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June 3, 2009

*Butabu: Adobe Architecture of West Africa, Photographs by James Morris*  
Opens Apr. 22 at Fowler Museum at UCLA

For centuries, complex earthen structures, many of them quite massive, have been built in the Sahel region of western Africa, an area encompassing parts of Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Togo, Benin, Ghana, and Burkina Faso. Made of earth mixed with water, these buildings display a remarkable diversity of form and originality. In *Butabu: Adobe Architecture of West Africa, Photographs by James Morris*—on view at the Fowler Museum at UCLA from Apr. 22–July 15, 2007—fifty lush, large-scale photographs offer a stunning visual survey of these structures, from monumental mosques to family homes.

In 1999 and 2000, Morris spent several months in Africa traveling to remote villages and desert communities to photograph these organically shaped, labor-intensive structures. During his time in the Sahel region, Morris created a typological record of regional earthen buildings, as well as an artist's rendering of West African architecture that reflects the sensuous, surreal, and sculptural quality of these distinctive buildings.

Several images of ambitious religious buildings—like the Friday Mosque in Djenne, Mali, the largest earthen building in the world; the towering Friday Mosque in Agadez, Niger; and the iconic Djinguereber Mosque in Timbuktu, Mali—flaunt a grandiosity that seems to push the physical limits of earthen architecture. Photographs of more humble structures, like private homes or neighborhood mosques and churches, display highly expressive and stylish buildings, often decorated with intricate painting, grillwork, or relief designs.

Interestingly, these African buildings share many qualities now much discussed in contemporary Western architectural circles: sustainability, sculptural form, and the participation of the community in their conception, fabrication, and preservation.

The term *butabu*—which describes the process of moistening earth with water in preparation for building—emphasizes the human presence as intrinsic to the creation and maintenance of these structures. The array of rich surface textures in these images are vivid markers of the earth used to make these structures and the continual communal effort required to sustain them, as they are threatened by the uncertainties of weather and the encroachment of Western technology.

In Morris's sophisticated compositions the expressive structures sharply lit by the African sun remind viewers of the landscape from which they have been built for centuries. The modern existence of these buildings is a reflection of their sustainability and usefulness and an affirmation of a vital, resourceful, and creative culture. Morris's vivid, large-scale images (most are in the range of 32 x 45 inches) convey the dramatic nature of these buildings and reveal them as aesthetic treasures as well as architecture with contemporary relevance.

Morris is a British photographer whose work centers on the built environment and the cultural landscape. His photographs are in the permanent collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum, the British Council, Princeton University, and many other private collections. The exhibition is accompanied by the book *Butabu: Adobe Architecture of West Africa, Photographs* by James Morris published in 2003 by Princeton Architectural Press.

*Butabu: Adobe Architecture of West Africa, Photographs* by James Morris is organized and toured by Curatorial Assistance Traveling Exhibitions (CATE), Pasadena, California. Support for the Los Angeles presentation was provided by the Shirley and Ralph Shapiro Director's Discretionary Fund and Manus, the support group of the Fowler Museum.

*Butabu: Adobe Architecture of West Africa, Photographs* by James Morris will be on view in the Fowler Museum's Lucas Gallery. The Museum 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's School of the Arts and Architecture, is located in the north part of the UCLA campus. Admission is free. Parking is available for a maximum of \$8 in Lot 4. For more information, the public may call (310) 825-4361 or visit [fowler.ucla.edu](http://fowler.ucla.edu).

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