying a religion as profoundly misunderstood as "voodoo." The Fowler's talented exhibition designer, David Mayo, who accompanied Doran and Don Cosentino to Haiti, has these recollections:

1994. The Daewoo pitches and pounds down yet another destroyed road of Cité Soleil, a suburb of Port-au-Prince. Doran Ross (project director), Don Cosentino (curator) and I are on our way to meet with another *oungan* (Vodou practitioner). His *ounfo* (ceremonial space) is purported to contain particularly good Vodou altars. We are not disappointed. I am desperately trying to understand the aesthetics of these masterworks of collage. Don is diving ever deeper into the beautiful madness of this complex belief system. Doran is exploring the principles that underly an art that springs from the confines of this thing called Vodou. Doran studies the detritus as well as the masterworks. He distills this mélange into forms of art worthy of

II Installation view of *Music in the Life of Africa, 1999*.  
Photo: Jonathan Molvik, courtesy of the Fowler Museum at UCLA

The final room of the exhibition, "Music to Hear," offered visitors a chance to make their own music with instruments supplied by the Fowler alongside various kinds of instructions and listening stations.

connoisseurship. Don explores the brilliance of a street aesthetic colliding with religion. I find myself slipping steadily into a disturbing fever dream. What will come of this?

We careen through the labyrinthine world of Port-au-Prince seeking artifacts, images, and feelings that reflect the essence of Vodou. The Iron Market, the National Palace, the upscale galleries of Pétion-Ville, private collectors, Vodou ceremonies, but especially *ounfo* after *ounfo*. Doran brought a cool, calculating eye to our explorations. His approach was respectfully playful: an appreciation of the seriousness of Vodou as a way of life while delighting in the eccentric imagery that defines it. It was a point of view that helped me understand the sophistication of the art that populates Vodou. Developing an exhibition as unusual as the *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou* was a great opportunity to witness Doran's peculiarly obsessive approach to art. Something I'm not likely to forget.<sup>5</sup>

Beyond his own role in acquiring objects for the museum, Doran also facilitated significant gifts of art from long-term patrons who chose the Fowler as a home for their carefully assembled

collections (Berns, Roberts, and Ross 2010: 196–98; Berns 2014: 28–29). For example, the 1993 exhibition *Sleeping Beauties: African Headrests and Other Highlights from the Jerome L. Joss Collection at UCLA* (Fig. 9) featured promised gifts from Joss, a major patron who also had helped fund the new Fowler building and has its largest gallery named after him. The headrests and other sculptural works he donated from Africa and Indonesia were characterized by Doran as “a major asset to our collections.” Art historian William J. Dewey was invited to curate the presentation of “sleeping beauties” drawing on his field research among the Shona and other southern African peoples and to author the accompanying publication.<sup>6</sup> Doran organized the installation of Joss’s other gift “highlights,” and edited a second book *Visions of Africa: The Jerome L. Joss Collection of African Art at UCLA* (1994), which included catalogue entries written by a long list of twenty-eight specialists on particular object-types.

Acquiring this substantial collection of African headrests highlighted another relatively unsung category of “personal object,” whose functionality and artistry are found across the continent (with the earliest examples from Egypt dating to the third millennium BCE; see Dewey 1993: 30–31, Fig. 1). Doran relished the close friendship and collegial relationship he had with Joss, taking pleasure in helping to source these wonderfully diverse objects that reveal, as do gourds, ceramics, and other practical genres with domestic and ritual purposes, the wide-ranging inventiveness of African artists (as well as artists from across Asia and the Pacific). There is wonderful irony in the fact that in Jerome Joss’s earlier advertising career he coined the term “Posturepedic” for Sealy’s distinctively firm bedding and that his singular collecting obsession was also about making sleep more comfortable! In Henrietta Cosentino’s biographical sketch on Joss she wrote that, “With this loving collection of headrests, he awakens our aesthetic attention, helps us see culture in new ways, and even sets us to dreaming” (1993: 13).

Helen and Robert Kuhn were also long-term Fowler patrons and major collectors of African art. They had a singular passion for African musical instruments, especially because of their capacity to double as spectacular sculpture—each instrument a work of art

in its own right. Gifting their 144-object collection to the Fowler in 1991 and 1992 might have simply offered the museum an opportunity to exhibit a selection of its finest examples. But, instead, in Doran’s inimitable way, he used the donation as a springboard for developing a citywide celebration of Africa’s musical legacy. He wisely drew on faculty in UCLA’s important ethnomusicology department, one of the first and most distinguished in the country. He assembled planning teams that included scholars who studied the musical traditions of Africa and the various African-influenced musical genres recognized in America and further afield in the Diaspora. Always thinking of how more can be more, Doran spearheaded the umbrella project the Heritage of African Music, which included exhibitions at the Fowler and at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art featuring the Kuhn’s Africa-based collection and a third on Diasporic traditions at the California African American Museum. The Fowler’s eight-month-long exhibition, *Music in the Life of Africa*, was organized around case studies that were both thematic and geographic/ethnographic, each highlighting key instrument types contextualized with image and sound. Figure 10 shows a focus on The Musical Art of the Griot within the section on Religion, with photographs and video featuring *balafons* in use. The final room in the exhibition offered a range of drums, rattles, gongs, thumb pianos and more to be played by visitors to make their own music (Fig. 11). Offering such hands-on experiences, especially to children and families, was a key pedagogical component and a reflection of Doran’s (and Betsy Quick’s) insistence that exhibitions should also be participatory and fun. The Heritage of African Music was also complemented by extensive performances, workshops, lectures, and a collaborative arts and music program developed with the Los Angeles Unified School District. Along with *Wrapped in Pride* (see Quick, this issue), which closed just before *Music in the Life of Africa*, such expansive community-based efforts demonstrate Doran’s extraordinary vision, leadership, and prodigious working style.

Another thing Doran prioritized to great effect was scheduling complementary exhibitions to run simultaneously so they could play off each other to enrich visitor engagement. Smaller exhibitions

12 Installation view of *Muffler Men, Muñecos, and Other Welded Wonders*, Fowler Museum, 1999–2000. Photo: Don Cole, courtesy of the Fowler Museum at UCLA

This view highlights *Duck*, by Kal Mekkawi of Affordable Muffler and Auto Repair, private collection, and a series of dogs by various artists.





were organized to riff on larger endeavors, especially traveling exhibitions the Fowler took from other museums. For example, alongside the 1999–2000 show *Recycled/Re-Seen: Folk Art from the Global Scrap Heap* (Museum of International Folk Art, Santa Fe), Doran invited UCLA graduate students Patrick A. Polk and Timothy C. Correll to co-curate *Muffler Men, Muñecos, and Other Welded Wonders* (Fig. 12). Hiding in plain sight, this project brought attention to the whimsical, eye-catching sculptures made by local, mostly Latino welders who repurposed cast-off auto parts. Similarly, the 1998–1999 exhibition *Bicycles: History, Beauty, Fantasy* (Pryor Dodge Bicycle Collection) prompted the companion project, also curated by Patrick A. Polk, *Cruisin', Stylin', and Pedal-Scrapin': The Art of the Lowrider Bicycle*—to the delight of young and teenage visitors. These pairings show how Doran improvised to

highlight the often-unsung local manifestations of global artistic and cultural phenomena. They also show, of course, that more is more is indeed more.

I have not mentioned the role of serendipity in Doran's working process but certainly it, too, infused his timing, curatorial choices, and success. This is especially true of one final project in 2000 that deserves mentioning, *Main Event: The Ali/Foreman Extravaganza Through the Lens of Howard L. Bingham*, which sprung from Doran's entrepreneurial spirit and responsiveness to the power of storytelling (Fig. 13). In 1999, his research assistant

**13** Installation view of *Main Event: The Ali/Foreman Extravaganza Through the Lens of Howard L. Bingham*, Fowler Museum, 2000.

Photo: Jonathan Malvik, courtesy of the Fowler Museum at UCLA

**14** left–right: Howard L. Bingham, Doran H. Ross, and Muhammed Ali at a private museum event, 2000.

Photo: Unknown photographer, courtesy of Betsy D. Quick





15 Installation view of *Art of the Lega*, Fowler Museum, 2001. Photo: Don Cole, courtesy of the Fowler Museum at UCLA

Linda Lee was running down the Los Angeles-based photographer Howard Bingham to get permission to use his photographs for *Wrapped in Pride: Ghanaian Kente and African American Identity*. Her tenacity paid off when Bingham arrived at the Fowler with images in hand and met Doran, who was duly impressed with Bingham's work and learned about his extensive documentation of the famous 1974 heavyweight boxing match in Kinshasa between Muhammed Ali and George Foreman. Bingham and Ali had been friends since 1962, and as Ali's personal photographer, Bingham accompanied him to what became an eight-week extravaganza in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (then Zaire). In typical Doran Ross fashion, he saw a potentially great traveling exhibition opportunity with huge popular appeal and took on the job himself of culling through between 6,000 and 7,000 images to arrive at the final 130. Moreover, as he wrote in the opening text panel: "This exhibition is concerned less with the events in the ring than with the politics of sports, celebrity journalism, celebrity journalists, the rigors of training, the devotion of fans, and even the relatively quiet moments between public activities." *Main Event* was the first US exhibition to spotlight Bingham's extraordinary photographs and to offer such intimate portraits of Ali, Foreman, and others who participated. Not surprisingly, the show garnered enormous press and attendance, and the opening program featured a full-house

public lecture by Bingham (Fig. 14). Importantly, *Main Event* also offered a glimpse into the sinister regime of Zaire's president, Mobutu Sese Seko, who exploited the match for his own self-promotion and siphoned funds from his failing national treasury to guarantee a spectacular purse for each fighter as well as operated a prison underneath the very stadium where the fight was held (see Lemons 2000).

Even though Doran officially retired at the end of UCLA's fiscal year in June 2001, he had initiated the planning for several future exhibitions: *Art of the Lega: Meaning and Metaphor in Central Africa*—scheduled to open in October 2001; *Ways of the Rivers: Arts and Environment of the Niger Delta* in 2002 (see Peek and Anderson, this issue); and *A Saint in the City: Sufi Arts of Urban Senegal* in 2003 (see Roberts, this issue). For *Art of the Lega*, Doran had encouraged Jay T. Last, starting in 1999, to donate the collection of 318 examples of Lega arts he had amassed over a forty-year period, "making the Fowler one of the finest repositories of Lega art anywhere in the world" (Berns 2014: 28–29). Doran had invited Elisabeth Cameron (a former UCLA art history graduate student who had worked on two earlier Fowler projects; see Cameron, this issue) to guest curate the exhibition, which was produced in partnership with the Nelson Atkins Museum of Art (Fig. 15). The gift was completed under my watch in 2013, and we traveled the exhibition that same year to the musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac in Paris. Jay and Deborah Last, patrons of the museum since the early 1970s, remain among the Fowler's most important supporters and donors of art.

It bears repeating that Doran's multifaceted legacy at the Fowler Museum may be best expressed through the collections he facilitated and built—permanent resources for study, teaching,

interpretation, artist interventions, and dissemination via myriad forms of outreach, whether educational programming, exhibitions, or publications. During field trips to Ghana he himself amassed notable collections of Fante *asafo* flags and Akan kente cloth that are among the most significant in the world not just for their range and artistry but because of the documentation that accompanies them (see Quick and Forni, this issue). He also helped secure significant gifts of Akan *forowa* and goldweights as well as the paintings of popular Kumasi-based sign painter, Almighty God (see Forni, this issue). There are many other collections for which he was responsible, but perhaps most groundbreaking was the Joint Textile Collecting Project in which the Fowler partnered with the Musée National du Mali from 1987–1990 to acquire textiles for both institutions (see Hoffman and Kratz, this issue). Doran also supported a second collecting initiative by art historian Barbara E. Frank in 1991 in the Fologa region of Mali, where she assembled a comprehensive representation of pottery types also for the Musée National du Mali; little did he know that this endeavor would inspire a major shift in her research over the subsequent thirty years, focusing on the potters of the Fologa (see Frank, forthcoming).

This overview essay summarizes many of the ways Doran actualized the Fowler's mission, priorities, and goals over the course of his tenure, helping build for the museum a distinctive and unparalleled position in the cultural landscape of Los Angeles. In an essay Doran wrote for *UCLA Magazine* in 1997, not long after he assumed the "official" directorship of the Fowler, he said:

In our exhibitions and public programs, we try to be guided by audience-embracing objectives ... Art is one very telling way to explore the rich heritages that all of us may claim, the visual resonances and renaissances we readily find in our own backyard, especially here in Los Angeles, one of the most culturally diverse of all cities (Ross 1997: 22).

The foundation he built, working closely with the museum's staff and many collaborators locally as well as from around the world, set the stage for the Fowler's future trajectory and growth. When I became director following Doran's retirement in 2001, after having partnered with the museum on a number of exhibition projects, some of my and some of the Fowler's origination, the transition was fluid because I subscribed to many of the museum's already established values and guiding principles (although I am not an equal proponent of Doran's "more is more is more" maxim!). I am grateful for all he taught me and for the constancy of his support before and then during my own Fowler tenure. He stepped away to let me develop my own priorities and leadership style, only intervening when asked. He came to almost every Fowler opening and was always a welcome presence at the institution that was such an indelible part of his life. I do want to add that, lest anyone think that Doran never got angry or expressed his displeasure, I can attest to the phone calls and occasional letters where he spoke his mind about something that involved him. Others have experienced his strong views and persuasive arguments. Why should we expect anyone with Doran's level of passion, commitment, and engagement to settle for anything less than the best and what he believed to be the correct path forward? David Mayo, who worked with him so closely, recalls Doran's tactics when he wanted a different result:

I sat across from his desk and made my pitch. The conversation proceeded as one would expect and then I was confronted by THE

PAUSE. A sudden full stop and interlude of silence from him ... It was a disarming moment that effectively created a freeze frame during a conversation. Along the way I learned the intricacies of THE PAUSE. He used it judiciously but to great effect.<sup>7</sup>

And, equally strategic in my view, Doran liked to keep meetings short and set his office thermostat accordingly to a near deep freeze!

Doran was an extraordinary mentor, colleague, and friend, and I feel blessed to have been one of the beneficiaries of his generosity, attention, and affection. There have been times over the past year of pandemic challenges that I wished I could pick up the phone and call him, or talk over lunch at his favorite Italian restaurant. I know I will think of him often and smile about what he might think or say about the Fowler or the field of African art studies, and their futures. My home is graced with the beautiful gourds he gave me, my "stop smoking" Almighty God cat paintings, the Ghanaian "wives" that used to grace his living room. He has left me with so many memories to savor and enjoy. I will miss him, always.

#### Notes

- 1 An excerpt of comments made by Doran H. Ross upon receiving the Culture of Liberation Award from the Center for the Study of Political Graphics, Los Angeles, 1998.
- 2 According to Henrietta Cosentino (the Fowler's senior editor at the time and editor of *Elephant*), the idea for the "interleaf" came from its use in Susan Vogel's *Africa Explores* (1991).
- 3 Henrietta Cosentino, personal communication, 2021.
- 4 Henrietta Cosentino, personal communication, 2021.
- 5 David Mayo, personal communication, 2021.
- 6 [Ed. note] And in a startling act of prescience, Doran hired Leslie Ellen Jones as a freelance copy editor for the volume, some dozen years before she became the executive editor of *African Arts*. She was doomed from the start.
- 7 David Mayo, personal communication, 2021.

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