

HESSE FLATOW

Utle, Luke. (2025, Dec 18). "Adama Delphine Fawundu binds culture through art." *The Daily Utah Chronicle*. Online.

Adama Delphine Fawundu binds culture through art

The current artist at the "Salt" exhibition is a great, modern addition to the UMFA.



Adama Delphine Fawundu exhibit at the UMFA on Thursday, Dec. 4, 2025.
(Photo by Kristina Walker | The Daily Utah Chronicle)

The [Utah Museum of Fine Arts](#) acts not only as a place to display fantastic pieces of art, but as a platform for the modern art scene to shine through. This is done, of course, through dedicated exhibits. Though on the second floor, almost touched away from sight is the "[Salt](#)" exhibit.

"Salt" is an annual exhibit that shows off the talents of an up-and-coming artist, or artists that are currently on the rise. The artists are not limited to just the local area, as "Salt" tries to give voices to artists on a national level. For "Salt.17," the most recent one, things have gone in a different direction with the current artist on show. Rather than being a new artist or rising figure, the work currently on display is done by an already established force in the artistic world: [Adama Delphine Fawundu](#).

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How it all comes together

Fawundu is an artist who combines many genres of the field to make her vision come into focus. Though her background is in photography, she is not limited to that field by any means. Fawundu also works as an associate professor of visual arts at [Columbia University](#). She explores themes of inter-connectivity, trying to find the common grounds of people and transforming it into art. She started working with the UMFA because she takes interest in exploring African art collections in locations that are not connected to Africa. At the same time, Emily Lawhead, associate curator of modern and contemporary art, was looking for an artist for "Salt.17." "The stars aligned," Lawhead said.

Modern art based in tradition

As for the exhibit, the standout piece is the large woven together piece titled "Simba No. 1." Whenever Fawundu visits a place for art, she combines local concepts with traditional African ones. On the piece is a patch that has salt from the Great Salt Lake, with another depicting brine shrimp. She has coined this style as "Kpoto Patchwok." "Kpoto" is a Mende word that means "gathering" and "patchwok" is a Krio word that means "piecing textiles together." This collage holds other elements as well, such as a gourd used to symbolize the African Diaspora.

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Across from this main piece is a collection of the others. They are titled as "Sun of Vitality No. 1-3," and each of them serves as a tribute to three different bodies of water. Those bodies of water are the Kongo River, the Mano River and the Great Salt Lake. Lawhead mentioned that Fawundu was interested in the Great Salt Lake for its uniqueness of being a salt lake. Lastly, there is a collection of African art from the UMFA on display that are compatible with the pieces of Fawundu's exhibition. The four pieces on display were chosen from a selection of hundreds with the choices whittled down over time. "It's inspiring to see," Liam Howards, a museum patron and Salt Lake local said.

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The display will be up until June 14, 2026. Not included in the exhibit is a video of Fawundu at the Great Salt Lake, which can be seen in an adjacent room to "Salt. 17" and serves as a complete piece. Fawundu's style is one born of talent and appreciation, blending cultural concepts in a way that not one single aspect drowns out the other. Rather, it works to elevate and simply must be seen.