

2018

Alfred J. Tulk Exhibition Introductory Panel

Fairfield University Art Museum

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LIBERIA, 1931-33

THE COLLECTIONS OF ALFRED J. TULK

Alfred James Tulk was born in London in 1899. As a young man, he moved to the United States, where he earned a degree in studio art from Yale University. In 1931, Tulk took a leave from his work as a commercial artist in New York to embark with his wife and children on a journey to West Africa. The Tulks spent eighteen months at a Methodist mission station in Ganta, Liberia, which had been established a few years earlier by Tulk's longtime friend Dr. George W. Harley.

The early 1930s was a period of rapid economic change and cultural transformation in Liberia. A new system of mandatory government taxation was introduced, and new prospects for income from a growing cash-crop labor workforce emerged. At the same time, the survival of indigenous religious beliefs and traditional political power structures came under increasing pressure. Tulk's sizeable portfolio of oil paintings, watercolors and drawings document the peoples and cultures he encountered there during this moment of transition. In addition to his work as a painter and draftsman, while in Liberia Tulk also assembled a small but important collection of masks, statues and other artifacts, including jewelry, musical instruments and household items. These reflect his fascination with the sculptural forms, the sacred function of art in society, and the relationship between African visual art, music and dance.

Reuniting for the first time in over 85 years many of the artworks and artifacts collected by Tulk – who resided in Connecticut for most of his adult life – this exhibition explores the relationship between his collecting practice and the growth and development of his artistic style while living in West Africa.

Christopher B. Steiner, PhD

Lucy C. McDannel '22 Professor of Art History & Anthropology
Connecticut College
Curator of the Exhibition

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TownVibe is the exclusive media sponsor of the 2018-19 exhibition program in the Bellarmine Hall Galleries.