

REBECCA FENTON

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Smithsonian Institution
Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage
600 Maryland Ave SW, Suite 2001
Washington, DC 20024

Research Interests

Dress, textiles, and fashion
Expressive culture of migration
Photography in Africa

Historical and contemporary arts of global Africa
Museology, histories of collecting and display
Architecture and materiality

Education

PhD Art History, 2018 – Indiana University, Bloomington

Major Area: African, Oceanic, & Pre-Columbian American Art

Minor Areas: African Studies, Modern and Contemporary Art

Dissertation: “Cloth as Conduit: Aesthetics, Dress, and Commerce in Mande Diasporas”

Advised by Patrick McNaughton and Diane Pelrine

MA Art History, 2013 – Indiana University, Bloomington

Thesis: “The Pursuit of Elegance: Congolese Self-Fashioning in Image and Action”

BFA Studio Art, 2008 – Miami University, Oxford, Ohio

summa cum laude, departmental honors with distinction

Thesis: “Contributions/Souvenirs: Contemporary Art and Artists in Mali”

Selected Awards and Grants

2017–2018 Smithsonian Institution–Big 10 Predoctoral Fellowship, dual appointment in Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, National Museum of Natural History

2016–2017 College of Arts & Sciences Dissertation Research Fellowship, Indiana University
Theodore R. Bowie Graduate Fellowship, IU (fall)

2015–2016 Russell A. Havens Fellowship, Art History, IU
College Arts and Humanities Institute Graduate Research Travel Award, IU (spring)
Pre-Dissertation International Travel Grant, Office of the Vice President for International Affairs, IU (fall)

2014–2015 Roy Sieber Fellowship, Art History, IU (summer 2015)

2013–2014 College of Arts & Sciences Graduate Fellowship, IU
Louise McNutt Graduate Fellowship, IU (summer 2014)

2011–2013 Curatorial Graduate Assistantship, Art Museum, IU

Teaching

As Instructor of Record

2015 Introduction to African Art, Indiana University

2014 Renaissance to Modern Art (summer), Indiana University

As Teaching Assistant

2014 Ancient to Medieval Art, Indiana University

2007 Arts of Southeast Asia, Miami University

Professional Experience

2018 Curator, Benin Program, Smithsonian Folklife Festival, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage (current appointment)

2018 Researcher, Presenter (volunteer) Smithsonian Folklife Festival *Crafts of African Fashion*

- program
- 2013 Curatorial Assistant, Eskenazi Museum of Art, Indiana University (summer)
- 2011–2013 Curatorial Graduate Assistant for the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, IU
- 2008 Program Assistant for Arts & Culture in Mali, Antioch Education Abroad (fall)

Publications

- Five essays for Harn Museum of Art exhibition catalog, *Peace, Power, Prestige: African Metalwork*, ed. Susan Cooksey. Gainesville: University Press of Florida (forthcoming 2019)
- “Sounds and Shapes of Ritual in the Cross River Region,” “Forging Value: West African Currencies,” “Rings of Power on the Liberian Coast,” “Sculptures that Act: Lobi and Gan Arts” “Radiant Beauty and Social Substance in a Malian Masquerade”
- Exhibition review: *L’Afrique des Routes*, Musée du Quai Branly–Jacques Chirac, January 31–November 12, 2017, for *African Arts* (51.3, Fall 2018)
- Exhibition review: *Afriques Capitales*, La Villette and Gare Saint-Saveur, March 22–September 3, 2017, for *African Arts* (51.2, Summer 2018)
- Online essay: “It is Heritage: Two Families of Cloth Dyers in Dakar, Senegal.” *Folklife*, Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage online magazine (June 2018) festival.si.edu/blog/it-is-heritage-two-families-cloth-dyers-dakar-senegal
- ArtInsight* gallery guide for rotating display of African Textiles, Indiana University Art Museum (2013)

Manuscript in progress

- Article: “Theorizing Change in Contemporary West African Fashion”

Invited Lectures

- “African Art and Museum Imagination: Some Thoughts on Looking.” Miami University Art Museum, March 12, 2014
- “The Pursuit of Elegance: Photography and Congolese Self-Fashioning.” Art Institute of Chicago, September 6, 2013

Presentations

- “Traditional Dress in a Global Community: Mande Fashion Theories.” (Accepted) Conference paper, Costume Society of America, April 2019.
- “Open and Closed: Aesthetics and Identities in Global West African Fashion.” Symposium paper, Costume Institute of the African Diaspora, London, May 4, 2018
- “At Home in the Market: Fashion, Identity, and Reputation in West African Cloth Networks.” Conference Paper, African Studies Association, Chicago, November 16–18, 2017
- “Movement, Meaning, and Networks of Cloth in West Africa and Beyond.” Conference paper (panel co-convenor), European Conference on African Studies, Basel, Switzerland, June 29, 2017
- “Encoding Fashion in Post-Independence Bamako.” Conference paper, Lusophone Studies Association panel, African Studies Association, Indianapolis, November 21, 2014
- “Exhibition as Intervention: Two Centuries of Black American Art.” Conference paper, Midwest Art History Society, St. Louis, April 4, 2014
- “Self-Made Men: Congolese Sapeurs, Performance, and Photography.” Symposium paper, 48th Annual Graduate Seminar, Art Institute of Chicago, April 12–13, 2013
- “Strategies of Everyday Elegance: Approaching Dress in West Africa.” Symposium paper, Technologies of Experience, Indiana University, April 5–6, 2013
- “Exhibiting Difference: African Objects in 19th-Century Museums.” Symposium paper, From Romanticism to Modernism: 19th-Century Visual Culture, Miami University, February 25, 2011

Gallery talks on African photography and African hats for undergraduate classes, Indiana University Art Museum, 2012

Service

Graduate student participant in Critical Area Studies in a Global Era workshop, 2015

Graduate Students in African Studies: President and Symposium Chair 2014–2015; Vice President and Symposium Chair, 2013–2014

Volunteer for African Studies Association Annual Meeting Local Arrangements Committee, 2014

Brown Bag Lecture Series Coordinator, Art History department, Indiana University, 2013–2014

Workshop leader, “Teaching about Africa through Textiles,” for African Studies Program Summer Teachers’ Institute, Indiana University, 2013

Art History Association: Co-president and Symposium Co-chair, 2012–2013

Fine Arts Library Advisory Committee member, 2012–2013

Affiliations

Arts Council of the African Studies Association

College Art Association

Mande Studies Association

West African Research Association/West African Research Center, Dakar

Field Research

2019 Benin, 1 month

2018 Benin, 1 week

2017 France, 3 months

2016 Senegal, 6 months; France, 2 months

2015 Senegal, 2 months

2008 Mali, 4 months; Senegal, 3 weeks

2007 Mali, 4 months

2006 India, 2 months

Languages

French, highly proficient

Bamanankan, intermediate

Wolof, beginning