

CHAZEN MUSEUM OF ART
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PRESS RELEASE
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Chazen Museum of Art Presents a Community Regatta October 4, 2008, 3–5 p.m., Memorial Union Terrace

Set Sail with the Chazen! An afternoon of wind-powered water fun on Lake Mendota will celebrate the upcoming exhibition *Mami Wata: Arts for Water Spirits in Africa and Its Diasporas*. The Mami Wata Regatta will feature sails painted by community artists and art organizations and will conclude with a parade of lighted boats. The regatta will take place Saturday, October 4 from 3–5 p.m. at the Memorial Union Terrace. It was organized in conjunction with Hoofers Sailing Club, and sponsored in part by MG&E to highlight the importance of wind power. Rain date October 5.

Beautiful and seductive, protective yet dangerous, the African water deity Mami Wata (pidgin English for “Mother Water”) is often portrayed as a mermaid, a snake charmer, or a combination of both. She and related African spirits dwell in rivers, seas, and other bodies of water. Traditional and now contemporary art has been created to celebrate Mami Wata, and this exhibition explores five hundred years of the visual culture and history devoted to her, inspired by her, and created in honor of the essential, sacred nature of water.

The regatta was initially proposed by exhibition curator Henry Drewal, a UW–Madison professor and sailor. Intended to remind people about the importance of our own water resources, the event also provided area artists with an opportunity to create their own water-spirit-inspired artworks. Hoofers Sailing Club has generously donated sails and provided sailors for this lake-faring afternoon. The Chazen, with the help of Professor Leslee Nelson in the Department of Art, invited artists to participate. Those who painted sails include: Brenda Baker and Bird Ross; Elizabeth Doyle; Henry Hawkins; Sharon Kilfoy; Laurel Lee; Madison Children’s Museum students, under the direction of Katharine Goray; Angela Richardson and Nancy Selfridge; and Sonia Valle.

Mami Wata: Arts for Water Spirits in Africa and Its Diasporas brings together masks, altars, sculpture, paintings, and more from west and central Africa, the Caribbean, Brazil, and the United States. It demonstrates the pervasiveness of the water deities, the centuries-long centrality of water and its spirits to the lives of people across many cultures, and the imagery’s relevance and adaptability in an ever-changing world. *Mami Wata* will be on view at the Chazen Museum of Art from October 18, 2008, through January 11, 2009. The regatta is the first of many special events celebrating this exhibition. Opening weekend events are outlined below; for a list of all *Mami Wata*–related programming please visit chazen.wisc.edu.

Curator Henry John Drewal is Evjue-Bascom Professor of Art History and Afro-American Studies at the UW–Madison and adjunct curator of African Art at the Chazen Museum of Art, UW–Madison. He has studied Mami Wata for more than thirty years.

Mami Wata: Arts for Water Spirits in Africa and Its Diasporas was organized by the Fowler Museum at UCLA and made possible by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, promoting excellence in the humanities.

Mami Wata: Arts for Water Spirits in Africa and Its Diasporas is a Bassett Performance Series Event. Other generous local support is provided by MG&E, Wisconsin Arts Board with funds from the State of Wisconsin and the National Endowment for the Arts, Isthmus | TheDailyPage.com, Chazen Museum of Art Council, Madison Arts Commission, Anonymous Fund, Aquatic Sciences Center Sea Grant Institute, Brittingham Fund, and Hilldale Fund.

Opening Weekend at the Chazen

Friday October 17: A Carnival of Water Creatures

Mami Wata costume reception in Paige Court, 7–9 p.m. Admission: \$8 members, \$12 nonmembers, \$5 UW students with I.D.

The evening will feature John Hughes playing the kora, a traditional West African stringed instrument; Madison’s Atimevu Drum and Dance Ensemble; Patricia Smith delivering a spoken word performance; West African music and dance choreographed by Professor Chris Walker and performed by UW–Madison students. Plus African food from Buraka, and a cash bar. *Costumes of mermaids, sea creatures, snake charmers, gods, goddesses, saints, or other inspiring water creatures highly encouraged.*

Before the reception: 6 p.m. “Mami Wata’s Big Splash!” Lecture by exhibition curator Henry Drewal, professor of art history and Afro-American studies, UW–Madison. Room L140, free admission.

Saturday October 18: Celebrate Water Spirits!: A Family Day

12–4 p.m. Free admission. Children under 12 should be accompanied by an adult.

An afternoon of art, performance, and activities for families, including: Madison’s Ballet Folklórico México; John Hughes on kora; Milwaukee’s Ton Ko-Thi Children’s Performing Ensemble of drum and dance; Art Shegonee, Native American traditional dancer/performer; Sonia Valle and Goongoo Peas with Caribbean music and stories; Madison’s Young People of Promise of Mt. Zion Baptist Church with a praise dance; paper mask-making workshop with artist Gerald Duane Coleman. Plus: guided exhibition tours, and a charming surprise guest from Henry Vilas Zoo.

Sunday October 19: Exhibition catalogue signing

2:15 p.m. In conjunction with the Wisconsin Book Festival, curator Henry Drewal will give a brief reading and sign exhibition catalogues.

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The Chazen Museum of Art is open Tuesdays–Fridays 9 a.m.–5 p.m.; Saturdays and Sundays 11 a.m.–5 p.m.; closed Mondays and major holidays. Admission to galleries and educational events is free. The museum is located on the campus of the University of Wisconsin–Madison and is accessible to wheelchairs from the north entrance (nearest to Library Mall). An elevator is down the corridor to the right. Parking is available at the City of Madison State Street Campus Ramp (entrances on Frances and Lake streets) and the University Square ramp (entrance on Lake Street). Metered parking is available in the UW Lot 46 lower level (entrances on Lake and Frances streets). Evening and weekend parking is also available in UW Lot 83 under Fluno Center (entrance on Frances Street) and in UW Lot 7 under Grainger Hall (entrance on Brooks Street between University Avenue and Johnson Street). The Chazen will provide sign language interpreters for associated programs by three-week advance request to Anne Lambert, Curator of Education, weekdays, (608) 263-4421 (voice). Information is also available by visiting our Web site at www.chazen.wisc.edu.