

**Traditional Art of West Africa**



# **Traditional Art of West Africa**

**A LOAN EXHIBITION**

**February 12 - March 16, 1972**

**UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY  
State University of New York at Binghamton**



## FOREWORD

Within the stylistic boundaries of each tribal tradition, the African artist transforms wood, fiber, metal, clay and stone into symbolic images. Based on legend and cult, humans and animal forms are created mainly for ceremonial purposes, and are interpreted in geometric simplifications and bold stylizations. The power and vitality of abstract shapes and patterns fascinated, contributed, and became part of the artistic heritage of 20th century painting and sculpture.

With the increasing interest in African art and culture it is with great pleasure that the University Art Gallery with the Department of Anthropology presents this exhibition. Many have helped to make this undertaking a reality.

This exhibition would not have been possible without the generous participation of the Museum of Primitive Art, the American Museum of Natural History, and the many private collectors mentioned in the Catalog who kindly made works available. To Dr. Robert Goldwater, Miss Elizabeth Little, and Miss Dorothy Lytle of the Museum of Primitive Art, and to Dr. Stanley Freed and Mr. Philip Gifford of the American Museum of Natural History we extend our gratitude for their support.

We gratefully acknowledge the financial assistance of the United Student Government and the Undergraduate Art Majors Committee, particularly John Capoulos, Susan Fried and David Harvey who worked enthusiastically with the United Student Government on the development of this exhibition.

Special thanks are due to our students, Barbara Adams, Anthony Ascrizzi, Robert Boyer, Adele Castellani, Julie and Steve Dibner, Alan Garfield, Christine Henkel, Jacqueline Kitson, John Peluso, Andrea Rubinstein, Susan Stoler and Sharon Volo. Mrs. Inge Levie and Mr. Walter Luckert, our Gallery staff, deserve our thanks for their valuable assistance.

Finally, we are privileged to have Professor Michael Horowitz, Chairman of the Department of Anthropology, select this exhibition and write the Introduction and Catalog. He was assisted by our student, Sherry Greene, who helped in many aspects of this project from its conception.

Michael Milkovich, Director  
Mary Newcome, Curator



## INTRODUCTION

To see African masks and figures in a gallery, wrenched from their living context, is like seeing a Stradivarius violin in a glass case — one longs to hear it played, by a master intimate with its literature, in a properly tuned concert hall, before an appreciative, understanding audience. Under glass it is at best potential; at worst dead. In concert it is alive, fulfilled. We accept this in music; but our understanding of art, of sculpture and painting, is almost always as displayed in a museum or a private collection. Only rarely, as when we see El Greco's *Burial of Count Orgaz* in the Church of Santo Tomé, Toledo, and during an actual religious service, with the sound of the liturgy, the scent of the incense, the intensity of the congregation of believers, do we begin truly to approach the meaning of the work as intended by its creator. Thus it is with an African mask. That we can respond to it hanging from a wall, surrounded by objects from other traditions, is, perhaps, a tribute to the skill of its carver. We call this or that figure a "masterpiece," and we understand how the cubist revolution of the early Twentieth Century depended upon the discovery by Picasso and others of the African artists' solutions to the problems with which they were wrestling. But as the violin was made to be played, the mask was made to be danced. The mask is only an element; indeed, most of the masks displayed in this and other collections are themselves fragments, for attached to the carving on the dancer's face or above his head is a long skirt of raffia or cloth. This is meant to be seen in action, on specific occasions, supported by the drums and songs of the musicians and the masks and costumes of the other dancers, before an awed, involved, knowledgeable assemblage, in an appropriate arena of grassland or forest, or within a shrine or secret society lodge. And even this is insufficient. For as we turn for understanding of the iconography of the Church to the liturgy, the religious and exegetical thoughts of the canonists, so must we seek to comprehend the philosophical, religious, and cosmological ideas and systems to which these sculpted pieces relate. Unfortunately, satisfactory analyses of African cosmological systems are very few, although one of the outstanding ones, Marcel Griaule's *Conversations with Ogotemmêli: an Introduction to Dogon Religious Ideas* (London, 1965), refers to a people whose work is displayed in this exhibition with a number of splendid pieces.

The importance of the total context is shown by the novelist Chinua Achebe, writing of the Ibo during the initial colonial period. Achebe tells us of Edogo, who carved the new *agaba* mask which was to be presented for the first time in a ceremony given by women for their deceased husbands. Edogo was uncertain of the mask; when he finished the carving it seemed to have in the nose the inappropriate delicacy of an *Mmwo* mask (see Cat. No. 75). The test was to see it in action. Edogo could not know by contemplating it in isolation. "Looking at it now that it had come to life the weakness seemed to disappear. It



even seemed to make the rest of the face more fierce" (*Arrow of God*, London, 1964, p. 251).

In recognizing the necessity of understanding the total context, the community environment of African art, we run, nonetheless, a second risk, that is losing sight of the individual artist. To return to the analogy of European church art, we do not feel that our studies are complete without an attempt to identify the specific locale, school, and, where at all possible, creator of the work. This is a problem of immense difficulty in a nonliterate society, where a work is not signed, where — with wood — old examples are rapidly consumed by insects and climate, and where the provenience is often unrecorded or erroneously stated by the time the piece gets to the foreign collector. But African art is no less the creation of individual artists than is European art. As William Fagg writes: "We cannot be satisfied to identify a work as Yoruba, or even as from the Egba or Ekiti Yoruba; we must classify it if we can with the works of a particular village and a particular family of carvers, and if we can progress so far we shall usually be able to discover the carver's name" (*Nigerian Images: the Splendor of African Sculpture*, New York, 1963, p. 120).

We are clearly guilty, in this exhibition, of perpetuating both these faults, for we have been unable to present the entire context for any of the pieces, and we have seldom been able to identify the individual artists. Our hope is that the exhibition will serve as an introduction, flawed as it is, and whet the viewers' appetites for the more complete presentation which these works demand and to which they are entitled.

The vogue for African art early gave rise to sculpture made for sale to foreigners rather than for use by the artist's community. As early as the Sixteenth Century, Portuguese voyagers commissioned African carvers to create works of ivory on European models: dining utensils, salt cellars, hunting horns. These seem to have come mainly from Benin and from the Sherbro Islands (see W. Fagg, *Afro-Portuguese Ivories*, London, 1959). Some hundred years ago, BaKongo sculptors carved elephant and rhinoceros tusks, intricately relieved with figures of people — in African and European dress — and animals ascending the tusk in a tight spiral (see Cat. Nos. 87, 88, 89). These again were made for sale to strangers. More recently whole workshops of carvers in many countries have copied and modified traditional objects specifically to be sold to tourists and resident foreigners. These may be seen by the hundreds in front of most hotels and in most airports in Africa. Such modern representations are shown in one Senufo piece in this exhibition (Cat. No. 25) and perhaps in others. Such work is clearly having an effect on African art, if only because the pieces are made for a new audience, unaware or uninterested in the traditional contextual *gestalt*.

Michael M. Horowitz





## CATALOG

1

Mali: Dogon

MASK

Wood, paint; height 35"

Collection: Museum of Primitive Art 56.363

Exhibited: New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Art of Oceania, Africa, and the Americas from the Museum of Primitive Art*, 1969, Cat. No. 226; Rockefeller University, "West African Sculpture," 1970-1971. (Note: only the most prominent exhibitions are indicated.)

F.-H. Lem, whose Sudanic pieces were obtained in the field during 1934-1935, and which subsequently formed the basis of the great Helena Rubinstein collection, illustrates a similar mask in his *Sudanese Sculpture*, 1949, pl. 7: "Totemistic mask, surmounted by a female figure, of the type called 'sodege' used in the ritual dances of the 'naba'."

2

Mali: Dogon

MASK

Mask with single horn, surmounted by female standing figure

Wood, paint, rope; height 28 1/4"

Collection: Museum of Primitive Art 55.8 (Gift of Rene d'Hamoncourt)

Exhibited: New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Art of Oceania, Africa, and the Americas from the Museum of Primitive Art*, 1969, Cat. No. 223.

E. Elisofon, *The Sculpture of Africa*, 1958: "This horn-bill mask culminates in the figure of a standing woman. Each type of mask has its own name and special song and dance. The masked rites are largely expiatory and apotropaic."

3

Mali: Dogon

MASK SURMOUNTED WITH FEMALE FIGURE

Wood; height 28"

Collection: Professor and Mrs. Michael M. Horowitz, Binghamton, New York

4

Mali: Dogon

MALE FIGURE

Wood, red stone; height 20"

Collection: Professor and Mrs. Michael M. Horowitz





5

Mali: Dogon

HORSE AND RIDER

Wood; height 15 1/2"

Collection: Museum of Primitive Art 63:113

Exhibited: New York World's Fair, New York City Pavilion, 1964 and 1965; New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Art of Oceania, Africa, and the Americas from the Museum of Primitive Art*, 1969, Cat. No. 240; Museum of Primitive Art, *Sculpture from Three African Tribes*, 1959, Pl. 11.

6

Mali: Dogon

DOUBLE FIGURE: ANCESTRAL COUPLE

Wood, encrustation; height 24 1/2"

Collection: Museum of Primitive Art 65:13

Exhibited: New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Art of Oceania, Africa, and the Americas from the Museum of Primitive Art*, 1969, Pl. 232.

These *tellem* figures, their hands raised in a supplicatory manner, are covered with the remains of sacrificial offerings.

According to P. Langlois (*Art Soudanais: Tribus Dogons*, 1954, p. 40), these doors were affixed to the granary of the Hogan, chief priest among the Dogon. The Hogan received special veneration among the people, and only a limited number of especially privileged persons could approach him. The granaries of ordinary people were far less finely carved. The architecture of the granary is illustrated in Marcel Griaule's study of Dogon cosmology, *Conversations with Ogotemmêli: an Introduction to Dogon Religious Ideas*, 1965, Pl. 1a.

7

Mali: Dogon

GRANARY DOOR

Wood; height 36 1/2"

Collection: Museum of Primitive Art 58:65

8

Mali: Bambara

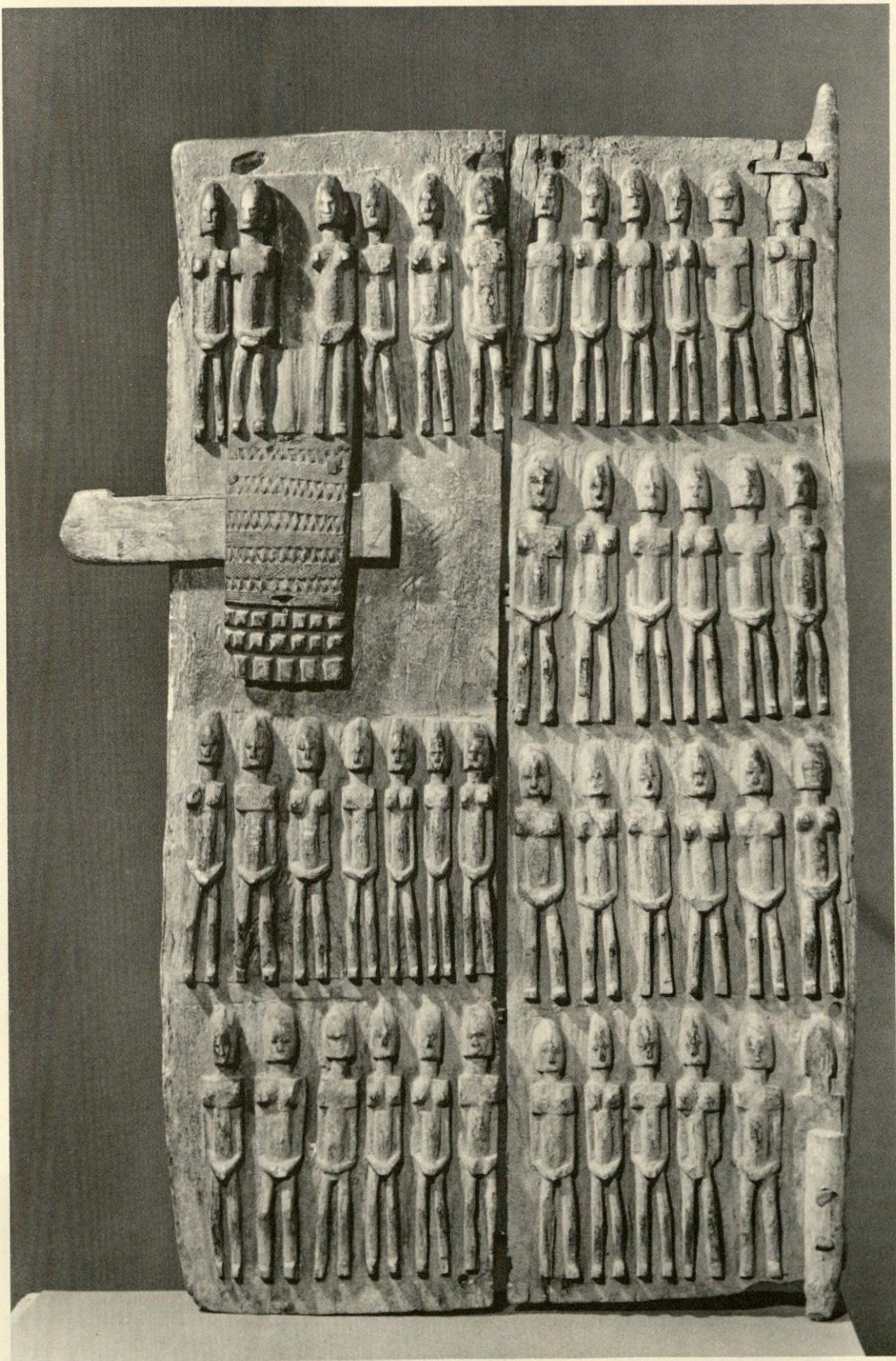
ANTELOPE HEADPIECE (*Tji wara*)

Wood; height 27 1/4"

Collection: Museum of Primitive Art 59:315

Exhibited: The Century Association, New York, "Primitive Sculpture from the Collection of Nelson A. Rockefeller" 1953.









The *tji wara* are abundantly known in Europe and America, largely because they are being produced in workshops for the tourist trade. A substantial number of authentic pieces were collected in Africa, and many were exhibited in the Museum of Primitive Art show, *Bambara Sculpture from the Western Sudan*, 1960. In his introduction to the exhibition catalogue, Robert Goldwater notes that these headpieces are associated with the agricultural societies of young men, who have the right to dance them. "... the ceremony would appear to have a double intention: it is both a propitiation of those spirits of the earth that have been disturbed by man's activity and interference (we must remember that the ground is first cleared by burning, thus suddenly and visibly routing the animals from their natural homes), and a fecundity rite, performed through sympathetic magic" (*Ibid.*, 16).

9

Mali: Bambara

ANTELOPE HEADPIECE (*Tji wara*)

Wood, metal; height 18 1/4"

Collection: Museum of Primitive Art 62.37

Exhibited: Museum of Primitive Art, "Birds, Beasts and Fantastic Creatures from the Museum Collection," 1970.

10

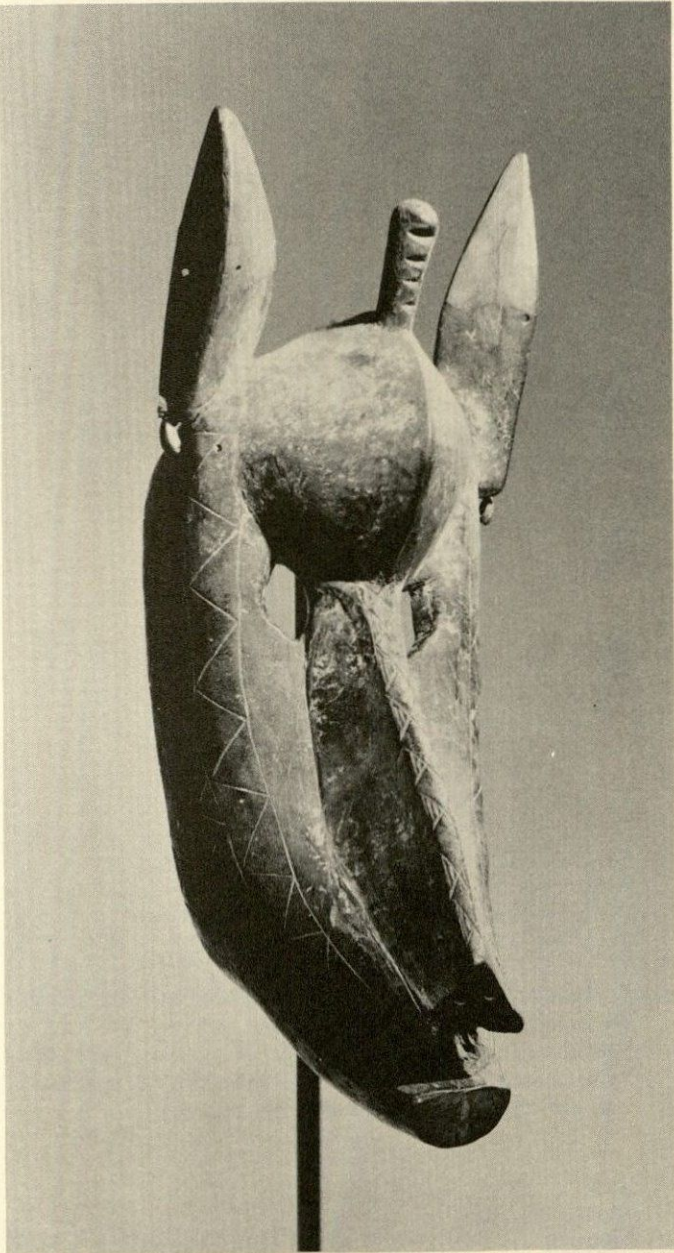
Mali: Bambara

MALE FIGURE WITH RAM HEADPIECE

Wood, paint; height 44"

Collection: Professor and Mrs. Michael M. Horowitz





11

Mali: Bambara

KORE SOCIETY HYENA MASK (*Souroukou*)

Wood; height 17 1/8"

Collection: Museum of Primitive Art 60.3

Exhibited: Museum of Primitive Art, "Queens and Antelopes: Bambara Sculpture from the Western Sudan," 1960; New York Metropolitan Museum of Art,

*Art of Oceania, Africa, and the Americas from the Museum of Primitive Art*, 1969, Cat. No. 253.

Koré dancers wearing the *souroukou* mask are responsible for keeping the uninitiated away from the arena where the agricultural deity, Koré, is celebrated. The rites are concerned with rain and increasing agricultural productivity. See G. Dieterlen, *Essai sur la Religion Bambara*, 1951.





13

12

Mali: Bambara

KORÉ SOCIETY HYENA MASK (*Souroukou*)

Wood, Metal; height 20 1/4"

Collection: Museum of Primitive Art 60.5

Exhibited: Museum of Primitive Art, "Queens and Antelopes: Bambara Sculpture from the Western Sudan," 1960 (R. Goldwater, *Bambara Sculpture from the Western Sudan*, 1960, Pl. 35); New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Art of Oceania, Africa, and the Americas*, 1969, Pl. 252.

"The Koré then is a nature god, a god of the fields and of vegetation and growth in general, who is honored annually, and also more especially every seven years, when the initiation of new members of the society is marked by special rites" (R. Goldwater, *op. cit.*, 13).

13

Mali: Bambara

MASK

Wood, paint, cloth, metal, dried mud, hair, wire; height 43"

Collection: Museum of Primitive Art 63.94

Exhibited: University of California, Santa Barbara, "African Arts of Transformation," 1970, Cat. No. 86.

A related piece, collected by F.-H. Lem, formed part of the Helena Rubinstein collection which was sold at auction in 1966. Lem, writing of that piece, says it represented "the chain of ancestors, forming the upper part of mask worn by members of the 'ntieko' during the execution of the ritual dances at the beginning and at the end of the farming cycle" (*Sudanese Sculpture*, 1949, p. 39).





According to F.-H. Lem (*Sudanese Sculpture*, 1949, Pls. 58 and 63), these zoo-anthropomorphic masks are "used in the execution of ritual dances preceding sowing and harvest time." For an illustration of a Bobo dancer in mask and full costume, see M. Leiris and J. Delange, *African Art*, 1968, Pl. 134. The masks are danced in the cult of *Do*, village guardian spirits. A group of masked Bobo dancers is shown in D. Paulme, *Les Sculptures de l'Afrique noire*, 1956, Pl. III.

16

Upper Volta: Bobo

MASK

Wood, paint; height 11 3/4"

Collection: Museum of Primitive Art 61.260

(Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John J. Klejman)

17

Upper Volta: Bobo

MASK

Wood, paint; height 36 1/4"

Collection: Museum of Primitive Art 58.230

Exhibited: New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Art of Oceania, Africa, and the Americas from the Museum of Primitive Art*, 1969, Cat. No. 245.

14

Mali: Bambara

MASK

Wood, paint; height 33 3/4"

Collection: Professor and Mrs. Michael M. Horowitz

15

Upper Volta: Bobo

MASK

Wood, paint, twine; height 72"

Collection: Museum of Primitive Art 57.179

Exhibited: Museum of Primitive Art, *Traditional Art of the African Nations*, 1961, Pl. 12; Denver Art Museum, "African Art," 1964; National Gallery of Art, 1970; Brooklyn Museum, "African Sculpture," 1970.

18

Upper Volta: Bobo-Fing

HELMET MASK

Wood, paint, bristle, resin; height 16 1/2"

Collection: Museum of Primitive Art 59.313

"Among the Bobo, helmet masks are rather rare; they are employed at initiation ceremonies, embodying protective forces" (Museum of Primitive Art).

19

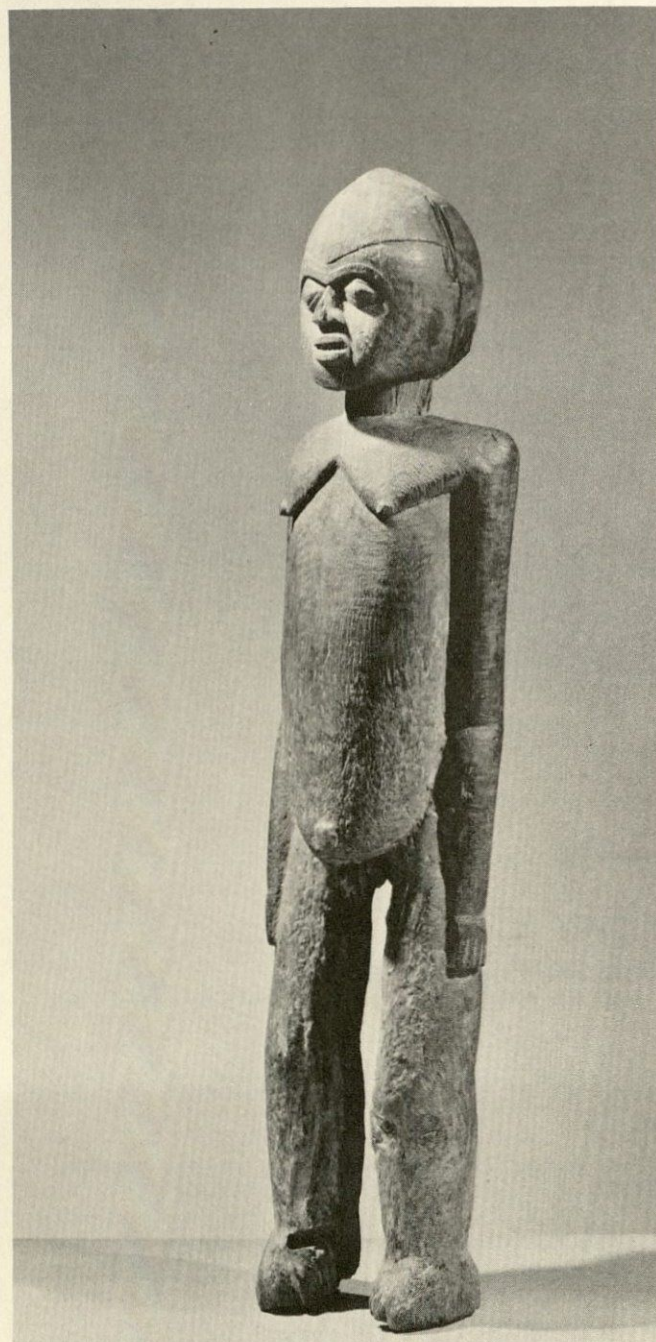
Upper Volta: Mossi

MASK

Wood; height 46"

Collection: State University of New York at Binghamton, University Art Gallery 1968.114





20

Upper Volta: Lobi

STANDING MAN

Wood; height 16 7/8"

Collection: Museum of Primitive Art 59.320

(Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert L. Stolper)

"... Lobi sculpture, the most sensitive of which is a delicate head with a helmet-like coiffure favoured by these people, seems to be associated with protective magic or perhaps divination rather than with cults devoted to gods or nature" (M. Leiris and J. Delange, *African Art*, 1968, p. 281).



21

Upper Volta: Kurumba

ANTELOPE HEADDRESS

Wood, paint; height 14 1/4"

Collection: Museum of Primitive Art 56.380

Exhibited: Art Institute of Chicago, "The Traditional Sculpture of Africa," 1961; State University College at New Paltz, "Traditional African Tribal Sculpture," 1967.

These carved and painted antelopes, forming the upper part of a mask, are said, by William Fagg, "to be used in the ceremony of the dispersal of the ancestral spirits at the end of a period of mourning" (*Tribes and Forms in African Art*, 1965, Pl. 28). Authentic examples are very rare, although they are now being produced in large numbers as "airport-hotel" art. Curiously, the Kurumba are not known to have carved any other kinds of masks or figures. In addition to the piece illustrated by Fagg, interesting examples are found in Pierre Meauze, *African Art: Sculpture*, 1968, p. 41, and in M. Leiris and J. Delange, *African Art*, 1968, Pl. 315. A most highly stylized piece, still said to represent an antelope, is illustrated in R. Sieber and A. Rubin, *Sculpture of Black Africa: the Paul Tishman Collection*, 1968, Pl. 15.

22

Ivory Coast: Senufo

FIGURE WITH REVOLVING "FIRE-SPITTER" HEADDRESS

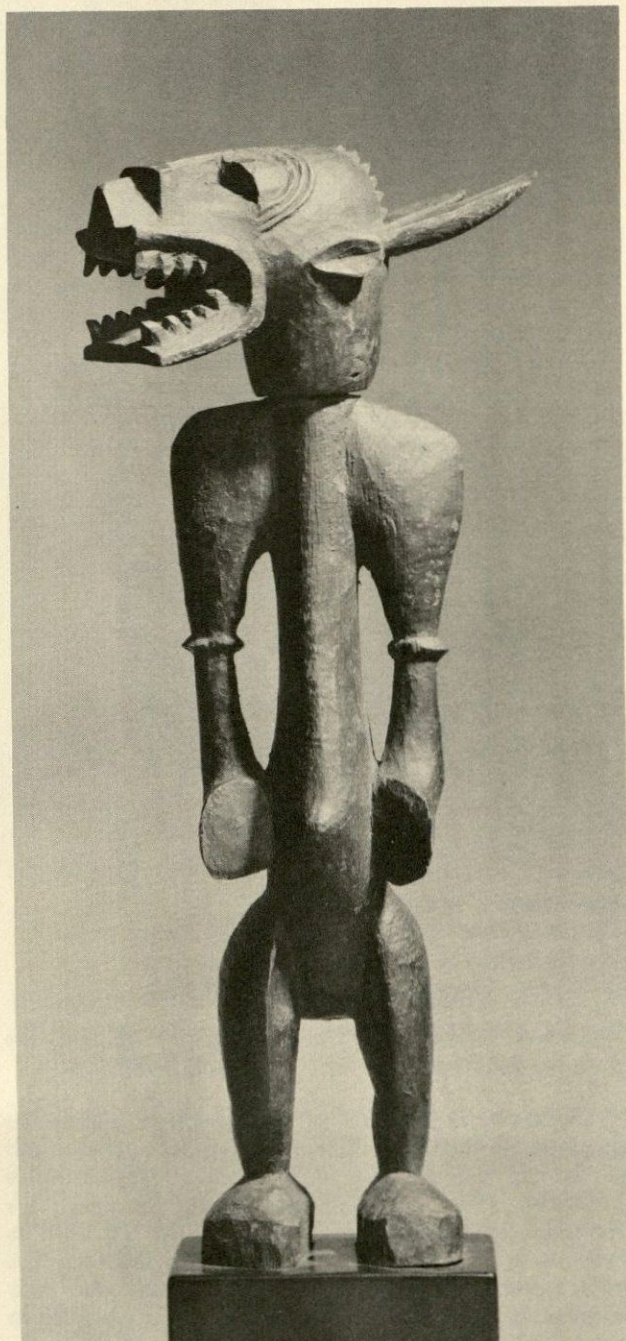
Wood, paint; height 12 5/8"

Collection: Museum of Primitive Art 59.123

Exhibited: New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Art of Oceania, Africa, and the Americas from the Museum of Primitive Art*, 1969, Cat. No. 281.

These helmet masks, containing an assortment of protruding teeth, horns, jaws, ears, often surmounted with chameleon-like figures, are meant, according to Robert Goldwater (*Senufo Sculpture from West Africa*, 1964, p. 17), "to impress and to terrify. The ceremonial purpose and the visual effect are therefore very different from those of the delicate face mask, and this range and variety is one of the characteristics of Senufo sculpture. Yet in the manner of their conception there is a certain similarity, for both face and helmet masks consist of a gathering together of separate, and naturalistically incongruous elements." A dancer wearing a helmet mask similar to that on the exhibited figure is illustrated *Ibid.*, Pl. 60. B. Holas, *Arts de la Côte d'Ivoire*, 1969, pp. 120-121, illustrates two large sculpted figures wearing helmet masks, which, he says, represent the guardian spirits of the sacred forest of *poro*.

22





23

Ivory Coast: Senufo  
SEATED FEMALE FIGURE WITH CHILD  
Wood; height 21 7/8"  
Collection: Museum of Primitive Art 59.15

Exhibited: The Hudson River Museum, "African Art in  
Westchester from Private Collections," 1971, Cat. No.  
43.

24

Ivory Coast: Senufo  
FEMALE FIGURE  
Wood; height 21 3/8"  
Collection: Professor and Mrs. Michael M. Horowitz

25

Ivory Coast: Senufo  
FEMALE FIGURE  
Wood, paint; height 50 1/2"  
Collection: Professor and Mrs. Michael M. Horowitz

This "rhythm pounder," while related to traditional  
forms, was carved for sale rather than for use. It is in-  
cluded in this exhibition because it is an aesthetic  
success, despite its lack of authenticity; the sculptor's  
skill and creativity are manifest even without the con-  
ventional audience.

26

Ivory Coast: Senufo  
MALE FIGURE  
Wood; height 11 7/8"  
Collection: Professor and Mrs. Michael M. Horowitz

27

Ivory Coast: Senufo  
DOUBLE FACE MASK (*Kpelié*)  
Wood; height 9 3/4"  
Collection: Museum of Primitive Art 60.2

Exhibited: Museum of Primitive Art, *Senufo Sculpture  
from West Africa*, by Robert Goldwater, 1964, Pl. 26.

"The particular function of the *kpelié* mask in the  
observances of the *Lo* (a Senufo initiation society) is said  
to remind the initiates of the limits of permissible  
behavior" (W. Fagg, *African Tribal Images: the  
Katherine White Reswick Collection*, 1968, Pl. 16). The  
example in this exhibition, double-faced, may combine  
both female and male forces; the tension from this  
combination is a recurrent theme in West African  
cosmology.





28

Ivory Coast: Senufo

MASK

Wood; height 14 5/8"

Collection: State University of New York at Binghamton, University Art Gallery, 1968.92

(Gift of the May Company)

29

Ivory Coast: Senufo

BIRD (*Porpianong*)

Wood, paint; height 55 3/8"

Collection: Museum of Primitive Art 60.16

Exhibited: Museum of Primitive Art, *Traditional Art of the African Nations*, 1961, Pl. 25; Bowdoin College Museum of Art, "Art of Sub-Saharan Africa," 1968.

These large representations of the hornbill, whose posture suggests a man as much as a bird, seem to be relatively recent innovations in Senufo sculpture. "In its allegoric form, with its long beak touching, or almost touching, its swollen belly to suggest the male and female components of increase, it is called *porpianong* or *porparga*. This means, says Holas, that it stands for the whole category of the *porpia*, tribal effigies symbolizing the continuity of the whole community, or 'the constituent elements of the collectivity' " (R. Goldwater, *Senufo Sculpture from West Africa*, 1964, p. 28).

30

Ivory Coast: Senufo

SEATED FEMALE FIGURE

Wood; height 26"

Collection: Professor and Mrs. Robert S. Jordan, Endwell, New York

31

Ivory Coast: Guro

MASK

Wood, paint; height 13 5/8"

Collection: Mr. and Mrs. Charles Justice, Johnson City, New York

This mask is probably used in rites of the men's cult, the *dié*. The deep red coloring, locally obtained, is highly characteristic of Guro masks, as is the long straight nose without nostrils. Although the Guro live in close proximity to the Baule, and have doubtless exchanged much with them, they make almost no sculpture, concentrating rather on the mask. One of the few examples of Guro statuary is illustrated in M. Leiris and J. Delange, *African Art*, 1968, Pl. 339.

32

Ivory Coast: Baule

STANDING MALE FIGURE

Wood, paint, ivory; height 16 5/8"

Collection: Museum of Primitive Art 56.385

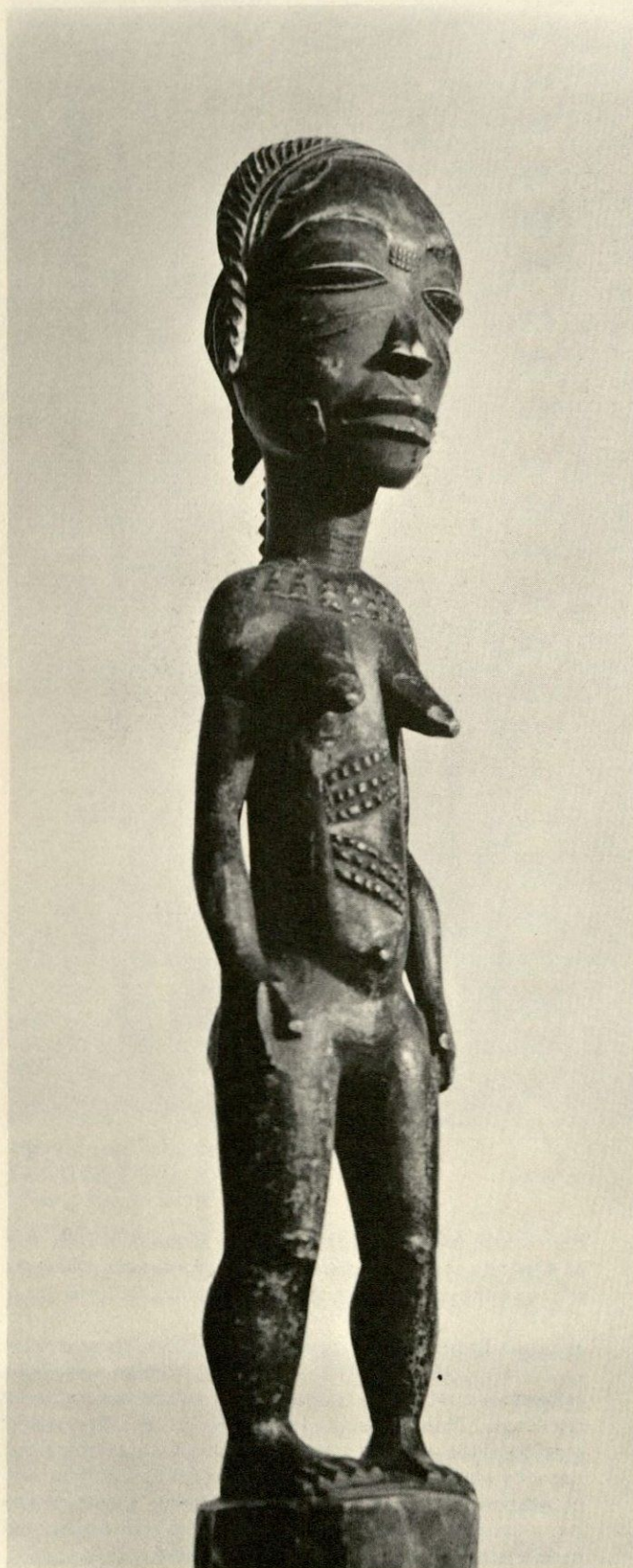


27

Exhibited: New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Art of Oceania, Africa, and the Americas from the Museum of Primitive Art*, 1969, Pl. 327.

William Fagg and Margaret Plass (*African Sculpture: an Anthology*, 1964, p. 136) note that foreign neophyte collectors most readily respond with enthusiasm to Baule carvings. "This appears to be because of the ingratiating quality of the great majority of Baule pieces, a superficial suavity which is often accompanied by a lack of firmness of structural form." Nonetheless, many Baule pieces have considerable power as shown in this male figure and in the female figure (Cat. No. 33) exhibited with it.





33

Ivory Coast: Baule

FEMALE FIGURE

Wood, beads; height 16"

Collection: Professor and Mrs. Michael M. Horowitz

Region of Bouake.

34

Ivory Coast: Baule

FEMALE FIGURE

Wood; height 7 5/8"

Collection: Professor and Mrs. Michael M. Horowitz

Region of Bouake.

35

Ivory Coast: Baule

FEMALE FIGURE

Wood, beads; height 11 1/4"

Collection: Professor and Mrs. Michael M. Horowitz

36

Ivory Coast: Baule

HEDDLE PULLEY

Wood; height 5 5/8"

Collection: Professor and Mrs. Michael M. Horowitz

37

Ivory Coast: Baule

GOLD WEIGHTS

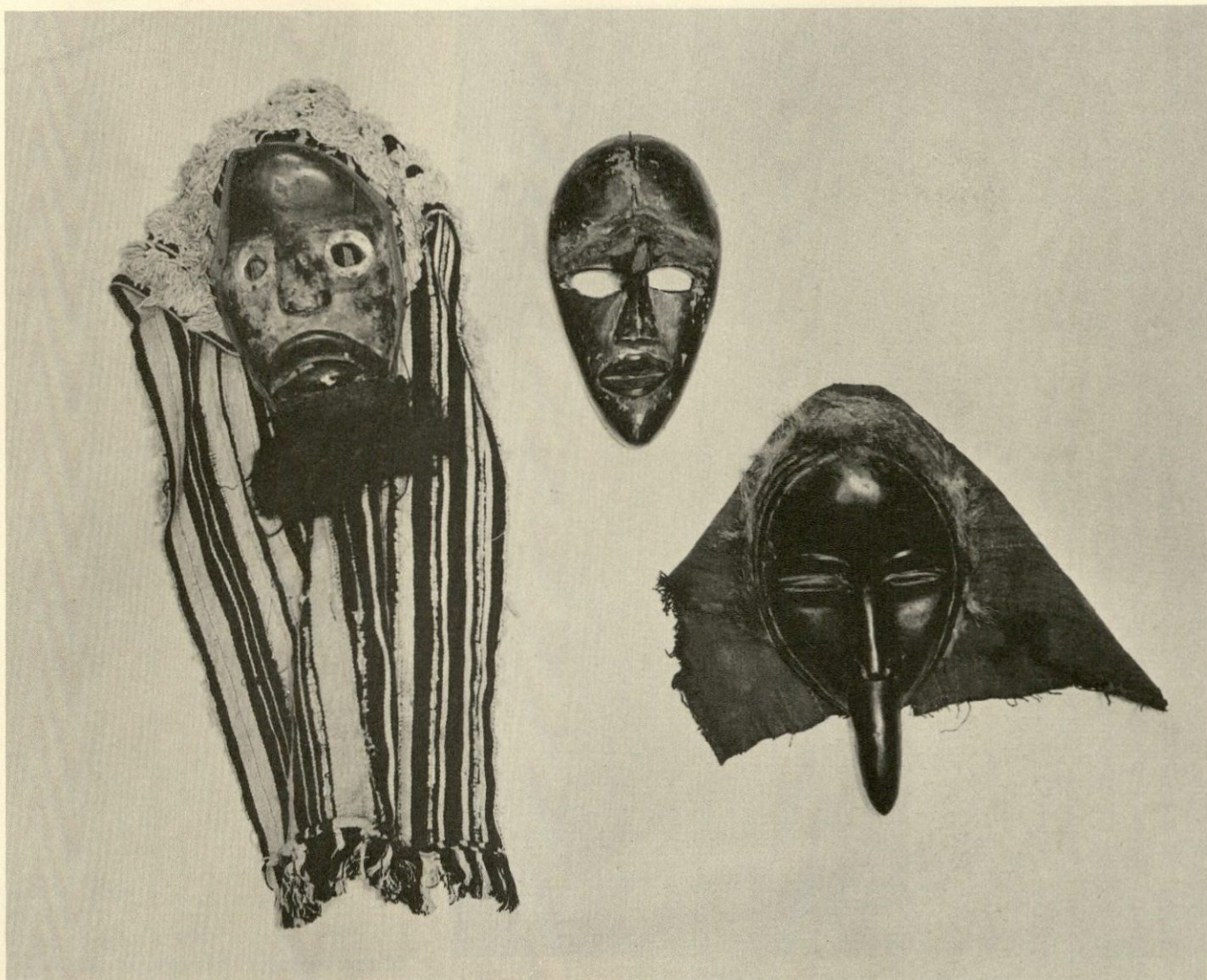
Bronze\*

Collection: Professor and Mrs. Michael M. Horowitz

- |              |                             |
|--------------|-----------------------------|
| a. sword     | k. animal figure with bands |
| b. horse     | l. flower                   |
| c. crocodile | m. rabbit (modern)          |
| d. chameleon | n. crocodile (modern)       |
| e. shield    | o. bird (modern)            |
| f. trumpet   | p. fish                     |
| g. shield    | q. beetle                   |
| h. knot      | r. sword                    |
| i. star      | s. lizard                   |
| j. fish      |                             |

\* Note: no metallurgic studies have been done on any of the pieces in this exhibition. The terms "brass" and "bronze" are here used without precision, meaning simply any alloy of copper with other metals (such as zinc, tin).





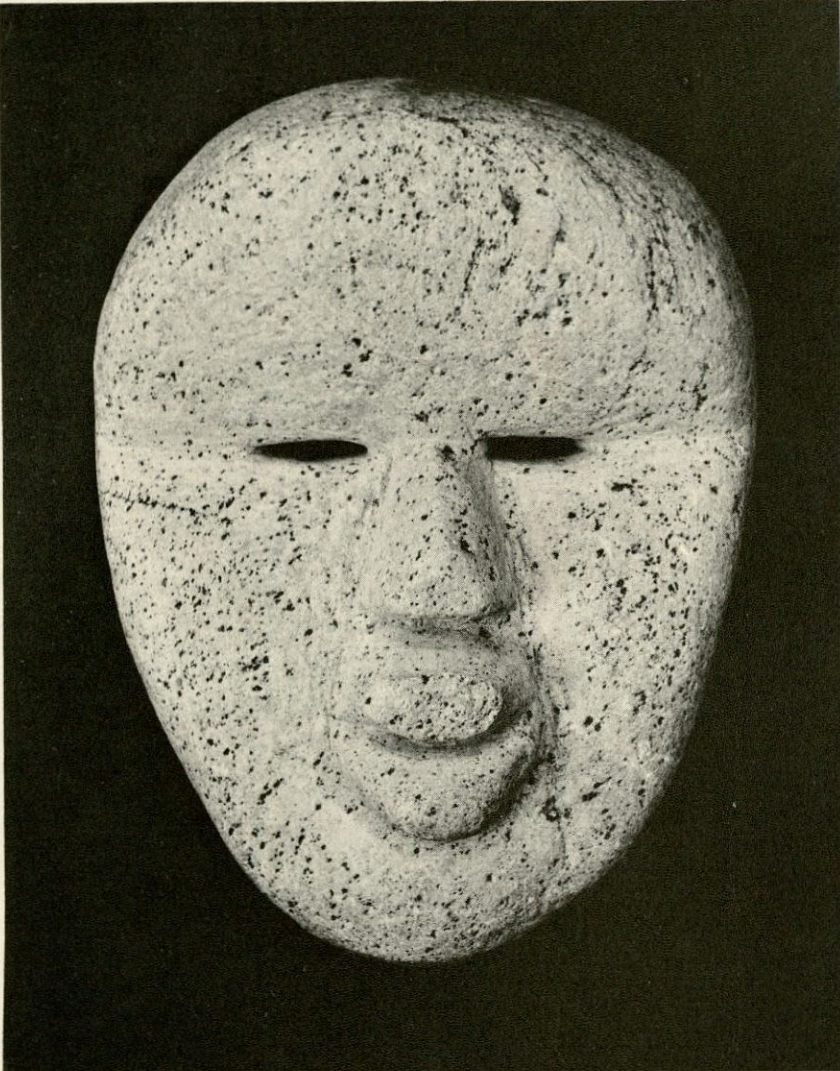
38, 40, 39

38  
Ivory Coast: Dan  
MASK  
Wood, paint, fiber, metal, cloth; height 10"  
Collection: Professor and Mrs. Michael M. Horowitz  
Region of Man.

39  
Ivory Coast: Dan  
MASK  
Wood, fur, cloth; height 12 1/4"  
Collection: Professor and Mrs. Michael M. Horowitz  
Region of Man.

40  
Ivory Coast: Dan  
MASK  
Wood, hide and fur fragments; height 9 3/8"  
Collection: Professor and Mrs. Michael M. Horowitz  
Region of Man.





41

Ivory Coast: Dan

MASK

Stone; height 6"

Collection: State University of New York at  
Binghamton, University Art Gallery, 1968.91  
(Gift of the May Company)

Illustrated: State University of New York at  
Binghamton, *University Art Gallery Bulletin*, 1, Fall  
1968, p. 56.

This is one of the very few Poro society masks carved in

stone. A larger example was shown in the catalogue,  
*Beyond Europe* (March 27, 1971 — May 22, 1971), of the  
Saidenberg Gallery, New York, Pl. 35: "Amongst all of  
these, a stone mask is so rare that this example may well  
be unique."

42

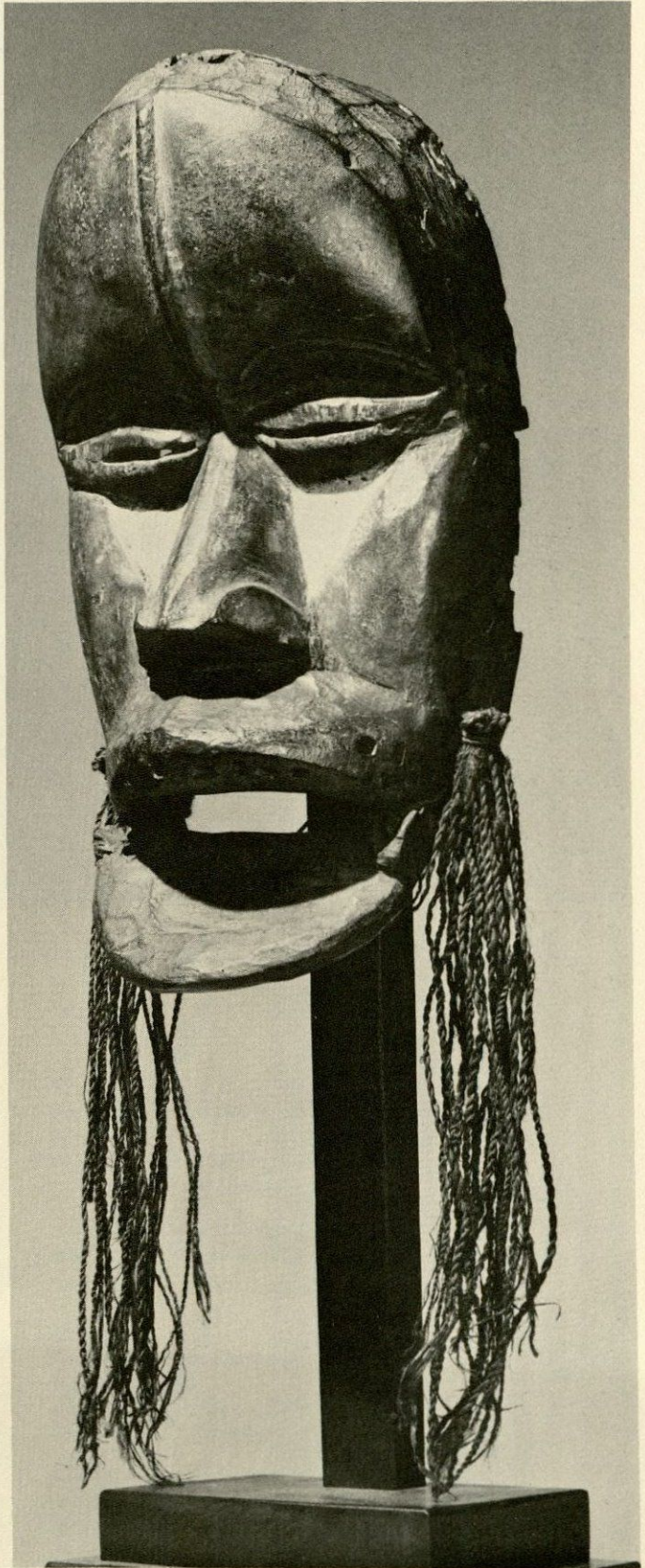
Ivory Coast: Bete

MASK

Wood, hide fragments; height 11 1/2"

Collection: Professor and Mrs. Michael M. Horowitz





43

Liberia: Dan

MASK

Wood; height 8 5/8"

Collection: Museum of Primitive Art 57.109

Exhibited: Art Institute of Chicago, "The Traditional Sculpture of Africa," 1961; New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Art of Oceania, Africa, and the Americas*. . . , 1969, Cat. No. 317.

This magnificent Poro society mask is illustrated in *Masterpieces in the Museum of Primitive Art*, 1965, Pl. 8. For an important discussion of Dan carvings, see H. Himmelheber, "Sculptors and Sculptures of the Dan," in L. Brown and M. Crowder, eds., *The Proceedings of the First International Congress of Africanists*, 1964.

44

Liberia: Dan

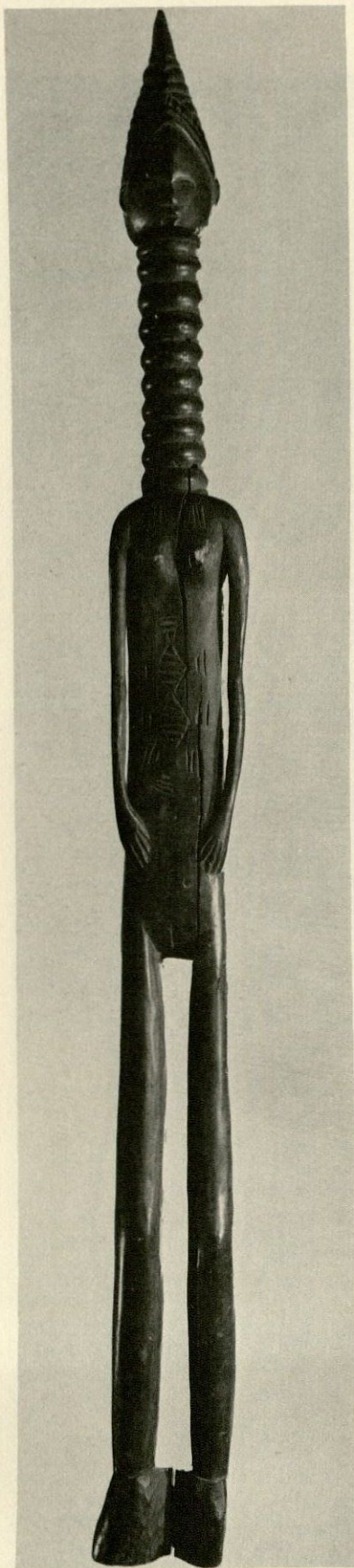
MASK (Poro Society)

Wood, fiber; height 12"

Collection: Museum of Primitive Art 57.247

Exhibited: University of Massachusetts, "Africa below the Sahara," 1960.





46



48

45

Liberia: N'gere

MASK

Wood, paint, fabric, tin, cord, fibre, nails, cartridge cases; height 12 1/2"

Collection: Museum of Primitive Art 56.215

Exhibited: New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Art of Oceania, Africa, and the Americas*. . . , 1969.

Illustrated: Museum of Primitive Art, *Traditional Art of the African Nations*, 1961, Pl. 23; D. P. Biebuyck, ed., *Tradition and Creativity in Tribal Art*, 1969, Pl. 5.

Compare this grotesque, wildly exuberant mask with the restrained, formalized Dan masks in this exhibition. Yet Dan and N'gere may represent contrasting modes in the same tradition, and a single sculptor may carve both types. For discussion, see P. J. L. Vandenhouste, *Classification stylistique du masque Dan et Guéré de la Côte d'Ivoire occidentale*, Mededeelinger van het Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, Leiden, 4, 1948.





46

Liberia: Vai

FEMALE FIGURE

Wood; height 37 1/2"

Collection: American Museum of Natural History 90.0-1515.

This figure was acquired by the Museum between 1907 and 1911.

47

Liberia: Vai

FEMALE FIGURE

Wood; height 26"

Collection: American Museum of Natural History 90.0-1513

This figure was acquired by the Museum between 1907 and 1911.

48

Sierra Leone: Mende

HELMET MASK

Wood; height 17"

Collection: Mr. and Mrs. Charles Justice

These masks, with a raffia fringe descending to the knees, are worn by female dancers of the Bundu secret society.

49

Sierra Leone: Mende/Creole

MASK

Wood, paint, burlap; height 15 1/2"

Collection: Professor and Mrs. Robert S. Jordan

According to Professor Jordan, this is a "devil dancer's" mask, now worn during entertainments.

50

Guinea (Sierra Leone?): Kissi

HEAD

Soapstone; height 13"

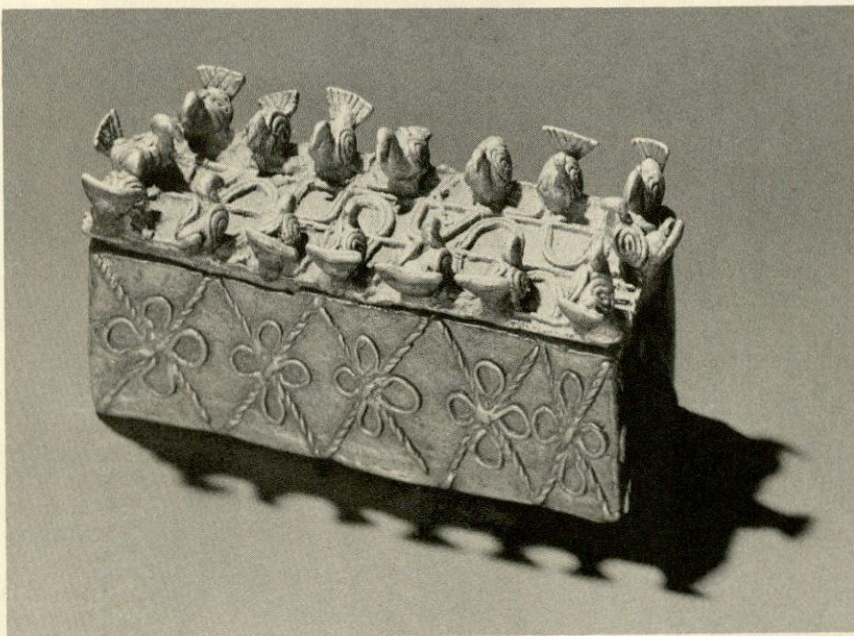
Collection: Professor and Mrs. Robert S. Jordan

This piece, which may have been an object of ancestor worship, appears related to the carved soapstone *nomoli* of the Kissi, Mende, and other peoples of the Sierra Leone-Guinea rice-farming zone.









51  
Guinea: Baga  
STANDING FEMALE FIGURE  
Wood; height 25 1/4"  
Collection: Museum of Primitive Art 59.118

The face on this figure, both in form and ornamentation, reproduces the enormous *Nimba* masks worn by the members of the *Simo* society among the northern Baga. These masks, heavily fringed with raffia, are so large that the dancer sees through a slot in the chest. The great *Nimba* headdress in the Museum of Primitive Art is illustrated in *Traditional Art of the African Nations*, 1961, Pl. 19. According to Michel Leiris and Jacqueline Delange (*African Art*, 1968), the *Nimba* is so heavy it "requires relays of dancers to carry it." A splendid example from the Musée de l'Homme is illustrated in the same volume (Pl. 144).

52  
Ghana: Ashanti  
GOLD DUST BOX (*Abamphruwa*)  
Brass; length 3 1/4"  
Collection: Museum of Primitive Art 60.74a,b

Exhibited: Museum of Primitive Art, "African Sculpture from the Museum's Collection," 1966; "Selections from the Museum Collection," 1968.

The rise of the Ashanti kingdom around Kumasi was predicated upon the control and exploitation of the gold and slave trade, and on the remarkable administrative abilities of a number of the Asantehene, the rulers of metropolitan Kumasi. A fine summary of the brass art work used for measuring and storing gold dust is M. D. McLeod, "Goldweights of Asante," *African Arts* 5(1):8-15, 1971. The article has excellent illustrations.

53  
Ghana: Ashanti  
GOLDWEIGHTS  
Brass  
Collection: State University of New York at Binghamton, University Art Gallery

- a. man carrying wood on head, 1968.115
- b. sword, 1968.116
- c. fishing net, 1968.117
- d. leopard with tortoise, 1968.118
- e. antelope, 1968.119
- f. bird in trap, 1968.120

54  
Ghana: Ashanti  
GOLDWEIGHT  
Brass  
Collection: Professor and Mrs. Irving Zupnick, Vestal, New York

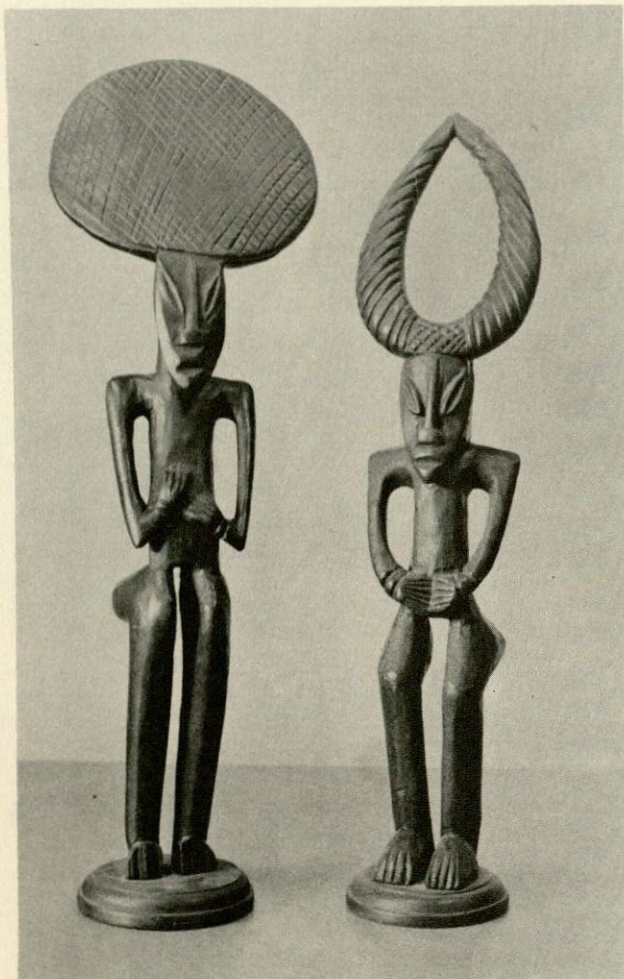
Figure of a female with hands on head.

55  
Ghana: Ashanti  
KENTE CLOTH  
Cotton, silk; height 84 3/4", width 51"  
Collection: Museum of Primitive Art 62.78

Exhibited: Arnot Art Gallery, Elmira, New York, "The Art of Black Africa: Past and Present," 1965.

Ashanti Kente cloth, woven in narrow strips and sewn together, represents some of the finest indigenous weaving in West Africa.





56

Ghana: Ashanti  
MALE FIGURE

Wood; height 19 1/2"

Collection: Professor Hans Hoffmann

Exhibited: Harpur College, *Primitivism, Folk and the Primitive*, 1962, Pl. 14.

This is an unusual example of Ashanti figure carving. A related piece is illustrated in Leon Underwood, *Figures in Wood of West Africa*, 1951, Pl. 8.

57

Ghana: Ashanti  
MALE FIGURE

Wood; height 18"

Collection: Professor Hans Hoffmann

58

Niger: Fulani (Wodaabe)

CATTLE, CAMEL, HORSE AND RIDER

Unbaked clay

Collection: Professor and Mrs. Michael M. Horowitz

These animals are sculpted by Wodaabe children as toys. This group was made by Gorjo bi Adam, in Mainé-Soroa, Niger, in 1968. The cattle are distinguished primarily by the disposition of their horns:

- a. fitordajé - cow, one horn pointing forward and one back
- b. bijaré - bull, large short horns bent downward and back
- c. kiipiri - bull, horns forward
- d. tékoreré - bull, horns turn toward each other, above, and slightly forward
- e. hogolé - cow, horns straight out
- f. yorué - cow, horns up, curved slightly inward
- g. luringé - cow, horns up at about 45° for two-thirds their length, then turned downward
- h. ellingé - cow, horns up
- i. gariélé - bull, horns up and turned forward
- j. kalhaldé - cow, horns up and pointed backwards
- k. nyalbé - yearling heifer
- l. yeloba - camel
- m. pusho Munkayla - Munkayla's horse.

This may be the first exhibition of this type of sculpture in a museum or gallery. For an excellent ethnographic description of the Wodaabe, see M. Dupire, *Peuls nomades: étude descriptive des Wodaabe du Sahel Nigérien*, 1962.

59

Niger: Fulani (Wodaabe)

DECORATED BOWLS

Calabash, ink; heights 2 1/8" and 2 5/8"

Collection: Professor and Mrs. Michael M. Horowitz

These bowls, incised by Amina in Mainé-Soroa, 1968, reproduce the designs of the facial and body tatoos worn by the Wodaabe.





60

Nigeria: Yoruba

MALE FIGURE (*Ibeji*)

Wood, beads; height 9 1/2"

Collection: Mr. and Mrs. Timothy Terry, Binghamton, New York

Twins in Yoruba: *Ibeji*. Twins occupy a special place in Yoruba cosmology, bridging the mundane world of the mortals with the sacred world of the spirits. Twins are the most mortal of infants, for their prematurity renders them vulnerable and their death rates are probably greater than those for children born singly. Yet twins are credited with enormous power, with special access to the supernatural. This dual role may be seen in the sculpted figures of dead twins: on the one hand, the figures are invariably small, meant to be carried by their bereaved mothers, and thus represent infants; on the other hand, the carvings are usually shown sexually and physically mature, as if they were adult.

For a well-illustrated discussion of *ibeji* figures among the Yoruba, see Robert F. Thompson, "Twin Statuettes," in *Black Gods and Kings: Yoruba Art at the University of California, Los Angeles*, 1971.

61

Nigeria: Yoruba

FEMALE FIGURE (*Ibeji*)

Wood, beads, cowrie shells, string; height 9"

Collection: Mr. and Mrs. Timothy Terry

"Today the mother of twins in traditional areas may dance in a public place where she receives money even if she is of means. Hence the coming of twins is associated with a rise in the fortune of the family. . . The riches of the twin birth may be suggested by garlands of the traditional money of cowries adorning several of the twin images. . ." (R. F. Thompson, *Black Gods and Kings: Yoruba Art at the University of California, Los Angeles*, 1971, p. 13/2).



62  
Nigeria: Yoruba  
FEMALE FIGURE (*Ibeji*)  
Wood; height 11"  
Collection: American Museum of Natural History 90.1-8420

63  
Nigeria: Yoruba  
FEMALE FIGURE (*Ibeji*)  
Wood, beads; height 11"  
Collection: American Museum of Natural History 90.1-8421

64  
Nigeria: Yoruba  
MALE FIGURE (*Ibeji*)  
Wood; height 10 1/2"  
Collection: American Museum of Natural History 90.2-3251

65  
Nigeria: Yoruba  
FEMALE FIGURE (*Ibeji*)  
Wood, beads; height 9 1/2"  
Collection: American Museum of Natural History 90.1-9815

This pair of *Ibeji* (with No. 66) was collected in 1951 at Oyo by William Bascom, anthropologist and author of *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria*, 1969.

66  
Nigeria: Yoruba  
MALE FIGURE (*Ibeji*)  
Wood, beads; height 9 1/2"  
Collection: American Museum of Natural History 90.1-9816

67  
Nigeria: Yoruba  
MALE FIGURE (*Ibeji*?)  
Wood; height 12 1/2"  
Collection: State University of New York at Binghamton, University Art Gallery, 1966.182  
(Gift of Mr. Harry Bober)

Illustrated: State University of New York at Binghamton, *University Art Gallery Bulletin*, 1, Fall 1968, p. 56.

68  
Nigeria: Yoruba  
LINKED MALE AND FEMALE FIGURES (*edan Ogboni*)  
Brass; height 5" each  
Collection: American Museum of Natural History 90.2-3276a,b

These figures are probably Obo work. Elderly, prominent Yoruba men, devoted to the earth as a deity, formed the Ogboni society, and were permitted to wear the linked *edan*, brass figures of a male and a female, about their necks. As a political group they provided a counterpoise to the power of the *oni*, ruler of a metropolitan state. Peter Morton-Williams has described the society in "The Yoruba Ogboni cult in Oyo," *Africa* 30(4):362-374, 1960. A recent study of the linked figures themselves is L. E. Roache's "Psychophysical attributes of the Ogboni *edan*," *African Arts* 4(2):48-53, 1971.

69  
Nigeria: Yoruba  
MALE AND FEMALE FIGURES (*Ogboni*)  
Brass; height 5 1/2"  
Collection: American Museum of Natural History 90.2-3288a,b

Probably Obo work, representing male and female elements in creation.

70  
Nigeria: Yoruba  
FEMALE FIGURE FORMING "OGBONI STAFF"  
Bronze; height 12 1/2"  
Collection: American Museum of Natural History 90.1-6061a,b

"The anthropomorphic brass staff of the Yoruba Ogboni Society — the *edan Ogboni* — holds a position of isolation and aesthetic distinction within the Yoruba plastic. Whereas traditional wood-carving is humanistic in its identification with life, is spontaneous, descriptive, and experimental in idiom, Ogboni art is iconic — archetypal, hieratic, and conservative, a manifestation of eternal principle. Where the formal theme of Yoruba carving is abstract, dynamic, architectonic, Ogboni art is absolute, static, linear. . . Though art associated with Orisha [deities] is often religious it is not generally held to contain a spirit, and is never worshipped as a spirit. Orisha art is more typically symbolic of the spirit, where Ogboni art, in contrast, is sacred and worshipped as the actual vessel of the spirit" (Denis Williams, "The iconology of the Yoruba *edan Ogboni*," *Africa* 34(2):139, 1964).







71

Nigeria: Yoruba

MASK

Wood, paint; height 11"

Collection: American Museum of Natural History 90.2-78

Identified by William Bascom as a mask for Gelede, a religious society among Southwestern Yoruba concerned with the propitiation of witches. From Meko. Gelede masks are worn on top of the head, sometimes with the face toward the sky. Nonetheless, the eyes are usually pierced to enliven the mask (W. Fagg, *Nigerian Images*, 1963, Pl. 80).

72

Nigeria: Yoruba

MASK (Gelede, from Meko)

Wood; height 10 1/2"

Collection: American Museum of Natural History 90.2-81

"...senior ancestral masks, the elder *egungun*, in traditional times sought out and destroyed individual human witches. The function of Gelede seems more vast: *confrontation with the gods as witches*. A different strategy is required to defend against the enormous powers of thunder, smallpox, and the sea in combination with the witches. Therefore, in contrast to the assemblages of skulls and amorphous clay which ride the heads of senior moral inquisitors in the cult of *egungun*, Gelede images are calm and beautiful. These images confront the unassailable collective witchcraft of the gods and their followers by means of a praise poem cast into a thousand sculptures. The communication suggested: beauty is an ultimate weapon against overwhelming forces of destruction" (R. F. Thompson, *Black Gods and Kings*. . ., 1971, p. 14/1).

73

Nigeria: Yoruba

MASK

Wood, paint, cloth; height 10"

Collection: American Museum of Natural History 90.1-9943

Identified by William Bascom as mask for Egungun religious society, from Oyo.

Karimu, a carver said:

"A hunter had this Egungun in his house. . .

If he did not, the entire family would become sick and the small children would die away.

We were told by the diviner that this was so, once, when our children were dying.

As time went on, we realized that Ifa was right, this Egun saved children, because all the children born after this mask was purchased lived. . ." (R. F. Thompson, *Black Gods and Kings*. . ., 1971, p. 15/2).

74

Nigeria: Yoruba

KNEELING FEMALE FIGURE WITH INFANT (*Adosa sango*)

Wood, beads, cowrie, brass; height 11 1/2"

Collection: American Museum of Natural History 90.1-9838

According to Bascom, this figure, from Oyo, represents an initiate of the deity Sango (lightning).

75

Nigeria: Yoruba

STOOL

Wood, paint; height 23 1/2"

Collection: American Museum of Natural History 90.2-85

These stools, with their carved and painted human figures, are shrine furniture. This one is probably for Obatala, the deity of creativity.

76

Nigeria: Bini

SEATED FIGURE

Wood; height 11 3/4"

Collection: Dr. and Mrs. David Bloom, Binghamton, New York

Exhibited: Harpur College, *Primitivism, Folk, and the Primitive*, 1962, Pl. 10.

77

Nigeria: Ibibio

MASK

Wood; height 9 5/8"

Collection: Professor and Mrs. Philip Rogers, Binghamton, New York

78

Nigeria: Ibibio

MASK

Wood; height 10 1/2"

Collection: Professor and Mrs. Philip Rogers

79

Nigeria: Ibo

MASK

Wood, paint; height 17 1/2"

Collection: Museum of Primitive Art 56.346

Exhibited: the Rockefeller Institute, "African Art," 1964.



# West Africa



- |           |                   |            |
|-----------|-------------------|------------|
| 1-DOGON   | 9-BAULE           | 17-YORUBA  |
| 2-BAMBARA | 10-DAN-NGERE-BETE | 18-BINI    |
| 3-BOBO    | 11-VAI            | 19-IBIBIO  |
| 4-MOSSI   | 12-MENDE          | 20-IBO     |
| 5-LOBI    | 13-KISSI          | 21-BAMUM   |
| 6-KURUMBA | 14-BAGA           | 22-FANG    |
| 7-SENUFO  | 15-ASHANTI        | 23-KOTA    |
| 8-GURO    | 16-FULANI         | 24-BAKONGO |







This "maiden spirit" mask is danced during rites of the Mmwo society. While these white-painted representations of the ghosts of dead women are found in many collections, the Mmwo cult also dances in male masks, one of which is illustrated in W. Fagg, *African Tribal Images*, 1968, Pl. 155. Fagg comments: "Emphasis on the male-female duality is in fact a recurrent feature in most Ibo sculpture, though it takes many different forms in different localities."

80  
Nigeria: Ibo  
MASK  
Wood, paint; height 14"  
Collection: American Museum of Natural History 90.2-3405

81  
Nigeria: Ibo (possibly Ibibio)  
MALE FIGURE  
Wood, paint; height 27 1/2"  
Collection: American Museum of Natural History 90.2-295

82  
Nigeria: Ibo (possibly Ibibio)  
FEMALE FIGURE  
Wood, paint; height 27 1/2"  
Collection: American Museum of Natural History 90.2-296

83  
Cameroon: Bamum  
PIPE BOWL IN FIGURE OF A MAN  
Terra cotta; height 7 5/8"  
Collection: Professor Hans Hoffmann, Vestal, New York

Exhibited: Harpur College, *Primitivism, Folk, and the Primitive*, 1962, Cat. No. 84.

This pipe and the other Cameroon pieces loaned by Professor Hoffmann, were collected in the German territory of Kamerun before the First World War. In the Cameroon grasslands, after palm wine, "Tobacco rates second among the prayed for luxuries. The gods must have responded favorably in past centuries, because the use of the weed is widespread" (Paul Gebauer, "Cameroon Tobacco Pipes," *African Arts* 5(2):28, 1972). Gebauer notes that pipe making, recently in decline in the Cameroon, has been actively revived as a project of the Peace Corps volunteers.

84  
Cameroon: Bamum  
FEMALE FIGURE  
Brass; height 10 3/8"  
Collection: Professor Hans Hoffmann

Exhibited: Harpur College, *Primitivism, Folk, and the Primitive*, 1962, Pls. 23, 24.

85  
Cameroon: Bamum  
FEMALE FIGURE  
Brass; height 11"  
Collection: Professor Hans Hoffmann

Exhibited: Harpur College, *Primitivism, Folk, and the Primitive*, 1962, Pls. 24, 25.

86  
Cameroon: Grasslands (?)  
BIRD  
Wood; height 14 1/2"  
Collection: Professor Hans Hoffmann

Exhibited: Harpur College, *Primitivism, Folk, and the Primitive*, 1962, Cat. No. 86.

87  
Gabon: Fang  
HARP WITH FEMALE FIGURE ON SOUNDING BOX  
Wood, paint, hide, fiber strings; height 29 1/4"  
Collection: Museum of Primitive Art 57.93

Exhibited: Museum of Primitive Art, "Selected Works from the Collection," 1957.

For a discussion of Fang art, see J. Fernandez, "Principles of opposition and vitality in Fang aesthetics," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 25:53-64, 1966.

88  
Gabon: Kota  
FUNERARY FIGURE (*Mbulu ngulu*)  
Wood, copper, brass; height 21 1/2"  
Collection: Museum of Primitive Art 57.230

Exhibited: Museum of Primitive Art, *Traditional Art of the African Nations*, 1961, Pl. 66; Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Art of Oceania, Africa, and the Americas from the Museum of Primitive Art*, 1969, Pl. 408.

African art had a monumental influence on Twentieth Century European painting and sculpture, most



strikingly in cubism. Juan Gris was so impressed with Kota reliquary figures, such as the one exhibited here, that he constructed a copy out of cardboard. Robert Goldwater ("Judgments of Primitive Art, 1905-1965," in D. P. Biebuyck, ed., *Tradition and Creativity in Tribal Art*, 1969, p. 33) comments: "In describing Picasso's relation to African art, stress has usually been placed upon the purely formal derivations. . . There is no doubt that these African solutions of abstract problems of structure and composition played an important role in Picasso's attraction to Dan masks and to Bakota figures. One has only to compare the studies done in connection with 'Les Desmoiselles d'Avignon' of 1906-07 to see how direct this formal influence was." P. Meauze (*African Art: Sculpture*, 1968, p. 110), writes of these Kota figures: "If we examine a group of them together we shall be even more disconcerted. Some of them radiate a sort of 'solar' power like pagan monstrosities, while others, of a sinister and even dangerous aspect (but perhaps this is a subjective feeling), symbolise the fear of the unknown."

89  
Congo Zaire: BaKongo  
CARVED TUSK

Elephant ivory; height 31"  
Collection: American Museum of Natural History 90.0-94

90  
Congo Zaire: BaKongo  
CARVED TUSK  
Elephant ivory; height 24"  
Collection: American Museum of Natural History 90.0-96

91  
Congo Zaire: BaKongo  
CARVED TUSK  
Rhinoceros ivory; height 7 1/4"  
Collection: Professor and Mrs. Michael M. Horowitz

Although there are a few known Bakongo ivory statues of considerable antiquity, most of them are relatively recent, and were made for sale (see C. Kjersmeier, *Centres de style de la sculpture Nègre africaine*, Vol. 3 ("Congo Belge"), 1937, p. 27 and Pl. 44). These pieces are perhaps the most aesthetically pleasing of all modern African sculpture designed specifically for sale.

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