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For Immediate Use:
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Fowler In Focus: The Art of Hair in Africa
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Fowler In Focus: The Art of Hair in Africa brings together a selection of the Fowler Museum's African hair adornments and an award-winning contemporary film by Ghanaian-American artist Akosua Adoma Owusu. This juxtaposition examines the potential of hair—its styling and ornamentation—to function as an important form of social communication, contributing to the construction of identity and the expression of cultural affinity.



Left: Comb (*kan-kan*), Likely Djuka peoples, Surinam, Godo Holo, 20th century, wood. Fowler Museum at UCLA. Gift of William Lloyd Davis and the Rogers Family Foundation

Middle: Comb, Asante peoples, Ghana, Circa 1900, wood. Fowler Museum at UCLA. Gift of Franklin D. and Judith H. Murphy

Right: Comb, Chokwe peoples, Democratic Republic of Congo, West Kasai province, Tshikapa, wood. Fowler Museum at UCLA

Finely crafted hairpins and combs from the Fowler collection reflect the great amount of care and attention that African peoples, both in Africa and its Diaspora, have long lavished upon already elaborate coiffures. Many of these combs are made of prestige materials, including beads, copper wire, and ivory, and they are carefully embellished with bas-relief geometric patterns or representations of animal or human forms—important elements that may convey information about the wearer.

Owusu's film *Me Broni Ba (My White Baby, 2009)* reminds us of the important roles that hair plays everywhere, not solely in Africa. Together, the hair ornaments and the film allow us to compare the role of hair in different time frames and sets of circumstances. They present diverse forms of hair styling; address changing ideas of beauty and identity; and highlight the dynamism and reinvention that are still so often overlooked when considering the arts of Africa. *Me Broni Ba* was acquired by the Fowler Museum in 2015.

About the Artist: Adoma Akosua Owusu

Akosua Adoma Owusu is an award-winning filmmaker of Ghanaian descent whose short films have been screened throughout North America, Europe, Africa, and Asia. She earned master of fine arts degrees in both film/video and fine arts from the California Institute of the Arts in 2008 and began her career as a post-production assistant on Chris Rock's HBO documentary "Good Hair" (2009). Soon thereafter she transitioned to making her own short, experimental films. Owusu has been the recipient of many awards, most notably, the African Movie Academy Award for Best Short Film in 2013 for her film *Kwaku Ananse*. Her films have been exhibited and are held in numerous university and museum collections, including the Whitney Museum of Art, MOCADA, the University of Pennsylvania, and Yale University. Recently Owusu has been focusing on her Kickstarter project "Damn the Man, Save the Rex!" aimed at saving Ghana's oldest cinema house and renovating it as a venue for art, music, and film. She is also currently working on her first feature-length film.

This exhibition is organized by Gemma Rodrigues, curator of African Arts, and Erica Jones, curatorial assistant of African Arts, 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 through Sundays, from noon to 5 p.m.; and on Thursdays, from noon until 8 p.m. 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.

Related Events

Sunday, June 7, 1–4 pm

Kids in the Courtyard: Craft a Comb

Get inspired by the beautiful combs on view in *The Art of Hair in Africa* and then create your own lovely hair adornments.

Thursday, June 18, 12 pm

Culture Fix: The Art of Hair in Africa

In this gallery talk, co-curator Erica Jones discusses shifting ideals of beauty and the role of hair adornment in Africa from the colonial period to today.