

ORIGINS GALLERY

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Dear friends,

July, 2004

In the early years of the gallery I would go to Africa three times a year on intense, exhausting, and exhilarating trips. Congo was always the most dangerous, with officials and gendarmes the predators; Nigeria the most chaotic, ethnic hatred vying with poverty to create near anarchy. The smaller countries like Dahomey and Togo, even Mali and Upper Volta, had a more relaxed human face – of tinhorn rulers with redeemingly inefficient regimes.

Eventually, I would go only once a year, staying nimble in front of corrupt officialdom, or stoic on grueling treks to remote areas where beautiful sculptures could be found. Airports in Monrovia or Bamako were simple dusty strips, filled with excited families in traditional dress crowding the plane's disembarking ladder. And then my Land Rover would plod on to spine-jarring trails, with the Sahara stretching out into the savanna areas, or further south where the tropical rainforests pushed against the edges so that only one vehicle could proceed at a time.

Change has indeed come, and a few capital airports are sleek and security conscious. Even main roads are occasionally paved. But the Africa I have known for many decades is still largely traditional, layered, and fascinating; ancient cultures, stunning adobe architecture, and tribal customs of gentility, politeness and great affability. Sadly, the internecine violence in adjacent Ivory Coast continues, and even seeps over the vague borders to create menace. If you only seek a *virtual* African experience, read Alexander McCall Smith's THE NO.1 LADIES' DETECTIVE AGENCY, for immense pleasure and great insight into everyday African life.

After a soggy Berkshire summer, my fidget-factor was in high gear, so last November I took off for Mexico. For two months I went to a Spanish school in the 16th Century silver-mining city of San Miguel de Allende. While mumbling irregular conjugations, I would share the narrow cobble-stoned streets with ambling burros, admire bouganvillea in sumptuous courtyards, and would often encounter a fiesta with dancing, fireworks and mucho tequila. Found a troupe of bizarre puppets in an artist's house, and also acquired two fabulous processional statues, now effectively protecting our gallery from evil.

Went on an interminable flight to west Africa for a two month collecting journey starting in Cameroun. This very beautiful land of extreme contrasts, with jungle, mountains, desert, and pristine coastal areas, has long been a favorite, not least of which because a dear friend there named his youngest son after me. But now "le petit Gordon" is at least a foot taller than I am, and a father of six. The Paramount Chief of Fouban still presides over his sprawling hillside domain, where in 1969 I was shocked to see a human head displayed on a pike, and I've never found out which spirit he had so mortally offended.

With Gabon just over the border to the south, I was very lucky to acquire an amazing collection of Kota memorial statues including one with four faces. These abstract sculptures were a huge influence on modern European art and we have a photograph of such a reliquary in the summer Tanglewood program.

Togo was next, where I joyfully celebrated a wedding linking two important families. There is always a lively market in African art here as a result of the Europeans who come to escape their harsh winters. The beaches are uncrowded and the gambling is not too fixed. Dealers and collectors from Benin and Ghana came to offer me important artworks. These are now on exhibit in Stockbridge, as are compelling statues and dance masks from Mali and Burkina Faso, where this journey ended .

After my four animated travel months, Judith enticed me to return by telling me about all the frozen pipes, burst water tanks and resulting floods in my house. I hurried back, ignored the gore, and had a terrific last week of skiing at Jiminy Peak.

LOCAL NEWS. Our dear colleague Ryan Miller has decided to take a sabbatical to parts unknown. We look forward to great travel tales. Stanley, Patti, Lesli and Anne will all be here to welcome you again, and there'll be new 'initiates' as well. Amherst College has a wonderful African Textile exhibit and Jacob's Pillow will be featuring our good friend Lamine Thiam in an African dance program. In NYC, Sotheby's just had an important auction of Tribal Art on May 14. Featured on the catalogue cover was a gorgeous woman I lived with for 15 years – an Ibo masterpiece I originally collected in Africa in 1971. Hammer price: a whopping \$75,000. AFRICAN ART INVESTMENT GROUP. We are reviving this project as it could be fun and profitable. Intriguing trips to auctions in Paris, London, Brussels, Dakar? Strategy meetings at the Four Seasons in NYC? Ask to be put on our info list for details.

Have you heard about the latest iconic ARTCAR? It's ours! We found an old Cadillac HEARSE in superb condition, fell in love, painted it with the spectacular colors and Mondrian-like designs of the Ndebele (South Africa). We use it to joy ride, make deliveries, and attend special events. Maybe you even saw us in the rollicking NYC Halloween parade last October, surrounded by African drummers and stilt-dancers. You can see the ARTCAR when you visit us in Stockbridge!

Celebrate the new shipments and the excitement of a new season with our OPENING party on Saturday, June 12th. We'll be regaled by West African Fode Cissoko, a sizzling Kora and djembe artist, who comes from an ancient family of griots/musicians. Also many good people and great art. Baobob juleps? Scorpion martinis? You'll be surprised.... Be sure to ask us about the date of our next Opening party later this summer.

Judith

Judith Schuchalter

Albert Gordon

Albert

