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*UCLA Fowler Museum to premiere 'Art of Being Tuareg: Sahara Nomads in a Modern World'*  
October 29, 2006–February 25, 2007

The Tuareg, a semi-nomadic people of Niger, Mali, and Algeria, have fascinated travelers and scholars throughout history. The “art” of being Tuareg—their elegant dress and exquisite ornamentation, their refined song, speech, and dance—has been the subject of rhapsodic descriptions that suggest a Tuareg “mystique.” Who the Tuareg are today and how the Tuareg and their mystique have been invented through time by themselves and by others are considered in the first major U.S. exhibition on Tuareg art and culture, *Art of Being Tuareg: Sahara Nomads in a Modern World*, on display from October 29, 2006 through February 25, 2007 at UCLA’s Fowler Museum.

*Art of Being Tuareg* examines the history of “The Blue People of the Sahara,” so-called for their indigo turbans that at times stain their skin and define their identity as they ride on majestic camels. It explores their beautiful silver jewelry, clothing, distinctive leatherwork, and other highly decorated items crafted by Tuareg smiths, while at the same time addressing the complexities of history, gender, desert living, and the ever-changing global market.

“With Americans’ increased awareness of the Islamic world, the sale of Tuareg jewelry in exclusive boutiques, recent tours in the U.S. by Tuareg music and dance groups, and even a car named after the people, this exhibition meets a growing interest in the Tuareg and their rich culture,” says curator Thomas K. Seligman.

The exhibition unfolds in reverse chronological order, beginning with photographic portraits of several Tuareg and first-person accounts of what it means to be a Tuareg in a modern world. Next visitors enter a “boutique” that affirms the popularity of Tuareg artistry today, found in Hermès catalogues—which since 1993 have featured Tuareg leatherwork, scarves with Tuareg motifs, silver belt buckles, and jewelry designs made on commission—as well as in art fairs and shops in cities across the U.S. and Europe.

Visitors then encounter the workshop of the Oumba and Ouhoulou family of Agadez and Niamey, Niger, a group of productive and well-respected inadan (artists or smiths). A range of objects produced by the family over a thirty-year period—including exquisite silver and gold amulets, necklaces, bracelets, earrings, and beautifully decorated and richly colored leatherwork—reveal the influences of modernization and a shifting clientele that has expanded beyond the Tuareg to include

Africans from other regions, Europeans, and Asians. A sales display from their boutique in Niamey and a video depicting the family interacting while making works of art provide insight into their lives.

Following this close look at one inadan family, visitors enter a small gallery devoted to objects dating from the 19th century. Here a selection of intricately carved tent poles, finely wrought silver jewelry, swords and sheaths, and Koranic boards and cases display the Tuareg's renowned aesthetics and skill.

Finally, visitors enter a large gallery space that evokes the openness of the desert, with the vast desert horizon. In the center of the room is a Tuareg tent made of goatskin, complete with elaborately carved decorative tent poles, beautiful leather and reed windscreens featuring carefully executed geometric designs, and a variety of wooden bowls and leather bags typically found within and around a tent. Art and artifacts displayed in this desert environment include camel saddles and leather bags—richly decorated with tassels and fringes—daggers and swords, tools, musical instruments, and tea-making items, all typical of a nomadic Tuareg lifestyle. Also on view are splendid examples of silver jewelry and amulets, including numerous pendants of the ubiquitous cross of Agadez, the distinctive engraved cross whose origins have been debated for decades.

A video in this section offers extensive footage from a three-day wedding in the desert and shows the confluence of the Tuareg's past and present. Beautiful white camels are mounted by men dressed in all their finery, their heads and faces wrapped in indigo veils, while similarly dressed Tuareg men drive their 4x4 trucks. Women wear locally embroidered shirts and wraps, as well as imported fabrics with sequins. Music played on a drum made from a goatskin stretched over a wooden mortar contrasts with a Tuareg “rock” band playing electric instruments powered by a portable generator. Thus, the exhibition comes full circle, from the introduction of the Tuareg today, back through time, and emerging again to reveal the multifaceted dynamic of the Tuareg in the twenty-first century.

### **History of the Tuareg**

Early Arab and Berber travelers' accounts contain the first written descriptions of the Tuareg. North African traders crossed the Sahara following well-established caravan routes, which had also facilitated the introduction of Islam into the region beginning in the 7th century. Hundreds of years later, in the 19th century, European explorers often employed the Tuareg as desert guides. Today Algeria, Niger, and Mali are home to the largest concentration of Tuareg—estimated at close to one million people—a loose confederation of groups of pastoral nomads, settled agriculturalists, and, today, city dwellers.

Several social groupings exist within Tuareg culture, including that of artists or smiths, known as inadan, whose art and lives are the focus of this exhibition. There are many accounts of the origins of the inadan, but it is likely that they are, in part, descendants of Jews who were forced out of southern Morocco in the 14th and 15th centuries and followed trans-Saharan trade routes to the region of the Tuareg. Even today, some inadan claim Lord Dauda (David) as their patron saint, though many are practicing Muslims. Inadan have a complex and ambiguous relationship to the larger group and are often not considered “true” Tuareg, as their social origins are from outside the culture. Yet they fill an essential role, as they make all weapons, tools, leather objects, jewelry, and camel saddles.

### **Exhibition Details**

Approximately thirty percent of the 235 objects on display in Art of Being Tuareg are from the collection of the Fowler Museum. In addition, significant loans have come from the Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University, Switzerland's Musée d'ethnographie Neuchâtel, and Paris' soon-to-open Musée du Quai Branly.

This traveling exhibition is co-organized by the UCLA Fowler Museum and the Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University and is curated by Thomas K. Seligman, director of the Cantor Arts Center, and Kristyne Loughran, independent scholar. The exhibition, publication,

and accompanying public programs were made possible by the generous support of C. Diane Christensen and Karen Christensen; at the Fowler, the Shirley and Ralph Shapiro Director's Discretionary Fund, the Yvonne Lenart Public Programs Fund, and Manus, the Support Group of the Fowler Museum; and at the Cantor Arts Center, the Halperin Director's Discretionary Fund and the Phyllis C. Wattis Program Fund.

After its debut at the Fowler, *Art of Being Tuareg* will be on view at the Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University (May 30–September 2, 2007) and then the Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art (2008). A same-titled book (ISBN 0-9748729-4-6, paper, \$45.00; ISBN 0-9748729-6-2, cloth, \$75.00) edited by the curators has been published by the Fowler and is distributed by the University of Washington Press.

### **Visiting the Fowler**

The Fowler is open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 5 p.m.; and on Thursdays, noon until 8 p.m. The Museum is closed Mondays and Tuesdays. The 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 \$8 in Lot 4. For more information, the public may call (310) 825-4361 or visit [fowler.ucla.edu](http://fowler.ucla.edu).

### **Related Events**

Sunday, October 29, 2006 12–5 pm OPENING DAY

2–4 pm

Panel Discussion: Modern Meets Tuareg

Curator Thomas K. Seligman leads a conversation following presentations by art historian and co-curator Kristyne Loughran and activist and educator Mohamed ag Ewangaye, who will examine Tuareg jewelry, dress, and culture to discern the 'art' of being Tuareg in current times.

4 pm

Musical Performance by Tidawt

Modern and traditional Tuareg music performed by members of the Niger-based band Tidawt. Outdoors in the Fowler's UCLA Art Council Amphitheater.

Saturday, November 11, 2006 7 am–6 pm

Fowler on the Town: Desert Living: Inside and Out

A daytrip to California's Coachella Valley uncovers how the area's denizens have created their own signature approach to living in the desert. The trip begins with a stop at the Museum of the Living Desert for a discussion of African horticulture and Cahuilla Indian practices. After lunch, the excursion continues with a tour of the high desert near Joshua Tree National Park, highlighting buildings, landscapes, and artscapes created by the local artists. Transportation is provided. \$40 per person (includes breakfast and light snacks; add \$20 for a boxed lunch, or pack your own). Reservations required: 310/825-8655.

Sunday November 19, 2006 1–4 pm

Kids in the Courtyard: Art 2 Go!

When you're a nomad on the move, your art needs to be portable, too. Exquisite leather bags are a trademark of Tuareg people of the Sahara Desert. Stitch and embellish a satchel to carry your most precious possessions.

Saturdays, December 2 and 9, 2006 1–5 pm

A World of Art Workshop: Silver Jewelry

Tuareg artisans make silver earrings, necklaces, rings, and saddle decorations. In this introductory workshop, mold your own treasures and gifts for the holidays using Precious Metal Clay –a unique material that transforms from wonderfully malleable “clay” into solid silver. Artist Lora Hart, founding director of New Metal Artists, will guide students in creating Tuareg-inspired pendants and earrings. The two-part workshop will cover various finishing methods including wire brushing, burnishing and patinas. \$25 for members; \$40 for non-members. Reservations required: 310/825-7525.

Sunday, December 10, 2006 12 and 2:30 pm

Food Lecture and Tasting: Flavor Oasis

Couscous, with its origins in West Africa, has become an increasingly popular food in different parts of the world. Farid Zadi, an instructor in Le Cordon Bleu program at the California School of Culinary Arts, discusses the evolution of couscous and the foodstuffs of North and West Africa and those transported historically by the Tuareg for trade. Take part in the accompanying cooking demonstration and sample delicious couscous, prepared using the traditional method of steaming the grain several times. The tasting concludes with sweet tea, poured from on high, in a show of true African hospitality. \$10 for members; \$15 for non-members. Reservations required: 310/825-8655.

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