

# *Wandering Spirit: African Wax Prints*

## Speaker and Program Ideas

### **African Fashion Show**

Reach out to West and Central African immigrant communities in your region or city and collaborate to host a wax print fashion show. Invite individuals from different African countries to showcase their favorite traditional fabrics and regional style. Find an emcee who can share information about the symbolism and history of the varied textiles and style of dress. Pair this event with an African dance or music performance.

### **Block Printing & Pattern Design**

With inspiration from the textiles featured in the exhibition, host a hands-on workshop to create a graphic pattern using printmaking blocks cut from simple materials such as potatoes, meat trays, cut and stacked cardboard, or carved blocks of wood. Each printing block can be stamped onto paper or cloth to create a pattern or repeated motif. Invite a local artist or graphic designer to lead this hands-on workshop about pattern and printing. The workshop content can be adapted for children or adults.

### **Lecture: The Dutch Colonies and African Trade**

Invite a historian who can address the relationship between the Netherlands and Africa (past and present) to discuss the Golden Triangle of trade that led up to the development of the wax print textile industry, and also Vlisco's current relationship to various countries in Africa.

### **Wax Prints Teacher Event**

Host an afterschool or in-service educator event at your museum specifically for area K-12 teachers to examine aspects of content featured in the exhibition—the geography of West and Central Africa, symbolism of designs and patterns popular in wax prints, cultural traditions, and fashions of Ghana, Nigeria, Togo, etc. Allow time for teachers to explore the exhibition on their own, then discuss teachable topics related to art, history, geography, anthropology, textiles, literature, and other aspects of African culture. Invite guest speakers (as desired), and consider collaborating with area African cultural centers or African studies departments at your local or regional Universities. Make use of the lesson ideas included in this programming guide.

### **Family Day: Prints**

Plan an event for all ages that engages the senses tied to themes in the exhibition. Have a runway fashion show for family day participants that features participants donning

African wax print fabric worn as *pagnes* or “wrappers” by tying pieces of fabric around one’s waist. Engage African drummers or a traditional African musical group and have a folklore reading hour where visitors can listen to African folktales (such as the adventures of Anansi the spider) or read proverbs to share life lessons and morals. Play a game where a proverb is matched with its hidden meaning. Design and print “fabric” using ready made block stamps, or create your own design and print graphic block designs using inspiration from the symbols and shapes found in wax print cloth.

### **Wrapper and Head Tie DIY Demonstration**

Host a hands-on, drop-in demonstration to show how one can manipulate yardage of cloth into simple, wearable garments. Discuss and demonstrate how to cut and finish the edges of the raw cloth, and tie them into a skirt-like “wrapper,” wear on one’s head as a scarf, or use as a shawl to inspire visitors to create pieces at home.

### **Gallery Talk: Wax Prints**

Invite the curator of the exhibition, Gifty Benson, to speak about the collection on view: to discuss the history and function of wax prints, the hidden meaning of some of the designs, and the styles of garments made from wax prints and worn in various countries of Africa.

### **Illustrated Lecture: Textile Design in the U.S.A.**

Invite a textile designer in the United States to speak about their work, studio, and the process of designing and manufacturing fabrics in the US in comparison to companies such as ABC and Vlisco and the wax printing process.

### **Batik Workshop**

With inspiration from the textiles on view in the exhibition, host a hands-on workshop on the history and technique of batik. Invite a nationally known or local textile artist to teach the process. Consider collaborating with your local college or university’s textile department.

### **African Proverbs, Myths, and Folktale Reading**

Host a public reading of African proverbs, myths, and folktales, and discuss the symbolism or take-away messages from each text. Relate several proverbs and folk tales to specific fabrics and their patterns featured in the exhibition. Invite a professor of African languages and literature or a local resident familiar with aspects of African culture to read and discuss them.

### **Connecting With Local and Regional Experts**

Contact local groups with whom you might wish to collaborate for program design, audience development, or speaker outreach. Some ideas related to this exhibition:

- African Studies Department at a local or regional university
- University Department of African languages and literature
- University Department of Graphic Design
- University Department of Textiles and Fashion Design
- University Department of Cultural Anthropology
- West African Cultural Centers and Community Centers
- A regional or local professional textile or fabric designer
- United States distributor of African fabrics
- African American Culture and Community Centers
- African American Museums

Your state arts council, state humanities council, or regional arts organizations may also be able to help you locate regional speakers who would be willing to be involved in a program or event at your museum.

- A list of state arts councils can be found at [http://arts.endow.gov/partner/state/SAA\\_RAO\\_list.html](http://arts.endow.gov/partner/state/SAA_RAO_list.html), or call the National Endowment for the Arts at 202-682-5400.
- A list of state humanities councils can be found at <http://www.neh.gov/whoware/statecouncils.html>, or call the National Endowment for the Humanities at 800-NEH (634)-1121.
- The U.S. Regional Arts Organization represents six nonprofit entities created to encourage development of the arts and to support arts programs on a regular basis. Their web site is <http://www.usregionalarts.org/> and lists all state arts agencies. You can also check your regional arts organization for information on its performing arts programs.