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**BOWERS
MUSEUM**

Celebrating Strength and Tradition: Bowers Museum Acquires Stunning *Ndwango* by Ubuhle Women



Santa Ana, CA (August 6, 2024) – The Bowers Museum is thrilled to announce the acquisition of a remarkable new *ndwango* (beaded artwork) by South African artist Zondlile Zondo. The piece, titled *Dressed for the Dance*, is a vibrant celebration of cultural heritage and female empowerment, highlighting the artistic excellence of the Ubuhle Women, a community of Xhosa and Zulu women artists living and working together in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

About the Artwork:

- Artist: Zondlile Zondo
- Title: *Dressed for the Dance*
- Year: 2023
- Location: KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa
- Medium: Glass beads sewn onto fabric
- Acquisition: Bowers Museum Purchase made possible by generous contributions from the Bead Society of Orange County, Bowers Museum Collectors Council, Janis Agopian, and the Marion & John Scott Trust

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Cattle hold deep cultural significance for the peoples of eastern South Africa and frequently feature in the *ndwangos* created by the Ubuhle Women. *Dressed for the Dance* draws inspiration from the matric dance, a celebratory event preceding the graduation of South African girls from high school. Despite its large horns suggesting it might be a bull, the depicted Ankole is female. According to Zondlile Zondo, the artwork captures the joy and excitement of graduation and symbolizes the strength of a young girl poised to find her place in the world.

About Ubuhle Women:

The Bowers Museum previously showcased the extraordinary talent of the Ubuhle Women in the exhibition *Ubuhle Women: Beadwork and the Art of Independence*, which ran from July 1, 2023, to August 27, 2023. The exhibition featured a new form of bead art called *ndwango*, developed by a community of women in rural KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The six artists featured in the exhibition create their beadwork on black fabric reminiscent of the Xhosa headscarves and skirts from their childhoods. By stretching the textile like a canvas, the artists transform the flat cloth into contemporary artworks adorned with Czech glass beads.

The *ndwangos*, meaning "cloth" or "rag" in Xhosa, are created using skills passed down through generations. Each piece is crafted in a unique style that the artists describe as coming "directly from the soul." The artworks feature both abstract and figurative subjects, with a single panel taking more than 10 months to complete. Ubuhle, meaning "beauty" in the Xhosa and Zulu languages, refers to the shimmering quality of light on glass beads, which holds particular spiritual significance for the Xhosa people. The meticulous skill and scale of ambition involved in creating each panel become evident as each tiny bead catches the light.



Exhibition and Viewing:

Dressed for the Dance is now a permanent part of the Bowers Museum's collection. This stunning piece is on view just outside the Norma Kershaw Auditorium in the Dorothy and Donald Kennedy Wing, allowing visitors to appreciate its cultural significance and artistic mastery on an ongoing basis.

About Bowers Museum:

Located in the historic heart of Orange County, Bowers Museum's 9 permanent collection exhibitions showcase art and artifacts from cultures around the world. As the largest and one of the oldest museums in Orange County, Bowers has been voted 'Best Museum' in Orange County for the past 30 years (as of 2023). Now on view, the featured exhibition *Asian Comics: Evolution of an Art Form* closes September 8. Learn more at bowers.org.

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