

Spring 2010

Under the Dome - Spring 2010

McKissick Museum--University of South Carolina

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UNDER *the* DOME

Telling the Story of Southern Life

McKISSICK MUSEUM NEWSLETTER • SPRING 2010

Grass Roots

African Origins of an American Art



Women making suku blai, 1975–76
Mamunta, Siere Leone, Photo: Lisa M. Laramée



George Browne instructing students at the Penn School, c. 1920
Penn School Collection, Southern Historical Collection
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Photo: Leigh Richmond Miner

The humble but beautifully crafted coiled basket has been made in Africa for millennia and by people of African descent in the American South for as long as they have been on these shores. Once a common agricultural tool, the Lowcountry basket is also a container of memory, a repository of history, a symbol of identity, and a work of art. On Feb. 13, 2010, McKissick Museum will open a major exhibition that traces the history and artistry of sweetgrass baskets, now celebrated as the state craft of South Carolina.

Five years in the making, **Grass Roots: African Origins of American Art** charts the migration of Africans, rice, and the baskets necessary to process the grain to the South Atlantic coast. Organized by New York's Museum for African Art (MfAA), in partnership with McKissick Museum, the Avery Research Center at the College of Charleston, and the Sweetgrass Cultural Arts Festival Association, the exhibit brings together an extraordinary collection of more than 200 objects.

More than 300 years ago, people from Africa brought an understanding of rice cultivation and skills as basket makers to plantations in America. Their knowledge and labor transformed the landscape and economy of Carolina and made rice the colony's first major export crop, and the coiled fanner basket became the signature form made by Africans in America.

In the 21st century, the art of coiled basketry continues to thrive and be passed down from generation to generation. Virtuoso basket makers on both sides of the Atlantic invent forms, experiment with new materials, and perfect the techniques they learned from their parents and grandparents. The stunning contemporary baskets from Africa and South Carolina in this exhibition demonstrate how basket artists are bringing new vitality to an ancient art.

Following its run at the head of the Horseshoe at USC, Grass Roots will travel to the Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art for summer and fall 2010 and will end its tour at the Museum for African Art's new home on 5th Avenue at 110th Street in New York City.



(left to right) Basket, Leola Wright, 1996; Sweetgrass, pine needles, palmetto
Double Basket, Mary Jane Manigault, 1985; Sweetgrass, pine needles, palmetto
Sugar Basket; Alethia Foreman, 2006; Sweetgrass, pine needles, palmetto
Baskets from the collection of McKissick Museum, USC
Courtesy of the Museum for African Art, New York
Photos by Karin L. Willis

Celebrating Culture and Creativity

THE ENDURING SPIRIT OF THE SWEETGRASS BASKET

Please join McKissick Museum for special programs in honor of the exciting exhibition **Grass Roots: African Origins of an American Art**. Scheduled programs include special tours, lectures, video presentations, and demonstrations. All events are free and open to the public.



*Cobra Basket, Mary Jackson, 1983
Sweetgrass, bulrush, palmetto
Collection of McKissick Museum, USC
Courtesy of the Museum for
African Art, New York.
Photo: Karin L. Willis*

“This is a major project for McKissick Museum,” said Lynn Robertson, executive director of McKissick. “We first started documenting and collecting baskets 30 years ago. The research and fieldwork we have supported enable us now to see them in a global context. I think if you asked most South Carolinians to name the symbols of our state, the things that best represent our geography and our culture, the sweetgrass basket would be near the top of that list.”

Planned activities include:

OPENING DAY

**SATURDAY, FEB. 13, 2010,
10 A.M.–4 P.M.**

10:30–11:45 a.m. Tour of the exhibition with basket maker Nakia Wigfall and curator Dale Rosengarten

Noon–1 p.m. Talk by Peter H. Wood of Duke University, author of *Black Majority*

1–3 p.m. Special viewing of the acclaimed new film *Grass Roots: The Enduring Art of the Lowcountry Basket*, directed by Dana Sardet

3–3:45 p.m. Tour of the exhibition with Rosengarten and Wigfall

BASKET DAY

SATURDAY, APRIL 17, 11 A.M.–4 P.M.

Basket makers from the Charleston area demonstrating and selling handcrafted baskets on the historic USC Horseshoe.

SWEET GRASS SUNDAYS

**FEB. 21, MARCH 21, AND APRIL 18,
2010, 1–4 P.M.**

Extended hours for an additional opportunity to experience Grass Roots.

Please check our Web site at www.cas.sc.edu/mcks for additional details. To schedule a guided tour of Grass Roots, please call 803-777-7251.

Grass Roots has been supported by grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation, the MetLife Foundation's Museums and Community Connections Program, and the Getty Foundation (for the exhibition publication). The National Endowment for the Humanities honored Grass Roots with a "We the People—America's Historic Places" designation. Additional funding for the Grass Roots video, produced by the Center for the Documentary at the College of Charleston, came from the Henry and Sylvia Yasczik Foundation, the Humanities CouncilSC, The South Carolina Arts Commission, and the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor.

Spring in the Garden

McKissick Museum invites you to welcome the new season at **Spring in the Garden**, a fund-raiser and reception. Located in the urban gardens of Belinda and Richard Gergel, Spring in the Garden will be held on Saturday, March 13, 2010, from 4:30 to 7:30 p.m. Popular USC instructor and naturalist Rudy Mancke will present information sessions during the evening. He will discuss the nature found in and around this lovely Columbia garden.

After touring the garden, you can view and purchase art for the garden as well as enjoy seasonal

food and drink. Spring in the Garden promises to be educational and entertaining. McKissick Museum's Advisory Council hosts two events each year to raise funds to support acquisitions and public programs. What better way of telling the story of community, culture, and the environment than a stroll in a spring garden!

Tickets for Spring in the Garden are \$75 per person and must be purchased in advance. Please call 803-777-7251 to purchase tickets, or come by the museum today!

McKissick Welcomes New Council Members

McKissick Museum is pleased to announce our largest incoming Advisory Council class since the 1980s. These 12 new members include individuals from the business community as well as educators and artists. Many have worked with McKissick Museum in the past on numerous projects, from the Spring Gala to long-term planning and the South Carolina Folk Heritage Awards. They are all interested and involved in their community, its culture, and its environment. Their areas of expertise range from art and architecture to business and biology, from education and the environment to gardening and government.

We welcome Vic Cain, Alonso Cuellar, Will Taylor Goins, Jim Hockman, Judy Hubbard, Adrienne Montare, John Nelson, Alice Perritt, David Sennema, Ann Sinclair, David Shields, and Andrea Thorpe. They join Melanie Baker, Judy Battiste, Marilyn Edelho, Naomi Freedman, Scot Hockman, Lewis Huffman, Patricia Moore-Pastides, Ben Rast, Eric Tappa, Susan Thorpe, and Jim Witkowski (chair).



Celebrate Nature with McKissick Museum



Mancke speaking to a record audience during the Nature of Fall lecture on the historic Horseshoe

McKissick Museum is pleased to continue its popular **The Nature of Things** lecture series with Rudy Mancke for 2010. The 2009 events proved to be a huge success, especially when the weather permitted being outdoors. Guests are both educated and entertained with Mancke's humor, facts, and anecdotes on the flora and fauna of the South. This series of public lectures is scheduled to coincide with the vernal and autumnal equinoxes and the summer and winter solstices. They are free and open to the public. Guests are

encouraged to bring items to discuss—but please, no live animals.

Mancke is synonymous with nature in South Carolina. He is best known for producing and appearing in SC-ETV's "NatureScene," a nationally syndicated television program on which he appeared for 23 years.

McKissick Museum is well known for its natural history holdings and for the permanent exhibit **Natural Curiosity: USC and the Evolution of Scientific Inquiry into the Natural World**, which it opened in late 2007. Natural Curiosity explores man's relationship with the natural world through the process of collecting and displaying natural specimens and artifacts; the exhibit covers 1,200 square feet and houses more than 1,000 specimens that have been gathered during the University's more than 200 years of history.

The lectures are scheduled for four Tuesdays (March 23, June 22, Sept. 21, and Dec. 21) at noon at McKissick Museum. Grab some lunch and join us for an entertaining and educational hour as we explore the plants and animals of the South.

What's Happening in Folk Art



Kevin Fogle and Amanda Roddy

Saddler Taylor, chief curator of research and folklife, is currently away on military leave with the South Carolina National Guard. However, operations at the museum's Folklife Resource Center (FRC) continue in his absence. Graduate assistants Kevin Fogle, a Ph.D. student in archaeology, and Amanda Roddy, a master's student in public history, remain in charge of daily operations and continue to assist independent researchers and museum staff alike in navigating the holdings of the FRC. Along with ongoing maintenance of the Digital Traditions Web site and the continued standardization of archival databases, the two have recently worked to complete contract media digitization projects, handle research requests, and prepare supplemental materials for the upcoming Grass Roots exhibit.

Museum Management Certificate Program

STUDENT NEWS:

Melanie Neil was awarded one of four traveling scholarships to attend the Southeastern Museums Conference (SEMC) in Charleston, W.Va., Oct. 13–16, 2009. Melanie was recognized at the SEMC Business Meeting/Awards Luncheon.

Alumna Erika Schofner curated the exhibition *We Were Here: Archaeology of the Johannes Kolb Site* for the Hartsville Museum, Hartsville, S.C. The exhibition was on view from Oct. 1 through Nov. 14, 2009.

Students in last fall's collections class were presented with an exciting opportunity for their term project. Working with the pieces held at Rutledge Chapel, on the historic Horseshoe, each student was assigned an object to accession into the museum's permanent collection. As seen in the photos documenting this process, they unpacked objects from storage, cleaned the artifacts, created an inventory, completed condition reports and catalog worksheets, and established provenance. Students then presented a proposal for rehousing the objects that included a conservation plan. The final component was to research and write a short history of the object and present the findings to the class.

McKissick Museum was delighted to have the opportunity to have students investigate these items, which will enrich the history of the Rutledge Chapel for the University community.

The Museum Management Program offers one core course per term. All of the classes are scheduled for Wednesdays from 2 to 4:30 pm. Our classes are offered in the following rotation. Please plan your schedule accordingly.

Spring 2010, MUSM 700 Administration and Management of Museums

Fall 2010, MUSM 701 Exhibition Development

Spring 2011, MUSM 704 Collecting, Collections Management, and Curatorial Practice

To schedule internship hours or an independent study, or if you would like more information about the program, please contact Lana Burgess or Peggy Nunn at 803-777-7251.

(right top to bottom) Collections Curator Jill Koverman instructing students on handling objects at Rutledge Chapel

Students examining objects at Rutledge Chapel



Telling the Story of Southern Life ...

Community, Culture, and the Environment



The McKissick Museum is located at the head of the University of South Carolina's historic Horseshoe in the heart of campus. All exhibitions are free and open to the public.

Gallery hours are 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. The museum is open from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturdays. McKissick is closed on Sundays. Metered parking is available on all adjacent streets and in the lower level of Pendleton Street Garage.

A number of volunteer opportunities are available at the McKissick Museum. Call 803-777-7251 for information on membership, tours, programs, and exhibits. Visit us on the Internet at www.cas.sc.edu/mcks.

The University of South Carolina is an equal opportunity institution.
09730 University Publications 12/09



exhibitions, events, and activities

Order Now!

DECORATING THE MODERN HOME

MAY 29–JULY 31, 2010

The concept of decorating a home in the twentieth century has expanded into an unprecedented, profit-generating enterprise. It all began with the first mail-order catalogs, which offered products made from new technologies to aid our nation's developing industries. By the late nineteenth century, manufacturers expanded their offerings of mass-produced items to meet the needs at home. Sears and Roebuck, as well as Montgomery Ward, were the first nationwide distributors to offer a variety of goods from dishes, textiles, and furniture to decorative glass and porcelain door knobs. With the continued westward population expansion, the time was right for mail-order merchandise.



Sears, Roebuck and Company, *Catalog Printing*
Image courtesy of Dr. Allison Marsh

Today people decorate for every season, every event, and even the everyday. From the celebrity of Martha Stewart to the proliferation of catalogs, Web sites, and cable television channels, Americans have become obsessed with adorning our interior environments. *The New York Times* has referred to the late 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century as "The Age of Disposable Décor." **Order Now!** will explore the evolution of the types of fine arts and crafts consumers purchase as a means of defining personal taste and projecting societal status.

Exhibits

Natural Curiosity: USC and the Evolution of Scientific Inquiry into the Natural World

A semipermanent installation

Grass Roots: African Origins of an American Art

Feb. 13–May 8, 2010

McKissick Museum Annual Fundraiser Exhibition

May 22–Aug. 20, 2010

Order Now! Decorating the Modern Home

May 29–July 31, 2010

A Celebration of the World's Barrier Islands: The Batiks of Mary Edna Fraser

Aug. 14–Dec. 14, 2010

Get Cockey: Students and Athletics at the University of South Carolina

Sept. 1–Dec. 18, 2010

SAVE THE DATE

Spring in the Garden—Museum Spring Fund-raiser

Saturday, March 13, 2010—Held at the home of Belinda and Richard Gergel, **Spring in the Garden** will feature a garden tour, innovative art, and delicious food and drink. Please join us as we celebrate the arrival of spring. Advanced tickets required.

Please visit www.cas.sc.edu/mcks for additional details.