

Press Release

Brooklyn Museum



Yorùbá artist, *Egúngún* Masquerade Dance Costume (paka egúngún), ca. 1920-48. Lèkewogbe compound, Ogbomòsò, Oyo State, Nigeria. Cotton, wool, wood, silk, synthetic textiles (including viscose rayon and acetate), indigo dye, and aluminum. 58 x 7 x 70 in. (147.32 x 17.78 x 177.8 cm). Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Sam Hill, 1998.125.

The Brooklyn Museum Presents *One: Egúngún*

A single *egúngún* masquerade costume, on view from February 8 to August 18, 2019, traces the rich history of Nigeria's Yorùbá culture from West Africa to the United States.

One: Egúngún, which features a single Yorùbá masquerade costume from the Brooklyn Museum's collection, uses new research and multiple perspectives to emphasize the global connections and contemporary contexts of African masquerades. Made during the early twentieth century in southwestern Nigeria, this costume—or *egúngún*—is composed of more than three hundred different textiles from Africa, Europe, and Asia, suspended from a single length of wood, which swirl in motion during festival dances honoring departed ancestors. The presentation is accompanied by photographs and footage of Yorùbá masquerade festivals, related textiles, and new curatorial research that uncovers the vibrant history of this particular *egúngún*, tracing its journey from West Africa to Brooklyn.

The exhibition is curated by Kristen Windmuller-Luna, Sills Family Consulting Curator, African Arts, Brooklyn Museum. It is part of the *One Brooklyn* series, in which each exhibition focuses on an individual work from the Brooklyn Museum's encyclopedic collection, revealing the many stories woven into a single work of art.

One: Egúngún tells the life story of a singular early twentieth-century Yorùbá masquerade costume from its origins in Ògbómòṣò, in southwestern Nigeria, to its current home in Brooklyn. A *paka* type of *egúngún*, the masquerade costume is defined by its numerous suspended fabric panels. Composed of materials ranging from indigo-dyed cottons on the interior to imported fabrics on the outside, the *egúngún* is meant to provide a place for the ancestors to dwell, and it reflects the many ways that cloth is linked to community, identity, and honor in Yorùbá society. Each textile in the costume indicates the spiritual devotion, wealth, and good taste of the family that created it. Though no longer ritually empowered or used in religious practices, the *egúngún* at the Brooklyn Museum remains a powerful symbol of belief, history, and global connections.

Included in the exhibition is new research and filming done throughout Nigeria in summer 2018 by Windmuller-Luna, thanks to the support of the Sills Family Foundation. Her research traces the *egúngún* on view at the Museum back to its original makers, the Lekewogbe family from the city of Ògbómòṣò. At their request, this exhibition will honor the Lekewogbe name by telling the story of their family's masquerade heritage in their own words, incorporating video filmed at their compound in August 2018. *One: Egúngún* includes text in both English and Yorùbá, marking the first time an exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum has included wall labels in an African language. The exhibition will also feature a text contribution from Chief Ayanda Ifadara Ojeyimika Clarke, the Ajibilu Awo of Osogbo and a leader of the local Brooklyn Yorùbá community.

Since the sixteenth century, *egúngún* masquerades have been practiced in West Africa and its diasporas as a way to strengthen connections between living Yorùbá peoples and their ancestors. The masquerade practices vary from region to region in Nigeria, with each *egúngún* playing a specific role in these performances. The *egúngún* in the Brooklyn Museum's collection represents an important cultural practice that has evolved and expanded over five centuries, and is still performed in Nigeria, Benin, and in areas of the diaspora—including Brooklyn—for both ritual and entertainment purposes.

"It's key to consider an *egúngún*—or any piece of art from Africa or around the world—from multiple angles and with multiple sources, from oral history to written documents to fiber analysis," says Windmuller-Luna. "I hope that with this exhibition we are able to introduce many voices and perspectives into our galleries, celebrating how *egúngún* is both part of Yorùbá history and a vibrant part of its present, whether in Nigeria or here in Brooklyn."

Also on view are four distinctive West African textiles and garments that demonstrate the importance of cloth in Yorùbá belief and aesthetics. These selected textiles—which include *aṣọ-òkè* (strip-woven cloth), *àdìrẹ* (resist -dye), *agbádá* (embroidered prestige tunic), and *ankara* (wax print)—represent just a few of the many textiles that compose this *egúngún*, whose fabric components underwent detailed historical and scientific examinations in preparation for the exhibition. When combined with the oral history of the masquerade costume, this information helps to date the work more precisely. By focusing on a single *egúngún*, this exhibition emphasizes the global connections of African masquerades, while also celebrating the unique life history of this particular costume.

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