

**Tang Teaching Museum Presents**  
***Sixfold Symmetry: Pattern in Art and Science***

**Exhibition Explores the Networks, Structures, and Systems  
We Use to Understand the World**

**New Commission by Nigerian Artist Victor Ekpuk Animates Gallery,  
Alongside Objects from Across Cultures and Fields of Study**

Saratoga Springs, NY (September 7, 2016) — The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College presents *Sixfold Symmetry: Pattern in Art and Science*, an exhibition of contemporary and historical art, artifacts, and material culture exploring the human desire to use and create pattern to understand the world around us. On view September 17, 2016 – March 12, 2017, the Tang Teaching Museum project features collaborations with faculty members from multiple Skidmore College departments, including Art History, Biology, World Languages, Mathematics, Computer Science, Music, Psychology, and Religion.

Each collaborating professor explores the use of pattern in specific aspects of their field of study. The exhibition, which takes its name from the symmetry shown in the late 19<sup>th</sup>- early 20<sup>th</sup>-century snowflake photographs by Wilson "Snowflake" Bentley, highlights cross-disciplinary connections in an installation that places objects from across time, cultures, and disciplines in dialogue.

"*Sixfold Symmetry* investigates why the human brain discerns, designs, and desires pattern across all the areas of our lives," said Rachel Seligman, the Tang's Assistant Director of Curatorial Affairs and exhibition co-curator. "This phenomenon has been present throughout human cultures for centuries. Exploring it from different academic perspectives in collaboration with Skidmore colleagues has revealed unexpected and fascinating connections and relationships."

Entering the galleries, visitors are invited to explore connections between a kaleidoscope of seemingly disparate objects such as Bentley's snowflake photographs, Shaker spirit drawings, Tibetan mandalas, Kabbalistic diagrams, and a wall-hanging by Iranian artist Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian called *First Family – Hexagon* (2010) that uses six-sided forms.

The Tang has commissioned an original wall drawing for the exhibition from contemporary Nigerian artist Victor Ekpuk, whose work is inspired by aesthetically rich and inherently secretive forms of textile-based written communication in Nigeria. The creation of the drawing itself includes a public performance element as visitors, students, and faculty witness the creation of the large-scale work inside the Tang's gallery.

"One of the questions I am most interested in is the relationship between pattern in nature and human constructions of pattern," said Associate Professor of Mathematics Rachel Roe-Dale, exhibition co-

curator. “*Sixfold Symmetry* challenges our audiences to investigate the links between disciplines and consider the unifying intricacies of natural and cultural phenomena.”

The overlapping investigation of pattern also delves into the algorithmic structures of modern artwork, modified field recordings of natural environments, and dazzle camouflage used on World War I battleships to disguise a ship’s speed and direction. Hungarian-born, French artist Vera Molnar is represented in the exhibition with three works of computer graphics. Molnar was one of the first artists to experiment with computer-generated art, using early programming languages such as Fortran and Basic to plot delicate, square-dominated graphic drawings in the 1970s. Field recordings of natural locations in support of scientific study, including in the Southwest desert and Mid-Atlantic forest, reveal representations of pattern by manipulating speed and scale of observation. *Sixfold Symmetry* also explores “expectancy grammar”—the psychological tendency for humans to selectively process some linguistic elements over others while reading. A Tobii Eye Tracker device installed in the gallery prompts viewers to peruse text and superimposes the resulting eye patterns over the words.

The gallery also acts as the performance space for Skidmore’s Gamelan Banyu Wali ensemble. A 16-piece gamelan, traditionally used by Indonesian cultures to produce a melodic structure described as “fractal,” accommodates both student and professional ensembles, and is the focus of a series of public workshops. Additional programming tied to the exhibition includes a conversation with Victor Ekpuk on September 17, in which the artist and Art History Professor Lisa Aronson will discuss the source of inspiration for Ekpuk’s wall drawings—the secret indigenous Nigerian script known *nsibidi*.

### **About the Tang Teaching Museum**

The Tang Teaching Museum at Skidmore College is a pioneer of interdisciplinary exploration and learning. A cultural anchor of New York's Capital Region, the institution's approach has become a model for university art museums across the country—with exhibition programs and series that bring together the visual and performing arts with fields of study as disparate as history, astronomy, and physics. The Tang has one of the most rigorous faculty-engagement initiatives in the nation, the Mellon Seminar, and robust publication and touring exhibition initiatives that extend the institution's reach far beyond its walls. The Tang Teaching Museum's building, designed by architect Antoine Predock, serves as a visual metaphor for the convergence of ideas and exchange the institution catalyzes. More information at <http://tang.skidmore.edu>.

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