

# WORLD ART COLLECTIONS EXHIBITIONS

SAINSBURY CENTRE  
for Visual Arts



Mask  
Full caption below



Lois Walpole  
Full caption below



Heatherwick panel  
Full caption below

## Press Release

### Spring exhibition at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts ***Basketry: Making Human Nature***

***Basketry: Making Human Nature***, a major new exhibition which features basketry from the ancient world to the present day, opens at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, University of East Anglia, Norwich, on Tuesday 8 February and runs until Sunday 22 May 2011. It comprises world art objects and contemporary art (including a number of new works and commissions) from Western Amazonia, North America, Oceania, Africa, Japan, South-East Asia and Europe. The exhibition, which includes practical items such as a reed boat, a donkey saddle bag and a suit of armour together with art and design pieces, challenges our notions of basketry and explores ideas about the place of basketry in human culture. Amongst the contemporary art in the exhibition are works by Laura Ellen Bacon, Wilfried Popp and Lois Walpole, with new commissions from Mary Butcher and Ueno Masao. The exhibition also includes three works from the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection of world art, which is permanently displayed at the Centre.

***Basketry: Making Human Nature*** is curated by Professor Sandy Heslop, at the University of East Anglia, and is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) through the *Beyond Text* programme. The exhibition is in association with the Norfolk and Norwich Festival (6 – 21 May) and is a British Museum Partnership Project.

*"People have been using basketry for tens of thousands of years, all across the world. Its importance for many purposes, in all kinds of environments, has been central to the success of our species. From it we have also learned the principles of structure and pattern, of protection and integration"* – Professor Sandy Heslop, Exhibition Curator.

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Amongst the works in the exhibition are stunning shields from North East Congo and the Solomon Islands, fish traps from Cameroon, Ghana and Thailand, a colourful gorget from the Society Islands, Egyptian shoes, masks from the Salampasu of Angola, baskets from across the globe and contemporary forms. The objects will demonstrate a broad range of weaving techniques including braiding, coiling and binding, and will feature designs from simple geometric herringbone twill to the most complex sculptural forms. The materials used will also encourage us to think more broadly about basketry, ranging from traditional willow and cane, to wire and recycled plastic.

Basketry is an early technology, probably preceding pottery and textile. It is likely that the forms and surface patterns of pottery vessels, such as some of the oldest surviving examples from Jomon Japan, were in part dependent on basketry prototypes. The exhibition includes objects which emulate basketry including a ceramic Kuba pot from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a Greek Hellenistic glass bowl and examples of the redeployment of basketry patterns in media such as woodcarving. The exhibition also seeks to show how basketry techniques have been widely applied, beyond the making of small containers that we might immediately think of. Amongst the large-scale basketry in the show is a reed boat from Lake Titicaca in Peru, a fishing weir from Papua New Guinea and a woven architectural wall panel from Guy's Hospital in London by artist Thomas Heatherwick. In parts of the world the walls of houses are still woven and this was once far more widely practised, for example in Britain, with the use of wattle. The penning of animals and reclaiming land from water with hurdles have been central to the ways people have used basketry to manage their environment and make it habitable. The links between basketry and ecology are further explored in the exhibition by considering the cultivation of essential raw materials and the threat to cultural traditions where the availability of resources is in decline.

The exhibition also considers the implications of basketry for social and economic organisation. As well as trapping fish and game, basketry is used in food storage and preparation, for example, for sieving, winnowing grain, for steaming fish. These and similar processes were arguably first made possible by basketry technology, and the antiquity and importance of such developments, and their impact on social life, is a key theme. The organisation of basket and mat making, often a gendered and age-related activity, also raises questions such as who may have used them, for what and when? The uses of baskets also highlight the inventiveness of human beings. Many of the practical objects in the exhibition such as the cassava squeezer from Amazonia show how people used basketry technology to resolve a wide range of day-to-day problems and needs. Further to this, the process of weaving mats and baskets was a formative experience for the development of human concerns with number and structure. Forms that do not exist in nature, for example, the cube, are easily made as baskets and have become central to a modern conception of geometry. *Basketry: Making Human Nature* raises these ideas and considers whether there is link between such practical and conceptual activities across cultures.

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Contemporary works in the exhibition will highlight the ways in which artists are now working with the aesthetic and structural possibilities of basket technologies. National and international artist's commissions and new work will respond directly to the Centre's gallery spaces and the exhibition themes. Amongst contemporary works on display will be a striking spun fibre chaise by Mathias Bengtsson, *Three Stainless Steel Balls* by Dail Behennah and a red, white and blue tetrahedron by Joanna Gilmour.

*"The technology of basketry has a deeply ancient heritage that remains the basis of much activity in contemporary art, design, craft and architecture. Basketry is much more than baskets. This exhibition, and the research project that it came out of, shows us that the fusion of art and technology that basketry exemplifies has led to the creation of some of the most beautiful works in the history of art"* – Dr Paul Greenhalgh, Director, Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts.

*Basketry: Making Human Nature* is accompanied by a comprehensive range of events including the conference, *Basketry and Beyond: Constructing Cultures*. Speakers will include Mary Butcher, David Guss and Tim Ingold. There are also a series of two-day basketry workshops with leading artists including Tim Johnson and Lois Walpole (see Notes to Editors for more details).

A related exhibition, *East Anglian Basketry*, which forms part of the *Beyond Text* project will run at The Gallery, Norwich University College of the Arts, Norwich, from Friday 7 January until Friday 11 February (see Notes to Editors).

**CATALOGUES ARE AVAILABLE ON REQUEST FROM 26 JANUARY**

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**For further information or photographs please contact**

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East Anglia

## Notes to Editors

### Dates, Times and Information

*Basketry* runs from Tuesday 8 February to Sunday 22 May 2011. The exhibition will be open Tuesday to Sunday (closed Mondays including Bank Holiday Mondays), 10am to 5pm. Tel 01603 593199 [www.scva.ac.uk](http://www.scva.ac.uk)

#### Admission

£4, concessions £2

Family admission (up to 2 adults and 3 children) £8, concessions £6

### ***Basketry: Making Human Nature***

The exhibition is a Sainsbury Institute for Art (SIfA) project and has been developed by the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts and the School of World Art Studies and Museology at the University of East Anglia. *Basketry* has been curated by Professor Sandy Heslop

Support by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) through the *Beyond Text* programme

### In Association With

The Norfolk and Norwich Festival (NNF11)

[www.nnfestival.org.uk](http://www.nnfestival.org.uk)

### Sainsbury Centre Exhibition Marketing Sponsors

National Express

### Catalogue

The exhibition is accompanied by an illustrated catalogue. Press copies available on request from January.

### Basketry Conference

#### *Basketry and Beyond:*

#### *Constructing Cultures*

Thursday 14 – Saturday 16 April

Thursday 1.30pm – 6.30pm, followed by drinks reception

Friday 9am – 6.30pm

Saturday 9am – 4pm

Where: Thomas Paine Study Centre, University of East Anglia

Price: £75, £30 for students; includes drinks reception, lunches and refreshments

Bookings: essential before Tuesday 1 March. Email [n.orr@uea.ac.uk](mailto:n.orr@uea.ac.uk) or call 01603 592286

Early-bird booking does not apply

### Basketry Creative Weekend Studios

Four intensive workshops with exhibition artists Mary Butcher, Felicity Irons, Tim Johnson and Lois Walpole will form part of the exhibition season. Visit [www.scva.ac.uk/whatson](http://www.scva.ac.uk/whatson) for more information

### ***East Anglian Basketry***

Friday 7 January – Friday 11 February 2011

The Gallery at Norwich University College of the Arts, St George's Street, Norwich, NR3 1BB. The gallery is open Monday to Saturday, 10am to 5pm. Open to the public, admission free.

Part of the *Beyond Text* project.

### Other Information

George Sexton Associates have provided the lighting and exhibition design for *Basketry* at the Sainsbury Centre

The Sainsbury Centre is supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and The Gatsby Charitable Foundation

Images, left to right: Mask, Salampasu, Democratic Republic of Congo, 1951, Plant material, clay, 73 x 28 x 28 © Royal Museum of Central Africa (Tervuren); Lois Walpole, *Millennium Picnic Basket*, 1999, Recycled juice cartons, 62 x 100 x 100 cm (closed) © Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service (Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery); Thomas Heatherwick, *Boiler Suit – A Panel from the Facade of Guy's Hospital Boiler Room*, 2007, 2.6 x 2.6 m, Edmund Sumner/VIEW