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## ***Dynasty and Divinity: Ife Art in Ancient Nigeria* to Open at the Indianapolis Museum of Art in July**

*Exhibition features some of the most exceptional objects from ancient Africa, many on view for the first time outside of Nigeria*

**INDIANAPOLIS, IN, February 17, 2011**— *Dynasty and Divinity: Ife Art in Ancient Nigeria*, an exhibition devoted to the art of Ife, the ancient city-state of the Yoruba people of West Africa, will be on view at the Indianapolis Museum of Art from July 8, 2011, through January 15, 2012.

The exhibition, which was co-organized by the Museum for African Art, New York, and the Fundación Botín, in Santander, Spain, in collaboration with the Nigerian National Commission for Museums and Monuments, features more than 100 extraordinary copper alloy, terra-cotta and stone sculptures from the 9th to 15th centuries. These works take on particular significance since Ife, pronounced “EE-fay,” is the place where the Yoruba people believe that the world and mankind were created. Most of the objects from this celebrated center have never been seen before in the United States.

“The historic art of the Ife people is astonishing. At the same time that the Renaissance blossomed in Western Europe, Ife sculptors were producing some of art history’s most sensitive, lifelike portrayals of men and women,” said Maxwell L. Anderson, The Melvin & Bren Simon Director and CEO of the IMA. “*Dynasty and Divinity* will forever change popular perceptions of the art of Africa, and the IMA is proud to offer everyone throughout the Midwest access to this epochal display.”

“Indianapolis is very fortunate to have the opportunity to host this remarkable show of some of Africa’s best known and greatest art,” said Elizabeth Morton, IMA adjunct curator of African art and exhibition curator. “The exquisite copper alloy and terra-cotta heads and figures are astounding in their naturalism and artistic complexity, making this among the most significant exhibitions ever of sub-Saharan African art.”

*Dynasty and Divinity* reveals the importance of royal life and ritual in the ancient center of Ife through a diversity of objects that includes portrait heads, miniatures, expressive caricatures of old age, lively animals, and sculptures showing the impressive regalia worn by Ife’s kings and queens. Together, these illuminate one of the world’s greatest art centers and demonstrate the technological sophistication of Ife artists.

The exhibition includes such celebrated works as stunningly naturalistic, life-size copper portrait heads and an astonishing seated male figure found in the town of Tada, Nigeria. Like many of the objects in the exhibition, the figure, dating from the late 13th or early 14th century, was still part of an active shrine during the early 20th century. Other masterpieces are carved stone animals and human figures as well as works in cast metal from neighboring cultures.

Also in the exhibition are sculptures that illustrate the complexity of life in a dynastic center, from the self-assurance and dignity of members of the community to the violence and misfortune that could befall others. Several copper alloy and terra-cotta heads and figures, for example, are expressive representations of the notion of authority, while startling representations of disease and deformity, rendered in stone and terra-cotta, show the afflictions that may result from both divine and worldly forces.

Today, the city of Ife is still a spiritual heartland for the 29 million Yoruba people living in Nigeria and countless descendants in the Americas and elsewhere in the world. The present Ooni, or traditional ruler, of Ife, His Royal Majesty Alayeluwa Oba Okunade Sijuwade, Olabuse II, heads one of the longest surviving monarchies in the world. Some of the objects in the exhibition, including a copper mask said to represent the 14th-century ruler Obalufon II, were kept in the Ooni's palace until the 1950s, when they were transferred to the Nigerian Department of Antiquities for purposes of conservation, study and display.

### **Exhibition Organization and Support**

*Dynasty and Divinity* is co-organized by the Museum for African Art, New York, and the Fundación Botín, Santander, Spain, in collaboration with the Nigerian National Commission for Museums and Monuments. All of the objects in the exhibition are on loan from the Commission.

*Dynasty and Divinity: Ife Art in Ancient Nigeria* has been supported, in part, by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts, and is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and Humanities.

In addition to traveling to the IMA, the exhibition's U.S. tour includes the following institutions: The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas; Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Va.; and Museum for African Art, N.Y.

### **Catalogue**

The exhibition catalogue has been written by Henry John Drewal, Evjue-Bascom Professor of Art History and Afro-American Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Adjunct Curator of African Art at the University's Chazen Museum of Art, with an introductory essay by Enid Schildkrout, Chief Curator and Director of Exhibitions and Publications at the Museum for African Art. Published in both English and Spanish editions, it has 200 pages and 147 illustrations. The catalogue is published with support from the Getty Foundation.

### **About the Indianapolis Museum of Art**

Encompassing 152 acres of gardens and grounds, the Indianapolis Museum of Art is among the 10 largest encyclopedic art museums in the United States, and features significant collections of African, American, Asian, European and contemporary art, as well as a newly established collection of design arts. The IMA offers visitors an expansive view of arts and culture through its collection of more than 54,000 works of art that span 5,000 years of history from across the world's continents. The collections include paintings, sculpture, furniture and design objects, prints, drawings and photographs, as well as textiles and costumes.

Additionally, art, design, and nature are featured at 100 Acres: The Virginia B. Fairbanks Art & Nature Park and Oldfields—Lilly House & Gardens, an historic Country Place Era estate on the IMA grounds. Beyond the Indianapolis campus, in 2011 the IMA will open to the public the recently acquired landmark Miller House and Garden in Columbus, Indiana. One of the country's most highly regarded examples of mid-century Modernist residences, the Miller House was designed by Eero Saarinen, with interiors by Alexander Girard, and landscape design by Daniel Urban Kiley.

Recognizing the IMA's positive impact on its community, the Museum was named a recipient of the 2009 National Medal for Museum and Library Services – the nation's highest honor for museums and libraries. The IMA's commitment to free general admission, programming for schools and teachers, environmental leadership and online initiatives were among cited community contributions in the Museum's selection for the award.

Located at 4000 Michigan Road, the IMA and Lilly House are open Tuesday through Saturday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Thursday and Friday, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.; and Sunday, noon to 5 p.m. The IMA is



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closed Mondays and Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's days. For more information, call 317-923-1331 or visit [www.imamuseum.org](http://www.imamuseum.org).

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