



## SHAPING POWER: LUBA MASTERWORKS FROM THE ROYAL MUSEUM FOR CENTRAL AFRICA CURATOR BIO

### **Mary (Polly) Nooter Roberts**

Mary (Polly) Nooter Roberts is Professor in UCLA's Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance, and Consulting Curator for African Art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). Dr. Roberts was hired in December 2011 to launch a program and establish a gallery dedicated to the arts of Africa. At LACMA, Roberts has curated two exhibitions: *Tradition as Innovation in African Art* (2008) and *Shaping Power: Luba Masterworks from the Royal Museum for Central Africa* (2013), the first exhibition to inaugurate the new permanent gallery space at LACMA.

Previously, Dr. Roberts was Senior Curator at the Museum for African Art in New York until 1994. There, her exhibitions and books included *Secrecy: African Art that Conceals and Reveals* (1993); *Exhibition-ism: Museums and African Art* (1994); and with Allen F. Roberts, *Memory: Luba Art and the Making of History* (1996), which won the College Art Association's Alfred Barr Award for museum scholarship. From 1999–2008 she served as Deputy Director and Chief Curator at the Fowler Museum at UCLA. Her exhibitions and publications produced there include: *Body Politics: The Female Image in Luba Art and the Sculpture of Alison Saar* (2000); *A Saint in the City: Sufi Arts of Urban Senegal* (2003), with Allen F. Roberts, which won both the Herskovits Award and the Arnold Rubin Outstanding Publication Award; *Inscribing Meaning: Writing and Graphic Systems in African Art* (2007); and *Continental Rifts: Contemporary Time-Based Works of Africa* (2009).

Dr. Roberts has been a Getty Postdoctoral Fellow and held other grants and awards; served as President of the Arts Council of the African Studies Association; and is an editor of *African Arts* journal. In 2007, she was

decorated as a Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters by the Republic of France for her promotion of art and artists of francophone Africa.

Roberts obtained her MA and PhD in Art History from Columbia University with a specialization in the arts of Africa. She conducted two years of field research among Luba peoples in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire) for her doctoral dissertation and has spent her career curating exhibitions, lecturing, and publishing on Luba sculpture and other arts of Africa. Her most recent book is *LUBA* in the "Visions of Africa" Series (2007), and a special article entitled "The King is a Woman: Shaping Power in Luba Royal Arts" appears in the Fall 2013 issue of *African Arts* journal. Dr. Roberts' other areas of research include Senegalese Sufi arts and devotional images and environments of the Indian Ocean World.