

RIGHT: NIGERIAN, YORUBA PEOPLE,
GÈLÈDÈ HEADDRESS, 1920-1940.
WOOD AND PIGMENT.
GIFT OF DRS. JAMES AND GLADYS
STRAIN. MEAD ART MUSEUM AT
AMHERST COLLEGE, AC 2003.99



YORUBA WORLD

ON VIEW MAY 8, 2025–APRIL 19, 2026

Experience traditional sculpture and masquerade traditions of the Yoruba culture of Nigeria and its influence on the formation of Yoruba Atlantic religions and the visual iconography of the arts of the African diaspora. Featuring selected works from The Amistad Center for Art & Culture's collection, traditional Yoruba material culture, and works by contemporary diaspora artists. Related programming explores Yoruba influence and identity in the Americas with a special focus on the Brazilian, Cuban, Haitian, Puerto Rican, and Jamaican descendant communities of the greater Hartford region.

PRESENTED WITH THE AMISTAD CENTER FOR ART
& CULTURE IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE EXHIBITION
YORUBA WORLD. SUPPORT PROVIDED BY THE JOSEPH
AND ROBERT CORNELL MEMORIAL FOUNDATION FUND
AT THE WADSWORTH.

FRONT COVER: DETAIL, WOLE LAGUNJU, STUDY OF
PYTHON CRESTED FIGURE, 2021. OIL ON CANVAS.
COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST.

TheAmistadCenter
forArt&Culture

THE WADSWORTH

PUBLIC LECTURE



HONORING THE GREAT YORUBA MOTHER! THE GÈLÈDÈ SPECTACLE IN AFRICA AND ITS CARRYOVERS IN THE AMERICAS

DR. BABATUNDE LAWAL
Thursday, March 19, 2026

THE WADSWORTH

HONORING THE GREAT YORUBA MOTHER! THE GÈLÈDÈ SPECTACLE IN AFRICA AND ITS CARRYOVERS IN THE AMERICAS

DR. BABATUNDE LAWAL

Thursday, March 19, 2026

6pm, Avery Theater, The Wadsworth

Yoruba people trace their lineage to the powerful city state of Ile-Ife, located on the west coast of Africa in Nigeria, where they have lived in advanced urban kingdoms for more than 1,500 years. Yoruba artistic practice is rooted in honoring the ancestors, and Yoruba artists are known for their outstanding and unique work across various media, including woodcarving, sculpture, metal work, textiles, and beadwork. Tonight, Dr. Babatunde Lawal, Professor of Art History at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia and renowned scholar of African art, examines the visual culture of the Yoruba and their influences in the Americas. Lawal illuminates the Gèlèdè spectacle—a popular Yoruba community festival of masquerade, dance, and song—as a launching point for exploring broader aspects of Yoruba history and art. Performed by men as a way of honoring the spiritual power of women and female ancestors, the festival ensures community harmony, fertility, and social order within Yoruba society.



LEFT: NIGERIAN, YORUBA PEOPLE.
GÈLÈDÈ MASK, 1920-1940. WOOD AND
PIGMENT. GIFT OF DRS. JAMES AND
GLADYS STRAIN. MEAD ART MUSEUM AT
AMHERST COLLEGE, AC 2003.101

ABOUT THE SPEAKER



DR. BABATUNDE LAWAL

is a professor of Art History at Virginia Commonwealth University. He specializes in African, African American, and African Diaspora art with a personal research focus on the ancient and contemporary arts of Nigeria, particularly the visual culture of the Yoruba and its influences in the Americas. He has conducted fieldwork in Africa, the Caribbean, United States, and Brazil. He has published widely, in addition to presenting papers, chairing sessions, and delivering keynote addresses at international conferences within and outside the United States. Lawal has served as visiting professor at Dartmouth College, Columbia University, Harvard University, Williams College, and the State University of Bahia in Salvador-Brazil, among others. He has also served as a consultant for major museums such as the British Museum, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, Newark Museum, Detroit Institute of Arts, Chrysler Museum, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Seattle Art Museum, and High Museum of Art. Lawal received his PhD and MA in art history from Indiana University in Bloomington, as well as a BA in graphic design from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. His book *The Gèlèdè Spectacle: Art, Gender, and Social Harmony in an African Culture* (University of Washington Press, 1997) is one of the foremost sources on the Gèlèdè tradition.

ABOVE: PORTRAIT OF BABATUNDE LAWAL, COURTESY OF THE SCHOLAR.