



**Stanley Museum of Art**

University of Iowa  
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Iowa City, Iowa 52242  
[stanleymuseum.uiowa.edu](http://stanleymuseum.uiowa.edu)

**NEWS RELEASE**

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**Stanley Museum of Art Curator Cory Gundlach Appointed as New  
Director of the African Studies Program at UIOWA**

**Iowa City, Iowa** – The University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art Curator of African Art, Cory Gundlach, who recently led the historic restitution of artifacts to the Kingdom of Benin, has been named the new director of the African Studies Program (ASP), an International Programs (IP) affinity group at the university.

“International Programs is delighted that Cory has accepted our invitation to become the director of the African Studies Program,” said Russell Ganim, associate provost at IP. “Cory’s experience, expertise, and connections on the continent make him the perfect colleague to help the UI increase its presence in sub-Saharan Africa. Cory has IP’s full support, and we are excited to assist him in enhancing the UI’s reputation in this key part of the world.”

“I am honored to lead the African Studies Program and work with faculty members across Iowa’s campus that are actively involved in teaching and research on or about the continent,” said Gundlach. “By combining the resources of the Stanley Museum of Art with the academic expertise of our faculty, we have the privilege to shape what African studies is at Iowa, and as a curator of African art, I see the African collection at the Stanley Museum as one of Iowa’s most valuable resources for teaching and research.”

Gundlach's recent success in the historic restitution of artifacts, the first of its kind by a North American museum, underscores his commitment to ethical practices and global cultural exchange which shape his approach to leading the African Studies Program.

“I look forward to ways I can align my curatorial work with my goal as director of ASP, which is to create new relationships with colleagues on the continent and to strengthen those we already have,” Gundlach stated.

In July 2024, the Stanley Museum of Art returned two artworks from its collection from the Benin Kingdom to His Majesty, Oba Ewuare II. The objects, commonly referred to as Benin Bronzes, were identified as having been looted from the Oba’s Palace during the British siege of

1897. The ceremony was held in the Benin Palace and attended by the Oba and representatives from the Benin Royal Court and the Stanley Museum of Art team, led by Gundlach.

Through these experiences and the rich African art collection at the Stanley Museum of Art, Gundlach aims to increase the involvement of students and student organizations in ASP, host ASP-related events at the museum, and increase faculty, student, and public engagement with the African collection, exhibitions, and visiting scholars and artists from the continent.

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### **About Cory Gundlach**

In 1998, Gundlach began his museum career at the Morris Graves Museum of Art in Eureka, California. From 2004 to 2010, he worked in public art administration and museum exhibition design in Fort Collins, Colorado. He enrolled in Iowa's graduate program in African art history in 2010 and completed field research on Lobi-style figure sculpture in southwest Burkina Faso in 2011 and 2012, and later researched contemporary art in Senegal and Ghana.

Gundlach began work as a curatorial research assistant at the University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art in 2012 and was appointed full-time as curator of African art in 2015. He defended his dissertation on Lobi art history in 2019. In 2021, he organized and moderated a three-part, multidisciplinary symposium on African art with nine international scholars. In 2022, he curated five exhibitions of African art for the inaugural installation at the Stanley Museum of Art. His student-curated exhibition, *Alternate Paths: New Histories of Art from African to America*, is the result of his spring 2024 class, "Curating African Art in America," and is the Stanley Museum of Art's first traveling exhibition. Since 2019, Gundlach has taught multiple courses in African art history and museum studies.

In 2023, Gundlach and the Stanley Museum of Art Director Lauren Lessing received a \$400,000 grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to support two-years of provenance research on the museum's African collection. This Mellon grant also provided support for the Stanley Museum of Art's restitution project. In 2024, Gundlach and Mellon Curatorial Fellow Peju Layiwola returned two objects directly to the Oba of Benin, thus marking the Stanley as the first museum to do so in North America.

Gundlach holds a B.A. in fine art from Cal Poly Humboldt, a B.A. in art history from CSU Fort Collins, and a Ph.D. in African art history from Iowa.

### **About the African Studies Program**

The African Studies Program (ASP), a constituent program of the University of Iowa International Programs, was established in 1979 to promote the interdisciplinary study of Africa at The University of Iowa. It helps students gain a broader understanding of African history and

contemporary life in Africa and provides an environment of cooperation and collaboration among students and faculty that leads to increased opportunities for research and teaching.

Learn more at <https://international.uiowa.edu/african-studies-program>

### **About the University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art**

The University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art is a leading university art museum that serves as a focal point for members of the public as well as a multi-disciplinary tool and creative hub for students across campus. The Stanley has one of the most important university-owned art collections in the country, including significant holdings of African art, 20th-century painting and sculpture, works on paper, textiles, and ceramics. Their world-class collection began with acquisitions made in the 1930s to support the nation's first Master of Fine Arts program. The collection continued to evolve as generations of UI faculty and students, including Grant Wood, Elizabeth Catlett, Miriam Schapiro, Philip Guston, and Ana Mendieta, shaped the field of American art.

For more information, visit [stanleymuseum.uiowa.edu](http://stanleymuseum.uiowa.edu).