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For Immediate Use

*Fowler to Present West Coast Solo Museum Exhibition Debut of
Celebrated Artist El Anatsui Apr. 22*

"It's hard to think of many found-object artists who have achieved work as intricately made, culturally resonant and visually sumptuous as El Anatsui's."

Raphael Rubinstein, *Art in America*, May 2006

El Anatsui is one of Africa's most influential artists, recently named by Britain's *The Independent* as one of the fifty greatest cultural figures shaping the continent. His work considers aspects of Africa's history, drawing simultaneously on traditional idioms, especially from Ghana, and contemporary western art. 'El Anatsui: Gawu'—on view at the Fowler Museum at UCLA from Apr. 22–Aug. 26, 2007—features eight recent, large-scale works by the artist.

The pieces in 'El Anatsui: Gawu' make use of large quantities of discarded everyday materials, such as metal liquor bottle wrappers and tops and flattened food tins, stitched together and transformed to create new works of stunning originality. These huge, undulating metallic tapestries also recall the Ghanaian tradition of weaving and assembling kente cloth. Explains Anatsui, "Art grows out of each particular situation and I believe that artists are better off working with whatever their environment throws up."

In each place they are installed, Anatsui's works take on subtly different forms, as the pieces are draped or situated anew. Included in this exhibition are several examples of his monumental textile-like wall pieces, including two new works. Also on display are two installations: *Crumbling Wall*, 2000, a massive sculpture comprised of stacked rusted cassava graters, and *Peak Project*, 1999, a series of free-standing, abstract sculptures made of tin can tops connected with copper wire.

Beyond the powerful visual impact of the works, Anatsui's sculptures open myriad possibilities for interpretation. Referencing diverse relationships of trade, materiality, tradition, and modernity between West Africa, Europe, and the Americas, Anatsui draws our attention to the life histories of the materials that surround him. Bottles of liquor, for example, were the units of currency preferred by European traders seeking to acquire slaves and ivory on the West African coast. Liquor and rum (a by-product of the Caribbean sugar plantations for which Africa had supplied the labor) were exchanged at great advantage to the European traders. Anatsui's work gently alerts us to these histories, interlacing their material evidence and metaphors like elements within a cloth.

Anatsui explains the composite Ewe word 'Gawu' as follows: "'Ga' contains allusions to many things including metal, and 'Wu' references a fashioned cloak. The word encapsulates the medium, process, and the format of the works, and I think it is appropriate for a show in which I am for the first time featuring works all in metal, sewn into extensive sheets."

Born in 1944 in Ghana, El Anatsui lives and works in Nigeria and is professor of sculpture at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He has participated in more than 85 exhibitions worldwide including the 1990 Venice Biennale and the major traveling exhibition 'Africa Remix.' His works are held in numerous public institutions, including the British Museum, de Young Museum in San Francisco, Smithsonian's National Museum for African Art, Setagaya Art Museum in Tokyo, and the National Gallery of Contemporary Art in Nigeria.

'El Anatsui: Gawu' is an Oriel Mostyn Gallery touring exhibition and was generously supported by the Arts Council of Wales. Additional funding was provided by Wales Arts International. The Los Angeles presentation is made possible in part by the Shirley and Ralph Shapiro Director's Discretionary Fund and Manus, the support group of the Fowler Museum.

'El Anatsui: Gawu' will be on view in the Fowler Museum's Getty 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.

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