

# African Diaspora Archaeology Newsletter

---

Volume 11  
Issue 3 *September 2008*

Article 10

---

9-1-2008

## Grass Roots: African Origins of an American Art August-November, 2008, Charleston, South Carolina

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/adan>

---

### Recommended Citation

(2008) "Grass Roots: African Origins of an American Art August-November, 2008, Charleston, South Carolina," *African Diaspora Archaeology Newsletter*: Vol. 11 : Iss. 3 , Article 10.  
Available at: <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/adan/vol11/iss3/10>

This Announcement is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in African Diaspora Archaeology Newsletter by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@library.umass.edu](mailto:scholarworks@library.umass.edu).

## Exhibition

### **Grass Roots: African Origins of an American Art** August-November, 2008, Charleston, South Carolina



*Grass Roots: African Origins of an American Art*, a highly anticipated exhibition created by the Museum for African Art in New York, opens on August 29, 2008 at the Gibbes Museum of Art in Charleston, South Carolina, and runs through November 30, 2008. Through the story of the beautiful coiled basket, *Grass Roots* revisits the history of the southeastern United States and demonstrates the enduring contribution of African people and culture to American life. Featuring over two hundred objects, including baskets made in Africa and the American South, African sculptures, paintings from the Charleston Renaissance, historic photography, and new video, the exhibition follows the history of the coiled basket on two continents and shows how a simple farm tool once used for processing rice has become a work of art and an important symbol of African-American identity.

*Grass Roots* traces the parallel histories of coiled basketry in Africa and the United States, starting from the domestication of rice in West Africa, through the transatlantic slave trade, to the migration of African rice culture to America. The exhibition addresses the history of the Carolina rice plantation and highlights the technological innovations brought to American agriculture by people from Africa. It tells the compelling story of the survival of African-American basketry over three hundred years. While the need for agricultural forms has declined, coiled baskets continue to be made as objects of beauty. *Grass Roots* focuses on the coastal town of Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina, across the Cooper River from Charleston, where basket makers have taken control of their craft as independent entrepreneurs.

On both sides of the Atlantic, the art of basketry continues to be passed down from generation to generation. In South Carolina and Georgia, as in many parts of Africa, virtuoso basket makers invent forms, experiment with new materials, and perfect the techniques they have learned from their parents and grandparents. The exhibition features baskets made by contemporary American and African basket makers as well as historic examples, some dating to the early 19th century, from Lowcountry rice plantations and African villages.

"It is thrilling to be able to tell this story through the coiled basketry traditions that forever link the two continents," said Elsie McCabe, President of the Museum for African Art. "This exhibition is about baskets in both places, but because of new scholarship brought to bear on the subject, it is really about much more. It explores many rich cultural patterns both lost and maintained; it shows how people have built and rebuilt their heritage over

centuries of oppression and opportunity; it reveals how a simple but always beautifully crafted tool has come to be appreciated as an object of art."

*Grass Roots: African Origins of an American Art* includes five short films that feature basket makers demonstrating their techniques and telling their stories. The exhibition is accompanied by a beautifully illustrated full-color catalogue with essays by acclaimed scholars of African and American history and art. *Grass Roots* is curated by Enid Schildkrout, Chief Curator and Director of Exhibitions and Publications at the Museum for African Art, New York, and Dale Rosengarten, Curator and Historian, Special Collections, College of Charleston Library, with input from an advisory board of eminent social historians, art historians, anthropologists, and contemporary basket makers. The exhibit was organized by the Museum for African Art in cooperation with the Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture at the College of Charleston and the McKissick Museum at the University of South Carolina. It begins a national tour at the Gibbes Museum of Art and will be an inaugural exhibition at the Museum for African Art's new building in New York City opening in 2010.