

**FOR  
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*The only museum in the nation emphasizing art by women of the African Diaspora*

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**August 31, 2016**

## Spelman College Museum of Fine Art Organizes Special Exhibition of 20 Women Artists and Fashion Designers

***AFRICA FORECAST: Fashioning Contemporary Life***  
**September 15 – December 3, 2016**



**Fabiola Jean-Louis** (b. 1978, Haiti/Lives and works in New York)  
*Amina*, edition 2/15, 2016  
Archival pigment print  
29 x 28.5 inches  
Courtesy the artist and Alan Avery Art Company

ATLANTA, GA – Spelman College Museum of Fine Art's fall exhibition *AFRICA FORECAST: Fashioning Contemporary Life* draws bold inspiration from trends in African style. The result is an original multidisciplinary exhibition, on view September 15 through December 3, 2016, which explores how 20 women artists and designers from Africa and of African descent shape, imagine and redefine the influence of fashion on everyday life. The exhibition, curated by Museum Director Andrea Barnwell Brownlee, Ph.D., C'93, and Seattle-based co-curator Erika Dalya Massaquoi, Ph.D., commemorates the Museum's 20th anniversary season. A significant objective of the exhibition project is identifying financial support to acquire works by several of the featured artists.

During the two years *AFRICA FORECAST* was in development, Dr. Brownlee and Dr. Massaquoi carefully considered a blend of overlapping perspectives about fashion. "The first consideration took into account how fashion is an ever-changing global marketplace," explained Dr. Brownlee. "Secondly, we considered the unique ways fashion informs the artistic practice and lives of contemporary artists; and, finally, the ways that Black women, who reside throughout the African Diaspora, use creative practices to fashion their behavior and construct their lives."

Informed by these foundational perspectives, the resulting exhibition is layered and expansive. "The women in *AFRICA FORECAST* promote an aesthetic of renewal as they transmit—through the lens of fashion—pop art, avant-garde and experimental strategies," said Dr. Massaquoi. "The discourse of fashion, in the context of the exhibition, acts like a genre, a style, or category in which the artists amplify their identity to communicate their truth. Fashion and design are not created in

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a vacuum—we made a specific ask to the artists that they communicate, through their work, the relentless stimulation, innovation and objects of fascination that stir their practices.”



**Vanessa German** (b. 1976, United States/  
Lives and works in Pittsburgh)  
*The Blacks (Alexius Diana)*, 2015  
Inkjet print on archival paper  
40 x 60 inches  
Courtesy the artist and Pavel Zoubok  
Gallery, New York

With two women of color at its helm, the exhibition embodies the significance and impact of African Americans in the curatorial field. It also reflects Spelman College’s role as a leader in the education and cultivation of African Americans in the area of curatorial studies. In January 2016, the College established one of the few curatorial studies programs in the U.S. focused on addressing the lack of diversity in the museum profession. The nine students in Spelman’s program will assist with the installation of *AFRICA FORECAST* and participate in roundtable conversations with the curators as they prepare to open the exhibition.

“The curatorial studies program offers our students a unique opportunity to learn first-hand what it takes to create a first-class exhibition,” said Spelman President Mary Schmidt Campbell, Ph.D. “It’s also a prime example of the College’s mission to develop programs and spaces much like the Museum and our planned arts, innovation and entrepreneurship center that harness the power of a liberal arts education.”

Featuring photography, garments, performance, video, painting and sculpture, *AFRICA FORECAST* is a dynamic blend of influences that departs from solely commercial interpretations of fashion and industry trends. Instead, it offers interdisciplinary and poetic coverage of style and widespread approaches to dress, socialization and activism. The exhibition provides a vibrant snapshot of the current mood, lived experiences and distinct socio-cultural perspectives of the featured artists who are highly engaged, connected and global citizens.

The featured artists and designers in the exhibition examine a variety of timely and enduring topics including innovation, the body, gender roles, portraiture, beauty, style, embellishment, documentary methodology and the power of manipulating artistic mediums. Their work encourages visitors to imagine how fashion shapes their lived experiences.



**Wura-Natasha Ogunji** (b. 1972 United  
States/Lives and works in Austin, Texas  
and Lagos, Nigeria)  
*Strut* (still), 2016  
Single-channel digital video  
5:51 minutes  
Courtesy the artist

*AFRICA FORECAST* showcases more than 50 works, which have been completed in the last three years—15 of which will be presented at the Museum for the first time and several created specifically for this exhibition. “Another great quality of the show is the infusion of color throughout the galleries, which work to qualify fashion’s feeling: freedom, beauty, magic,” said Dr. Massoquoi. “The goal is to entice audiences and immerse them in a lyrical enclave of style.”

Since the Museum was established in 1996, it has presented more than 45 exhibitions that honor its unique emphasis on art by women of the African Diaspora. “Like previous exhibitions, *AFRICA FORECAST* presents timely and important perspectives and promises to garner popular and critical acclaim,” said Dr. Brownlee. “It continues the Museum’s legacy of introducing new artists to Atlanta audiences and invites all viewers to stretch their perceptions about the range of works that Black women artists create. Acquiring work by a selection of the exceptional artists that are featured in this exhibition is in perfect alignment with the Museum’s goals and growth.”

*AFRICA FORECAST: Fashioning Contemporary Life* is made possible by the Wish Foundation and the LUBO Fund. Additional support provided by the Fulton County Commissioners under the guidance of Fulton County Arts & Culture.

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## *AFRICA FORECAST: Fashioning Contemporary Life*

### ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES

#### **Firelei Báez (b. 1981, Dominican Republic/Lives and works in New York)**

Firelei Báez makes large scale, intricate works on paper that are intrinsically indebted to a rigorous studio practice.

#### **Joana Choumali (b. 1974, Côte d'Ivoire/Lives and works in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire)**

Joana Choumali is a fine art photographer who works primarily on conceptual portraiture, mixed media and documentary to explore her own identity.

#### **Bethany Collins (b. 1984, United States/Lives and works in Atlanta and Chicago)**

Bethany Collins is a multidisciplinary artist whose conceptually driven work is fueled by a critical exploration of how race and language interact.

#### **Vanessa German (b. 1976, United States/Lives and works in Pittsburgh)**

Vanessa German is a visual and performance artist and the founder of Love Front Porch and the ARThouse, a community arts initiative for the children in the Pittsburgh neighborhood Homewood.

#### **Ayana V. Jackson (b. 1977, United States/Lives and works in New York, Paris and Johannesburg, South Africa)**

Ayana V. Jackson's photographic approaches range from reportage and portraiture to performance and a studio-based practice that crystallizes the experience of contemporary Africa and African diasporic societies.

#### **Fabiola Jean-Louis (b. 1978, Haiti/Lives and works in New York)**

Fabiola Jean-Louis is a fine artist and photographer who creates paper gown sculpture and richly-textured photographic portraits that are informed by sci-fi, costume design and surrealism.

#### **Madam Wokie (established in 2009, Freetown, Sierra Leone)**

Madam Wokie, a fashion design company created by Mary Ann Kaikai, is committed to the creation of stylish, durable and affordable African-inspired ready-to-wear and bespoke garments and accessories.

#### **Marcia Kure (b. 1970, Nigeria/Lives and works in Princeton, New Jersey)**

Marcia Kure is a multi-media artist who is known for her drawings, photomontages and sculptures, which are critical responses to the postcolonial existential condition. In her current work, she explores materials as metaphors for the body.

#### **Zanele Muholi (b. 1972, South Africa/Lives and works in Johannesburg, South Africa)**

Zanele Muholi, an internationally-acclaimed visual activist, co-founder of the Forum for Empowerment of Women (2002) and founder of Inkanyiso (2009), has a self-proclaimed mission to "re-write a black queer and trans visual history of South Africa for the world to know of our resistance and existence at the height of hate crimes in South Africa and beyond."

#### **Wura-Natasha Ogunji (b. 1972 United States/Lives and works in Austin, Texas and Lagos, Nigeria)**

Wura-Natasha Ogunji, the recipient of a number awards including a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship (2012), is a performance and visual artist who uses her own body to explore movement and mark-making across water, land and air.

**Toyin Ojih Odutola (b. 1985, Nigeria/Lives and works in New York)**

Toyin Ojih Odutola is an accomplished visual artist who creates drawings that utilize a variety of media. With any given tool, she emphasizes how an image is a striated terrain to mine beyond representation.

**Zohra Opoku (b. 1976, Germany/Lives and works in Accra, Ghana)**

Zohra Opoku's multimedia work includes installations, photography and video to explore the sophistication of textile cultures in disparate spaces, targeting fashion's political and psychological role and socio-cultural dynamics in relation to African history and individualistic or societal identities.

**Ebony G. Patterson (b. 1981, Jamaica/Lives and works in Kingston, Jamaica and Lexington, Kentucky)**

Ebony G. Patterson is an internationally-acclaimed artist whose heavily embellished paintings, tapestries and installations raise questions about body politics, the performance of gender, beauty, stereotyping, race and ritual.

**Mimi Plange (b. 1978, Ghana/Lives and works in New York)**

Mimi Plange is a widely-acclaimed fashion designer who has received a host of accolades including Designer of the Year at the Mercedes-Benz Africa Fashion Week in South Africa (2012) and Mayor Michael Bloomberg's Design Entrepreneurs Award in New York (2012). Her work has been featured in many publications including The New York Times, Women's Wear Daily, Essence and Vogue UK.

**Jessica Scott-Felder (b. 1981, United States/Lives and works in Atlanta)**

Jessica Scott-Felder is a multidisciplinary artist whose recent exhibitions include the A.I.R. Gallery in New York and a solo installation and performance exhibition at the Telfair Museum in Savannah, Georgia, in 2013.

**Amy Sherald (b. 1973, United States/Lives and works in Baltimore, Maryland)**

Amy Sherald's portrait paintings and lush, high-keyed palettes have earned her critical acclaim. In 2016, she was awarded first prize in the Outwin Boochever Portrait Competition at the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery.

**Sophie Zinga (established in 2012, Dakar, Senegal)**

Sophie Zinga is a fashion brand that reflects the minimal graphic and design sensibilities of its founder, designer Sophie Nzinga Sy, as well as her passion for art, travel and the multiple cultures that shape and inform her life.

**Lina Iris Viktor (b. 1987, England/Lives and works in New York)**

Lina Iris Viktor is a multi-disciplinary artist who adheres to the color palette of blue, black, white and 24-karat gold to create dynamic paintings, living sculptures, photography, performance works and installations.

**Brenna Youngblood (b. 1979, United States/Lives and works in Los Angeles)**

Brenna Youngblood is a painter who creates paintings and photo collage, her favored medium, to explore and reflect the multicultural layers of meaning in the "City of Angels."

**Billie Zangewa (b. 1973, South Africa/Lives and works in Johannesburg, South Africa)**

Billie Zangewa, an artist who has had an extensive history in fashion and advertising, is internationally acclaimed for her multi-layered cut silk tapestries.

## RELATED EVENTS

Opening Reception: Celebrate the Museum's 20th anniversary and the opening of *AFRICA FORECAST: Fashioning Contemporary Life* on Thursday, September 15, 2016, at 6:30 p.m. This special event features Artists Talk, a conversation with artists Vanessa German, Ayana V. Jackson and Fabiola Jean-Louis moderated by exhibition co-curator Erika Dalya Massaquoi, Ph.D.

A host of exhibition-related programs are slated for September through December 2016 including Yoga in the Museum, a panel discussion with artists, Community Conversations, film-screenings and much more.

## ABOUT THE CURATORS

**Andrea Barnwell Brownlee, Ph.D.**, an art historian, curator, writer, critic, and recipient of the prestigious 2013 David C. Driskell Prize in African American Art and Art History, has been the director of the Spelman College Museum of Fine Art since 2001. She has curated and co-curated numerous exhibitions including *iona rozeal brown: a<sup>3</sup> . . . black on both sides* (2004), *María Magdalena Campos-Pons: Dreaming of an Island* (2008), *Undercover: Performing and Transforming Black Female Identities* (2009), *IngridMwangiRobertHutter: Constant Triumph* (2011), *Maren Hassinger. . .Dreaming* (2014) and *Howardena Pindell* (2015). *Cinema Remixed & Reloaded: Black Women Artists and the Moving Image Since 1970* (2007), which she co-curated with Valerie Cassel Oliver, senior curator, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, was presented in the Havana Bienial in Havana, Cuba in 2012. Brownlee is the recipient of numerous academic, professional and scholarly awards including a MacArthur Curatorial Fellowship in the Department of Modern and Contemporary Art at The Art Institute of Chicago (1998 – 2000), a Future Women Leadership Award from ArtTable (2005) and the inaugural Nexus Award from the Atlanta Contemporary Arts Center (2010). Brownlee, an alumna of Spelman College, earned her Ph.D. in Art History from Duke University.

**Erika Dalya Massaquoi, Ph.D.**, is a curator, educator and entrepreneur. Her brand, The Oula Company blends modern, global style and social responsibility. Her research interests are African and diaspora art, fashion and new and emergent media. Massaquoi's current curatorial work includes *DISGUISE: Masks and Contemporary African Art, Seattle Art Museum* (2015), The Fowler Museum at UCLA (2015 – 2016), Brooklyn Museum (2016) and GENIUS, Frye Art Museum (2015 – 2016). As the former assistant dean of the School of Art & Design at The Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City, she organized numerous fashion-oriented exhibitions (2008 – 2012). She has held curatorial positions at the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Museum of the Moving Image. Massaquoi received undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of Chicago and her Ph.D. from New York University in 2004. Her thesis exhibition, *Race In Digital Space*, originated at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) List Visual Arts Center (2001) and traveled to the Studio Museum in Harlem (2002) and the Spelman College Museum of Fine Art (2002). Massaquoi has taught new media, cinema and contemporary art classes at Yale University, New York University and The New School for Social Research.

## ABOUT SPELMAN COLLEGE MUSEUM OF FINE ART

In "Six Reasons to Love Atlanta," CNN.com praised the Spelman College Museum of Fine Art for its "fantastically curated exhibitions" that focus on art by and about women of the African Diaspora. Since the Museum opened in 1996, it has established an impressive track record for organizing first-rate, mission-specific, art exhibitions that expand art offerings in Atlanta and the southeast region. It has garnered a reputation for organizing exhibitions that merit national and international attention. Milestones include being selected as the first institution from the United States that jointly (along with the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston) represented the United States at the 2012 Havana Biennial in Havana, Cuba. The Museum is poised to continue its

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trajectory of pursuing ambitious relevant projects that have a lasting impact. For more information visit [museum.spelman.edu](https://museum.spelman.edu).

## ABOUT SPELMAN COLLEGE

Founded in 1881, Spelman College is a highly selective, liberal arts college widely recognized as the global leader in the education of women of African descent. Located in Atlanta, the College's picturesque campus is home to 2,100 students. Outstanding alumnae include Children's Defense Fund Founder Marian Wright Edelman; Sam's Club CEO Rosalind Brewer, Broadway producer Alia Jones, former Acting Surgeon General and Spelman's first alumna President Audrey Forbes Manley, Harvard professor Evelyn Hammonds, author Pearl Cleage and actress LaTanya Richardson Jackson. For more information, visit [www.spelman.edu](https://www.spelman.edu).