

Distinguished Alumna Deborah Stokes, LC'74: Livingston College Fostered Art and Social Justice

Deborah L. Stokes, honored in 2015 as a Livingston College Distinguished Alumna, has served as the Curator for Education, Head of K-12 and Teacher Programs with the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African Art since 2008.



At the Smithsonian, Stokes oversees the development of educational programs, activities, and materials for diverse school audiences and teacher development. Stokes writes with an eye to multidisciplinary, cross-unit collaborative programming and has created family gallery guides integrating the arts with natural history, astronomy and environmental science in a series of exhibitions.

Before arriving at the Smithsonian, Stokes was appointed Visiting Professor in the Art History Department at University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) teaching The Visual Art of Africa and Issues in Contemporary African Art. Stokes received her M.A. in Museum Studies at Columbia College Chicago, and worked as a Research Associate in the Anthropology Collections at the Field Museum in Chicago with a focus on African beadwork. She has published extensively in African arts.

Stokes' work on the African continent has taken her to Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa and she continues to foster ideas of cross cultural collaboration with contemporary artists, curators, and educators both nationally and internationally.

In 2012, Stokes received the Pioneer Award from the Federal Government Distance Learning Association (FGDLA) in recognition of an individual for demonstrating initiative and leadership in the development and implementation of distance learning in the federal government.

In August 2013 her Distance Learning program was awarded the coveted Pinnacle Award from the Center for Interactive Learning and Collaboration (CILC). Stokes is currently serving a three-year term on the Advisory Board of Art Education, Journal of the National Art Education Association.

During her college tenure, Stokes found mentors in the Art and Art History programs at Livingston College who introduced her to the museum world in New York City. "Livingston College gave a foundation to the idea of social justice," Stokes tells us in the embedded video. (You may also open the video in a new window.)

Also, check out an article documenting the “First Livingston Women’s [Art] Show” in 1972, at which Stokes exhibited paintings and a silk screen print.