

# Press Release



December 2011



## **Brooklyn Museum Curator Emeritus William C. Siegmann Dies**

William C. Siegmann, Curator Emeritus of the Arts of Africa and the Pacific Islands at the Brooklyn Museum, passed away peacefully on November 29, 2011.

Bill Siegmann had a long-standing and deeply personal connection to Liberia, which began with service in the Peace Corps in the late 1960s and continued throughout his life. He taught at Cuttington University, where he also founded the Africana Museum. Bill returned to Liberia to pursue research between 1974 and 1976, which was supported by a Fulbright-Hays fellowship. Upon his return to the U.S., he served as a curator, first at the Museum of the Society of African Missions, in Tenafly, N.J., and then at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco in 1979-84. Upon being awarded another Fulbright fellowship in 1984, Bill once again returned to Liberia. In conjunction with the West African Museums Programme, he served as Director of the National Museum of Liberia, in Monrovia, where he oversaw the renovation of the museum's nineteenth-century building and the expansion and re-installation of its collections.

During his tenure at Brooklyn, from 1987 to 2007, Bill acquired over 1600 objects for the museum, a prolific record of considered connoisseurship that is unmatched in the history of Brooklyn's African and Pacific Island collections. When he arrived, Bill was charged with the care of a collection that was already widely recognized to be among the most important in the country. However, under his stewardship, it expanded in scope and breadth in significant ways:



Early in his tenure, Bill secured an important gift of nearly 200 works of Oceanic art from Mr. and Mrs. John A. Friede and Melville W. Hall, including this magnificent latmul drum.

## **Brooklyn Museum**

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This striking Kota reliquary was among the works acquired following an exhibition of the collection of the American abstract expressionist painter Adolph Gottlieb.



This work, *Vessel* (1991) by Magdelene Odundo, a British artist of Kenyan descent, was the first piece of contemporary African art to enter Brooklyn's collections.



The incredible and unusual We divination object below is just one example of hundreds of works that Bill acquired from Liberia and Sierra Leone, his area of particular expertise and interest.



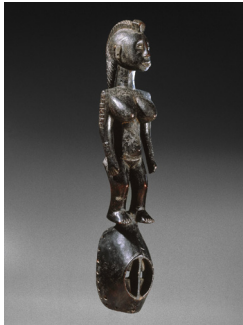
Among his most important acquisitions number a Sapi stone figure, from the 16th century.



This Nok terracotta head, possibly dating to 550 B.C.E., added great temporal depth to the collection.



Under Bill's stewardship, our collection of works from Ethiopia grew exponentially, including this medieval cross.



Through Bill's efforts, Brooklyn received a major bequest from the American artist Beatrice Riese, which included many outstanding items, such as this mask by a Mossi artist.

Bill also organized at least eight major exhibitions at Brooklyn, including *African Art and Leadership*; *Image and Reflection: Adolph Gottlieb's Pictographs and African Sculpture*; *In Pursuit of the Spiritual: Oceanic Art Given by Mr. and Mrs. John A. Friede and Mrs. Melville W. Hall*; *African Furniture*; and, *Masterworks of African Art from the Collection of Beatrice Riese*, as well as four separate reinstallations of the African and Pacific Islands collections. He authored *African Art: A Century at the Brooklyn Museum* (Prestel, 2009), with contributions by Kevin D. Dumouchelle, the first catalogue on the museum's African collection. Most recently, Bill served as a consultant to the Saint Louis Art Museum.

Bill was one of the leading experts on the arts of Liberia and Sierra Leone. He wrote extensively on the arts of masquerades and age grades in this region, and on issues in museology, collecting, and interpretation. Bill also shared his skills in collections development broadly, conducting frequent seminars on museum management and curatorial training in Europe, Africa, and South America through grants from UNESCO and the U.S. Department of State. He also taught at numerous universities in Africa and the U.S.

A native of Minneapolis, Minnesota, Bill Siegmann received a B.A. from the University of Minnesota and an M.A. from Indiana University, Bloomington. For the past several years he lived in Brooklyn, New York.

A memorial service is planned for early January, in New York City. He is survived by a brother, Arthur Siegmann, and a niece, Laura, both of Cincinnati, and a nephew, Mark, of New York City.

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